**INTERNET**

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

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

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

**SITTING DAYS—2015**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>9, 10, 11, 12, 23, 24, 25, 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 5, 16, 17, 18, 19, 23, 24, 25, 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>12, 13, 14, 25, 26, 27, 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 15, 16, 17, 18, 22, 23, 24, 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>10, 11, 12, 13, 17, 18, 19, 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>12, 13, 14, 15, 19, 20, 21, 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>9, 10, 11, 12, 23, 24, 25, 26, 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>1, 2, 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RADIO BROADCASTS**

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

- **ADELAIDE**: 972AM
- **BRISBANE**: 936AM
- **CANBERRA**: 103.9FM
- **DARWIN**: 102.5FM
- **HOBART**: 747AM
- **MELBOURNE**: 1026AM
- **PERTH**: 585AM
- **SYDNEY**: 630AM

For information regarding frequencies in other locations please visit
http://www.abc.net.au/newsradio/listen/frequencies.htm
Forty-Fourth Parliament
First Session—Seventh Period

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

House of Representatives Office holders
Speaker—Hon. Anthony David Hawthorn Smith
Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Craig Scott MP
Second Deputy Speaker—Mr Robert George Mitchell MP
Members of the Speaker's Panel—Mr Russell Evan Broadbent MP,
Ms Anna Elizabeth Burke MP, Ms Sharon Catherine Claydon MP,
Hon John Kenneth Cobb MP, Mr Patrick Martin Conroy MP,
Mr Ian Reginald Goodenough MP, Mrs Natasha Louise Griggs MP,
Ms Sarah Moya Henderson MP, Mr Stephen James Irons MP,
Mr Craig Kelly MP, Ms Michelle Leanne Landry MP, Ms Clare Ellen O'Neil, MP,
Mrs Jane Prentice MP, Ms Melissa Lee Price MP,
Dr Andrew John Southcott MP, Mr Michael Sukkar MP,
Mr Ross Xavier Vasta MP, Mrs Lucy Elizabeth Wicks MP

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

Party Leaders and Whips
Liberal Party of Australia
Leader—Hon. Malcolm Bligh Turnbull MP
Deputy Leader—Hon. Julie Isabel Bishop MP
Chief Government Whip—Ms Nola Bethwyn Marino MP
Government Whips—Mr Ewen Thomas Jones MP and Mr Brett David Whiteley 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

Printed by authority of the House of Representatives
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abbott, Hon Anthony John</td>
<td>Warringah, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albanese, Hon Anthony Norman</td>
<td>Grayndler, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander, Mr John Gilbert OAM</td>
<td>Bennelong, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrews, Mrs Karen Lesley</td>
<td>McPherson, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrews, Hon Kevin James</td>
<td>Menzies, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baldwin, Hon Robert Charles</td>
<td>Paterson, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bandt, Mr Adam Paul</td>
<td>Melbourne, VIC</td>
<td>AG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billson, Hon Bruce Fredrick</td>
<td>Dunkley, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bird, Hon Sharon Leah</td>
<td>Cunningham, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishop, Hon Bronwyn Kathleen</td>
<td>Mackellar, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishop, Hon Julie Isabel</td>
<td>Curtin, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowen, Hon Chris Eyles</td>
<td>McMahon, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briggs, Hon Jamie Edward</td>
<td>Mayo, SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broad, Mr Andrew John</td>
<td>Mallee, VIC</td>
<td>NATS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadbent, Mr Russell Evan</td>
<td>McMillan, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brodtmann, Ms Gai Marie</td>
<td>Canberra, ACT</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brough, Hon Malcolm Thomas</td>
<td>Fisher, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buchholz, Mr Scott</td>
<td>Wright, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burke, Ms Anna Elizabeth</td>
<td>Chisholm, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burke, Hon Anthony Stephen</td>
<td>Watson, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butler, Hon Mark Christopher</td>
<td>Port Adelaide, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butler, Ms Terri Megan</td>
<td>Griffith, QLD</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Byrne, Hon Anthony Michael</td>
<td>Holt, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chalmers, Dr James Edward</td>
<td>Rankin, QLD</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Champion, Mr Nicholas David</td>
<td>Wakefield, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chester, Hon Darren</td>
<td>Gippsland, VIC</td>
<td>NATS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chesters, Ms Lisa Marie</td>
<td>Bendigo, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christensen, Mr George Robert</td>
<td>Dawson, QLD</td>
<td>NATS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ciobo, Hon Steven Michele</td>
<td>Moncrieff, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare, Hon Jason Dean</td>
<td>Blaxland, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claydon, Ms Sharon Catherine</td>
<td>Newcastle, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cobb, Hon John Kenneth</td>
<td>Calare, NSW</td>
<td>NATS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coleman, Mr David Bernard</td>
<td>Banks, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collins, Hon Julie Marce</td>
<td>Franklin, TAS</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conroy, Mr Patrick Martin</td>
<td>Charlton, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coulton, Mr Mark Maclean</td>
<td>Parkes, NSW</td>
<td>NATS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danby, Hon Michael</td>
<td>Melbourne Ports, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dreyfus, Hon Mark Alfred QC</td>
<td>Isaacs, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutton, Hon Peter Craig</td>
<td>Dickson, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elliot, Hon Maria Justine</td>
<td>Richmond, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellis, Hon Katherine Margaret</td>
<td>Adelaide, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entsch, Hon Warren George</td>
<td>Leichhardt, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeney, Hon David</td>
<td>Batman, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fergusson, Mr Laurie Donald Thomas</td>
<td>Werriwa, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitzgibbon, Hon Joel Andrew</td>
<td>Hunter, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fletcher, Hon Paul William</td>
<td>Bradfield, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frydenberg, Hon Joshua Anthony</td>
<td>Kooyong, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gambaro, Hon Teresa</td>
<td>Brisbane, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members</td>
<td>Division</td>
<td>Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giles, Mr Andrew James</td>
<td>Scullin, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gillespie, Dr David Arthur</td>
<td>Lyne, NSW</td>
<td>NATS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodenough, Mr Ian Reginald</td>
<td>Moore, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gray, Hon Gary AO</td>
<td>Brand, WA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griffin, Hon Alan Peter</td>
<td>Bruce, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griggs, Mrs Natasha Louise</td>
<td>Solomon, NT</td>
<td>CLP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hall, Ms Jill Griffiths</td>
<td>Shortland, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hartsuyker, Hon Luke</td>
<td>Cowper, NSW</td>
<td>NATS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hastie, Mr Andrew</td>
<td>Canning, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawke, Mr Alexander George</td>
<td>Mitchell, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayes, Mr Christopher Patrick</td>
<td>Fowler, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henderson, Ms Sarah Moya</td>
<td>Corangamite, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hendy, Dr Peter William</td>
<td>Eden-Monaro, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hogan, Mr Kevin John</td>
<td>Page, NSW</td>
<td>NATS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howarth, Mr Luke Ronald</td>
<td>Petrie, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunt, Hon Gregory Andrew</td>
<td>Flinders, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husic, Hon Edham Nurredin</td>
<td>Chifley, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hutchinson, Mr Eric Russell</td>
<td>Lyons, TAS</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irons, Mr Stephen James</td>
<td>Swan, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jensen, Dr Dennis Geoffrey</td>
<td>Tangney, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones, Mr Ewen Thomas</td>
<td>Herbert, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones, Mr Stephen Patrick</td>
<td>Throsby, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joyce, Hon. Barnaby Thomas Gerard</td>
<td>New England, NSW</td>
<td>NATS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katter, Hon. Robert Carl</td>
<td>Kennedy, QLD</td>
<td>AUS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keenan, Hon. Michael</td>
<td>Stirling, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly, Mr Craig</td>
<td>Hughes, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King, Hon. Catherine Fiona</td>
<td>Ballarat, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laming, Mr Andrew</td>
<td>Bowman, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landry, Ms Michelle Leanne</td>
<td>Capricornia, QLD</td>
<td>NATS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laundy, Mr Craig</td>
<td>Reid, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leigh, Hon. Dr Andrew Keith</td>
<td>Fraser, ACT</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ley, Hon. Sussan Penelope</td>
<td>Farrer, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macfarlane, Hon. Ian Elgin</td>
<td>Groom, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macklin, Hon. Jennifer Louise</td>
<td>Jagajaga, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MacTIERMAN, Hon. Alannah Joan Geraldine Cecilia</td>
<td>Perth, WA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marino, Ms Nola Bethwyn</td>
<td>Forrest, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Markus, Mrs Louise Elizabeth</td>
<td>Macquarie, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marles, Hon. Richard Donald</td>
<td>Corio, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matheson, Mr Russell Glenn</td>
<td>Macarthur, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCormack, Hon. Michael Francis</td>
<td>Riverina, NSW</td>
<td>NATS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McGowan, Ms Catherine AO</td>
<td>Indi, VIC</td>
<td>IND.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McNamara, Mrs Karen Jane</td>
<td>Dobell, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell, Mr Robert George</td>
<td>McEwen, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morrison, Hon. Scott John</td>
<td>Cook, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neumann, Hon. Shayne Kenneth</td>
<td>Blair, QLD</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nikolic, Mr Andrew Alexander AM, CSC</td>
<td>Bass, TAS</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O'Connor, Hon. Brendan Patrick John</td>
<td>Gorton, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O'Dowd, Mr Kenneth Desmond</td>
<td>Flynn, QLD</td>
<td>NATS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Members of the House of Representatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>O'Dwyer, Hon. Ms Kelly Megan</td>
<td>Higgins, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O'Neil, Ms Clare Ellen</td>
<td>Hotham, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owens, Ms Julie</td>
<td>Parramatta, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palmer, Mr Clive Frederick</td>
<td>Fairfax QLD</td>
<td>PUP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parke, Hon. Melissa</td>
<td>Fremantle, WA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasin, Mr Anthony</td>
<td>Barker, SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perrett, Mr Graham Douglas</td>
<td>Moreton, QLD</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pitt, Mr Keith John</td>
<td>Hinkler, QLD</td>
<td>NATS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plibersek, Hon. Tanya Joan</td>
<td>Sydney, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porter, Hon. Charles Christian</td>
<td>Pearce, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prentice, Mrs Jane</td>
<td>Ryan, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price, Ms Melissa Lee</td>
<td>Durack, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pyne, Hon. Christopher Maurice</td>
<td>Sturt, SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramsey, Mr Rowan Eric</td>
<td>Grey, SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ripoll, Hon. Bernard Fernando</td>
<td>Oxley, QLD</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rishworth, Hon. Amanda Louise</td>
<td>Kingston, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robb, Hon. Andrew John AO</td>
<td>Goldstein, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert, Hon. Stuart Rowland</td>
<td>Fadden, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rowland, Ms Michelle Anne</td>
<td>Greenway, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roy, Mr Wyatt</td>
<td>Longman, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruddock, Hon. Philip Maxwell</td>
<td>Berowra, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan, Ms Joanne Catherine</td>
<td>Lalor, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott, Hon. Bruce Craig</td>
<td>Maranoa, QLD</td>
<td>NATS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott, Ms Fiona Meryl</td>
<td>Lindsay, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shorten, Hon. William Richard</td>
<td>Maribyrnong, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simpkins, Mr Luke Xavier Linton</td>
<td>Cowan, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith, Hon. Anthony David Hawthorn</td>
<td>Casey, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snowdon, Hon. Warren Edward</td>
<td>Lingiari, NT</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southcott, Dr Andrew John</td>
<td>Boothby, SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone, Hon. Dr Sharman Nancy</td>
<td>Murray, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudmalis, Ms Ann Elizabeth</td>
<td>Gilmore, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sukkar, Mr Michael</td>
<td>Deakin, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swan, Hon. Wayne Maxwell</td>
<td>Lilley, QLD</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor, Mr Angus James</td>
<td>Hume, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tehan, Mr Daniel Thomas (Dan)</td>
<td>Wannon, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thistlethwaite, Hon. Mr Matthew James</td>
<td>Kingsford Smith, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomson, Hon. Kelvin John</td>
<td>Wills, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truss, Hon. Warren Errol</td>
<td>Wide Bay, QLD</td>
<td>NATS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tudge, Hon. Alan Edward</td>
<td>Aston, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnbull, Hon. Alan Edward</td>
<td>Wentworth, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vamvakionou, Ms Maria</td>
<td>Calwell, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>van Manen, Mr Albertus Johannes</td>
<td>Forde, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varvaris, Mr Nickolas</td>
<td>Barton, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vasta, Mr Ross Xavier</td>
<td>Bonner, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watts, Mr Timothy Graham</td>
<td>Gellibrand, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whiteley, Mr Brett David</td>
<td>Braddon, TAS</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wicks, Mrs Lucy Elizabeth</td>
<td>Robertson, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilkie, Mr Andrew Damien</td>
<td>Denison, TAS</td>
<td>IND</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Members of the House of Representatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Williams, Mr Matthew</td>
<td>Hindmarsh, SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilson, Mr Richard James</td>
<td>O'Connor, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood, Mr Jason Peter</td>
<td>La Trobe, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyatt, Mr Kenneth George AM</td>
<td>Hasluck, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zappia, Mr Antonio</td>
<td>Makin, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
</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—Katter’s Australia Party; AG—Australian Greens; PUP—Palmer United Party

### Heads of Parliamentary Departments

Clerk of the Senate—R Laing  
Clerk of the House of Representatives—D Elder  
Acting Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—D Heriot  
Parliamentary Budget Officer—P Bowen
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Minister</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
<td>Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Indigenous Affairs</td>
<td>Senator Hon Nigel Scullion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Women</td>
<td>Senator Hon Michaelia Cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabinet Secretary</td>
<td>Senator Hon Michaelia Cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service</td>
<td>Senator Hon Mitch Fifield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Digital Government</td>
<td>Senator Hon Michael Keenan MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Counter Terrorism</td>
<td>Senator Hon Scott Ryan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister to the Prime Minister</td>
<td>Hon Alan Tudge MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister to the Prime Minister</td>
<td>Senator Hon James McGrath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Productivity</td>
<td>Hon Dr Peter Hendy MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Cabinet Secretary</td>
<td>Senator Hon Richard Colbeck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development (Deputy Prime Minister)</td>
<td>Hon Warren Truss MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Resources, Energy and Northern Australia</td>
<td>Hon Josh Frydenberg MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Territories, Local Government and Major Projects</td>
<td>Hon Paul Fletcher MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister to the Deputy Prime Minister</td>
<td>Hon Michael McCormack MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Foreign Affairs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Trade and Investment</td>
<td>Hon Julie Bishop MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for International Development and the Pacific</td>
<td>Hon Andrew Robb AO MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Tourism and International Education</td>
<td>Hon Steven Ciobo MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting the Minister for Trade and Investment</td>
<td>Senator Hon Richard Colbeck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Multicultural Affairs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attorney-General</td>
<td>Senator Hon George Brandis QC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Vice-President of the Executive Council)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Leader of the Government in the Senate)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Justice</td>
<td>Hon Michael Keenan MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Multicultural Affairs</td>
<td>Senator Hon Concetta Fierravanti-Wells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Small Business</td>
<td>Hon Kelly O'Dwyer MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Treasurer</td>
<td>Hon Kelly O’Dwyer MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister to the Treasurer</td>
<td>Hon Alex Hawke MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Finance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Deputy Leader of Government in the Senate)</td>
<td>Senator Hon Mathias Cormann</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Minister of State</td>
<td>Hon Mal Brough MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources</td>
<td>Hon Barnaby Joyce MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources</td>
<td>Senator Hon Anne Ruston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science (Leader of the House)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Science</td>
<td>Hon Karen Andrews MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Innovation</td>
<td>Hon Wyatt Roy MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Immigration and Border Protection</strong></td>
<td>Hon Peter Dutton MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Multicultural Affairs</td>
<td><strong>Senator Hon Concetta Fierravanti-Wells</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for the Environment</strong></td>
<td>Hon Greg Hunt MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Cities and the Built Environment</td>
<td>Hon Jamie Briggs MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Health</strong></td>
<td>Hon Sussan Ley MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Health</td>
<td><strong>Hon. Ken Wyatt MP</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Sport</strong></td>
<td>Hon Sussan Ley MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Rural Health</td>
<td>Senator Hon Fiona Nash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Defence</strong></td>
<td>Senator Hon Marise Payne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Veterans’ Affairs</td>
<td><strong>Hon Stuart Robert MP</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Centenary of ANZAC</strong></td>
<td><strong>Hon Stuart Robert MP</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Defence Materiel and Science</td>
<td>Hon Mal Brough MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Defence</td>
<td><strong>Hon Darren Chester MP</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Communications</strong></td>
<td>Senator Hon Mitch Fifield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for the Arts</strong></td>
<td>Senator Hon Mitch Fifield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Manager of Government Business in the Senate)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Employment</strong></td>
<td>Senator Hon Michaelia Cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Social Services</strong></td>
<td>Hon Christian Porter MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Human Services</td>
<td>Hon Stuart Robert MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Multicultural Affairs</td>
<td><strong>Senator Hon Concetta Fierravanti-Wells</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Education and Training</strong></td>
<td>Senator Hon Simon Birmingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Vocational Education and Skills</td>
<td>Hon Luke Hartsuyker MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Deputy Leader of the House)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Tourism and International Education</td>
<td>Senator Hon Richard Colbeck</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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. Assistant Ministers in italics are designated as Parliamentary Secretaries under the Ministers of State Act 1952.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Shadow Minister</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leader of the Opposition</td>
<td>Hon Bill Shorten MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister Assisting the Leader for Science</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Kim Carr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister Assisting the Leader on State and Territory Relations</td>
<td>Senator Katy Gallagher*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Women</td>
<td>Senator Claire Moore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager of Opposition Business (Senate)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Cabinet Secretary</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Jacinta Collins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Opposition</td>
<td>Hon Michael Danby MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Opposition</td>
<td>Hon Ed Husic MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Opposition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Manager of Opposition Business (Senate)</td>
<td>Terri Butler M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development</td>
<td>Hon Tanya Plibersek MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Trade and Investment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Defence</td>
<td>Dr Jim Chalmers MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Defence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Defence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Defence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Defence and the Centenary of ANZAC</td>
<td>Hon David Feeney MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence</td>
<td>Gai Brodtmann MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and Transport</td>
<td>Hon Anthony Albanese MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Cities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Tourism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Northern Australia</td>
<td>Hon Gary Gray AO MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Regional Development and Local</td>
<td>Hon Julie Collins MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Infrastructure</td>
<td>Hon Alannah MacTiernan MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Western Australia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Northern Australia</td>
<td>Hon Warren Snowdon MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for External Territories</td>
<td>Hon Warren Snowdon MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Treasurer</td>
<td>Hon Chris Bowen MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Small Business</td>
<td>Michelle Rowland MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Treasurer</td>
<td>Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Competition</td>
<td>Dr Jim Chalmers MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Productivity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Shadow Treasurer</td>
<td>Hon Ed Husic MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business</td>
<td>Julie Owens MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TITLE</td>
<td>SHADOW MINISTER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Finance</td>
<td>Hon Tony Burke MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager of Opposition Business (House)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Special Minister of State</td>
<td>Hon Gary Gray MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Environment, Climate Change and Water</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Lisa Singh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Industry</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Lisa Singh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Vocational Education</td>
<td>Hon Sharon Bird MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Higher Education</td>
<td>Hon Amanda Rishworth MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Manufacturing</td>
<td>Nick Champion MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Communications</td>
<td>Hon Jason Clare MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Attorney General</td>
<td>Hon Mark Dreyfus QC MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for the Arts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Manager of Opposition Business (House)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<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>Graham Perrett MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Arts</td>
<td>Hon Michael Danby MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Education</td>
<td>Hon Kate Ellis MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Early Childhood</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Education</td>
<td>Hon Amanda Rishworth MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood Education</td>
<td>Julie Owens MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for School Education and Youth</td>
<td>Senat...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry</td>
<td>Hon Joel Fitzgibbon MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Rural Affairs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Resources</td>
<td>Hon Gary Gray AO MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Health</td>
<td>Hon Catherine King MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Ageing</td>
<td>Hon Shayne Neumann MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Mental Health</td>
<td>Senator Katy Gallagher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Sport</td>
<td>Dr Jim Chalmers MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Health</td>
<td>Stephen Jones MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Health</td>
<td>Tony Zappia MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Aged Care</td>
<td>Senator Helen Polley</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></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Housing and Homelessness</td>
<td>Senator Katy Gallagher*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Human Services</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Doug Cameron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Carers</td>
<td>Senator Claire Moore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Communities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Families and Payments</td>
<td>Senator Carol Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Child Safety and Prevention of Family Violence</td>
<td>Terri Butler MP</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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ix
Shadow Cabinet Ministers are shown in bold type.

* Senator Katy Gallagher’s appointment to the Shadow Ministry is effective from 1 November 2015. Senator the Hon Jan McLucas will serve as Shadow Minister for Housing and Homelessness and Shadow Minister for Mental Health, and represent the Shadow Minister for Northern Australia, the Shadow Minister for Health, the Shadow Assistant Minister for Health, the Shadow Minister for Sport and the Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs in the Senate until 31 October 2015.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>SHADOW MINISTER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs</td>
<td>Hon Shayne Neumann MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous Affairs</td>
<td>Hon Warren Snowdon MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations</td>
<td>Hon Brendan O’Connor MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Employment Services</td>
<td>Hon Julie Collins MP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONTENTS

MONDAY, 9 NOVEMBER 2015

Chamber
PETITIONS—
  Recognition of the State of Palestine ................................................................. 12333
  Sri Lanka: Human Rights ....................................................................................... 12333
PETITIONS—
  Responses ............................................................................................................... 12333
  Cigarette Smoking ............................................................................................... 12333
PETITIONS—
  Statements ............................................................................................................ 12334
COMMITTEES—
  Procedure Committee ........................................................................................ 12336
PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS—
  Remembrance Day ............................................................................................... 12337
  International Year of Soils .................................................................................. 12344
  Adhesive Arachnoiditis ......................................................................................... 12347
  Rural and Regional Newspapers .......................................................................... 12352
  Queensland: Urannah Dam ................................................................................. 12360
COMMITTEES—
  Standing Committee on Tax and Revenue—
    Membership ........................................................................................................ 12365
BILLS—
  Social Services Legislation Amendment (More Generous Means Testing for Youth
    Payments) Bill 2015—
    Second Reading .................................................................................................. 12365
STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS—
  Australia Post ....................................................................................................... 12385
  Trade Unions ....................................................................................................... 12386
  Lalor Electorate: Deepavali .................................................................................... 12386
  Herbert Electorate: Trade with China, Japan and South Korea ......................... 12387
  Indi Electorate: Red Hat Society .......................................................................... 12387
  Trade Unions ....................................................................................................... 12388
  Canberra Electorate: Fashion Industry ................................................................. 12388
  Trade Unions ....................................................................................................... 12389
  Kingsford Smith Electorate: Maroubra Fun Run and Oktoberfest ..................... 12389
  Trade Unions ....................................................................................................... 12390
  Richmond Electorate: Domestic and Family Violence ....................................... 12390
  Trade with China ................................................................................................. 12390
  Chisholm Electorate: Mr Joseph D’Onofrio ......................................................... 12391
  Trade with China ................................................................................................. 12391
  Fremantle Electorate: Leeuwin Barracks ............................................................. 12392
  Trade with China ................................................................................................. 12392
  Workplace Relations ............................................................................................ 12393
  Trade with China ................................................................................................. 12393
CONTENTS—continued

Hunter Wetlands Centre ........................................................................................................ 12394
Trade with China .................................................................................................................. 12394
PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION—
    Member for North Sydney—
        Resignation .................................................................................................................. 12395
North Sydney Electorate—
    Issue of Writ .................................................................................................................... 12395
STATEMENTS ON INDULGENCE—
    Sport .................................................................................................................................. 12395
MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS ..................................................................................... 12397
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE—
    Christmas Island ............................................................................................................. 12397
    Economy ........................................................................................................................... 12398
    Goods and Services Tax .................................................................................................. 12399
    Economy ........................................................................................................................... 12400
    Goods and Services Tax .................................................................................................. 12401
    Rail Infrastructure ............................................................................................................ 12402
DISTINGUISHED VISITORS .......................................................................................... 12403
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE—
    Economy ........................................................................................................................... 12403
    Goods and Services Tax .................................................................................................. 12404
    Trade .................................................................................................................................. 12405
    Goods and Services Tax .................................................................................................. 12406
    Asylum Seekers .................................................................................................................. 12407
    Goods and Services Tax .................................................................................................. 12408
    Road Infrastructure .......................................................................................................... 12409
    Goods and Services Tax .................................................................................................. 12410
    Centenary of Anzac .......................................................................................................... 12411
    Remembrance Day ........................................................................................................... 12411
    Goods and Services Tax .................................................................................................. 12412
    Telecommunications ......................................................................................................... 12413
    Goods and Services Tax .................................................................................................. 12414
    Youth Allowance ............................................................................................................... 12415
DOCUMENTS—
    Presentation ....................................................................................................................... 12416
AUDITOR-GENERAL’S REPORTS—
    Report No. 6 of 2015-16 .................................................................................................. 12416
DOCUMENTS—
    Parliamentary Services Commissioner—
        Presentation .................................................................................................................. 12416
BUSINESS—
    Days and Hours of Meeting ............................................................................................ 12416
BILLS—
    Social Services Legislation Amendment (More Generous Means Testing for Youth Payments) Bill 2015—
        Second Reading ............................................................................................................ 12416
CONTENTS—continued

Third Reading................................................................. 12418
Higher Education Support Amendment (VET FEE-HELP Reform) Bill 2015—
Second Reading.............................................................. 12418
ADJOURNMENT—
Pacific Islands: Climate Change ........................................ 12494
Calwell Electorate: Forced Marriage .................................... 12496
Dunkley Electorate: Frankston .............................................. 12497
Mackellar Electorate: Blackmores ........................................ 12498
Blair Electorate: Volunteers ............................................... 12499
Forrest Electorate: Diwali .................................................. 12501
Augusta Spring Flower Show ............................................. 12501
South West Rose Society Show ......................................... 12501
Heritage Park Dardanup .................................................... 12501
NOTICES ........................................................................ 12502

Federation Chamber

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS—
Electorate of Greenway: Deepavali ....................................... 12504
Mining ........................................................................ 12504
Fraser Electorate: Indian Festival of Lights ............................ 12505
Cowan Electorate: Deepavali ............................................... 12506
Kingsford Smith Electorate: Sport ........................................ 12507
Capricornia Electorate ......................................................... 12508
Domestic and Family Violence ............................................ 12508
Deakin Electorate: Infrastructure .......................................... 12509
Aboriginal Legal Service ..................................................... 12510
Robertson Electorate: Broadband ......................................... 12511

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS—
Freedom of Information .................................................... 12512
Agriculture .................................................................... 12514
Iraq and Syria .................................................................. 12521

BILLS—
Marriage Legislation Amendment Bill 2015—
Second Reading.................................................................. 12524
Lung Health Awareness Month .......................................... 12526
Australian Cities ............................................................... 12532

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS—
Richmond Electorate: Byron Lighthouse Run ........................ 12543
Barton Electorate: All Saints Grammar School ...................... 12544
Indi Electorate: Advanced CFA Youth Crew ....................... 12544
Banks Electorate: St George Art Society ............................... 12544
Breast Cancer .................................................................... 12545
Moore Electorate: Infrastructure ......................................... 12545
Canberra Electorate: Baseball ............................................... 12546
Corangamite Electorate: Infrastructure .................................. 12546
CONTENTS—continued

West Papua.................................................................................................................. 12546
Lyons Electorate: Willow Creek.................................................................................. 12547
Blair Electorate: The Colinton Boys............................................................................ 12547
Ataturk, Mustafa Kemal............................................................................................. 12548
Melbourne Electorate: Yarra City University of the Third Age................................. 12548
Petrie Electorate: Year 12 Students............................................................................. 12549
Richmond Electorate: Education Funding................................................................. 12549
Bruce Highway........................................................................................................... 12549
Indi Electorate: Mars Petcare Australia...................................................................... 12550
Swan Electorate: Bentley Hospital............................................................................. 12550
Shortland Electorate: Charlestown Caring Group..................................................... 12551
Queensland Organised Crime Commission of Inquiry............................................. 12551
Canberra Electorate.................................................................................................... 12551
Hinkler Electorate: Education..................................................................................... 12552
Christmas Island........................................................................................................ 12552
Deakin Electorate: Deepavali..................................................................................... 12553
Richmond Electorate: Coal Seam Gas ...................................................................... 12553
Forde Electorate: Canterbury College........................................................................ 12554
Shortland Electorate: Belmont Community Child Care Centre............................... 12554
Dobell Electorate: Rural Fire Service......................................................................... 12555
Nalbaratnam, Mr Sivarasa......................................................................................... 12555
McMillan Electorate: Project Enlighten...................................................................... 12556
Canberra Electorate: Little Wars Convention............................................................ 12556

COMMITTEES—
Treaties Committee—
Report......................................................................................................................... 12556

PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION—
Valedictory.................................................................................................................. 12556

GRIEVANCE DEBATE—
Liberal Government ................................................................................................. 12574
Liberal Party................................................................................................................. 12577
Mining ........................................................................................................................... 12577
Infrastructure .............................................................................................................. 12579
Indi Electorate: Telecommunications........................................................................ 12585
Free-Range Producers............................................................................................... 12587
Mental Health.............................................................................................................. 12588
Australian Human Rights Commission..................................................................... 12591
Private Health Insurance............................................................................................ 12593
Banks Electorate......................................................................................................... 12596
Moreton Electorate: Road and Rail Infrastructure..................................................... 12598
La Trobe Electorate: Infrastructure........................................................................... 12601

ADJOURNMENT............................................................................................................. 12603

Questions In Writing
Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet: Corporate Credit Cards—
(Question No. 451 Amended).................................................................................... 12604
CONTENTS—continued

Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet: Executive Training—
(Question No. 502).................................................................................................................. 12604
Grimes, Dr Paul PSM—(Question No. 766)......................................................................... 12604
Grimes, Dr Paul PSM—(Question No. 767)........................................................................... 12605
Grimes, Dr Paul, PSM—(Question No. 768).......................................................................... 12605
Grimes, Dr Paul, PSM—(Question No. 769)........................................................................ 12606
Grimes, Dr Paul, PSM—(Question No. 770)................................................................. 12606
Grimes, Dr Paul, PSM—(Question No. 771)....................................................................... 12607
Grimes, Dr Paul, PSM—(Question No. 772)....................................................................... 12607
Grimes, Dr Paul, PSM—(Question No. 773)....................................................................... 12608
Grimes, Dr Paul, PSM—(Question No. 774)....................................................................... 12608
Grimes, Dr Paul, PSM—(Question No. 775)....................................................................... 12608
Order-In Pty Ltd—(Question No. 778)................................................................................ 12609
Carmichael Mine Project—(Question No. 795)................................................................... 12609
Communications and the Arts: Hospitality Expenses—(Question No. 812)....................... 12610
Talent Development Program—(Question No. 837).............................................................. 12611
Artsbank—(Question No. 842)............................................................................................ 12612
Australian Government’s Artbank Program—(Question No. 843)........................................... 12612
Supertrawler: Geelong Star—(Question No. 849)................................................................. 12612
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade: Staff Contracts—(Question No. 852).................. 12614
Attorney-General’s Department: Staff Contracts—(Question No. 854)................................. 12615
Department of Social Services: Staff Contracts—(Question No. 858)..................................... 12616
Department of Human Services: Staff Contracts—(Question No. 859)............................... 12616
Department of Industry, Innovation and Science: Staff Contracts—
(Question No. 860)................................................................................................................ 12617
Department of Veterans’ Affairs: Staff Contracts—(Question No. 862)................................. 12618
Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet: Casual Staff Contracts—
(Question No. 868)................................................................................................................ 12619
Attorney-General’s Department: Casual Staff Contracts—(Question No. 872)......................... 12620
Department of Social Services: Casual Staff Contracts—(Question No. 876)....................... 12621
Department of Human Services: Casual Staff Contracts—(Question No. 877)....................... 12621
Department of Industry, Innovation and Science: Casual Staff Contracts—
(Question No. 878)................................................................................................................ 12621
Department of Veterans’ Affairs: Casual Staff Contracts—(Question No. 880)....................... 12621
Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet: Contracted Services Payments—
(Question No. 886)................................................................................................................ 12622
Department of Human Services: Contracted Services Payments—
(Question No. 895)................................................................................................................ 12623
Department of Industry, Innovation and Science: Contracted Services Payments—
(Question No. 896)................................................................................................................ 12623
Department of Veterans’ Affairs: Contracted Services Payments—
(Question No. 898)................................................................................................................ 12623
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade: Office Space—(Question No. 906)....................... 12624
Department of Employment: Office Space—(Question No. 907).......................................... 12625
CONTENTS—continued

Department of Social Services: Office Space—(Question No. 912)............................................. 12626
Department of Human Services: Office Space—(Question No. 913)............................................. 12627
Department of Veterans' Affairs: Office Space—(Question No. 916)............................................. 12628
Department of Communications: Office Space—(Question No. 917)............................................. 12630
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade: Offices Efficiency Upgrades—
  (Question No. 924).......................................................................................................................... 12630
Department of Human Services: Offices Efficiency Upgrades—(Question No. 931)..................... 12630
Department of Industry, Innovation and Science: Offices Efficiency Upgrades—
  (Question No. 932).......................................................................................................................... 12631
Department of Veterans' Affairs: Offices Efficiency Upgrades—(Question No. 934)..................... 12632
Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet: Consultants—(Question No. 940).............................. 12632
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade: Consultants—(Question No. 942)............................... 12632
Department of Human Services: Consultants—(Question No. 949).............................................. 12632
Department of Industry, Innovation and Science: Consultants—(Question No. 950)...................... 12633
Department of Veterans' Affairs: Consultants—(Question No. 952).............................................. 12633
Attorney-General's Department: Media Monitoring—(Question No. 962)...................................... 12634
Department of Social Services: Media Monitoring—(Question No. 966)........................................ 12634
Department of Human Services: Media Monitoring—(Question No. 967)...................................... 12635
Department of Industry, Innovation and Science: Media Monitoring—
  (Question No. 968).......................................................................................................................... 12635
Department of Veterans' Affairs: Media Monitoring—(Question No. 970)...................................... 12635
Department of Communications: Media Monitoring—(Question No. 971)................................. 12635
Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet: Market Research—(Question No. 976)..................... 12636
Attorney-General's Department: Market Research—(Question No. 980)....................................... 12636
Department of Agriculture and Water Resources: Market Research—
  (Question No. 982).......................................................................................................................... 12636
Department of Social Services: Market Research—(Question No. 984)......................................... 12637
Department of Human Services: Market Research—(Question No. 985)....................................... 12637
Department of Industry, Innovation and Science: Market Research—
  (Question No. 986).......................................................................................................................... 12637
Department of Veterans' Affairs: Market Research—(Question No. 988)...................................... 12637
Department of Communications: Market Research—(Question No. 989)...................................... 12638
Department of Finance: Market Research—(Question No. 992)...................................................... 12638
Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet: Advertising—(Question No. 994).............................. 12639
Attorney-General's Department: Advertising—(Question No. 998).............................................. 12640
Department of Social Services: Advertising—(Question No. 1002)............................................. 12640
Department of Human Services: Advertising—(Question No. 1003)........................................... 12641
Department of Industry, Innovation and Science: Advertising—
  (Question No. 1004).......................................................................................................................... 12641
Department of Veterans' Affairs: Advertising—(Question No. 1006)............................................ 12641
Department of Communications: Advertising—(Question No. 1007)......................................... 12641
Department of Health: Advertising—(Question No. 1011)............................................................. 12642
Department of Social Services: Office Equipment—(Question No. 1020)..................................... 12642
Department of Human Services: Office Equipment—(Question No. 1021)................................... 12643
The SPEAKER (Hon. Tony Smith) took the chair at 10:00, made an acknowledgement of country and read prayers.

PETITIONS

Dr JENSEN (Tangney) (10:01): On behalf of the Standing Committee on Petitions, and in accordance with standing order 207, I present the following petitions:

Recognition of the State of Palestine

To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives

This petition of citizens and residents of Australia draws the attention of the House to the parlous situation currently being suffered by the Palestinians. It seeks to address the national and civil rights of the Palestinian people following years of failed diplomacy and Israeli belligerence. Israel's occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem now extends to 48 years and the relentless expansion of settlements calls into question the sincerity of Israel's negotiating position.

We therefore ask the House to do all in its power to formally recognise the state of Palestine.

from 1,009 citizens

Sri Lanka: Human Rights

To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives

This petition of citizens of Australia and other countries draws to the attention of the House the report of the investigation by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights into alleged war crimes and other serious human rights violations committed by both sides during Sri Lanka's civil war, and the Oct.2015 resolution by the UN Human Rights Council calling for an independent international investigation.

We therefore ask the House: to support the UN Human Rights Council call for a war crimes court with international judges to investigate alleged atrocities during Sri Lanka's civil war in order to ensure that the victims of such crimes and other abuses obtain the truth, justice and reparations they deserve, and to end Australia's inhumane policy of returning asylum seekers in collaboration with Sri Lanka.

from 234 citizens

Petitions received.

PETITIONS

Responses

Dr JENSEN (Tangney) (10:02): Ministerial responses to petitions previously presented to the House have been received as follows:

Cigarette Smoking

Dear Dr Jensen

Thank you for your correspondence of 7 September 2015 regarding a petition submitted for the consideration of the Standing Committee on Petitions, that smoking should be illegal.

Tobacco smoking remains one of the leading causes of preventable death and disease among Australians, killing over 15,000 Australians every year. The social and economic costs of smoking (including health costs) to Australian society are estimated at $31.5 billion each year. However, the number of smokers in Australia remains too high, with approximately 2.8 million people continuing to
smoke. The Australian Government is committed to reducing this figure and to initiatives that discourage uptake.

A broad range of tobacco control measures implemented over time will help to achieve these outcomes including: excise increases on tobacco, because higher cigarette prices are one of the most effective ways to cut smoking, especially among young people, who are particularly sensitive to price; education programmes and campaigns; plain packaging of tobacco products; labelling tobacco products with updated and larger graphic health warnings; prohibiting tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship; and providing support for smokers to quit.

The daily smoking rate for those aged 14 years or older over the past two decades has nearly halved, from 24.3 per cent in 1991 to 12.8 per cent in 2013, and supports the view that multifaceted tobacco control measures of governments at the Federal and state level are having an impact.

The Government believes that public health strategies are more likely to achieve long-term health gains and prevent the uptake of smoking, than the prohibition of tobacco. Comprehension of the harms arising from smoking tobacco is crucial in preventing the uptake of smoking and empowering individuals to quit.

Thank you for bringing this matter to my attention.

from the Minister for Health, Ms Ley

PETITIONS

Statements

Dr JENSEN (Tangney) (10:02): Today I am going to talk about time lines associated with petitions and how these time lines interact with the parliamentary calendar. This is of particular relevance as we near the end of the 2015 sittings.

A petition has two distinct phases of action and processes—and both of these need to be considered by petitioners in the preparation and finalisation of their petition. The first and primary time frame is that governed by the petitioner's organisational plans or the subject matter's requirements. The second is the time frame for the House to receive and consider petitions and for valid petitions to be presented—and, where petitions are referred to the executive, for a response to be received.

The first phase of a petition is the development and signature stage. This is the period where the terms of the petition are drafted by the petitioner and the petition's content and formatting is prepared in line with House requirements. Then the principal petitioner organises their process for collecting signatures on the petition. Finally, the petitioner decides when to stop collecting signatures and sends the completed petition to the Petitions Committee. They may also wish to approach a member and request that they present the petition.

The time frames involved in this important phase are largely a matter for the principal petitioner to decide. If the petitioner has pressing external constraints—for example, there is urgency surrounding the issue being petitioned about—they may need to forgo a longer signature collection period in favour of an earlier assessment and hopefully a presentation soon after.

Examples of petitions which have been presented to the House that fall into these categories include petitions regarding government approval processes or closure dates, matters that are seasonal and issues associated with medical conditions. However, petitioners
must be aware of the timing issues of the House after their petition has been submitted to avoid unrealistic expectations and consequential disappointment.

Petitioners should factor in the time to consider and research the petition issue themselves and then summarise the key reasons for petitioning, and their request of the House, into 250 words. They will need to allow time to understand and work within the House's petitioning requirements—available on the House and committee website—and liaise with their local member or the secretariat if necessary. It is unrealistic to expect to draft and set up a petition at the last minute.

Once a petition has been submitted, it is prepared for consideration by the committee at an approaching meeting. This includes undertaking manual signature counts. The petition may not be considered at the committee's very next meeting because some petitions are delivered too late to be processed in time for the imminent meeting, whilst other petitions are so large that it takes many man-hours to count the signatures. Petitions are best posted well in advance of sitting weeks. In particular, petitions with very high signature counts should allow ample administrative time, and these petitioners are advised to liaise with the secretariat beforehand.

After the committee meet and certify that a petition meets the House's requirements, the petition will either be received by a member for their arrangement to present it or bundled for inclusion in the next petitions announcement by the chair. This means that petitions which are certified for the chair to present have a known time frame for presentation and, if relevant, a known referral date.

The timing of members' presentations of certified petitions is a matter for members to decide. Members should of course be abiding by the standing orders which permit petitions to be presented during specified speaking opportunities. However, whether a member presents one day or the next is their choice.

The other timing factor in the life cycle of a petition is the House's sitting calendar. If a petition is assessed at a committee meeting just before a long recess in the sitting calendar, then considerable time may elapse before a petition can be presented by the chair. This will happen in the last sitting week of this year—the week commencing 30 November. Only petitions which are certified for member presentation at the committee's meeting in that week can possibly be presented that week.

The last prong in the petitions cycle is the receipt of a ministerial response. The response is registered at the time the committee receives it, but a recess period will mean a delay in making the response public—when presented—and available to the petitioner. The House standing orders encourage ministers to respond to petitions within 90 days of referral. Most petitions receive responses well within this time frame.

In conclusion, I encourage all members who hold certified petitions to make arrangements for presenting these in the next few sitting weeks before the summer recess. The alternative is to send the petition to the committee to arrange for petitions to be presented during this timeslot instead.

I also suggest that all petitioners keen to have their petitions presented this year should finalise their petitions and deliver them promptly.
Dr SOUTHCOTT (Boothby) (10:08): by leave—I rise to update the House on the Procedure Committee's inquiry into the adequacy of provisions for nursing mothers in the House of Representatives. Members may be aware that there has recently been some public interest in provisions for nursing mothers in the House. This follows a steady increase in the number of members who are balancing their role as a member with the responsibilities of caring for young children. In fact you could say that the House is experiencing a baby boom, with more than 10 members welcoming babies into their families this year. Amongst them, we have congratulated as new mothers the members for Higgins, Adelaide and Kingston. This reflects changes in the workforce and in the wider community. Many mothers are returning to work soon after having a baby, and workplaces are seeking to implement measures to support their staff to balance work and family responsibilities.

One of the challenges for women returning to work after having a baby is continuing to breastfeed. As the numbers of breastfeeding members in the House has increased, the need for adequate provisions to support these women has become apparent. Members may be aware that members breastfeeding an infant are able to give their vote by proxy for most votes of the House. This is provided for by a resolution of the House agreed in 2008, following an earlier report by the Procedure Committee. In recent years, a number of nursing mothers have taken advantage of the opportunity to vote by proxy. As part of its inquiry, the committee will review how this provision is working in practice. The committee will also explore other ways that the House can assist those members responsible for feeding their infant to participate fully in the work of the House. For example, the committee will consider whether members should be allowed to feed their infants in the chamber, in the Federation Chamber, and during committee proceedings. While speakers have allowed babies into the chamber in the past, and other members have not always objected to their presence, it is technically against the standing orders. Indeed, there have also been occasions in this and in other houses where a member has challenged the presence of another member's child. The current rules regarding visitors in the House create uncertainty for a member wishing to take their baby into the chamber, and place the Speaker in a potentially difficult position.

We have sought written comment from members, and some have already responded. We would be pleased to receive written submissions or less formal written comments by the end of the week. The committee has also invited members to attend a round table this Thursday at 1 pm in committee room 1R6. The round table will be a private informal discussion. All members are welcome to attend to share their views on how we can better support our colleagues during the precious early months of their children's lives. It is very important to the committee that its final report reflects the values and opinions of members of this House. The committee is also aware that the practices and procedures of the House should meet changing community expectations with regard to encouraging women to breastfeed, supporting women's participation in the workforce, and balancing work and family. We look forward to members' participation in this important inquiry.
PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Remembrance Day

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (10:12): I move:

That this House:

(1) recognises that Wednesday 11 November marks Remembrance Day, the 97th anniversary of the Armistice which ended World War I;

(2) commemorates the sacrifice of the more than 60,000 Australians who were killed in World War I, and the 156,000 wounded, gassed or taken prisoner;

(3) recognises the contribution of the more than 1,000 Indigenous Australians who fought in World War I;

(4) notes that by the number of deaths and casualties, World War I remains the most costly conflict in Australian history; and

(5) calls on all Australians to observe one minute’s silence at 11 am, in memory of those who have died or suffered in wars and conflict.

The SPEAKER: Is the motion seconded?

Mrs McNamara: I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

Mrs PRENTICE: Mr Speaker, this Wednesday, 11 November, is Remembrance Day and marks the 97th anniversary of the armistice which ended World War I. In the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, we pause to commemorate all Australians who have died or suffered in wars and armed conflicts. Clearly, the world has changed beyond recognition since the early decades of the 20th century. With the passage of time, we have seen the last of the survivors of World War I pass on. Ninety-seven years may have passed, but their service has not been forgotten. We as Australians owe it to the men and women who enlisted, who served and who gave their lives fighting for our nation to preserve their memory and to honour their sacrifice—and honour them we do. The exploits of Australian servicemen during the First World War have rightfully become part of Australian folklore. In particular, the bravery of the diggers on the shores of Gallipoli came to define the identity of our nation. The Army barracks located in my electorate was renamed Gallipoli Barracks in honour of those who served and died in that conflict. This is just one of many such tributes around the country. I also commend the ongoing work of the Australian War Memorial, under the directorship of Dr Brendan Nelson, in keeping the ANZAC memory alive.

The war weighed heavily on the resources of our young nation. It is fascinating to go back through Hansard to read about the extent of preparations for the war effort. For example, on 14 April 1915 the then Prime Minister, Andrew Fisher, provided a detailed update to the House on the equipment required to clothe and arm Allied forces across the Commonwealth—the requisitioning of the output of 22 mills to provide the wool for the uniforms; and the supply of two million yards of cloth for jackets and more than one million yards of flannel for shirts and blankets, and the supply of one million pairs of boots. Much of this burden was born by Australia—a nation just 14 years old and home to a population of less than five million people; less than a quarter of what we are today.

On 29 April 1915, the Minister for Defence confirmed to parliament for the first time that Australian forces had landed on the Gallipoli peninsula. That minister was Sir George Pearce, a senator from Western Australia and my great-grandfather. On the day of the original
armistice, 11 November 1918, he was once again Minister for Defence, albeit under a new prime minister. World War I exacted a terrible human toll on our nation. More than 60,000 men and women lost their lives in the conflict, and a further 156,000 were wounded, gassed or taken prisoner. The death and dislocation caused by the war were so great that the Bureau of Statistics figures show the population of Australia declined in 1915 and again in 1916—the first and to date only years in post-Federation recorded history that this has occurred. I use the term 'recorded history' advisedly because, at the time, most Indigenous Australians were not recorded in census statistics, nor were they permitted the right to vote. Nevertheless, the Australian War Memorial estimates that more than 1,000 Indigenous Australians fought in the First World War. Many more attempted to enlist but were denied on the grounds of race. Those who managed to successfully enlist enjoyed equal pay and generally equal treatment to all soldiers, a rarity at the time. Sadly, equal treatment was not extended in the postwar period, and it would be five more decades until Indigenous Australians were accorded equal rights under the Australian Constitution.

Mr Speaker, as the motion notes, in terms of the numbers of deaths and casualties, the First World War remains the most costly conflict in Australian history. I am sure that it is the fervent wish of all Australians that its human toll is never surpassed. History recalls that the world did not fully heed the lessons of the First World War and was doomed to repeat the cycle of destruction a generation later in the Second World War. Even in these relatively more peaceful times, war and conflict remains a fact of life for millions of people worldwide. On this Remembrance Day like all others, we should pause to reflect on the memory of those Australians who have died in wars and armed conflicts. A grateful nation honours their sacrifice, and their legacy is a safer and more peaceful world.

Lest we forget.

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (10:17): I commend the member for Ryan on this motion to recognise Remembrance Day. I have represented the opposition at ceremonies in northern France on Remembrance Day. I have stood on the beach at Gallipoli. I have represented Australia in a very junior capacity at the Commonwealth cemetery in Berlin. Both my grandfathers served in the First World War. My maternal grandfather, John Peek, served in the 3rd Light Horse and the family are very proud that he was commissioned in the field in 1917. My paternal grandfather, Hauptman (Captain) Bruno Danziger served in the German heavy artillery and won the Iron Cross. Both served on the Western Front, both were officers and both survived; obviously, otherwise I would not be here. Both of my grandfathers had very different fates. John Peek returned to Australia and was honoured, as we should honour all our veterans. I have to record, sadly, that my paternal grandfather, Bruno, and his wife, Margarethe, were murdered in the Second World War in Auschwitz. Nothing compares to standing on the beach at Gallipoli, and when you see those gravestones just by the water's edge it really communicates the sacrifice that Australians made in the pursuit of our national identity.

My part of Melbourne was heavily affected by the war. Up from Beaconsfield Parade, we recently remembered the Anzac girls with a wonderful ceremony for the matron there, Matron Grace Wilson. The Lemnos Greek community organised a wonderful ceremony that was part of the Centenary of Anzac commemorations. Australian personnel were shipped from Port Melbourne. Melbourne was the capital of Australia in those days. A total of 126,753
servicemen, medical chaplains and nurses embarked from Port Melbourne. On 19 October 1914, the first troop ship left from there. You can see those iconic pictures in almost every RSL in the country: pictures on the wall of the Anzacs leaving with all the streamers being thrown and big crowds down below. It was also to Port Melbourne that fewer returned. Almost one-third of the 60,000 Australians who died in the war were Victorians.

As a little boy I remember my grandfather marching to the St Kilda RSL Army and Navy Club outside Luna Park and then going with him up that scary European-style grill elevator to where we used to have the Christmas party for kids.

Representing the opposition, as I said previously, I visited the World War I battlefield at Villers-Bretonneux. I remember walking up the hill and seeing the sandstone wall on which the names of 10,000 Australians who were killed in the First World War and who have no known grave were engraved. I found on that wall the name of my grandmother's brother, David Swan, one of the thousands of Australians butchered in some of the ill-fated military operations, such as the Battle of Pozieres—probably the most disastrous event for Australia in the First World War.

I am very proud of the sculptures we have put in Albert Park. There is one by Peter Corlett to remember Matron Grace Wilson and the wonderful nurses on Lemnos, popularised in the ABC show *Anzac Girls*. We also have double VC winner Albert Jacka, who was the mayor of St Kilda and whose commemorations I have attended ever since becoming a member. These commemorations do not attempt to glorify war. Most monuments and speakers, including in this House, recall the horrors that war inflicts on soldiers, their families back home and, of course, the civilians caught up in the fighting.

The terrible situation in some parts of the world today is a reminder that war has lost none of its brutality. But these commemorations of the 97th anniversary of Remembrance Day remind us of the sacrifice that Australians have made for our country, for the freedom of other people's countries and for their comrades in arms. The motion for the recognition of Remembrance Day is a valuable reminder of the debt we owe to those great Australians. It is also a useful occasion for remembering those people who are on active service now in places around the world, and those who have made equal contributions in conflicts in the Second World War, Korea, Malaysia, Vietnam and, more recently, the Gulf.
grieving mother who could not consolidate her loss with a physical burial. Almost an entire
generation of young Australian men were wiped out in the most costly conflict in our history.

At the first anniversary of the armistice, King George V made a decree that all people
across the British Empire should cease what they are doing at the hour of the Armistice:
… which stayed the world wide carnage of the four preceding years and marked the victory of Right
and Freedom.

The anniversary of the armistice—Remembrance Day—has become representative of all the
sacrifices made by our armed force to ensure that ‘right and freedom’ prevail.

We remember and honour our loved ones and, importantly, we remember and honour the
fallen who have no name, and here in Canberra the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier lies in the
Australian War Memorial’s Hall of Memory. The tombs of unknown soldiers across the world
all hold their significance in the anonymity of the remains of the soldier. The one soldier who
will ever remain unknown is emblematically representative of all fallen soldiers. Across the
nation, whether in small community memorial gardens or here in Canberra at the Australian
War Memorial, Australians will pause in memory. I and my family will remember in
particular my husband’s late great-uncle, Private Ernest Marshall Baskerville. He set sail on
the RMS Moolton on 11 December 1915 from Sydney as one of the 1 Infantry Battalion 9 to
12 Reinforcements. I have no doubt that, as he watched the Sydney skyline fade into the
distance, his heart was full of pride to fight for his country and his head was full of hope for
the safe return of himself and his mates. Sadly, Ernest was injured in September 1917 at the
battle of Polygon Wood in France. Only a month later, he died of his wounds in the north-
west of France at Le Treport. As Ernest’s surviving family, we are able to tell his story and
honour his sacrifice, knowing where, when and how he died. My heart goes out to those
families who are not so fortunate as to know the stories of their loved ones. They do not and
may never know where and when and how they fell. This is why Remembrance Day is so
important, and why the tomb of the unknown soldier holds such great significance. I have
been fortunate enough to visit the final resting place of Ernest. As I paid my respects, I
contemplated the wretched heartbreak of so many mothers across the world who lost their
sons—some who were mere boys as they marched off so bravely.

On Remembrance Day I along with many other Australians will wear a red poppy as a
symbol of my respect and to honour those who have served and are serving in our armed
forces. The iconic red Flanders poppy has long been a symbolic part of Remembrance Day.
The red poppy was among the first flowers to bloom following the devastation of the
battlefields in northern France and Belgium. Lieutenant Colonel John McRae was at the front
line during the Battle of Ypres in May 1915. His best friend, Lieutenant Alexis Helmer, was
killed by a German shell on 2 May 1915 and the following day, Lieutenant Colonel John
McRae looked out at the fields of blooming red poppies and penned his famous poem, In
Flanders Fields.

May we never forget those who have shed their blood in sacrifice for our country and for
the peace of the world. May we respect and honour those who today serve in our armed
forces. May we never take for granted the great sacrifices made by those who have gone
before us, and by those who are defending and protecting us today and into tomorrow. I urge
all Australians to pause at 11 am on 11 November to remember, honour and contemplate the
sacrifices and the great loss of life upon which this nation's freedoms and liberties are won. Lest we forget.

Mr HAYES (Fowler—Chief Opposition Whip) (10:27): With Remembrance Day approaching on Wednesday this week, I thank the member for Ryan for bringing this motion before the chamber today. It is very timely. The Australian story, quite frankly, is an extraordinary one—one that is filled with significant events that have helped to forge our nation's identity through our achievements and through our experiences. However, in getting to where we are today, tribute must be paid to the many who have played a role in defending our nation; in particular, to those who have made the ultimate sacrifice.

The story of the Anzac legend started with our involvement in the First World War. Australians and New Zealanders landed on the beach in Gallipoli, and everyone knows the story of how hard fought the battle was. But it was not the battle: it was the courage and integrity of the Australians and New Zealanders that helped forge this spirit. Bear in mind, this was the war that was supposed to end all wars. In fact, it was the most bloody and most destructive conflict that we have ever been engaged in, with over 300,000 soldiers taking part in the conflicts, including 1,000 serving Indigenous members of the military. The war lasted for four years, and saw the wanton destruction of nearly three million lives. When the armistice was signed to end hostilities on the Western Front on 11 November 1918, more than 61,000 Australians had been killed and 156,000 wounded, many of those sustaining permanent incapacities. At the time, Australia had a population less than five million citizens, making the numbers of casualties during the war almost too incredible to believe, in terms of the weight carried by this small and yet emerging nation.

On Wednesday, I will join with other members and senators at 11 am at the Australian War Memorial. There will be many commemorative services taking place all over the country. A number of those services will take place in my electorate of Fowler, including services being organised by the Cabra-Vale Diggers club, the City of Liverpool RSL sub-branch, the Canley Heights RSL sub-branch and the Mounties club. These commemorative services are a salient reminder of the sacrifices that have been made by our Australian servicemen who have served our nation and who we owe so much for the lives that we live today. As a nation we must never forget the debt that we owe these Australians and we must never forget the responsibilities we have to their families. For that I commend Legacy on the work that they have done and continue to do today.

I also take the opportunity to acknowledge the efforts and work of all the management committees involved in organising the local commemorative services in my electorate, particularly George Taylor, the president of Cabra-Vale Diggers club; Kevin Ingram, the president of Mounties; Taffy Pritchard, the president of the Canley Heights RSL sub-branch, together with Bill Lottey; and the indomitable John Baron, president of the Liverpool RSL sub-branch. John plays an extraordinary role in my community in making sure that people never forget the contribution of our servicemen and servicewomen.

This year marks the 97th anniversary of the end of World War I. Australia has been engaged in a number of major conflicts, and they also deserve to be remembered at this stage—our involvement in the Boer War, World War I and World War II, the Korean conflict, Vietnam, East Timor, Afghanistan and Iraq, and now extending our involvement in the Middle East. This Wednesday, Remembrance Day, is a time for us to reflect on the
contributions of the men and women who serve our nation in all wars and all peacekeeping operations. We will pause to honour the extraordinary sacrifice that these Australians have made and remember those who have died in the defence of our values, including the often forgotten contributions that have been made by Aboriginal Australians.

We honour the Anzac spirit, which has been part of the foundation of this nation—not warlike qualities but rather a preparedness to defend the vulnerable, to defend the values which this nation has always upheld. It is a time to celebrate peace, to honour courage and to think about ordinary Australians who have lived through extraordinary times. May we never forget.

Mr GOODENOUGH (Moore) (10:32): I rise to support the motion by the member for Ryan in recognition of Remembrance Day, this year marking the 97th anniversary of the armistice which ended the First World War on 11 November 1918. At RSL branches across Australia, in communities, institutions, schools and workplaces, let us all join together at 11 o'clock this Wednesday in observing one minute's silence. Although there are no longer any remaining living veterans of the First World War in Australia, we must honour their memory amongst our younger generation and migrants in promoting awareness of the sacrifice that our veterans have made. The significance of their contribution is just as relevant today as it was nearly a century ago. It is seen in our democracy, culture, institutions and values which form the basis of our great Australian society and it has allowed us to enjoy prosperity in peace.

The lesson we can learn for our current and future generations of Australians is of greater patriotism, loyalty to our country and service to our nation. We must fight vigorously against the emerging counterculture and anti-establishment elements in our society which seek to undermine our proud national heritage. Referred to as the Great War and the 'war to end all wars', this significant conflict in our national history has contributed to our Australian national identity and the values which we hold dear, including devotion to duty, loyalty to one's mates, personal sacrifice and service to our country.

At that time, Australia was a young nation, barely 15 years out of Federation, and the First World War represented our first substantive entry onto the international stage. Patriotic Australians, keen to do their duty for king and country, enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force. The First World War unleashed the horror of modern warfare on an unprecedented scale with the development of small arms and automatic weapons with high, sustained rates of fire, chemical weapons, and artillery with explosive ordnance. Never before in history had such lethal and effective weapons been deployed on the battlefield, inflicting heavy casualties and loss of life. Australian troops were confronted with the sombre reality of entrenched machine gun positions and the appalling stalemate conditions of trench warfare. In these conditions of hardship and deprivation, the Anzac spirit was born out of our troops' support of each other.

From a population of 4.9 million Australians, 416,809 men enlisted, of which 59,357 were killed between 4 August 1914 and 11 November 1918; 155,133 were wounded and 4,044 were taken prisoner. On average, 38 Australians died each day during the 1,560 days of the war. There were 431,448 hospitalisations. The highest rate of enlistment occurred in my home state of Western Australia, where 32,231 men enlisted, representing 9.9 per cent of the state's population.
The contribution by women to the war effort must also be recognised. A total of 2,139 women served with the Australian Army Nursing Service, and 130 worked with Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service. A further 423 nurses served in hospitals within Australia. Twenty-three of these women died in service during the war.

In the context of a world that is faced with conflict and security concerns, it is important that the Anzac values be maintained and passed down to future generations of young Australians, so that we may meet and overcome the future security challenges that we face as a nation in uncertain times. The nature of war and conflict is evolving from engagement between sovereign nations and states to terrorism and guerrilla-style conflict between organised militias. Just as the diggers were confronted with modern weapons, today we are faced with new security threats in the war on terrorism.

Mr MITCHELL (McEwen—Second Deputy Speaker) (10:37): I rise in support of this motion, and thank the member for Ryan for bringing it to us. With only a few days now until we pause to commemorate the 97th anniversary of the armistice that ended the Great War, it is only appropriate that we take time in this place to remember those who went and participated in this conflict. World War I remains the most costly conflict in Australian history, with over 60,000 of our men and women killed and 156,000 wounded or taken prisoner.

I want to acknowledge today the many of those who were injured, or who made the supreme sacrifice, who either came from or had a close association with our electorate of McEwen. Our community has a long and rich military history; a history of victories and of pain, and a history of which we are proud—particularly in the Seymour area, home to Puckapunyal Army base, which is still being used as a mobilisation and training area, as it has done since before World War I. Seymour is the home of the famous Light Horse Park, the Seymour Military Heritage Weekend and, of course, the nationally renowned and iconic Vietnam Veterans Commemorative Walk.

Indeed, only this year, as we commemorated the Centenary of Anzac, we launched a book from our community called There Was a Soldier Who Wandered Far Away. This book was written by respected local author Karen Christensen and it documents the story of Lieutenant Leslie Cecil Maygar, the very first Australian to win the Victoria Cross. He was born in Wandong in my electorate of McEwen.

My hometown of Whittlesea's honour roll lists the names of my ancestors who served in both the first and second world wars: Frank Kummer, killed on 25 October 1917 of wounds in France; Kenneth MacNee, the brother of Harold MacNee, DCM and Military Cross; and Keith Mitchell, who died on 25 April 1915 on the Gallipoli Peninsula in Turkey. It is said that Keith was shot through the neck on the first ridge around 300 yards inland. He was digging trenches for the stretcher bearers leading onto Anzac Beach. Right across the electorate on honour rolls in Kilmore and Lancefield are the names of family members who answered our country's call. On 30 October I had the honour of attending the official unveiling of the Whittlesea township avenue of honour plaque upgrade, rightfully ensuring that these men's and other local diggers' names will never be forgotten.

This history is not just a distant memory to us—words on a page or names on a dusty honour roll. This is real and living history that forms part of the spirit of our families and our community. The First World War shaped our identity as a people and a nation. The Gallipoli
campaign in particular has come to exemplify powerful Australian values of mateship, sacrifice, loyalty and pride. As we undertake our commemorations over the next week, I encourage everyone to honour the memory of those who served by looking up into the branches of their family trees and at the stories behind the names on our local honour rolls. Try to find out, if you can, the history of your family's service. Together let us learn the story of the people who fought and who found the courage to do the truly extraordinary.

Sadly, our Indigenous brothers who fought for Australia found on their return to Australia that, instead of recognition and grace, Aboriginal diggers received ignorance and racism. They were not eligible for returned servicemen's land grants or even membership of the RSL. Grace Smallwood wrote:

I know of at least one Aboriginal veteran of World War I who was not only denied his pay packet and his pension but, on his return, was given the very same rags he had been wearing the day he volunteered, and sent back to work on the station as if the trenches, the mud and the fighting had never existed.

These diggers were ineligible to vote but they were eligible to die for this country. Cecil Fisher wrote:

They have forgotten him, need him no more
He who fought for his land in nearly every war
Tribal fights before his country was taken by Captain Cook
Then went overseas to fight at Gallipoli and Tobruk
... ... ...
This black soldier who never marches on ANZAC Day
Living in his Gunya doesn't have much to say
Thinks of his friends who fought some returned some died
If only one day they could march together side by side
His medals he keeps hidden away from prying eyes
No one knows, no one sees the tears in his old black eyes
He's been outcast just left by himself to die
Recognition at last black ANZAC hold your head high.

Let us as a new generation give meaning to the solemn national promise that we repeat. On the 11th hour of the 11th day we should remember them, lest we forget.

Debate adjourned.

International Year of Soils

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (10:42): I move:

That this House:

(1) acknowledges that the United Nations General Assembly has declared 2015 as the International Year of Soils (IYS);

(2) notes that:

(a) the IYS aims to be a platform for raising awareness of the importance of sustainable soil management as the basis for food systems, fuel and fibre production, essential ecosystem functions and better adaptation to climate change for present and future generations; and
The purpose of my motion this morning is to raise the profile of World Soil Day and the importance the United Nations has placed on the need to raise awareness of the importance of soil health and related issues.

The UN's motivation for a call for greater focus on soil health is obvious. Soil is the network of interacting living organisms within the earth's surface layer which support life above ground. The nutritional value of the food we eat is largely determined by the health of the soil in which it grows. Soil is of course the basis for food, feed, fuel and fibre production and for services to ecosystems and human wellbeing. It is the reservoir for at least a quarter of global biodiversity and therefore requires the same attention as aboveground biodiversity. Soils play a key role in the supply of clean water and resilience to floods and droughts. The largest store of terrestrial carbon is in the soil; therefore its preservation will contribute to climate change adaptation and mitigation.

The maintenance and, indeed, enhancement of global soil resources is essential if humanity's need for food, water, and energy security is to be met. It is well known that it is now predicted that the world's population will grow to some nine billion by 2050—that is up from the current seven billion. Since European settlement, many of the farming methods that have been embraced here in Australia have degraded our soils. Thankfully, we have largely learned from those mistakes in more recent decades and have adopted more enlightened methods, such as low- or no-till farming practices and reducing our reliance on fertilisers. An army of people working with our natural resource management groups, including through Landcare projects, have for decades now been helping to better manage the land and river ways that feed us. But much more needs to be done.

The former Labor government recognised this, and in 2012 created the position of Advocate for Soil Health. Former Governor-General Major General Michael Jeffery still holds that position and is doing an outstanding job. Indeed, to his credit, the former Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, extended his period of office. I am confident that Major General Jeffery would not mind me saying that in my experience—having had many conversations with him—he is often frustrated by the lack of attention our soils receive from our policymakers. As he points out, our current approaches to water management are focused...
mainly on the—on average—12 per cent of rainfall that ends up in our streams, our rivers and eventually our dams—in other words, the water we actually see. Another two per cent falls on our rooftops and roads. However, the greatest potential for efficiency lies in making better use of the 86 per cent of rainfall initially falling on our soils, of which a staggering 50 per cent—or 25 times the quantity held in all of our dams—wastefully evaporates because it cannot filtrate the landscape.

This is where the importance of organic carbon in soils comes in. A properly structured soil with appropriate carbon content will allow rainfall to penetrate and to be initially stored in-ground for use by plants and animals. It will also allow the water to filter slowly, recharging our waterways, particularly during times of limited rainfall. Dams and other water storage are generally very important, but when you think about it there is much more we can achieve through innovation, technology, research and development in the area of soils.

In this place we now have a Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources. But where is our minister focused on soil? It takes both water and soil to create the food on which we so rely. All of us in this place need to start talking about the challenges and opportunities ahead in a bipartisan way. There is a lot of talk about water, as important as that is. I acknowledge that, but we need to be talking more about soils. I pose the question in this place, and I will not ask for a show of hands: who, before this motion this morning, knew that it is the International Year of Soils? Very few, I suspect.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Broadbent): Is the motion seconded?

Mr HUTCHINSON (Lyons) (10:48): I second the motion. I also thank the shadow minister and member for Hunter for bringing this really very important motion before the House today. Indeed, soils sustain livelihoods. They sustain life on earth as we know it. Indeed, as the member pointed out, the biodiversity that exists within soils rivals biodiversity of the above-ground species that we are all—for obvious reasons—more familiar with.

It is worth repeating, as is highlighted on the website fao.org—a very good source of information—that soil is the basis for food, feed, fuel and fibre production, and for the services to ecosystems and human wellbeing. It is the reservoir for at least a quarter of global biodiversity and, therefore, requires the same attention as our above-ground biodiversity. Soils play a key role in the supply of water and in resilience to floods and droughts. The largest store of terrestrial carbon is in the soil, so its preservation may contribute to climate change adaptation and mitigation. The maintenance and enhancement of global soil resources is essential if humanity's need for food, water and energy security is to be met. It has been highlighted through the opportunities that have been provided to farmers and the agricultural areas within this country more generally as part of the Emissions Reduction Fund that there are projects all around the country now that have taken advantage of the opportunities within the ERF to demonstrate their capacity to sequester carbon dioxide. As we are all well aware, there were 47 million tonnes at a cost of $13.95 a time, some of which was sequestered through soil carbon, which I look forward seeing more of.

As the member for Hunter pointed out, within the International Year of Soils 5 December is World Soil Day. There are five pillars of action, which is part of a global soil partnership:

1. Promote sustainable management of soil resources for soil protection, conservation and sustainable productivity
2. Encourage investment, technical cooperation, policy, education awareness and extension in soil
3. Promote targeted soil research and development focusing on identified gaps and priorities and synergies with related productive, environmental and social development actions.

4. Enhance the quantity and quality of soil data and information—which I think is something that Australia does pretty well—data collection (generation), analysis, validation, reporting—and so forth, and harmonisation of how that data is collated around the world.

Soil biology is a critical part of healthy soil, whether it be applying organic composts, fertilisers and bio amendments; encouraging natural biological cycles and nutrient transfer; adopting holistic management; implementing time controlled grazing within agricultural systems; using grazing management and animal impact as farm and ecosystem development tools; retaining stubble, or performing biological stubble breakdown; constructing interventions in the landscape or waterways to slow or capture the flow of water that can be so damaging from time to time; fencing off waterways and implementing water reticulation for stock; investing in revegetation, pasture cropping, direct drill cropping and pasture sowing; changing different crop rotations; and incorporating green manure and undersowing of legumes. These are all things that can enhance our agricultural systems.

I have been speaking to Bill Chilvers from my electorate—a very practical man who is obviously a very capable and knowledgeable man in respect of Tasmania's soils—and Lee Peterson, who does all of the work for Huston's, a business that grows lettuces in the south of Tasmania. Indeed, these are the things that sustain our livelihoods. Run down the asset and the capacity and the capability of our soils are compromised. Improving soils is about improving organic matter, making sure that our baseline capacity within those soils is maintained. It would be remiss of me, in the short time that I have left, not to mention the potential for biochar, particularly the work done by Mr Frank Strie, who also lives in my electorate.

Debate adjourned.

Adhesive Arachnoiditis

Mr IRONS (Swan) (10:53): I move:

That this House:

(1) recognises that thousands of Australians received a spinal injection of the chemical dye Iophendylate (marked as Pantopaque and Myodil) and that many now suffer from the painful disease adhesive arachnoiditis;

(2) acknowledges the recommendations in the report Living with the pain of adhesive arachnoiditis: Report on the roundtable into adhesive arachnoiditis presented by the Standing Committee on Health and Ageing on 11 February 2013 and calls for all recommendations to be implemented; and

(3) encourages all Members of Parliament to be aware of the condition and support members of their community suffering from adhesive arachnoiditis.

I move this motion today with the strong support of the member for Shortland, my colleague the member for Reid and also the member for Werriwa, who are all going to speak to it.

This House needs to continue to hear about this issue as there is still much that must be done to support the sufferers of adhesive arachnoiditis. In 2011, I brought this disease to the House's attention through a speech. I note that I was not the first member to highlight this crippling disease in the parliament. I know that Jenny George, the former member for...
Throsby, tried back in 2003 to bring this disease to the attention of parliament through an inquiry. It was great that in 2011 we could get the then Standing Committee on Health and Ageing to do that. Again, I would like to thank the members in the chamber today for highlighting its importance and beginning what has become a very long but much-needed battle on behalf of those suffering with the debilitating disease.

Our efforts back then led to a House of Representatives standing committee report *Living with the pain of adhesive arachnoiditis* and a number of significant recommendations. I was deputy chair of that committee at the time and the member for Shortland, who is in the chamber, was the chair. We have not had success in having these recommendations implemented in their entirety. They should be implemented without delay. The first and foremost recommendation of this report encouraged GlaxoSmithKline to consider establishing a charitable foundation to assist sufferers of adhesive arachnoiditis, by raising awareness, supporting research and managing cases around Australia.

Almost three years on from the report’s publication, I would like to express my disappointment in GlaxoSmithKline for their inaction and continued avoidance of the responsibility. The company has the means to provide what would have been the most modest of support to the unfortunate victims of the chemical in the contrast media but instead has chosen to look the other way. As we know from their US website, GSK are very generous to some of the foundations that have been set up, and it would have been fantastic if they would set up the same in Australia. So much pain is caused by the disease but more pain and heartbreak is caused by the lack of recognition by GSK. It can never be put right, but a small gesture like establishing a foundation would go a long way to assist sufferers.

In response to the recommendations made by the committee, GlaxoSmithKline said:

We believe that it would not be appropriate for GSK to be responsible for establishing a charitable foundation as recommended by the committee.

I think this is a bad decision by GSK and I am sure committee members would agree with me. I ask GSK to reconsider and I say look to your hearts and not to your lawyers. Their lack of corporate social responsibility only extends and prolongs the frustration, desertion and isolation felt for decades by sufferers of the debilitating disease.

I note that the three further recommendations in the report focused on raising awareness of the condition. Today I will be instructing the secretariat of the Standing Committee on Health to write to all the organisations mentioned in these recommendations to ascertain progress made since the recommendations were tabled, namely the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners; Medicare Locals, now Primary Healthcare Networks; the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists; the Australian Research Council; the National Health and Medical Research Council; other health providers and, obviously, GSK.

It is incredible that sufferers still contact my office—and I know they contact other members as well—to tell me that doctors and GPs are unaware of the condition's existence. Imagine how frustrating that must be when you go to a doctor with all these issues and they cannot give you a diagnosis. That is why it is particularly important that part 3 of this motion be agreed to by the House. As members of parliament, we need to provide understanding and support to sufferers in our communities.
On a more positive tone, I would like to mention my constituent Mr Max Scott, a sufferer of adhesive arachnoiditis and the first person to bring this issue to my attention more than five years ago. It was my meeting with Mr Scott in 2009 that instigated my push for adhesive arachnoiditis to be looked into by the then Standing Committee on Health and Ageing, during which Mr Scott appeared as a witness. Recently, Mr Scott contacted my office again and told me that he was able to stand up for the first time in a long time. He still cannot walk but just standing has made a big difference to Mr Scott. The doctors cannot explain it and have called it a miracle. Again, I want to thank Mr Scott for his courage in dealing with this debilitating disease and for the vital role he has played over the years in getting adhesive arachnoiditis recognised and debated on a national level.

We must now push forward and continue to fight for these recommendations. Many Australians are relying on our efforts. Thank you.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Broadbent):** Is the motion seconded?

**Ms HALL** (Shortland—Opposition Whip) (10:59): I second the motion. Firstly, I congratulate the member for Swan for being a consistent campaigner to have this issue addressed. Adhesive arachnoiditis is one of the most painful and debilitating conditions that a person can have. It is not something that they were born with. Rather, it is something that, in many cases, occurred because they were having treatment for or seeking an answer to why they had back pain. Back in the 1970s, it was standard procedure to give a person a myelogram. When they had a myelogram, they had Myodil or Pantopaque injected into their spine. It has subsequently become well known that Myodil and Pantopaque cause arachnoiditis—not in everybody, but in a significant number of people.

So I join with the member for Swan in saying that GSK, GlaxoSmithKline, should have addressed this issue much sooner. Hiding behind lawyers does not resolve the issue; it does not get rid of the pain that these people living with adhesive arachnoiditis suffer on a daily basis. Their lives are turned upside down. They cannot enjoy the normal activities that a person has an expectation to enjoy. They have constant pain: pain in their back and pain in their legs. At the time that they undertook the myelogram with this oil based contrast medium that was used, the side effects were unknown and there was not enough research around the fact that side effects could occur. These side effects could have been mitigated if it had been removed. This was not done in many cases.

The round table that the committee held in September 2012 was one of the most moving round tables that I have been involved in. We had people who had been living with adhesive arachnoiditis for many years telling us about what it had done to their lives. At that particular time, Lyrica, a treatment that was available to a person who was a veteran, was not listed on the PBS. That has subsequently been listed, which helps to some extent. But it still has not got to the bottom of it. It still has not come up with any sort of cure for adhesive arachnoiditis or any sort of compensation—I dare to say compensation—for those people living with adhesive arachnoiditis.

I join with the member of Swan, too, in expressing my disappointment that GlaxoSmithKline has not established a charitable foundation to assist sufferers of adhesive arachnoiditis. This foundation would raise awareness of the condition and support research into adhesive arachnoiditis, which is needed, because you cannot get around the condition or come up with any sort of cure or any sort of proper response unless you undertake the
research and look at ways that you can address this condition. It would also coordinate adhesive arachnoiditis support groups because support groups are needed. Not long ago, I visited a constituent who cannot get out of his bed. He is living in his bed. His only contact with people is with his family, and it is a very difficult situation. So there needs to be support. There needs to be representation made to the government to establish and maintain an Australian case register, which is really important. There is not enough information out there.

I have to say it is very disappointing that this report has not been implemented or properly responded to. This is an issue that is impacting on Australians' lives, and it is up to the government to respond to it, and it is up to GlaxoSmithKline to actually take some action to help all those people whose lives have been ruined.

Mr LAUNDY (Reid) (11:04): Over the past couple of years of my being in this place, there have been many occasions when the member for Swan has raised issues with me which he is passionate about. I would like to congratulate him and the member for Shortland for moving this motion today. Over the last couple of years, the member for Swan has, on many occasions—too many to count—mentioned this particular cause of adhesive arachnoiditis and the devastating impact it has had on so many Australians, the vast majority of whom today are potentially undiagnosed. I would like to thank the member for Swan and the member for Shortland, acknowledging that, for the duration of this report and this study, their roles as chair and co-chair have changed, but they have been united in their pursuit of what the right thing to do is.

We take for granted that we stand in this place to speak. When we finish speaking, we walk back to our offices. What you are potentially talking about with sufferers of this disease is people like Mr Scott in the electorate of Swan; the doctors currently think it is a miracle that he can stand. As the member for Shortland said, she has a constituent who is confined to bed.

The two recommendations of the report that I would like to focus on are the responsibility of GlaxoSmithKline and the responsibility of us as a government to raise awareness of the potential for undiagnosed cases currently out in the community at large. GlaxoSmithKline is obviously a big pharma company with big resources and, as a result, big lawyers. But they have to acknowledge and own up, 'fess up, to their part in the role they have played in this and do the right thing. Instead of hiding behind lawyers, they have to deal with, as this recommendation says, setting up a charitable organisation. As the member for Swan said, they have done this on numerous occasions in the US. I call on them, like the member for Swan and the member for Shortland, to acknowledge their role in this and the onus on them to provide some sort of support for people who have been adversely impacted through medicines that they are responsible for.

The second major part of the report was the lack of broader community knowledge about the plight. I know that the member for Swan and the member for Shortland were contacted by sufferers. Some 30 years ago, when this was used as a treatment for x-rays, 250,000 people in total used the drug. Currently we have 60,000 listed as diagnosed to be suffering from it. Potentially, there are many out there who are suffering in silence and unaware of what they are suffering from. Why? Because as the report rightfully identified, there is such a low level of understanding on the frontline of our medical practices.

I would particularly like to point out the bodies which the report has said should be engaged and educated in an attempt to promote this cause to patients who are potentially
undiagnosed. They are the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, Primary Healthcare Networks, the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists, the Australian Research Council, the National Health and Medical Research Council and other healthcare providers. In fact, I would like to join the member for Swan in putting not only the financial responsibility back onto GlaxoSmithKline, but I would encourage them to enter into an education campaign that could be run through medical networks, so that resources could be made available and another potential reason for undiagnosed causes of pain could be proffered—when seen at the frontline by our wonderful primary healthcare physicians.

This is about doing what is right. We all have the right to stand and walk around at the end of what we would have considered in those days a standard medical procedure. GSK is fully aware of the adverse impact this drug has had. I call on it to make right what is wrong. I commend again the member for Swan and the member for Shortland for their unending pursuance of what is right.

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Werriwa) (11:09): I was first referred to the issue of adhesive arachnoiditis by a visit from constituent Pamela Romano of Ingleburn. Having undertaken a myelogram in 1972, she was later to endure severe low back pain, leg pain, numbness and chronic pain in the legs and feet, a burning sensation, and bladder and bowel dysfunction, leading to a failed back operation at a later stage. I note the recent recommendations by the roundtable: the need for more information and advocacy that the Australian College of General Practitioners and Medicare Locals provide practitioners with information, that the Australian government through the Australian Research Council supports research projects et cetera. However, I think the fundamental issue is the conduct of GlaxoSmithKline.

It is not as though this is a recent phenomenon. In 1948, Sweden banned the use of this product and a significant number of other countries followed. It is not as though it is raised for the first time in this parliament by the member for Swan. Back in 2002, the then member for Throsby, Jenni George, raised this same issue in this parliament. We have seen GlaxoSmithKline utilise a barrage of lawyers, who are paid expensive remuneration, to fight against these victims. It was very timely on the weekend when I noticed an article in the Saturday newspaper on the Baryulgil community of northern New South Wales who endured the same sort of attitude from James Hardie, a company thinking that the Indigenous workers would die off and basically that the matter would go into history and no-one would be properly compensated.

In regard to the resolution by the then member for Throsby, which has been crucially followed by the member for Swan since then, I note the point was made that:

In October 1994, the then federal minister responsible for therapeutic goods in this country advised the New South Wales minister as follows:

Myodil was a contrast medium used mainly for myelography ... It had a number of adverse reactions; arachnoiditis being one of the more serious.

As it was in use before the Commonwealth began to evaluate drugs of this class, it was never evaluated by the Therapeutic Goods Administration for efficacy and safety.

That is quite amazing. What we do know, however, is that the company which imported and distributed Pantopaque/Myodil was advised by the therapeutic goods branch in June 1978 that it was
involved in ‘unauthorised distribution’ which ‘has not been restricted to the “approved end users” but, apparently, has been supplied to all parts of the Commonwealth’.

There were questions about the use of this product for decades but the company blithely went ahead. As far back as 2008, Dr Dennis Cordato commented:

I am of the opinion that there is a causal link between this and a substance known as myodil … the inflammation of the arachnoiditis membrane covering the spinal cord and brain.

In 2005—quite a few years ago—Mark Colvin on PM quoted Marcus Stoodley, a neurosurgeon at the Prince of Wales Hospital who said:

It is now medically accepted that Myodil is associated with the subsequent development of arachnoiditis.

I have detailed the complaints that my constituent has endured. Clearly there is a large number of sufferers in this country. Clearly GlaxoSmithKline should, very late in the day, take notice of this recent series of recommendations to utilise some of their money to ‘raise awareness, support research, coordinate support groups, make representations to government to establish and maintain an Australian case register’.

Clearly over time there have been significant indicators that this drug has caused massive problems. Countries would not have banned it if there were not an issue here. Quite frankly, they have had the clear attitude of hoping that they can battle it out, that the number is not that large, that interest is sporadic, although maybe by a few members of parliament more longer term, and that the media occasionally, every four or fix years, might raise it. For people like my constituent, clearly their entire existence has been very severely restricted. This woman has great difficulty in moving around, she is emotionally very distraught over the issue and has undertaken an operation which failed, has found a great degree of disinterest and a great degree of aggravated opposition from GlaxoSmithKline. I very much join with the mover of the motion and the seconder in supporting this motion.

Debate adjourned.

**Rural and Regional Newspapers**

**Mr CHAMPION** (Wakefield) (11:22): I move:

That this House:

(1) notes:

(a) the importance of rural and regional newspapers in providing a vital service to the towns and regional communities they cover; and

(b) that maintaining a viable rural and regional press is in the interest of regional communities; and

(2) recommends that the Government:

(a) considers reviewing the amount of government advertising in regional papers;

(b) recognises the significance of its decisions regarding government advertising and the impact that these decisions can have on regional publications; and

(c) stops discriminating against newspapers which service rural and regional areas through its changes to government advertising.

I have many papers in my electorate. I remember growing up in Kapunda and reading both The Bunyip and The Leader. The Bunyip is a great country paper with a great history. It serves Gawler and the immediate surrounds of that town. The Northern Argus serves Clare and the
Gilbert Valley. The Barossa *Herald* serves the Barossa and the outer Gawler area. *The Leader*, based in the Barossa obviously serves the Barossa but it also stretches across into Kapunda, my home town. The *Plains Producer* services Balaklava, and the *Two Wells & Districts Echo* serves the people of the Adelaide Plains.

These are very important papers, trusted sources of information in these towns. They are trusted to both record the ebb and flow of country life—the sport and the community events—but also to bring the news of the nation and news of government programs to their local community. That is why I can attest to their importance. Several times as a local member, and also as a candidate for public office, I have advertised in these papers. I can attest to their efficacy in terms of advertising dollars.

About 32 per cent of the nation is rural or regional, and we know that these country newspapers have the highest levels of content of any medium; they are completely unmatched by radio and television. We have heard government backbenchers talking about some of the changes that have occurred in those media markets in recent years. We have seen a retreat of national news organisations from rural and regional Australia, and I think that is a great pity.

We know that they are still the most trusted paid medium in Australia, ahead of TV or radio or online sources. We know that nearly eight million Australians read regional or community newspapers. We know also that in order for these newspapers to continue to do this they have to retain and receive sufficient revenues to remain in print. They are important parts of these communities and important parts of this country. So that is why to one extent or another they rely on government as an advertiser as a source of revenue. Given that eight million people live in rural and regional settings, and given they deserve information from the government as much as people who live in the cities, you would not expect this government to cut regional advertising in the papers in the 2015-16 year by 20 to 30 per cent over what it was in 2014-15.

We have country members of the government out there sending in their press releases, expecting them to be quoted verbatim by the country journalists—

**Mr Ewen Jones:** What's wrong with that?

**Mr CHAMPION:** We hear the member for Townsville saying, 'What's wrong with that?'

You might want to go and talk to these papers and perhaps talk to the Treasurer and the Finance Minister and get them to start advertising in these papers. We know that this government is not shy of promoting itself. We have ad campaigns for the Green Army, jobactive, the FTA—

**Mr Nikolic:** There is a lot to promote.

**Mr CHAMPION:** I hear the member opposite saying there is a lot to promote. All I am asking is that they give country papers their share of the promotion dollar. Otherwise, there is a suspicion that this is aimed at cities and marginal seats, and not aimed at truly giving information to the public.

The classic example of this is the $20,000 instant asset write-off, which was advertised in the city press before the end of the 2014-15 financial year, but someone must have forgotten about the regional press. Yet where do we find the small businesses, the subcontractors and the people who create the great wealth of this nation? Where do you find them? You find them out in country towns; you find them out in farms and in regional communities; that is
where you will find them. They deserve information just as much as the marginal seats in the city. They deserve the information.

There are 250 regional publications with Country Press Australia, who are in the building and lobbying MPs, so they will be around to see everybody. I think they have sent everybody a copy of every regional paper that they can get their hands on. It is important that the government advertising dollar responds to this campaign, because it is a campaign that is grounded in the public interest.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Broadbent): I thank the member for Wakefield, and it is a pleasure to agree with him. Is there a seconder to the motion?

Ms Brodtmann: I second the motion.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I thank the member for Canberra. The question is that the motion be agreed to. I call the honourable member for Bass.

Mr NIKOLIC (Bass) (11:20): Thank you. Like the member for Wakefield, I bemoan the retreat of national media from regional areas, because maintaining a viable rural and regional press is vital to the social and economic wellbeing of local communities. In the digital age, however, the challenges for regional newspapers are considerable. These include the pervasive adoption of mobile devices and social media, resulting in a much broader array of media choices, and fierce competition for advertising dollars. Newspapers today must be innovative and adapt to these challenges. But they should also be supported by government policies that help to develop regional businesses and institutions, as the coalition is doing.

In my electorate of Bass we are fortunate to have The Examiner, the only seven-day-a-week newspaper outside of capital cities in the Fairfax stable. Around 60 kilometres away in Scottsdale, we also have the North-Eastern Advertiser, a locally owned, independent, Tasmanian regional weekly that is 106 years old. It is bucking the general media trend of the big cities, with growing circulation and increasing advertising revenue demonstrating how much local people value the coverage of local issues. I congratulate editor Neil Grose for reinvigorating the paper's fortunes.

But The Examiner, based in Launceston, is newsworthy in its own right. Having grown side by side with Tasmania during its 173 year existence, The Examiner is the oldest newspaper in Tasmania and the third-oldest continually operating in Australia. Its founding editorialist, the Reverend John West, was a strong advocate for the end of convict transportation. His writing in The Examiner and later in the Sydney Morning Herald, helped pave the way for Federation. The Examiner in 2015 continues to win international awards and punches above its weight when it comes to influencing the local and national conversation.

I also know from my personal association with The Examiner over the last 30 years or so how much pride it has in its connection to our community. We see this in every edition. Just last Friday The Examiner launched its annual Empty Stocking Appeal, Australia's oldest continuing public charitable campaign. The value that local people place on The Examiner is apparent in its high reader penetration. With the additional subscription options available today, 70 per cent of people in The Examiner's catchment area read the printed or online versions each day. That is because The Examiner's editorial focus is local news, which no other local media type can cover in as much detail.
Let me now turn to the economic viability of regional newspapers which, like The Examiner, have traditionally relied on print advertising and hard copy sales revenue. It is clear this has been eroded over time by new media. Many regional newspapers are no longer locally owned and are part of major media companies headquartered in the big cities. This has occurred for a number of reasons, including market share rules and networking technology, which enable resource sharing and operational efficiencies. Efficiencies have meant reduced staffing levels in many regional media organisations, including those imposed by Fairfax at The Examiner. As a private company, that is their right. In contrast, publicly funded media organisations like the ABC, with greater regional responsibilities than its commercial peers, have, sadly, mimicked the diversion of resources to the capital cities.

As I said earlier, new media and online advertising have transformed traditional revenue sources across the board, which in many cases has seen less local news being produced. Advertising has moved on and the fact is that traditional media channels no longer deliver the coverage they once did. Newspapers, both regional and metropolitan, are facing up to the challenges of the digital age and so must the government.

It is also worth reminding ourselves that, while government advertising in regional papers is needed to get messages out, the fact is that additional revenues from advertising are managed by head offices more often than not in capital cities far removed from Launceston and other regional centres. So we must be cautious in suggesting that government advertising alone is any sort of golden bullet that secures the future of regional media.

In conclusion, let me reaffirm that maintaining a viable rural and regional press is in the best interests of regional communities. In the digital age, newspapers today must be innovative and adaptive. Government policy should similarly acknowledge contemporary realities and encourage local ownership and a fair playing field.

Mr MARLES (Corio) (11:25): Geelong has a number of weekly local newspapers, among them GeelongNEWS and the Geelong echo, which give us their snapshot of the weekly news in our town midweek, GeelongNEWS in respect of that news which occurs within Geelong centre and to the north and the echo in terms of the news on the peninsula. The Geelong Independent is a welcome addition to one's letterbox coming into Thursday-Friday, as we go into the weekend, for its take on what has occurred in Geelong during the week. All serve our community tremendously.

But today I really want to talk about Geelong's daily newspaper, the Geelong Advertiser. I have a copy of today's paper here. It has been a part of our community for a very long time. If I can be indulgent: my first photo was in this paper in 1976, when I won as a tender eight-year-old the under-9 swimming championship at my local school. That a newspaper would cover such an event as that says a lot about what regional newspapers are all about. From that moment onwards, in the way in which I grew up it was always an incentive to see if you could get your name in the Geelong Addy. It was the incentive to kick a goal in the junior footie, because then you would get your photo in the Addy. A bit later on in my life a good round in the weekend golf comp might land you in the Geelong Addy. More recently I have flipped through the pages of that newspaper—indeed, on this very day—to try to find my name in relation to whatever particular issue is going on.

I look at my children, particularly my older two, Sam and Bella. They read this newspaper in a way that they do not read the Herald Sun, The Age, The Australian or the Financial
**Review.** They flick through it with the hope that they might see their name in the way I did when I grew up but also so they might see a photo of their friends in a variety of different ways. Reading the Geelong Advertiser is an entirely different experience from reading any other newspaper, because it is our newspaper. It tells our story.

Warren Buffett encapsulated this perfectly when he said:

If you want to know what’s going on in your town – whether the news is about the mayor or taxes or high school football – there is no substitute for a local newspaper that is doing its job. A reader's eyes may glaze over after they take in a couple of paragraphs about Canadian tariffs or political developments in Pakistan; a story about the reader himself or his neighbours will be read to the end. Wherever there is a pervasive sense of community, a paper that serves the special informational needs of that community will remain indispensable to a significant portion of its residents.

Those words are absolutely true in relation to the Geelong Advertiser.

The Geelong Advertiser was founded in 1840. It is Australia's second oldest masthead. It was established by a Scots immigrant, James Harrison, who is perhaps Geelong's most famous son. James Harrison, as the original promoter and editor of the Geelong Advertiser, also gained fame as the inventor of the modern fridge. Indeed, he came up with that invention by his observations of the way in which alcohol evaporating on typeset made that typeset cold.

The Geelong Advertiser is a really significant part of Geelong. It has had many owners through the years. Today, it is owned by News Corp and it employs more journalists and photographers than any other local media outlet within our region. In that sense, it is the custodian of Geelong's story. I think, when you examine what it is that makes Geelong Geelong, there are a few critical institutions – the Geelong Football Club is an obvious example, perhaps Deakin University, you might say, is one of the critical organisations within our city—but I think there is none that is more important than the Geelong Advertiser. Without it, our story would not be told, and without our story being told it would be hard to characterise the same sense of identity. We might just be another outer suburb of Melbourne. But what makes us distinct is that we have a voice, and the Geelong Advertiser, for 175 years this month, has been the voice of Geelong.

**Mr EWEN JONES** (Herbert—Government Whip) (11:30): I thank the member for Wakefield for raising this motion and I would like to add my voice to the chorus of people extolling the virtues of a competitive and informed local media market.

I do not have to tell anyone about the values involved in this debate and I would like to add my voice to the chorus of people extolling the virtues of a competitive and informed local media market.

My local paper, the Townsville Bulletin, has to cover not only the issues such as energy and water infrastructure but also the local issues such as chooks, primary school pageants and swimming carnivals. While this may seem trivial to some, it certainly is not. The ability to be all things to all people is a tough gig. It is something which few can accomplish and fewer understand. The ability to affect a regional community's self-perception and mood should never be underestimated nor undervalued. Sure it is a training ground for journalists who want
to be the next Laurie Oakes or Paul Kelly, but it is also home to wise old sages such as John Anderson who can show them the virtue of telling a story and writing for their audience and can show them that there is as much to learn from the publican at Gannon's Hotel in Julia Creek as there is from an exclusive with the Prime Minister—and many times it is probably more interesting and probably has fewer untruths in it. I may rue the day, but I never want to see the day, when locals cannot get a say with letters to the editor or with stories about lollipop ladies or Centrals rugby league. To do that, newspapers must have a strong economic base, good leadership and a strong sense of community.

In this, I would like to draw the tenuous bow and make mention of the proposed changes to my local ABC programming. ABC management have firmly stated that this is not a budgetary change but a programming change. The ABC has come out strongly and announced these changes without consideration of the Townsville market. We in Townsville will get out first hour of breakfast radio from Newcastle or the Gold Coast. This is despite saying that we would not lose one minute of local broadcasting. Our main morning talk show will be cut from two-and-a-half hours, to one hour. It would seem that the ABC has forgotten what the Townsville Bulletin still holds firm: programs such as these, are what gives our community its texture, its colour, its smell and its sound. It is what the regional media is all about.

I do not get a great run in either place. The previous speakers have said that we should be able to just put out our press releases and have them printed verbatim. I cannot see what is wrong with that, because at least you know when it is coming from me it is the truth. These pesky journalists wanting to know what the truth is and finding the other side of the story are wasting their time and they should know better. If they just put it exactly as I said, we would all get along fine.

Decisions made by others miles away—and, in Townsville's case, thousands of kilometres away—must be made with the view that we are an important part of our state and country. We deserve to be treated fairly, and head offices all over the country must understand that it is, indeed, different where we live and we need to be respected by all players. My Townsville Bulletin and my local ABC are vital cogs in my region's psyche, and so it should be. To that point, as busy a man as Rupert Murdoch is—the Townsville Bulletin is owned by News Corp—he came through Townsville because he wanted to see what the new printing press was like. He wanted to see the new offices and see how it was actually working in Townsville on the ground, and that is what the Townsville Bulletin represents.

My seat is only in Townsville, but around Townsville we also have the Ayr Advocate, the Herbert River Express, and the Northern Minor in Charters Towers. Those papers are very important in making sure it is not just about the Cowboys—paraphrasing what the member for Corio just said—it is about our local people, it is about your eisteddfod results, it is about your primary school kids, it is about your junior sport, it is about our community and I think regional newspapers are a vital cog in that. They are a great training ground for journalists, editors, sub-editors and advertising people on the way through. But it must come with a good, solid economic base, and newspapers, per se, have faced a great deal of change in the very recent years and have come through the other side.

Ms KING (Ballarat) (11:35): I am very pleased to lend my voice to this very important debate for those of us who live in regional Australia on the importance of our regional and rural newspapers. More than 100,000 people live within the boundaries of my electorate of
Ballarat. It contains small towns, such as the community of Dean, with a few hundred residents through to the burgeoning regional city of Ballarat itself. Ballarat's history has always contained a wide array of experiences. The Eureka Stockade saw 500 diggers from around the world take an oath on the Southern Cross. It saw police troopers sent in to enforce the law, backed by two army regiments following orders from the government. Each person has their own version of events from that day. Each had their own history that led them there. Ballarat's largest towns and smaller settlements are all founded by similar people and similar families, with stories just as varied. These stories do not tell themselves. Frequently, if it were not the dogged reporting of local regional papers and newsletters, they would not be told at all. Who else is going to access the opinion of a potato farmer half an hour from the nearest train line?

If a volunteer group from a town with a population of double figures runs a charity drive, are they going to get air time in a major broadsheet? I do not think so.

For stories of national significance that happen locally, local media is an absolute necessity. Without the local connection, the story will not show our perspective—something that leaves us all poorly informed. Without papers defined by that insistent focus on our communities, however small or distant they are from capital cities, we do not hear from people and they do not always hear from us. Such a bridge between parts of our community builds familiarity and can generate community cohesion, as well as give an insight into wonderful local events. These regional newspapers and the stories they tell of our communities deserve our support.

The federal government does spend a significant amount of money communicating policy, informing citizens and advertising programs through media nationally yet many of the smaller, regional publications miss out. There is an important disconnect we need to think about here. Not only is the government and its departments ignoring a communication channel that is completely integrated with target communities they want to get to but it is also failing to recognise the impact federal advertising dollars can have on regional communities, particularly on those smaller regional newspapers.

In my own electorate, we have large publications. We have a Fairfax publication in Ballarat, The Courier, which is a daily newspaper. But we also have much smaller publications across multiple areas of my electorate: The Moorabool News in Bacchus Marsh and Ballan; the leader, The Local News, in Daylesford and Hepburn Shire; The Miner, which now covers from Ballarat all the way through to the member for Corangamite's seat in Geelong; and smaller but growing community publications like the Glenlyon & District News, the Creswick District News and the Buninyong District Newsletter—all of which I advertise in. These projects are not large by national standards, but in terms of 'local penetration', they connect with audiences in a way that is second to none.

Even a single government advertisement could be enough for these papers to take on a local photographer for a day a week or offer work experience to local students. By supporting regional publications, we can easily support our regional communities. Regional newspapers also play a very broad role in ensuring that local voices are heard. It is the stories within those regional newspapers, breaking stories in some instances, that are only told by local journalists who know the people to talk to, who actually go and speak to those people and who delve deep into the history of a particular issue. They also make sure that regional communities
have a very powerful voice, potentially, on the national stage as some of those journalists eventually do go on to be on our national broadsheets. There is a number of journalists who started at the Ballarat Courier, for example, who I now see throughout many of our major newspapers. Many have also gone on to be editors and other staff on other newspapers. They are fantastic publications.

It is critical that these newspapers are supported. It is also important that when advertising important government programs whether it be things like tax help or whether it be particular tax concessions or small business concessions that those smaller regional newspapers are also seen as a really good conduit into those communities. They are often the paper that people will read. They may not necessarily read The Australian — some will but not all — but they will pick up the local paper that covers that area. They will make sure that they have the local newsletter that covers that area as well and I would strongly encourage the government to support rural and regional media because it is in the best interests of rural and regional communities that we do support a strong regional newspaper.

Mr Hutchison (Lyons) (11:41): I also rise to support the member for Wakefield's motion and particularly acknowledge the importance of rural and regional newspapers in providing a vital service to the towns and regional communities they cover. They maintain a viable regional and rural press in the interests of regional communities. I will take this opportunity to acknowledge that many small publications, as the member for Ballarat also highlighted, are not the carrier of daily national news but are important to local communities that depend on them to function.

I also acknowledge Matt Deighton, the editor of The Mercury, which is a very important daily publication in Hobart and in southern Tasmania. Also on the north-west coast we have the Fairfax publication, The Advocate, edited by Julian O'Brien. I particularly acknowledge the regional lift outs that go into, in my case, the municipality of Latrobe and the municipality of Kentish. Indeed, they are very important services.

I will touch on The Examiner, one of the nation's oldest newspapers, in a moment. I also acknowledge other publications in my electorate that include The Bagdad News — thanks to Vicky Pearson — The Brighton Community News, The Central Coast Courier, The Coastal Column — and the wonderful job that Heidi Howe particular does in collating that at St Helens.

I must make special mention of The Country Courier. My thoughts are with Chris Keating, the former editor. I know he is unwell at the moment. I also congratulate a former staffer of mine, Alison Andrews, who has just unfortunately resigned to take up a role as the owner — a 'media magnet' as we like to call her — of The Country Courier, which goes throughout the northern midlands and it is a very important publication in that part of Tasmania. The Derwent Valley Gazette is owned by The Mercury and I thank them for the coverage of the Prime Minister's visit there a couple of weeks ago. Other publications include: The Great Oyster Bay Community News edited by Bill Fry and his team; The Highland Digest — great work done by editor Libby Schubridge and those at the online access centre; The Kentish Voice; The Meeandah Valley Gazette; The Midlands Herald; The Southern Midlands News, The Surreal Times; Tasman Gazette, ably run by Gaye Wright; and The Valley and East Coast Voice run by Wendy Dawson, who took over from the formidable Judith Spilsbury who ran it for many years.
The Examiner in Northern Tasmania is Australia's third-oldest surviving daily newspaper after the Sydney Morning Herald 1831 and the Geelong Advertiser in 1840. As the Launceston Examiner Commercial and Agricultural Advertising, it was the first published on Saturday afternoon 12 March 1842 on a hand press smuggled into Van Diemen's Land disguised as a brewery machine.

The Launceston Examiner was originally located in Brisbane Street Launceston and had a staff of 12 led by its founder and first editor, James Aikenhead. The first three editions were free and were then sold for sixpence to become a biweekly in 1842 and by 1853 it was being published three times a week. James Aikenhead was a local businessman who was eventually joined by Johnathon Stammers Waddell. But it was Congregational minister John West who is still remembered as The Examiner's first campaigning editorial writer. From his office he drove the anti-transportation fight to stop the transportation of convicts from England to the new Australian colonies.

The Reverend West wrote the leading article in the first edition of The Examiner attacking convict transportation and its detrimental effect on building a respectable, sound and prosperous society. This launched the newspaper's leading role in the antitransportation campaign which helped unite the Australian colonies and sow the seeds of the Federation of Australian states in 1901. The Reverend West went onto become editor of The Sydney Morning Herald in 1854. The Examiner moved to a purpose-built premises in Paterson Street, Launceston, in 1857, from where it continued to operate until a few months ago.

During its long and distinguished history, The Examiner has always remembered the legacy of reformist lead writer, the Reverend West. It has grown to become one of the city's biggest businesses, employing nearly 350 staff at its peak. It became an integral part of its community dominating news media across the state as a fiercely independent publication always ready to campaign for its community.

I am telling the story not only because it holds an interesting place but because I want to all urge all to advocate to protect these businesses. They are an important part of healthy rural and regional communities. In contrast to other media, newspaper audiences have never been bigger, whether it be online or in print editions.

Debate adjourned.

Queensland: Urannah Dam

Mr CHRISTENSEN (Dawson—The Nationals Deputy Whip) (11:46): I move the motion relating to Urannah Dam:

That this House:

(1) congratulates the Government on its support of development in north and central Queensland with its White Paper on Developing Northern Australia;

(2) acknowledges the contribution of the Government to:

(a) water infrastructure in north Australia through its $500 million National Water Infrastructure Development Fund; and

(b) key infrastructure in north Australia through its $5 billion Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility;

(3) congratulates the Government on its support of water projects throughout northern Australia including Nullinga Dam and the development of the Ord River Irrigation Scheme;
(4) calls on the Government to support the construction of the Urannah Dam;

(5) notes that the:

(a) damming of Urannah Creek in the Whitsunday region would open up 30,000 hectares of new agricultural land;

(b) new agricultural land will have the potential to triple the current cane production industry in the region and double the size of other agricultural production; and

(c) Urannah Dam will develop water sources and power supplies to service the growing mining and agricultural industries in the Whitsunday region;

(6) further notes that the:

(a) development of the project has the potential to double the current agriculture workforce in the region;

(b) dam has the capacity to generate $323 million over 25 years; and

(c) development of industry in the region will help to repopulate the Collinsville community; and

(7) calls for the support of federal, state and local governments in providing supportive policy in order to aid the progress of the Urannah Dam especially in allowing private investment in the project.

We have spent many decades in this country speaking about the promise of northern Australia: vast tracks of land, enormous coastlines and more water than we know what to do with. Like that great gold deposit, or reef, that Harold Lasseter announced in 1929, the promises of riches from the north have not been delivered. Like Lasseter's Reef, doubts have increased over time. When people talk about northern development, north Australians are quick to say, 'Well, we've heard it all before and nothing ever happens.'

But right now, I have got to say, North Queenslanders in particular are very excited about the genuine commitment from the Liberal National government: the white paper, the overall policy direction and the fact that now substantial dollars are on the table. I am going to say, due credit goes to the member for Warringah, the former Prime Minister, for seizing the opportunity and being the Leader of Government to come up with, not just a concrete plan and political will to develop the north, but putting those dollars on the table. The $5 billion fund for concessional loans to develop infrastructure in the north demonstrates that this government means business. I congratulate the Prime Minister for taking that plan further, for appointing a dedicated minister for northern Australia. In fact, that minister, the Minister for Resources, Energy and Northern Australia, was in my electorate just recently. He went for a tour of the north and I can tell you he is thoroughly dedicated to ensuring that the northern Australia white paper is realised on the ground.

There are a number of things the government can do in order to enable development and growth in northern Australia, principally through providing or facilitating investment in key areas that is going to enable growth. I talk about road transport, rail transport, ports, communications, energy and water. I am particularly excited about the opportunities for water infrastructure that were announced in the white paper and in the further agricultural competitiveness white paper that the agriculture minister announced. There is $500 million that has been set aside in a National Water Infrastructure Development Fund, $200 million of which is specifically for northern Australia. That is because the north provides the biggest opportunity for water infrastructure. We have the largest amount of rainfall across the nation, reliability of rainfall and we have wet and dry seasons, of course. But, substantially, the
rainfall is just simply lost and runs out to sea. If we could capture some of that rainfall in major projects, we could revitalise and develop the north.

One specific project I want to talk about is Urannah Dam. It is just outside my electorate, actually in the electorate of Capricornia. I will note that the member for Capricornia is going to speak on this soon. It is a project that has been talked about since the fifties and sixties. Again, people do roll their eyes when they hear about it, sadly, because it has been talked about for so long. But now is the time. We have the Liberal National coalition governments stumping up, not just words but actual policy frameworks and funding. We have got the funding there to do this.

I want to just say what Urannah Dam will deliver. Urannah Dam, if built, would actually capture that much water it would open up a 30,000 hectare area of agricultural land to the south of Collinsville, well suited to irrigation farming, and it would make a contribution. This was identified back in 2001 in a study into the development of Urannah Dam. An agro-economic assessment identified a net present value for the project of $323.2 million over 25 years from the agriculture industry associated with the Urannah Dam alone. It does not include the potential development that we would get from industrial mining and power generation. It would create 6,000 jobs during its construction. Beyond that construction phase, as I said, the new agriculture sector will open up ongoing job opportunities. There is potential for food-processing jobs to be created, port development and the jobs that would be created there. Sadly, we have had the extreme Greens and the Mackay Conservation Group attacking this project before it has even seen the light of day. They say that it makes no sense to build this dam when there is water available, but the water will enable new agriculture areas to grow. Bowen Collinsville Enterprise, a local group, are doing their own prefeasibility study, which they are going to deliver to me this month to hand on to the agriculture minister and the northern Australia minister. I look forward to that, because this is a great opportunity for developing the north.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (11:51): Is there a seconder for the motion?

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

Mr Butler (Port Adelaide) (11:51): Ordinarily, the opposition would be represented in this debate initiated by the member for Dawson by the member for Brand or the member for Lingiari, both of whom are in Darwin today at the Northern Australia Investment Forum, talking about Labor’s commitment to northern Australia, so I am happy to sub in for them. Northern Australia obviously has different challenges and different opportunities to the rest of the country. Cairns has more in common with Broome than it does with Brisbane, and Broome has more in common with Cairns than it does with Perth.

It is encouraging indeed that the federal government is focusing on northern Australia’s potential, and Labor looks forward to working with the government to achieve this. Labor in government established the focus on northern Australia by creating the Office of Northern Australia and the Northern Australia Ministerial Forum. It is positive that the government is continuing with similar governance arrangements.

The white paper on developing northern Australia deserves serious attention. It is, however, a little light in detail. Many initiatives are subject to further consultation, planning
or review, so there is much work to do to translate big expectations into concrete, deliverable outcomes.

The government has built up expectations around its northern Australia policies, particularly the $5 billion northern infrastructure loan facility, to which the member for Dawson referred. But the government has not yet followed through with its announcements. We still have no information on how loans will be prioritised and what the money will be spent on. The government promised that the project proposals for its loan facility would be accepted from 1 July 2015. We are now well into November, and the government has not even released eligibility criteria defining the types of infrastructure that will be supported or the financial criteria that projects need to meet. The government needs to stop this uncertainty and finalise the loan eligibility criteria forthwith.

Native title and land rights are important property rights which provide valuable economic opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Labor welcomes investment in the improvement of native title processes to accelerate the resolution of outstanding native title claims. These processes must be progressed with the full engagement, involvement and agreement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Reforms to native title bodies and processes must not circumvent or undermine land rights legislation.

A focus on improved policy process is critical, including guarantees that robust cost-benefit analysis processes will be followed for every investment project. So much of northern development will always depend on sustainable water supply and access. The Rudd government in 2007 convened a Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce, which examined the long-term strategic potential for land and water development, with particular emphasis on the capacity of the northern Australian area's agricultural development.

The Martin and Henderson Northern Territory Labor governments were part of that process and had, as a critical objective, set up strategic Indigenous reserves, or SIRs. SIRs aimed to allow Aboriginal traditional owners to have perpetual, exclusive and inalienable rights to a share of water from aquifers, rivers and creeks. The idea was that that water could be used by Aboriginal people for economic or environmental activity that would generate prosperity for their communities. The policy was developed by the Indigenous Water Policy Group and driven by the North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance, or NAILSMA.

The election of the Mills and then Giles CLP government in 2012 unfortunately changed everything. Immediately after the election, the CLP government tore up the SIRs, denying Aboriginal people the opportunity to participate in their own economic future and development. The same CLP government then handed out huge allocations of water to other, non-Indigenous, interests.

At present the Northern Land Council is negotiating on behalf of traditional owners of those lands planned for Ord stage 3 in the extreme north-west of the NT abutting the Western Australian border. Ord stage 2 was negotiated in such a way that the traditional owners' interest, native title, was extinguished in exchange for $57 million and some training dollars as well. We know of the enormous social dislocation caused by stages 1 and 2 for Aboriginal people. Any visit to Kununurra will show that. Now the Northern Territory government, no doubt with the support of this federal Liberal government, is also seeking to extinguish native title for the owners of the Knox Plain and Keep River areas of the NT.
Wouldn’t it be better for Aboriginal people to be at the table right from the start of these grand ideas? It can be done and it must be done, or northern development will remain a pipedream for Aboriginal people, and attempts to develop their lands will be rife with acrimony and dissent.

Ms LANDRY (Capricornia) (11:56): First, I would just like to correct the previous member. The minister is actually announcing the criteria on the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility today, where the member’s colleagues are, up in Darwin.

I would like to thank my colleague the member for Dawson for putting up this private member’s motion today. It allows us to reflect on our government’s push to develop northern Australia and to reflect on key water projects that should be considered in this process. In terms of economic potential, northern Australia is really our nation’s next pioneer frontier. Our North has enormous untapped potential, but it needs an injection of infrastructure and investment. The official appointment of a new minister for northern Australia—the Minister for Resources, Energy and Northern Australia—is proof that our government is serious about the long-term economic value that this part of Australia has to offer. Recently, I was delighted to host a visit by the minister to Rockhampton.

Today, I too join the member for Dawson in congratulating the coalition government on its support of development in north and central Queensland with the white paper on developing northern Australia. This paper, combined with our government’s white paper on agricultural competitiveness, endorses the need for water infrastructure in northern Australia through a $500 million National Water Infrastructure Development Fund. In addition, there is a $5 billion northern Australia infrastructure loans facility to allow major investors to access funds to build new projects.

But the development of our North hinges on a commodity that none of us can do without, and that is water. My electorate of Capricornia begins at the city of Rockhampton and takes in a vast area to Mackay and inland Queensland and as far north as Collinsville. There are three key water infrastructure projects that I would like to see developed there in the coming years under the push to develop northern Australia: the Eden Bann and Rookwood weirs, near Rockhampton; Connors River Dam, near Sarina and Moranbah; and the Urannah Dam, near Mackay. Raising the wall at Eden Bann Weir, near Rockhampton, and building a new weir at Rookwood would open up a new agricultural corridor on the Fitzroy River, the second largest catchment area of its type in Australia. I continue to push for these projects to get federal backing.

Eventually, we also need to proceed with Connors River Dam in the Isaac regional shire. This project is shovel-ready. Right now this project has been put on hold due to the coal-mining downturn, as it requires mining investors to support its construction financially.

Another significant project that needs to be funded in the push to develop Northern Australia is the Urannah Dam, 60 kilometres south-west of Proserpine. According to regional economic group, Bowen Collinsville Enterprise, or BCE, the Urannah Dam could be used for organic horticulture and organic sugar production, as well as for coal mining in the Bowen Basin and to supply electricity for the town of Collinsville. Collinsville has been hit by the local coal downturn and needs a boost. BCE is adamant that Urannah would give Collinsville a new lease of life by offering new irrigation industries and employment opportunities.
I join the member for Dawson in calling on the government to support the construction of the Urannah Dam under the Northern Australia process. Such a dam would open up new agricultural land, with the potential to triple the current cane production industry in the region and double the size of other agricultural production. And, importantly, it has the potential to double the current agriculture workforce in the region. It is estimated that the dam has the capacity to generate $323 million over 25 years and, as I said, would help to repopulate the Collinsville community and give a major boost to business in the area.

Of course, this project requires the support of federal, state and local governments, especially in allowing private investment to be part of the project. I have been to Collinsville—it is in the far north of my electorate—and have spoken to local people and local business owners. And I have been to meetings about the Urannah Dam. The community is adamant that the development of Urannah Dam and a power station at Collinsville will provide a new lease of life to this once-booming coal region. I therefore commend this private member's bill to the House today.

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEES
Standing Committee on Tax and Revenue

Membership

Mr TUDGE (Aston—Assistant Minister to the Prime Minister) (12:02): by leave—I move:
That Mrs B. K. Bishop be appointed a member of the Standing Committee on Tax and Revenue.
Question agreed to.

BILLS
Social Services Legislation Amendment (More Generous Means Testing for Youth Payments) Bill 2015
Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr COULTON (Parkes—The Nationals Chief Whip) (12:02): I rise this afternoon to speak on the Social Services Legislation Amendment (More Generous Means Testing for Youth Payments) Bill 2015. This bill will implement the government's 2015 budget measure that will provide more consistent and more generous support for families with dependent young people who qualify for certain youth income support payments. With a financial commitment from the government of $262.7 million over the forward estimates, this bill will bring extra support to families as their children move into young adulthood—particularly rural and regional families whose children continue to study beyond year 12.

From 1 January 2016, this will include removing the family assets test and the family actual means test from the youth allowance parental means test arrangements. This will result in a more consistent level of support for families, as young people move from family tax benefit part A to an individual income support payment. The parental income test exemptions
for youth allowance will also be aligned with existing arrangements for family tax benefit part A.

Removing the family assets test for youth allowance will allow around 4,100 additional dependent youth allowance claimants to qualify for the first time, accessing average annual payments of more than $7,000 a year. Removing the family actual means test will see around 1,200 more people receiving youth allowance for the first time, as well as increasing payments for around 4,860 existing students by approximately $2,000 a year.

The changes will reduce the significant regulatory burden on around 30,000 families subject to the family actual means test and around 200,000 families subject to the family assets test. The changes mean farming families will not have farm assets counted toward the means test for their dependent children claiming youth allowance.

A further beneficial component of this budget measure will apply from 1 July 2016 to expand the 'family pool' for the youth parental income test to include a notional maximum rate of family tax benefit part A for all of the children for whom the parents have financial responsibility. This will apply to families that have dependent children receiving individual youth payments which are parental income tested and which also have younger dependent siblings, and will result in a lower rate of reduction to the dependent child's youth allowance than is currently the case.

These changes will be particularly important to the people of the Parkes electorate. I have had countless contacts and meetings with parents who are struggling to access tertiary education for their children. We have mentioned in here that farm assets will be exempt, which will be very important. But it is also important for a lot of people in regional Australia who are working in town and have a combined income—and I will use the example of a policeman married to a schoolteacher—which until now has made it very difficult to access funds and to send their children away to university. We have had the case in families with two or three children where a decision has been made by the parents about which of their children can go to university and receive a tertiary education and which cannot, which is completely unacceptable. So these changes will be very much welcomed.

Including all FTB children in the family pool for the youth parental income test will allow around 13,700 families with dependent children in both the family tax benefit part A and youth systems to become eligible for an average increase in payment of around $1,100 a year. Around 5,800 families who currently miss out on payments due to the combined higher taper rates will also become eligible for an average payment of around $1,300 a year. Additionally, in a two-stage process from 1 January 2016, maintenance income will be removed from the youth allowance parental income test assessment. From 1 January 2017, a separate maintenance income test for the treatment of child support will be applied, like the test that currently applies to family tax benefit part A.

This bill is boosting assistance for working families, smoothing the transition to individual payments for young people, and better supporting them to study to build their careers, develop economic opportunities and contribute to our community. I will conclude on this by saying that there is one thing that will rectify the multitude of problems across our society, and that is education. At the moment, a young person from regional Australia is 30 per cent less likely to access tertiary education than someone from a metropolitan area. As someone who prior to coming to this place, in my previous occupation as a farmer, has educated three children
through university, I understand the financial burden that is placed upon families. So this is a very good step forward in allowing people from regional Australia to level that playing field and giving them an opportunity to receive an education that will not only benefit them but ultimately benefit those regional communities from whence they came, because anyone that has a qualification as a professional person is more likely to go and work in a regional area if they were actually born and raised there in the first place. So I have great pleasure in supporting this bill.

Mr RAMSEY (Grey) (12:09): I rise to speak on the Social Services Legislation Amendment (More Generous Means Testing for Youth Payments) Bill 2015. I must say that in fact this issue is one of the reasons, I think, that I am in this parliament. As I raised my children, I realised just difficult it was for those of us that live in regional Australia to get our children particularly through tertiary education but even through secondary education if there is a need to send them away for that period of their life, and it got me actively involved on a mission in politics, if you like. In fact, at one stage I managed to sponsor a motion through the Liberal Party Federal Council in support of a better outcome for regional students. I was a little frustrated that, of course, that did not make immediate changes to the political world, and I guess my eyes were opened somewhat. So I became more involved in the political process, and perhaps that is one of the triggers that led me to the position that I hold today.

I normally subscribe to the theory that as long as people are able they should shoulder some responsibility for their choices in life, and that includes where they live. So if we choose to live in my electorate, for instance, in the far west so we can access the great surfing beaches at places like Cactus, or if we choose to live at Oodnadatta because we like the peace and quiet, that is our choice, and if the groceries cost more in that shop they cost more in that shop. But, of course, children do not have a choice, because children are necessary baggage with their parents, and they go where their parents and guardians take them. So, if they cannot realise their dreams and find a path to tertiary education but even through secondary education because their parents have made a choice, I do not think we should allow that decision to run against them. That is why I think governments should be in that place, making sure that we are presenting a more even playing field. I even produced a paper on this subject in 2009, and in fact the member for Gippsland, who is sitting in front of you at the moment, Mr Deputy Speaker, said to me only the other day, 'That paper is still relevant; those points that you make are still very real in this debate.'

In 2009—that is why I developed the paper—I hoped for a better outcome. There was a time when we were in opposition and I was hoping to improve the situation we had. But in fact the government of the day, the Labor government under Kevin Rudd, made changes in this area to youth allowance eligibility. Some, I would have to say, were good, inasmuch as that government limited the ability for people living at home in the city to substantially gain out of the system for independent living, but some were extremely deleterious to country students—in particular on the independence test for youth allowance. So instead of progressing country students, as I had hoped, we were ceding ground. There was a long ground war after these decisions by the previous government, and regional members Australia-wide—who, I must say, are nearly all coalition—were incensed. After a long campaign, in March 2010 then Prime Minister Rudd finally backed down on most of the changes relating to the independent youth allowance and, in particular, restored the previous arrangements for those in outer regional and remote Australia. By 2011, the government
ceded yet more ground and gave the same conditions to inner regional Australia. So, apart from the stricter means test, we had almost turned full circle. But, of course, given that I was unhappy about that particular position in the first place, it stands to reason that I would still be lobbying, first in opposition and now in government, for a better deal for country students.

I quote from a speech that I gave to this place in October 2009, raising issues of rural disadvantage.

However, there is another form of disadvantage that governments have been less willing to accept responsibility for. Those who live in the country who have to leave the parental home to attend university have an inbuilt financial disadvantage. Where other students can live at home cheaply with the support of family, country students and their families face years of extra costs amounting to tens of thousands of dollars per student.

That statement is still relevant today, and country students and their families face years of extra costs amounting to tens of thousands of dollars per student.

During this whole period there has been a united group within the coalition that have continued to lobby for change, and that has included the member for Gippsland. A reoccurring theme for regional MPs has been this situation where we have families that are asset rich and income poor. It particularly pertains to the farming industry but not only the farming industry. You might have a farmer or a motel owner that is struggling for reasons due to drought and the economic downturn in regional communities and not getting a great income from their asset and is often worse off than a straight wage earner, and their children have been ineligible for assistance because the family is deemed to control assets. It is not a fair and proper arrangement to then turn on the people that control these assets and say, 'You must mortgage them up to get your children an education.' In fact, if it is a poorly performing asset in the first place, imparting greater debt on them so they can finance their children's way through education is only undermining the very model that supports them in the first place.

Students are not stupid; otherwise they would not be seeking a higher education, perhaps. They know when a family can or cannot afford to send them away, in this case, to university. We have the HECS and HELP schemes, but it is this issue of supporting that person in situ that rests most heavily on the family. They know when their families can or cannot afford this outcome. So rather than say to their family, 'I really want to go to university, but I understand that we cannot afford it so I will go off and get a job locally, sweeping the floor at the local garage,' instead they say to their family: 'I don't really want to go to university. I would rather have that job down at the local garage.' The kids are sending an open message to the family that reduces the guilt that particular family might have about not being able to support them on their dreams. So I think the level of unmet need or unmet desire to go to higher levels of education within rural and regional communities is understated for this fact.

This legislation, amongst other things, removes the family actual assets test. It is estimated that that will enable an extra 4,100 students to qualify for assistance. It removes the family means test. It is estimated that that will assist another 1,200 students to access appropriate assistance. It places the means test in sync with the family tax benefit part A, as of course it should. There is no logical reason why you would not line up these criteria together. This is a huge move for the thousands of isolated families in Australia. As I said, 4,100 in the first instance from just the family actual assets test, to an outcome that will probably produce about $7,000 a year extra for them to meet, primarily, accommodation expenses. It is a big
step and it is a great win for those of us within the coalition that have continued to lobby for change in this area.

There are a raft of other changes, of course: altering arrangements where parents receive income support payments, to iron out some of the cliff faces where students are transitioning from family tax benefit A to individual support, removing a number of superfluous exemptions and bringing ABSTUDY into line. These are basically housekeeping measures, but, in total, the commitment from the government will cost an extra $262 million over the forward estimates. From my point of view, the big move is the removal of the family actual assets test and the family means test for youth allowance, and I say hooray.

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland—Assistant Minister for Defence) (12:19): It is with great pleasure I join this debate on the Social Services Legislation Amendment (More Generous Means Testing for Youth Payments) Bill 2015, but also it is a great pleasure to follow my good friend and colleague the member for Grey, who spoke very eloquently and made the case about the unique barriers which confront regional families when it comes to helping their children go on to achieve their full potential. And like the member for Grey, one of my great motivations in even running for parliament was to make sure that I could do my bit to help young people achieve their full potential in Gippsland, or in other parts of regional Australia. It is a great pleasure to participate in this debate on some positive news, but I hasten to add I still regard the area of student income support, and youth allowance more generally, as a policy area of unfinished business, where there is more work to be done.

But the bill before the House does provide more generous means-testing arrangements for youth payments, and the changes will help regional and rural families to better support the transition of their children from school through to further study, including those children who continue to study beyond year 12. As the member for Grey indicated, around 1,200 families from regional and remote areas will be eligible for an increase in payment from the removal of the family actual means test, and there are also expected benefits from the removal of the family assets test. This change, in particular for farming families, will mean that their farm assets will not be counted toward the test for their children accessing youth allowance.

All families currently subject to the family assets test and the family actual means test will benefit by reduced regulatory burden. So this is a great win for many regional MPs who have lobbied for change in this area. In addition, some children from regional and remote areas who often face higher study costs associated with living away from home will benefit from an increase in their rate of youth allowance and we will see others qualify for youth allowance for the first time, with some of them able to access payments of more than $7,000 a year.

The bill follows a great deal of hard work by the member for Grey and many others. But I would like to acknowledge the Victorian senator Bridget McKenzie, who was part of the interdepartmental committee on access to higher education for regional and remote students and was one of the driving forces behind the changes we see before the House today.

Removing complex and unnecessary means testing and improving the operation of parental income test is a good first step in responding to the concerns that have been raised by parents in relation to means testing, and will also assist with the level of participation of young regional people in tertiary studies. While the changes are great news, they will certainly boost the numbers of families that the government will assist, and that level of assistance will
encourage more young people into study to help build their careers, which will make an important economic contribution and a major boost to the skills base of regional communities.

Looking at the speaking list for today's bill, I note that, of the 20 MPs listed to speak, every one of them is regionally based. It is an important point to make, because this is an issue which tends to divide this House on the basis of city versus country. As I said in my opening remarks, I regard this very much as unfinished business: there is still work to be done. The reason so many regional MPs are speaking on this bill is that they recognise that there is still a great deal of work to be done. I encourage my city based colleagues in this place on both sides of the House to take the time to try and understand this issue, because it is complex.

As the member for Grey indicated in his comments, this is not an issue of children making the choice to live in rural and regional communities; it is a decision that their parents have made, and the children find themselves at a significant disadvantage when it comes to furthering their career options. This is about helping young regional people achieve their dreams. This is making sure that young people in our regional communities do not have barriers placed in front of them which we can reasonably address in this place.

The system of student income support, as it stands today, is still broken, and the changes before the House today are a very important step; however, they do not change the fundamental concerns I have with the issue of access for young people in regional communities who are forced to move away from home to attend university. It is a totemic issue for regional MPs across the pay divide. What we are seeing right now is a direct transfer of wealth from the pockets of regional families into the city based landlords or city based universities.

We are still failing to grapple with the fundamental concerns that many regional MPs have about this issue. There are two points at the heart of underperformance or underinvolvement of regional students in universities: one is the aspirational barrier—we need to get better as leaders in our regional communities at encouraging young people in regional towns to aspire to achieve great things in their lives. It is a challenge for us to address in our communities. The second is an economic barrier, and we can do something about that in this place. We can help regional families overcome some of the cost barriers that are placed in their way when their children are forced to move away from home to attend a course and improve their skills.

The economic barriers faced by regional students are the costs on top of the costs that every other student faces. The member for Grey mentioned the HECS system, and every student has the opportunity to defer the payment of their course costs through the HECS system. But a young person moving from Gippsland to attend university in Melbourne faces additional costs: rent, living in a residence or travelling back and forth from home—sometimes three or four hours, if they want to return and still be part of their family back in their community. The magnitude of those costs is somewhere in the vicinity of $15,000 to $20,000 per year—that is $15,000 to $20,000 of after-tax income which is being directly transferred from a regional family into the city. I think it is something that this House can do more to address into the future.

I have a very different view to some members on this issue of student income support, because I do not regard it as a welfare or a social security issue; I regard this fundamentally as an issue about fairness and access. If we do not have the capacity in Australia to establish regional universities and university courses within close proximity to all the young people in
Monday, 9 November 2015    HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES    12371

our community, then we have to make sure that we are prepared to assist all regional students who are forced to move away from home to attend the course of their choice. We need to improve access to our nation's universities for regional students who often have no other option than to travel many hundreds of kilometres away from their home and support networks to pursue the course of their choice. This is a social issue in the sense that it makes good sense, because these young people are more likely to return to their regional communities with the skills they have developed at university, whether it be in law, engineering, health, teaching or other sought-after professions. The bill is a good start but it is really only a down payment on the complete reform, which is still required.

I am on the public record many times in support of a policy position which the Nationals have developed at the grassroots level—and it has been through state conferences and federal conferences of the National Party. That position is one of a tertiary access allowance, which means that any student within reasonable income test considerations forced to travel in excess of 90 minutes to attend a university will receive some level of support for those living-away-from-home costs which other members have spoken about. It is a simple recognition of the additional costs which regional families face when forced to send their loved ones, their children, away from home to attend university.

We need to do more to ease the burden on not only the families but the students themselves and the younger remaining siblings, which the member for Grey and the member for Parkes also spoke about. We have situations where families have more than one child at university, or one child at university, and children still at home and the wealth being taken out of that family has a genuine deleterious impact on the children remaining at home. I have heard stories from parents who have had to make a choice about which child they send to university. I would suggest that in 2015 we can do a little better than that.

I mentioned the impact that this economic barrier has on students. I fear that our high dropout rate and high deferment rates for regional students have a lot to do with the pressure we place on these students when they move away from home to attend university. In many ways, my fear is that we are actually setting these children up to fail, because they are under more pressure than perhaps their city counterparts. For one, these are 17- to 18-year-olds leaving home for the first time. They are setting up a home for the first time a long way from their support networks. Because mum and dad do not necessarily have all the resources to support them, they are going to have to work part time. They are going to have to learn to live in a new city. They are going to have to safely navigate and negotiate their way round that city but also return home, if that is their choice, on weekends.

These are the issues many constituents raise with me on a weekly basis. In fact, when the former Gillard-Rudd government made changes to youth allowance—I think it was around 2009—I had literally thousands of people sign petitions in protest of the changes that were made. As the member for Grey indicated, it led to quite a significant campaign amongst regional MPs. Eventually, we did force some changes in the original proposal put forward by the then education minister, Julia Gillard—and I thank her for being prepared to make some concessions. But we still have not solved the problem, and I fear that we are still a long way from pulling together the political will in this place when I refer to the speaking list today and I see the 20 members who are speaking on this issue are all regionally based. Again, I encourage my city based colleagues to look at this issue with fresh eyes and gain, perhaps, a
better understanding of the additional costs and barriers that regional families face when helping their young people achieve their full potential.

The point I want to make in closing is in relation to the skills shortage we face in many regional communities. We have had other speakers comment today that, undoubtedly, the people most likely to set up careers, to open an office, to set up a practice and to use their skills in a regional setting are probably young people who have had experience in that regional community in the first place.

We export a lot of great things from our regional communities. In my own electorate of Gippsland, we export dairy products, timber products, seafood and horticultural products. Beef, lamb, wool—you name it, we export it. But our most precious export is, undoubtedly, the children we send to university, and we want to bring them back. We want to have the opportunity to bring those children back in the future and bring their skills back to our regional communities. But if we do not invest in them at that young age—at 17, 18 and 19 through to 21, when they are at university—if we do not help them address that economic barrier, I fear that we will not give them their full opportunity to achieve their absolute best.

I am not one who suggests that going to university is the be-all and end-all. I certainly support as much investment as the government can afford in trades and other forms of training. But I do agree with the member for Grey, who indicated that we have the situation in regional communities where young people place limits on themselves on the basis of knowing what their family can afford. That is a barrier that no young person growing up in Gippsland or other parts of regional Australia should have to place on themselves.

I believe we have the capacity in this place in the coming months and years to, from at least an economic perspective, address this one barrier for young people who are moving away from home to attend university. We actually have the capacity in this place, in the decisions we make, to make a very real difference in young people's lives. I believe we can do better. I am very heartened by the fact that members opposite from regional communities have spoken in favour of this change and other changes in the past. I am also heartened by the fact that, on this side of the House, amongst my Liberal colleagues and National Party colleagues, there is a unanimous view, a considered and determined view, to continue to pursue this issue within the government. I believe we have great capacity to do better in relation to the level of support we can provide for young people who move away from home to attend university and, just as importantly, I believe we can support their families and the regional communities that they have come from.

I believe the legislation before the House today is an important first step, but I will continue to work with members of good faith who share my passion for helping regional students achieve their full potential. I will continue to work with them in the months and years ahead to ensure we are doing everything we can to allow young people in regional communities the same opportunities—I am not after anything more—that their city based cousins and friends can enjoy. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr TAYLOR (Hume) (12:33): I believe that supporting our younger generations to access higher education is one of the great investments we can make in our future. At a very personal level, this is an issue I care about deeply. I was a country kid who was lucky enough to go away to university and do three degrees. As for so many other country kids, that was an
opportunity that was life changing, and I want to see that passed on to the next generation of children growing up in the bush.

I have also been involved with one of the residential colleges at the University of Sydney that, in recent years, has given out millions of dollars in scholarships to kids wanting to go to university to give them every opportunity to participate in education at one of the world's leading universities.

The benefits of education to country communities cannot be overstated. Not only is access to good education life changing, it can be absolutely transformative for the communities themselves. It fosters leadership, it encourages enterprise and innovation, it brings new skills to a region and, importantly, it helps keep our country towns vibrant and viable. It is true that many of these people who go off to study outside their home town may not come back, but many do come back. Whilst it might not happen immediately, it certainly happens over time. For too long, though, rural students, including many from my own electorate of Hume, have been disadvantaged when it comes to accessing government support while they are studying. That is why I am so supportive of this bill.

What is the problem we are trying to solve here? As a country, we know that education is central to prosperity and to innovation, but we need to confront the relatively low tertiary education levels in rural areas. My colleague Senator Bridget McKenzie has been a very strong advocate of these changes in her own quest to ensure that regional students get fairer access to education. She showed me some ABS figures from 2011 showing how regional and remote areas account for just 21 per cent of domestic undergraduate higher education enrolments. These students also tend to have lower year 12 completion rates than city students, which often affects aspirations. Not only are enrolments lower, as I said, but completions are lower. We saw this in a Joining the Dots briefing released this year from the Australian Council for Educational Research which found that 74 per cent of all students who commenced university in 2005 had completed but for regional students the completion rate was only 69 per cent and for remote students it was 60 per cent. It was even lower for Indigenous students. So we can see a strong correlation between completion rates and where students come from. At the same time, we know that youth unemployment and underemployment is unacceptably high in parts of regional Australia and in parts of my electorate. We know that with younger people the problem is not just unemployment, which is sitting at 14 per cent and higher, but also underemployment, which is not always as clear from the figures.

Why do we have this problem in rural areas? In a national tertiary access research survey conducted by the Isolated Children's Parents' Association in 2013, 93 per cent of members found the cost of tertiary education for their children was a huge challenge. The cost is a huge challenge. More than half of the families surveyed were living 500 to 2,000 kilometres from the nearest university offering the required course. The expense of tertiary study is not the study itself and this is a mistake that is often made. People think the real issue is the cost of the university tuition. It is not; it is the living expenses, which most kids or their families struggle to afford.

The Deferring a University Offer in Victoria report last year concluded that financial stresses and travel-related costs are the biggest barriers for rural and regional students. University of Melbourne researcher Professor John Polesel says, 'Factors such as money,
university location, travelling long distances and a desire to stay at home are more likely to affect non-metropolitan students.' Hear, hear to that! We know that is absolutely right. Under existing legislation for accessing youth allowance, students from the bush often need to work a few jobs to make ends meet, leaving little time to study. They also find it harder to secure part time work after re-locating.

The pressure of the work-study overload is often too much for some students who withdraw from study and move home to work or find a full-time job before completing their tertiary qualifications. That accounts for the lower completion rates which I talked about earlier. Until now, students from rural and regional areas have endured a significant handicap as their city-based contemporaries often have the benefit of completing their tertiary studies while living at home with their parents.

So what are we doing about it? The government recognises the need to make it easier and fairer for country students to access youth income payments so they can complete their studies. As a government and as a nation we are committed to supporting productivity gains and innovation. This means removing those barriers to vocational and university study and supporting our young people to develop their skills. We know that there is a strong link between tertiary study and expansive employment opportunities and that it is much more pronounced in rural and regional areas.

This amendment bill provides more generous means testing for youth payments and will enable more generous and consistent support for families with dependent young people who qualify for certain youth income support payments. Among some of the very welcome changes is the removal of the family assets test and the family actual means test from the youth allowance parental means test arrangements. This will mean that farm assets are not counted towards the means test for their dependent children who are claiming youth allowance.

Removing the family assets test for youth allowance will allow around 4,100 additional dependent youth allowance claimants to qualify for the first time. They will access average annual payments of more than $7,000 a year. Removing the family actual means test will see around 1,200 more people receiving youth allowance for the first time and that will also mean increasing payments for around 4,860 existing students by approximately $2,000 a year. The bill is focused on boosting assistance for working families, particularly in rural and regional areas. With a financial commitment from the government of $263 million over the forward estimates, the bill will bring extra support to some 30,000 families as their children move into young adulthood.

To qualify for youth allowance, many rural students, especially those from farms, defer their study and work for a year or two to qualify for independence from their families. For farming families, part of the reason for this is that family farms were considered in the means test for dependent children. By removing that test, we can send a message to rural students that we want them to acquire new skills, expertise and training. From my own perspective, I hope those skills and expertise flow back to the bush.

I want to say a couple of things about the importance of creating jobs as part of this. We hear often that, with the burgeoning number of people going on to tertiary education, particularly to university, we are struggling to find work for all of them, particularly work that is relevant to the study they have done. Through complementary social services legislation,
the government is introducing a series of measures to encourage job service providers and job seekers to comply with mutual service obligations and most importantly to help them to get into work quickly.

There is a very simple story as to what drives jobs growth. There is the demand side and the supply side and there is matching the two together. On the demand side, the key is to control government consumption and to strongly encourage investment. For instance, just outside my electorate tens of thousands of jobs will come from the construction phase of Badgerys Creek airport, the EIS for which was released a few weeks ago. Depending on how the redistribution unfolds, that may ultimately be part of the newly formed electorate of Hume. We understand the demand side of the economy does not need a jobs plan; what it needs is good, hard-headed economics and a very strong focus on investment and driving infrastructure investment from the public sector.

The supply side and the matching is all about getting potential employees into a position where they can find work and they have the skills to do that work. It is partly about industrial relations, but it is also about welfare and the job search system. That is exactly what we are focused on in much of the work the government is doing. Many of the researchers and experts in labour market economics tell us that the unemployment benefit system and job search system are absolutely crucial in influencing unemployment and getting people into work. This is particularly so for countries with a relatively generous level of benefit, like Australia.

We are investing $5 billion in employment services to better meet the needs of job seekers, employers and employment providers. Our real objective is to promote strong workforce participation by people of working age and to help more job seekers move from welfare to work. To do that we are providing much stronger incentives for employment providers to deliver high-quality services. Part of that is paying them for outcomes, which would seem like an eminently sensible thing to do but was not part of the previous setup. We are also seeking to take away a lot of the red tape from employment providers—they have been wrapped in red tape up until now. Much of the training we are looking to do through the employment service providers is much more targeted and we are not seeking to do training for training's sake.

Job seekers need to understand that our system requires mutual obligation—they have to do their bit—and we are simplifying and extending the mutual obligation framework to ensure job seekers remain actively engaged while looking for work. It is not about box ticking; it has to be far more fundamental than that.

The government's new jobactive program and related programs are providing real assistance to people looking for meaningful work. I was recently at Young meeting with a group of local people who had signed up for one of a number of local Work for the Dole projects. Work for the Dole is being run through jobactive providers. At Young, the jobactive providers include the Salvation Army, MBC Max Employment and Employment Services Group. The Work for the Dole team at the Young showground has been doing a tremendous job fixing up showground buildings and grounds, preparing the grounds ahead of the recent show—which was a huge success. Much of the work on the grounds that led up to this most recent show was being done by this Work for the Dole group.

One of the participants, Cassandra Gendle, who has been on the team since August, said she has 'learnt a lot and is getting a lot more confident working around other people'. That is a great endorsement. Team leader Mick Alexander said he is seeing a lot of positives from the
project—including teamwork, mateship, self-pride and higher self-esteem for participants. 
Jobactive is all about delivering outcomes, not just ticking boxes, and I am really backing it.

Returning to the bill before the chamber, country families are all too familiar with the 
reality that a good education is often about leaving home, and personal family sacrifices are 
made to make that happen. My wife, Louise, and I have become strong supporters of the 
Country Education Foundation of Australia. It does invaluable work helping disadvantaged 
rural students access grants and scholarships. The work of the CEFA is an investment in the 
future of rural and regional Australia. It is a model of locally based grants, and it is proof of 
the sound return on investment when it comes to supporting rural students.

In 1993 a group of people from Boorowa got together to support and encourage their 
school leavers to pursue tertiary education. They started raising funds, and in the first year 
rased $5,000 and provided scholarships to five students. The idea soon spread to the nearby 
communities of Yass, Cowra and Harden, all towns in the Hume electorate. In 2003 the 
foundation went national and it has since grown to a network of more than 40 local education 
foundations across Australia.

This year CEFA has given out over 400 grants—nearly half a million dollars. CEFA is 
funded through private and corporate philanthropy and receives no government funding. 
Research by Social Ventures Australia indicates that, for every dollar invested, a social return 
of $3.10 is generated. That is an extraordinary return on investment. This bill, similarly, is a 
downpayment on our nation's future. It is about boosting assistance for working families, 
particularly in rural and regional areas. It is about better supporting young people into study, 
to build their careers, develop economic opportunities and contribute to our economy across 
Australia and particularly in regional areas. I absolutely commend this bill to the House.

Dr STONE (Murray) (12:47): I too rise to support the Social Services Legislation 
Amendment (More Generous Means Testing for Youth Payments) Bill 2015. In fact, this is 
legislative change that I have advocated for for a very long time. We have had workshops; we 
have had demonstrations; we have had our young students signing petitions; we have had 
them meeting in the mall in the city of greater Shepparton—all arguing that it is not fair that 
rural and regional students—who have to pay so much more to live away from home for 
tertiary education—should be held back because the legislation did not properly reflect their 
family's circumstances. They have been denied the support that metropolitan students receive 
by virtue of their families living near the tram tracks or living a short distance away from the 
place they need to attend for their education.

This bill introduces one of the changes outlined in the 2015 budget and it is going to 
provide much better support for our young people. The aim is to align the parental means-
testing arrangements for youth allowance with the arrangements for family tax benefit part A. 
The changes will in particular remove a family assets test and the family actual means test 
from the youth allowance means-testing arrangements starting from 1 January next year. They 
will align the parental income test exemptions for youth allowance with current arrangements 
for family tax benefit part A, and that will also occur from 1 January 2016.

The changes will not include maintenance income paid to parents in the youth allowance 
parental income test assessment from 1 January 2016. The changes will introduce a new 
maintenance income test as part of the youth allowance parental income test to assess child 
support paid to a parent from 1 January 2017. The changes will include all dependent children
who qualify for family tax benefit in the family pool for youth allowance parental income test not just those children who are senior secondary schoolchildren aged 16 or more, and that will commence from 1 January 2016.

These changes to the family assets and income assessment are going to mean in particular that people in rural areas will have a better chance to access higher education in Australia. Removing the family assets test will allow around 4,100 additional dependent youth allowances for young people to qualify for the first time. Around 1,200 families from regional and remote areas will be eligible for an increase in payment by the removal of the family actual means test. They are also expected to benefit from the removal of the family assets test.

In addition, these measures will also increase the payments for around 4,860 existing students by approximately $2,000 extra per year. That is very important. We estimate it costs a rural student on average about $20,000 to live away from home. That is in addition of course to the fees and charges and equipment that other students will also pay. If you have more than one family member in tertiary study, you can imagine how that soon mounts up to a situation where students do not even apply for tertiary education entrance because they are aware of the distress, perhaps even embarrassment, that a parent will have when they literally cannot afford for that young student to go away and follow a career with a tertiary education.

Young people from rural and remote areas are, therefore, not surprisingly underrepresented in higher education enrolments. The 2011 ABS census found that 27 per cent of 15 to 64-year-olds live in rural and remote areas, but students from those areas only accounted for 21 per cent of the domestic undergraduate higher education enrolments. This is particularly concerning in my region, which is officially called Hume for the east of the electorate and Loddon Mallee to the west of the electorate. My area is suffering from drought, particularly in the west of the electorate—in fact, there are food parcels now supporting many families.

I met with the Salvation Army in Bendigo just last week. They are concerned that they have such a run on food distributions to farm families that they haven't the resources to continue and that their regional rural counsellor, who is dealing with the emotional distress of being so impoverished at the moment due to the seasonal conditions, will run out of money for his support in June next year. They are most concerned about what will happen when there is not even that locally based financial and emotional counsellor available to support the families.

You can imagine those families contemplating the cost of $20,000-plus for their student to live away from home to study. It is an extra distress and a real sense of loss and disappointment when a family in such straitened circumstances cannot afford to have their student realise their opportunities when they do have their results at the end of year 12, because they may be accepted into a course but the course is elsewhere.

There is the cost of relocation for a rural student plus the cost of accommodation, their travel to and from their home, communicating back home, mobile phone use, the possible need to own a car, textbooks, computers and other needs when they are studying. All of these pose a barrier for rural and regional people to undertake higher education. Young people from rural and regional Australia are more often faced with these higher costs than lower-income people in metropolitan areas, because there is often no local university they can access or, if there is a local university, they only offer the first year of a course in the local regional city or town. They are expected to travel in their second or subsequent years to a campus which
again will require them to live away from home, so it is only deferring the cost for one year. When the student and their family look at that situation, they are still faced with the fact that they cannot even afford to apply for university in the first instance.

When there is a university course available locally, there are often no alternatives other than having private transport to the place. There is very little public transport in most regional areas. It is also very often the case that these students need additional assistance because they are the first member of a family who has had university education. In my city of Shepparton, the population who attends university for the first time often also needs English as a second language support—extra cost for the university and the student.

The rural and remote higher education students are more likely to be from a lower-middle-SES background compared to metropolitan students. In 2013, 35 per cent of regional students and 43 per cent of remote students were from a low-socioeconomic-status background, in comparison with only 13 per cent of metropolitan students. That is a very stark difference indeed. In the state of Victoria, the Greater Shepparton children report of 2014 found there were 24.6 per cent who were disengaged school leavers—meaning those not involved in work of study at all—compared to the Victorian average figure of 15.4 per cent. It was getting close to double the number of disengaged school leavers in the City of Greater Shepparton compared to the Victorian state average. You will not be surprised, then, that there is over 26 per cent youth unemployment in the City of Greater Shepparton. Many of those young people did not even apply for higher education options, knowing that their families simply could not find the funds to support those young people living away from home.

While deferral of studies by students ranged from 5.8 per cent in the western metropolitan Melbourne region to 9.3 per cent in the southern metropolitan region, deferrals in non-metropolitan areas—for example, in the Loddon-Mallee region—were 12.6 per cent, again substantially higher than metropolitan. The deferral rates were 17.2 per cent in the Hume region, which includes the City of Greater Shepparton. That 17.2 per cent of deferrals compares with just 5.8 in the western metropolitan region of Melbourne. So you can see that even the deferral rates are substantially higher. This is very often students seeking to do a gap year in the hope that after a year of working they might gain independent status, which was important under the old system, or be able to save enough to support themselves at least in their first year of away-from-home studies.

Among young people from non-metropolitan regions of Victoria, 43.6 per cent said they were waiting to qualify for youth allowance to finance their studies. That is just under half. That is substantially higher than deferrers in Barwon and south-western regions. Those saying they were trying to do a gap year to be able to finance their studies in the future in the Hume region rose to 57 per cent. One of the concerns when you take a gap year, of course, is that you do not return to your studies. There is a very significant proportion of those students, even with the very best of intentions for pursuing the career of their dreams, who will find they are not able to pick up those studies after that one year of deferment. There are a number of reasons, chief amongst those lack of financial capacity. As I said, it can cost up to $20,000 to live away from home. If you are depending on food parcels literally to put food on the table on your dried-off dairy farm in the Dingee area, you are not going to be able even to contemplate your student applying for university.
This bill introduced by the coalition should give young people in rural and remote Australia a far better chance to achieve their career goals and aspirations, and that is only fair. It is un-Australian to do anything else. Given the huge difficulties now being faced by families in drought throughout eastern Australia and the man-made water insecurity and price hikes in northern Victoria and southern New South Wales, we are now seeing farm family distress like never before. With farm career futures less likely for the sons and daughters of many farm families, it is essential that they can afford to live away from home to study an alternative career in an alternative life. Unfortunately, if there are cost barriers in the way, there are few unskilled or semiskilled jobs that they can look to if they cannot move from the region to gain some real career qualifications. With those qualifications they can return to that area as professionals. Ironically, studying agricultural science is one of the surest ways to be employed after graduation from your university course. There are said to be two or three jobs for every agricultural science graduate in Australia. But given the general reputation of agriculture at the moment as an occupation that is too high risk, with incomes being too low for the investment required even to commence becoming an independent, self-sufficient farm, too many students out of rural areas are not choosing to pursue agricultural science as a career, even though the job prospects after study are so enticing.

One of the issues there is that better career counselling is needed in rural and regional secondary schools. I am most concerned that in a very recent survey undertaken in the City of Greater Shepparton area, many of the students, even with career counsellors in their schools, were unaware that such support was available to them. Numbers of students had no idea of what prospects there were in the region in terms of employment or what higher education or training or, indeed, tertiary studies could lead to. In addition to this legislation making it more possible for rural and regional students to attend university, I am hoping that the innovations that our Minister for Education is only too aware are necessary for our rural and regional students include better, professional career counselling. This would not be from a teacher who has been in the local system for very many years—many decades often—and who has no knowledge about what is available beyond her own classroom or the confines of the school grounds.

We have a situation in inland Australia of a real hollowing out of opportunity and income. Our rural communities too often look with envy at the metropolitan life experience in those places that cling to the sea shores—the fertile crescents around Australia—particularly, in eastern Australia. We have got to make sure that the great value in Australia of equality for all in fact plays out for rural and regional students when it comes to their access to higher education. We know that a tertiary education can lead to much better job prospects. It can lead to much greater mobility—both socially and occupationally—across the country for a lifetime. I commend this bill to the House. It has been a long time coming and a lot of work has been done by so many from this side of the House. I commend all of those who have worked so long and hard and have been around the regions. It is an excellent bill and it is time for it to become the law.

Mr WHITELEY (Braddon—Government Whip) (13:02): I thank the member for Murray for her contribution, which I think hit the nub of the feelings of regional and rural representatives in this house of parliament. It has been a long time coming and it is a very worthy piece of legislation, indeed, as I stand to speak on the Social Services Legislation
Amendment (More Generous Means Testing for Youth Payments) Bill 2015. The coalition is committed to young Australians. We are committed to delivering better outcomes for them and we remain committed to giving them a hand-up, not just a handout. Whilst we are significantly tightening accountability within the Social Services portfolio, we are also delivering more realistic and more generous means testing for youth payments, and I know that will come as tremendous news for so many Australian families. This bill seeks to remedy some of the ways in which means testing has fallen short of the mark in delivering youth allowance to those who should be receiving it. This bill is consistent with that commitment and is a consequence of the sound fiscal management of this government because, when you manage the nation's finances in an effective and efficient manner, the taxpayer can then afford to give those of our young people that are in need a hand-up when they need it.

It is through providing more jobs and increased growth that this government is ensuring our generous social welfare system remains sustainable into the future. That is why the ALP's reckless political games around the blocking of the China free trade agreement was so fundamentally reckless. Those opposite care more about appeasing the militant CFMEU than they do about ensuring our economy can continue to provide a sustainable and cohesive social welfare system. When in government, they wrote blank cheques that they could not afford in this social services space and drove the country to the brink through their erratic and inefficient fiscal management. Conversely, this government has delivered free trade agreements with Korea, Japan and now China. We have positioned this great country's economy to take advantage of these emerging and populist markets. It is such prudent and responsible fiscal management which has ensured that this government can deliver a more generous means test for calculating youth allowance. It is only a coalition government that can provide a guarantee to the Australian people on social security sustainability.

This government remains absolutely conscious of the obligation we have to the taxpayer. That is why this more generous means test for youth allowance is characterised by nuance. This bill's nuanced approach to means testing is indicative of the understanding this government has of the needs of our young Australians and the demands of fiscal responsibility, because, whilst we of the government side want to provide even greater opportunity to our young Australians, we have taken an obligation to the taxpayer very seriously indeed. This government is committed to an affordable and sustainable social welfare system that is fundamentally rooted in sound economic management of the taxpayer's wallet. This government is not in the business of pursuing populist economic policy. We want to make the right decisions, and sometimes we have to make the hard decisions to deliver better economic results for this nation.

The financial impacts of this bill have been scrutinised and weighed against the benefits they will deliver for our young Australians. Due to measures enacted in this bill, our young people will be better off, and the taxpayer will get a return on the investment we are making in our young men and our young women. This bill introduces measures announced in the 2015 budget. It provides more generous and consistent support for some of our younger Australians. The coalition believes in investing in our young people and in unlocking their potential regardless of the circumstances in which they have been raised.

This bill is utterly consistent with the coalition's values. In our federal party platform it states that we believe in equality of opportunity, with all Australians having the opportunity to
reach their full potential in a tolerant national community. Ours is a guarantee of equality of opportunity for all rather than the perverse pursuit of equality of outcome. We know that through giving the individual space to achieve, and opportunity to succeed, Australians are imbued with such initiative that they will prosper. This bill is consistent with that endeavour and it is targeted specifically at unlocking the potential of our young Australians who are pursuing a hand up, not a hand out. This bill will benefit young people in my electorate of Braddon especially as it provides more generous and consistent support for families with dependent young people who qualify for certain youth income support payments. This bill is a generous broadening of income support for socially disadvantaged people in our society and will particularly assist young people in rural and regional Australia.

The coalition government is entirely committed to unlocking the potential of all Australians. From Alice Springs to Broome or from Cairns to Burnie, this government is delivering better outcomes and more opportunity for our young Australians. This bill is evidence of our commitment to hope, reward and opportunity. We understand that income support helps to deliver better outcomes for socially disadvantaged Australians and aids in unlocking opportunities for them. This bill will particularly affect our younger rural and regional Australians wishing to continue to study after graduating from year 12. This bill will enable some young Australians to fulfil their potential as they move from school into the workforce. This is a great win for my electorate as many of my young constituents seek to further themselves through tertiary study. It is my hope and the hope of many of my colleagues that this bill will encourage many, who simply could not afford to do so, to now pursue further study be it in a university or in a trade.

This bill will deliver better outcomes for young people through several changes to the manner in which youth allowance is calculated—and thank goodness for that. This bill removes the family assets test and the family actual means test from the Youth Allowance parental means test. Removing the family assets test for Youth Allowance will allow some 4,100 additional dependent Youth Allowance claimants to qualify for the first time. This will on average allow those individuals to access some $7,000 a year in youth allowance. This is a great outcome for some of our younger Australians and will give them a greater chance to invest in their own future. This is evidence of this government's commitment to greater opportunity for our young Australians. Removing the family actual means test will result in some 1,200 more young Australians receiving Youth Allowance for the first time. It will also deliver an increase in payments for around 4,860 existing students by approximately $2,000 each and every year.

The removal of these means tests will deliver a more reasonable assessment of our young Australians, deliver better application of Youth Allowance giving them a hand up and increasing their opportunity. Through these measures, the coalition will deliver better outcomes for our young Australians especially, as I said, in rural and regional Australia. These changes mean that farming families will not have farm assets counted towards the means test for their dependent children claiming Youth Allowance. This will directly assist many young Australians across regional Australia and deliver them the capacity to further invest in themselves through further study. This measure will particularly deliver some much needed nuance to the social services space with regard to our farming families. As some of
our farmers contend, with the unforgiving Australian climate as the member for Murray so eloquently described earlier, their assets do not necessarily translate into cash at hand.

I am proud to say that this government has shown much understanding of the agricultural sector in this bill, which will deliver better outcomes for our rural Australians. It is a measure I welcome and know it will deliver better outcomes for the constituents of Braddon. I am glad that this government is extending the same opportunities that exist for many young people living in the city. The perception that all farmers have huge on-hand wealth is simply not true. This bill will deliver a more accurate assessment for Youth Allowance of farming families and it is a measure of which I am particularly proud.

This government remains resolved to delivering effective outcomes in the social services space and this bill is part of that undertaking. This government believes in sound and responsible measures that deliver the best possible outcomes for those who need it most whilst maintaining our obligation to the taxpayer for frugal fiscal management. This government believes very much in opportunity for all. It is my belief that this bill achieves both these requirements. This bill is one of a multitude that this government has delivered in the social services space since our election and is evidence to this government's success in social services.

Through applying more generous means testing for youth payments, this government is fulfilling its promise to unlock the potential of each and every Australian. Importantly, however, there is a cost to the taxpayer in this bill. It should be noted that this government cares about every single tax dollar we spend. We understand the government does not have any money; it only has the hard-earned tax money of ordinary Australians. This government is delivering sound and effective economic management of this nation's finances. It is only through the sound fiscal stewardship of the coalition that we are able to enact a bill such as this.

This government is as frugal as it is generous, and I am satisfied by the due diligence this bill pays to the taxpayer and the generosity it shows to our young Australians. Those opposite have a very well recorded track record of delivering poor economic policy alongside inaccurate and inefficient social security legislation. This witch's brew of fiscal ineptitude left the coalition with a real mess to clean up in this legislative space and the work is an ongoing task. It is a testament to the resolve and hard work of this government that we have taken a verity of measures to increase accountability, decrease waste and increase the benefits of a targeted and nuanced social welfare. There is much more to do in this space, but I am glad this government is delivering better outcomes for our young Australians.

It is my belief that broadening the means test is a very big step in the right direction when it comes to giving young regional and rural Australians a helping hand in their development. There has always been a disparity in the provision of services to these young members of our society. It is the coalition that continues to rectify this inequality of opportunity to our young regional citizens. We must do more, but it is absolutely true that this bill will deliver better outcomes for younger people and this government will continue to work toward a more efficient and effective social welfare system. This is an endeavour of which I am proud to participate in and I commend this bill to the house.

**WYATT ROY** (Longman—Assistant Minister for Innovation) (13:15): I come from a farming family and I am the first person in my family to finish high school—I have two older
brothers—let alone go on to further tertiary study. I am actually still technically completing my tertiary study. It is a very proud moment for me to be able to stand in this House and see the Social Services Legislation Amendment (More Generous Means Testing for Youth Payments) Bill 2015 come before this parliament. There has been a very long journey to this moment. Senator McKenzie, in the other place; the member for Murray and many of our rural and regional MPs on this side have done an enormous amount of work and a lot of advocacy in the face of significant adversity to see this bill come before the House. This bill levels the playing field. It says, 'Despite where you come from—whether you come from a rural or regional community, or you come from the inner city—your access to tertiary education, higher education, should be exactly the same.' It is a truly egalitarian moment for our country to say that regardless of your background and regardless of where you come from, you should have equal access to educational opportunities.

We know, as a country, that when our young people access educational opportunities, particularly higher education, that is the most enabling thing that a government really can do for the next generation of Australians. To say that you can go on and better yourself, upskill yourself, really provides a significant personal boost to our young Australians. Beyond that, this bill boosts the assistance for working families and it better supports young people into study to build their careers, which ultimately develops our whole nation's economic opportunities through their contribution to the Australian economy.

This bill will implement a range of measures that will make a very big difference. From 1 January 2016, this will include removing the family assets test and the family actual means test from the Youth allowance parental means test arrangements. This will result in a more consistent level of support for families as young people move from family tax benefit part A to an individual income support payment. The parental income test exemption for youth allowance will also be aligned with existing arrangements for family tax benefit part A. The bill has a range of other measures, but it does say that young people, regardless of their background, have a right to access the high level of education that will fundamentally change their lives.

In my own electorate, I have a campus of QUT in Caboolture. My electorate, unfortunately, ranks one of the lowest in the country when it comes to tertiary education. I sat down with the director of the QUT Caboolture campus and I said to him: 'What is it that is stopping young people from accessing this further education? What is it stopping them from accessing this opportunity?' Many of us will think that it is their background, the income of their parents or the need to move. But he had a very insightful comment. He said, 'The thing that is most stopping young people from accessing education here is simply the belief that they can.'

When we step back and we look at the educational opportunities for the next generation of Australians, it is easy to forget that it is often a very big thing for a young person to take hold of those opportunities—for people like me and my own family where no-one before me has gone on to access those opportunities, where no-one has even finished high school let alone gone on to further education, where no-one has walked through the front doors of a university campus anywhere in the country. It is a very big psychological step for them to say: 'Yes, I can actually do this. Yes, I can work to better myself and to open up new opportunities in my life.'
Any barrier that stops a young person from accessing those opportunities, any barrier gets in the way and says that somebody from a rural or regional community does not have the same opportunity, has enormous impact on their approach to further education. This bill goes a very long way to addressing those challenges and overcoming what might be not just a financial barrier but also a very significant psychological barrier from a young person accessing an opportunity that will fundamentally change their life and that will change the opportunities they have and, ultimately, collectively will contribute to Australian society and the Australian economy.

For those reasons, I strongly commend this bill to the House.

Dr Gillespie (Lyne) (13:20): We are all familiar with the phrase, 'the tyranny of distance'. I think Donald Horne raised that term in one of his many dissertations talking about the tyranny of distance. Well, in the educational sense, I and seven million other Australians live in regional Australia. Access to education and successful tertiary education, in whatever field, will increase the potential of many individual regional and rural students. When you come from the regions, one of the barriers to achieving your educational dream and going off to university is not the HECS fee but the cost of relocating.

In my region, there are several universities that have a physical presence. We have Charles Sturt University in Port Macquarie that will, hopefully, have a 5,000-student campus. The University of New South Wales has a medical school there. We have the Armidale university with a teaching campus, and we have the University of Newcastle with a teaching campus, both in Tarae. We have opportunities, but unfortunately not every degree is covered in those regional opportunities, and that is the issue for many students in my region.

I know a couple of students who are at university in Adelaide, all the way from the east coast of Australia. They had to move to Adelaide to get the opportunity to do the course they need to do to follow their academic career. We have a few that go to Melbourne, many to Sydney, an awful lot down to Newcastle and a few up to Brisbane—north and south and west. But for many the opportunities to do a course are limited because of the financial barrier of relocating. If you want to go to university in Armidale, which has a much better cost of living than, say, Melbourne or Sydney, there is still a huge financial impost on your family, or you have to have incredible perspicacity, application and ability and a bit of luck to get multiple part-time jobs to build up a financial war chest to relocate yourself up to the Armidale university, if the course that you want to do is up there.

That is what I am trying to point out. It is not just the academic barriers. If you work and study hard you will get a good mark and you will get into just about whatever you want most of the time. But, if that opportunity comes up in a town far from you and you are not blessed to be living in a metropolitan centre where you can catch the 327 into UTS or down Parramatta Road to Sydney uni and live at home, cost wise, for the student and the family that is supporting the student, it is $25,000 a head. That is basically what it costs to set up as a student in Sydney when you factor in your relocation costs and your transport costs. Rents are absolutely ridiculous in Sydney. For some of the student accommodation there you have to pay $250 to get a little tiny room that would be used for luggage in the place that you come from. It is crazy. That is the actual barrier. People are worried about the HECS debt. You do not have to pay that back until you are earning money, and the government is paying for most of your tuition, even with the HECS component.
So I really welcome this legislation, which is going part way to addressing that problem. Youth allowance has been an issue since I put my toe in the water of the political conversation back in 2010. We had workshops trying to get policy changes with Senator Fiona Nash and subsequently Senator Bridget McKenzie, from Victoria. So many of my rural and regional colleagues have argued the case up and down the trail of committees that you go to and with various ministers.

I am so pleased that this legislation is here now, because it is going part way to address that financial barrier for many of the sorts of people who really should be trying to get some assistance, through changing the qualifications to get youth allowance. It is removing the family assets test and the family actual means test from the youth allowance parental means test arrangements. That sounds like quite a mouthful. It will come into force in July 2016. Also, from January 2016, maintenance income will be removed from the youth allowance parental income test. It is changing around the edges so that more people can qualify.

What does that mean in dollars and cents? It means that $262 million of federal taxpayers' money will be redverted through these income tested arrangements. How many will benefit from this change? Potentially the changes in the family assets test will lead 4,100 additional dependent youth allowance claimants to qualify for the very first time. That will not solve every rural and regional person's dilemma, but it will certainly help a significant number of them. They estimate that the amount will be up to $7,000. If you are setting up in Sydney in shared houses, quarters, a college, student hostels or wherever you can get a room, that is a significant help. It means that it is much more achievable.

Removing the family actual means test will mean that another 1,200 people will get some assistance, but it is only estimated at $2,000 a year. But, again, any up-front payment will help you make that jump into living in a metropolitan centre—or for some of the students who I hope will come from the metropolitan suburbs, who want to move up to Charles Sturt University's new campus in Port Macquarie. They are hoping to have international students as well as metropolitan students who come up because they can get a really good education there. To relocate out of Sydney, out of Newcastle or out of anywhere to another town and to set up another domestic accommodation and support mechanism when you are dislocated from your family are the big issue.

Including all the FTB children in the family pool will also benefit about 13,700 families. It is a small amount, but, again, it is not be sniffed at: $1,100.

I commend this bill to the House. It is a good initiative. It is part way addressing the problem and the cost involved in the tyranny of distance in accessing education.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Vasta): It being close to 1.30, the debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 43. The debate may be resumed at a later hour.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Australia Post

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (13:29): Last Friday I attended an Australia Post public listening session held at the Ingle Farm post office, where Australia Post representatives spoke with customers about proposed changes to mail delivery and postage fees. Being familiar with the Ingle Farm post office, I was not surprised by the constant stream of customers who used the range of services available.
Australia Post is proposing a two-speed mail delivery service, with overnight mail deliveries charged at a higher rate than standard postage rates—for which delivery times will be slower. Many of the people that I spoke with, particularly older people, have not embraced the internet and still rely on mail services. I also noted comments that some people no longer use Australia Post parcel delivery services because they are more expensive than other parcel delivery services available.

Australia Post's application to increase postage costs is currently before the ACCC. If Australia Post's justification for change is that postage rates are falling, then increasing the postage cost by 42 per cent from 70 cents to $1.00 is surely going to lead to less mail being posted. Logic would suggest that reducing the price of postage would be a smarter option. Perhaps if Australia Post wants to trim costs it might begin by looking at the excessive executive salaries currently being paid rather than putting at risk the jobs of more Australia Post workers, who will inevitably lose their jobs if higher postage prices cause a further decline in the services used.

Trade Unions

Mrs WICKS (Robertson) (13:30): I rise to congratulate this government once again on securing significant free trade agreements that will deliver major benefits to workers, businesses and consumers in my electorate of Robertson, and which were discussed at length at an outstanding Austrade forum we held at Gosford RSL last week. More than 40 local business heard clearly that there has never been a better time to engage with our export markets.

But, sadly, this positive message about the benefit of free trade agreements is not forthcoming from the unions. In fact, the behaviour of the ACTU has been quite deceitful, setting up phony, so-called 'debates' around the country, including on the Central Coast. I am more than willing to engage in fair, balanced and open discussion—our Austrade forum held last week is a good case in point. But these sham debates run by the ACTU are only designed to push misleading arguments and misleading facts.

What is worse is that I and several other coalition members had been invited to debates, and we sent written apologies that we could not attend—often, well in advance and, in my case, to an event that was not even in my electorate—yet the unions advertised our so-called 'attendance' then had the gall to claim that we were 'no shows', while their silence about the lack of attendance by Labor MPs was deafening.

But I believe that Australians will always choose optimism and opportunity over fear, division and misleading campaigns. So I will continue to promote the fact that the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement will boost trade, propel growth and create many thousands of jobs. (Time expired)

Lalor Electorate: Deepavali

Ms RYAN (Lalor—Opposition Whip) (13:32): On this Saturday, 14 November, Wyndham Deepavali will occur at Presidents Park in Werribee. It is being sponsored by Wyndham City Council and the state government, with many more generous sponsors.

The themes for Deepavali this year in Wyndham, as shown on their social media campaign to advertise this great event, are 'Many Faiths, One Festival' and 'Many Cultures, One Nation.' In light of one of the great challenges that our nation faces, the south Asian community in my
electorate are intent on making Deepavali bigger and better than last year. They have adopted a former media campaign by posting on their Facebook page a statement, 'This Deepavali, I say no to family violence.'

I applaud the members of my community who are making that connection—who are thinking about Deepavali and thinking about bringing light into the darkness and bringing knowledge over ignorance, and ensuring that this wonderful festival, that brings together people from all over the city and the west of Melbourne to celebrate Deepavali, is going to bring wisdom to the community about family violence.

**Herbert Electorate: Trade with China, Japan and South Korea**

Mr EWEN JONES (Herbert—Government Whip) (13:33): It said all there needed to be said about what the Labor Party and the union movement hold closest as their core beliefs. Recently, Austrade came to Townsville and hosted a seminar on the benefits of the three free trade agreements signed under Minister Andrew Robb. They were, of course, the Korean free trade agreement, the Japanese free trade agreement and the China free trade agreement.

Inside the seminar were officials from Austrade, experts in their fields of engagement with each country. The guest speaker, a mango grower, told of the opportunities they had uncovered. She told how they more than doubled their crop and how they produced more R2E2 mangoes because of their reddish skins. The Chinese population really likes the reddish skin, whereas the Japanese love the Kensington Pride or Bowen special. So she was able to grow from that.

We had over 100 business people inside, from Mount Garnet and Hughenden, and from Garbutt and the Burdekin. They were all keen on hearing how they could grow their businesses, how they could increase our city's GDP, how it could lead to more employment and opportunities and how they could participate in such a positive process presented by a positive government.

Outside, Labor's candidate for Herbert stood there with the CFMEU, the CPSU and the ETU on a picket line. They want to hold Australia back. They want everyone to be the same; they do not want people to strive—they do not want people to grow. They just want people to be more and more irrelevant in their lives each day. Shame on them! Shame on them all! (Time expired)

**Indi Electorate: Red Hat Society**

Ms McGOWAN (Indi) (13:35): There is a famous poem that says:

When I am an old woman I shall wear purple
With a red hat which doesn’t go, and doesn’t suit me.

I am delighted to welcome into Parliament House today, members of the Purple Power Surge Girls—in particular, Wendy Cooksey, who is from my electorate of Indi; and Pam, Julia and Ida from Albury.

Wendy and her colleagues are members of a fascinating group—the Red Hat Society. Sadly, they had to take their hats off coming into Parliament House and have, sadly, been held up! These women have a passion for a global society where women connect, support and encourage other women in the pursuit of fun, friendship, freedom and fitness, and they support women all over the world to do that.
Over lunch today we had a fantastic conversation about growing old disgracefully—wearing clothes that look glorious, but the colours are a little off. We have shared stories of friendship, of supporting each other and of being there for each other as we grow older. I am so proud to represent all the red hatters of Indi in this Parliament House—the groups in Albury-Wodonga, such as the Purple Power Surge Girls; and the groups in Wangaratta and the groups in Benalla. I am really proud to be the voice for older people right across rural and regional Victoria. I am particularly proud to be the voice of older women.

I say congratulations to Wendy and all the red hatters. Thank you for taking the initiative to come to this, our House—especially the House for older rural and regional Australians. (Time expired)

Trade Unions

Ms SCOTT (Lindsay) (13:37): I have two words: 'false' and 'misleading'. That is what the unions are all about. At a time when we see former union bigwigs sitting in jail or answering questions at the royal commission into union governance, and union membership at record lows, one would have thought the ACTU and their mates and cronies might have just got the hint to clean up their act. But, sadly, they have not. They are more intent on lying to the people of my electorate and deceiving people with their silly campaigns and their stupid little games.

They have misused their members' money. They are lying to their members, falsely and misleadingly telling people that I was attending a debate when they had acknowledged my letter saying that I was unavailable on the night they had written to me about. They then further falsely advertised on network radio right across the Sydney metropolitan basin that I and the honourable member for Macquarie were going to turn up with the President of the ACTU to debate the Chinese free trade agreement when they knew we were unavailable. Further, they falsely advertised on Facebook, paying for that again.

Rather than representing the rights of their workers, they are paying for false advertising and falsely putting robocalls right through the electorate. Shame on the unions.

Canberra Electorate: Fashion Industry

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (13:38): I rise today to talk about the importance of shopping local. As a former small business owner, I am a great supporter of shopping local to support local jobs, innovation and creativity and also reduce our carbon footprint. It is an ethos I try to live by every day. So in the last sitting period it was an honour to help launch the Shop Small campaign, a campaign that encourages the community to get behind local enterprises by shopping at locally owned businesses throughout the month of November.

During the month of November last year, we here in this House got together as the Parliamentary Friends of Aussie Fashion group and wore garments made by designers in our electorates. I had an absolute ball showing off the breadth of talent we have here in Canberra, and I am doing it again this week. This week I will be wearing items by Canberra designers Zilpah tart, the Prodigal Daughter, Karen Lee and more. Today it is prodigal tart—not prodigal tart; Prodigal Daughter. It is Zilpah tart and Prodigal Daughter—there are all these great names. For anyone wanting to check out some Canberra designers, I suggest you visit the Hustle&Scout Twilight Fashion Market, with the next market coming up on 5 December at Barton. It is a great time to go and get some fantastic locally handmade Christmas presents.
To the Canberra family-run small businesses, the start-ups and the independents that make our city so vibrant and unique, I say thank you. This month and every month, I will get behind you.

**Trade Unions**

*Mrs McNAMARA* (Dobell) (13:40): Surprise, surprise: over the last couple of weeks we have had more union lies. Australian electorates were subjected to an expensive $3 million deceitful and pathetic attempt to embarrass the government and coalition members in electorates such as Dobell. In my electorate of Dobell, this deceitful and misleading campaign was orchestrated by the ACTU, the CFMEU and the Central Coast Community Union Alliance.

Despite the pathetic attempts and considerable money investment to mislead the community, it did not work. Not only did unions use hardworking members' funds to advertise and hold an event in my electorate that they knew I could not attend; they never even consulted my availability to organise the event. But they continued to mislead the public by going ahead with the event, and at what cost to hardworking union members? Interstate plane fares; accommodation; hire cars; venue hire; catering; printing and advertising even though they knew that I was not going to attend; letterbox drops; robocalls? Approximately $20,000. Putting it on the union members' MasterCard? Priceless. Now it is known locally as the $20,000 phone call. Why? Because, out of the approximately 180,000 residents in my electorate, only four contacted my office to find out why I did not attend. Surprise, surprise: all four are known in our system as being strong opposition supporters.

If the Central Coast Community Union Alliance have money to waste, do not waste it. Put it to good use. Donate $20,000 to a local charity.

**Kingsford Smith Electorate: Maroubra Fun Run and Oktoberfest**

*Mr THISTLETHWAITE* (Kingsford Smith) (13:41): I wish to congratulate all of the runners, walkers and wheelers who took part in the Maroubra Fun Run and Oktoberfest on 25 October. This event was first staged in 1996 by the Maroubra Chamber of Commerce, and this year, in its 20th year, it celebrated one of the most successful events. In 1996, a mere 190 people competed in the fun run. This year 1,500 completed the course, and 5,000 people went through the Oktoberfest festival. The event raised $15,000 for local charities, and it was great to see over 300 schoolkids competing and completing both the four-kilometre and eight-kilometre events, with South Coogee Public School taking out the award for the most students in the event. It is a great way to encourage healthy lifestyles amongst students in our local community.

I wish to pay great tribute to Richard and Philip Walsh of Walsh's Village Pharmacy, who for the past 20 years have spearheaded the organisation of this event. Thanks also to the South Maroubra Surf Lifesaving Club, the Maroubra Rotary Club, the Maroubra Lions club—the Souths Juniors have been wonderful sponsors of the events—Randwick SES and, of course, the Maroubra Chamber of Commerce and the Randwick City Council. It is wonderful to have had this event go for 20 years in our community, and may it continue into the future. Congratulations to all those who completed the course, and thanks to all the volunteers who made it possible.
Trade Unions

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (13:43): What this country needs is a positive approach. What this country needs is an expansion of markets. Under this government and the trade minister, despite the negativity, there has been great news. We are talking about the Korean free trade agreement, the Japanese free trade agreement and the Chinese free trade agreement. Everywhere around this country, whether it is in Malaga, Wangara, Landsdale or Gnangara, the manufacturers and the service sectors, and in fact all the Australian people, can now see how useful and great it will be when Australian manufacturers and service providers have access to a billion-person market. Everybody sees that. Increasingly, all the polls about the Chinese free trade agreement say that people are seeing this, acknowledging this and recognising the great opportunities that this government is providing.

Unfortunately, not everybody sees it that way. Of course, the union movement, as usual, do not see their members' money as the money that belongs to the members; they see it as a political opportunity. I know that the union royal commission has outlined a number of excesses, but what a terrible waste of union members' money has occurred as a result of this opposition to the Chinese free trade agreement. Everyone around this country agrees it is a good thing.

Richmond Electorate: Domestic and Family Violence

Mrs ELLIOT (Richmond) (13:44): I rise to talk about a very important issue in my community, which is raising awareness about domestic violence. Next week, in conjunction with the Tweed Valley Women's Service at Murwillumbah, I am very pleased that, together, we have organised a White Ribbon event to raise awareness about domestic and family violence right throughout our community. On Tuesday, 17 November, concerned members of the community are invited to come together to sign a pledge and decorate a tree to commemorate and acknowledge White Ribbon Day, and show their support for ending violence against women. The event will be followed by a morning tea, and it will be held next Tuesday at 10 o'clock at the Tweed Shire Women's Service at Murwillumbah.

As a former police officer, I saw firsthand, on so many occasions, the devastating impact of domestic violence on women and children, and upon our community. We all have a responsibility to act. We are holding this event to help break the silence around violence and to raise awareness of the issue, because we all know violence against women is now at epidemic proportions. Devastatingly, over 12 months, on average, one woman is killed every week in Australia. This is outrageous. People need to know they can make a difference, and bringing an end to violence really will take a whole community approach.

I would also like to commend Tracy Asby and all of those in the Tweed Valley Women's Service. I also want to commend all of our police and emergency service workers, and those in our community organisations—all of whom are working so hard to end violence against women and children in our community.

Trade with China

Mrs MARKUS (Macquarie) (13:46): I too rise to speak about the despicable act by the secretary of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, ACTU, Dave Oliver. I sent an apology to Mr Oliver on 20 October indicating I would be interstate on parliamentary duties, prearranged several months earlier, and therefore unable to attend their debate on ChAFTA in
Penrith on 28 October—their sham and fake debate. Dissatisfied with the response, Mr Oliver requested I reconsider my decision and, again, on 26 October, yet another response was sent to Mr Oliver reiterating that I could not attend due to parliamentary duties. Following this, information was still disseminated that I was attending this fake debate and this was perpetuated across social media.

This is nothing more and nothing less than a cheap, political and grossly misleading campaign driven by the ACTU's own fear of losing membership, especially given that in recent weeks ABS data revealed that in just 12 months, union membership had fallen from 17 per cent of the workforce to just 15 per cent. Union members deserve principled, ethical leadership. They do not deserve to be pawns in the ACTU's partisan political games, with their union fees being spent on ugly, deceptive campaigns.

On Monday, 2 November in the Macquarie electorate, I attended a real free trade agreement forum, looking at all of the free trade agreements in North Asia. It was attended by real people, running real businesses, that intend to create more jobs as they expand their business and their exports.

Chisholm Electorate: Mr Joseph D'Onofrio

Ms BURKE (Chisholm) (13:48): Vale, Maestro Joe—Joseph D'Onofrio, a great friend, and a great community member, has sadly succumbed to motor neurone disease. I want to pay my respects to him and pass on my deep sadness to his family and the extended community, particularly the fencing community. You do not hear too much about fencing in this country, but Joseph was a passionate fencer. He fenced for over 64 years, and he brought that passion for fencing from Italy to Australia. He set up the Fioretto Fencing Club in my electorate. He worked tirelessly to promote the sport. Indeed, when his home club was closed because it was no longer safe to operate in, he worked tirelessly to find a new home, in my area, within the eastern suburbs, so kids could still learn this sport and have the passion he did.

Inspirational quotes have been flooding in about this amazing man who gave to this sport and our community so much over many years. He was a justice of the peace for in excess of 35 years. He was passionate about the migrant community and helped many migrants to successfully settle into our community. He was certainly passionate about his family. He was dedicated to his wife and daughters and grandchildren. He was an exceptional human being. He was honoured, in that role, with the Order of Australia, and as a senior Victorian. But it was his tireless dedication to a sport, that most people would not consider as a sport, was just outstanding. I will miss him greatly, most particularly his outstanding moustache.

Trade with China

Ms HENDERSON (Corangamite) (13:49): Once again this year, it was a pleasure to host our stand at the Colac Show. It was a terrific success. One of the big talking points, particularly amongst dairy farmers, was our China-Australia Free Trade Agreement. It will open up significant new opportunities. Tariffs of up to 20 per cent will be progressively eliminated. Tariffs on ice cream and infant formula, for instance, will go within four years. But, at the Colac Show, there was plenty of disgust all around at the dishonest campaign that was being run by Labor and the unions over ChAFTA. Even after Labor conceded that ChAFTA was good for jobs and our economic future, and joined with us to pass the enabling
legislation in this place, the union movement continued with its dishonest and unethical campaign.

After the ACTU set up a fake debate knowing that I could not attend, it then proceeded to lie to its own members by claiming that I would be attending. In automated robocalls it then compounded that lie by claiming that I had not shown up, simply to disparage me and our government. Today, I call on the President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, Ged Kearney, who made those calls to apologise for her dishonest and unethical conduct. If she will not apologise, she should seriously consider resigning. Unions play an important role in our community. Rather than play these partisan games, they must show ethical and honest leadership.

**Fremantle Electorate: Leeuwin Barracks**

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (13:51): The Department of Defence is in the process of selling Leeuwin Barracks in my electorate of Fremantle. This remarkable 14-hectare site is located on the Swan River foreshore in the town of East Fremantle. It is home to 58 different buildings and structures, including some important memorials related to the barracks' role in the training of more than 13,000 RAN junior recruits from 1960 to 1984. Unfortunately, Leeuwin was a place at which serious institutional abuse occurred. While it is clear the property is surplus to current defence requirements, the disposal of the Leeuwin Barracks site marks a critical and transformative shift and one that must occur with great care. The sale and redevelopment of the site provides both an opportunity and a challenge. It should enable a thoughtful riverside development with generous public open space, community facilities, well-planned transport links, the retention of local heritage, including Leeuwin's military training significance and an acknowledgement of abuse suffered by JRs and the site's Indigenous heritage. But such an outcome will only be reached through proper consultation and planning, which must involve the Town of East Fremantle and local community.

I am grateful to the Assistant Minister for Defence who has kept me advised of community consultations and of course my local community members who have taken the time to participate in the consultation process—and I know there has already been some robust advocacy for the necessary heritage and local planning outcomes.

I will continue to assist the East Fremantle Council, residents and veterans in their efforts to ensure that Leeuwin Barracks is sold with appropriate plans and conditions in place. It is very important that the process not be rushed.

**Trade with China**

Mr HASTIE (Canning) (13:52): Union opposition to the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement is the most recent example of unions not doing what is best for their members whereby they sacrifice their long-term economic interests on the altar of short-term grubby politics.

Unions like the CFMEU, United Voice, SDA and MUA seem to be more about taking money from some of the lowest-paid workers in our nation and giving it to a few well-paid executive members, funding Labor and the Greens, or using it for purely political campaigns that are not in the best interests of their memberships.

The latest campaign, where voters have been told that their coalition MP failed to attend a public forum on ChAFTA, despite that MP declining the invitation prior to the event, is
disingenuous and pathetic. And yet, this is what we have come to expect from the unions—false and defamatory smear campaigns. The hardworking and honest members of the ACTU and others deserve better representation than this.

My electorate of Canning has fewer white collar workers than the national average but a high number of people making their living in a trade. Trade-like occupations make up more than 40 per cent of the workforce, with employment in manufacturing at 2.9 per cent—well above the national average of 0.7 per cent. I want what is best for Canning workers: to deliver the public policy that creates jobs and a better standard of living—and that is what I will strive to deliver—in spite of militant unionism. That is what the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement will do for Australia and Canning more broadly.

Workplace Relations

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR (Gorton) (13:54): The question I would like to put to this place is: why is the government continuing its ideological and confrontational approach in dealing with its own workforce? Why, for example, has the employment minister continued her predecessor's approach by seeking cuts to income of up to $8,000 from national security staff at Border Force? This disrespectful and unfair assault on the conditions of employment of those who do good work in often trying circumstances underlines exactly the attitude of the Turnbull government—indeed not just for their own workforce but for all Australian workers. I saw the good work of national security staff firsthand as a former minister.

This failure of leadership has led to rare industrial action by national security staff who of course are asking for nothing more than to be treated fairly at work and to get a decent income. Labor calls upon the employment minister to meet with the CPSU and workplace delegates with a view to resolving this protracted dispute and restoring some respect and appreciation for those workers who serve our nation well. There is no doubt that this approach is unfair to those workers and it is a slap in the face for all workers in this nation.

Trade with China

Mr SUKKAR (Deakin) (13:55): I also rise to draw attention to the deceitful and dishonest campaign orchestrated recently by the ACTU across my electorate. As part of their continued xenophobic campaign against the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement, they sought to dishonestly advertise my attendance at one of their union meetings designed to attack this landmark agreement. So I apologise to all those in the Deakin electorate who had their evenings interrupted by unsolicited and dishonest prerecorded messages from the unions.

If the unions leaders are prepared to lie about something as simple as this, one can only wonder what other blatant lies they are spreading. What is more disgraceful, however, is that their continued campaign against this landmark trade agreement will mean fewer jobs for Australian workers. I am glad that the Labor Party got over the line, and we dragged them kicking and screaming to support this agreement.

This agreement presents a fantastic opportunity for Australia and will open up huge opportunities for our resources, agriculture, manufacturing and service industries. What does that mean? It means more jobs for Australians.

I say thank you to all the members on this side of the House who got the Labor members kicking and screaming to support the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement.
Hunter Wetlands Centre

Ms CLAYDON (Newcastle) (13:57): On Saturday I had the pleasure of attending the 30th anniversary of the Hunter Wetlands Centre in my electorate of Newcastle. I celebrated this milestone with some of the long-time volunteers and supporters of the centre including Jenny Castles; Wendy Heys; John and Trudi Mills; the current CEO Stuart Blanch; president David Crofts; and the visionary founder of the wetlands, Professor Max Maddock.

Through the hard work and dedication of countless local volunteers, an old rubbish dump and disused oval was transformed into Australia's first community owned Ramsar wetlands and visitors centre. Today the centre is a haven for more the 250 species of Australian wildlife and provides the people of Newcastle with a special place to visit with educational facilities—thanks to Labor's BER program—a bush tucker garden and guided tours.

Over the past three decades, this organisation has fostered community participation and educated thousands of Novocastrians about the significance of wetlands to our region's ecology. Representatives from Kushiro Wetlands in Japan, the Hunter Wetland Centre's sister Ramsar wetlands site, made the journey to Newcastle to show their support of this momentous occasion and to sign a renewal of the sister wetlands relationship. I also had the pleasure of taking the ASEAN parliamentary delegation to join in these celebrations on Saturday.

The weekend also saw the solar project switched on, which will save the wetlands centre some $4000 a year. (Time expired)

Trade with China

Mrs SUDMALIS (Gilmore) (13:59): It is time for unions to stop playing silly games pretending the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement will harm Australians. I will describe how they play their dodgy games. First, someone from a union invites me as the federal member to a debate on ChAFTA, not bothering to check if I am available. And then, when I do not show up, they intend to do a round of robo calls saying how much I do not care. It has happened in other electorates too.

Well, I have news for such behaviour: the people of Gilmore are awake to such games and, what is more, they hate robocalls, from anyone—let alone untruthful ones. If this happens, then people living in Gilmore should know that I cannot be part of the union debate as I am attending committee enquiries investigating how people have lost their homes and businesses due to circumstances around their bank loans contracts, which is of much greater importance. This crazy imaginary debate is nothing more and nothing less than a cheap political campaign. You can tell, because Labor members of parliament unable to attend the debates are not condemned by— (Time expired)

The SPEAKER (14:00): It being 2 pm, in accordance with standing order 43, the time for members’ statements has concluded.
PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION

Member for North Sydney

Resignation

The SPEAKER (14:00): I inform the House that on Friday, 23 October 2015 I received a letter from the Hon. Joseph Benedict Hockey resigning his seat as the member for the electoral division of North Sydney.

North Sydney Electorate

Issue of Writ

The SPEAKER (14:00): On Monday, 26 October 2015, I issued a writ for the election of a member to serve for the electoral division of North Sydney, in the state of New South Wales, to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Mr Hockey. The dates in connection with the by-election are fixed as follows: close of rolls—Monday, 2 November 2015; close of nominations—Thursday, 12 November 2015; declaration of nominations—Friday, 13 November 2015; polling day—Saturday, 5 December 2015; return of writ—on or before Wednesday, 3 February 2016.

STATEMENTS ON INDULGENCE

Sport

Mr Turnbull (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (14:01): I seek on indulgence to make some remarks about sporting matters and, in particular, the Melbourne Cup. It has always been the race that stops the nation. It is nearly as old as the city after which it is named; but, at the last cup running, in three minutes and 23 seconds, Michelle Payne rewrote the history of that race. This was a first, for a woman to ride a winner in the Melbourne Cup. It happened despite all the hardship and adversity Michelle has faced in her life. It happened despite the doubters and the cynics who said this was no place for a woman. It happened because of her tenacity, courage and skill in riding Prince of Penzance to the winning post, ahead of the world's best stayers and jockeys. It took 105 runnings of the Melbourne Cup for a woman jockey to make it to the winner's circle, and it is a reminder, I suppose, of how this sport has been dominated by men.

Michelle did not just win a race; she smashed through one of the most stubborn of glass ceilings. For that, she, and all Australians, should be extremely proud. It was a remarkable ride. Her life is one of overcoming adversity. She lost her mum, Mary, to a car accident in Ballarat when she was only six months old and the youngest of 10. Her father, Paddy, and her older sister, Bridget—although only 16 herself—cared for her as a baby. Bridget, too, would lose her life far too young, after being thrown from a horse. Through all this, this family held together, and Michelle held her nerve. I am told she offered a quiet prayer for her mum and her big sister as she waited at the barrier gate for the start of the cup. How proud they would have been.

Let us consider, applaud and admire the most famous strapper in Australia: her brother, Stevie. What an extraordinary role model for people working with a disability! He was the strapper for Prince of Penzance and he drew the No. 1 barrier for Michelle in the barrier draw. I do not know that the Melbourne Cup has often been the subject of statements by the Prime
Minister, but that was a remarkable race and a remarkable day. They are a remarkable family, and it is a reminder of what a great country we are.

I should now note the wonderful campaign by the Wallabies in the Rugby World Cup. They got all the way to the final. They were the underdogs. It was a great campaign; Michael Cheika, the coach, and Stephen Moore, the captain, did an outstanding job. They were beaten, of course, in the final by the All Blacks, who everyone expected to win. It was a fantastic game. At half-time, Australia was behind, and I think half of the nation rolled over and went back to sleep. The other half stayed awake and woke the sleeping half up in the second half, when we were coming back to win. Nonetheless, as a result, it was a great campaign. Congratulations to the Wallabies and congratulations to the All Blacks. In 10 years time, if you call out 'Richie' in a New Zealand playground, all the boys will run towards you.

I have to explain my tie. I had a bet with the Prime Minister of New Zealand that, if the Wallabies won, he would wear our tie and, if the All Blacks won, I would wear his. I am happy to honour this bet. I have offered him a bet on the cricket, but he does not think the odds are good enough on that.

Honourable members interjecting—

Mr Turnbull: An honourable member asked me about further bets. The Prime Minister of New Zealand, John Key, who is a great role model for all of us, says he does look good in gold and he is looking forward to further bets. As for this tie from New Zealand, as football ties go, it is not too bad—apart from its unfortunate circumstances. The minister for agriculture has checked it out from a biosecurity point of view and he ensures me there are no apple stains on it. However, we have detected a bit of Lemon & Paeroa and Steinlager, which just goes to show you have to be careful when you are getting the beer out of the chillybin.

Mr Shorten (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:06): It is a pleasure to congratulate one of my constituents the remarkable Michelle Payne on her history-making achievement. Racing is glamorous, it is exciting and it is hard work, but racing is also inherently dangerous. Sadly, the last six jockeys and track-work riders to die in Australia have all been women. Michelle Payne knows these risks as well as anyone. In 2004, she fell from her horse, fracturing her skull and bruising her brain, and even those closest to her urged her to give up racing. Eight years later, at a Sunday race meeting at Donald, she was thrown over the head of her ride, breaking her ribs and fracturing four vertebrae. Again, she was told it might be time for her to walk away. But last Tuesday, in front of more than 100,000 cheering fans and watched by millions around the world, Michelle piloted Prince of Penzance to claim the 155th Melbourne Cup by half a length. She had started that day from barrier 1, which was a spot drawn for her by her loving brother and devoted strapper, Stevie. It was impossible not to be moved by the pride on Stevie's face—a man who has never been defined by his impairment—leading a Melbourne Cup champion into the winner's circle. And, in a wonderful post-race interview that only an Australian could have given, Michelle said to a watching world, 'Anyone who thinks that women aren't good enough for group 1 racing can get stuffed.' Hear, hear!

Michelle Payne's victory brought joy to an entire nation. It caps a wonderful year for women's sport—the brilliance of the Diamonds in the world cup and the Southern Stars reclaiming the ashes—inspiration and examples for girls and women everywhere. And it was a message for the so-called experts who wrote in 2012—a year defined by the Olympic
heroics of Sally Pearson, Alicia Coutts and Anna Meares amongst others—that Black Caviar was Australia’s best female athlete. Of course, we should not forget Prince of Penzance himself, the first horse to salute at 100 to one since Old Rowley in 1940. We should also congratulate his trainer, Darren Weir, a former farrier from Berriwillock, a small town in the Mallee.

Normally when a long-odds runner wins the cup, it is considered a day for the bookmakers and tough beat for the punters. On a small note, I backed Criterion, which ran an unlucky third. But for all of us who listened to Michelle and Stevie Payne speak after the race, all of us who saw the joy and delight on the faces of trainers and connections, we instantly forgot who we had backed or the money that we had lost. On Melbourne Cup day our nation stopped for more than the race. We stopped to celebrate the journey of two children growing up with eight brothers and sisters and without their mum, looking out for one another in tough times, encouraging each other to beat the odds, sharing a dream of sporting immortality. Last Tuesday. we were witness to a genuine sporting fairytale and every Australian was richer because of it. Michelle Payne is a fantastic ambassador for women, for racing and for Australia. She is a gem.

A small note on the Wallabies, in response to the Prime Minister's comments: it was an incredible campaign. To the audience who stayed up and watched the game, it was a great campaign; it was a tough match against the All Blacks. We congratulate the captain, Stephen Moore, we congratulate the coach, Michael Cheika, and we look forward to renewed success from them in the future.

MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Mr Turnbull (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (14:10): I inform the House that Minister Robb will be absent from question time today and tomorrow as he is attending the Northern Australia Investment Forum in Darwin. The Minister for Foreign Affairs will answer questions on his behalf. The Minister for Resources, Energy and Northern Australia, Mr Frydenberg, will be absent today and tomorrow as he is also in Darwin attending the same forum. The Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science will answer questions on his behalf. The Minister for the Environment, Mr Hunt, will be absent from question time this week, as he is attending a series of bilateral meetings with ministerial counterparts and attending the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Pre Conference of the Parties meeting in Paris. The foreign minister will answer questions on his behalf also.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Christmas Island

Mr Marles (Corio) (14:11): My question is to the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection. Will the minister provide the House with an update of events on Christmas Island, where it is reported a man who was under Australia’s care has died?

Mr Dutton (Dickson—Minister for Immigration and Border Protection) (14:12): I thank the honourable member for his question. As has been reported in the press today and commented on by the department, there has been a disturbance at Christmas Island, which I am advised commenced just after 11 pm last night. In terms of the population at the Christmas Island detention centre, there are 203 people at the Christmas Island detention centre, no women and no children. There has been an initial response by the Serco officers, who have
responsibility for maintaining the IDC there, and there will be further responses from the appropriate authorities, either negotiating or dealing with those people who have caused disturbances there.

It is important to remind the House that, as I say, the population today at the IDC is 203 people. At its peak, there were 2,238 people on Christmas Island, and we are very keen to reduce the number down to zero. We have been able to stop new boat arrivals. We have not had a successful people-smuggling venture to Australia in about 18 months or so, and the fact is that we have been able to close 13 of 17 detention centres since we have been in government. So we take the management of the detention centre network very seriously. If people have caused damage to Commonwealth property, they will be investigated and prosecuted in relation those matters.

The most serious part of the question that the member asked was in relation to an individual who, I am sorry to say, is deceased—a person that escaped from the centre, as I am advised, on Saturday was later found deceased yesterday. There is obviously a coronial inquiry in relation to the circumstances surrounding the death of that individual. As I am advised, there are no suspicious circumstances in relation to the death, but the matter should properly be investigated by the Australian Federal Police and referred to the coroner for a full coronial investigation. The government, obviously, will rely on that investigation and will not be making any comment further in relation to that person's circumstances.

Economy

Mr WILLIAMS (Hindmarsh) (14:14): My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister explain to the House the importance of providing strong economic leadership to promote jobs and growth?

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (14:14): I thank the honourable member for his question. I remember the visit we had in his electorate only a few weeks ago in which we met with remarkably innovative companies, including an Adelaide manufacturing business that is 85 years old but has secured a global niche in making cutting-edge products which are the best in the world, and it has done this entirely through innovative technologies.

Every sinew of the government is focused on delivering better jobs and greater opportunities for Australians. There is a lot of talk about economic reform and a lot of talk about tax reform. The focus always has to be on jobs and growth. That is what we are delivering—jobs and growth. We know that this is the best time to be an Australian. There have never been bigger opportunities than there are today, never been broader horizons. What we need to ensure is that, at every level, the government of Australia is doing what it can to promote jobs, promote growth, promote efficiency, promote innovation—and that is what we are seeking to do right across the board.

We know that if we are to remain a high wage, generous social welfare net, first world economy then we have to be more productive, more innovative and more competitive. Australians are responding to that. They can see the enormous opportunities. They can see the opportunities that are arising as a result of the free trade agreements. Just in the last five years, services exports—education, tourism, design services and so many others—have been growing at nine per cent a year. We know that, if we are to maintain and grow our national
income, we cannot rely on the terms of trade, on commodity exports, alone. They are a very important and huge part of our economy but the growth has to come from across the board.

Ms Butler interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Griffith will cease interjecting.

Mr TURNBULL: What that means is that we need to have an adult and informed debate and discussion about the reforms that government can undertake. I notice that members on the other side have been running for cover whenever any changes to the tax system are mentioned. They want us to channel the former Treasurer, the member for Lilley, who succeeded only in shutting down discussion on tax. Let me say to you, Mr Speaker: we are not afraid of an open discussion. We want to see every view expressed.

Mr Brendan O'Connor interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Gorton will cease interjecting.

Mr TURNBULL: We want to ensure that when we make decisions we do so in a manner that is well informed, where there has been the widest consultation and where we are satisfied and Australians are satisfied that the Australian government is listening to them.

Goods and Services Tax

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:17): My question is to the Prime Minister. Given that various advocates within the Prime Minister's party have suggested that an increased GST could pay for cutting personal income tax, cutting business tax, compensating pensioners, funding schools and hospitals, and paying down national debt, will the Prime Minister please explain what exactly his 15 per cent GST will pay for?

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (14:18): I thank the honourable member for what appears to be the beginning of a not especially scary scare campaign to date. But I am glad he has identified that there is a diversity of views in our party—yes, there is.

Mr Perrett interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Moreton is now warned.

Mr TURNBULL: The remarkable thing is that there is even a diversity of views within the Labor Party. Jay Weatherill is advocating big tax changes. Kristina Keneally is advocating changes to the GST, and so is Geoff Gallop, so is Peter Beattie and so is John Brumby from his own state of Victoria. The animosity towards the goods and services tax—of course, we all remember the former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd described the introduction of which as being 'fundamental injustice day', memorably, some years ago—that antipathy towards the GST is not shared by all of his colleagues. Regrettably, from the honourable member's point of view, not all of his colleagues' former writings have been purged. The Stalinism is not as efficient as it used to be, apparently. I note from 2004, the member for Fraser said:

… Howard's eight years have been marked by some strong policy initiatives…. The GST was radical for Australia, and in a broader context it brought us in line with the rest of the developed world.

There you go. Well, he has had a bit of thought reform since then! We are working through, consultatively, many options and many ideas about tax and other economic reform. It is well understood that there are a range of views, and that is why we are engaging with ACOSS, we are engaging with the ACTU, we are engaging with the peak business organisations and many others right across the board. We are meeting with the states and the territories and we have
convened a meeting of COAG in December, where we will be discussing all of these issues. What the government is doing is seeking to ensure that we can maintain strong growth so that our children and our grandchildren will have even better opportunities in the future than we have had. The way we do that is by going about the business of government in an open and consultative way.

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the House will cease interjecting.

Mr Bowen: Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order on direct relevance. The Prime Minister has 30 seconds left to tell us: what will his increase in the GST pay for? What will it be?

The SPEAKER: The member for McMahon will resume his seat. He doesn't have the call. The Prime Minister has the call. There is no point of order.

Ms Butler interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Griffith will cease interjecting.

Mr Turnbull: There is something to be said for retro fashion; but, really, the honourable member seems to be living in the past. The Australian people are not interested in that type of blame game politics. What they want to know is that there is a major debate, that government is listening, that Australians are participating and that we will have a fully-informed debate on these important issues.

Economy

Mr Sukkar (Deakin) (14:21): My question is to the Treasurer. How is the government's strong economic leadership building a stronger economy? Will the Treasurer update the House on how Australia is transitioning from the mining boom to a more competitive economy?

Mr Morrison (Cook—Treasurer) (14:22): I thank the member for Deakin for his question and his keen interest in these issues. He knows that Australians are realists, but they are also optimists. They are realistic about the global volatility that exists and about how our economy is transitioning post the mining boom, as we diversify this economy. They know their role in that process. We also know that they are very optimistic. They are optimistic because they know that they can deal with these challenges and they do know that they can succeed. They will not be cheated and they will not be intimidated out of the prosperity that they know that they can achieve in these circumstances. They have reason to be optimistic. The Reserve Bank Governor drew attention last week to the fact that, despite the strong headwinds that our economy has been confronting, we are growing and we are growing well. We are growing in the face of these strong headwinds—

Mr Conroy interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Charlton will cease interjecting.

Mr Morrison: and we are growing at a rate of twice that of similar economies like Canada and at a rate higher than the OECD. They know that we are optimistic because we are achieving 10 times the rate of job growth that was being achieved at the time of the last election in 2013. They know that we are confident because we can see—

Ms Plibersek interjecting—
The SPEAKER: The member for Sydney.

Mr MORRISON: the job ads figures, which came out today, show that we are up again in job advertisements. There are more opportunities being created in the job market today than there were at the time of the last election. We are seeing that confidence expressed in the various surveys of business conditions, business confidence and consumer confidence. The government is acting to back Australians to support jobs and growth in our economy. We are doing that through innovation—a statement will be brought down by the Prime Minister and the Minister for Innovation—and a $50 billion infrastructure plan is being rolled out around the country. There is greater choice through greater and more effective competition policy; then there are the trade agreements and, of course, our aspirations for a better tax system.

Australians are paying too high an economic price for our tax system, and we need a system that rewards effort and backs people being out there, working, saving and investing and removes impediments that are holding Australians back. We do not want a tax system that increases the tax burden on Australians. You do not need to increase the tax burden to deal with budget challenges that we as a country are facing. You do that by controlling expenditure and growing the economy. So we want a tax system that helps grow the economy by removing the impediments that are there. You do not want to engage in a tax-system discussion which is just about raising higher taxes to give a bucket of money to the states to spend, as they are already doing. What you want is a strong leadership that understands and identifies the problem, that works through the options and that works collaboratively with states and territories to ensure that we can get a model that deals with the challenges that the Australian economy is facing and Australians are facing—(Time expired)

Goods and Services Tax

Ms BUTLER (Griffith) (14:25): My question is to the Prime Minister. According to the ABS, childcare costs in Brisbane in my electorate have increased 14 per cent since this Liberal government was elected. Will the Prime Minister rule out making it harder for families to make ends meet by adding a GST to the cost of child care?

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (14:25): As the honourable member knows, our proposed Jobs for Families package increases childcare investment by an additional $3½ billion. It increases overall expenditure to $40 billion over the next four years. It will deliver simpler, more affordable, more flexible and accessible system for around 1.2 million families from around 1 July 2017, many of whom will be on average $30 a week better off. The changes to the activity test better align—as she knows—subsidised care to the hours worked—

The SPEAKER: The Prime Minister will resume his seat. Before I call the member for Griffith, I caution against frivolous points of order.

Ms BUTLER: My question goes to whether the GST would be added to the cost of child care.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order. The Prime Minister is entitled to give context to the question. The member for Hotham will cease interjecting.

Mr TURNBULL: The families who do not meet the activity test but who earn around $65,000 a year or less will still receive 12 hours of—
The SPEAKER: The member for Griffith, you have already raised a point of order on relevance. There can only be one point of order.

Ms BUTLER: I now raise the question of whether the Prime Minister is flouting your ruling, Mr Speaker.

The SPEAKER: No, he is not. I said there was no point of order and so he cannot be flouting my ruling. He is entitled to give context.

Mr TURNBULL: Families who do not meet the activity test but earn around $65,000 a year or less—you would think the honourable member who represents many of those families would have some interest in this—will still receive 12 hours a week of subsidised care for their children. The new childcare subsidy is consistent with the Productivity Commission's recommendation to have a simple, single means tested subsidy that provides greater assistance to low-income families, including those with multiple children. Under the six years of Labor fees increased by 53 per cent by contrast, costing parents $73 a week.

Turning now to the GST, I can see that right across Australia we have a broad discussion about how we are going to ensure that our tax system is relevant to 2015 and how it will support Australians and back them in as they work, save and invest—right across the board. Of course, everyone is participating in it—former Labor premiers, but not the honourable members opposite. All they want to do is run these scare campaigns. They want to play the rule-in, rule-out game. They want to frighten people. Let me tell you something—and I have given the honourable member a pretty clear answer on this. If you were to increase the GST without any compensation and without any other arrangements, households on lower incomes would be disadvantaged, and that is why it would never be done. That is why it was not done in the past—

Ms Butler interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Griffith!

Mr TURNBULL: and that is why it is inconceivable. The fact of the matter is that any changes to the tax system will be fair. They will be fair—that is a fundamental design requirement. The honourable member should be wise enough to recognise that that is the way—(Time expired)

The SPEAKER: Just before I call the member for Denison, the member for Jagajaga will cease interjecting. I asked the member for Griffith to cease interjecting; she continues to interject; she is now warned.

Rail Infrastructure

Mr WILKIE (Denison) (14:29): My question is to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, you understand how rail is clean, eases congestion and links communities, but in Hobart—despite there being a pressing need, an available rail corridor and popular support—a succession of state governments have shown little real interest in it. Will you act in the best interest of the community, economy and environment and promise to fund the Hobart northern suburbs light rail if the business case stacks up?

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (14:30): I thank the honourable member for his question. I am not as familiar with this project as he is, although I have heard its merits being raised by advocates there, including by Professor Peter Newman, who is one of the
leading transport economists in the world. It clearly does have its supporters; it does also have some sceptics.

Let me just say this to the honourable member: this is proposed infrastructure which is in the state of Tasmania and the primary proponent of such a project obviously has to be the Tasmanian government. Speaking for our government, we will support transport infrastructure in cities on the basis of its merit. Of course, we need good mass transit; we need good public transport; we need good rail, light and heavy; we need good roads and we need good planning. We are not assessing projects on the basis of any preconception or bias towards roads or rail, but on the other hand that does not mean that any public transport project will get unlimited federal funding. We are very conscious of the opportunities for value capture to ensure that some of the accretion in real estate value occasioned by the construction of mass transit, like the kind the honourable member refers to, can be taken to support the project. In all of my discussions with state governments, and I know I can speak for the minister in this regard too, we have had a lot of support on that and a lot of interest in that.

As far as the particular project he has asked about, I understand that Infrastructure Tasmania is conducting an assessment and review of the various reports about the Hobart light rail project. They will be providing a recommendation by 31 December to the Hodgman government in Tasmania on the priority of the protect and the use of the corridor. I am advised that the state government, led by Premier Will Hodgman, has no predetermined outcomes in mind and looks forward to examining the recommendations from Infrastructure Tasmania. In the meantime, our government will continue to work collaboratively with the Tasmanian government, as we always have, and seek to deliver real results for all Tasmanians. We will consider any request for Commonwealth support in a thoroughly businesslike manner, including, of course, assessment by Infrastructure Australia.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER: I inform the House that we have the ASEAN parliamentary delegation present on the floor of the House this afternoon. On behalf of the House, I extend a very warm welcome.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Economy

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP (Mackellar) (14:32): My question is to the Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science. Will the minister update the House on action the government is already taking to place innovation and science at the centre of economic growth and the creation of jobs?

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House and Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science) (14:33): I thank the member for Mackellar for her question, because she, like all members on this side of the House, recognises that the government is committed to showing the economic leadership that will create the jobs and the growth that are necessary to provide wealth in our economy and jobs for our people.
We are doing this through a number of measures. Both the Treasurer and the Prime Minister so far in question time today have outlined a few of the measures that we are using to drive economic leadership in this country. Most recently, of course, we also passed the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement in the teeth of opposition from the union movement, but it was passed. We are also using innovation and science to drive economic leadership in this country. We are doing so through commercialising research and by bringing people back from overseas who have taken their talents elsewhere and improved on them; we want them to come back here and add to our skills.

We are doing it through training, through the skills and training of the workforce, and we are doing it by trying to create a better regime for start-ups, venture capital, capital gains tax treatment and income tax treatment. They are ways to encourage innovation and new businesses to get started. We are trying to create a culture where risk is embraced and initiative is enabled through the taking of risks. We recently announced the very well-received appointment of Dr Alan Finkel as the Chief Scientist. He is a classic example of an academic who is also a philanthropist and also a businessman. He will lead by example in the new innovation and science agenda. He replaces Ian Chubb, who for five years has been promoting science and laying some of the foundations for the government's reforms.

We are also showing the way by listening to what the sector is saying to us, because leadership is not just about talking; it is about listening to what the public are saying and it is about listening to the sector. For example, the Prime Minister, the assistant ministers for science and innovation and I attended the innovation roundtable at the University of Western Sydney, the economic summit that was held before that and the hackathon held by the Assistant Minister for Innovation. The Assistant Minister for Science has also just been to Singapore and South Korea, talking to people about how they have driven innovation in their economies. The Assistant Minister for Innovation has just returned from Israel, where he met with people to see how they have become an agile and nimble economy.

That is what we intend to bring about in this country over the coming years—an agile and nimble, optimistic and forward-looking economy, not the bleak view of the opposition and not the negativity, bleakness and the dark cloud of the opposition over the Australian economy. We are future looking. We are new politics; Labor is old politics. (Time expired)

Goods and Services Tax

Mr BOWEN (McMahon) (14:36): My question is to the Prime Minister. The Treasurer has promised an increase in the GST will not lead to an increase in the total tax take. This would require every dollar raised by the GST increase to be spent on tax cuts, so how will the government compensate pensioners, veterans and carers for the increase in the GST?

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (14:36): The shadow Treasurer overlooks the fact that the government does not have a proposal to increase the GST. He would no doubt like the government to do so; he would no doubt like to write the government's policies. As he lies awake at night dreaming of a glorious future in a Shorten government, no doubt he imagines what policies he would like us to undertake. But the honourable member would be better off focusing on what his proposals are to deal with the challenges that we face. What is the Labor Party's proposal to deal with the massive deficit that they left us—the tens of billions of dollars worth of unfunded commitments? How do they propose to address the fact that we left them in 2007 with cash in the bank and they left
us with a massive and growing deficit—with a structural deficit? How does he explain his own distinguished track record in stifling innovation with the employee share schemes legislation, which basically abolished employee share schemes—something that even he now acknowledges was a mistaken effort?

The honourable member should be well aware of this, and I will repeat what I said in response to the member for Griffith's question earlier: there are many, many proposals for tax reform being debated at the moment. They are being advocated and canvassed by people across the board—by Labor people, by Liberals, by academics, by interest groups. That is good, because if and when a government proposes substantial reforms it needs to do at least two things—

Mr Champion interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Wakefield is now warned.

Mr TURNBULL: It needs to first demonstrate that the reforms are not reforms for reform's sake—that they will deliver stronger growth and greater opportunities; that they will be fair, ensuring that the burden of taxation is borne in an equitable manner across the economy; and that they will encourage innovation and growth and so forth. But we also have to demonstrate that we have listened to every view—that we have consulted widely, that we have not taken things off the table in some sort of panic response to feeble scare campaigns but have gone about the business of government in an open and adult way, taking account of all of the matters that are relevant and then coming to a thoroughly informed conclusion. The Australian people should expect nothing less from a responsible government.

Trade

Mr GOODENOUGH (Moore) (14:39): My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Will the minister update the House on how the series of recently concluded free trade agreements will boost Australia's prosperity and create jobs for Australians both now and in the future?

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (14:40): I thank the member for Moore for his question. As he knows, Australia is the 12th largest economy in the world and the fifth largest on a per capita basis. This is due in large part to the fact that we are an open, export-oriented market economy. Our jobs growth, our economic growth and our standard of living depend upon the capacity of our exporters, our businesses, to trade their goods and services around the world. This government is committed to securing Australian jobs and further prosperity by supporting private enterprise and innovation in finding new markets for our goods and services. A key element of that support is of course opening up new markets and enhancing existing markets, and that is why the Minister for Trade and Investment, Andrew Robb, has concluded these three free trade agreements with South Korea, Japan and China. This will give Australian businesses access to greater opportunities than ever before. Likewise, the success of the Trans Pacific Partnership negotiations will also expand business opportunities for the 12 countries of the TPP. They represent about 40 per cent of the global economy—a marketplace of around 800 million people comprising a quarter of the world's trade. The 11 other countries, apart from Australia, in the TPP already represent a third of Australia's exports, so the boost to jobs and economic growth through more open markets will be significant. We are already seeing the private sector seize on the
opportunities. McWilliams Wines, which employs around 200 staff already, have said of the Japan-Australia Economic Partnership Agreement:

We have orders in hand now to take advantage of JAEEPA. These orders have been generated as a direct impact of JAEEPA and more are in the pipeline as new customers engage directly with McWilliams.

The director, Mark Healy, went on to say:

The JAEEPA has opened up new opportunities as Australia becomes more cost competitive …

As for the China FTA, he said:

We have seen an increased level of interest in Australian wine … Many of these enquiries are from new customers looking to replace supply from countries that do not enjoy a FTA with China.

Another Australian company, Blackmores, has significantly expanded its presence, and its CEO, Christine Holgate, has said of the FTAs:

I can absolutely see the demand for our products from Chinese consumers. I can also see that there’s a big differential in pricing between Australia and China …

She said that this China free trade agreement would take that away and make their products more accessible to more Chinese people. She went on to say:

The more that we grow in those markets, the more money we have to re-invest into research back here and into local jobs.

This government will pursue every opportunity available to us to conclude more free trade agreements, particularly with more countries in our region. This will create new markets for Australian businesses, particularly those that are innovative, those that are creative, because they will be competitive.

**Goods and Services Tax**

Mr HUSIC (Chifley) (14:43): My question is to the Prime Minister. My electorate of Chifley in Western Sydney has amongst the highest rates of diabetes in metropolitan Australia. How will slugging people in my electorate with a GST on fresh fruit and vegetables encourage them to buy healthy food for their families, and will the Prime Minister now rule out hitting every Australian with a GST on fresh fruit and vegetables?

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (14:43): I will be brief, because I answered this question with my previous answer. The honourable member should understand—I know he does understand—that in any consideration of changes to the tax system it is important to keep all proposals, all ideas, on the table so that there is a broad discussion.

Mr Champion: For how long?

The SPEAKER: The member for Wakefield has been warned.

Mr TURNBULL: The honourable member shouts out ‘How long?’ I will tell you how short it was under his government. When Kevin Rudd and Wayne Swan produced the Henry tax review after sitting on it for months and months, they effectively ruled out everything in it before it was published and then came up with only one brilliant idea, which was the resource super profits tax. That was great! What a brilliant idea that was! Ultimately, after they did several backflips and lost a Prime Minister, it ended up raising no money at all, although, of course, they did commit billions of dollars of expenditure on the back of it. The fact is that good policy formation requires open discussion.
The honourable member obviously believes that the GST should not be extended to fresh food, and that is a powerful point. It is a very good point, and he should make that point. But the honourable member should understand that the government is going to consider all of the options which are being raised right across the board. But I would say this to the honourable member: we are utterly clear that, firstly, changes to the tax system must be done in a way that promotes economic growth, promotes incentives, gives people incentives and backs them as they choose to work, save and invest, and they obviously have to meet the fundraising requirements of the government—they have to pay for all of the government services. So the tax system has to be supportive of economic growth at the same time as it raises money.

It also has to be fair. The honourable member knows very well that we have an elaborate social welfare system which compensates and supports the less well-off in the face of across-the-economy charges like the GST and all the other things that everybody pays the same price for, whether they are rich or poor. The real issue is one of economic efficiency and equity. Both of those are clear commitments and goals of the government, as they should be of any government, but they are especially so of the government I am proud to lead.

Mr Champion interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Wakefield will cease interjecting. It is his final warning!

Asylum Seekers

Ms GAMBARO (Brisbane) (14:46): My question is to the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection. Will the minister advise the House on Australia's response to the Syrian humanitarian crisis? How is the government's strong and consistent approach to border protection helping men, women, children and persecuted minorities fleeing the conflict in Syria and the surrounding areas?

Mr DUTTON (Dickson—Minister for Immigration and Border Protection) (14:47): I thank the member for Brisbane for her question and her ongoing interest in these matters. She is a great supporter of the refugee community in Brisbane. She is like many people in this parliament who work very hard to make sure that we can provide a new life for people who could not have imagined growing up in a country like ours.

Last week I was in Jordan and in Lebanon, and I had the opportunity of meeting people within the Zaatari camp in Jordan. In that camp there are about 80,000 people, including 40,000 children. We spoke with the UN officials there and others who facilitated the visit about the increasing need for humanitarian assistance and also for countries like ours to provide settlement opportunities for people from those camps. It is very important for all of us to realise, as I know many people in this place do, that the situation in Syria is deteriorating and as winter approaches the situation becomes more and more dire, in particular for those families with children.

This government has promised $44 million, which will provide assistance to some 240,000 humanitarian refugees within the camps. That brings to $230 million the amount that our country has provided by way of humanitarian assistance since 2011. Of course, the government announced in September that we would provide 12,000 places within the humanitarian and refugee program to people who have been displaced from Syria and Iraq. As at 1 November this year, 2,218 people have had initial assessments undertaken. We are
continuing the security and health checks of those people so that we might settle those people as quickly as possible in Australia.

At the embassy in Amman, I had the great honour of presenting to four families their immigration cards, their travel documents, to come to Australia, and I hope that those people will be here before Christmas. I think all of us in this country have been very proud of the response across the nation. I also say thank you very much to the states and territories. There is, in effect, a bidding war going on between the premiers and chief ministers to encourage Syrians to come to their particular part of the country, and I think that is a great thing. It is a dividend of the hard work that this government has undertaken to keep our borders secure and to make sure that we can have an orderly migration program. Our country already had, on a per capita basis, the highest number of settlements under the refugee and humanitarian program compared to any other country in the world. The fact that, in addition to those 13,750 places that we can offer this year, we are offering the additional 12,000 places to those people most in need should make all of us in this place and across the country very proud.

Goods and Services Tax

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:50): My question is to the Prime Minister. The admirably industrious member for Lyne, in a radio interview on 2 November, ruled out applying the GST to rent or nursing home payments. Will the Prime Minister do the same?

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (14:50): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question, and, given that I have answered this question—not as briefly as the member for Adelaide said I warranted to do, although you can never entirely rely on a politician when he says, 'I'll be brief'—I will invite the Treasurer to respond to this.

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Treasurer) (14:51): Prime Minister, I thank you for the opportunity to respond to the question. I commend the member for Lyne for being part of this discussion that we are having about a better tax system. He has put forward an option, and he has had that costed. We are considering all options and the government have put forward no preferred option or proposal. What would assist the government is if all the options that are already out there but have not been fully released were able to be considered by the government. Of course, I am referring to when the member for McMahon, the shadow Treasurer, was the Treasurer and he commissioned some Treasury advice on a number of scenarios. One of those scenarios—he will remember it as scenario 3—was to increase the GST rate to 12½ per cent and also to broaden the base. A large part of it is blacked out. It would help the government, given we want to consider all the options, if he could tell us what scenario one is and what scenario two is and what the full details of scenario three are and where he was proposing to extend the base. Heaven forbid what scenario four, scenario five and scenario six are. How many scenarios were there?

How many scenarios were there? Captain Keynesian over there, I am sure, would have many of these options and it would greatly assist us, as we consider all of the options, as you would be required to do when you are trying to come up with the best tax system, if the shadow Treasurer would give permission for all the Treasury modelling that was done by the previous government on increasing the GST to be released.
Mr COLEMAN (Banks) (14:52): My question is to the Minister for Territories, Local Government and Major Projects. Will the minister please provide the House with an update on the impact on Banks residents of the M5 East duplication and the upgrade of the Beverley Hills M5 interchange? How will the Banks electorate, especially residents from Riverwood, Peakhurst, Lugano, Padstow, Mortdale and Narwee benefit from these changes?

Mr FLETCHER (Bradfield—Minister for Territories, Local Government and Major Projects) (14:53): I thank the member for Banks for his question because—

An honourable member interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Members on my right and on my left will cease interjecting.

Dr Chalmers interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Rankin is warned!

Mr FLETCHER: he has demonstrated a passionate commitment to his electorate and he has been a very strong advocate for infrastructure investment to serve the people of Banks, including suburbs such as Riverwood, Peakhurst, Lugano, Padstow, Mortdale and Narwee. The M5 East duplication and the upgrade of the King Georges Road interchange at Beverley Hills form critical parts of the WestConnex project, a vital piece of infrastructure that will bring significant benefits to the people of Banks.

Mr Mitchell interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for McEwen is warned! The level of interjections is far too high. Members want to hear the answer. There is no point of order on the level of interjections. They are unacceptable and they are disorderly.

Mr Burke: Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It might make the House quieter if the minister simply tables the preprepared notes to the 'spontaneous' question.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order. The member for Watson will resume his seat.

An honourable member interjecting—

The SPEAKER: I am giving fair warning to the House: I will deal with this level of interjection, if it continues.

Mr FLETCHER: I am very pleased to return to the answer I am giving to this very important question. The Leader of the Opposition might find it amusing that ministers take seriously questions from members of the House about matters of interest to their electorate, but on this side of the House we take very seriously the role of the government in meeting the needs of electorates and in responding to questions raised by members of parliament about their electorate, including, of course, the benefits that the M5 East, as part of the WestConnex project, will bring to the people of the electorate of Banks.

I am pleased to inform the House that the upgrade of the King Georges Road interchange began some 18 months ahead of schedule. One of the reasons we have been able to advance the schedule in which the M5 East is preceded with is that the federal government has provided a concessional loan of $2 billion. This has allowed the enormously important WestConnex project to proceed with the greatest possible speed. As the member for Banks has been highlighting, this particular interchange is one which raises considerable concerns
but, of course, the M5 East will deliver enhanced speeds for people to get from the suburbs within the electorate of Banks into the City of Sydney and in other directions. Infrastructure is enormously important for the people of Banks and for the people of Sydney. That is why the Turnbull government is committed to the WestConnex project and we have provided a $2 billion—

Mr Albanese interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Grayndler will resume his seat. The minister has the call.

Mr FLETCHER: I am advised I retain the call. I am delighted at that because I have more to say about the terrific way we are meeting the needs of the electorate of Banks and I congratulate the member for his advocacy.

(Time expired)

Mr Albanese: Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It might assist the House if the minister was prepared to table the business case for the project, if it exists.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Goods and Services Tax

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (14:57): My question, genuinely without notice, is to the Minister the Agriculture and Water Resources.

The SPEAKER: I would be surprised if you had given him notice!

Mr FITZGIBBON: Minister, how much will a lamb roast cost if the government hits fresh food with a 15 per cent GST?

Mr JOYCE (New England—Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources) (14:58): I thank the honourable member for his question. It gives me a chance to talk about the record prices we are currently getting for sheep because of the three free-trade agreements which our nation has signed with China, Korea and Japan. I will be heading to China, Korea and Japan in about three days time. We have also signed new live animal destinations to Bahrain, to Egypt, to Lebanon, to Cambodia, to Thailand and big ones into China, for we landed our first load—

Mr Fitzgibbon: Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think you know, Mr Speaker.

The SPEAKER: You will state your point of order.

Mr Fitzgibbon: Relevance.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order. The minister is not even one minute into his answer.

Mr JOYCE: As we know, it is based on a completely false premise, as there is no policy direction to increase the GST, but I have been very interested in some of the iterations which have been coming from the shadow minister for agriculture, like the last one. Once upon a time, they had a—what was it?—a $252 million limit on foreign investment in land. Just lately—

The SPEAKER: The minister will contain himself to matters of tax.

Mr JOYCE: he moved it to $1,000 million. Now he has reduced it by 95 per cent, back to $50 million. There is one thing I am absolutely certain about: if we are looking for consistency, we do not look in your direction.
Mrs WICKS (Robertson) (15:00): My constituency question is to the Minister for Veterans' Affairs. Will the minister outline to the House how the government has been working to honour our veterans in this Centenary of Anzac year, including in my electorate of Robertson and particularly ahead of Remembrance Day on Wednesday?

Mr ROBERT (Fadden—Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Minister for Human Services and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Centenary of ANZAC) (15:00): Let me thank the member for Robertson for her question and note the 2,600 veterans and their families she has in her electorate. And I thank her for her work in representing them.

There is a serious point to this week in terms of Remembrance Day. I know people from right across this country, including in this House, will pause this Wednesday at 11 o'clock, symbolising when the guns went silent on the Western Front at 11 am on the eleventh day of the eleventh month. It is a serious time for us to stop and reflect. It is 100 years since the Anzac landing; 100 years since the Anzac corps was established. Of course many would go fighting at Gallipoli and many more on the Western Front.

For the next four years there will be a range of commemoration activities right across the country, and the government will continue to progressively roll out those activities overseas. Those interested can go to Anzacentenary.gov.au to see the domestic agenda for what is happening in terms of commemoration.

But as all members know the heart and soul of commemoration in this country at Anzac Day and Remembrance Day is what happens in electorates and what happens in communities. It is wonderful—

Mr Mitchell interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for McEwen will leave under 94(a).

The member for McEwen then left the chamber.

Mr ROBERT: the Anzac Centenary Local Grants Program, which has been a bipartisan program, over 1,600 different grants across 150 electorates have been used so exceptionally well. I note that over eight different grants have been used in the electorate of the member for Robertson.

As many of our communities gather together, I note in the member for Robertson's electorate there will be gatherings at the Woy Woy Ettalong-Hardy's Bay RSL Sub-Branch, the Gosford RSL Sub-Branch, the Terrigal Wamberal RSL Sub-Branch, the Vietnam Veterans Peacekeepers and Peacemakers Association Gosford City Sub-Branch and the Davistown RSL Sub-Branch. People at those sub-branches will genuinely gather, across both aisles—

Ms Macklin interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Jagajaga is warned.

Mr ROBERT: to remember what is happening.

It is also pleasing to see the Saluting Their Service Commemorative Grants—up to $4,000—is available for local communities for all of the electorates here. Within the member
for Robertson's electorate, the Davistown club RSL sub-branch will receive $7,000 for two projects: upgrading their war memorial surrounds and the purpose of four plaques for their memorial wall. Likewise, the Ocean Beach Surf Life Saving Club in the members' electorate will receive $4,000 to construct a community memorial at the club in Umina. Lastly, the Radar Air Defence Branch of RAAF Association will receive $600 for a commemorative banner.

So I thank the member for her advocacy for those projects, and I encourage all of us this Wednesday to pause to remember those who have gone before, remember those who fought for our country, remember those who paid the ultimate price, and remember that freedom is not free.

**Goods and Services Tax**

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (15:03): My question is to the Prime Minister. NATSEM modelling shows increasing the GST to 15 per cent would mean a family on about $26,000 a year would pay more than 20 per cent of its household income in GST, but a family on about $170,000 a year would pay only 8.8 per cent of its household income on the GST. Why is the Prime Minister intent on putting the highest burden on low- and middle-income households?

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (15:04): I thank the honourable member for her question, but she knows full-well, as all honourable members do, that the government has no intention of placing inequitable burdens on households with low incomes. Instead of engaging in a discussion—

Ms O'Neil interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Hotham is warned.

Mr TURNBULL: constructively, the opposition is simply asserting is the government is proposing to do something which the government is not proposing to do. We are in the business of carefully considering the numerous options and analyses—including the NATSEM modelling, which we are very familiar with—and all of these matters, and coming to a fully informed decision. So, when the honourable member stands up and says, 'You are going to put a 15 per cent GST on all households without any compensation, and this will damage or relatively damage our lower income households', she is using a completely false premise.

The government is not proposing to do that at all. The honourable member is completely addicted to the old political paradigm of 'rule in, rule out'. She feels that, under the withering cross-examination from the Labor Party, we will wilt and we will rule everything out; that we will be as feeble as the member for Lilley was when he was the Treasurer; that we will rule every issue out and that we will shut down the discussion—

Ms Owens interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Parramatta is warned.

Mr TURNBULL: She feels that we will not allow a debate and that—

Mr Thistlethwaite interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Kingsford Smith is warned.
Mr Turnbull: we will go off into a back room and come up with some proposal uninformed by any public discussion. Really!

The honourable member's party demonstrated over six years that that is not the way to make public policy—over six dysfunctional years of extremely damaging government for Australia. The focus for us is to be open-minded and consultative and to consider all of these matters. But, as I have said and I will say again: we are committed to reform which will support Australia's economy, support innovation, support jobs and support investment. We are also committed to ensuring that it is fair and that households on lower incomes are not worse off as a result. That is absolutely critical. The honourable member understands that, but she is not prepared to admit it because the truth disappoints her. She would rather create a straw man and tilt at that.

Telecommunications

Mr Hogan (Page) (15:07): My question is to Mr Fletcher, the Minister representing the Minister for Communications. My question comes from a constituent who submitted it via my Facebook page after I asked the community what they wanted me to ask in question time. David McIntyre from Cawongla asks, 'When will people living in our area get better internet and mobile phone service?'

Mr Champion interjecting—

The Speaker: The member for Wakefield will leave under 94(a). The minister has the call.

The member for Wakefield then left the chamber.

Mr Fletcher (Bradfield—Minister for Territories, Local Government and Major Projects) (15:07): I thank the member for Page for his very important question on behalf of his constituent in Cawongla. As it happens, I have prepared myself for an answer to this question as well, as is consistent with the professional operation of a government that cares about constituents and meeting their needs. It turns out that we have a very good story to tell when it comes to broadband in Cawongla and in other areas of rural and remote Australia. Most of Cawongla is already covered by the NBN fixed wireless footprint, which delivers 25 megabits per second peak speed service down and five megabits per second peak speed service up. There are already some 300,000 premises that are covered by this network. That is a dramatic increase on the numbers that we inherited when we came to government in 2013.

In addition, those in Cawongla who are not covered by the fixed wireless service, which comes from a nearby base station at Homeleigh, will have the benefit of the satellite service. Of course, the first satellite was launched quite recently. That will deliver 25 megabits per second peak speed down and five megabits per second peak speed up, with services due to begin by the middle of next year. So, in Cawongla, as in much of rural and regional Australia all across rural and regional Australia, there is a good story to tell on broadband. We are delivering broadband services. We are rolling them out notwithstanding the chaotic mess that we inherited from the previous government. The Turnbull government is delivering because that is what you do in government. The opposition is asking silly questions and making silly interjections.

The Speaker: The minister has concluded his answer.
Mr Burke: Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order under standing order 102. If their questions are going to be all on notice to the ministers, can't they just do it in the normal way?

The SPEAKER: The member for Watson will resume his seat.

Goods and Services Tax

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (15:09): My question is to the Prime Minister. NATSEM modelling shows that an increase in the GST even when paired with a five per cent reduction in income tax still leaves almost two-thirds of Australian households worse off. How fair is it to make two-thirds of Australian households worse off?

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (15:10): I thank the honourable member for his question but I have asked precisely this question from his deputy just a moment ago.

Ms Macklin interjecting—

The SPEAKER: I remind the member for Jagajaga that she is warned.

Mr TURNBULL: The reality is that you can create any scenario you like with modelling and come up with something which is unfair or fair. The fact is that the outcome that is presupposed in the NATSEM modelling would of course not be fair. That is pretty obvious but it is not the government's policy. It is the Leader of the Opposition's fantasy about what the government's policy might be. I know the honourable member would love us to rush to judgement.

Mr Thistlethwaite interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Kingsford Smith has been warned.

Mr TURNBULL: He does not want us to spend time talking to ACOSS or talking to the ACTU or talking to the national reform summit. He does not want us to consult to all Australians.

Mr Thistlethwaite interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Kingsford Smith will leave under 94(a).

The member for Kingsford Smith then left the chamber.

Mr TURNBULL: He wants us to do what his party did in government and shut down debate by ruling things out. This is a government that is committed to an open debate about these important matters which will inform us. It will inform the people and, when we come to our conclusions, they will know and we will know that we have reached the best informed conclusions we can. The honourable member should not be afraid of open discussion. He should get out from under the doona. He should engage in the open discussion. He should come out and recognise that in Australia we are entitled to have an open debate about taxation reform, an open debate about the economy. And the Labor Party is not in it. They do not want to be in it. They do not want to have that open discussion.

Let me say it again for the last time in this question time at least: there will be no changes made under our government which will be unfair to people on lower incomes. We are committed to ensuring that there is equity across the system. We will ensure that any changes that we make are ones which will promote growth, promote jobs, promote innovation, ensure that our children and our grandchildren have the chance of better jobs in the future than we have had, ensure that we are able to seize the unprecedented opportunities Australians now
face and ensure that the government is backing Australians as they work, save and invest, not holding them back. That is our commitment. If the honourable member believes he has some good ideas as to how we can do that, let's see them. Forget the scare campaign; it is time to campaign on facts and good ideas.

Youth Allowance

Mr WILSON (O'Conner) (15:13): My question is to the Minister for Social Services. Can the minister please update the House on the progress the government is making towards fair and equitable access to youth payments for both dependent and independent students in rural and regional electorates like O'Conner?

Mr PORTER (Pearce—Minister for Social Services) (15:13): I thank the member for his question. Indeed, it is a timely question because very soon in this House we will be debating in the final stages the Social Services Legislation Amendment (More Generous Means Testing for Youth Payments) Bill 2015. I think the member for O'Conner will realise that in large part that bill had its genesis in a range of complaints that had emanated from rural communities about some of the difficulties that they were experiencing in accessing appropriate education for students in their families. In fact, I recall the member having spoken to me about this issue some time ago after a forum in his electorate where a parent from Albany in the great electorate of O'Conner had described spending up to 80 hours trying to help their child fill out the necessary documentation which went to the issue of asset testing for that child and that child's family to be eligible for the relevant payments for study. That was clearly an untenable situation and it left those families at great disadvantage.

Member for O'Conner, I congratulate you for your great advocacy and, of course, as you would be aware—and the timeliness of the question goes to the point—the Social Services Legislation Amendment (More Generous Means Testing for Youth Payments) Bill 2015 will be debated very shortly in this parliament. What it will do is remove the complex and unnecessary meaning tests and improve the operation of parental income tests. The changes will help students from regional and rural families—like those that you spoke to in Albany, member for O'Conner—to better support the transition of their children from school to further study, including those children who continue to study beyond year 12. The bill was introduced at the urging of Senator Bridget McKenzie, who you have had a great relationship with on this matter, yourself, the member for O'Conner, and other backbench colleagues, following an examination of issues by an interdepartmental committee on access to higher education for regional and remote students. The committee held 14 regional education forums, including one in Albany which I have spoken about. It was attended by over 65 people, and they were very obviously eager to discuss this.

What the proposed changes will mean is very much simplified rules by more closely aligning the parental means test assessment for youth payments with the family tax benefit A assessment, which is subject only to an income test based on adjusted taxable income, and the latter, the family tax benefit part A, having no family assets test or family actual means test. What that will mean, across Australia, is that about 1,200 families from regional and remote areas will become eligible for an increase in payment from the removal of the family actual means test. They are also expected to benefit from the removal of the family assets test. What you will see is farming families who will not have farm assets counted towards the test for their children accessing youth allowance, and for all of the families that we have looked at
you will see a benefit of an increase in their rate of youth allowance, which is very important, and that will be about $7,000 per year. So, well done, member.

DOCUMENTS

Presentation

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House and Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science) (15:16): Documents are tabled in accordance with list circulated to honourable members earlier today. Full details of the documents will be recorded in the *Votes and Proceedings*.

AUDITOR-GENERAL’S REPORTS

Report No. 6 of 2015-16

The SPEAKER (15:17): I present the Auditor-General’s performance audit report No. 6 of 2015-2016 entitled *Third follow-up audit into the Australian Electoral Commission’s preparation for and conduct of federal elections—Australian Electoral Commission*. Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

DOCUMENTS

Parliamentary Services Commissioner

Presentation


BUSINESS

Days and Hours of Meeting

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House and Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science) (15:17): I present a chart showing the program of sittings for 2016. Copies of the program have been placed on the table. I ask leave of the House to move that the program be agreed to. Leave granted.

Mr PYNE: I move:

That the program of sittings for 2016 be agreed to.

Question agreed to.

BILLS

Social Services Legislation Amendment (More Generous Means Testing for Youth Payments) Bill 2015

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr PORTER (Pearce—Minister for Social Services) (15:18): We are on the Social Services Legislation Amendment (More Generous Means Testing for Youth Payments) Bill 2015, and I thank all of the members opposite for their contributions on this bill. The bill will implement the government's 2015 budget measure that will provide more consistent and more
generous support for families with dependent young people who qualify for certain youth income support payments.

With a financial commitment from the government of $262.7 million over the forward estimates, this bill will bring extra support for families as their children move into young adulthood, particularly rural and regional families whose children continue to study beyond year 12. The measure will, from 1 January 2016, include removing the family assets test and the family actual means test from the youth allowance parental means test arrangements. The additional tests are complex and can create a disincentive for people to increase their income and improve their capacity to support their families. Removal of the tests will align the youth allowance parental means test arrangements with those applying to family tax benefit part A, which do not include a family assets test or family actual means test.

The measure will also result in a more consistent level of support for families as young people move from family tax benefit part A to an individual income support payment. The parental income test exemptions for youth allowance will also be aligned with existing arrangements for family tax benefit part A. Removing the family assets test youth allowance will allow around 4,100 additional dependent youth allowance claimants to qualify for the first time, accessing average annual payments of more than $7,000 a year. Removing the family actual means test will also see around 1,200 more people receiving youth allowance for the first time, as well as increasing payments for around 4,860 existing students by approximately $2,000 a year.

The changes will reduce the significant regulatory burden on around 30,000 families subject to the family actual means test and around 200,000 families subject to the family assets test. The removal of the family actual means test means families will no longer need to document their expenditure and savings in detail or require the services of an accountant. The removal of the family assets test means families will no longer need to list and value their assets. The change means farming families will not have farm assets counted towards the means test for their dependent children claiming youth allowance.

A further beneficial component of this budget measure will apply from 1 July 2016, that being to expand the family pool for the youth parental income test to include a notional family rate of family tax benefit part A for all of the children for whom the parents have financial responsibility. This will apply to families that have dependent children receiving individual youth payments that parentally income tested and also younger dependent siblings and will result in a lower rate of reduction to the dependent child youth allowance that is currently the case. The current rules unfairly reduce assistance to families as young people move to parentally income tested youth income support payments by imposing excessive withdrawal rates.

The measure will reduce sudden drops in family assistance as young people move from family tax benefit part A and onto youth allowance or certain other youth payments. Including all FTB in the family pool for the youth parental income test will allow around 13,700 families with dependent children in both the FTB part A and youth systems to become eligible for an average increase in payment of around $1,100 a year. Around 5,800 families who currently miss out on payments due to the combined high taper rates will also become eligible for an average payment of around $1,300 a year. Additionally, in a two-stage process from 1 January 2016, maintenance income will be removed from the Youth Allowance...
parental income test assessment and from 1 January 2017 a separate maintenance income test for the treatment of child support will be applied, like the test that currently applies to family tax benefit part A. The change will align treatment of child support benefit families who have children both in the youth payment system and in the family tax benefit system. These families are currently penalised by double counting the contribution of non-resident parents through child support in some circumstances.

The measures were adopted following an examination of issues by an interdepartmental committee on access to higher education for regional and remote students at the urging of Senator Bridget McKenzie, the member for Wannon and the member for Forrest, who have urged the government to do more to improve access to education for regional and remote students. Removing complex and unnecessary means tests and improving the operation of the parental income test is a good first step in responding to the concerns around parental means testing and the levels of student assistance available that were identified in the interdepartmental committee's interim advice.

This bill is boosting assistance for working families, smoothing the transition to individual payment for young people and better supporting them into study to build their careers, develop economic opportunities and contribute to our economy. I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.
Bill read a second time.

Message from the Governor-General recommending appropriation announced.

Third Reading

Mr PORTER (Pearce—Minister for Social Services) (15:23): by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

Higher Education Support Amendment (VET FEE-HELP Reform) Bill 2015

Second Reading

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

Ms BIRD (Cunningham) (15:24): It is my pleasure to indicate my intention to support the bill but to move the amendments to the bill tabled in my name. The Higher Education Amendment (Vet Fee-Help Reform) Bill 2015, which is before the House, is in addition to previous changes made to the Vet Fee-Help system. Given the detail of the bill, which I will just cover briefly, the opposition has no problem with supporting the bill and its intentions. I have indicated that I have a second reading amendment for the House in order to put in place some options which we believe are critically important to strengthening the issue that this bill seeks to deal with. The bill before us has a number of changes to provide protections for both students and taxpayers in the operation of the VET FEE-HELP system, in particular dealing with debt cancellations for inappropriate signups, stronger requirements around the registration and trading history requirements of providers, infringement notices and penalties in regards to breaches of the guidelines, and a range of technical amendments.
I want to firstly put before the House the context of recent developments of the VET FEE-HELP operation across the VET sector in recent times and then, out of that, outline to the House the amendments that Labor is proposing in this debate. I believe these are sensible amendments and I hope the government decides to support them. I should indicate that Labor, as I said, intends to support the bill as we believe it does propose useful changes to the operation of the scheme. However, we believe that they would be significantly strengthened by the adoption of our amendments.

It cannot have escaped, I would suggest, anyone's notice over the last 12 months that there have been consistent and serious public and media reports about what could only be described as shonky and unethical behaviour by too many registered training organisations and brokers acting on their behalf. The report started with concerns about the marketing and recruitment practices that were targeting mostly disadvantaged people with the clear intention of luring them into training qualifications that were all too often inappropriate for either the person's learning level or their employment needs. Indeed, as a member of the House of Reps committee inquiry into the operation of TAFEs—and the parliamentary secretary at the table was a member of that committee as well at the time—I heard, along with other committee members, many stories of undercutting the TAFE provision of courses by some private providers who were recruiting students with such things as offers of free laptops, shopping vouchers and other inducements. The evidence that we heard was broadly beyond the very strict terms of reference of the inquiry but the committee was concerned enough about the frequency and the nature of this material to include a recommendation seeking action by government regulators to address the problem and that made up the fourth recommendation of the report, which stated:

The Australian Government should continue its current actions through the Australian Skills Quality Authority, other regulators, national Training Standards and any other involved parties, to take suitable action to address loopholes that are allowing high-risk and unscrupulous practices to endanger the experience of students and the reputation of training provision.

I would point out that despite this being a bipartisan report of the committee, the government has not yet responded to the report even though it was in tabled in November last year.

In June this year, the Senate committee tabled its report into the operation, regulation and funding of private vocational education and training providers in Australia, which made extensive recommendations regarding the operation of VET FEE-HELP scheme and it reflected the significance of the issue in the vast number of submissions that were received to the inquiry. A significant piece of work also was completed by the regulator, ASQA, on the marketing and recruitment practices in the sector. That report, titled *Marketing and advertising practices of Australia's registered training organisations*, highlighted a number of concerns. It said:

It has been found in this national review by scrutinising their web sites that 45.4% of RTOs investigated could be in breach of the national standards required for registration as an RTO under the *National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011* and of the Australian consumer law and/or state and territory fair trading laws with respect to their marketing and advertising.

These potential breaches range from relatively minor concerns that can and should be rectified quickly and easily, to more serious breaches that could involve major sanctions being applied, including a loss of the RTO's registration.
The report then went through some specific examples of the types of marketing and recruitment activity that had been causing ASQA some concern. The report made a series of recommendations about increased ASQA auditing, strengthening national standards—including the use of brokers and other third parties—and greater transparency measures to provide information to students. I have to say that the government has acted in many of these areas and Labor has supported these actions. However, the reality is that the behaviours have continued despite these actions. They have been insufficient to stop the shonky and unethical behaviour, and as a result the rip-offs and the damage to the reliability and reputation of the whole sector has continued to gather pace.

Extensive evidence was provided to the Senate committee by the Consumer Action Law Centre of the types of cases they continue to see. They said:

It has been widely acknowledged that there has been misuse of the Commonwealth government’s FEE-HELP loan scheme, misleading advertising, soliciting students for unsuitable courses, and inappropriate use of brokers to recruit students.

Their report indicated a particular area that was the centre of complaints they received. It said:

The profit maximisation principles of private VET providers mean low cost delivery modes are increasing, particularly the provision of online training … We have received reports of students enrolled in online courses being provided with no physical materials, faulty learning software and little ongoing support, while still incurring significant VET FEE-HELP debts.

I just want to share one example from that report with the House because it would not be unfamiliar, I would suggest, to most of us, as we see these sorts of reports coming in in our own electorates. The example is about a student called Luke that they dealt with. The report said:

Luke enrolled in an online course with a private VET provider, via an education broker. He was confused by the online format of the course, and says there were no help buttons. Luke called the education broker about his problems. The sales representative told Luke that he would follow up with the provider, but Luke never heard back from the provider. Luke could not complete the course as there was minimal support or information to assist him. He eventually withdrew from the course.

This is the sort of case example that I am hearing consistently from colleagues on this side of the House—and I am sure that it is no different for the minister—from their experiences.

The Consumer Action Law Centre submission details a range of issues with the provision of details about the nature and size of the debt that students are incurring under the scheme, and they raise issues of unfair contract terms and general consumer protection measures. The report also contains evidence of the problem that persistently arises with students being unaware that they have not only been signed up to a course but also to a VET FEE-HELP debt, often under high-pressure sales tactics. The report says:

We have heard reports from students that they did not understand the VET FEE-HELP debt they will incur, census dates, cancellation rights or cooling off rights. We have also received complaints from students who claim that their VET FEE-HELP debt has been incurred without their knowledge, or that barriers were placed on their ability to withdraw prior to the census date. Some claim never to have studied at the institution and cannot remember signing a Commonwealth Assistance Form.

Like a significant number of submissions, the CALC submission makes the point that there needs to be a dedicated external dispute resolution scheme in place to resolve disputes between students and providers.
In their supplementary submission to the inquiry, they specifically recommend that there be a national industry ombudsman. It is important to also recognise that the peak body for private providers, the Australian Council for Private Education and Training, or ACPET, in their submission to the inquiry also advocated that there be a national training ombudsman scheme established. The argument in their submission was:

The second concept proposed following the ACPET industry summit on 30 October 2014 is the introduction of a national industry ombudsman scheme for the Tertiary sector. ACPET advocates for a national consumer-focused complaint handling process for students and providers to complement the new National Training Complaints Hotline, as existing ombudsman arrangements focus either on government owned providers or international student issues.

They make the point that they believe the scheme would result in a number of major benefits. Specifically, they argue a national ombudsman would improve industry image, be a cost-effective resolution option, improve communication, provide early warnings to regulators and provide market research for the sector.

The proposal that Labor are putting forward in our amendment is that there be a national VET ombudsman established—an industry based ombudsman. We would argue it has been well canvassed in submissions from various stakeholders across the sector. In just the two examples I have given, you have had a peak, important and influential consumer rights organisation talk about the importance of the need for an industry ombudsman, as did the peak organisation of the private sector. Only recently I spoke at the ACPET conference and made the point that I recognise they have taken actions themselves to try to have their members sign up to a national code of conduct and practice—to give commitments about the way they will operate in the market. But, despite their actions and activities as a peak body on behalf of the private sector, they still feel that there needs to be an industry ombudsman for the sector. Labor absolutely agrees that that is a necessary outcome.

So the first part of our amendment, recognising that this bill is targeted at addressing some of the issues specifically with VET FEE-HELP, is to suggest to the government that they look to establishing a national industry ombudsman. There are of course important differences between the regulator and the role that an ombudsman would fill. The regulator certainly do, in their intelligence gathering across the sector, receive reports of complaints and concerns about providers and courses. They do use that—in particular, I would acknowledge the work that they do in their strategic reviews for particular sectors, most recently the childcare sector, aged care and so forth—but they do not directly deal on a one-to-one basis with complaints.

The government has established a National Training Complaints Hotline, but again that hotline is about directing people to another existing avenue in which to seek to have their complaint resolved. As we have seen in public discussion, too often the only outcome that students feel they are able to achieve is to go for legal advice or a legal process, and that of course is prohibitive for many people. That is why people like the Consumer Action Law Centre end up getting so many of the representations and concerns.

There is obviously a need for somebody with the expertise and the power to work on solving complaints that come from individuals. We are not proposing that the ombudsman only deal with VET FEE-HELP. They should be an ombudsman for domestic students across the sector. But it is well over time, I think, that they have that option put in place for vocational-education-and-training students. So I hope that in the first part of our amendment
the government will hear not only our voice in the opposition in putting the amendment forward but, as I say, a significant number of stakeholders across the sector concerned about the reputation of their sector and seeking to have those issues resolved.

The second part of our amendment calls on the government to support Labor's proposal to have the Australian National Audit Office also look at the operation of the VET FEE-HELP scheme specifically. Of course, the VET FEE-HELP scheme is administered by the department, so I think it is an appropriate option to have the ANAO have a look at all the systems that are in place through that process and to be quite rigorous about providing the government and indeed all of us in the parliament and the community with advice on how that system might be improved and ensure that we are not seeing RTOs who should not be doing so get access to VET FEE-HELP and also that the systems for managing those communications with students are improved.

This is the reason that Senator Kim Carr, as the shadow minister, and I wrote to the Auditor-General in November last year, nearly a year ago. We had seen the significant number of reports from the media, industry and indeed the regulator, ASQA, and the concerns about unscrupulous behaviour, in particular the misuse of VET FEE-HELP. So we asked the Auditor-General to fully investigate VET FEE-HELP to ensure that skills funding is being used in accordance with the intention of the legislation—legislation that had bipartisan support at the time—and is not being squandered by unscrupulous behaviour and providers. I am pleased to tell the House that in January we were advised that the Auditor-General had requested that a performance audit of VET FEE-HELP be included in their 2015-16 work program.

It is of course imperative that taxpayers' funds are spent on quality training and that students are not incurring debts for either poor-quality or unsuitable courses. Consistently we hear examples where students firstly have a debt—and let us talk about the size of these debts. For some of these diploma courses that are being offered, people are being charged anywhere between $15,000 and $25,000—for a diploma. Some people are paying more for a one-year diploma than you would pay for a university degree. They are significant and sizeable debts.

Often, as we have now seen in more recent media reports and public debate, they are not completing the course. The completion rates in too many areas, whether it is at a particular provider or it is in particular student cohorts, are extraordinarily low, unacceptably low. Add to that the fact that, if people do not complete their course, it is unlikely and much more difficult for them in any reasonable time frame to reach the income level at which you repay the debt. It then has a real potential to become a bad debt for government—that is, in effect, the taxpayer. There is an emerging and very important debate going on publicly about how sustainable that is. I think we all have a vested interest in ensuring that the scheme works—as I said, it is legislation that had bipartisan support throughout the time of its introduction—in the way that it was intended to work.

We do not want students who have a debt and have no qualification that is recognised in industry as quality. We already have heard, for example, in Victoria, childcare providers saying they fundamentally have black lists of providers because they know that the quality of the training is just not up to speed. We do not want students having qualifications that actually do not give them an opportunity to work or to do further education, whichever option they are
seeking to achieve. But, really importantly, we do not want students to have a debt and no qualification because they should never have been enrolled in the course in the first place.

Increasingly we hear of examples—I saw it in my own electorate, and I am sure many here have—of recruiters hanging around outside Centrelink offices and outside particular community centres, particularly targeting people who they believe will be desperate to sign up for something, because of course they are keen to get a job and they are keen to get a qualification, and signing them up to diploma level courses rather than appropriately assessing what their education needs are and directing them into the appropriate courses. In many cases there has been significant evidence from many community advocates that in fact people really needed to be enrolled in language-, literacy- and numeracy-level courses before they would be well set up to succeed in further vocational training, let alone a diploma-level course. This sort of behaviour is significant, and it is something that we think is absolutely contrary to what the intention of the legislation was in the first place. Therefore, it is something that is particularly pertinent for the Australian National Audit Office to look at.

I have to say that to date I have not had an indication from the government about this. We have a new minister, so I will give him credit that he may be looking at this particular issue. But it is whether the government also supports a call for the Australian National Audit Office to look at this matter. This is why I am giving the new minister the opportunity with this amendment, perhaps to have a bipartisan approach to the Australian National Audit Office at how the VET FEE-HELP scheme is operating.

I would like to foreshadow to the House that Labor will also propose some in detail amendments. These in detail amendments, just for the information of members, will be moved in order to put in place a mechanism that actually requires a far more proactive and responsible, if you like, opt in by students when they are signing up for these debts. We put this proposal forward because we would argue that the evidence is pretty overwhelming now that a lot of students are signing up and, at best, they might understand that they have signed up to a course but they do not always understand that they are signing up to the debt—let alone the size of that debt, the repayment arrangements in place for that debt, cooling off periods, what their recourse is if they are unhappy and how they can pursue having the debt waived. There are all of those sorts of issues.

The government has—and we have supported them—increased the standards around information and disclosure for RTOs and for taking responsibility for the behaviour of their brokers. But I do not believe that it has been sufficient. We are still seeing current examples of this sort of activity going on. It is clear that something far more significant is needed. Given that the government is the loan provider—the government is the one providing that loan to the student and the one which will be seeking to have it recouped from the student when they are earning the appropriate amount of money—then I think it is an important action for us to take at this point in time, given the absolute abuse of the scheme that is still going on, to say that the student cannot sign all those forms at the same time.

The bill before us proposes a two-day cooling off; I would suggest that still gives far too much leeway. We have to remember that we are trying to deal with people who are taking shonky and unethical actions. I would not put it past them, for example, just to have two different dates on forms and have people sit there and sign them. I think that it needs a far more significant mechanism. We propose that the student signs up to the course and they sign
up for the loan application, then the RTO sends that to the department. It is the department which would then communicate with the student, and say to the student, 'You've applied for a VET FEE-HELP loan. This is what it is; this is how much you are looking at paying; these are the arrangements—the terms—under which this operates; and these are your rights in terms of disputing any outcomes or wanting to get your debt waived.' All the information that has been put in the standards for training providers to give to students we actually get from the government which, at the end of the day, is providing the loan. If it ends up as a bad debt, it is the government and the taxpayer who are then carrying that debt.

The student would then have to reply to the department and say, 'Yes, I understand that. I do want that loan, and I am applying for it.' I suggest to the House that very often we will find that students come back and say, 'Yeah—no; I didn't know anything about that. I don't want that and that's not what I wanted to do.' I think that by doing that we will enable students to make what should be a good consumer choice—an informed choice and a choice free of any pressure or sales tactics, or any of those sorts of things that are going on.

I acknowledge that there are many private providers out there—like all colleagues, I meet them regularly—who are doing a really important job. They behave really ethically themselves, they are focused on quality education and they are concerned that these rogues are eating alive their market share and destroying their reputation, and they want to see action taken. So in the third reading we will have the opportunity to debate that mechanism and proposal in more detail. But I am firmly of the view that we need something that is more removed from that direct point of contact either with the broker or the RTO before people sign up for these debts, because they can be very significant. Even if people feel that they are never going to get to the income to pay it back—and let's be honest: when you sign up pensioners at the community centre who are aged pensioners, it is pretty unlikely they are ever going to return enough to pay it back!—it is still a very significant worry to people. You hear it all the time, about their concerns and the real anxiety it creates when they realise they have this debt, because it is a lot of money to many of these people on fixed incomes. So I just foreshadow that we will move that in the in consideration section. I look forward to talking with the minister and seeing if we can get an agreement on that particular area as well.

In summing up, I particularly want to say that there has been some debate about it all being Labor's fault, and some criticism of us. I hope that the government recognises that in fact the previous bills, which we are seeking to amend, were bipartisan bills. They were agreed to by everybody in this House. In fact, if there was any criticism at the time, the then shadow minister was a bit critical of the fact that we were putting too much red tape in the system. So I would argue to people that it is not like a simple case of blaming either side here. I think that what we need to recognise is that regardless of what we have done for the agreed position in the last two years in an attempt to stamp out this behaviour, it has not worked. When you are dealing with people who are determined to use shonky, unethical practices and find their way around the system, I think it is time we get very hardline and make it far more difficult. It is time we get an ombudsman in place to give an accessible avenue for people to get issues resolved; get the ANAO to have a look at the operation; and have a talk about the in-detail amendments about changing the way people sign up for the debt in the first place and taking the responsibility, as the government providing that debt, of making sure that it is done in the best possible way.
So I recommend the second reading amendments to the House. I am happy to talk to anybody about the in-detail amendments as we lead up to that debate, and I indicate that we do support the bill and the intentions of the bill; we just would like to see it significantly strengthened by some of the measures that we have proposed. I move:

That all words after "That" be omitted with a view to substituting the following words:
"while not declining to give the bill a second reading, the House calls on the Government to:

(1) appoint a National VET Ombudsman with the power to:
   (a) investigate consumer complaints;
   (b) order Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) which have been found to have acted unscrupulously to refund course fees to the student; and
   (c) order RTOs to refund the course fee to the Government and have the student’s VET FEE-HELP fee waived in cases where the course fees have been paid by the Government and the student has accrued a VET FEE-HELP debt; and

(2) support Labor’s call for the Auditor-General to conduct an audit on the use of VET FEE-HELP".

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

Mr Zappia: I second the amendment.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The original question was that this bill be now read a second time. To this the honourable member for Cunningham 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 the form that the amendment be agreed to. The question now is that the amendment be agreed to. I call the member for Calare.


The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): Parkes—sorry. That is unforgivable of me. I looked at my notes and not at you—very rude. My apologies.

Mr COULTON: Madam Deputy Speaker, we could be brothers. It is an easy mistake to make.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: No, it is really rude.

Mr COULTON: I am very pleased to be speaking on this bill, the Higher Education Support Amendment (VET FEE-HELP Reform) Bill 2015. I acknowledge that this bill has bipartisan support. I will not make any comment as to the amendments that the shadow minister just spoke about; I will leave that to the minister to deal with. But I will say that these issues were very apparent in the time of the previous government, and they chose not to take the action at the time, so I think the shadow minister should be a little measured in her expectations of what might happen. But I will leave those discussions to the minister.

I am a big fan of VET, and I am a supporter of the intention of VET FEE-HELP. Education is the key to solving a lot of the problems that our society deals with, whether it is poverty, skills shortages, health or bigotry. A whole range of things can be overcome when people have an education. The idea that people who may not have had the opportunities at a younger age to have a formal education can undertake higher education and receive a loan from the government to do that seems to me like a good scheme, and I know people who have undertaken higher education under this scheme.
But problems started to be brought to my attention more than 12 months ago, early in 2014. In the first instance, a registered provider from Dubbo came and saw me and explained that unscrupulous providers were signing up people to these courses at a retirement village. His concern was that people were signing up to a debt they did not know about. Obviously the whole concept of VET is to help people improve their skills to get into a higher skilled, better paid job, and the idea that this would be pitched to people who had already retired was just ridiculous. So the alarm bells started to go off there.

Not long after that, I was contacted by several people in Coonamble. The issues that happened in Coonamble made it very clear that this was not just people who had inadvertently done something where they were not really sure of the details. To me, what happened in Coonamble was orchestrated fraud of the Australian taxpayer and of innocent people on a grand scale. What happened in Coonamble was that providers came to town and hired a room at one of the local clubs, and word got around that, if you went to this particular room and signed your name, a $50 bill was handed to you, with the promise of being sent a laptop and an iPad at a later date. It is my understanding that this course that was being offered was at quite a high level, that it was at a value of $14,500, and that many of the people who signed up—there are some reports that some people did not even sign their name, because some of the people that went there and got their $50 were actually illiterate—did not have the skills or the levels of literacy to possibly undertake a course of this complexity. So here you have people walking in, getting their $50 and walking out, not knowing that they now had a $14,500 debt to their name. When they were going to maybe go for a loan to buy a car or a house or something, there would be this debt against their name that they did not realise they had signed up for. Anecdotally, there was talk of about 100 people doing this. At $14,500, that is nearly $1½ million of Commonwealth funds that this unscrupulous operator took out of the town of Coonamble for no positive result. If the Commonwealth government were going to spend $1½ million in Coonamble to help the education of its community, there would be much better ways of doing it than this.

So, following discussions that I had in the early days of this government with Senator Birmingham and subsequent conversations with Minister Hartsuyker, I am pleased that this legislation has come in. This is a rip-off of the Australian people and the Australian Commonwealth government of mammoth proportions. Quite frankly, as well as closing up these loopholes, I would like to see some of these operators pursued and the funds recovered from them, because this was an orchestrated fraud on the most vulnerable people in our society.

I support this bill. The information is all there. The minister would have mentioned that in his introduction of this bill. It would be shocking to find out what the magnitude of this fraud is. I suspect, across the nation, it would be in the hundreds of millions of dollars. I am pleased that we will be closing up the loopholes and that we can make sure that our dollars that go into VET education go to the people that need them, that the courses are appropriate, that the trainers are suitably qualified, and that there is a positive outcome for these people. I support this bill. I will leave commentary on the opposition’s amendments for the minister in his summing up.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (16:01): Labor put forward a positive plan to crack down on unscrupulous providers in the vocational education sector. I really welcome that,
because this has been an area of considerable shame and scandal with very regrettable results, both for the revenue and for students—who, frankly, are entitled to better treatment than they have received.

In the amendments that my colleague the shadow minister, the member for Cunningham, has moved, we call on the government to appoint an industry funded, national VET ombudsman and we call for the Auditor-General to conduct an audit on the use of VET FEE-HELP. We will also be putting forward an amendment during consideration in detail which requires the department to write to prospective students with a clear statement of the amount of debt they are about to undertake and to require the student to reply to the department before a debt is raised. Looking at what has been going on in this area, I think that this is a really important safeguard. It is also our intention to refer the legislation to the Senate legislation committee to look at options to cap tuition fee levels for courses covered by VET FEE-HELP and lower the lifetime limit on VET FEE-HELP student loans.

The bill before the House is in addition to changes that we saw earlier this year, in April. It seeks to prevent inappropriate enrolments and debts by introducing a two-day cooling off period between enrolment and the application for a VET FEE-HELP loan so that course enrolment is no longer confused with the loan application process; introducing minimum prerequisites such as literacy and numeracy to ensure that students can complete the higher level VET courses—diploma level and above—for which VET FEE-HELP is available; and requiring, to protect younger students, a parent’s or guardian’s signature before a student under the age of 18 can request a VET FEE-HELP loan.

The bill also seeks to protect both students and taxpayers by making it easier for a student to have their debt cancelled where they have been signed up for a loan inappropriately and easier for the government to recoup the cost from providers, introducing minimum registration and trading history requirements to ensure that new VET FEE-HELP provider applicants have a proven history of delivering quality training, introducing infringement notices and financial penalties for breaches of the VET FEE-HELP guidelines, and introducing technical amendments to strengthen the department’s administration of the scheme and its partnerships with the Australian Skills Quality Authority to monitor and enforce compliance.

I think it is fair to say that, in the past 18 months, VET FEE-HELP has become a major national scandal, that it is severely affecting both students and the Commonwealth budget. We have had some very serious investigations into this matter. I saw one just in the last couple of days, reported on by Natasha Bita in *The Weekend Australian*. She wrote:

Even the Wolf of Wall Street sniffed the honey pot. Convicted New York swindler Jordan Belfort managed to cash in on the training jackpot that is costing Australian taxpayers billions of dollars each year.

Face to Face Training, a government-registered private college, hired Belfort to coach its staff and devise sales training programs at its Brisbane headquarters this year. The privately owned college pocketed $18 million in taxpayer funding last year, but the Queensland government cut its funding last month following an audit that was triggered by complaints about marketing and training delivery.

In Victoria, the state Registration and Qualifications Authority has revoked the training qualifications of 7,000 students, decreeing them to be worthless because of poor quality training.
This is a shocking outcome for those students—they go through, they get the qualification, but it is effectively worthless due to the poor quality of the training. Malcolm Turnbull has described Australia’s vocational education and training system as 'a shambles'. You have had entrepreneurs getting into this area in ways that have been totally unsatisfactory from whatever perspective you wish to look at them. Colleges have been selling courses to students who have no intention or ability to complete. Many of the courses are of poor quality. We’re seeing very low completion rates. The program’s grown at an unsustainable rate.

Governments will spend $6 billion this year on training courses for 1.79 million students enrolled in VET courses that range from motor mechanics to massage therapy. The figure does not include the $2.75 billion that will be spent this year on student loans through the federal government’s VET FEE-HELP scheme.

I understand that students have run up a $5.5 billion debt in the three years since federal, state and territory governments decided to deregulate the VET system and that the loan scheme is bleeding money as private colleges inflate the cost of training. Average tuition fees have tripled in three years from $4814 to $12,308. The average cost of an information technology diploma soared from $2779 in 2011 to $18,735 last year. A diploma of business management that cost $4623 in 2011 now costs $15,493. These are astronomical jumps in costs but they have not been accompanied by an improvement in quality of courses. On the contrary, the evidence there is very disturbing and discouraging.

It is also discouraging that colleges get to keep the cash even when students drop out. When students sign up for a loan, the federal education department pays their full tuition fees directly to the college, and the colleges get to keep the cash. Students can borrow up to $97,728—but they do not have to pay it back if they earn less than $54,000 a year. Taxpayers carry the debt.

The system gives colleges a strong incentive to sign up as many students as possible to cheap "quickie" courses delivered online. Spruikers—known as "brokers"—are paid a commission to recruit students from schools and Centrelink offices, retirement villages, caravan parks, public housing estates and mental health units. Students have been given things like laptops, footy tickets, meals and groceries to sign up for courses that are promoted as being 'free' but are in fact a debt to the government and for taxpayers.

The shame of this is that there are people who have been aware of, concerned about and raising this for years. I particularly mention the Australian Education Union and their TAFE division, who were aware of this right from the outset—aware of the risks of attacking the TAFE sector and the public provision in the name of competition.

The Australian Education Union’s federal TAFE secretary, Pat Forward, says deregulation has stripped funding from the government-operated Technical and Further Education system. Even though six out of 10 VET students attend TAFE, private colleges are getting three-quarters of the public funding.

Ms Forward says:
VET Fee-HELP is just a honey pot. The system is broken. There are hundreds of millions of dollars taxpayers will not get back, and these kids will carry a debt for the rest of their lives for a qualification that is worthless.
I share that concern.

At the start of this year, Australia had 4609 registered training organisations, of which 3440 were privately operated. Worryingly, nearly one in 10 have had their registration refused, cancelled or suspended by the government regulator, the Australian Skills Quality Authority, in the past four years. In recent audits, ASQA imposed licensing conditions on eight large providers.

We also had a Senate inquiry into VET in the past year which uncovered 'harrowing and concerning evidence of misconduct'. All in all, it is a very unsatisfactory situation with a scheme that has really exploded.

The number of students using VET Fee-Help loans has grown tenfold since 2010, when 26,100 students borrowed $117m. Last year, 203,000 students borrowed $1.7bn. In the first six months of this year, they took out loans worth $1.37bn—on track to hit $2.75bn.

So a very disturbing explosion with the National Centre for Vocational Education Research predicting that four out of five students will drop out of their course. Of course that is completely unsatisfactory.

Against this background of large debts, poor-quality qualifications, dodgy providers and exploitative practices, Labor has called for the Auditor-General to conduct an inquiry into the use of VET FEE-HELP and we have urged the ACCC to take action against shonky providers.

This legislation seeks to address some of the issues around VET FEE-HELP—I commend that. I welcome that but I do not think that it goes far enough. We do not see efforts to control the spiralling costs for students, which I have referred to. I think that the two-day cooling off period could prove to be easy to manipulate. You could have providers printing out enrolment forms with one signed date, and the VET FEE-HELP applications with a date two days later. We do not see signs of an effort to re-examine the previous approvals for providers and we do not see debt relief for students who have been defrauded by dodgy providers.

One of things that we would like to see the government do is establish a national VET ombudsman to add some strength to the regulator. The Australian Council for Private Education and Training has called for an ombudsman, and the report of the Senate inquiry that I referred to has also recommended a national VET ombudsman. This is a proposal which is also supported by the ACTU VET committee, and so the Education Union, the AMWU, TWU, CFMEU, SDA and ETU are all part of that. It has also been supported by the Consumer Action Law Centre.

I think that this is the sort of thing that will help us to crack down on rorts in VET FEE-HELP. We have known for years now that this has been going on. People have been drawing it to public attention and our attention as policymakers. What we need is a comprehensive crackdown on private providers and we need an understanding from the government that there are crooks at work in this industry; and that students, TAFEs, taxpayers and the good-quality providers are all victims in this scandal and they deserve more than what they have been getting so far.

Labor has always supported TAFE. Gough Whitlam instituted the Kangan report into TAFE—and indeed the Kangan TAFE college is just to the north of my electorate and very much a part of the local community. That Kangan report into TAFE resulted in additional Commonwealth investment for TAFE infrastructure, quality improvement, staff development and equity programs. The last Labor government increased Commonwealth annual funding
for VET by 25 per cent in real terms, with over $19 billion invested over five years; it also increased TAFE campus infrastructure and technology upgrades.

I think that TAFE must remain an essential part of Australia's skills and training sector. It plays a vital role in servicing our regions, industries in transition and disadvantaged groups. There is no doubt that, as the economy changes, the jobs of the future will change. Our trades will involve more technology based skills, and workers will need training in these skills to remain competitive in the employment market. Given that, it is absolutely critical that we invest in supporting our national asset: our public TAFE sector. I really regret the fact that we have had what is essentially an ideological move saying that what is needed is competition, that the VET sector should be opened up to anyone who can obtain registration as a training provider and that, regarding the use of the word 'choice', the noble thing to do is to give our fellow Australians choice about which training provider they can select.

Sadly, the result that we have seen as a consequence of this is, effectively, wreckage of the VET system and wreckage of the TAFE system. As I said, it is absolutely scandalous that the Victorian government had to send out letters to around 10,000 students notifying them that their qualifications needed to be revoked. It is completely unsatisfactory that these poor people have been exploited in this way, and I strongly support the amendment moved by the shadow minister.

Mr JOHN COBB (Calare) (16:16): It is with a lot of feeling that I speak on our Higher Education Support Amendment (VET FEE-HELP Reform) Bill 2015. The member for Wills mentioned that there are victims here, and he is quite right. The good providers who are doing the right thing are victims because it sullies the good name of everybody when providers take advantage of young people and of a government system that allows those people to borrow money from the Commonwealth. Obviously, the students themselves are victims if they are encouraged to get involved in a course that either is no good to them or does not leave them with anything substantive at the end of the day. It is good to see that, when there is a need to sort something out, all sides of the House support sorting it out.

The bill is about reforming the vocational education and training sector because of the actions of a minority of unscrupulous training providers and/or their agents. The bill will strengthen the administration of the VET FEE-HELP loan scheme to protect students who, in their youth and inexperience, are obviously vulnerable. It will also protect taxpayers and the reputation of the broader sector, as I said earlier, through pushing the minority of poor providers out.

Make no mistake, we, the government, are happy to support the VFH scheme that allows students to study higher level VET qualifications without the stress of having to pay up-front fees. We are serious when we say we are happy to do that. However, following Labor expanding the loan scheme in 2012, it has experienced significant growth. Generally, we would see a spike in education as a positive, but, unfortunately, some of this growth is a result of providers who aggressively market the scheme, roping in vulnerable people, young and inexperienced people. These people expect their study to lead to a world of opportunity, but some are just left with a significant debt and no real training outcome.

We have already taken a number of steps to crack down on VFH providers doing the wrong thing. In March this year, a series of measures was introduced, including banning inducements to students under the VFH loan scheme, tightening VET marketing and
recruitment practices, and ensuring students have more information on training providers so that they can make an informed choice. These are just a few of eight measures, some of which have already been given effect through changes to VET guidelines or student communication products.

The bill intends to build on these measures with new safeguards. Its primary purpose is to prevent inappropriate enrolments and debts by introducing a two-day cooling-off period between enrolment and application for a VFH loan. Students will, from 1 January 2016, have two days after enrolment before they are allowed to submit a request for Commonwealth assistance. No longer will course enrolment be confused with the loan application. The bill ensures this cooling-off period is in place even with late enrolments close to the census date, which is when students incur the debt.

It will also introduce prerequisites to ensure students can complete the higher level VET courses—diploma and above—which the VFH is available for. It will protect vulnerable students from the outset, before they incur a debt, by requiring providers to establish minimum prerequisites for enrolment in each course. This ensures a student's capacity to complete the course, including assessment of language, literacy and numeracy proficiency, is properly assessed before they are enrolled and before they incur a debt. While we know there are many training organisations which already have stringent admission requirements, there are some who do not, so we are seeing vulnerable students being targeted and undertaking courses they do not have the capacity to complete. This bill makes this good practice a requirement for all VET FEE-HELP approved providers for courses for which students wish to access VET FEE-HELP.

The bill will also require a parent or guardian's signature before a student under 18 can request a loan. This is common sense as it will ensure young people who may lack financial literacy or the necessary life experience to make the right decision do not sign up to a course that will have no real benefits and get into debt they do not need.

The bill will further protect students and taxpayers by making it easier for a student to have their debt cancelled where they have signed up for a loan inappropriately. The bill broadens the circumstances in which students can have their loan cancelled where inappropriate behaviour has been used in their recruitment and acceptance into a course. The taxpayer should not and will not bear the cost. The government will be requiring providers to repay the costs of any loans that are remitted in such circumstances and may impose additional penalties on providers, such as fines or conditions on approval.

An extremely important consequence of this bill is the infringement notice scheme. This will see providers breaking the rule held to account through introducing a scheme of infringement notices attached to civil penalties for VET FEE-HELP training providers that engage in improper conduct.

The Department of Education and Training will now be able to deal with inappropriate behaviour by providers directly with a number of new powers available to them. The department will be able to cancel student debt and force providers to repay the Commonwealth. That is a very strong action and I believe a necessary one—that the department will be able to cancel student debt and force providers to repay the Commonwealth. The new suite of powers will also include administrative action such as suspension or revocation of approval or civil penalties including infringement notices. Dodgy
providers will no longer be able to float under the radar without consequence. They will face the force of the law.

Administrative changes will be introduced lifting the standards for those who are approved to offer VET FEE-HELP funded courses. A higher benchmark will ensure that only the best providers will be approved to offer the scheme. It will weed out those doing the wrong thing. Australian students deserve the best access to education that provides high-quality outcomes. We must set a high benchmark for our providers. This is why we have introduced a new minimum registration and trading history requirement for new VET FEE-HELP provider applicants. This ensures all new providers will have a proven track record in delivering high-level qualifications.

It is necessary these reforms have come before the House. It has happened as a result of Labor failing to introduce appropriate controls and safeguards to protect students and taxpayers from low-quality providers when the scheme was widened. The reputation of the Australian VFH sector is at stake. We know the incredibly contribution many of these providers make. The majority of providers are obviously very conscientious and very good and are proud of their reputation. I hope they do not feel aggrieved by this because they are not being targeted. I think this is a situation where those who are doing the right thing know who they are and those who are not doing the right thing most definitely know who they are. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (16:25): I rise to speak in relation to the Higher Education Support Amendment (VET FEE-HELP Reform) Bill 2015. Over the last 18 months we have seen truly troubling and major problems emerge in the Australian vocational education and training sector. These problems have arisen as a result of quite scurrilous behaviour by some providers. We have seen outrageous practices and as a federal member in a marginal seat I have to say that we always keep in tune with what is happening on the ground.

On the weekend, I did my 201st mobile office since the last federal election at the Fernvale markets. Some of the things which keep coming to me and which I have seen over time are the flavours and the issues which really affect people. One of the things which has increasingly come to mind in my electorate office in Ipswich and across most of Ipswich and the Somerset region has been the issue of value for money and people being ripped off. There has been some quite scurrilous targeting of Indigenous people, of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, unemployed people and people on Centrelink payments. One guy I saw in my electorate office came to see me after he had served time in prison, saying how he was ripped off by a scurrilous provider in relation to what was offered to him in his first time in prison and how he really felt betrayed by that provider. His story is one of many I have heard. Victims are frequently targeted by high-pressure and predatory sales practices, either by rogue RTOs or by third-party marketers known as brokers.

The recent Senate Education and Employment References Committee inquiry into the operation, regulation and funding of private VET providers heard many stories about the marketing practices in relation to courses. Particular concern was raised with the use of language, which obscured the fact that courses were funded by a loan from the government and there was an expectation, like all loans, that that loan would be repaid. One of the submissions I saw was from TAFE Community Alliance, which told the Senate inquiry that there was an older woman in her 70s at Bankstown Central shopping centre having lunch with
a Bible group when approached by a young man asking would they like a free laptop and a free diploma in community services. All they had to do was to sign up. They would never earn more than $50,000 a year, so this group of pensioners would not have to pay back the loan. How unscrupulous and disgraceful is that, to exploit people in those circumstances?

The Redfern Legal Centre reported RTO brokers were targeting people door to door, selling in public housing blocks or on the footpath outside Centrelink. These are very vulnerable people often and this is a disgraceful and disgusting act by many people who have been undertaking this form of marketing. The Consumer Action Law Centre told the Senate inquiry:

We are deeply concerned about aggressive marketing tactics that target consumers who do not have the aptitude or ability to complete VET courses. When offering courses, we have seen providers … and brokers exaggerate the ongoing support available to students and reassure computer illiterate consumers that they will be able to easily complete a course online.

We have received reports of education brokers in particular cold calling or door-knocking potential students and pushing them to enrol in unsuitable courses over the phone or on their doorstep. These are just some of the many stories that many members of this chamber have heard. I certainly have heard these stories from people who come into my electorate office.

Students often enrol in overpriced, low-quality courses, and fund their study with a Commonwealth VET FEE-HELP line. When enrolled, many find that they do not get the support they need and that the training is woefully inadequate. It is no surprise how many fail to complete the courses. When they do, they often discover that the courses they undertook did not correlate with their educational prospects and their potential employment in the future. So they were misled. Those who complete their courses often find that those studies have failed to improve their employment prospects at all, and they are still left with a crippling VET FEE-HELP debt.

I have heard story after story after story. I have attended a number of providers in my electorate and met with just in the last couple of weeks a new one that came to my electorate. I have heard these stories from constituents, parents and students, and from people from very vulnerable backgrounds who have been exploited.

This issue was raised again last week. And I am glad the shadow minister for employment and workplace relations is sitting at the table here because he was with me in Ipswich just last week in my electorate where we hosted a jobs forum, and this issue came up during that forum. The local media reported on issues in terms of mature-age workforce, youth employment and other issues germane to this particular issue that is relevant in the bill we are discussing in the chamber today.

More of these problems are emerging as the sector continues to explode. In the 12 months between 2013 and 2014, the number of students accessing VET FEE-HELP increased by 103 per cent. The average amount of those loans increased by 24 per cent per student. For the Commonwealth this is a 151 per cent increase in the cost of student VET FEE-HELP loans. We have a situation where the value of these VET FEE-HELP payments to providers increased from $699 million in 2013 to $1.75 billion in 2014—a number of providers soaring by 44 per cent. These are extraordinary figures. They are worth repeating. A number of people repeat them and I am very happy to mention this because these are staggering figures.
It goes to show that the government has taken their eye off the ball in this area. We have consistently called on the Abbott-Turnbull Liberal government to deal with the swindlers and charlatans ripping off students and taxpayers and damaging the reputation of reputable VET FEE-HELP providers in the sector. For two years we have poked and prodded the government about this issue, asking them to get serious about the rorting in the VET sector. We have called for the Auditor-General to investigate, to do an audit report. We have asked for an ACCC education campaign to be undertaken.

We welcomed the news in late October that the ACCC launched its first prosecution of a VET FEE-HELP provider. While not pre-empting the outcome of any case, can I say that we support strong action in the sector. Sadly, we are still awaiting strong action from this current government sitting in the Treasury benches. Despite Labor’s calls, the government has dragged its feet and, true to form, the government has tried to scapegoat us. We have heard that from speeches here. But they have been in power for two years; two years and what have they done? They have tried to blame us when they have been in power. Ministers have shied away from talking about the problems in the VET sector. They have shied away from doing anything to protect students and taxpayers and they have shied away from doing the work that is necessary.

It has taken the government almost two years, and they have tap-danced around this issue for long enough. During those two years what has the government done? They ripped $2 billion from the skills portfolio. The government trumpeted the new national standards that came into effect in April this year but we have seen many of those problems persist. The recent Senate inquiry into the operation, regulation and funding of the VET FEE-HELP sector noted with concern that, despite the 2015 standards, it received evidence that some of those practices, such as offering inducements to enrol, had not been stamped out. The report noted:

3.55 While the new Standards explicitly forbid inducement-based marketing, the committee notes that their introduction has not had the effect of eliminating this behaviour by all RTOs. The committee therefore suggests that more rigorous enforcement and tighter regulations around RTO marketing practices are required.

And I say amen to that. It is about time the government did something about that. In evidence to the inquiry, the Yarraville Community Centre reported that banned tactics had continued to be practiced by some RTOs after commencement of the new standards. The Yarraville Community Centre, for the record, offers an English program to about 250 students at eight venues across the city at Maribyrnong.

In terms of the role of third-party brokers, submitters to that inquiry expressed concern that the new standards applied exclusively to the RTOs and not to the brokers. The Redfern Legal Centre stated:

Currently the standards and the regulations apply exclusively to RTOs, but it is the conduct of the brokers and the marketing agents which really leads to this whole mess in the first place. They are the ones with the incentive to get high volume sales without any real focus on what happens after that.

We are concerned that the standards do not go far enough. We are concerned about this bill. For example, this bill introduces a two-day cooling off period between the signing of a course for enrolment and the application of the associated VET FEE-HELP line. The intention is to provide some separation between the two applications forms to reduce confusion between the two documents. There is nothing, however, to prevent a shonky, scurrilous provider skirting
around the cooling-off period simply by printing the loan application form with the date two days after the enrolment application. More broadly, nothing in the bill will address the soaring cost to students, costs that have seen the average student VET loan grow from $5,890 to $8,666 in 2014—two years after the figure I mentioned before in 2012. This bill will provide no remedy or debt relief to students already ripped off by any rorting RTOs.

We need to go further, and I call on the government to protect students, taxpayers and the reputable providers in the sector. That is why Labor has proposed a national VET ombudsman, to give the regulator some real teeth. The establishment of an ombudsman is the recommendation of the report of that recent Senate inquiry I referred to. The report noted that numerous witnesses at the inquiry voiced their support for an ombudsman to help domestic students resolve their complaints with VET providers. The Consumer Action Law Centre noted a key feature of the student remediation framework should be a national industry ombudsman that would independently resolve disputes between students and training providers at no cost to students or the taxpayer. An ombudsman is strongly supported by the Australian Council for Private Education and Training.

We call on the government to do the right thing, listen to what Labor has had to say and listen to that Senate inquiry and the recommendations. We support the revitalisation of our TAFE system, which is so critical to the VET sector. At the jobs forum last Thursday, which I mentioned before, there was a great cheer in the room when the shadow minister spoke of Labor’s commitment to TAFE. It really was spontaneous, straight-from-the-floor applause. Australians recognise that TAFE is a trusted provider of vocational education and training.

We also know that TAFE has been under attack from conservative governments across Australia. In Victoria the former Baillieu government cut $300 million from the state TAFE system, forcing closures, cancellations, job cuts and campus closures. Fortunately, Victorian voters rejected that government and turfed them out. In my home state of Queensland the truly lamentable former Premier Campbell Newman—an appalling premier almost as bad at Joh Bjelke-Petersen—cut TAFE funding and forced fees up as soon as he was elected. There was speculation in the media that his government intended to merge the Bremer TAFE in my electorate with TAFE in Toowoomba or the Gold Coast. There was no connection with the Gold Coast at all. We are seeing this pattern across the board from coalition governments. At the time, Premier Newman said, ‘TAFE is being re-focused so it meets the needs of employers so we create jobs.’ That was quoted in the Brisbane Times on 23 June 2014. His government achieved absolutely neither, and the Queensland opposition vowed to rescue TAFE from the LNP. The new Labor government of Annastacia Palaszczuk is doing just that.

You cannot trust the coalition when it comes to TAFE and the VET sector. In two years the Abbott-Turnbull government have cut $2 billion from skills and training, with $1 billion from apprentices alone. In the two years since this Abbott-Turnbull Liberal government was elected, we have lost 100,000 apprentices in this country. It is a disgrace. These are cuts which the current Prime Minister says he supports unreservedly and wholeheartedly, so there is no difference whether it is the member for Warringah or the member for Wentworth who sits in that chair. It is a disgrace.

Labor has put forward some very sensible proposals. We are ready and willing to fight for TAFE. I believe we are the only party that Australians can trust in relation to fostering and nurturing TAFE. Forty-one years ago Gough Whitlam increased Commonwealth investment
in TAFE infrastructure, quality improvements and staff development in response to a
government report. In the 1980s the Hawke and Keating governments continued to foster the
links, and I am proud to be part of a former Labor government that when we were in office
increased VET funding by 25 per cent in real terms with a $19 billion investment over five
years.

The government should look again at what they are doing. They are not doing enough.
They should rededicate themselves to TAFE. In relation to this bill they should listen to
Labor's amendments and concerns and support Labor because only Labor backs TAFE and
only Labor backs the VET FEE sector.

**Dr GILLESPIE** (Lyne) (16:40): This Higher Education Support Amendment (VET FEE-
HELP Reform) Bill 2015 is an open-and-shut case. If ever a bill needed to pass, this is it. If
ever there were a scheme that needed reform and tightening up, having its boundaries well
and truly set and enforced, this is it.

Members on the other side have called on the minister for a widespread audit, but the
minister cannot issue an audit. The Australian National Audit Office is the office responsible
for that. Given the amount of press and coverage that this sector of government funding has
received, I am sure the Australian National Audit Office is shining up the microscope and
getting new batteries in the torch. I would be very surprised if they do not do a thorough audit
of this.

But we have witnessed a decline in standards at the same time as an explosion in providers.
Some of the figures the member for Wills mentioned I have read too. The $5 billion worth of
debt accumulated in three years with the tripling of fees? For goodness sake, this is just not
adequate at all. In fact it is a scandal. I support this legislation. To see fees rise from $699
million to $1.7 billion in one year tells you something. To have 44 per cent more providers
from one year to the next is like a stampede of people who are trying to get access to easy
money. It has not meant that there has been an explosion of quality vocational education and
training providers.

Part of the problem that the fees these unscrupulous providers have charged is that 40 per
cent of the people who get trained by them are never going to reach the threshold of earnings
to trigger repayments. It is a problem because the HECS debts and the VET FEE-HELP loans
are a liability to the government and, naturally, the taxpayer—because, when you are talking
about the government, you mean the Australian taxpayer. It is billions and billions of dollars.

We do not like to regulate fees and I hate to say it, but we really need to clamp down on the
outrageous fees that are being charged. Usually, if you set a limit on fees, people will charge
the maximum available in the regulation. One would hope the competitive nature of education
would mean there would be competition in fees, but it seems to have been open slather.

There are two stories that I found particularly disingenuous and illustrated how crooked
some of these people are. In Cairns there were two providers offering the same course.
Funnily enough, they were registered at the same address. One charged $12,750 on the VET
FEE-HELP, but, for the same diploma of management from the same provider, you could get
it direct if you paid up front $3,420. That is outrageous. In Sydney a diploma of business had
an up front fee of $7,000—or you could go online and apply for a VET FEE-HELP loan, take
it out, do the same thing through the same RTO and be charged $4,800. How outrageous is this?

Also in the spotlight is ASQA. It is their job to supervise this, so they are already investigating at least 23 RTOs, but I suspect there will be many more. When I looked back at this I was horrified to see all of these things happening. I looked into where this scheme came from. It was introduced in 2009, and I hate to say it but the regulation and the oversight of yet another scheme from that era has brought everyone into disrepute.

There has been a lot of action already. A ban on inducements was introduced on 1 April, so you cannot offer to sign up people on the promise of a free phone or an iPad, and withdrawal fees that were waved in front of people who realise that they were being scammed and wanted to withdraw—they were hitting them up with extensive withdrawal fees—have been banned as well. You can no longer advertise. These brokers cannot walk around train stations or areas of shopping centres and advise potential students or people to sign up to a course and call it free. The brokers must also disclose the name of the provider and disclose their commission.

There was also a phenomenon where they were getting people signed up on a promise of an iPad or an iPhone or some other inducement and claiming the whole loan up-front, and then the person would drop out but the loan had been paid. The unsuspecting person who signed up would not hear anything more until he or she is notified that he or she has a massive loan. There are sensible guidelines like prerequisite skills, namely, a certain level of literacy and numeracy is required and, like many contracts that you sign, there is a cooling-off period. These are all common sense mechanisms. Also, in regard to picking on vulnerable, inexperienced people, they cannot sign up anyone under the age of 18 unless they are formally declared under legislation and are receiving independent payments from DSS or unless they have their legal guardian or parent signing permission.

We can also, with this legislation, levy infringement notices that come with a hefty fine. I say: throw the book at them. I would take them to court. If they have been in breach of consumer laws and, in New South Wales, Fair Trading Regulations, I would go after them hammer and tongs to try to get the money back so that the taxpayer gets money that has been received under false pretences, and also, as a punishment, they should get a fine as well. Suspend them, cancel the debt and demand that the costs be repaid.

I suspect ASQA is going to be extremely busy. One in ten RTOs have already been cancelled, and there are many more that will be found out to be quite shady and shonky in their dealings. Amongst all of the RTOs in my part of the world, in the Lyne electorate, we have the North Coast TAFE. They are in Taree, they are in Port Macquarie and they do a great job. I have been up to the TAFE myself. It is co-located with the University of Newcastle, and it enjoys a very high reputation in town and in the region. Years ago, TAFE was historically the only provider in the VET space. Competition has been good for them because they have a great product, and they have become more flexible and nimble compared to some of the private RTOs who are actually responding to industry requirements a lot quicker than TAFE. The TAFE has not been involved in any of these shady dealings. They are quite above board, and I would like to hope that, as a result of this exposure of some of the shonky tradings, in the competitive market place people realise the value that they will get out of the TAFE.
We could go on with many more stories, but the essential thing is that I support this legislation. The sooner that it comes into force the sooner that the whole VET training space will be better off for students, and the taxpayer will not be ripped off as much.

**Mr LAURIE FERGUSON** (Werriwa) (16:50): In relation to the Higher Education Support Amendment (VET FEE-HELP Reform) Bill 2015 it is manifest that there are some very significant changes by the government that are well and truly required. Very briefly touching on those, they include the proper assessment in regard to language abilities, the literacy and numeracy skills of people undertaking courses, the introduction of a two-day cooling-off period so that people have at least a minimum time to assess what they are getting themselves into, the requirement that parents or guardians be involved where under 18-year-olds are being persuaded to go into these courses, easier cancellation of debt where there is inappropriate behaviour by the providers, an infringement notice scheme giving the Department of Education a full suite of powers to deal with inappropriate behaviour et cetera.

There are some very worthwhile changes there that we would certainly support. I do associate myself with the opposition suggestions that there be an industry based ombudsman. Many speakers have detailed that the private providers' representative body, which would hold itself out as being the voice of the legitimate practitioners in the field, has supported this, and I gather it is also supporting a code of practice. The other suggestion by the opposition is that the Australian National Audit Office actually get moving in regard to looking at this field. I would certainly associate myself with that.

The government, in moving to rectify these issues, is not acting in a vacuum, because there has been a Senate inquiry into these issues. There have been concerns by the monitoring bodies. As detailed by the previous speaker, in April this year there were already some changes in regard to inducements and the ability to avoid very high costs if you seek to get out of these loans.

The report of the Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment spoke of rampant abuse, accelerating costs and a doubling of bad debt to the government. It made a significant number of recommendations, about 15 or 16. The report spoke of a concerted and urgent blitz of providers and of opposition to the suggestion that one of the solutions, that some people are apparently putting forward, might be that we lower the threshold at which people have to repay debts from $54,000 to $30,000. It spoke of minimum hours standards of VET FEE-HELP courses et cetera and generally called for the actual practitioners to be reviewed more strongly.

It is not as though the government is acting without an urgent need. The pattern that we have been seeing in the industry up until now is of the Commonwealth paying colleges $18,000 a course. The colleges pay the brokers $5,000 a student in many cases. The brokers are then paying salesmen in the field $800 to $1,000 for a signature and the salesmen have been giving out inducements—iPads are often cited. I was very disturbed by the very crude example the member for Parkes gave this House today in Coonamble where it was 50 bucks a pop till you walk in the room and they might send you an iPad later. People are being signed up to this debt and, thereby, the Australian taxpayers basically in most cases are also being signed up to this problem. And then, at the end of the day, students take on an $18,000 deferred debt per course to be repaid if the student ever earns over $54,000 per year.
This is obviously of deep concern at a number of levels. There are many people who, quite frankly, should not be undertaking these courses. They are not assessed as to whether they are able to do them. There are people with minimal English, people who have only recently arrived in the country and people who do not have the intellectual capacity to accomplish these courses. I do not want to be negative about individuals but clearly we are seeing absolute organised exploitation of these people by practitioners in the field. It is a situation where it is clear that people are being signed up when they have no possibility whatsoever of repaying the debt so, therefore, as I say, it is just transferred to the taxpayer.

But that is not to say that there are not problems for a significant number of those people who do take out these loans. It is not as though, in going down this road, it does not have any emotional impact upon people. People actually do worry about debt. Some of them treat it very seriously. They do not just say, 'Oh well, the government is going to fix this up for me later on.' People have hopes in life and expectations that by doing these courses they will improve their circumstances, they will assist their families, they will be more productive and they are being basically manipulated to go into a situation they certainly should not. As I said, it is not an altruistic attitude by these companies. They are out to make big money. We are talking about a situation where the figures involved have gone from $325 million in 2012 to $1.76 billion in 2014 and, on projections, could go to $4 billion this year. There was a 440 per cent increase in enrolments from 2012 to 2014. It is a situation where the value of the VET FEE-HELP loan scheme has increased by 151 per cent between 2013 and 2014. Another worrying aspect of who is being hurt is that it has been accompanied of course by an overall reduction in the skill sector funding in this country. We have got a large number of providers out there, about 3,000-plus in the private sector. It is clear that there has not been a proper processing system to actually examine these people. Very disreputable elements have come into the industry.

I noticed in today's Sydney Morning Herald the sheer effrontery of some of these characters. The company ACN, Australian Careers Network, has, so far in the assessment of the regulators, used improper enrolment practices, poor compliance and governmental practices in their subsidiaries. They have been in significant disputation with the people policing this industry yet Mr Ivan Brown, the chief executive, has got the sheer effrontery to actually say that if VET vocational education and training funding ceases, a business with a valuation of $135 million will be destroyed. Well, I would not have thought, given its practices, that the major issue confronting Australian politics was whether that company will go down the spout. It just shows the kind of characters involved in this field. Mr Brown thinks that, despite all of this manipulation and exploitation in a ruthless fashion of these vulnerable people and the fact that the company has been hauled forward for these practices, the biggest issue in our faces is whether or not his company is going to have financial problems.

Of course he is not alone. We have seen a series of exposes. I have to get these second-hand because I am not a regular reader of The Australian newspaper but I have got to say that The Australian has certainly been on the job in this matter. I have got to give credit where it is due. On 6 November, John Ross wrote:

Up to $6 billion in taxpayer funded loans have been doled out to students who will never finish their training courses, an analysis by The Australian showed.
He spoke of figures released that day revealing that just 21 per cent of students eligible for loans under the scheme completed their courses during the scheme's early years. There have been cases—not speculation, not suburban myth—brought forward publicly of about one per cent to five per cent completion rates in this field. The article by John Ross detailed a compilation by the Adelaide based National Centre for Vocational Education Research, the key finding being that just one over one in five eligible borrowers who commenced courses between 2009 and 2012 went on to complete the courses. This suggests up to $530 million of the $670 million allocated through the scheme during those years went to cover the fees of people who never graduated.

*The Financial Review* had an article by Kylar Loussikian and Julie Hare that spoke of Cornerstone Institute. It has received $40 million in payments for the year to date despite just five graduations from more than 4,000 enrolments—not a very good batting average there. In January last year, Cornerstone was approved for VET FEE-HELP advance payments of half a million dollars, which would have covered up to 50 students under the college's current pricing. The article went on to detail a report from the Victorian government last week that revealed enrolments in private training courses had ballooned 374 per cent in the first six months of this year. It also shows only half of the state's training subsidies are direct to courses aligned to specific job outcomes.

The other area in this country very hard hit by this is the TAFE sector. The previous speaker, the member for Lyne, highly praised TAFE. He said that they were not involved in any of this corrupt practice and he wished them the best. But the reality is they are fighting shonky operators with their hands tied behind their back in the context of movement of money to the private sector and a reduction in support for them.

I want to briefly refer to South West Sydney Institute where we have seen the loss of 150 teachers in the areas of adult basic education, allied timber, auto, business and administration, information technology, language literacy and numeracy and metal fabrication. They have also cut 100 administrative and support staff in the last two years. There is also a situation currently where there is a review as to whether carpentry will lose eight of its 35 teachers; glass and glazing, three of its six teachers; a possibility that three of the seven at Granville College—in the suburb I reside in—in painting and decorating losing their employment; and six out of 20 plumbing teachers at Granville and Miller colleges.

This is an internationally renowned organisation. It has operated in this country since the 19th century. Its credentials are recognised around the world. It retrained the defence forces of this country after Second World War and gave people opportunity for a career and a life after they fought for the country. They did it very well and now it is very much up against the wall because of the practices in this industry, and, of course, because of the severe cutbacks by the New South Wales government in regard to support for this training.

It is not just a matter that people should not be signed up. It is not just the issue of these encouragements being given to people. It is not just a matter of the inability of these people to repay the moneys, therefore the Australian taxpayer. Some people here are always talking about the burden we put on people from taxation et cetera. When you squander money like this, it is no wonder that taxes have to be looked at. It is also, importantly, the lack of skills we will see from this because we are seeing courses that are totally inadequate. They are basically able to do courses in a very short period of time. Child care and aged care have been
particularly cited. But it is not only there; it is the number of hours in which these courses can be done.

People are talking about online courses and the questionable ability of people to actually present them—all these types of things. One example was cited where the teacher forgot to teach half the course. That is the kind of reality out there for TAFE. It is not only these other aspects. It is a very serious assault on the ability of this country to train, to be competitive and to avoid high-scale, sometimes, very questionable migration policies to basically bring in people on part-time visas because of these shortages. Now we have a system here which is facilitated by the spread of these loans and the encouragement of questionable people coming into a field that is so important to the country. This will worsen the existing issues.

I want to commend the government for what it is doing. I hope that these measures are successful in capturing a very distinct problem in the field, but I also suggest that there is some merit in the opposition's proposals that we have an ombudsman to get feedback, to follow-up problems, to give people a voice, to let them have the view that there is someone there to accomplish change in the sector, and also the opposition's other proposal. I commend the legislation.

Mr PITT (Hinkler) (17:04): I am very pleased to be speaking here today in support of the Higher Education Support Amendment (VET FEE-HELP Reform) Bill 2015. This bill will strengthen the protections for students in the vocational education and training sector and push unscrupulous training providers out of the market. This bill addresses issues that are well known to my office. I will not name the students or organisations for privacy reasons, but I would like to share a couple of their stories.

I had a young woman who contacted the Hinkler office after she withdrew from studying a Diploma of Management and the college tried to charge her $12,000. She was led to believe the cancellation costs were just $600 and that she would have to return the so-called 'free' laptop she received. She had cancelled her enrolment because she felt the method of delivery and standard of content was poor. When my office contacted the college they advised that because the young woman had not withdrawn within the required two weeks or census date she would have to pay $6,000 in course fees she had incurred and would have to purchase the laptop. The laptop could not be returned because the young woman had used data and the device now contained her personal information and documents.

Another common problem in my electorate affects temporary foreign workers who enter Australia on student visas. When they get here their passports are confiscated and they never see the inside of a classroom. They work in the horticulture sector, where they are exploited by unscrupulous contract labour hire firms. I congratulate the government on forming Taskforce Cadena to address just this type of exploitation. Some registered training organisations are complicit in this exploitation because they take the foreign workers' money in exchange for silence. They know full well that those students will never set foot inside a classroom or submit an assignment.

Another example relates to the aggressive and false marketing of courses. A gentleman contacted my office in July concerned that when his son applied online for what he thought was a vacant job in warehousing with a contract labour hire firm, he was instead contacted by a registered training organisation. Their email confirmed he was registered to attend an induction session to enrol in a certificate III in logistics and warehousing. There was no job
vacancy. I share his concern that these online job advertisements are completely misleading. To quote the gentleman directly:

These ads are making the Registered Training Organisations rich, while leaving people with a debt and no job.

What is also concerning is that the email from the RTO contained all the documentation that the job seeker would need to provide for enrolment but did not disclose any information about the course content, the course outcomes, the course costs or the course cancellation fees.

These kinds of unscrupulous training providers have been allowed to flourish since Labor made changes to the VET HELP loans scheme in 2012. Providers are preying on vulnerable people and signing them up to courses of dubious quality that they do not want and do not need. People in my region are particularly vulnerable, given the high unemployment rate and low job vacancy levels.

Between 2012 and 2014, the number of approved VET providers increased from 119 to 254, and the number of students increased from about 55,000 to 202,000. The total value of VET HELP loans increased from $325 million to $1.75 billion. That is in someone's pocket. To quote Chris Robinson from ASQA, the Australian Skills Quality Authority, the expansion 'precipitated unprecedented examples of unethical student recruitment practices and astronomical fees as dodgy operators jumped into a new and easy government supplied pool of money'.

In March this year, the government announced a suite of reforms to the VET FEE-HELP scheme to protect students, taxpayers and the reputation of Australia's VET sector. These reforms spanned areas such as marketing and inducements, consumer information, debt processes and provider standards. The first of these changes included the banning of inducements such as free laptops, cash or vouchers, and that came into effect in April this year. The second tranche of reforms came into effect on 1 July this year.

Since then, providers have been banned from charging a withdrawal fee. Costing several thousands of dollars in some cases, the fees acted as a barrier to some students withdrawing from a course before the census date, which is when the loan is levied. In addition, training providers and agents can no longer market VET FEE-HELP supported training as 'free' or—in italics—'government funded' or mislead students in any way into believing that VET FEE-HELP is not a loan that is expected to be paid back.

Providers must now publish on their websites which agents and brokers they use and are responsible for the conduct of their agent or broker. Agents must now disclose to the student the name of the VET provider and the course they are marketing, and they must also disclose that they will receive a commission for any referred student enrolment.

The government has also announced that, from 1 January next year, providers cannot levy the full debt load up front and in one hit. Instead, students will have a number of opportunities during a course to confirm if they wish to continue to be enrolled, and their debt will be levied accordingly.

This bill now implements the remainder of the government's announced changes. For example, the bill introduces changes that will protect vulnerable students at the starting point, before they incur a debt, by requiring providers to establish minimum prerequisites for enrolment for each course. This ensures that a student's capacity to complete the course—
including language, literacy and numeracy proficiency—is properly assessed before they are enrolled and before they incur a debt.

The bill makes a number of technical amendments to enact a two-day cooling-off period, ensuring that students have time to make separate study and payment decisions. Students will, from 1 January 2016, have two days after enrolment before they are allowed to submit a request for Commonwealth assistance—the VET FEE-HELP loan application form. No longer will course enrolment be confused with the loan application. The bill ensures that this cooling-off period is in place even with late enrolments close to the census date, which is when students incur the debt.

The bill also increases protections for students under the age of 18 by requiring a parent's or guardian's signature before the student can request a VET FEE-HELP loan. Can you imagine if you rolled down to the bank to sign up for an $18,000 loan to buy a car? That certainly would not be as simple as this has been in the past, and we are addressing this problem. This is an appropriate protection to ensure that young people, who may lack the necessary life experience and financial literacy, are not being signed up to courses and debts they do not need. An exemption is provided for minors who are deemed independent under the requirements of the Social Security Act 1991.

The bill broadens the circumstances in which students can have their loan cancelled where inappropriate behaviour has been used in their recruitment. This is a cost that taxpayers should not have to bear, which is why the government will be requiring providers to repay the costs of any loans that were signed under inappropriate circumstances. It may impose additional penalties on providers such as fines or conditions on approval.

The bill introduces a scheme of infringement notices attached to civil penalties for VET FEE-HELP training providers that engage in improper conduct. In the 2015-16 budget, we allocated $18.2 million to strengthen compliance. The Department of Education and Training will now have a full suite of powers available to it to deal with inappropriate behaviour by providers or brokers. This ranges from cancelling student debt and forcing providers to repay the cost to the Commonwealth, to administrative action such as the suspension or revocation of approval, or civil penalties including infringement notices. The bill expands the department's and the Australian Skills Quality Authority's powers for monitoring and enforcement action against providers and brokers who are doing the wrong thing.

As well as protecting students, this bill also lifts the standards of organisations that are approved to offer VET FEE-HELP funded courses. Approved providers are entrusted by students and taxpayers with potentially millions of dollars in tuition fees. The government believes that VET FEE-HELP providers should meet a high benchmark of financial viability and training quality. That is why this bill introduces a new minimum registration and trading history requirement for new VET FEE-HELP provider applicants. This ensures that all new providers offering VET FEE-HELP have a proven track record in delivering high-level qualifications.

As the former owner of an RTO, I can tell you that the standards are incredibly strict, particularly for certification. Unfortunately, on entering this place, I had to sell that business because there were far too many conflicts, but I am very proud of the fact that I had it for over 10 years, and it continues to function on the basis that it provides quality training to real people for a real price. The fly-by-nighters I have had an enormous amount of experience
with. I have seen them everywhere. I lost jobs all over the country in my previous life against the people who show up, who might be subsidised or who can track down government funding. It certainly is wrong. I would encourage all of those organisations out there—and they are out there—which are good, quality organisations which have been around for a long time and which continue to do the right thing. I would encourage them to hang in because we certainly need them to continue doing that. They provide good training to students with good trainers for a reasonable price.

I certainly heard the contributions from the two previous speakers about TAFE. Whilst TAFE do provide a good service, the issue that I discovered in the many years that I was involved was that TAFE simply do not have the ability to be flexible. They certainly did not at that stage; they may well have shifted now. They need to be able to provide services to people who work on shift, people who work away, people who work on site. They need to adjust their business model; otherwise, they simply will not survive.

There are positives, Mr Deputy Speaker. There are positives. The vocational education and training sector is a vitally important part of Australia's economy. It is a sector that has a long and proud tradition in Australia. For many young people, it provides the bridge between school and work. For unemployed people, it often provides a pathway back into employment and a life off welfare. And for people in work, it can be the mechanism by which they can expand their skills and progress in their careers.

I was certainly one of those. I completed a trade before going to university— before doing all sorts of things and then ending up in here, would you believe, Mr Acting Deputy President—it has been a very long and torturous path! But I understand the training sector, particularly for VET, and we desperately need those trade skills in Australia.

The coalition government is committed to ensuring that we continue to have a strong VET sector—a sector that helps students to develop the skills they need for the jobs of today and to adapt to the work of the future. That is why we have introduced programs like the $20,000 trade support loans for apprentices. As someone who undertook an electrical apprenticeship, I know how much difference such a loan would have made to me. Certainly, as I recall it, my first pay packet was some $63—

Mr Irons: $39!

Mr PITT: I hear $39 from my good friend and colleague! The government supports the principle of VET students being able to access a loan so they may undertake quality training in the same way that a university student is supported through HECS-HELP. Certainly, the tradespeople of Australia are just as valued as those who do a university degree.

Unfortunately, Labor failed to put in place sufficient controls and safeguards to protect students and taxpayers' money when they introduced the VET FEE-HELP scheme. In typical fashion, they did not have an eye to the implementation risks. They are well aware that this is a problem of their own making. The shadow minister for higher education, research innovation and industry acknowledged as much only a few weeks ago. Senator Carr, from the other place, was quoted in The Sydney Morning Herald newspaper:

Labor Senator Kim Carr said Labor introduced VET FEE-HELP with good intentions but the scheme contains "fundamental weaknesses" that need to be fixed.
We are fixing those weaknesses. This bill is necessary to address Labor's failure with regard to VET FEE-HELP and to put in place proper controls and safeguards to protect students and taxpayers from the unscrupulous behaviour of some providers.

I commend the bill to the House.


This bill builds on legislation that passed in April, legislation that aims to strengthen the integrity of our VET sector. As we know, over the past 18 months—actually, it has been going a bit longer than that—the VET sector has been in the headlines for all the wrong reasons. Far too many vulnerable students are ending up with high debts, quite often with a qualification that is not recognised by employers because of quality issues.

In fact, a recent investigation by the Australian Skills Quality Authority, a national regulator established by Labor, found problems with two-thirds of the private training providers that it audited. That is a significant sum—two-thirds. In some cases, students are ending up with large debts and no qualifications because they were enrolled inappropriately in courses that were never going to meet their needs. I have heard some shocking stories, as we all have. I have just been talking to my colleague about some shocking stories from her electorate. I have heard shocking stories of students being offered iPads, laptops and shopping vouchers to lure them into signing up to a course. And I have seen news reports about $200 spotter fees being paid to people to sign up to courses costing up to $25,000.

Not only are these issues affecting students poorly they are also affecting all Australians through the impact on the Commonwealth budget. The ballooning of the VET FEE-HELP debt from almost $699 million in 2013 to $1.7 billion in 2014 is extremely concerning, particularly when combined with shockingly low completion rates. Between the end of 2013 and 2014 the number of students accessing VET FEE-HELP grew by 103 per cent. The average loan amount per student has increased by 24 per cent and the number of providers offering access to VET FEE-HELP has grown by 44 per cent. Clearly, these numbers are not sustainable.

Aside from the financial impact, dodgy providers and exploitative practices are also having a devastating impact on the reputation of the sector. And this is a really important sector. It is a really valuable sector, and not just for Australians: it is also, potentially, a very lucrative export market. I know this—I have just been to India for the inaugural Australia India Leadership Dialogue. Prime Minister Modi has an enormous agenda to rebuild that nation: to build universities, schools and roads. They need skills and they need tradespeople of every description, and they need education to be able to get those tradespeople. So this is an enormous opportunity for the VET sector in India, and we also know there is enormous opportunity in China and in the region.

Most people in this House know that I am a huge fan of vocational education and training. My concern is that these dodgy providers and exploitative practices are having a devastating impact on the reputation of the sector. I am a graduate of the wonderful Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology—a very proud graduate of that institution. I was actually union president of that institution too; it is where I cut my teeth on politics. RMIT, as many know, was established over 100 years ago, when access to education was limited only to the
wealthy. It is the oldest workers college in the world—a very proud tradition. It currently opens up opportunities to people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds—from working-class backgrounds—and it has been doing that for more than a century. I am talking here not just in terms of trades but also in opportunities to access a range of learning in a range of sectors.

I also had the great pleasure, just before I entered this life, of tutoring out at the University of Canberra. Again, I got to see firsthand the benefits that students get from vocational education. Now, as the member for Canberra and just by going out into my community, I see what the Canberra Institute of Technology is doing across a broad range of areas. I have been out with the shadow minister for a number of visits around the electorate, most recently to the CIT down in Fyshwick, where I met with a number of young Canberrans and also Canberrans who are midcareer—in their 40s or 50s and wanting to update their skills. They had gone through their trade training in the seventies or eighties and the world has completely changed—particularly in automotive skills. So these men and women are now updating their skills to ensure that they can keep abreast of change and that they can stay competitive in the market. I have met not one but two family units at the CIT, with fathers and sons studying a trade together.

The member beforehand was saying that TAFEs, in his view, are not up to date, are not flexible enough, are not responsive enough to what is happening in the market and are not keeping up to date with technology. I disagree entirely. In a number of visits I have made to CIT at Fyshwick, I have been amazed by the way in which the teachers and educators are constantly looking at ways to innovate when it comes to teaching tools, learning tools and assessment tools. When I was there just recently, I met a plumbing educator who showed me how, with the beauty of an iPad, he can now take photos of the work that the students are doing, and that can be part of their assessment. So he has a visual representation of their assessment throughout the course, so he can actually track, through images on the iPad, the achievements and progress of the students. So I disagree entirely with the former speaker. TAFE is innovating, keeping abreast of changes and ensuring that it is constantly changing and evolving and constantly flexible so that its graduates can be competitive.

I have also had the opportunity to go and visit many, many trade training centres in my electorate. Just recently I went to the Trinity College trade training centre, which was funded by Labor and opened by the current ACT Liberal senator. I find it rather ironic that Senator Seselja has opened a number of trade training centres in Canberra despite the fact that his government has actually abolished all funding for trade training centres. But I have been to a number of trade training centres, and all are working incredibly well, and the schools that they are attached to are incredibly grateful. As I said, just recently I visited Trinity College. They have a beautiful new trade training centre for child care—cert III and IV, I think. St Mary MacKillop College has an extraordinary trade training centre for hospitality, carpentry, architecture and a range of other skills. That centre is allowing students to have a pathway, and it opens up a range of options to them for their careers. Erindale College has a fantastic hospitality centre, all thanks to Labor.

As I said, I am a big fan of vocational education. It gives people valuable, tangible skills that they can use to get a great job and have a wonderful career. I really cannot sufficiently underscore how vital the vocational education sector is to Australia's prosperity. So I am
pleased to support this legislation today to address some of the issues surrounding VET FEE-HELP, because we must protect vulnerable students from shonky providers.

The bill is in addition to previous changes that were made in April 2015, and it seeks to prevent inappropriate enrolments and debts by introducing a two-day cooling-off period between enrolment and the application for a VET FEE-HELP loan so that course enrolment is no longer confused with the loan application process. It also introduces minimum prerequisites such as literacy and numeracy to make sure that students can complete the higher level VET courses at the diploma level and above for which VET FEE-HELP is available, and it requires a parent's or guardian's signature before a student under 18 can request a VET FEE-HELP loan, to protect younger students. The bill will further protect students and taxpayers by making it easier for a student to have their debt cancelled where they have been signed up for a loan inappropriately and for the government to recoup the cost from the providers. It also introduces minimum registration and trading history requirements to ensure new VET FEE-HELP provider applicants have a proven history of delivering quality training. It introduces infringement notices and financial penalties for breaches of the VET FEE-HELP guidelines, and it also introduces technical amendments to strengthen the department's administration of the scheme and its partnerships with the Australian Skills Quality Authority to monitor and enforce compliance.

As I said at the start of my speech, Labor welcomes any opportunity to strengthen the integrity of VET—we are great fans of VET—and to crack down on shonky providers. The measures in this bill that I have just outlined will go some way to achieving that, but Labor believes they do not go far enough. Despite the introduction of new national standards, which came into effect in April, the problems and rorts within the system are still occurring. We are particularly concerned that there are no efforts to control the spiralling costs for students, with loans having grown in value from $5,890 in 2012 to $8,666 in 2014. That is a significant increase in just two years. The two-day cooling-off period could prove to be easy to manipulate by providers printing out enrolment forms with one signing date and VET FEE-HELP applications with a date two days later. There is no effort to re-examine previous approvals for providers, and there is no debt relief for students who have already been defrauded by dodgy providers.

Before I detail Labor's amendments to this bill, I might just point out that the Labor Party has a very proud track record when it comes to vocational education and training. I just mention the significant investment that we made in trade training centres. It completely changes the opportunities for young Australians, providing them with pathways so they can get their year 12 certificate, still continue to study French and also get a cert I or II in carpentry at the same time. The $3 billion we provided for the Building Australia's Future Workforce program provides some 130,000 new training places for apprentices. In 2011 we established a national regulator, the Australian Skills Quality Authority, as I mentioned earlier. We then amended the legislation in 2012 to increase the coverage of VET FEE-HELP to all diplomas and associate diplomas and also to conduct a trial to extend VET FEE-HELP to certificate IV courses. This meant that any Australian could have access to vocational training, no matter what their background or their financial position. So I find it frustrating to hear the government falsely claiming Labor in government failed to protect students and taxpayers from unscrupulous providers and wasted billions of dollars, because this is
completely false. Labor has a strong record on investing in skills and helping students and workers to obtain the skills they need to participate and compete in the modern workforce, as well as introducing regulation and quality assurance.

Now to Labor’s amendments, and I will be brief. Firstly, we are calling for the establishment of an industry ombudsman. A national VET ombudsman would add some real strength to the regulator. This has been backed up by the Australian Council for Private Education and Training, along with the report from the Senate inquiry into the operation, regulation and funding of private VET providers in Australia which also recommended a national VET ombudsman. An ombudsman would give students direct access to a complaint-resolution process—somebody on their side to get the issues resolved for them.

Secondly, Labor is calling on the government to have the Australian National Audit Office look closely at the operation of the VET FEE-HELP scheme. This is a view the Labor Party has had for some time. In fact, last year, the shadow ministers called on the Auditor-General to investigate VET FEE-HELP to ensure that skills funding was being used in accordance with the intent of the legislation. The Auditor-General has requested that a performance audit be included in its work program for this financial year.

Finally, the last amendment requires the department to write to the student with a clear statement on the amount of debt that they are about to undertake and for the student to reply to the department before a debt is raised. We will also refer the legislation to the Senate legislation committee to look at options to cap tuition-fee levels for courses covered by VET FEE-HELP and lower the lifetime limit on student loans.

Students, TAFEs, taxpayers and good quality providers are all the victims of this scandal. A Shorten Labor government will guarantee TAFE funding into the future by working with premiers and chief ministers on a comprehensive national priority plan that defines the role of TAFE and places it squarely as the public provider within the sector. Vocational training is a vital sector. I support it wholeheartedly. We must protect students, we must protect the integrity of the sector and we must ensure VET FEE-HELP is sustainable. I commend this bill to the House.

Ms GAMBARO (Brisbane) (17:31): I wish to rise and speak in favour of the Higher Education Amendment (VET FEE-HELP Reform) Bill. The Vocational Education and Training FEE-HELP program was first introduced by Labor in 2009. It was set up so that students undertaking a diploma or an advanced diploma qualification could access a loan to help with their course fees. The government supports the principle of VET students being able to access a loan so that they can undertake quality training in the same way that a university student is supported through HECS-HELP. But when Labor introduced the scheme, they failed to put in place sufficient controls and safeguards to protect students and taxpayers' money. This was the first of the Labor Party's litany of errors.

Just three years later, the Labor Party expanded access to the VET FEE-HELP scheme by removing the credit-transfer arrangements between VET providers and universities. Again, they failed to think about the risk of taxpayers' money when these changes were made. The consequences have been a huge surge in enrolments by very unscrupulous VET FEE-HELP providers. These providers have sought out vulnerable people, and enrolled them in courses of questionable standards that were neither beneficial nor necessary. No promise of an education should come with a debt that cannot be repaid.
Labor had a chance to change the major flaw in their scheme in 2013, when the first complaints started coming in and they were reported to the national training regulator. But surprise, surprise, they did absolutely nothing. There were a litany of complaints about the scheme—and what did they do? They just sat on their hands and did absolutely nothing at all. The VET FEE-HELP scheme was established to give Australians a chance to better themselves, not to limit their opportunities.

To protect students, taxpayers and the reputation of Australia's VET sector, the government introduced a raft of reforms to the VET FEE-HELP scheme in March this year. These reforms reach right across areas such as marketing and inducements, consumer information, debt processes and provider standards. There is a huge breadth of reforms, which highlight the depth of the flaws that have existed in Labor's policy since it was introduced. The first of these changes was the banning of inducements such as free laptops—people were given cash, they were given vouchers—and that was to come into effect on 1 April this year. The second phase of the reforms came into effect on 1 July this year. Students will now have a number of opportunities during a course to consider their enrolment, and their debt will be levied accordingly. This legislation clears the waters that were left muddied by the opposition.

In this very next phase of the legislation, this bill will seek to prevent inappropriate enrolments and debts by introducing more standards so that vulnerable students will have more protection. And more protection is what it is all about. Between enrolment and an application for a VFH loan, this bill will introduce a two-day cooling off period, which is very much a relief. It is a very good measure that will enable students to have a period of time from when they enrol to consider their application. I welcome that particular change to this legislation.

To ensure that students can complete the higher level VET courses, this government will also introduce a minimum of prerequisites. Before a student under 18 can request a VFH loan, a parent or a guardian's signature will be required. Again, that is very much a welcome move, and I fully support that.

These measures are common-sense measures that will ensure that future students will not suffer the same fate as past victims, who have suffered time and time again. This legislation will act to protect those least able to protect themselves. To burden those already most burdened is absolutely morally bankrupt, and this act will make it punishable. Under this bill, the cancellation of a debt will also be easier, where students have signed up for a loan inappropriately. This is a cost that will be recouped from the provider and not the taxpayer. The government will also introduce minimum registration and a trading history requirement for new VFH provider applicants to ensure that those who are approved have a proven history of delivering quality education. And quality training is at the core of this bill. This will allow authorities to weed out those already caught preying on students in the past. They have absolutely no place in training students, if they have been caught doing this in the past.

If we provide an environment in which avenues of our education system have the potential to burden students more than benefit them, then we must do more to better the system. I commend all of the changes in this bill to the House.

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (17:37): I rise today to support the Higher Education Amendment (VET FEE-HELP Reform) Bill and also put on record my support for the important amendments that Labor's shadow minister has put forward.
Vocational education is critically important to the future economic prosperity of our nation. Labor understands how essential vocational education is as a pathway to the practical, hands-on, highly-skilled jobs of the future. That is why, when in government, we significantly resourced and reformed the vocational education sector—something that had been left neglected by the Howard government and that we put significant effort into.

Far from being the runner-up to Australia’s higher education sector, VET plays an important part, or the other side of the coin, when it comes to higher education. We need to support our young people to follow pathways into further study, whether it is higher or vocational education—both are incredibly important. Equally important is ensuring that young people can access—and not just young people; I have to emphasise it is also about people retraining such as those who want to change career or, in some very unfortunate circumstances, have found themselves made redundant and need an alternative pathway into employment.

Whether it is higher or vocational education, it must be accessible and affordable. That is why our VET FEE-HELP, if it is used in a prudent, responsible way, is an important part of the process. However, in the last two years, we have seen reports that the reputation of Australia’s vocational education training system and the VET FEE-HELP program are now at risk, increasingly, as a result of unethical behaviour. One can only call these people shonks and unscrupulous private vocational training providers.

I must say at this point: there are some great private providers who deliver high-quality vocational education and of course our public provider, TAFE, does a great job of delivering high-quality vocational education. But, unfortunately, we have seen reports of some private providers who have come into the marketplace and have not been providing high-quality education. We have seen reports—particularly in the area of child care, management and business—where less than suitable training has been provided. Some young people have signed up for courses thinking they will get a childcare qualification that will allow them to step into a job when all we have seen is very, very poor-quality training provided by these organisations. Some childcare providers have blacklisted graduates from some of these training providers. So it is not a good outcome, and these students have ended up with significant debt.

What is equally concerning are reports of students being signed up to training courses without their actual knowledge. Just last week an individual in my electorate told me that a training provider rang him and said, ‘Look. Do you want to do a course in management?’ He said, ‘I’ll think about it.’ Without his knowledge, they signed him up to that course. They said they would send him an iPad to do his course on. He never received the iPad nor heard from them again. Unfortunately, at tax time, he found that he had a VET FEE-HELP debt, which he is now required to pay back after receiving no funding.

We have seen the VET FEE-HELP debt increase from $700 million in 2013 to $1.7 billion in 2014. This is extremely concerning, and I think that figures and time frame show that this has increasingly become a problem in the last 18 months or so. In fact at the end of 2013-14, the number of students accessing VET FEE-HELP had grown by 103 per cent and of course, unfortunately, a lot of these people who signed up for VET FEE-HELP and enrolled in vocational education training have not been supported to complete their course. In fact only 24 per cent of VET FEE-HELP assisted students actually completed their course.
So we have got a problem. We have got an issue, and the government has not taken responsibility for it. They continually blame Labor and of course they fail to recognise that they have actually been in government—and we may have a new Prime Minister—for the last two years. It is time they took some responsibility for this increasing problem and did something about it.

While it is belated, we certainly welcome these moves and some of the other moves that the government has made but we do not believe they go far enough. Our VET system should be designed to skill up people in preparation for a world of work, giving high-quality training and ensuring that they have the skills for the future. We have seen the Abbott-Turnbull government sitting on their hands, tinkering around the edges while not actually dealing with these shonks and unscrupulous training providers, who have exploited disadvantaged and vulnerable people in the name of obscene profits.

As I said, numerous people have contacted me and, unfortunately, we have seen the regulator being overwhelmed by these reports. It is time that we have a regulatory framework that is fit for purpose, which I why I think it is very important that the government takes Labor's amendments seriously, in terms of an ombudsman. We think that this is a very important improvement that the government should have a look at. This has been supported by the Australian Council for Private Education and Training—they have called for an ombudsman as well. The report from the Senate inquiry into the operation, regulation and funding of private vocational education and training providers in Australia has also recommended a national VET ombudsman. We think this is an important element to complement ASQA, the Australian Skills Quality Authority. We think that this is very important and that it is something that should be seriously looked at.

In addition to this, we have also called for an auditor-general to investigate VET FEE-HELP to ensure that skills funding is being used in accordance with the intent of the legislation. The Auditor-General has requested that a performance audit be included in the Australian National Audit Office 2015-16 work program, and we think this is really important. In fact, Labor has been calling for this for some time. We also think that the amendments we have put in place, to ensure that students are aware that they are signing up for and actually getting a debt, are really, really important. What Labor is calling for is making it really, really clear that students know what is happening and that they are signing off on it. We think the government should look very carefully at our amendments and ensure that they are brought into line.

Like I said, there are many good private training providers out there, and what these shonks in the system—these poor quality training providers—are actually doing is tarnishing the reputation of our whole vocational education system. Our vocational education system does and will play a critically important role into the future. But, without ensuring that there is a good reputation in the system and around the country, how will people know, when they sign up to a vocational education training pathway and incur a debt, that they are getting high quality vocational education and training and that that training will lead them to a job? This is so critically important.

I think it is also a timely reminder and it is concerning that, despite the evidence we do have on hand, the government does want to pursue open slather arrangements when it comes to higher education. Among a number of things in their plan to deregulate the university
sector, one of the big calls they had was to include private providers and allow private providers to access HECS-HELP subsidies and Commonwealth support. I think what we have seen in the vocational education system is that you do need strong regulators and a strong regulatory framework to ensure that this is not abused and that vulnerable people are not abused. Certainly, I think it is time for the government to, perhaps, not just tinker around the edges, but actually do something concrete. We believe that the amendments that we have put forward strengthen the bill before the House and we really urge the government to look at this.

I think it is also important to recognise, and I will take this opportunity to talk about, the important role that TAFE has in the vocational education system. TAFE, as the public provider, is an important element. As I said, there are some strong, positive private providers in the system; however, we have also seen some shonks. Unfortunately, TAFE has not been treated well by Liberal governments, and Liberal governments have attacked TAFE. TAFE plays a critically important role; that is why Labor has made a commitment to and understands the critical role that TAFE plays for many industries. There are many areas that TAFE will provide courses in that the private providers will not. I think it is well recognised that, in industries that are going through significant transition, TAFE comes in and works with those employees to ensure that they get training for jobs.

It is important to recognise the role that TAFE plays in English as a second language, supporting people actually getting a handle on English as new migrants to this country. It is critically important. That is why Labor has announced, recognising the central importance of the role that TAFE plays, that Labor will work with premiers and chief ministers to ensure that there is a TAFE funding guarantee and a national priority plan which will properly define and support TAFE and the role that it plays. We think that this is an important move in strengthening our vocational education sector. It is an important move to ensure that the role that TAFE plays is properly recognised and ensure that they can continue to deliver the high quality education that they provide.

But, of course, in terms of some of the reports that have come out about some of the very poor practices that we have seen in the private vocational education sector, we need these to be dealt with and dealt with quickly. The government has been sitting on its hands and tinkering around the edges. It is now time for the government to act. We cannot have these vulnerable people being taken advantage of by organisations that have no intention of delivering training or, indeed, do, but provide very poor quality training that will not lead to young people and those transitioning into new careers finding a job.

It is time that we see the government act on these shonky providers and stop making excuses about why they have not acted. It is their responsibility, they are in government and it is time that they do not shirk their responsibility and actually address this issue. Please look at Labor's amendments. We think these are strong amendments and we hope the government will indeed accept them.

Mr VAN MANEN (Forde) (17:52): Wow! It was interesting to sit in the House for 15 minutes and listen to the member for Kingston attempt to rewrite history and absolve the previous Labor government of all sins in relation to the issues that now face the VET FEE-HELP sector, because it was actually under the previous Labor government's watch that the framework and systems were put in place that have led to the catastrophe that faces the VET
FEE-HELP sector today. It is not the first time that we have listened in this place to those opposite trying to rewrite history. There has been no acknowledgement whatsoever of their failings when in government, yet they come in here and pontificate about the fact that we, as a government, now need to fix all these problems posthaste. In stark contrast to the previous government, we have taken the time to work with the industry, work with the sector and come up with a sensible set of solutions to the problems that are genuinely facing the sector.

Everybody in this country and all of us in this House readily acknowledge that every Australian deserves the right to access quality education. That is why I stand in this place today to speak in support of the Higher Education Amendment (VET FEE-HELP Reform) Bill 2015. This bill seeks to amend the Higher Education Support Act 2003 to strengthen the protection for students in the vocational education and training sector, and it seeks to push those unscrupulous training providers out of the marketplace. There is one thing that I will agree with the member for Kingston on, and that is the notion that, whether somebody is going to university or going to learn a trade, we should provide a level playing field in terms of support. I have no doubt that that was the initial intention of the VET FEE-HELP model, which is effectively an extension of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme to the trade skills sector. That has been extremely well received.

We have seen in Australia a long and proud tradition of vocational and educational training. I remind the member for Kingston that it was actually under the Howard government that we developed the Australian industry trade colleges and that Labor, when they came into government, did away with Australian industry trade colleges. The member for McPherson, who is at the table, well knows the success and tremendous achievements of the Australian Industry Trade College at Robina.

Mrs Andrews: I do.

Mr VAN MANEN: I had the pleasure of meeting with principal Mark Hands last week and one of their students, and I listened to some of the terrific achievements of that college in working in the vocational educational system. The greatest value is that they have developed a curriculum that allows their students to gain the Queensland Certificate of Education; not only that, those students spend their two senior years also working in industry. The value of that to those students is that 93 per cent of students that graduate from that college have a job when they leave school. That innovation was put in place by the Howard government, and those opposite dismantled it.

In my electorate, where the youth unemployment rate is 17 per cent, vocational education and training is extraordinarily important. Part of the reason for my meeting last week with Principal Mark Hands was to look at developing a campus in Beenleigh to service the Yatala industrial area and other industrial areas in my electorate. So, on this side of the House, we fully support and acknowledge the importance of the vocational education sector, and we have some great service providers in all of our electorates, I am sure, and those include TAFE. The Meadowbrook campus of the Metropolitan South Institute of TAFE do a fantastic job not only in the trades and skills sector but in a number of other areas, particularly with our large migrant community.

As I have touched on, it was the previous Labor government that axed the credit transfer arrangements between VET FEE-HELP funded qualifications and university qualifications in 2012. Since then, VET FEE-HELP has undergone unanticipated growth. Between 2012 and
2014, approved education providers grew from some 119 to 254 and nominal loans debt more than quadrupled. Much of this growth was because of the unscrupulous behaviour of a minority of providers and agents, who have aggressively marketed the scheme, targeting vulnerable people who are left with significant debt but no benefit from training. I think we would all recognise that that is unconscionable. The people that are going to these organisations are looking for this training to help restore some self-confidence and pride and gain some new skills and new abilities to improve their opportunities in the workplace.

Those opposite failed our Australian students. As I said earlier, the system put in place by Labor failed to enact the necessary safeguards to protect students and taxpayers from these rorts, and out of control expansion precipitated unprecedented examples of unethical student recruitment practices, with promises of free laptops or iPads hiding astronomical fees, as dodgy operators jumped into new and easy-to-access government supplied pools of money. Labor not only failed Australian students but also failed the hardworking taxpayers whose money they treated with disregard. Those opposite had the chance to rectify these wrongs in 2013, when the first complaints were made to the National Training Regulator and the Australian Skills Quality Authority. Labor ignored these complaints. Yet, in a revelation some two years later, the shadow minister for higher education, Senator Kim Carr, finally acknowledged the need for stronger measures, outlining 'fundamental weaknesses that needed to be fixed'. I think this is a symptom of those opposite: they ignore the problem for years and years and then finally they have this hallelujah moment when they discover there is a problem and expect us to fix it in 60 seconds. I can assure those opposite that we have a diligent and prudent process. There have been many problems from those opposite that we have had to fix in the past two-and-a-bit years in government. We will fix this, and it will be for the better for the sector and, most importantly, for those people looking to study through the VET system in Australia.

I commend the Minister for Education and Training, Senator Simon Birmingham, for announcing earlier this year that a series of measures would be introduced to crack down on the unscrupulous behaviour which has left some students with a mountain of debt and no qualifications to show for it. The member for Kingston's comments earlier that the government have been sitting on their hands, doing nothing, is plainly incorrect, because we have been working on this since earlier in the year.

These important measures seek to stamp out those rorting the system and restore integrity into the higher education sector. These measures have been progressively introduced since April 2015 and are already making a positive impact. This bill provides the additional laws necessary to implement significant measures from 1 January 2016. The Higher Education Support Amendment (VET FEE-HELP Reform) Bill 2015 seeks to prevent inappropriate enrolments and debts by implementing a number of measures, including the introduction of a two-day cooling-off period between enrolment and application for a VET FEE-HELP loan; the introduction of minimum pre-requisites to ensure students can complete the higher level VET courses for which VET FEE-HELP is available; and the requirement of a parent's or guardian's signature before a student under 18 years can request a VET FEE-HELP loan.

This bill also aims to further protect students and taxpayers by including a number of measures, such as making it easier for a student to have their debt cancelled where they have been signed up for a loan inappropriately—a cost that will be recouped from providers to
protect taxpayers; introducing minimum registration and trading history requirements for new VET FEE-HELP provider applicants to ensure a proven history of delivering quality training; introducing infringement notices for breaches of the VET FEE-HELP guidelines; and making technical amendments to strengthen the department's administration of the scheme and its partnerships with ASQA to monitor and enforce compliance. Where Labor have failed to protect students and taxpayers, these measures are being introduced by the coalition government to rectify those weaknesses.

In addition to these reforms, the government's changes to VET FEE-HELP will include a number of measures to prevent students from being caught up in dodgy courses and high student debt. These changes include banning inducements for enrolment; banning withdrawal fees and other barriers if students change their mind about an enrolment; and banning inappropriate marketing, including marketing that describes a VET FEE-HELP funded course as 'free'. Education providers will also be responsible for the actions of their agents under these new changes, and providers will be banned from levying the full debt load up-front, regardless of a student's progress through the course. This will be achieved by requiring training providers to have multiple census dates and proportionate levying of fees across each course. The new measures that are being implemented by the coalition government will protect students from dodgy education and training providers and inappropriate incentives and marketing and will also protect the hard-earned tax dollars of Australians.

I commend the Minister for Education and Training and the new Minister for Vocational Education and Skills for consulting widely on the implementation of these reforms to ensure we get it right. The government has consulted with various stakeholders through a number of forums and has also appointed a VET FEE-HELP Reform Working Group—with representatives of training providers, students, employers and consumer law advocates and regulators—to advise on the implementation of the reforms, including the measures in this bill.

It is this government, on this side of the House, which is seeking to rectify the inadequacies of the previous Labor government that have led to the issues we are now facing in the VET FEE-HELP sector. For a community like mine, which has a large number of people of low socioeconomic status who are looking to improve their skills and their abilities so that they can get a job and work to contribute to their families and develop self-esteem and personal responsibility, these changes will go a long way to helping some of those who, over the past few years, have no doubt been victims of some of these rorts and rip-offs by unscrupulous VET FEE-HELP providers. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms MacTIERNAN (Perth) (18:06): Of course, both sides of the House support the Higher Education Support Amendment (VET FEE-HELP Reform) Bill 2015. Indeed, we on this side of the House have for the last 18 months been drawing attention to the rapidly escalating problem that has been occurring in the VET FEE-HELP area as more and more unscrupulous operators sought to take advantage of the loan scheme. I do find that last contribution really quite extraordinary. I mean, you have been in government for over two years now. This has been a matter of great public record with report after report. Part of a report into vocational education by a committee for which I was deputy chair was to show that these scams were escalating. There was also a very good report by the University of Sydney, entitled The capture of public wealth by the for-profit VET sector, as well as a very comprehensive report
by the Auditor-General of Western Australia into what was going on with the standard checking.

It is quite bizarre that a government that has been in place for two years is considering a matter that has been the subject to a great deal of commentary, where we have seen the debt levels spiral. In the last year alone the debt level has gone from $699 million to $1.7 billion, and the $699 million was a doubling of the previous year. We have seen this problem grow out of all proportion. We thought that, when we got rid of the previous PM, we would have a little rationality and balance brought into the debate. I accept the current minister is working to attend to this problem, but there is no doubt that under the previous administration, under the Abbott government, that this problem was left to blow out of control.

The measures that are being introduced in this legislation are going to provide some protections. There will be some prerequisite entry requirements for enrolments and there will be a two-day cooling-off period. For students under 18 the signature of a parent or guardian is required before a contract has any force, as well as a variety of other provisions. But we know, for example, that the two-day cooling-off period is an insufficient provision because many people are unaware that they have signed up to a particular training program until quite some time afterwards, when they are advised that they have accumulated a debt. For those who are unaware that they have signed an agreement to enrol in a particular course and an agreement to take out a loan to fund the provider, it is a highly unsatisfactory control mechanism.

We have moved a series of amendments which we seriously ask the government to entertain. We do accept that the government is wanting to move to address this problem, because it is entirely unacceptable that we have so many young people who are accumulating absurd amounts of debt for qualifications that, in many instances, are quite meaningless and will not enhance their ability to find employment. These are programs that are fundamentally driven by unscrupulous profit taking. We do accept that the government wants to take some steps here, but we do say that, if you look at provisions such as the cooling-off period and at the sort of rorting which has been going on in the system, you will see that that is not really going to bring home the bacon in placing some very rigorous controls around the sector.

I want to talk very briefly about some of the findings that have come out of Western Australia. Although we have kept our own Training Accreditation Council, we do nevertheless apply the national standards. The WA auditor-general did a very interesting report on the standards of the RTOs in Western Australia; he was looking specifically at the checks undertaken by the Training Accreditation Council. What he revealed was primarily directed towards the RTOs, but he also expressed concern about whether the Training Accreditation Council was a sufficient mechanism to provide rigour in the system. When the number of non-compliant organisations is around 35 per cent, there is very genuine cause for concern that the mechanisms to regulate the RTOs are not strong enough to give us confidence that this system will deliver much-needed vocational training. In WA the auditor-general found that more than half of those organisations which were checked were non-compliant and around 35 per cent of the non-compliance was significant or critical. We are not simply talking about stuff at the margin such as 'You haven't completed the paperwork,' but really critical things like lack of evidence of student assessment, unqualified trainers, no assessment of the practical application of skills as required and allowing students to pass
despite their written assessments showing incorrect or incomplete answers. We did see that sanctions were applied to suspend, vary or cancel around nine RTOs, but the numbers engaged in non-compliance are much greater than that.

I also want to say that part of this problem with the VET FEE-HELP liabilities that have been accumulating has been the massive increase in the cost of vocational training provided by state governments. In Western Australia, there has just been a huge increase in the fees for TAFE for the government provided services, which in return has created many, many more opportunities for opportunistic RTOs of questionable capacity and questionable intention to flourish because the public sector is being priced out of the reach of many.

We have a number of problems here that have come together in a perfect storm—the massive increase in fees and what we could only say is a problematic regime of regulation. If we have a system that shows that half of the organisations that are operating are noncompliant and 35 per cent of those are significantly noncompliant, then I do not think that we can say that we have a rigorous and strong system in place. These little pieces of amendments that have come in today are going to go a very small way to trying to bring some of the worst excesses under control; but they are not really going to the fundamental heart and the more critical problem, which is how we are going to make the for-profit RTO sector more rigorous and more reliable—because a 50 per cent noncompliance rate obviously is completely unacceptable.

Interestingly, we need to be looking at what we are seeing happen in the United States. As we are now merrily moving away from a very heavily subsidised and free provision of TAFE education to a more and more expensive TAFE education, I think it is very interesting to note that the number of states and jurisdictions within the United States of America that have actually decided that this is a pathway to economic doom. Indeed, they are reversing a decades-long practice of charging fees and in the key and critical areas of industry that they want to encourage within their states—within those areas that represent the industries that we want to encourage in the 21st century—they are in fact getting rid of technical and vocational education fees. They are moving towards a system where the government provides the funds for young people to embark on those careers and perhaps for older people to retrain in those critical areas, because they are recognising that this is a fundamental investment that is required for the promotion of industry. It is every bit as important as any of the other industry assistance schemes that we engage in in order to encourage a business formation around our country.

I make this plea, and we are supporting this legislation. This legislation is a very modest and somewhat belated attempt to deal with what is a very significant problem, but we do need to do more. We need to be looking at how we give more teeth and grunt to our regulatory regime so that we can have greater confidence and so that next time we do a review of compliance we would expect to see that the level of compliance is far higher and that the number of organisations where there are significant departures are significantly less. We need to take out the incentive for those people that are coming into this space simply to profit without delivering a worthwhile product. We support the legislation, but we di urge the government to seriously consider the important amendments that we are proposing to this legislation.
Mrs McNAMARA (Dobell) (18:20): I rise today in support of the Higher Education Support Amendment (VET FEE-HELP Reform) Bill 2015. I thank the Minister for Vocational Education and Skills, the Hon. Luke Hartsuyker, for his work on this bill. I also acknowledge the Minister for Education and Training, Senator the Hon. Simon Birmingham.

This bill seeks to strengthen the administration of the VET FEE-HELP loan schemes and these amendments seek to protect vulnerable students, taxpayers and the overall integrity of the entire vocational education and training sector. The amendments are a result of the actions of a small number of training providers or their agents who have unfortunately taken advantage of prospective students. The government proudly supports the VET FEE-HELP loan scheme as it encourages more training to be undertaken by more people. The students who utilise the VET FEE-HELP scheme often undertake training they would otherwise not have had access to due to the significant up-front fees.

The VET FEE-HELP scheme has been in a growth period since it was expanded by the then Labor government in 2012. Between 2013 and 2014, the number of students accessing VET FEE-HELP increased by approximately 103 per cent from just over 100,000 to almost 203,000 enrolled students. The total value of these loans more than doubled from $699 million in 2013 to $1,757 million in 2014. Since first made available to students in 2009, a total amount of $3.1 billion had been accessed under the VET FEE-HELP scheme by 2014.

To an extent, the growth has been attributable to more providers entering the training market. Unfortunately, the industry has been scarred by a minority of opportunists taking advantage of vulnerable students. Due to the competitive growth in the market, unscrupulous conduct has included programs aimed at vulnerable people who are, as a result, left with large amounts of debt—and even, in some cases, an incomplete or useless qualification. This is simply not good enough.

This government has acknowledged the relationship between the growth in the VET FEE-HELP scheme and the marketing practices of a small group of training providers and has acted in response. A number of measures were introduced in March of this year by the then Assistant Minister for Education and Training, Senator Birmingham. Such measures included the banning of inducements such as free laptops, tablets, phones or even cashback offers to lure students under the VET FEE-HELP loan scheme. Marketing and recruitment practices have been tightened to ensure only appropriate marketing of the VET FEE-HELP loan scheme to potential students is undertaken. An education awareness component has also played a role with efforts to further explain how the VET FEE-HELP loan scheme works, as well as the rights and obligations of students under the scheme. Further measures included strengthening the debt waiver and revocation processes for students under the scheme and ensuring the debt incurred by students is in line with course delivery. Importantly, training providers are now prohibited from charging a withdrawal fee, which was a huge disincentive for students to withdraw from a course prior to the census date when the VET FEE-HELP loan would be charged—unfortunately an underhanded and dishonest method to fill the pockets of dubious providers at the expense of students.

The assessment criterion for training providers as well as scrutiny of these providers was also strengthened. Basic parameters were established in terms of literacy and numeracy requirements. This meant that prerequisites and prior education qualifications were introduced as a means of ensuring that the potential student is capable of completing the course in which
they have enrolled. Perhaps the most noteworthy of the measures designed to crack clown on dodgy training providers is the clarification of training and outcomes information. Put simply, students will be informed about their choices in regard to training providers and courses. Further transparency has been implemented whereby providers are required to disclose who their agent or broker is and whether or not they are receiving a commission in return for enrolment. Some of these measures have already been implemented with appropriate changes to VET guidelines or products designed to communicate to students. Providers will soon be unable to levy the full cost of course enrolments for students in one hit, which provides a safety net of intermittent opportunities for a student to opt out of continuance in a course without carrying the full financial burden of the whole course fees.

The measures that have been implemented are a great start but this bill builds on all changes made to date and goes further to prevent inappropriate enrolments and debts through a variety of different methods. The introduction of a two-day cooling off period between enrolment and application for a VET FEE-HELP loan will ensure the impact of the decision regarding further debt is considered properly by the applicant. It also prevents past practices of dishonest providers who target the unsuspecting and obtain enough details to unwittingly sign them up to a debt they may never be able to pay. Further, ensuring students can actually complete the higher level of education is important, which is why minimum prerequisites are to be introduced. This measure, in particular, ensures the debt to be incurred is not going to be wasted with the student not being able to complete the degree or gain any real education training outcome from the course. We have all heard the stories of those less than 18 years of age being hoodwinked into a VET FEE-HELP loan. Amendments in this bill will require a parent's or guardian's signature before a student under 18 years can incur this level of debt.

The protection of both students and taxpayers has also been addressed in the amendments in this bill. Firstly, students will have an easier process to follow to have their debt cancelled if they have been signed up for a loan inappropriately. Secondly, the taxpayer will be protected as this amendment will see the course fee cost being charged to the provider in the event that a student signed up to a course under dubious circumstances or misinformation. A track record of delivering quality training outcomes is now a requirement in respect of VET providers entering the VET FEE-HELP loan scheme. This will ensure only those which have a proven history of training are registered. Breaches of the VET FEE-HELP loan scheme guidelines will also be accompanied by infringement notices attached to civil penalties with the changes in this bill.

There are also technical amendments to be made to strengthen the Department of Education and Training's administration of the VET FEE-HELP loan scheme. These technical amendments also apply to the interaction the Department of Education and Training has with the Australian Skills Quality Authority to monitor and enforce compliance with the VET FEE-HELP loan scheme. These are common-sense changes The students who are genuinely seeking training with the assistance of the VET FEE-HELP loan scheme should be able to do so with accurate information which will in turn lead to informed choices. Also, the minority of providers who are intentionally misleading prospective students should not be permitted to continue this shameful practice. This bill does introduce additional regulations on those training providers approved under the VET FEE-HELP loan scheme; however, it is only those regulations necessary to protect students and taxpayers which are to be introduced. The
vulnerable students who have been led astray under the current system, the taxpayer who has footed the bill and the integrity of the vocational education and training sector in Australia will all benefit from the amendments to this bill.

As usual, once again this government is ensuring accountability that was clearly lacking under the former Labor government. In this instance the measures outlined in this bill are necessary given the failure of Labor to ensure compliance arrangements were in place for operators under the VET FEE-HELP loan scheme. Had they been, perhaps Peta, a constituent in my electorate of Dobell, who was approached by a training provider in a shopping centre about a so-called government-sponsored training course, would have been spared unwelcome debt. Upon filling out a few details on an inquiry form she later discovered she had unknowingly incurred a FEE-HELP debt as a result of basically unconscionable behaviour. It is appalling to think there are phony education providers, even in Dobell, who are preying on the naive in our community and putting them into debt to make a quick dollar for themselves. While the previous government knew of these problems and did nothing to put a stop to them, I am satisfied that the Turnbull coalition government has taken these vital steps to clean up this mess and spare thousands from this ruse.

The compliance measures missing from the former government's implementation would have ensured dodgy providers or their agents would not have been able to take unfair advantage of vulnerable students. Both students and taxpayers have been severely let down by the failings of the previous Labor government. Despite numerous complaints to the Department of Education and Training in 2011 and to the Australian Skills Quality Authority in 2013, Labor did nothing. Put bluntly, the Labor Party failed to anticipate the growth in this sector from dodgy providers looking to capitalise and failed to ensure compliance arrangements to protect students.

Concerns about the abuse of the VET FEE-HELP have not gone unnoticed by the media either. Earlier this year, The Age reported that the media had been flooded with complaints about shonky operators signing up vulnerable people to overpriced, unsuitable training courses—people including recent migrants, whose English was poor, or the long-term unemployed and people who were unaware at the time of what they were signing up to. The article points out the disparity between the debt incurred and the likelihood of the consumer to ever earn above the $53,345 income threshold at which they would then be required to begin repayments. ABC News noted late last year that one provider was charging $11,000 for a diploma of early childhood, but the median wage for an early childhood worker is $49,000. This wage is lower than the income threshold, and, therefore, it is unlikely that the loan will ever be repaid. The taxpayer then foots the bill.

Even in such cases, though, the fact is that many may not be aware that undertaking a VET FEE-HELP loan affects borrowing capacity in the future for credit cards, personal loans and home loans. It can have a sustained effect, and this is why it is so important to protect and inform potential students while appropriately monitoring and holding providers and their agents to account.

In December 2014, New South Wales Fair Trading issued a statement warning consumers about scammers and training marketers who were pretending to be government officials in order to get people to hand over their personal details. These scammers have used the temptation of incentives like cashbacks, vouchers, iPads or laptops in return for signing up to
a course under the guise that it will be government funded. It is unethical and underhanded behaviour, and it is reassuring to see that the coalition government has taken vital steps to stop these practices from occurring.

It is true that the majority of training providers and agents have acted in good faith and have shown due diligence in all aspects of their recruitment practices. It would certainly be unfair to put all providers in one basket and call it rotten. Marketing is a natural occurrence throughout all business sectors, whether it be a local cafe or a training provider, and most act responsibly and ethically. Training organisations are vital to our local community. They provide essential training and retraining, delivering opportunities across a broad spectrum of students—from the young person who wishes to train to enter a specific industry or move from welfare to gain employment to the single mother who wants to upskill to work to support her family, from the new migrant who wishes to contribute and integrate into their new community to the semiretired person who wants to learn new technologies and stay up to date. The Turnbull coalition government is committed to providing every resource and assistance possible to help our unemployed, underemployed or underskilled gain meaningful employment.

These changes are especially important in supporting the Dobell electorate. Unemployment and jobs growth in Dobell have always been pressing issues. I will continue to fight to ensure constituents in my electorate have access to the best possible training, which will, in turn, give them the best possible opportunity to gain employment. The provision of the VET FEE-HELP scheme is an essential component to prospective students gaining access to the necessary training in order to enter the workforce in their desired field. In Dobell, approximately one in two students obtain a year 12 certificate. Only 24 per cent of residents over the age of 15 have obtained certificate-level qualifications, and only 18 per cent of residents over the age of 15 have an undergraduate or a postgraduate degree. These figures are a case in point for the importance of the continued provision of quality training organisations.

I commend the Minister for Vocational Education and Skills for his ongoing commitment to safeguarding both prospective students and taxpayers through the delivery of this important piece of legislation. I am confident that the integrity of the VET FEE-HELP scheme will be strengthened by its passage, and it will, overall, ensure the outstanding quality of education and training in Australia will continue.

I commend this bill to the House.

Ms Ryan (Lalor—Opposition Whip) (18:35): I, too, rise today to speak about the Higher Education Support Amendment (VET FEE-HELP Reform) Bill 2015. Today, we are here trying to reform a piece of legislation, but the amending legislation that has been put forward by the government does not do enough. It does not go far enough to address the issues with VET FEE-HELP. The amending legislation that is being put forward is in response to what has become 18 months of major national scandal. It is not just the loans aspect but the training industry itself. I am checking my watch to see what the year and the month are. It is November 2015. For 18 months we have had headlines that have let everyone in this country know what is going on in this industry. We have waited 18 months for this government to bring some amending legislation forward that will change things on the ground for young people and change things on the ground to stop the rorting of the system that is going on. We
have waited 18 months. In what is becoming very indicative of the Turnbull government, this,
just like the NBN, does not go far enough and it has not got here fast enough.

Labor come today to the chamber with some further amendments that we think will
sharpen this piece of legislation and make it much more practical and much more useful on
the ground.

When we talk about the scandal and the disgrace that have been occurring in this space of
training organisations across an 18-month period, we do not have to go back far to find the
headlines that are most disturbing. I am looking at an article here and the headline says:
'Childcare centres blacklist accredited training organisations providing poor graduates'. It
dates back to September 2014. Our media outlets were alerting this country to the fact that the
quality of some of the training that was occurring in this country, supported by government
loans, was not what it needed to be—for 18 months. Today we are in the chamber with a
piece of legislation in front of us with amendments that do not go far enough, let alone have
come in fast enough.

In October 2015, in this last month, we have had headlines about private training colleges
luring students with false promises of free iPads, the ACCC alleges. This is very late because
I have heard several times in this chamber and in the Federation Chamber members of the
House of Representatives bringing to the notice of the House occurrences like this happening
in their electorates. Yet, we have been hearing those stories for 18 months and we are here
today with amendments that do not go far enough. We have also heard media reports about
the unscrupulous actions of some RTOs preying on vulnerable people, gaming a system to
ensure their profits are skyrocketing while young people's training is diminishing and the
quality of that training is being called into question.

While we look at this 18-month time line, I could put that into a Victorian perspective with
the work that has happened in Victoria with Minister Steve Herbert and the things he has put
on the ground in a very short space of time to tidy up this sector, to find those organisations
which are operating in unethical ways and to straighten out the system, and in the process to
put value back into the TAFE sector. Let us face it, we are having a conversation here about a
sector which, through private operators, diminished our state—government-backed TAFEs
across this country, TAFEs people could rely on to deliver a quality product, TAFEs which,
over years, had delivered quality products and had been perceived to deliver reliable product
to young people.

Over the 18 months, we have had three different ministers—Minister Macfarlane, Minister
Birmingham, Minister Hartsuyker—but very little has been done while this debt and the loans
have skyrocketed from $699 million 2013 to $1.7 billion in 2014. It is alarming that it has
taken this long for action to occur. It is even more alarming that we are here today to see that
action and it still does not go far enough. The government has known that this has been an
issue for a considerable period of time and has done nothing. Strong regulation of this sector
is essential to ensure young people receive quality training and are not signing away for a life
of debt. Vulnerable students are still, as we stand here today, being ripped off by shonks and
sharks and this needs to stop.

We have some amendments which Labor would put forward to build on the work done by
the government to date, which we would strongly recommend go into the mix going forward.
We want to see the government appoint an industry funded national VET Ombudsman. We
want that person may. We want there to be a reliable complaints process of the highest quality, so that the space is marked clearly: if you are an unethical provider operating in this space, if you are gaming the system, we have put someone there who will track you, who will look into those complaints and who will hold you accountable. And we want the Auditor-General to conduct an audit on the use of VET FEE-HELP. We believe students require direct access to a complaints resolution process and we believe it because in our electorates, as in the electorates of those opposite, we are hearing stories every day of young people signing up for loans and for courses they are not accessing and sometimes are being blocked from accessing. We need to get this right and we need to get this right now.

Labor is also calling on the government to support what we had in place for over six months, to have the Australian National Audit Office look closely at the operation of this system. We also think some of the suggestions from those opposite, what appears to be, at first impressions, a two-day cooling off period, might sound fine but we are talking about an industry which has already gamed the system. We are talking about an industry which has already used incentives like iPad, which have already gone to the most vulnerable young people in our communities, and had them signed up for loans and for courses, without due diligence, without advice. We are talking about an industry that is advertising in our national papers, who are advertising online. We are talking about young people who think they are applying for a job to find that they are not applying for a job, who are called in for what they think is an interview, to find themselves with a course adviser who is suggesting they do these courses and who wants them to sign up then and there. With a two-day cooling off period, what would change? These people have already gamed this system: two pieces of paper, two different dates, the same vulnerable young person, they will sign it both times. It is not enough protection.

I am also alarmed today to read in our papers that the department has asked providers to provide them with the details of the young people who have loans. There seems to be a mismatch here. It seems crazy to me that the government and the department do not already know who has these loans. What Labor is suggesting today is that is the step that needs to be put in place, so that a young person, a person wanting to retrain, a person wanting to access more training later in life, when they go to sign up for one of these courses and to sign up for a VET FEE-HELP loan, there is another step and that step is that the course provider provides that information to the department and the department contacts that person to have their interest in the loan verified. This is just another step, but is one that takes the provider out of the picture. Miraculously, the department would then have the contact details for everybody that has a VET FEE loan.

The two-day cooling off period for me is at the core of this something that appears to be not even a bandaid. It is too easily gamed. It is lacking in thought. It is lacking in real policy work around how we can stop these RTOs behaving in this way. How do we stop young people being saddled with guilt that they do not even realise they have taken on? How do we ensure that these costs do not continue to blow out—even if they were delivering a quality product to the person who signed up to do them, even if they were providing a quality product, and even if the organisations delivering that product had processes in place to satisfy what could only be called reasonable completion rates in these circumstances.
We have seen reports of a 24 per cent completion rate by some of these organisations. I do not know how the business model could possibly survive with a 24 per cent completion rate. There needs to be more done in this space, and the amendments in this piece of legislation and what Labor is putting forward would tighten this up very quickly. It would ensure that people who are signing up for the course and for the loan have been through a process where there is an extra layer of checking going on.

We need this because we have heard the stories. We need this because our papers have exposed some of the behaviours that are going on. It is belated. It is 18 months that we have been in this space, and the amendments do not go far enough. I urge those opposite to think carefully about the amendment that would include the ombudsman and about a contact specifically between the department and the person signing up for the course and signing up for the loan, because I believe that these two measures in themselves may go a long way to ensuring that people are aware of what they are signing up for.

As to the quality of the training the ombudsman could be a great resource on the ground, where people know they have a complaints process and they know that it is going to be seen by somebody independent. We would have somebody there tracking and monitoring, and not relying on our newspapers to cover it and not relying on constant calls for another Senate inquiry to see if these amendments have been further gamed by this sector.

You do not have to look far to see where actions have been taken quickly. You only have to look at some state governments. I suggest the government look closely at what is happening in Victoria, where this sector has had a microscope put over it, where courses have been very carefully scrutinised to ensure that people are getting quality.

Ultimately we are talking about a system where a potentially vulnerable person is going to put themselves into debt to access training in the belief that it will lead to secure employment. The history of this space is extraordinary. I have a story from my own electorate of a young man who applied for a position—or what he thought was a position—on Seek, and found himself on this rollercoaster of 'sign up for this course'. But the whole course did not get delivered, and the young person had to chase the trainer for months to get what was promised and what the federal government had paid for.

I think the harshest story I heard was the story of a choir and a young job seeker from Warrnambool, Ben Mutch that was reported by Henrietta Cook and Michael Bachelard. This young person was pursued, contacted like a door-to-door salesman. He thought he had been somehow talent identified to take on a loan to do a course that did not lead to an outcome of a job. We are in a space where there are some piranhas operating, and we need to be vigilant. I ask those opposite to support the amendments that Labor puts forward, to look through the eyes of our young people and the industry that needs them trained in specific areas. I ask them to look at our amendments.

Mrs WICKS (Robertson) (18:50): I am pleased to rise to speak in support of the Higher Education Support Amendment (VET FEE-HELP Reform) Bill 2015 and to commend the work of the government in bringing this legislation before the House. This bill is about better protecting students and cleaning out dodgy training providers who have been taking advantage of a system Labor broke. Specifically, the bill before the House today amends the Higher Education Support Act 2003, and I would like to recognise the Minister for Vocational Education and Skills for his leadership of these reforms.
Before I go into why this bill is important to my electorate on the Central Coast, it is important to provide some context as to why we need to see changes made to secure the future of this sector. VET FEE-HELP has undergone major growth. This occurred when Labor axed the credit transfer arrangements between VET FEE-HELP funded qualifications and university qualifications in 2012. I am advised we went from 55,000 students and 119 providers in 2012 to more than 200,000 students and over 250 providers just two years later. That saw tuition fees deferred to the VET FEE-HELP loans scheme skyrocket from $325 million in 2012 up to $1.76 billion last year. In fact, it more than doubled in 12 months.

It should be noted that of course the government supports the principle of VET students being able to access a loan. For many students, this means they may undertake quality training in the same way a university student is supported through HECS-HELP. I understand that much of this growth has been because of the unscrupulous behaviour of a minority of providers and agents. They have been aggressively marketing the scheme, targeting vulnerable people, who are left with a significant debt but no benefit from training. It is often young people who are left with this debt. Quite frankly, this is not good enough.

Sadly but, unfortunately, not surprisingly, the system put in place by the former Labor government failed to put in place some necessary safeguards that would protect students and taxpayers from these rorts. Thankfully, Labor has admitted these failures. A couple of months ago the shadow minister for higher education, research, innovation and industry said: Labor introduced VET FEE HELP with good intentions but the scheme contains 'fundamental weaknesses' that need to be fixed. He also said 'regulators were not given enough power to crack down on rogue operators.'

The coalition is working hard on the right process to fix the mess left by the previous Labor government. We have announced a series of measures to restore integrity in the sector. These measures provide the laws necessary to prevent inappropriate enrolments and debts. This includes a two-day cooling-off period between enrolment and application for a loan. We are also introducing minimum prerequisites for higher-grade courses, and a parent's or guardian's signature is now required before most students under the age of 18 years can request a VET FEE-HELP loan.

The bill also protects students and taxpayers by making it easier for a student to have their debt cancelled where they have been signed up for a loan inappropriately. I am pleased to confirm that this cost will be recouped from providers, not taxpayers. We are also introducing minimum registration and trading history requirements and the ability to issue infringement notices attached to civil penalties for any breaches. The changes are designed to make it easier for the department to administer the scheme and also to assist in its partnerships with the Australian Skills Quality Authority. The government's changes also include banning flashy-but-misleading marketing like saying a course is free when clearly it is not and removing withdrawal fees and other barriers for students who want to withdraw from a course.

The government provided $18.2 million in the 2015-16 budget for compliance to support these measures. In short, we are protecting students and making it easier to enforce compliance. The government has consulted widely on the implementation of these reforms, including with dedicated forums. In my electorate these sorts of reforms are part of a conversation we have been having ever since I became the member for Robertson more than two years ago now. In March of last year I held a forum with a number of VET providers in
my electorate, and we talked about the need for a robust skills industry. We discussed the need for flexibility, training, stakeholder communication, youth employment and a range of other issues. I have spoken with a couple of providers who were in attendance that day about whether they have confidence in this government’s move to enhance the integrity of their sector, and the answer overwhelmingly is yes.

Tony Mylan, the CEO of ET Australia, based at Gosford, said that these proposed reforms are very welcome. Tony said that this should assist in better eliminating certain VET providers who were employing questionable methods, preventing them profiting from unscrupulous business methods in this sector. He shared with me that on the Central Coast there are many prospective students still being told that the diploma they are thinking of doing is free. In his words, Tony Mylan said: ‘I hope that the changes will assist those people who cannot see through the marketing hype of the shonks. I hope it forces VET providers to explain to prospective students in easy-to-read statements that the VET FEE-HELP loans, if taken on, will affect their credit ratings.’ Tony said, ‘It is vital that high-quality training is provided so genuine students may gain from completing their training course and gain employment in their field of study.’ ET Australia is working to see all training providers focused on delivering high-quality training for students on the Central Coast.

Eagle Wing Education and Training, who we have also been working with on a local level to hear from them what matters to them, also back these measures. Its CEO, Andrew Church, told me that Eagle Wing previously had 1,500 trainees successfully enrolled in traineeships, with high completion rates but that Labor’s changes to the VET sector have resulted in an unworkable system that is confusing and convoluted, which meant that many young, middle aged and unemployed people are not able to access the system and the opportunities to gain further education. As a result, Andrew said Eagle Wing Education and Training now only have 30 people enrolled. He told me that small operators who have a history of successfully training and educating students are being pushed aside. No longer under these reforms.

Nationally, the Australian Council for Private Education and Training also backs these measures. CEO Rod Camm said the council fully supports protecting the interests of students from exploitation by a small number of training providers who have tarnished the reputation of the VET sector. He said these changes have the full support of all training providers committed to quality, integrity and student welfare. Jim Barron, CEO of Group Training Australia, said they firmly back efforts to ensure that training is robust and that taxpayer funds are not squandered on dubious courses and qualifications offered by rogues and dodgy providers.

The government’s moves are strengthened by our strong investments in the sector. We have invested $5.6 billion this year for VET through funding to the states and territories to support their training systems and TAFE. There are also up to 250 training places funded through the $664 million Industry Skills Fund, which supports businesses to train their workers and provides free, independent skills advice. The government’s budget measures are also benefiting small businesses and organisations in my electorate that are linked to this training industry. This includes cutting the small business company tax rate to the lowest in almost 50 years and for two years giving all small businesses an immediate tax deduction on any asset they buy costing up to $20,000. We are also providing up to $200 million a year for the new Australian Apprenticeship Support Network to provide more help to employers in recruiting,
training and retaining apprentices. Trade support loans of up to $20,000 each are also available, and I am pleased to advise that nearly 30,000 trade support loans have been accessed since the program began.

The minister, in his speech, described the VET sector as one 'that has a long and proud tradition in Australia'. For many young people, it provides that bridge between school and work. For unemployed people, it often provides a pathway back into employment and a life off welfare. And for people in work, it can be the mechanism by which they can expand their skills and progress in their careers. Today I joined with the minister and my colleagues in declaring that the Australian government is committed to ensuring that we have a strong VET sector that helps students and ensures there is public confidence in the system. I note that many of those opposite have shared the government's concerns about the VET FEE-HELP program. I look forward to hearing their support in this debate for these reforms to improve the integrity of this vital scheme for our future. I commend this bill to the House.

Mr CONROY (Charlton) (19:00): The contribution by the member for Robertson unfortunately typified some of the problems that we have in policy reform in this area. The member for Robertson was very happy to blame Labor for the flaws in this area—and we have acknowledged that we did not put in enough safeguards when the system was designed—but the member for Robertson neglects to admit that they have been in power for over two years. This is a problem that has occurred under them. They have come to it late and they have tried to solve it, and I applaud them for coming to it. This is a problem that has occurred because of mistakes made by both sides of politics, but what we have heard from those opposite was a just a straight blame game about what occurred over two years ago. It is very unfortunate, because on this issue everyone should be committed to getting rid of, to driving out and to prosecuting some of the most outrageous and exploitative behaviour that I have seen in the private sector in this country.

That is why I am pleased to speak on the Higher Education Support Amendment (VET FEE-HELP Reform) Bill 2015. Vocational education is fundamentally important to jobs, economic growth and our future productivity and prosperity. It is an area I am passionate about, given the importance of manufacturing and mining to my home region of the Hunter. It is so disappointing that, in my home state of New South Wales, the Liberal government has decimated the TAFE sector, sacking thousands of employees and drastically increasing fees. This short-sighted approach will have a devastating impact on the future New South Wales economy when we are faced with a significant shortage of skilled workers.

I am contacted regularly by young constituents who have incurred a debt they knew nothing about for a course they did not do or a qualification they did not obtain. Labor are of the view that this bill does not go far enough but we will support the bill nonetheless. Labor call for the Auditor-General to investigate this issue and for the government to appoint a national VET ombudsman. There is a major problem regarding student loans for vocational education. The following figures clearly identify the significant challenges facing this sector: the number of students accessing VET FEE-HELP has grown by 103 per cent, Commonwealth funding for student loans in vocational education has increased by 151 per cent, the average loan amount per student has increased by 24 per cent, and the number of providers offering access to VET FEE-HELP has increased by 44 percent. It is unconscionable that scurrilous providers are preying on young Australians for their own
financial reward. Labor has been calling on the government to act on this problem for the last two years, and it is high time that this legislation is before the House.

As I said earlier, Labor will support this bill and is moving a sensible amendment recommending that the government appoint a national VET ombudsman and have the Auditor-General conduct an audit on the use of VET FEE-HELP. The department should also be required to provide students who access loans with a statement of the amount of debt they will incur and to ensure that the student responds to this statement before the debt is raised.

This bill aims to prevent inappropriate enrolments and debts through the following methods: a two day cooling-off period will be introduced between enrolment and the application for a VET FEE-HELP loan so that course enrolment is no longer confused with the loan application process; minimum prerequisites including literacy and numeracy will be introduced to ensure students can complete the higher level VET courses for which VET FEE-HELP can be accessed; and for minors under the age of 18 there will now be a requirement for a parent or guardian to sign-off on the loan, which will help protect younger students seeking vocational education.

There are other sensible safeguards and protections that are necessary. The bill will ensure that it is easier for students to have their debt cancelled when they have signed up to a loan inappropriately and for the government to recoup the cost from providers, minimum registration and training requirements will be introduced to make sure that new VET FEE-HELP provider applicants have a proven history of delivering sound training, and infringement notices and financial penalties will be introduced for breaching the VET FEE-HELP guidelines.

Labor welcomes the fact that the government is finally acting on this issue, but more needs to be done. It is a clear that we need to appoint a national VET inspector for the sector. The government should be creating this position to ensure the problems we have seen now do not continue to happen. The Australian Council for Private Education and Training supports the appointment of a such an inspector, and the reports of the Senate inquiry into the operation, regulation and funding of private vocational education and training also recommend such an official.

The amendment moved by my colleague the member for Cunningham would require the Department of Education to notify prospective students in writing about the amount of debt they are about to undertake and would require a response from the student before the debt is raised. This is a sensible and logical amendment which will provide a much needed safeguard. Labor has also requested that the Auditor-General investigate VET FEE-HELP to make sure that skills funding is being used in accordance with how the legislation intended it to be used, and it is pleasing that the Auditor-General has requested that a performance audit be included in the Australian National Audit Office's work program for 2015-16.

I now turn to the broader debate around vocational education and training. Labor has a proud record of investing in skills and ensuring that students and workers have the skills they need to contribute to and participate in the modern workforce. The Liberal approach to vocational education is very different. The Abbott-Turnbull government has cut $2 billion from the skills portfolio. The coalition should hang their heads in shame at this counterproductive and illogical cut. The new Prime Minister likes to talk about innovation and productivity and new technologies. I say to him: it is pointless to talk about these things...
when you are cutting investment in skills and vocational education that are so fundamentally important for jobs, innovation and productivity. And at the state level, the Liberal approach is the same. The Baird Liberal government in my own state has a distinctly anti-TAFE agenda. At both the federal and state levels, the conservative side of politics is giving up on vocational education and, in so doing, is damaging Australia's future prosperity and economic growth. This is the context within which we debate this bill.

Before talking about some of the experiences of my own constituents that has driven this change, I briefly want to bring to the attention of the House a particularly disturbing incident in Sydney. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission has commenced proceedings against Unique International College in the Federal Court, alleging that its enrolment and marketing system was 'in all circumstances, unconscionable and in contravention of Australian consumer law'. The ACCC alleges that Unique targeted members of rural, remote and Indigenous communities to sign up to diploma courses without properly explaining to the students that they would be taking on a government debt as a result of the program. The offer of a free laptop was targeted at disadvantaged groups. Unique has collected approximately $140 million in government loans. This is worse than cowboy behaviour. This is deliberately targeting and preying on vulnerable young people and vulnerable communities. I commend the ACCC for its actions in deregistering Unique, and in commencing the proceedings against it in the Federal Court.

I have been contacted by several constituents who have had horrible experiences regarding HECS-HELP for vocational courses. A constituent of mine named Colin, from Edgeworth, came to my office recently seeking help with a debt he had accrued as a result of enrolling in a Diploma of Business at Evocca College last year. Within two weeks of enrolling in the course he changed roles with his employer, which resulted in significantly increased work duties. Realising he was no longer going to be able to complete the course, he explained to a representative from the college that he wished to withdraw. Whilst the option of deferment was discussed, I am told that he insisted on withdrawing completely and was assured by the representative that this would be arranged. He recalls being told that there was nothing further he needed to do.

However, when he completed his tax return this year, he was informed by his accountant that Evocca College had charged him for the whole course and he now had a HECS-HELP debt in excess of $11,000. He immediately called the college and spoke with a compliance officer about the debt and was advised that, despite not taking part in any study modules or submitting any assessments, he was still liable to pay for the course as the withdrawal he had requested was not processed. He told her about his request to cancel the course verbally over the phone, but was told nothing had been written down or recorded and unless he could prove that he had spoken to a representative of the college to cancel it, he had no recompense. My office has supported this constituent to seek a formal withdrawal and waiver of fees from the college. Whilst I am pleased that this has now occurred—and I am grateful to all the public servants involved in such a process—I note this involved long and complex interactions with the Department of Education and the Australian Taxation Office. This is clearly a less than ideal process.

How is it fair that a prospective student, with little affiliation with a provider and its systems, bears the full burden of responsibility when it comes to documenting their
withdrawal from a course? How is it fair that, despite it being patently obvious to the provider that a student has not engaged with course content in a meaningful way, that the responsibility of proving this falls upon the student? How is it fair, if you contact the person who signed you up for a course, to be told there is nothing further required of you when you seek to withdraw from it, and are then charged tens of thousands of dollars anyway? Colin’s example demonstrates why we are debating this bill and why these reforms are so urgently needed.

Another constituent has contacted my office regarding a HECS FEE-HELP debt accrued with the Australian Institute of Professional Education. Her name is Danielle and she recently started her first full-time job and submitted a tax return for the first time. Understandably, she was shocked to discover from her accountant that for the past two years she had been accruing a debt which is now worth more than $7,500. After seeking assistance from my office, she was able to ascertain that she unknowingly signed up to an online training course with the provider and contacted them to request an investigation in to how the debt has been accrued. Whilst the matter is still ongoing, this person has indicated to me that she has no recollection of signing up to this course. She tells me that she can recall being approached over the phone and in person by brokers representing a training provider some years ago, and on one occasion she gave personal details such as her tax file number and date of birth to a representative. She does not believe that at any time it was explained clearly to her that providing this information would result in fees being charged. She has never had any interaction with the college, has received no qualification yet she has a debt in excess of $7,500 as a result. Worse still, she had no idea that the debt had been sitting there for years. How many other people have debts that they have no idea about?

As I said at the start of my contribution, vocational education is of fundamental importance if the Australian economy is to grow, if employment opportunities are to expand, and if we are to remain competitive in an ever-changing and dynamic global economy. Labor proudly believes in the dignity and power of work, and vocational education is a vital component in ensuring a skilled and productive workforce. What has happened relating to VET-FEE HELP loans these past two years is a disgrace. This bill is a welcome step in addressing the problems the sector has faced.

Labor calls on the government to pass our sensible amendments which would bring greater security and safeguards to the system. That said, I do welcome this overdue action by the government. I applaud them for coming to the party and I applaud them recognising that there is a problem. After two years in power they are trying to fix it and I do genuinely thank them for their approach on this issue. More can be done. The amendments should be accepted by the government and should be passed.

I will finish on this point: ultimate responsibility for what has occurred does not rest with the current coalition government, it does not rest with the previous Labor government but with the shonks who have distorted the system and who have ripped hundreds of millions of taxpayers’ money out of system while exploiting vulnerable people by making promises that they could not fulfil with offers of free laptops and guaranteed jobs. They targeted people with low literacy, low numeracy and people who were desperate to get a job to advance themselves, to have a house, to pursue a career. I stand here and will conclude by condemning those people. Those people, quite frankly, are scum. They are people who exploit the hopes and dreams of the most vulnerable in our community and, in doing so, rip off Australian
taxpayers. So no matter what happens in this place, no matter if the amendments get up or not, those people need to be held responsible for their exploitative actions that give every private sector training provider in this country a bad name.

Mr McCormack (Riverina—Assistant Minister to the Deputy Prime Minister) (19:14): Strong words indeed from the member for Charlton. I do commend him for those comments he made towards the end of his speech about the fact that the blame does lie specifically with those unscrupulous merchants who want to take advantage of, as he put it, 'some of our most vulnerable people'. I also commend him for the work that he has done in his own electorate office to help those people who have been victims. That is what good local members do. But he did get a little bit political and so I cannot let him go completely unscathed. I cannot just give him praise entirely without pulling him up—

Ms Butler interjecting—

Mr McCormack: but I am not going to, member for Griffith—about the fact that Labor did have the opportunity to do something about this and Labor chose not to. We, as a coalition government, are getting on with the job of fixing what Labor did not.

The Higher Education Support Amendment (VET FEE-HELP Reform) Bill 2015 amends Higher Education Support Act 2003, strengthening the protections for students in the vocational educational training sector and pushing unscrupulous training providers out of the market. The member for Charlton understands that those unscrupulous training providers need to be pushed out of the market. He called them scum—he is probably right, it is a little bit strong—but he is probably right. They are taking advantage of vulnerable people. They are ripping off money from government coffers that could otherwise be spent far more wisely—indeed, far better in the entire education sector.

Why is this bill necessary? Well, VET FEE-HELP has undergone higher than expected growth since Labor axed the credit transfer arrangements between VET FEE-HELP, funded qualifications and university qualifications back in 2012. If you look at the figures, in 2012 nominal loans for VET FEE-HELP were $225 million, with 55,115 students and 119 approved providers. If you look at the figures just two years later, in 2014 nominal loans were $1.757 billion, with 202,776 students and approved providers numbering 254. That is massive growth. Much of this expansion is because of the unscrupulous behaviour of—I would like to say a minority—providers and agents who aggressively market the scheme.

They target vulnerable people, as we have heard from the member for Charlton, members on my side and other opposition members as well. What the unscrupulous providers do is leave those on whom they prey with a significant debt, but no benefit from training—absolutely no benefit. The system under the former Labor government failed to put in place the necessary safeguards to protect students and taxpayers from the rorting and from the rip-offs. Do not just take my word from it. The chief commissioner and the chief executive officer of the Australian Skills Quality Authority, Chris Robinson, had this to say in The Australian on 17 July this year; that the expansion:

precipitated unprecedented examples of unethical student recruitment practices and astronomical fees as dodgy operators jumped into a new and easy government-supplied pool of money.

As the member for Lalor quite correctly pointed out, they were gaming the system—absolutely gaming the system.
But Labor had a chance to act in 2013 when the first complaints were made to the national training regulator, the Australian Skills Quality Authority. What did Labor do? Nothing. They did not do anything. They did not act. That is why it has taken the member for Cowper, the minister responsible, the Minister for Vocational Education and Skills, to come into this chamber on 15 October—

Ms Butler: Two years later.

Mr McCormack: No, it is not two years later. You should have done something about it back in 2013. I appreciate you were not here then. The minister is doing something about it. The member for Cowper was the assistant minister for employment for two years and four days before taking on his new role, and he understands the need for jobs.

Not only will this bill weed out and eradicate those unscrupulous operators; it will, ultimately, with funds being better distributed to where they ought to go, I believe, lead to an increase in jobs. That is what training, vocational education, TAFEs and universities are all about: getting people into the workforce and getting people better paid jobs. That is why this bill is important.

On 18 September, the shadow minister for higher education, research, innovation and industry, Senator Kim Carr, finally acknowledged the need for stronger measures and, as reported in Melbourne’s *The Age*, he said:

Labor introduced VET FEE-HELP with good intentions but the scheme contains ‘fundamental weaknesses’ that need to be fixed.

And he added:

… and regulators were not given enough power to crack down on rogue operators.

They should have been given enough power and could have been given enough power when Labor was in power, but they were not. On 12 March this year, the Assistant Minister for Education and Training at the time, Senator Simon Birmingham, announced a series of measures to finally target that unscrupulous behaviour which has left some students with debt but, unfortunately, no qualifications. That is the great sadness about this. Young people—many of whom are young, some are not so young—think they are doing the right things by themselves and by their future career prospects are going into debt and taking the inducement of an iPad or a laptop or whatever else. And all they left with is just a huge debt and no qualifications and no improved prospects for a better career, which is what they hoped to do in the first place and what got them in the first place.

Senator Birmingham said that these measures, which he talked about back in March, would seek to stamp out unscrupulous behaviour, which will assist in restoring integrity in the sector. We heard the member for Robertson earlier talking about the need to restore integrity to the sector. These measures have been progressively introduced since 1 April this year, and they are already—I am pleased to report to the chamber—having the desired effect. They are having a good impact.

This bill provides the laws necessary to implement specific measures from 1 January next year, and it needs to be passed as a priority. We have only three weeks of parliament left. It needs to pass through this House. It needs to get through the Senate. It has to be passed as a priority.
This bill seeks to prevent inappropriate enrolments and debts by doing the following: introducing a two-day cooling-off period, as it is called, between enrolment and application for a VFH loan; introducing minimum prerequisites to ensure that students can complete the higher level VET courses, diploma and above, for which VET FEE-HELP is available; and requiring a parent's or guardian's signature before a student who is under 18 years—and there are many of those—can request a VET FEE-HELP loan, with exemptions for minors considered independent under the Social Security Act 1991. This bill will further protect students and taxpayers because it will make it easier for a student to have their debt cancelled where they have been signed up for a loan inappropriately, and the costs will be recouped from providers to protect taxpayers. It is important to protect the taxpayers because it is all our money that is being ripped off here.

This bill will introduce minimum registration and trading history requirements for new VET FEE-HELP provider applicants to ensure that those approved have a proven history of delivering quality training. So there will be checks and balances and measures to make sure that those people who are approved providers are in fact just that. It will also introduce infringement notices attached to civil penalties for breaches of the VET FEE-HELP guidelines, and let us hope those penalties are high and severe. They need to be. It will introduce technical amendments to strengthen the department's administration of the scheme and its partnerships with the Australian Skills Quality Authority to monitor and enforce compliance.

Minister Hartsuyker, in introducing this legislation on 15 October, described it as 'a very important and timely bill', and he is right, of course. He is very right. As he said at the time:

This bill will strengthen the protections for students in the Vocational Education and Training sector and push unscrupulous training providers out of the market.

It absolutely has to.

I am pleased to represent the Riverina electorate, where we have so much training going on. In fact, I have described my home town of Wagga Wagga as 'Australia's learning capital' because it is. This is why not only will this legislation strengthen the national effort but certainly, in the Riverina, the improved benefits are going to flow right through. I am not saying that there are unscrupulous providers in the Riverina, but the money that will be gained because it is not going to unscrupulous providers will provide benefit for the entire system and hopefully flow on and trickle down to those regional areas, one of which is the Riverina, where so much training is done.

I will give a bit of a snapshot for the benefit of the House of the sorts of things that we do in Wagga Wagga. The Riverina is blessed that its two cities are such important regional hubs and leaders in their fields of expertise, Griffith being the irrigation capital and the centre of the nation's food basket and Wagga Wagga, as I said before, being Australia's learning capital. We have Charles Sturt University providing both on-campus and many offshore international courses for many, many students, including my son Alexander at the moment, who is doing a business course there as a cadet accountant. My daughter, Georgina, also studied there. She studied her English and drama teaching as a high school teacher. Wagga has a wonderful TAFE college. My youngest son, Nicholas, who is starting out as an electrical apprentice on 18 January, will no doubt reap the benefits of what they do at Wagga Wagga TAFE.
Every Royal Australian Air Force person at some stage or another, if they have an extended career in the Air Force, will end up at Forest Hill, Wagga Wagga. Wagga Wagga is also the home of the soldier, with every Army recruit being trained at Blamey Barracks, Kapooka. I know that the member for Canberra, opposite, in her shadow Defence role, knows well—she has been there; I have been there with her to witness the passing-out parade—just what a great job the commandant, Colonel Steve Jobson, and his officers do in putting the polish on those fine young recruits, men and women, who go out to serve this nation and do it so very well, continuing on that long line of khaki which stretches right back to 25 April 1915.

Wagga Wagga has a Navy base, an important training and strategic facility. It is many hundreds of kilometres from the nearest drop of sea water, but we have a Navy base at Wagga Wagga doing important training with HMAS Albatross at Nowra.

The Regional Express Australian Airline Pilot Academy, out at the airport, in Don Kendell Drive, is a truly outstanding facility run by people who demand the best. They are inspiring the new breed of young pilots. You can add two rural clinical schools, Notre Dame and UNSW, providing medicine courses for the training of our future doctors. You have so many training opportunities and so many places of teaching excellence at Wagga Wagga that it deserves the title of Australia's learning capital. Indeed it does.

I will just get back to this bill. The Australian government are committed to ensuring that we continue to have a strong VET sector which helps students to develop the skills that they need for the jobs of today and to take advantage of being in the most exciting time in Australia's history. As the Prime Minister has pointed out, it is an exciting time to be in Australia. We have new ministries in innovation and in productivity. I am glad to see that science is back as a portfolio. Certainly we are doing the sorts of things that are benefiting business. We are getting on with the important task of fulfilling the three most important things in Australia, and they are (1) jobs, (2) jobs and (3) jobs. That is what we need to do as a government. That is what we are doing as a government. Jobs are so very critical to our future prosperity and our future growth.

We need Australia's best and brightest going to our colleges and our universities. They do not deserve to be ripped off. They will not be ripped off under this higher education support amendment bill, and that is why I commend this very important legislation to the House tonight.

Ms BUTLER (Griffith) (19:30): I want to say to Australians: your taxes should support vocational education for the community's benefit, not for the private benefit of a handful of companies. In contributing to the debate in relation to the Higher Education Support Amendment (VET FEE-HELP Reform) Bill 2015, I want to talk about vocational education and why it is needed to make sure that Australians have the skills to do the jobs of the future. I also want to record that there is a strong community benefit in having an educated, trained workforce, and so it is right that vocational education and training should be publicly funded. Taxpayers' money should work for community benefit, not for private interests.

As society and technology change, so does the nature of work. The jobs of the future will likely be different to the jobs of today because of widespread automation, amongst other reasons. In this year's report, Australia's future workforce?, the Committee for Economic Development of Australia said:
Economic progress has not been smooth nor has it been clean. Technological change has frequently created losers, but when job losses have been caused by productivity-enhancing technologies, they have tended to create demand via higher incomes and lower prices, which have generated new jobs economy wide. The next stage of the industrial revolution promises to continue this trend but in new challenging ways. The extension of computerisation into almost all aspects of human activity threatens to radically reshape the workforce of tomorrow.

It went on to say:

Modelling conducted for this report suggests almost five million jobs face a high probability of being replaced in the next decade or two while a further 18.4 per cent of the workforce has a medium probability of having their roles eliminated.

Future jobs will more often than not be skilled jobs, and will require digital literacy. Vocational education and training can equip students with the foundational skills they will need for the future.

For example, at Southbank in my electorate, TAFE Brisbane is offering courses in digital design and IT and in business, along with many other courses. The increasing demand for skills and the changing nature of the skills that will be needed, means that Australia needs a strong, high-quality and accessible vocational training and education system. That sort of system serves the interest of the individual, who gets the benefit of the education and training, and, more broadly, serves the community and national interests.

It is imperative that we as a nation prepare for the future economy and the future of work. We need to build productivity, to grow workforce participation and to spur economic growth. We also need to combat the rising inequality that threatens the peaceful and prosperous nature of our country. If we are serious about those tasks then we must ensure, among many other things, that we have a vocational education and training system that is fit for its modern purpose of giving all Australians the opportunity to build their foundational skills and knowledge.

That means that when our community invests in vocational education and training, we are investing in our nation's future. That is why the Abbott-Turnbull government's $2 billion cuts to skills funding is such a problem for our country. In contrast, the last Labor government increased Commonwealth annual funding for vocational education and training by 25 per cent in real terms, with over $19 billion invested over five years as well as investing in TAFE campus infrastructure and technology upgrades. And because we understand the importance of vocational education and training to Australia's economy and to our community, Labor backs publicly funded TAFE. In March this year the opposition leader, Bill Shorten, announced that Labor in government will continue to back TAFE. At the time he said:

Labor has expressed its concern on numerous occasions that the massive expansion of private providers in training has brought with it unintended consequences where we’re seeing some private providers gaming the system. And I think one of the solutions here is to help rebuild and restore confidence in TAFE, …

... … ...

There is a role for private providers in training and there are some private provider organisations doing outstanding work, but I think there is mounting community concern that on the one hand we’ve seen the Liberals dismantling and attacking TAFE, and the on the other hand, we’ve seen the ‘leave it to the market’ attitude of private providers in training and we’re seeing a long tail of underperformance and indeed in some cases scandalous behaviour.
In my view, the best way you can make sure you get a great vocational experience as a consumer is to choose TAFE.

The Liberals hate TAFE, and have tried to undermine it at every opportunity—gutting its funding, just like Campbell Newman did in my state of Queensland. Thankfully, Premier Palaszczuk and her government are working to save TAFE. The Labor government is reinvesting in TAFE and reinvigorating an institution that has successfully trained more than 1.3 million Queenslanders, working hand in hand with industry partners and delivering strong employment outcomes for our next generation of skilled workers.

Funding vocational education and training is an investment in Australia’s future, as I said. And taxpayers’ money should work for the community benefit, not for private interests—as I have also said. But in the past 18 months VET FEE-HELP, which is the income-contingent loans scheme for vocational education and training, has become a major national scandal, and is severely affecting students, the Commonwealth budget and the nation.

Damian Oliver and Serena Yu of the University of Sydney wrote about what is currently going on in the vocational education and training sector in their report entitled *The capture of public wealth by the for-profit sector*. And the figures about the rise of the private sector vocational providers and the corresponding impost on the public purse paint quite a picture. The National Centre for Vocational Education Research has reported:

There was a significant increase in VET FEE-HELP activity in 2013 and 2014 compared with earlier stages of the contingent loan scheme. Specifically, the number of approved VET FEE-HELP providers has doubled since 2012, to be just under 250 by 2014, with the number of VET FEE-HELP assisted students more than tripling over the same period, to nearly 160,000. Most of this growth has come from the private provider, full-fee-paying market, which constituted 76% of VET FEE-HELP assisted students in 2014 (compared with 54% in 2012).

The VET FEE-HELP debt ballooned from around $699 million in 2013 to $1.7 billion in 2014. In that period the average loan amount per student increased by 24 percent. These increases suggest that there is a problem in the way that these income-contingent loans are being used, and they indicate a very significant impost on taxpayers. And there are shockingly low completion rates for courses covered by these loans.

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research has said:

The students most likely to access VET FEE-HELP in 2013—14 are those attending externally and who are not employed.

When looking at the probability of course completion for eligible students who commenced their training during the scheme’s earlier years (between 2009 and 2012), those studying externally who are not employed have a particularly low predicted probability of completion (with a 10% probability of completing their training). This is compounded further should they be studying an advanced diploma (with an 8% probability of completing their training).

The centre goes on to say:

Given the substantial increase in recent years in the number of assisted students now attending externally who are not employed (increasing from 11,128 to 52,506 students between the two periods, an increase of about 370%), this may not bode well for future course completions of VET FEE-HELP assisted students.

This year there has been extensive media coverage of dodgy conduct on the part of some providers. For example, Fairfax has reported:
The industry, by design, is "demand driven". But it's colleges, not students, driving the demand. They employ an army of salesmen (known euphemistically as "brokers") who can earn millions in profits from taxpayer subsidies.

The dodgy brokers, such as some of those working for Melbourne's Phoenix Institute, target people living in public housing, the intellectually disabled, the drug addicted and non-English speakers.

They offer a free laptop as an incentive to get the signature of a new "student", then fill out the literacy and numeracy test themselves (or coach the client through it).

That was, as I say, a report from Fairfax. I have heard similar stories in my work as chair of Labor's cost of living committee. Community groups tell stories of people getting signed up into long-term debt, for a qualification they will likely never complete, with the offer of a free iPad. The Consumer Action Law Centre are particularly concerned at some of the alarming reports they have been receiving, and they are encouraging the Commonwealth to take action—greater action than has been taken in this bill, I might add.

The recent Senate inquiry heard of concerning marketing techniques and business models from private providers. And, significantly, the wholesale transfer of public money into private hands was revealed in detail in that Senate report. Private company Careers Australia had grown from 5,000 students in 2011 to 20,000 in 2015—300 per cent growth. Australian Careers Network had grown more than 400 per cent in one year, with an average taxpayer payment of $3,303 per student. As the report says:

Figures for VET FEE-HELP payments show that the growth in payments for some private companies has been dramatic. Careers Australia has had payments increase—this is taxpayer money—from $3.539 million in 2011 to $108.172 million in 2014. Evocca College, trading as ACTE Pty Ltd grew from $1.831 million in 2011, to $24.958 million in 2012, to $131.25m in 2014.

All of this is taxpayers' money. So it is not just the individuals who suffer from the current system; taxpayers suffer because rorting the income-contingent loans system really just takes taxpayers' money out of public hands and gives it to private, for-profit firms, and the whole sector suffers because of the reputational damage this causes the sector. That is a problem for the ethical providers seeking to attract students, and it is a national problem too, because education is an important export for us, and that means that quality matters. As I mentioned earlier, those private sector firms have low completion rates, meaning not only that the individual goes into debt and the taxpayer pays the company but that the individual generally does not even end up with a qualification. So, under the current arrangements, the individual loses, the taxpayer loses and the nation loses. Only the private firms' shareholders and executives are the winners.

Labor has been calling for action for almost two years. We have called for an investigation by the Auditor-General. We have asked that the ACCC run an education campaign to help people recognise shonky practices. We have spoken to ministers and their departments about a number of issues over this time. There has been a House of Representatives inquiry and two Senate inquiries, which heard of numerous abuses of the system. The government introduced new national standards that came into effect in April 2015, but the problems with the system are still occurring.

This legislation seeks to address some of the issues in relation to VET FEE-HELP loans, but it does not go far enough. That is why we are moving amendments and that is why we will
continue to call for the government to crack down on shonky practices. I hope that the government will support our amendments. I hope that the government will support, for example, a requirement that people actually tell the department that they have accepted the new obligation to enter into the arrangement with the college to get the qualification before finding out some time later that suddenly they have a $7,000 or $11,000 debt, as the member for Charlton spoke of in respect of some of his constituents. I hope that the government will take further and stronger action to try to crack down on these incredibly shonky and dodgy practices that are happening in the vocational education and training sector through the misuse of income-contingent loans—which, as I have said, is the wholesale transfer of taxpayers' money into private firms' hands. I hope that the government will take further action, because people's taxes should support vocational education for the community's benefit, not for the private benefit of a handful of companies, their shareholders and their executives.

This is a significant national issue. We face immense challenges because of automation and the other issues that are going to change the shape of work in the future. Work is going to be very different in 10 years, in 20 years and in 50 years. It is imperative that Australians have the skills and the knowledge needed to be able to do the new jobs of the future. When those five million jobs disappear because of automation, we need Australians to be ready for the high-skilled jobs of the future—the types of jobs that require digital literacy. That means being in a position where we have a strong and high-quality vocational education and training system that can deliver to students so that all students, regardless of background or socioeconomic status, have the opportunity to obtain those skills and that knowledge.

We know that that is important for their own individual lives and prosperity, but it is also important for the nation's prosperity. When you have increasing inequality, as this country does, and when have an increasing spread of income distribution and are seeing higher amounts of income at the top levels, that is the beginning of a serious inequality problem. We know on this side of the House that inequality matters not just because some people are better off than others but because great inequality contributes to destabilisation and insecurity and, as Christine Lagarde of the IMF has said, is actually a handbrake on economic growth.

We are a party that believes in economic growth, and we are a party that believes in opportunity. We believe that all people in this community and this society should have the opportunity to benefit from the nation's prosperity and to form a part of the nation's prosperity. That means, among a range of other things, workforce participation. That is why, for Labor, TAFE is not some sort of side issue and vocational education is not some sort of thing that you tack on; it is a fundamental, foundational responsibility of the Commonwealth to ensure that all people in Australia can gain access to vocational training and education in a way that allows them to develop their knowledge and skills and play a part in the future workforce. I commend the amendments to the House.

Ms MARINO (Forrest—Chief Government Whip) (19:44): The Higher Education Support Amendment (VET FEE-HELP Reform) Bill 2015 amends the Higher Education Support Act 2003 to strengthen the protections for students in the vocational education and training sector, and to push the unscrupulous training providers out of the market.

VET FEE-HELP—why is it needed? VET FEE-HELP has undergone unanticipated growth since Labor axed the credit-transfer arrangements between VET FEE-HELP-funded
qualifications and university qualifications in 2012. Throughout this debate, I have been disappointed to hear Labor members suffer from selective and collective amnesia about the source of this problem that we are seeking to address with this bill. Listening to the Labor members speak, it is really an attempt to rewrite history; pretend that they were not responsible for the dreadful legislation that enabled the rorts and the unconscionable conduct that we have seen in this instance. Much of the growth in this sector has been because of the unscrupulous behaviour of, probably, a minority of providers and agents who aggressively market the scheme, targeting vulnerable people who are left with a significant debt but no benefit from the training itself. This has put a real stain on the quality providers. It is something they certainly feel very greatly. It is a real issue for those young people, especially those who do not achieve any qualification as a result of signing up to a course.

The system under the former Labor government failed to put in place the necessary safeguards for these young people; to protect students, and taxpayers as well, from rorts. Labor failed to do this. Let there be no equivocation on this: Labor failed to do that. They actually had the chance in 2013 when the first complaints—I have heard many statements here about when the government should have acted—were made to the national training regulator, the Australian Skills Quality Authority, but Labor failed to do anything.

Labor's system allowed colleges to sign up students for, often, useless or quick-fix type courses, and to inflate the costs of courses. On 18 September 2015, the shadow minister for higher education, research innovation and industry, Senator Kim Carr, finally acknowledged the need for stronger measures. It took a while. Senator Carr, as reported in *The Age*, said:

Labor introduced VET FEE-HELP with good intentions but the scheme contains 'fundamental weaknesses' that need to be fixed.

And he said:

… regulators were not given enough power to crack down on rogue operators.

This is the first time that Senator Kim Carr and Labor actually admitted that they had created a problem in the way that they had drafted the legislation for this system.

What we have seen, as has been articulated by others, is that this has been a licence to print money—in some instances, taxpayers' money. A great many young people were affected by this. On 12 March, the Assistant Minister for Education and Training at the time, Senator Simon Birmingham, announced a series of measures to crack down on unscrupulous behaviour—the sort of behaviour that has left some students with debt and absolutely no qualifications. What a disaster.

These measures which seek to stamp out unscrupulous behaviour will assist in restoring integrity in the sector, especially for the good operators, and there are many of those. We want to see the young people end up with the skills and training that they so need for the future. The government has been introducing these measures progressively since April 2015, and they are already having an impact. The bill provides the laws necessary to implement specific measures from 1 January 2016. It should be passed as a priority. It seeks to prevent those inappropriate enrolments and debts by introducing a two-day cooling off period; introducing minimum prerequisites to ensure students can complete the higher level VET courses, for which VFH is available; and requiring a parent's or guardian's signature before a student under 18 can request a VFH loan.
The bill will also further protect students and taxpayers—it is important to protect taxpayers—by making it easier for a student to have their debt cancelled, where they have been signed up for a loan inappropriately; a cost that will be recouped from providers to protect the taxpayers as well as the student. It will introduce minimum registration and trading history requirements for new VFH provider applicants to ensure those approved have a proven history of delivering quality training; introduce infringements notices attached to civil penalties for breaches of the guidelines; and introduce technical amendments to strengthen the department's administration of the scheme, and its partnerships with Australian Quality Skills Authority to monitor and enforce compliance.

There are a raft of measures here. In addition to the reforms introduced by this bill, the government's changes to VET FEE-HELP also include banning inducements for enrolments—we have heard plenty about that—from 1 April; banning withdrawal fees and other barriers to students wishing to withdraw from a course before a debt is incurred; banning inappropriate marketing; making providers responsible for the actions of their agents; and, from 1 January 2016, banning providers from levying the full debt load up-front, regardless of a student's progress through the course. This is achieved in this legislation by requiring training providers to have multiple census dates and proportionate levying of fees across each course. The government provided $18.2 million in the 2015-16 budget for compliance to support these measures. The government has been aware of the problem created by Labor and has been progressively working through trying to fix just another mess. The government consulted widely, as is important, on the implementation of the reforms, including through dedicated forums after the announcement in March.

The government also appointed a VET FEE-HELP reform working group, comprised of representatives of training providers; students—of course, importantly; employers, the ones who have to employ young people and those who take these courses; and consumer law advocates and regulators to advise on the implementation of the reforms, including the measures in this bill.

Labor set up the VET FEE-HELP scheme and expanded access to it in 2012 but, as I said earlier, they simply failed to put in place the necessary safeguards to protect students and taxpayers from its abuse. That is what we are trying to fix tonight with this bill. The first complaints were received by the Department of Education and Training as far back as 2011, yet Labor failed to take any action. They failed to introduce a dedicated compliance regime for the VET FEE-HELP scheme.

The government has committed $5.6 billion this year for VET through funding to the states and territories to support their training systems and TAFE; direct funding for apprenticeships and the Industry Skills Fund; and student loans for VET students. We have also funded up to 250,000 training places funded through the $664 million Industry Skills Fund, which supports businesses to train their workers and provides free, independent skills advice to help businesses take advantage of growth opportunities—great practical initiatives.

We will also provide financial support to almost 80,000 employers this year to help with the costs of employing an apprentice through the Australian Apprenticeships Incentives Program. Again, these are very practical ways of assisting both the employers and the people seeking employment.
The government has invested in very tough new standards for all training providers that started on 1 April 2015, including $68 million to establish the Australian Skills Quality Authority to target poor-quality providers, whilst lifting the red tape burden on consistently high-performing providers—something that is important in the system.

We have developed in conjunction with states and territories a new national training complaints hotline—13 38 73, if you are listening—to make it easier for people to have their complaints about training heard and actioned. And we are supporting the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's investigation into VET FEE-HELP complaints.

By contrast, Labor cut more than one billion dollars from apprenticeships between the 2011-12 budget and the 2013 federal election, including millions of dollars in incentives taken out overnight on the eve of the 2013 election. In the 12 months after Labor discontinued the $1500 standard employer commencement incentive for existing worker apprentice and trainee commencements halved from 126,200 in June 2012 before the cut to 61,600 in the June quarter after the cut. The number of apprentices and trainees in training dropped by more than 100,000 over the same period.

Labor failed to deliver appropriate national standards for registered training organisations, failed to properly fund the regulator and failed to protect students and taxpayers from dodgy providers. And tonight we are attempting to clean up some of the dreadful mess that Labor created.

An independent review of Labor's signature Productivity Places Program found it could not be determined—and this is a classic—who had been trained, how many people had been trained and how many had been given the contracts to do the training. What an absolute mess, and even Labor abandoned it before the funding was due to run out.

When I look at the skills that are needed—and each member in this place knows of the opportunities and challenges ahead—I am pleased that we are also trialling innovative P-TECH style models of education in schools to give students an industry supported pathway in science, technology and maths. Our goal is to put industry at the heart of the training system by establishing the Australian Industry and Skills Committee and reforming training package development while, at the same time, abolishing more than a dozen of Labor's bureaucratic skills committees—a committee to have a committees.

We are also cutting the small business company tax rate to the lowest rate in almost 50 years and, for two years, giving all small businesses an immediate tax deduction on any asset they buy costing up to $20,000. This will benefit more than 95 per cent of all Australian businesses, including thousands of small businesses and tradespeople who employ an apprentice.

The government is providing up to $200 million a year for the new Australian Apprenticeship Support Network to provide more help to employers, particularly small business employers, to recruit, train and retain apprentices. The government will support more than 300,000 apprentices a year across more than 420 locations—much more than under Labor's old Apprenticeship Centres.

Our policy targets apprenticeship completions, which hovered at around 50 per cent under Labor. We will do this by providing more financial support to apprentices through Trade
Support Loans of up to $20,000, and nearly $30,000 of these Trade Support Loans have been accessed since the program began in July 2014. The loan assists apprentices with the costs of living with the greatest support available in the early years when the apprenticeship wages are at their lowest. This is practical direct encouragement for not only for business but young people seeking training and, again, as I said when I started: we are cleaning up yet another Labor mess with this legislation this evening. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr THISTLETHWAITE (Kingsford Smith) (19:59): I am speaking in support of the amendment moved by the member for Cunningham, which offers a very sensible and reasonable amendment to the Higher Education Support Amendment (VET FEE-HELP Reform) Bill 2015 to ensure that we tackle the problem of burgeoning debt for people taking on VET courses in Australia.

I think one of the greatest shames of the combination of a federal Liberal government and a state Liberal government has been the debacle that they have made of our vocational education and training system in this country. In New South Wales, we have seen massive cuts to the TAFE system. In the community that I represent, 40 TAFE teachers have gone from the local Randwick TAFE. We have seen the cost of courses increase by 10 times on the amount that they were a couple of years ago. As a result, we are beginning to see the number of tradespeople and the number of people graduating with diplomas and associate diplomas from our TAFE system decrease. This is not going to be good for our economy in the future, particularly when we are talking about building the next generation of infrastructure for the country, transitioning away from a mining boom and supporting intelligent manufacturing in this country. Attacking the sector of the education system that provides you with that technical and trade competence to grow our economy is, quite simply, a dumb move. But that is exactly what the combination of a federal Liberal government and a New South Wales Liberal government has done.

Over the course of recent years, we have seen a large increase in the number of people who are enrolling in VET courses, vocational education and training courses, throughout the country. In fact, we have seen a large increase in the number of people taking on higher education. This should be a good thing. In 2014, domestic enrolments in universities and higher education providers reached one million in Australia for the first time. Online enrolments continue to skyrocket, while the higher education workforce is also increasing rapidly, with more than 50,000 people holding academic jobs.

Unfortunately, in the past two years, the higher education system and, more specifically, the VET FEE-HELP system—the government system which supports people to pay their fees to undertake vocational education and training courses—have been embroiled in some controversy and scandal. Between the years 2013 and 2014, the number of students accessing this VET FEE-HELP loan scheme has grown by 103 per cent. The amount of money that student loans in the VET sector have cost the Commonwealth has increased by 151 per cent. The average loan amount per student has increased by 24 per cent. The number of providers offering access to VET FEE-HELP has grown by 44 per cent.

Obviously, there is a cost to the Commonwealth budget associated with this. If the increase in the number of people taking on these courses and the increase in government support for people to take on these courses were sustainable and resulted in people graduating with qualifications from these courses, then it would be a positive development because we all
know that the more education a person gets, the greater their value in the jobs market will be and, ultimately, the more productive our economy will be.

But over the past couple of years in particular, we have seen some scandalous and outrageous attempts by particular private providers in the VET sector to encourage almost predatory behaviour by some institutions to coax people into taking on courses that are beyond their means, into taking on a course that those providers, in some circumstances, also have a very good indication the person will not be able to graduate from.

One such example was well covered in Australian newspapers and outlined recently. A private Sydney college was accused of recruiting illiterate and disabled students to take out thousands of dollars in loans to fund courses that they were not told they were being signed up for. There have also been examples of very aggressive sales techniques where elderly or disabled people are telephoned or doorknocked and offered a free laptop or a loan for a course that they did not really want to sign up for or, in many respects, are not capable of undertaking.

We have seen some outrageous and unscrupulous behaviour by some private providers in this space over recent years. It outlines for me the importance of necessary and appropriate regulation when it comes to our education system. That regulation, unfortunately, must be there from the earliest years possible. It is important that we have standards in childcare centres throughout the country when we are talking about people educating our kids at the youngest of ages. When Labor were in government, we introduced new quality assurance standards for childcare centres. Unfortunately, they resulted, in one case, in a death within a childcare centre and severe injuries to children. So you do need appropriate regulation in the education sector. What is important is getting the balance right and ensuring that people cannot take advantage of vulnerable people and people whom they know will not be able to graduate from those particular courses at the end of the day.

This bill seeks to deal with some of those issues by putting in place some regulation to reduce the amount of unscrupulous activity that has been uncovered in this particular industry. It will do this by introducing a number of changes. Firstly, it will introduce a two-day cooling-off period between an enrolment and the application for a VET FEE-HELP loan so that course enrolment is no longer confused with the loan application process. Hopefully, the applicant will get a clear understanding that there is a difference between enrolling in the course and taking out the loan. Importantly, this will provide an opportunity for people to think about whether or not they want to take on what, in some cases, is going to be a heavy financial burden before they begin the course. The second element of these reforms is the introduction of a minimum prerequisite, such as literacy and numeracy, to ensure students can complete the higher level VET courses—diploma level and above—for which VET FEE-HELP is available. This is just plain common sense. It is common sense to ensure that, if someone is going to sign up for a particular course, they meet the necessary literacy and numeracy requirements and there is a reasonable prospect that the person will be able to complete the course. Providers and the government have an obligation to work together to ensure that there is the necessary support there for people to actually complete the course. The final element is requiring a parent's or guardian's signature before a student under 18 years can request a VET FEE-HELP loan to protect younger students.
The bill will also further protect students and taxpayers by making it easier for a student to have their debt cancelled where they have been signed up for a loan inappropriately and for the government to recoup the cost from providers. This importantly introduces that incentive for providers to undertake some level of scrutiny and accountability in respect of the people they are signing up to their courses and ultimately coxing into taking on VET FEE-HELP loans. Another element is the introduction of minimum registration and trading history requirements to ensure new VET FEE-HELP provider applicants have a proven history of delivering quality training. There is also the introduction of infringement notices and financial penalties for breaches of the VET FEE-HELP guidelines and technical amendments to strengthen the department's administration of the scheme and its partnerships with the Australian Skills Quality Authority to monitor and enforce compliance.

Labor supports these amendments. I support these amendments. They are sensible amendments that will introduce a greater level of scrutiny with respect to the selling and the signing up of people to vocational education and training courses by private providers in Australia. I lament the fact that it has taken the government almost two years to come up with these sensible amendments and proposed legislation to address these issues. As I mentioned earlier, there has been many anecdotal cases presented to the government over the course of the last couple of years about some of the outrageous activities that have been undertaken by some providers in this area. Nonetheless, the government has acted and we support those measures. However, Labor believes that these measures are manifestly inadequate, that more could be done to ensure that people are not rorting this system, signing up people to courses which they have a very good understanding the applicant will never be able to complete. Our concerns are that there are no efforts to control the spiralling costs for students, with loans having grown in value from $5,890 in 2012 to $8,666 in 2014.

The two-day cooling off period could prove to be easy to manipulate by providers printing out enrolment forms with one sign date and VET FEE-HELP applications with a date two days later. There is a concern that that particular amendment could be manipulated. There is no effort to re-examine previous approvals for providers and there is no debt relief for students who have already been defrauded by dodgy providers.

In response to these issues, which have been uncovered by numerous inquiries—and I must say uncovered by the work of the shadow minister the member for Cunningham, who has done a wonderful job consulting throughout the country not only with providers but also with students who have been affected by some of these unconscionable practices. The shadow minister has also offered a number of further reforms which we believe will provide the right balance and will strengthen this legislation and the operation of this system to ensure that many of the rorts and many of the unscrupulous activities which have been outlined throughout the course of this debate and have been highlighted throughout Australia do not occur again and that the system is sustainable into the future, that students are taking on courses they know they can complete and, importantly, that the burden on the government in terms of providing the funding for those loans but also importantly having to chase them up when people may not be in a position to pay for them at the end of the day because they have not graduated from the course and they have not increased their earning capacity, that we are reducing that burden on the Australian taxpayer.
So Labor has suggested a number of measures. They include a national vocational education and training ombudsman and support for Labor's call for the Auditor-General to conduct an audit of the use of VET FEE-HELP throughout the country. Labor believe it would be sensible to offer transparency and accountability in the operation of this system, both initially through an inquiry, an audit conducted by the Auditor-General—at the end of the day we are talking about the expenditure of millions of dollars of taxpayers money in a system where there is cogent evidence that there has been unscrupulous activity by particular providers and there is ample justification for the Auditor-General to conduct that inquiry—and then to have that system overseen by an ombudsman, so that if there were allegations of inappropriate conduct, people involved within the industry, most notably students and their families, had somewhere to go to seek advice and redress.

Labor has also put forward an amendment which requires the department to write to prospective students with a clear statement on the amount of debt that they are about to take on and require the student to reply to the department before a debt is raised. In many cases, students were not aware that they were taking on such large debts when they were signing up for these courses and being induced by the offer of laptops and other trimmings, that they will get a clear indication from the department that is offering them the loan about what they are taking on in terms of a financial burden. This is a sensible amendment and reform that will ensure people have a clear picture about their studies and their future. Finally, Labor will refer this legislation to a Senate committee to look at options to cap tuition fee levels for courses covered by VET FEE-HELP and to lower the lifetime limit on VET FEE-HELP student loans.

All in all, the bill has some positive elements but in my view it does not go far enough. There are further sensible reforms in the form of an ombudsman, in the form of the Auditor-General's inquiry and in the form of writing to prospective students that would strengthen this bill.

Ms HALL (Shortland—Opposition Whip) (20:14): Mr Deputy Speaker Irons, I believe this is the first time I have spoken with you in the chair. So congratulations on your elevation to the Speaker's panel.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Irons): Thank you.

Ms HALL: This legislation is long overdue. It has languished in the back room of the government for far too long. Students around Australia have been incurring debts on a very regular basis. The government's failure to act has led to a budget blow-out and to more students incurring massive debts and failing to complete courses. It is just not good enough.

There has been research done into the VET FEE-HELP student loans system. The Australian indicated on 6 November that up to $6 billion in taxpayer funded loans had been doled out to students and these students will never finish their courses. The figures released revealed that 21 per cent of students eligible for loans under VET FEE-HELP completed their course during the scheme's early years. That means that 79 per cent are not completing the courses. The article goes on to say that they believe that this has become even worse. That was compiled by the Adelaide based National Centre for Vocational Education Research. The Australian suggested that $530 million of the $670 million allocated through the scheme during those years went to cover the fees of people who never graduated. According to The Australian, it is estimated that up to $1.94 billion was loaned during 2013-14 to students who
did not complete their courses. It is not good enough. If the government was on its game, it would have been right onto it.

I, like most members in this House, have had constituents come and talk to me about this issue. I will give three examples to the House. Firstly, I might concentrate on why these students failed to complete their courses. They sign up for reasons of suitability for the courses, the quality of the courses, the quality of the trainers and the support they get during the course—all this contributes to the fact that they will not complete the course. Now I will go to the three examples I want to share with the House tonight.

The first one is a young woman, who was sitting in the library at Newcastle university when she received a phone call from one of these providers. This provider signed her up to a diploma course. The reason she was sitting in the university library was that she was doing the Newstart course for people who fail to score high enough in their HSC. She was trying to upgrade her skills so she could attend university. Her ATAR score was 37, and she was signed up to a diploma course which required a high level of literacy and really good educational skills. Needless to say, she sat for the same module three times and failed it three times. She incurred a debt of $20,000. She had no qualification, no job and a $20,000 debt. This is the way this scheme has been operating. This government has taken so long to address the issue.

The next person I will mention to the House is a 70-year-old man who lived in department of housing accommodation within the Shortland electorate. He was retired. He was getting his pension, and he was really quite happy with his lifestyle. He could afford to pay his rent. He could afford to pay his electricity. He could afford his food. But he was pursued by one of these providers telling him, 'You sign up to this course and we'll give you an iPad'. The gentleman in question said: 'I don't want an iPad. I don't need to train. I have retired.' Yet this person continued to ring him and pursue him, trying to get him to enrol in the course. In the end they went away because the constituent was a man of some stamina and he was able to stand up to the deluge of pressure that was placed upon him.

The third person was pretty similar to the other young woman I mentioned. This young girl signed up to the course and ended up with a $16,000 debt she was unable pay. She did not have the skills to complete the course—once again it was a diploma course. These students—particularly the last one I mentioned—contacted the provider, asking for support. She did not hear back from them. In her case we were lucky to be able to have the $16,000 debt waived, because of intervention from my office. But there are so many people out there that this is happening to, people who have ended up with debts and people who do not go and see their federal member. I am sure that members on both sides of this House would step in and fight for their constituent to have that debt removed. But, unfortunately, because the government has not acted, because they have sat there and let this explode, each and every day there are more young people who are ending up in the situation of those that I mentioned.

Just to reinforce the fact that it is still happening, I was contacted by a constituent last week from Kahibah—actually I was contacted by two constituents. This particular constituent emphasised to me how emphatic the provider was, how they pursued him, how they would not let him off the phone and how they continually rang him back and tried to get him to sign up to the course. He did not sign up, but simply the fact that these practices are taking place, that this level of pressure is being put on people—particularly when it is put on young people,
they find it hard to resist the temptation, particularly when a free iPad and many other inducements are thrown in.

This legislation will be introducing a two-day cool-off period between enrolling and the application for a VET FEE loan, so that course enrolment is no longer confused with the loan process. That is really not very long. Two days is a very short period of time. It is not even as long as the cool-off period when you buy a car. It also introduces a minimum prerequisite such as literacy and numeracy to ensure students can complete the higher level of their courses—diploma and above. It will address some of the issues that I have raised, but I would very much have liked it to have been in place before. I would like to know how this is going to operate and how it is going to be monitored. I would like to feel confident that these rorts by these shonky operators will not continue. It is going to require a parent's or guardian's signature for a student under the age of 18. They can resist a VET FEE-HELP loan to protect younger students.

In the cases of the two young women I spoke about who had incurred the big debts, they had both completed their HSC, so they were 18 years of age. They certainly were not world-wise. They certainly did not understand what they were getting themselves into. Their failure to complete the course was a barrier to them finding employment. They had failed the course. They had not done very well on their HSC. This was just another barrier that had been put in front of them. It has been a very long time to have it addressed. This does make it easier for students to cancel their debts. It does introduce a minimum registration and trading history requirement and makes a few technical amendments to the legislation.

I cannot let this opportunity go by without mentioning TAFE.

Ms Butler: Hear, hear!

Ms HALL: Yes. The Labor Party has a policy to direct 70 per cent of VET funding to TAFE. When a student enrols in TAFE, they are enrolling in a quality course. The courses are conducted by teachers, not trainers. The teachers have qualifications. They are accountable. They have a requirement to provide assistance to the students who are enrolled in their courses, unlike what we have seen with these shonky providers. In New South Wales the Baird government has introduced its Smart and Skilled program, which makes every VET program contestable. Put that alongside what we have had happen federally. It is a terrible situation for young people. In New South Wales that is also coupled with the fact that the Baird government is actually selling off TAFE sites. It is in the process or had identified a TAFE site in the Shortland electorate that it intends to sell off. My message to them is that, instead of selling off TAFE sites and putting training out to private providers, they would be much better served by ensuring that all students have access to a quality education through TAFE.

Eighty per cent of private profits come from government funds. If public funding is stopped and it does not go to the RTOs that are providing such poor-quality training but goes to TAFE instead, with that 80 per cent funding that comes from the private sector the TAFE sector will be strengthened even further.

In the few moments I have remaining I would like to talk to the amendment and give my wholehearted support to it. We definitely need to appoint a national VET ombudsman with the power to investigate consumer complaints. I was at a meeting yesterday where this very
issue was raised with me. A person said to me: 'Has the opposition thought about an ombudsman? Wouldn't this address some of the problems that are happening in the VET system?' Of course the answer is yes. The shadow minister has drafted an amendment, and this national VET ombudsman would investigate consumer complaints—there are so many at the moment—and hold those private providers accountable for their actions and accountable to the students that they enrol. The amendment also includes ordering RTOs which have been found to have acted unscrupulously to refund course fees to students and orders RTOs to refund course fees to the government and help the students with VET HELP.

This is a good amendment. I hope the government accepts it, because it will make a real difference to students undertaking vocational education.

Mr HAYES (Fowler—Chief Opposition Whip) (20:29): Over the past 18 months or so we have seen dozens of media reports about unscrupulous VET providers targeting vulnerable Australians to sign up to shonky diploma courses, certificates and even so-called advanced diplomas for the purpose of having people access Commonwealth funded VET FEE-HELP loans. These unethical practices have resulted in hundreds of disadvantaged people, including people who are disabled and some who are illiterate, entering into courses that they do not understand. But, more importantly, it has saddled them with thousands of dollars of debt. While the Liberal government has now introduced legislation concerning national standards for registered training organisations, the RTOs, which require them to declare commercial relationships with sale brokers and that allow the regulator to hold the RTOs accountable for the actions of their sale brokers, the problem with the VET system is still occurring.

The Higher Education Support Amendment (VET FEE-HELP Reform) Bill 2015 is an attempt by the government to address some of these issues around VET FEE-HELP including the introduction of a two-day cooling-off period between enrolment and the application for VET FEE-HELP loan, the introduction of minimum prerequisites such as literacy and numeracy skills and the requirement of a parent or guardian's permission before a student under the age of 18 can request a VET FEE-HELP loan. These are sensible propositions—they may be a little late, but nevertheless they are sensible—particularly in relation to the issue about prerequisites, because that has been one of the biggest concerns. People have been signed up even though they do not have the prerequisite skills to allow them to complete a particular course of study. If you are the private provider, it is not necessarily within your purview to ensure that your students actually graduate. The main thing is people being able to access the government funded loans.

While these proposals might address some of the concerns that people have about the VET FEE-HELP loans, I for one do not believe they go far enough. My concerns relate to a couple of things. Firstly, there is currently no effort to control the spiralling costs for students undertaking a VET course. With the average loan per student increasing by 24 per cent over the last year—in real terms, from $5,890 in 2012 to $8,666 in 2014—that is a significant jump in terms of a vocational education course. Course fees are accelerating well beyond inflation, but they are doing it within a pretty lucrative vocational education market. Since the introduction of VET FEE-HELP in 2008, the system has grown exponentially from $25 million in 2009 to $1.7 billion in 2014. Largely, this is attributable to the fact that there is an increasing number of students accessing VET FEE-HELP. That has grown by 103 per cent, and that is largely due to the increasing number of VET providers in the market and also to
the way the VET providers are going about marketing their courses and signing up potential students. This has not only increased the amount of money that a student loan in the VET scheme is costing the Commonwealth but also increased the average loan per student by 24 per cent. This is particularly concerning given that reports have estimated that 40 per cent of all VET FEE-HELP loans will never be repaid as the recipients will never earn the threshold of $53,000 required to trigger the repayments. In many instances—and we will come to a few of them in a minute—many students do not complete the courses. For many of the private providers that is not what they are in business to do—that is, to ensure that people actually attain graduation. They are in business to make profits out of their courses, and that is what they are doing; they are simply selling the education.

My second concern relates to practices of, for want of a better term, shonky providers in the VET sector. As of October this year, the Australian Skills Quality Authority, ASQA, an industry regulator which was established by Labor in 2011 to regulate course training providers, has received widespread complaints of inappropriate marketing practices, poor standards and rorting of the lucrative VET FEE-HELP loans scheme. Of the 21 RTOs that have now been audited by ASQA this year, eight have now had licence conditions imposed on them, while another six are still subject to ongoing investigation. We do not want a repeat of what we saw in the Unique International College, a private college located in Granville, which had its registration cancelled by ASQA on the basis that it was offering potential students up to $2,000 to sign up to documents that, in many instances, they could not read or, if they could, did not understand but that they signed up to in order to take out a Commonwealth loan of up to $25,000.

That is not insignificant, particularly when they are targeting a certain group of people in that respect. Therefore, this unconscionable conduct was clearly targeted at some people who would be regarded as falling into the category of being illiterate—many were disabled. But the college went on to offer students a $500 bonus if they were able to refer a friend to take up one of its courses as well. These are unscrupulous marketing practices. We have all heard about them offering the iPads and laptops. This is very much an extreme continuation of all that. It came only a week or so after reports in the media about the Melbourne based Phoenix Institute, which was told its registration would be cancelled following very similar complaints of students.

Nearer to home for me, you would recall there were press reports this year that a college that operates within my electorate and in many other places for that matter, the Evocca College, barely graduated one in 1,000 students as a result of the assessment scheme. It was attributed also to the inaccuracy of its marketing. Clearly that college or company received a significant number of complaints. When it was investigated, it was found that its policies and procedures were largely non-compliant with industry standards. These are just a continuation of serious concerns in the VET sector, where people are undertaking courses of vocational education but not receiving what they think they are going to get, which is a qualification that will lead them to employment.

For two years now Labor has been calling for action from the regulators including the ACCC. We do need to send a strong message to the VET sector. We have also consistently called for the government to crack down on the rorts in the VET FEE-HELP system. However, it has taken the government a little over two years and three ministers to develop
these half-measures, which we do not believe fully address the issues. Students, TAFE colleges, taxpayers and good quality private providers are all victims of what has been occurring here, these scandals. They all deserve better. They all deserve to have comprehensive safeguards put in place. I have been working closely with Phil Chadwick, the president of the New South Wales TAFE Teachers Association, who is also a good friend and an electrical trades teacher at the Miller TAFE College. Phil has consistently spoken about the impact that some of these shonky providers like Unique International College are causing to the reputation of providers in the VET sector as well as the impact that they are having on the quality of courses being offered.

The idea of vocational education is to get people up to being job ready or to enhance job opportunities; it is not to sell a piece of paper, a certificate, a diploma or whatever you want to call it. It does not have much value unless it is going to achieve the result that everyone thought it was going to when they signed on—that is, being a pathway to employment. Regrettably, all this is occurring at a time, particularly in New South Wales, when TAFE is under sustained pressure from government. Colleges including the TAFE college in my electorate of Fowler are experiencing serious funding cuts from various traditional trade based courses including plumbing, carpentry, electrical courses. All of this is undermining the reputation of vocational education. This is why Labor will be moving a number of amendments to the Higher Education Support Amendment (VET FEE-HELP Reform) Bill, to strengthen the existing measures and to protect vulnerable students. In particular, Labor will be referring the legislation to the Senate legislation committee to look at the options to cap tuition fee levels for courses offered under VET FEE-HELP and to lower the lifetime limit on VET FEE-HELP student loans. This will ensure that students are not entering into financial arrangements that could result in the prospect of anything up $100,000 debts as a result of signing on with some of the shonky providers.

In conjunction to this, Labor is also putting forward an amendment which will require the department to write to prospective students a very clear statement on the amount of debt that they will be undertaking as a consequence of signing onto a particular course so that they will know in advance what it is that they are actually agreeing to. Furthermore, we will be calling on the government to appoint an industry funded national VET Ombudsman as well as require the Commonwealth Auditor-General to conduct an audit of the use of the VET FEE-HELP loan scheme. I think these are all good things which will go to assisting the VET sector generally but, more importantly, they will assist those who are reliant on genuine vocational education for the very clear purpose of having a pathway into employment or for improving employment opportunities.

I believe the amendments that will be proposed by Labor will deliver greater protection not only to students but will also offer the taxpayer and the economy generally greater efficiency and a greater use of taxpayers’ dollars when it comes to vocational education. Under Labor, we will guarantee TAFE funding into the future by working with state and territory governments on a comprehensive national priority plan that clearly will define the role of TAFE and clearly establish TAFE as being in the front and centre of public funded vocational education in this country. TAFE is a body which, regrettably, has been much maligned. I think TAFE offers quality vocational education to students. It offers great opportunity for business to ensure that business has available to it the skill sets of employees they need for the
future. I support the legislation and I commend Labor's amendments as trying to make a
genuine effort to improve vocational education in this country.

Mr HUSIC (Chifley) (20:44): In areas like the one I represent from Western Sydney, we
not only need good educational opportunities in primary schools, secondary schools and
universities but also, importantly, in vocational education. We do need to be able to train up
people for the massive skill shortages that exist across a number of industries, and we need to
have the confidence that when students take up a course in a vocational provider, be it public
or private, that they are getting a good quality course. There have been concerns for some
time, particularly with the private providers, whom I do support existing within the system
because they do provide an opportunity for us to increase the number of pathways open to
people who want to engage in vocational education. There have been concerns about the way
in which people are being lured into particular private providers and the methods that are
being used and the consequence of bringing people into courses and not delivering the
outcomes that are required.

Back in March, ABC via 7.30 detailed some of these cases. It was brought home to me in
very stark terms, because the people that were involved or whose experiences had been
covered by that particular report came from Mount Druitt, a suburb within the Chifley
electorate. When I heard some of the stories, I was astounded at what was occurring. One
former teacher at Evocca College, Mount Druitt, detailed to 7.30 the types of instances where
people would, literally, get off the train at Mount Druitt, walk down to a Westfield shopping
centre and they would go straight in and there would be Evocca set up in a stall in the
shopping centre—day after day. They had been there for nearly two years according to this
report. The representative spruiking on behalf of Evocca College would say: 'Oh, just take the
iPad. Just sign up, just take it. It's all good. It doesn't cost anything, it's free.' But it is not free,
for reasons I will detail later.

And what would happen? Some of these students hard pressed for income would take the
iPads down to local pawnbrokers and try to sell them. The pawnbrokers know they cannot
accept the equipment because the equipment is still the property of the college until the
student graduates. There would be reports, as detailed in this 7.30 report, where some
pawnbrokers were getting five students a day attempting to sell their iPads. This is not the
worst of it. It was deemed by the teacher that I quoted earlier, Steven Fogerty, who was on the
report, that it was:

unscrupulous, absolutely unscrupulous. Zero interest in education and training, it is all about getting
these people in, keeping the number up and churning them through—churning them through.

What is happening as a result? These students are then forced to shoulder huge, huge debts.
The coalition government claims that this type of case is a minority. But this minority, in
Evocca's case, was one where they had received nearly $150 million in federal funding and
were enrolling students to courses where the students doubted they would be able to hit the
income level to be able to start repaying the debt. The concern has been—again, detailed in
this report—that most of the students struggle with basic reading and writing and it was unfair
of Evocca to sign them up for courses they did not have the skills to complete. So they are
lured in, they are not tested properly to see whether or not they have got the capability to go
through and complete the course and they then get, debts that are in staggering amounts. In
one case, one student whose story was detailed in this 7.30 report, owed nearly $30,000 for a diploma he is not sure he will ever finish. As another branch manager of Evocca said:

It's just dishonest. I'm unhappy that students have so much debt for either nothing or for very little outcome.

This, at its heart, is the massive problem that is being created, particularly for young people who feel the guilt of wearing a debt that they doubt very much they will be able to repay.

I spoke about this back in March in the Federation Chamber. I raised the point that we need to be able to see more people undertake vocational education and we need more skilled people in our economy. I certainly want more young people from our area involved. In fact, I was proud to be associated with the launch of Evocca Collage in Mount Druitt a few years ago because it is good to see more opportunities present for young people to be able to build up their skills base.

I have also seen some great students from Evocca in my area. In fact, on the weekend I was out at the Shalvey PCYC at the Festival of Hope, an initiative designed to raise funds for the PCYC in helping people in our area who are doing it tough and need to get their lives back on track. The PCYC has had a long-standing commitment to doing just that in our community. A lot of the event was organised, supported and run by Evocca Collage students. They are a great asset to our local area, but these students should not be tarred by the misdeeds and the 'unscrupulous', as it has been labelled, decisions by people within the management chain who are quite happy to lure people in, and not make sure that the people who are in can complete the course or do complete the course.

I had people from different parts of the country contact me after they had heard my criticisms of Evocca and they said that they were stunned at the way they had been treated. In fact, they had written to Evocca about their incompetencies and unprofessionalism, and one student: 'to which I address to Evocca to announce my cancellation after many issues with them and have since found out so many more discrepancies with this college I am completely appalled with. I have been lied to by course consultants, student service officers, tutors and now compliance managers—possibly more than I have found evidence of yet.'

Another person who wrote to me detailed, over a six-page letter, a series of concerns that they had—for example, that Evocca had failed to weed out students who honestly did not have a chance of finishing the course; that they had even been expected to google required answers or assistance if they needed it; that they would get tutorials sourced off YouTube; and that the course structure had been changed midstream. That was in one letter from someone from Queensland who wrote to me, from Deception Bay. This person—and this is the human toll—said: 'All this time I have felt that I am a failure, that I am the one who is stupid for struggling so badly. Today my eyes were opened when I researched Evocca to find out how many people in gaming have had the same issues as I've had.' People should not have to feel that way. People should not have to feel that they have been in some way, shape or form to blame for this.

What have we had in response from the government? I have heard a number of speakers because I have been following this with keen interest. A number of government speakers have said: 'Oh, Labor knew about this in 2013.' What happened in 2013? In 2013 we had a federal election, a change of government. You have known since that time that there has been a problem. What was your response? Your response was to continually blame Labor the whole
way through. In fact, in early January this year, Minister Birmingham was again going out blaming Labor. It took a 7.30 report in March, and now, nearly at the end of the year, we get some legislation to deal with it. How many students have had to go through this process of wearing the extra debt, being saddled with something that they cannot possibly repay and feeling guilty that they will be unable to pay it back? They want to repay the government. They have not been able to complete the course, but they have the debt hanging over their head.

*Mr Chester interjecting*—

*Mrs Husic*: Accept responsibility, Parliamentary Secretary. You do not need to go and read quotes and go back. You have had two years to do it. It is on your watch, Parliamentary Secretary. You and him and him and all of your side have had two years to fix it up. It has been on your watch, and what have you done on it? What have you done?

*Mr Chester*: Be honest, Ed.

*Mrs Husic*: No, you be honest, Parliamentary Secretary. Stump up. How many times have we had to sit in this place and listen to the coalition use the disgraceful term 'man up'—'man up and accept responsibility'? Well, why don't you take your own advice? Man up and accept that under your watch the amount of money that has gone to VET FEE-HELP has nearly doubled from—what is it?—nearly $600 million to $1.7 billion. You have known for ages that this has been a problem, and all you have engaged in is to blame, to distract, and to try to make other people look the other way. When you have always claimed that you think you have the answers, you have been unable to step up and put forward a solution. Instead of playing the blame game, why don't you work out what is going on?

*Mr Chester interjecting*—

*Mrs Husic*: Well, it is nice that you can sit there and read that. Why don't you go and talk to the students who are saddled with the debt? Why don't you talk to the students in the two years of your administration, more and more—

*The Deputy Speaker (Mr Irons)*: I remind the member that he is speaking through the chair.

*Mrs Husic*: Chair, through you, why doesn't the parliamentary secretary go through and talk to the students who are saddled with the debt? Why don't you talk to the students in the two years of your administration, more and more—

*Mrs Husic*: Chair, through you, why doesn't the parliamentary secretary go through and talk to the students who are saddled with the debt, maybe even in his own electorate? Instead of sitting there and reading quotes, why doesn't he step forward with a solution—or the other minister at the table, who has finally got round to something?

*Mrs Hartsuyker*: I've only been the minister for six weeks!

*Mrs Husic*: Well, your government has known about it for ages.

Labor have put forward—and I am proud to see that we have put forward—a series of important amendments. I want to commend the shadow minister, the member for Cunningham, on coming forward and thinking of a range of areas where we have put forward amendments that we think will strengthen the response to what has occurred. We have, for example, said that there should be an industry funded, national VET ombudsman to go through and to provide a greater degree of protection. We have said, for example, that the Auditor-General should do an audit of the VET FEE-HELP scheme. We have said that the department should write to people—that we should have measures in place to avoid people
being saddled with this debt, that they should be made aware of the likelihood of the debt that they will assume and that they should respond. It is not enough just to send the letter out and let people know. The prospective students should respond, come back and say that they acknowledge the likelihood of the debt that they are going to be taking on board. We have also called, for instance, for examining the options to cap tuition fee levels and lower lifetime limits on the size of the loans.

These are all practical, sensible suggestions being put forward to ensure that there is greater integrity in this system. A number of us have been concerned to see the types of trials and struggles that people have had to undergo, particularly in my area, as a result of the misdeeds and, as people have called them, the shonky operators. It is not good enough to just sit on our hands and believe that this situation will resolve itself. The sector has in fact, I think, not moved quickly enough to deal with this.

My biggest concern is that it undermines confidence in particularly the private providers of vocational education, who do have a role to play—a definite, concrete role to play—in providing vocational education. We should not have to put up with this. Particularly in my area, I feel strongly that students in Mount Druitt should be able to get a top-quality vocational education. They should be skilled up. This is an area where we have unemployment higher than the national average, and we have the scourge of youth unemployment affecting us. We know that there are jobs there. I know from the employers that I speak with in my area, where there is massive job growth expected. I do not want to see those jobs necessarily going to people outside the area when we have a massive issue that we need to deal with in terms of unemployment.

We need to train people up. We need to have them ready for those jobs. We need to be prepared for those requirements and make sure that employers can have the confidence that people have been trained up properly. We do not need people sitting in debt; we need people working in jobs, and they need to ensure that they have the skills to do those jobs. I certainly commend the amendment that Labor, the opposition, have put forward because we believe that this will provide a stronger response to something that has been a massive issue for people, particularly the people I represent in this place.

Debate interrupted.

ADJOURNMENT

The SPEAKER (20:59): It being almost 9 pm I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

Pacific Islands: Climate Change

Mr THISTLETHWAITE (Kingsford Smith) (20:59): When Australians speak of climate change they talk about a crisis that will hit us in the future—as something that will affect Australians’ lives in 20 to 30 years. In the Pacific Islands the story is much different. Climate change is a present danger, and it is affecting lives now.

Pacific Islanders do not contribute very much to climate change. Pacific Islands collectively contribute 0.03 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions but they bear the worst effects of climate change. They are the most vulnerable people in the world when it comes to the effects of climate change.
In January 2014 the Fijian village of Vunidogolo was relocated several kilometres inland because of the advancing sea. In the Marshall Islands staple crops, such as breadfruit, are now being wiped out and are no longer providing a valuable food source for many communities. In Tuvalu, Cyclone Pam wiped out all the coconut palms on many of the islands of the archipelago. In many Pacific nations now wells that have supplied communities with water for hundreds of years are becoming salinised and are no longer able to be used. Recently—and this highlights perfectly the case of climate change in the Pacific—the government of Kiribati purchased land on the island of Vanua Levu from the Fijian government because they know that in the future they are going to have to move communities from their islands of Kiribati to other parts of the Pacific.

Throughout the Pacific, diseases that were once under control are re-emerging in epidemic proportions. In Fiji last year there was a dengue fever outbreak in which 20,000 native Fijians were affected. NASA reports that the world sea level has risen by eight centimetres since 1992 and continues to do so. For many Pacific Islands if this rate of increase is not addressed their nations will simply be wiped out. For Pacific Islanders, climate change is urgent.

Australia is the lead economy in the Pacific. We are the wealthiest nation of the peoples in the Pacific. We have the highest living standards of people in the Pacific and, unfortunately, we are one of the largest per capita contributors to global greenhouse gas emissions anywhere throughout the world. This is something that our friends in the Pacific know. They want Australia to help them to take action.

But, unfortunately, this Liberal government has let our friends in the Pacific down. By removing a price on carbon, an economy-wide mechanism to reduce emissions in our economy, we have let our friends in the Pacific Islands down. As a result of the removal of the carbon price, electricity emissions from that sector, which were once reducing under Labor's carbon price, have now begun to increase again because of the removal of that policy. The Liberals have cut the renewable energy target. Australia has become the only nation in the world that through government programs is actively discouraging an increase in the amount of renewable energy that we want in our country. The government is saying that we want less renewable energy than we otherwise would have had under the previous policies of the Labor government.

This government has cut funding to climate change bodies and climate change adaptation throughout the Pacific and, in the greatest of insults, the immigration minister of our nation sought to make jokes about the plight of Pacific Islanders when it comes to climate change. I say to our friends in the Pacific Islands that the minister does not speak for Australians. The minister does not hold the views of most Australians when it comes to tackling climate change.

Pacific Island people feel let down by Australia, and they are expressing that disappointment. Earlier this year, the Fijian Prime Minister described Australia as leading a 'coalition of the selfish'. The Marshall Islands foreign minister, Tony de Brum, has said that he is very disappointed that Australia got rid of its price on carbon. And Australia's commitment to Paris in a couple of weeks' time of a 26 to 28 per cent reduction in emissions by 2030 is woefully inadequate to Pacific Islanders. It will not keep them within a two-degree-warming scenario. Australia must be doing more to help our friends in the Pacific Islands to tackle climate change. (Time expired)
Calwell Electorate: Forced Marriage

Ms VAMVAKINOU (Calwell) (21:04): Last Friday I participated in a theatre workshop at Roxburgh Park College in my electorate which addressed the issue of forced marriage and the rights of young people to determine their own future.

The workshop was organised by Miss Thoiba Saeedh, an intern in my office from the University of Melbourne, who also happens to be an AusAID sponsored student from the Maldives. The program was an annotation of the forced marriage pilot project run by Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans. The purpose of the workshop was to formulate a better understanding of forced marriage, to raise awareness and to empower young girls and boys to say no in the event of a forced marriage situation.

ACRATH and other community organisations have raised forced marriage as an issue deserving of attention and campaigning here in Australia. This particular workshop was initiated by my office as a way of raising awareness amongst my constituents of forced marriage and the broader issues of cultural identity and negotiating the competing demands of communal and family expectations with individual rights and aspirations, particularly between different generations. Given the very diverse migrant communities, in particular the newly-arrived and emerging communities from Africa, the Middle East and South-East Asia, Calwell is very much an appropriate place for pilot programs such as this to be run at the very grassroots level.

I want to take this opportunity to thank Elizabeth Payne from ACRATH for the amazing work that she does and that everyone at ACRATH does. I also want to thank the deputy principal, Tony Wakefield, teachers Yolande Suffern, Denise Rimoni and Angela Greet, and the year 10 sociology students from Roxburgh Park College for their tremendous effort and cooperation in making the workshop a success.

The project involved the use of applied theatre as the medium in which the issue of forced marriage was explored. Applied theatre is a platform used in many parts of the world to create dialogue on sensitive issues and human rights concerns. The applied theatre workshop provided an opportunity for the students to role play in a hypothetical situation, in this case, of course, a forced marriage situation, which was then enacted by some of the students whilst other students and audience members were given the opportunity to replace characters and redirect the theatre performance to ensure a different outcome for the protagonists.

By replacing and introducing characters we were able to discuss a range of issues surrounding forced marriage. We focused very much on the critical point of emphasising the fact that in Australia a forced marriage is against the law and that people have a right to say no. We analysed the effectiveness of the existing legislation. We also analysed the potential responses of families when authorities try to step in to what is considered by the family a private family matter. We analysed the reluctance of victims to seek help for fear of causing trouble for themselves and their family members. We also looked at the kind of help that is available for victims, such as being able to go on an airport watch list if you are under the age of 18. We also looked at other options, such as the issue of negotiations with family members, and we encouraged those negotiations.

Although in 2013 the Australian parliament criminalised forced marriage, to date there have been no prosecutions. However, many cases of forced marriage have since come to light...
and have subsequently been reported to the Australian Federal Police. Forced marriage is a serious human rights abuse. It is a practice that robs young girls and women as well as boys of their choices, in most cases denying them education, freedom and independence. Forced marriage involves threats of physical abuse, rape, physical assault, trauma and deep psychological impacts on the victim. In Australia, forced marriage is characterised as a human rights and gender inequality issue, and it is one that is 'not limited to any particular cultural group, religion or ethnicity'. Although it is now an illegal act whose perpetrators can be prosecuted, we need to be aware that it is also very much a cultural issue that results from culturally construed ideas around gender roles, religious and cultural practices, family honour and tradition. So in dealing with this issue we need to understand its causes and work to eradicate them whilst at the same time enforcing, where warranted, the formal legal response that is necessary to deal with this human rights abuse in Australia.

I want to congratulate all at Roxburgh Park Secondary College for their amazing contribution to this very important issue.

**Dunkley Electorate: Frankston**

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (21:09): Mr Speaker, I rise tonight to speak on a community well known to me, and I am sure you have great affection for my electorate in the Riviera of Melbourne, down at Dunkley. I want to particularly talk about that great Southern Hemisphere capital. I am not talking about Santiago or Buenos Aires; I am talking about Frankston, a great community made of great people with great possibilities for the future. It is pretty significant right now, because there is quite a lot of activity going on—activity that should support enterprise, opportunity and livelihood prospects in our community to match the outstanding quality of life opportunities. It is a great place to raise a family and to call home. But we need to make the most of those opportunities: the coastal beaches, the tourism hot spot, wonderful housing alternatives and good transport—we worked hard on the Scoresby Freeway and a few others to give the city many great attributes.

What we need now, though, is to focus on what is catalytic for the commercial centre of our city. It is a key part of the story of the greater Mornington Peninsula, and there is a chance right now to do something quite meaningful. But we have got to a bit of an impasse. The state government has understood the needs of the growing number of public transport travellers and the need to upgrade the Frankston train station. Some commitments have been made that should improve the amenity of the railway station. What I am concerned about, though, is not the ideas that are being brought forward to renovate the station, if you will, but more the concern that here is an opportunity to transform Frankston and to translate all of the momentum and economic potential that is there now into activity. A workmanlike, task-oriented approach to improve the Frankston railway station might tick the boxes as a job done, and it may be a competent plan, but it falls well short of the potential to use this project and other investments in the city to transform Frankston. The current plan is about improving the bus and rail station interchange, and certainly there is scope to improve the amenity, but I call on the state government and particularly our local state member, Mr Edbrooke, who I must commend for the work he is doing, to lift their vision and their horizon and think about the potential to use this investment as a catalytic investment—an injection of new opportunities into our city—and to revitalise and boost the Frankston Metropolitan Activity Centre.
Consider the transformation that has been achieved in Ringwood—somewhere not far from your patch, Mr Speaker—around a visionary look at the transport hub, to rebuild the commercial and retail centre in Ringwood. We have that potential as well. Think of all the money that has been invested in Dandenong. Imagine what could have been achieved if only a fraction of that investment were applied to Frankston, to take what could be characterised as a makeover of the station into a transformation and a broader purpose and ambition for our city. That is what the business chamber wants, that is what the council wants, and that is what I have been urging, calling for and working for for some time: to go beyond the immediate task of getting a transport project done and dusted and off the plate; to think about what we can do to bring in the private sector; to look at other investments that are being made in our city; to look at the educational infrastructure; to see Frankston as a commercialisation hub, a research centre and a centre for learning and knowledge; to build on the presence of Monash and Chisholm TAFE; and to be the Fremantle of the east coast, if you will.

Look at what else is going on as part of some $300 million worth of investments: the headquarters of South East Water, at $80 million; the Frankston Hospital extension; the new aquatic centre; the Peninsula Centre redevelopment; the TAFE training centre; the yacht club redevelopment; and the work at the Frankston Park Function Centre. I am pleased that I have been able to ensure that the Commonwealth government has been a part of many of these projects.

There are more investments on the table, but I plead with the state planning minister, Richard Wynne, to task the metropolitan team that he has at his disposal, who have the expertise to knit together these opportunities, to have the Victorian government see the potential, and not to blow a chance to do something quite transformational. Assign the Metropolitan Planning Authority the task of planning, coordinating and executing these projects and bringing in the private sector investment that will see this public sector investment catalysed into many times its value as others come to the party. Think about Peninsula Health needing to vacate the Mount Eliza centre and having some of the Peninsula Health activities also brought into our city. This is a time of delicious possibilities, but it needs leadership and vision. We have mapped out a way of achieving this. We need the state government to get behind it, to assign the Metropolitan Planning Authority to this important task, and not to miss this chance for Frankston. (Time expired)

Mackellar Electorate: Blackmores

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP (Mackellar) (21:14): Much has been said in this chamber in recent times about the success of a firm, Blackmores, which is based in my electorate. It is quite a remarkable firm in that it is a family dynasty, where the current chairman, Marcus Blackmore, has built on the strength of his father and his grandfather before him. There are many firms that have been successful in this country, but the thing that strikes me so much about Blackmores is that it remains fundamentally connected to its community.

On Saturday, 31 October, I had the privilege of taking part in an open day at their campus in support of health, environment and community organisations. Their idea was to have a really lovely campus, which encompasses a splendid, contemporary building, where manufacturing and packaging takes place, set in beautiful gardens of native plants—an environment which is very conducive to having a restful soul, if you like, was in keeping with the idea of complementary medicine.
There were stalls set up throughout the gardens, and more than 4,000 people attended. Some of the community organisations with stalls included Northern Beaches Interchange, Community Care Northern Beaches, the Be Centre, the Burdekin Association, Bear Cottage—which, of course, is for terminally-ill children, Bilgola Surf Life Saving Club, the Exodus Foundation, Avalon Computer Pals for seniors, and the local councils. Health, wellbeing and the environment were the major themes, with a focus on nutrition, kids and teen health, and active living and healthy ageing, while environment groups showcased recycling initiatives, productive gardens, medicinal plants, bush and wildlife care. All of this showcased the activity of volunteers in my electorate of Mackellar. We are very proud of the fact that, in my electorate, we seem to have a higher than average, if not the highest of any electorate, of people per head who volunteer their services, and do it for an altruistic reason.

There was also entertainment and speeches. Marcus Blackmore, as chairman of the board, welcomed everyone in a most enthusiastic but genuinely caring and interactive way. He was followed by the CEO, Christine Holgate, who was recently named in the list of 100 most influential women in Australia. The Reverend Bill Crews was, as always, a blessing. The Exodus Foundation, which I mentioned earlier, in fact, provided the food for which the 4,000 people were in queues to enjoy. This is the food that they normally prepare for the homeless people of Sydney. They provide a kitchen every day, and a van that provides people with meals that they otherwise would not have. It is always a delight to have Bill with us.

Visitors were able to tour the factory and the gardens, and enjoy performances from the Narrabeen North Public School band and the Pittwater High School Senior strings ensemble. There were many other schools and individual groups that took part, but the whole thing was an interactive exchange between Blackmores—a firm that provides so many products that the Australian public welcomes—and the community, because that is the sort firm that it is, and that is the sort of person that Marcus Blackmore is.

So, I simply say to them: congratulations on your continued involvement with our community, as well as being a hugely successful business. It is one that is exporting into Asia and making use of the new free trade agreements. Indeed, Christine Holgate has become the new chair of the Australia-ASEAN Business Council. It is truly a business with a heart, and I am very proud to have it in my electorate.

**Blair Electorate: Volunteers**

**Mr NEUMANN** (Blair) (21:19): Volunteers do not help out because they want thanks or reward; they do it because of a desire to be part of their community, and to provide opportunities for others in schools, community groups, sporting clubs and churches. More than six million Australians generously volunteer their time, energy and expertise each year and, through more than 730 million hours of unpaid work, provide an estimated benefit to the Australian economy of $16 billion.

I want to congratulate 41 volunteers in the Blair community. Last Tuesday, I had the pleasure of hosting the 2015 Blair Volunteer Awards, where we recognised the outstanding contribution of many individuals. There were 11 volunteer category winners and over 30 outstanding volunteers who have given of their time to the community, and they were recognised as well. I want to name a number of them and speak briefly about them.
John Robinson was the worthy winner of the 2015 Blair Volunteer Veterans Award. John is a Vietnam veteran who has provided years of dedicated service to the Kilcoy RSL Sub Branch in a number of positions, including branch president. John is also heavily involved in the wider Kilcoy community. It almost seems there is no committee in the Kilcoy community that he is not involved in.

George and Barbara Millard received the 2015 Blair Volunteer Senior Award for their work with Ozcare's Mozart Program, which provides recreational opportunities for adults with disability living in the Ipswich area.

Donna Reggett received the 2015 Blair Volunteer Disability Awareness Award. Donna has volunteered in many roles from the local to the national level. She is one of my community's most passionate and dedicated advocates for veterans and mental health support. She is a founder and president of Operation PTSD Support, which facilitates respite retreats for partners of military veterans and emergency services personnel experiencing mental health issues such as PTSD. Her daughter, Nicole Reggett, received the 2015 Blair Volunteer Youth Award. She is a quiet achiever and has been a member of the Ipswich PCYC Youth Committee since 2006 and is an active member of Operation PTSD Support.

Alice Metz was a very worthy recipient of the 2015 Blair Volunteer Junior Award. She is an exceptional young person, who gives generously of her time. She is involved in the Air Force Cadet Program at the RAAF Base at Amberley. She is a natural role model, and, despite her own health problems, which are a numerous, has a strong and practical sense of social justice.

Trudy O'Grady, whom I have known for many years, was awarded the 2015 Blair Volunteer Emergency Management Award. She began her State Emergency Service career as a cadet at age nine and is now Deputy Group Lead at Ipswich SES where she is renowned for her fantastic leadership skills.

Marilyn Spletter received the 2015 Blair Volunteer Environment Award for her lifelong dedication to our native flora and fauna. She has volunteers all the time in koala conservation. She has in the last 20 years hand raised orphaned baby koalas, possums and gliders and is vice-president of the Ipswich Koala Protection Society.

John Bopf, known as 'Mr Squash' in Ipswich, has given over 40 years service to this sport. He has been president of the Ipswich Squash Racquets Association for 42 years and received the 2015 Blair Long Term Commitment Award.

The Ipswich West State School Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden team was acknowledged for their community service and their stellar work and garden success at the school.

Reg Tohia was the very popular winner of the 2015 Blair Volunteer Education Award. Reg, a Maori elder, is a beloved figure at my old high school, Bundamba State Secondary College, where he has volunteered for 13 years. He was nominated by Bundamba principal, Kathy Morrison, who attended the awards ceremony together with other school staff. Kathy says Reg volunteers the same hours each week to the college as a full-time teacher and that his role in the P&C has been critical. He also represents the community at Anzac Day services.
Finally, Steph Shannon OAM received the award that I personally chose: the 2015 Blair Volunteer MP Award. Steph is an amazing person. She retired from her career as paediatric nurse after 47 years and now volunteers about 20 hours each week to help grieving children at Hilda's House at Ipswich Hospice Care. She was instrumental in steering the hospice's kids' grief group where she has helped hundreds of children and their families on their grief journey. After Steph spoke at the awards ceremony, there weren't many dry eyes in the room, I can say. Ipswich Hospice director Wendy Bryce nominated Steph saying that the most common description of Steph is simply 'an inspiration.' She is a worthy winner.

Congratulations to all those people whose service and commitment have improved our local community.

**Forrest Electorate: Diwali**

**Augusta Spring Flower Show**

**South West Rose Society Show**

**Heritage Park Dardanup**

Ms MARINO (Forrest—Chief Government Whip) (21:24): I rise to acknowledge some wonderful events in my electorate and I want to start with the South West Indian Group and their Diwali festival of light that was held in Bunbury on Saturday evening. Dr Ramesh, who is the chair of the committee, did an amazing job along with a small group of wonderful volunteers. We had a wonderful MC by the name of Sammi and a range of very colourful and entertaining performances. Of course there was sitar and Bollywood-type performances as well as traditional dancing and other performances. We even had a fire dancer. People were very entertained by children and adult performers in a variety of ways.

The Bunbury City Band, a renowned band in the south-west, always comes along and entertains and is part of our Anzac services and every major event it volunteers for. Once again, they were here at the Diwali festival of light. There was also a very interesting fashion parade as part of the performances in the evening.

Several hundred people came from around the south-west to enjoy this Indian festival. Part of the reason they came was for the beautiful traditional food that was served. There were long queues for the food, but it was very well managed. Everyone who came along had a wonderful evening. It was particularly well organised, and I want to congratulate the South West Indian Group for yet another very successful event.

Equally, I want to talk about the Augusta spring flower show. Again, Augusta is a very small community with a lot of volunteers. This particular show has amazing and beautiful flowers, and very creative people. There are also cooking displays, art and craft, and a fantastic creative scrap metal type of art on display. A lot of the work is done at the Men's Shed in Augusta, and the community puts together this event each year. People travel from quite a distance to be part of this event, and you get a wonderful homemade afternoon tea as part of that.

The other event I want to talk about is one I went to on Saturday—the South West Rose Society show. They do an amazing job every year. The blooms were beautiful this year and, again, a small group of volunteers do an extraordinary job.
The final thing I want to talk about—something close to my heart as someone from the transport and logistics industry in my family—is the Heritage Park in Dardanup, which held a 100-truck display on Sunday. It was absolutely fascinating to see so many vintage trucks present in one place. The trucks ranged from very early vehicles through to the most modern four-trailer road trains. I was very impressed that there was a 600-horsepower truck that actually carts a decent sized scraper. I saw this on the road recently.

If I can put a personal plug in, my father's beloved 1948 Diamond T truck was one of the stars of the show. It is fully restored. He worked this very hard in his life. The truck is in mint condition as he is very particular. A testament to how serious he was about his machines is that he actually built the shed for the trucks first before he built the family home. It is no wonder that, along with a whole range of other wonderful trucks, some beautiful Mack trucks—I have a lot of respect for Mack and Kenworth as they produced some fantastic vehicles.

We saw so many historic vehicles, including an old Foden. Everyone who came along was amazed and they all got to vote for their favourite vehicle. Because it was only yesterday, I am yet to find out which was the most popular and favourite truck of all of the people who came along. It was a huge effort but one greatly appreciated, and it was a walk through history for everyone who came along. The Dardanup Heritage Park is a wonderful example of what a community can do.

Question agreed to.

House adjourned at 21.29

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Mr Coleman: to move:
That this House:
(1) recognises the importance of start-ups in driving innovation in the Australian economy;
(2) notes the critical role that start-ups will play in creating the industries and jobs of the 21st century;
(3) acknowledges that in order to be internationally competitive in the future, the Australian economy must be agile and fast moving;
(4) welcomes the close engagement between the Government and the start-up community through events such as the recent policy hackathon; and
(5) encourages the Government to further build upon its existing innovation agenda through the implementation of additional policies to create a vibrant start-up environment in Australia.

Mr Christensen: to move:
That this House:
(1) notes the threat of violent extremism to Australian society;
(2) further notes the:
   (a) acts of terrorism committed by violent extremists within Australia against Australians;
   (b) specific terrorism incidents:
       (i) the attack on police officers at Endeavour Hills Police Station in 2014;
       (ii) the siege at Sydney’ Martin Place which resulted in the death of two Australians; and
(iii) most recently the murder of Mr Curtis Cheng at Parramatta Police Station; and
(c) significant number of ISIL recruits coming from Australia;
(3) commends the Australian police forces for their efforts in countering terrorism;
(4) notes the numerous acts of terror which have been prevented because of police efforts, in particular the:
   (a) attempt by the ‘Sydney Five’ to commit acts of terrorism in the city of Sydney in 2005;
   (b) Benbrika Group’s planned bombing of various sporting events in 2005 and 2006 as well as a plot to assassinate former Prime Minister the Hon. John Howard; and
   (c) 2009 plot to storm the Holsworthy Barracks in Sydney;
(5) praises the Prime Minister for his statement in response to the recent terrorism incident in Parramatta, that it is not compulsory to live in Australia and if one finds Australian values unpalatable then ‘there’s a big wide world out there and people have got freedom of movement’; and
(6) calls for continued action in countering violent extremism and in particular, radical Islam within Australia in order to prevent further acts of terrorism within our borders.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Griggs) took the chair at 10:31.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Electorate of Greenway: Deepavali

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (10:31): One of the great indicators of our fabulous, multicultural nation is the number of significant days for cultural and religious observances that have become part of the broader Australian calendar. One that has become very widespread, which is fantastic to see, is that of Deepavali, which falls on this Wednesday, 11 November. There have been many events conducted throughout Australia, and I would just like to mention a few of them that have been held around my area. Yesterday the Hindu Council of Australia had their Deepavali fair at Parramatta Park, and it was one of the best occasions ever for Deepavali. They have been holding these fairs for many years. The Council of Indian Australians also held a Deepavali event in my electorate at The Ponds.

Last weekend, also in my electorate, a number of the subcontinent based businesses in Seven Hills held their first local Deepavali event around Boomerang Place. It was great to see the amount of support from those small businesses who took the initiative, along with support from other groups like Blacktown City Council. It was a really fun-filled family day. A few weeks ago we also had the Blacktown Deepavali Mela at Blacktown Showground. All of these great events were made possible by organisations who put in a lot of time and effort, including by many volunteers. It is also significant to note the amazing amount of sponsorship that goes into running these events, which are devised as family days. It is great to see the wide cross-section of society, in particular the large number of families, that have been attending these events.

On that note I would like to take the opportunity to invite all members and senators to join in the Hindu Council of Australia's Deepavali celebrations in the parliament, which will be happening on the next sitting Monday, 23 November, in the Great Hall. This will be the 10th year that Deepavali will be celebrated in Parliament House. It is also a regular feature of other parliaments around Australia, which is fantastic to see.

Lastly I would like to note that this year Deepavali coincides with Remembrance Day. I think it is opportune to remember the large numbers of service men and women from India and elsewhere on the subcontinent, from many different religions, who served alongside Australian forces in the great wars and still do so today. I would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone celebrating Deepavali a very joyous occasion full of light and full of acts of seva—selfless service to others. How appropriate it is that we, as servants of our communities, practice and promote goodwill through such acts of seva. I wish everyone a very joyous and happy Deepavali.

Mining

Mr WILSON (O'Connor) (10:34): Today I rise to bring the House's attention to the mining industry in Western Australia and how important it is to our economy. The mining industry in WA produces around 45 per cent of the nation's mercantile exports and is mainly concentrated in my electorate of O'Connor and the electorate of Durack—that of Melissa Price.
It was with great pleasure that we were able to host the new Minister for Resources, Energy and Northern Australia, Josh Frydenberg, in Western Australia last week. The minister made himself available for a full week, and it was a real pleasure to show him around the mining industry in WA. The week began on Monday morning with a breakfast with 100 stakeholders in Perth, sponsored by AMEC and the CME, and it was very well received. The minister vowed to that audience to promote and support within cabinet the mining and energy sectors. He also reinforced his view of the need to maintain ministerial efforts on boosting the industry's productivity through taxation reform—which is the debate that we are currently having—industrial relations reform as well as deregulation and improved infrastructure. I would like to take this opportunity to thank AMEC and the CME for their very strong support for that event.

Later on Monday, I took the minister to Kalgoorlie. Kalgoorlie, in my electorate, is the heart of the WA mining industry, where it all began in 1893 when Paddy Hannan found gold, and it has been the heart and soul of the WA mining industry ever since. When we were in Kalgoorlie, we took the minister to Hahn Electrical. That is a business run by Daphne and Alan Hahn, and their son, Craig. A wonderful Goldfields success story, the business produces electricity components for underground mining and is exporting those components to the world. It employs 65 employees and has an extended family of businesses that employ over 200. The importance of Hahn Electrical, and businesses like it in Kalgoorlie, is to demonstrate to the minister that the mining industry is not just about the headline projects—the Gorgons and the $40 billion investments; it is also about those small-to-medium enterprises that support the mining industry. I would like to thank the Hahn family for hosting us for lunch and putting on a wonderful day and also for the work that they do within the Kalgoorlie-Boulder community.

Finally, no trip to Kalgoorlie would be complete without a visit to the Super Pit. The Super Pit, at the top end of Hannan Street in Kalgoorlie, was an amalgamation of all the existing mining leases by Alan Bond back in the late 1980s—one of the very good things that Alan Bond did in his time—and has now grown to be 3.5 kilometres long by one kilometre deep. The Super Pit produces 650,000 to 700,000 ounces of gold a year, employs 1,200 people directly in Kalgoorlie, along with the ancillary workers.

Fraser Electorate: Indian Festival of Lights

Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (10:37): Diwali, the Indian Festival of Lights, is the most widely celebrated festival of the people from the Indian subcontinent and across the whole world. Diwali means 'rows of lights', and it is the festival symbolising victory of good over evil, light over darkness and knowledge over ignorance. Historically, Diwali commemorates the return of Lord Rama to his kingdom after an absence of 14 years. To celebrate the event, Lord Rama's people put out little lanterns to illuminate his homecoming. Now, in recognition of this special time of the year, homes are decorated with candles, clay lamps, fairy lights and rangolis—intricate handmade artwork designs in colourful powder. The Festival of Lights is a joyful occasion of hospitality, community and generosity, marked with an exchange of decorative and enticing Indian sweets.

This Wednesday, the local Indian communities in my electorate will be bringing the Diwali festivities to our civic centre. As a part of the Diwali Mela in the City, workers, shoppers and passers-by in Garema Place will be treated to a selection of free traditional Indian sweets.
event is being organised in the city during lunchtime to share the festivities, as it is done in India. The Festival of Lights has evolved from its mythic origins to symbolise the reaffirmation of hope, a renewed commitment to friendship, religious tolerance, spreading the word of peace and harmony and, above all, celebration of the simple joys of life.

I look forward to joining the ACT Chief Minister, Andrew Barr, and the Indian High Commissioner, the Hon. Navdeep Suri, to commemorate this generous and inclusive celebration. Wednesday's festivities will be divided into three sections, each designated by a theme and a colour—saffron, white and green—reflecting the colours of the Indian flag. Garema Place will be filled with dance, music, food and lights. I am delighted to have this opportunity to extend an invitation of the Indian community in Canberra to everyone in the electorate of Fraser: come and join us on Wednesday for this spectacular Indian community festivity in Garema Place.

I would like to pay special tribute to all those Indian cultural and community organisations that are supporting and participating in the festival. It is a great local example of the unity and diversity of the Indian people. Thank you in particular to Lakshman Prasad, the president of the ACT Diwali Mela Incorporated. And thank you to all the people who give up so much of their time to the organisations that make up the Federation of Indian Associations of ACT: Amardeep Singh, Dr Krishna Nadimpalli, ChittiBabu Divi, Niranjan Agarwal, Sumandeep Dhillon, Debashish Raha, Jayanti Gupta, Sree Prasad, Lakhan Sharma, Madhumita Iyengar, Nishi Puri, Mahesh Scaria, Sujith Mysore, Ashok Jain and Prakash Mehta. Thank you all for your work and strengthening Canberra's diversity and inclusion, and happy Diwali Mela.

Cowan Electorate: Deepavali

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (10:40): This week, those of the Hindu religion and with origins in India will begin their celebration of Deepavali. Deepavali is one the biggest Hindu festivals, and it is celebrated with great enthusiasm and happiness in Perth. The festival is celebrated over five days, and it is on the third day that the main Deepavali festival, or festival of lights, is celebrated. Deepavali is known for its colourful varieties of fireworks. On the main Deepavali people light up diyas, and candles are all around their houses. They sing the Hindu prayer song Lakshmi Puja in the evening and seek the divine blessings of the goddess of wealth. The festival of Deepavali also includes an exchange of gifts. I understand that the key dates are Dhanteras on 9 November, Choti Diwali on 10 November, Deepavali on 11 November and Bhai Dooj on 13 November. Although most of those of Indian origin in Cowan are Hindu, there are also Christians, who are often from Goa, Sikhs and Jains. I know that on the same night as Deepavali the Jains also celebrate a festival of lights to mark the attainment of moksha or freedom from the cycle of birth and death by Mahavira, whilst the Sikhs celebrate Bandi Chhor Divas or the release from prison of the sixth guru. We are therefore in a celebration period of not just Hindus but most of those with origins in India.

It is, however, at this time important that I also use this opportunity to speak of the great contribution that many of these constituents have made to our community. The President of the Indian Society of Western Australia, Mukesh Jain, obviously of the Jain faith, has for many years superbly led the ISWA community. He and his committee have organised many profile events, and these events such as Deepavali and Indian national day have greatly increased the profile of the community and the positive way in which Indians are viewed in Western Australia. We are in fact in the middle of a series of Deepavali events across Perth,
and I want to congratulate the Indian Society and all those involved for the hard work they have put in to deliver a wonderful 2015 Deepavali in Perth. I will name vice-president Samir, secretary Surya, assistant secretary Virendra, treasurer Ramkrishna and assistant Jignesh.

Being the member for Cowan, I want to speak about the main community of Indian origin in Cowan. They are the Gujarartis. Gujarat is a state in the western part of India, but many of those in Cowan have come here from other countries. The Gujarati community is called the Gujarat Samaj, and the president is Yogesh Jogia. Gujarartis are renowned for being entrepreneurs, and it is common that they are business owners. By way of example, it does seem that most of the Cheesecake Shop franchisees seem to be Gujarartis, and Gujaratis are very much involved in running other small- and medium-sized businesses—alternatively, there are many professionals amongst them.

Of course there are many other groups of Indian origin in Cowan. There are the Sikhs, and there are those from the Odisha state, Goa, as I have mentioned, and many other places. Those of Indian origin, whether it is recent or distant, have made a wonderful contribution in Western Australia and also in the electorate of Cowan. They are a significant community and they add great and positive value. I hope that they all enjoy Deepavali and continue their efforts for themselves and for our country.

Kingsford Smith Electorate: Sport

Mr THISTLETHWAITE (Kingsford Smith) (10:43): I wish to congratulate all those involved in, and who were awarded at, the Randwick City awards for excellence in sporting achievement. These awards represent our community's way of recognising junior and senior sporting champions and inductees into the Randwick City Hall of Sporting Champions. The awards are in particular categories. One is females aged five to 12. This year the award was won by Tamsin Colley. Tamsin is an athlete with a disability, who competes in the TF36 classification, which means that she has coordination problems due to a brain tumour. In the last 12 months, Tamsin has competed at a national level for both her school and her athletics club. Her results are outstanding, having achieved many first places. In addition to these fine results, Tamsin has broken many records; the most impressive of those being the world record for the 800 metres for an athlete with a disability in her classification—congratulations, Tamsin. In male sports, the five to 12 category was won by Malikye Kessie. Malikye recently won two gold medals at the nippers' state championships in athletics. He also won a bronze medal in the 70 metres sprint, and he was named Junior Sportsperson of the Year at Maroubra Bay Public School.

The Bradley Matthews Memorial Award for overall sporting achievement in Randwick City went this year to Lucy McJannett, a 16-year-old swimmer who recently made the Australian junior swim team. She has won five New South Wales titles this year, and two national championships where she won in respective events. She was also a finalist in the Australian Open Championships at the age of 16—the youngest person to make an open swimming championship this year—and was a representative at the Junior Pan Pacific Championships, where she won a gold medal—congratulations, Lucy.

In the Randwick Sporting Hall of Champions this year there were two inductees: Alix Verge, former women's World Croquet Champion in 2009 and Australian champion in 2013 and 2014; and of course, Russell Fairfax—they don't come any more Randwick than Russell Fairfax! Educated at Matraville Public School, he played union for Randwick and went on to
play for Australia in eight test matches before switching over to rugby league where he played for the Roosters and had an immediate impact. In 1974 that team won the competition with him at fullback, and then won again in 1975. I have no doubt that Russell would have been a dual international, were it not for a severe leg injury. Congratulations to Alix and to Russell, the inductees into the Randwick Sporting Hall of Champions. Thanks to Cheryl McCormack, Peter Wynn and Anthony Minichiello, judges for all the awards.

**Capricornia Electorate**

Ms LANDRY (Capricornia) (10:46): People in regional Australia live far from the big cities and it is important that they also be given a voice in federal affairs. My electorate of Capricornia in Central and Northern Queensland is 91,049 square kilometres. Last week, I continued my series of ‘all ears’ listening tours around regional parts of the electorate to listen to what people had to say.

On a visit to Finch Hatton in the Pioneer Valley, west of Mackay, I met with publican Karen Collyer at the Criterion Hotel and with a number of local residents. Small-business owners like Karen are important to our small country towns and sidings, and I would like to thank her for her hospitality. I also met with the CWA at Gargett, also in the Pioneer Valley, and attended a lunch provided by CWA President, Mavis Head, and her members Connie Muscat, Dawn Breadsell, Mary Vassallo, Caryn Kempster, Anne Webster, Nola Duncan and Carolyn Tandridge. Recently I was thrilled to announced that after much lobbying we were able to secure a new mobile phone tower at Gargett to fix up mobile black spots. The Gargett branch of the CWA was formed in 1948. I thank the ladies for their warm hospitality and feedback on federal issues. I also met with Peter Woodland, chair of the Port Curtis Co-operative Dairy Association, which represents dairy farmers from Eungella through to Rosmoya near Rockhampton and inland Queensland. I was delighted to meet Julie McEvoy and Ingrid Haviland of Platypus Playcare, a childcare centre in Finch Hatton, and to present them with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flag.

I also held a listening post at the Marian Town Centre. Marian is steeped in pioneering sugar and farming history, and the town's Edward Lloyd Park is the final location of Melba House. President of the Pioneer Valley Tourism and Development Association, Lyn McMurdo, kindly hosted me for a visit. This is the original homestead that Helen Porter Mitchell—better known as Australia's famous opera singer Dame Nellie Melba—shared with her first husband when he managed the Marian sugar mill in the late 1800s. I thank Lyn and her members for their dedication as caretakers of our local history. On this ‘all ears’ listening tour I also joined students, staff and families at the Sarina State High School annual presentation evening at the Bob Wood Cultural Hall. Year 12 students will celebrate their valedictory on 16 November. I also held an ‘all ears’ listening post at the Criterion Hotel in Rockhampton. A packed room of people discussed many issues, and I thank them for their attendance.

**Domestic and Family Violence**

Ms O'NEIL (Hotham) (10:49): I rise today to voice my support for the City of Greater Dandenong's Walk Against Family Violence. I have had the great privilege of being a part of this community for many years. I have lived and worked there, I served there as a councillor and as mayor, and today I am very lucky to represent a good part of this city as the member for Hotham. Greater Dandenong is one of the most vibrant, interesting places in Australia—it
is a truly incredible place to live. It is a testament to the success of Australian multiculturalism, to the extraordinary contribution made to our nation by migrants and refugees, and to the willingness and ability of Australians to embrace incredible amounts of change, both social and economic. It is a lucky community in many ways.

It is also a community with some very specific challenges, and family violence is one of those. Like many parts of Australia, the reported incidence of family violence is growing very fast in the City of Greater Dandenong. Over the last 15 years or so we have seen about a 160 per cent increase in reported incidents of family violence, and experts tell us that that is due to both an overall increase in family violence and an increase in reporting. In a community like Greater Dandenong, women can face additional challenges getting the help and the support that they need—60 per cent of the people who live in the city were born overseas, and many more are from migrant backgrounds. We know that family violence occurs in all communities around Australia, but women from culturally and linguistically diverse communities can face special barriers in seeking assistance.

With this in mind, the City of Greater Dandenong has taken on the challenge of trying to tackle this problem by building community capacity to manage it. They have applied for a Building Safe Communities for Women grant program through the federal government, and I want to make my support for that application known. The rising rates of domestic violence right across Australia, but particularly in Greater Dandenong, are simply intolerable, and I want to commend the council, Victoria Police as well as the Victorian government for their efforts in tackling this problem.

I want to pay special tribute to the people of the City of Greater Dandenong themselves. On 24 November the community will come together and make a statement by walking against violence. The walk is going to start at Dandenong market at 10.30 am and will continue through to Harmony Square. Parliament will be sitting on that day, so I am very sorry to say that I am not going to attend the walk, but I want to send my absolute strongest support to this community. They are dealing with this problem in a way that I have seen them deal with so many others in the time that I have been a part of this community, and that is by standing together—160 nationalities, many languages, many cultures, but one strong community.

Deakin Electorate: Infrastructure

Mr SUKKAR (Deakin) (10:52): Over the most recent parliamentary recess I was very pleased to welcome the foreign minister, Julie Bishop, to the Deakin electorate, where we had the opportunity to open the new Centre for Knowledge and Innovation in Ringwood, which has been completed as part of the $665 million redevelopment of the Eastland Shopping Centre. The project, named Realm, is a state-of-the-art facility located in the Ringwood Town Square precinct. Key features of Realm include a new library; a comprehensive customer service centre combined with regional information services; a designated art gallery combined with flexible exhibition spaces; learning spaces for use by schools, community groups, universities and other organisations; a cafe; an interactive local history display—and the list goes on and on.

Importantly, it will also provide a regional one-stop-shop business resource hub that will strengthen competitiveness for local small businesses and entrepreneurs through unprecedented access to education, skills and business development services. Realm has been completed as part of a partnership between the Maroondah City Council, the Queensland
Investment Corporation and the Commonwealth government, and it demonstrates how the private sector and different levels of government can work constructively together to achieve substantial outcomes for local communities. As part of this year's budget I was thrilled to be able to secure $3 million for this project, not only for the way it will enhance a key civic space in the Deakin electorate but also, importantly, for the vital employment opportunities and productivity enhancements that will flow from it.

To further celebrate Realm's opening, it was also wonderful to welcome the Prime Minister to the centre last week, where he was able to meet with local business leaders and with students from Ringwood Secondary College, who are already utilising the space. He was also able to take time to read Possum Magic to young people who were there with their families, assembled for story time in the new library.

I want to take this opportunity to thank everybody involved with the project. I want to particularly mention Mayor Tony Dib, Councillor Nora Lamont and council CEO Steve Kozlowski, as well as the whole team at Maroondah City Council who really put this project forward to me and sold the vision. That was what ultimately helped me to be able to advocate for this $3 million of funding. Of course I want to thank the foreign minister, Julie Bishop, for doing an outstanding job in opening Realm and the Prime Minister for visiting. This shows how dedicated this government is to innovation and how much emphasis this government will place on innovation. I look forward to that increasing in the years to come.

**Aboriginal Legal Service**

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (10:55): The Aboriginal Legal Service pioneered the model of community legal services in Australia. They began as an operation of volunteers, Australia's first free legal service, in Redfern in my electorate of Sydney. They have been in operation since 1970. As well as the absolutely vital legal services they provide, they also operate the Custody Notification Service, the CNS. The CNS was set up in response to the recommendation of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody that police should notify the Aboriginal Legal Service when an Indigenous person is taken into custody. We all remember the national shame of the rate of Indigenous deaths in custody in the last century. As that royal commission found, between 1980 and 1989, 99 Indigenous people died in custody.

The royal commission found that Indigenous people face significantly higher risks of self-harm and of death in custody. They often feel more comfortable discussing health and welfare issues with someone from the Aboriginal Legal Service than with police. The CNS assists over 15,000 people every year. On average, once a week the CNS picks up that an Indigenous person in custody is at significant risk, either of self-harm or because of a pre-existing health condition. They can alert the police, and the person gets the help they need to be safe.

The Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Senator Nigel Scullion, himself said of the CNS earlier this year:

> It works, it has worked in NSW, it has led to zero deaths …

He is right. It does work. Since the CNS began, there have been no Indigenous deaths in police cell custody in New South Wales or the ACT in over 15 years. The CNS motto 'It's not just a phone line, it's a lifeline' is absolutely true. There is no other service available to take over this life-saving and vital work. But, sadly, they will not be able to provide this service for
much longer. Despite the minister's praise, funding for the CNS was only renewed for six months. That means that funding will stop this year on 31 December, just weeks away. I call on the government to continue to fund this absolutely vital service, this life-saving service, provided by the outstanding Aboriginal Legal Service.

Robertson Electorate: Broadband

Mrs WICKS (Robertson) (10:58): I rise to update the House on a series of NBN listening posts that I have been holding across my electorate in the recent months. We have an outstanding story to tell about the rollout of superfast broadband in my electorate of Robertson, because we have more than 67,000 premises either ready for service, under construction or in the rollout plan up to December next year. The latest three-year plan shows that the NBN is powering ahead, with 9½ million premises to either be connected or have work under construction in Australia. Certainly, the electorate of Robertson is testament to that. We have shaved years off construction time while still delivering superfast broadband of at least 50 megabits per second to 90 per cent of the fixed-line footprint.

To tell this story we have been holding a series of listening posts, 22 in total, starting at Umina Beach in August earlier this year. We are going right through until we reach Niagara Park in January. More recently, we have been at Spencer, Kincumber, Terrigal, Bensville and Mangrove Mountain. It has been fantastic to spend time, in particular, with our Mangrove Mountain and district communities west of the M1 in recent weeks, and to hear from local residents about what really matters to them.

I met with residents from Spencer and surrounding suburbs such as Gunderman and Wendoree Park on Saturday at the Spencer wharf. It was a beautiful day. We worked closely with the Spencer and Districts Progress Association to organise the posts. I really want to give special thanks in particular to the president, Brad Maisey; secretary, Monique Lisa; treasurer, Janet Ray; and association member Robyn Downham. Lack of communications infrastructure was a key issue that residents raised. Residents told me that there is either little or no mobile coverage in Spencer, and they also said that there is limited access to what is pretty slow internet. I heard stories like Antonio's, a Gunderman resident who recently moved from Sydney after living in Lane Cove for the last 10 years. While his family loves the country change and he gets to work in the Sydney CBD—his job is quite flexible and allows him the freedom to work from home whenever he needs to, Antonio said his family is limited to mobile 3G broadband, which he said actually does not work very well without an external antenna mounted on the roof of the house and, even with that antenna attached, reception is quite poor. There is also a lack of emergency support. This was highlighted during the storms that hit our region in April when the town of Spencer was isolated with no power, sewerage or running water.

At our listening post on Saturday, I committed to join with residents of Spencer and surrounding suburbs for a fight for better communications infrastructure for the people of this region. The nbn co advises that much of the region is expected to be covered by the satellite which was recently launched. I am pleased to see that NBN is working on having new commercial satellite services during the first half of next year, after testing and trials of the satellite have been completed. It gives me great pleasure to continue to fight for residents of Spencer and districts, and also to invite people to our listening posts in Kulnura and Peats Ridge next week.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Sukkar) (11:01): In accordance with standing order 193, the time for members' constituency statements has concluded.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Freedom of Information

Ms MacTIERNAN (Perth) (11:01): I move:

That this House:

(1) expresses concern at the culture of secrecy prevalent in the Government and the serious undermining of the core principles enshrined in the freedom of information legislation;

(2) notes the Government has:

(a) defunded the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC) despite failing to pass its legislation to abolish the office; and

(b) failed to advance Australia's application for the Open Government Partnership (OGP); and

(3) calls on the Government to abandon its attack on the OAIC and provide it with proper funding, and recommit to joining the OGP.

Since coming into federal parliament I have been totally stunned by the complete lack of regard for the principles of governance and transparency that underpin the Freedom of Information Act, as displayed by many ministers and government agencies. I had eight years as a minister, and I do understand that FOIs are a bit of a challenge and not something that ministers necessarily welcome. But I also understand, and have always understood, that this legislation has the important role of enhancing the prospects of open and accountable government. We know the Prime Minister himself has gone on record saying he supports this; saying that the current Australian government's Principles on open public sector information state that open access should be our default position; and saying that, 'unless there are good reasons to the contrary, government information should be free, easily discoverable, based on open standards and properly documented.'

Rather than looking at the position we have got ourselves into with the abolished Office of the Australian Information Commissioner—a decision that was made under the government of which the now Prime Minister was a senior member—where we had the absurd situation of the Freedom of Information Commissioner actually operating from his own home because the physical office had been abolished, I want to talk about a particular case that I think demonstrates how far this government will go to stop the truth being known.

We know that one of the biggest and most controversial issues is the $1.7 billion Perth Freight Link project. We know that Assistant Minister Jamie Briggs cooked up this ill-fated project, and that he did not come through official channels when it appeared like a UFO in the 2014 federal budget. It was very relevant for us to find out how this all happened, and so we sought documents relating to the freight link from the Assistant Minister in July this year. Initially they said: 'No, we are going to refuse that.' Twice we worked with them, and narrowed down the scope of the request so that it very clearly related to just those documents that would show us the advice that was coming from government agencies, and the discussion that went on between the Assistant Minister and the WA government. Finally they agreed to process our request, and identified 93 pages of documents.

On 18 September we thought, 'Nirvana. We have finally got a charges document.' We raced off and paid the first of the deposits, but six days later we found that in fact they would not be
finalising the document. They said that since the portfolio of the assistant minister no longer exists and that the documents have not been transferred to the new minister, that they were not able to finalise our request. So we made a complaint to the Commonwealth Ombudsman. The Commonwealth Ombudsman wrote to the department and said, 'Where are these documents?' The department wrote back, very ambiguously, 'These documents are specific to the minister and to the staff.' Now the Commonwealth Ombudsman has interpreted that as meaning that the department does not know where these documents are.

So I put it to you that we are now in a situation where we know there are critical documents out there that have been assessed. They have been cleared for release, but we cannot get them because there is no agency that can accept responsibility. Somehow or other the assistant minister has taken these 93 pages of documents off with him somewhere into his new portfolio, but they are not accessible to the public. We need to do better than this. We need to ensure, at minimum, that respect for the principles of open and transparent government are adhered to, and we want the Prime Minister to direct the assistant minister to now find these documents and release them to the public of Western Australia. We need to know why we are spending $1.7 billion on this project and why it is they are so desperate to keep all information from the public on this project.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Sukkar): Is the motion seconded?

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (11:06): I second the motion. I am happy to support the member for Perth's motion that this House expresses concern at the culture of secrecy prevalent in the government and the serious undermining of the core principles enshrined in the freedom-of-information legislation, and also at the de-funding of the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner. And if I have time in my speech I will also mention the Open Government Partnership.

Amazingly, I am speaking straight after the member for Perth moved that motion. Nobody from the government cares about freedom of information. It could not be more stark to have no speakers on this motion. As the member for Perth touched on in her speech, freedom of information is always difficult and a challenge for government. But, obviously, a government needs to be accountable and needs to listen to the people. I know it is important for the coalition government, because in their pamphlet, the 'Our Plan' pamphlet, the one that was handed out everywhere before the 2013 election—that blue pamphlet with a picture of Malcolm Turnbull on the cover—they said that the coalition government would:

… restore accountability and improve transparency measures …

This brochure has Malcolm Turnbull on the cover. This is not like Jaymes Diaz, that candidate for Greenway, who had no idea about the plan. This is an experienced minister under the Howard government who was part of this plan, yet the Abbott-Turnbull government has broken that election promise. They have completely broken it without any consultation or announcement.

In the 2014 budget we saw the coalition saying they would abolish the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner, without any discussion whatsoever and completely going against what the 'Our Plan' brochure stated. The Office of the Australian Information Commissioner is Australia's transparency watchdog, something essential in a democracy. The
OAIC oversees the FOI system, handles complaints and provides a cost-free, independent forum for appealing against government FOI decisions.

It is complicated. The coalition government said they would return the oversight of the FOI system to the Attorney-General's own department, a department which the secretary said took a hardball approach to FOI requests in Senate estimates last year. So much for improving transparency measures. And the government has made the Administrative Appeals Tribunal the only avenue for appealing unsatisfactory FOI decisions by the government.

Let us look at that: if you want to challenge a refusal to release documents, or if they are lost in the process, as the member for Perth outlined in her speech, then under FOI you will now have to pay over $800 just to file the appeal in the AAT, the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, and you will lose the support of the OAIC. I know that the member for Isaacs, Mark Dreyfus, a QC with experience in administrative law, has gone to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal just to have a look at the Attorney-General's diary. Not everyone has a QC handy when they have got an inquiry, so I would suggest this is a complete blockage of transparency and open government and democracy. It has a hint of that 'on water' matter, as we saw in that train wreck of an interview on the weekend where the immigration minister spoke to Barrie Cassidy on Insiders. If you get in trouble, just make it an on-water matter. It is like he is walking around with his feet in two buckets of water at the moment just trying to avoid any open government. They seem committed to secrecy, to opacity, to obfuscation and to making it more difficult for Australians to know what is going on.

The OAIC was established as part of Labor's commitment to improve transparency and accountability, which we made a commitment to before the 2007 election. When we made a commitment we stuck to it. We still believe strongly in that need for an independent FOI watchdog and it is bizarre to think that here, in 2015, we have such a backflip.

I also wanted to touch on the other aspect of the member for Perth's motion about the open government partnership. Over 65 participating countries have signed up for this. It started out with only eight countries; countries such as the USA, UK, Canada and New Zealand have signed up for this. There is a ranking. It would be bizarre to think that in 2015 we would try to disentangle ourselves from that commitment to the open government partnership. (Time expired)

Debate adjourned.

Agriculture

Dr STONE (Murray) (11:12): I move:
That this House:
(1) acknowledges:
(a) and applauds the efforts of Australian primary producers as they work to protect and rehabilitate the natural environment, often in conditions of extreme hardship;
(b) that Australian farmers have replanted the landscape via Landcare and the 20 Million Trees Programme;
(c) the personal commitment of Australian farmers to replanting the landscape; and
(d) that Victorian Farmers have won the fight against high saline water tables caused by tree clearing for mining and urban development in the 1800s;
(2) applauds the:

(a) environmental codes of conduct and farmers’ voluntary compliance as applied to food growers by our local food manufacturers and retailers; and

(b) clean green image developed by Australia’s food producers which adds great value to our food exports and domestic markets; and

(3) calls on the Government to designate a National Day of Australian Farming that celebrates their great achievements and their contributions to the nation.

Australian agriculture and its farm families have been pre-eminent in shaping Australia’s values and cultural identity. Our First World War Anzacs survived the inhuman conditions at Gallipoli and the Western Front because they lived rough, made do and when mounted they could ride and shoot better than the enemy. They came off our farms. While few today will ever get their shoes dusty marking cattle or drafting a mob of sheep, most male MPs and senators in this parliament proudly wear elastic-sided boots every day—footwear developed for safe riding and hard work down on the farm. Australia’s iconic dress is a wide-brimmed akubra and clothing reminiscent of the pastoralists at ease on the veranda after a long day in the paddock. Our bush poetry was once lauded and learnt by every school child, until we abandoned wholesale teaching of Australian history, afraid of the dark parts.

From the 1840s until 60 years ago, Australia figuratively rode on the sheep’s back—although in the mid-1800s kangaroo was still the main meat on the table in Adelaide. Early horticulture in Australia was developed by the Chinese, who had originally arrived as miners, and up until the 1920s one-third of all of our horticulture was due to the Chinese, in particular in Western Australia. It was Australia’s agribusiness innovation that invented the stump-jump plough that allowed cropping across our huge Mallee, arid and semiarid country. Our wheat varieties were developed by Australians like William Farrer, who gave us global competitiveness, ultimately in soft noodle wheats for Asia and the Middle East. Some 51 per cent of the Australian continent is still dedicated to farm production, with 90 per cent of that used for cattle grazing and sheep on native pastures in our arid and semiarid zones. But while that is a huge area, the value of cattle earnings are closely followed by wheat, dairy, vegetables, fruit, nuts and lamb meat and wool. Every day that the ceremonial mace is carried into our House of Representatives chamber, I am reminded of the contribution that wool once made to our economy as I see the golden rams heads encircling the shaft.

Wool in particular, but agriculture in general, established Australia as a thriving, innovative economy, battling the high risks of erratic rainfall in the driest inhabited continent on earth. Agriculture drove the establishment of large ports, manufacturing and service sectors. The early success of agriculture in Australia attracted foreign investment, especially from the UK, with vast holdings of land held by these interests; in particular, in the pastoral industry of Northern Australia. Cheap labour was an essential ingredient in establishing these early industries, with first convict and then Aboriginal labour sometimes working in slave-like conditions, and then the indentured workers in Queensland’s sugar industry brought in from the Pacific. By the 1900s, Australia was one of the world’s major food exporters, protected as it grew from its embryonic stages by high tariffs on imports and special Commonwealth country preferred-supplier status in markets like the UK.

Australian farmers have to compete and survive in one of the highest-risk and highest-input-cost environments in the world. At the same time, they are now the least supported by
any government in the developed world, whether that be in the form of special measures, tariffs on imports, subsidised insurance for the multiplicity of perils, or government-supported research and development. The low dollar has helped our exports to be more competitive but it has also, unfortunately, increased the cost of fertilisers, machinery and other farm inputs. We in Australia must acknowledge the efforts and the struggles of our great farmers—and also their triumphs, and their production that is the envy of the world: our clean, green food.

Irrigated agriculture is less than one per cent of the land mass of the country but contributes more than 28.7 per cent of the value of all agricultural production. Much of the irrigation of Australia comes from harnessing waters in the rivers of the Murray-Darling Basin. Unfortunately, with the unintended adverse consequences of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, we now have some $5 million to $7 million per day lost in value from primary production across the basin. This is due to the loss of water access security, and to speculator-driven peak prices for that water. Onshore and offshore superannuation funds and state governments are profiteering in this temporary water market, speculating on traded irrigation-system infrastructure built with taxpayer funds, all at the expense of the farmer, who quite simply cannot compete and is losing their enterprise.

We have to acknowledge the national efforts of our farmer community. The Day of Australian Farming is a day when we could celebrate their great achievements and their contributions to the nation. It is a day to remind our food consumers that 'down, down, everyday low prices' are not sustainable. Give the farmer a go. Celebrate their achievements, but acknowledge the incredible difficulties that they must today survive.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Sukkar): Is the motion seconded?

Mr Perrett: I second the motion.

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (11:17): I rise to speak on the motion by the member for Murray, and I am happy to applaud with her the efforts of Australian farmers. I say that not as someone with a farming background; I am the son of a butcher—who did actually end up going back onto the land. But all Australians need to be connected to a farmer. Whilst I have an inner-city seat, that includes Brisbane's fresh food markets at Rocklea—which I will touch on later—so I feel that there is a direct connection with the farmers.

No-one would quibble about the difficulties faced by all Australian farmers. I come from St George in Western Queensland. At the moment, some people have had some rain, but those never-ending droughts, the plagues of crop-eating insects, our harsh climate, and climate change are making long-term adjustments necessary. Farming is a particularly daunting task. Add to that the isolation, the ageing of our farmers, and some particular challenges going forward for the bush communities that support farmers, and also for the farmers themselves and their families. I was talking to a friend of mine, Wayne Long, out in St George on the weekend. He works on a cotton farm. He was saying that he is just waiting to see whether the water would flow through, to see what water was purchased, and to see—whilst they have put crops in—whether they would have enough water to irrigate. Good luck to Wayne and to all those waiting for that water to come.

We know that Australian farmers are skilled, and particularly intelligent and resilient. The importance of looking after our land is reflected by the United Nations General Assembly declaring this year the International Year of Soils. Coming from the western edge of the
Darling Downs—with, I would argue, the best soil in Australia—some might argue in the world—I believe it is important that we recognise the International Year of Soils, that we raise awareness about the profound importance of soil for human life, and that we educate the public about the crucial role that soil plays in food security. As our world population increases it will be even more important to keep our soil healthy and productive.

The importance of our agricultural sector cannot be overstated when it comes to our economy. It contributes three per cent to Australia's GDP just from the farm gate, and when value-adding processes after the food leaves the farm gate are taken into account then the contribution to GDP averages out at about 12 per cent, or $155 billion. As the son of a butcher, I would love to see that increase, particularly when it comes to sending packaged meat overseas rather than live exports if possible. The gross value of farm production is forecast to increase by eight per cent in 2015-16. I would like to see that dining revolution take place. I know that Australia can be, if not the food bowl, certainly a very well-stocked delicatessen. Be it produce from Tasmania, the Northern Territory or Western Australia, there foods that we can send into that growing middle class in Asia.

Our natural resources are vital to sustain the agricultural sector. Although farmers bear the brunt of protecting those resources as the stewards of the land, it is up to all of us to do our bit to protect our valuable natural assets. There are approximately 134,000 farm businesses in Australia. Each farmer produces enough food to feed 600 people; 150 of them are Australian and 450 live overseas. Australian farmers produce almost 93 per cent of Australia's daily domestic food supply.

Obviously, as the member for an inner city electorate, I know there are a few cattle and sheep at the Corinda State High School farm and some crops that they produce. I know that the Brisbane Produce Market, one of the six central markets in Australia, plays an important role in distributing food. The central markets in Newcastle, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth are a huge industry, turning over $7 billion a year, and throughout Australia these markets employ 17,500 people. Brisbane Markets is my biggest employer, employing 4,000 people, not to mention the transport and other contracts. Brisbane Markets turns over $1 billion a year. Obviously it is vital to our farmers that we look after fresh fruit and vegetables, and I am sure Andrew Young, the CEO of Brisbane Markets, will be making sure the government knows that they should not bring in a GST on fresh fruit and vegetables.

Mr HUTCHINSON (Lyons) (11:22): I thank the member for Murray for bringing forward this motion. I just had the pleasure this morning to speak about a motion from the member for Hunter on soils and I think there is a continuation here that is very relevant. Soils are the lifeblood of our nation. Healthy and productive soils sustain everything we do. They sustain life on earth and the biodiversity that exists. It is more obvious to us above the ground but less so below the ground. It is indeed something that is significant.

I note also that in the motion, which I am supporting, the member for Murray calls on the government to designate a national day of farming. I applaud her on those efforts. It gives me an opportunity to reflect on what is a really important sector within my rural, regional electorate and on the farmers that add so much to not only the economy of this country, or the state of Tasmania in my case, but also their local communities. They are often employers. They are members of sports clubs and service clubs. They are the people that sustain communities. When times are good, we know that farmers spend money in their local...
communities, so the notion that, when farmers are making a dollar, the country is making a dollar is very true.

I think particularly of the Midlands, which I must say are very, very dry at the moment. If we think of Tasmania, with 12 per cent of the nation’s rain falling on two per cent of the landmass, it is falling in all the wrong places at the moment. The east coast of Tassie is as dry as I have ever seen it. It is the driest October on record in some places. Tom Clarke, from Campbell Town, told me the other day that it is the driest October he has seen in 28 years. The country is certainly showing it.

These people are stewards of the first order—and I am thinking particularly about the Midlands of Tasmania, which is recognised as a biodiversity hot spot. Later I will touch on the 20 Million Trees Program, which is being undertaken in that part of my state. These people have for generations looked after the land on which they have farmed, in some cases since European settlement. Native grasses are threatened all around the world. Many Australian grass species have been retained in the Midlands of Tasmania because of the wool and sheep industry. It is actually because these people have managed the grazing of livestock in these areas that we still have the native grasses, which are so threatened all around Australia and, indeed, all around the world. These people are the ultimate stewards. I want to pay particular credit to those many families who, over generations, have managed those grasses in the Midlands of Tasmania in such a way as to retain them to this day.

The 20 Million Trees Program is a wonderful initiative. I am proud to say that I have two projects in my electorate, which are really about landscape connectivity. With so much of the money that we put into environmental projects a piecemeal type of approach is taken, whereas in Tasmania we have two projects that are linking the Central Highlands with the eastern highlands through corridors. I think the tragedy that is seeing plants and/or animals going onto endangered or threatened species lists is that we have not found better ways of reaching our objective here. We just cannot keep doing what we are doing. So I see in this project, which has been initiated through Greening Australia, Sebastian Burgess in particular, but also with the cooperation of so many individual farmers, that we have a fantastic opportunity to create a landscape outcome that will do more to make sure that we stop species decline and biodiversity is maintained within this very fragile area of Tasmania. I congratulate not only the Minister for the Environment and Greening Australia but also the landholders involved in what is a fantastic initiative in my electorate of Lyons.

Ms McGOWAN (Indi) (11:27): It gives me great pleasure today to support this motion. I want to talk on behalf of the Australian primary producers and our Landcare groups and support the call for a national day for farmers. In recognising the member for Murray, can I also congratulate you on the fantastic job you have done on the ground in protecting farmers in your own community, particularly through your work in protecting manufacturing jobs around the Shepparton-Moorooroopna area. You have been an outstanding champion for SPC and related people. So congratulations on that work.

Today I would like to claim my space, with my background in agriculture, and acknowledge the important work that happens in north-east Victoria with agriculture. I am a lifetime member of the organisation Australian Women in Agriculture and know the work that women in particular do in sustaining farming families. I am a member of the Victorian Farmers Federation and have been on the policy committee of the VFF. I am a producer of
prime lamb, which I am delighted to say is some of the best that you can possibly have. I am a
tree planter. I am also a member of the Indigo Valley Landcare Group. I join with one other
member of this House, Nola Marino, in being a proud Australian woman farmer. When I talk
about this word ‘farming’, I bring to the knowledge of the House that farmers are more than
just the one person. Farmers mostly operate in a family context. They are multigenerational,
so we have men, women, children, grandparents, uncles and aunts and also the people who
work on our farms. So that generic term for ‘farmer’ covers an enormous number of people
who are actively engaged in the production of our food.

At the local level these farming families and businesses are supported by many community
groups. Today I would particularly like to talk about landcare groups—in particular my local
Indigo Valley Landcare Group. Established in 1986, it was one of the forerunners of landcare
groups in our region and took upon itself the task of sharing knowledge, sharing work,
creating celebrations, doing planning, welcoming newcomers to the community and doing
fantastic field days. Most importantly, from my perspective, the landcare group introduced me
to some of the wise elders who were well established in my community and gave me access to
their knowledge and to the experience that generations of farming families had built up.

Today I particularly acknowledge and thank publicly Carol White. I thank Carol, John and
their family for the fantastic work that they have done in the Indigo Valley as farmers and as
wonderful protectors of our landscape. I also acknowledge Phil and Norm McLean—Phil in
particular for the introduction she gave me to trees and to the landscape. Phil, Norm and their
family have done a fantastic job in the Indigo Valley, teaching so many people so many
things and introducing me, as a young farmer, to agriculture and to the community.

These landcare groups operating in a small local area—there are about 71 in my electorate
of Indi—are also supported at the regional level by our catchment management authorities.
Today I also acknowledge the work done by the North East CMA and the Goulburn Broken
CMA. They do a fantastic job at a regional level, helping and supporting farmers and landcare
groups, helping with the planning and the marketing, sharing the knowledge and giving
farmers the infrastructure and the support we need to do our job.

Attached to the fantastic work of the CMAs there is another group that I particularly want
to mention today: a partnership between CMAs and philanthropy. In my electorate of Indi I
had the pleasure in July of launching the Swamps, Rivers and Ranges blueprint for the north-
east area of Victoria. This is a community-driven landscape restoration project. It is funded by
the Norman Wittenhall Foundation, which is a well-known and respected philanthropy group
dedicated to supporting community-driven environmental projects. One of the wonderful
things about the work that they have done—and I particularly acknowledge Stephen
Routledge for his work—is that they have been involved in over 60 environmental projects
across 19 landcare groups, bringing them together and taking a priority approach so that they
can be funded.

I support the member for Murray's call for a national day of Australian farmers. But a day
is not enough. We need government support and community support. We have to work
together as a nation to protect the diversity and variety of people who call themselves farmers
and to bring their work to the national level and say to them all, 'Well done. Thank you.' In
closing, I acknowledge the work of our Australian women farmers, often unrecognised, and in
particular I thank Australian Women in Agriculture for the terrific job they have done on behalf of us all.

Dr STONE (Murray) (11:33): by leave—I rise to speak again on this motion without closing the debate. In continuing with this motion, which calls for a national Australian day of recognition of the importance of farming, I want to talk about farmers and the environment. We so often have a situation in Australia where farmers are seen as the enemy of the environment—the opposition to those who call themselves environmentalists. In fact, the reality is that farmers are the environmentalists of Australia. They protect the biodiversity on their farms, particularly remnant vegetation, which they might re-fence, fence out or replant. They have to protect the air quality through looking after their soil erosion and any emissions from their livestock production. They look after water and soil protection.

In particular in northern Victoria farmers have managed the high-saline water tables—a natural phenomenon which has also come about from the clearing of the central highlands for the goldmining era and to pave the streets of Melbourne with red gum blocks. We had in the 1980s an enormous movement of soil salinity management, where the farmers, I am pleased to say, were able to succeed and to literally replant northern Victoria. Great plains like the Tragowel Plains, which were treeless when they were first seen by the first European, Major Mitchell, are now filled with trees in a landscape that resonates with bird calls, with returns of reptiles and native flowers that had not been seen for a very long time.

It is especially difficult in Australia for our farming population to manage the environment, which of course is essential for their own agribusiness success. That is because of the incredible concentration of buying power of the supermarkets. They compete on price, and they insist to the consumer that each of them is the cheapest and that they will remain the cheapest. They advertise on 'down, down, everyday low prices' or 'best price value' anywhere that you will find a place to buy food. The difficulty is that when a farmer invests, as they must, in their environmental services—in air and water quality and in protecting biodiversity, as I have mentioned—and in humane practices to make our Australian livestock industry one of the most humane and careful in the world, unfortunately they do not receive a cent extra on price when selling their produce to the supermarkets. In fact, the supermarkets insist on a code of environmental conduct—something that Australian farmers are happy to comply with—but not at a cent more for farmers when they take those extra yards to ensure our environment is protected.

This is extremely difficult for our Australian farmers, but they are willing participants in an environment where only the best will do for Australian consumers and where they know their clean, green reputation is one of the most important values they take into the global market environment.

I particularly want to acknowledge the farmers of Murray. I am a fifth-generation farmer from my electorate of Murray. I am pleased to say my son is a farmer and he expects his son to be a farmer and his daughters as well. I am also a fifth-generation irrigation farmer. Irrigation is under threat throughout Australia, particularly in northern Victoria, as the impacts of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan take effect. The mid-term review of the Goulburn-Murray Water Connections Project was published just on Friday, and we need to make sure that the problems and mistakes identified in that project with some billion dollars of federal funding are immediately dealt with. We need to make sure there is a resetting of the project so that
irrigation is at the end of the day, after the expenditure of that $1 billion, in a better place. We need to make sure it is in fact world's best practice and is not in the situation it currently faces, where farmers are being driven out of business and are in despair.

We have got to see more focus on our farmers' investment in education. We know a lot of our farm families think that it is best for their children to move off their properties given the hard times they are experiencing. But our future farmers will be great. They need to have excellence in education, and that means investment in something like agricultural science or other farm-related training. We know that tertiary educated farmers are those who can best manage into their farm's future, which is high tech and high business but also requires them to have a heart and to be environmentally sustainable. All of that is a feature of Australian farming. I commend this motion to the House.

Debate adjourned.

Iraq and Syria

Debate resumed on motion:
That this House calls on the Minister for Foreign Affairs to support a parliamentary debate during the current sitting on the Australian Government’s strategy in response to the crisis in Syria and Iraq.

Mr CHAMPION (Wakefield) (11:38): It is obviously a great honour to speak in the Federation Chamber, but this is a debate that should be going on in the House. It is a debate that should be had with all the members of the House. The Middle East, and in particular Syria, is a very important area of strategic concern, and what we have is a government that has gone from excessive and almost obsessive talk of death cults, on one hand, to a deathly silence, on the other. It is very important, given the strategic situation, that we actually discuss what is going on in Syria and the broader Middle East, because there are very big strategic shifts going on and we have a presence there in terms of our ADF personnel. And I know there are many personnel from my own electorate who are serving there. Obviously we have a big interest. We have a strategic interest and a common interest in humanity and in preventing armed conflict.

The situation could not be more desperate—hundreds of thousands of civilians have been killed by the Assad regime, by the Daesh regime and by various armed insurgent groups controlling various bits of territory. This has caused an avalanche of refugees, people fleeing this conflict. These people are legitimately fleeing to Lebanon and Jordan; both of their populations have expanded—in Lebanon's case, by almost a third. We now have a million people seeking asylum in Europe, with perhaps up to three million on their way. The ongoing conflict that is fuelling these movements of desperate and damaged people is accelerating because of the involvement of the participants on the ground—Daesh and the various armed insurgent groups of the Assad regime. It is also accelerating because of the presence of armed personnel of the nations of Iran and now Russia. We have problems in the lower part of Turkey; it is a very serious expansion of the conflict. And we have big things happening in this part of the world in terms of the emergence of Kurdistan—if not as a nation, then as a governing entity—reaching beyond the borders of Iraq. That has some very big challenges, given that this is pretty much the first time since the Treaty of Sevres that this has been contemplated.
We should be debating these big strategic shifts in the House of Representatives, and debating the causes of them: the breakdown of Ottoman rule; the breakdown of the model that replaced it, the Sykes-Picot agreement; and these nations of Iraq and Syria and others that were basically drawn by Europeans after the First World War. There has been very serious breakdown and very serious conflict. On top of that, we have the emergence of Iran as a regional player coming out of a self-imposed isolation in part, moving away from the development of nuclear weapons. That is to be welcomed, but we have to be very cautious in terms of Iran because they have killed and tortured their own citizens to prevent regime change in that country. We seem to have, as the member for Melbourne Ports articulates, a change of government policy in regard to Iran, which is very serious indeed.

To conclude, we should have a full debate, and every member of this House should participate in and contribute to that debate. We might learn something from one another, and we might think about what useful role Australia can play in diplomatic and military terms, in terms of our humanitarian policies and in terms of what expanded role we might play in this area to bring peace to what is a very troublesome and very troubled area of the world.

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (11:43): I am pleased to speak on this debate moved by the member for Sydney, but I must admit I am a bit confused. This seems to be a debate about having a debate. If the member for Sydney has, or any members of the opposition have, any criticism of Australia’s current policy in Syria and Iraq, then surely this is the time to bring it up, rather than saying we want to have a debate about having a debate. If they have some criticism about it, please—you have the opportunity. Raise your criticisms here during this debate rather than come in here saying, ‘Let’s have a debate about having a debate.’

If we are to have a debate on the issues of Syria, the first thing we need to admit is the past mistakes that have been made. We also need to admit that we here in Australia are not going to solve the Syrian civil war by debating it in our parliament. We in Australia are going to do very little to solve the problems of the Syrian war, except that we can act in concert with our allies.

Firstly, I will turn to some of the past mistakes that we have made. The mistakes go back to those heady days of the Arab Spring, when it was thought—mistakenly—in many Western nations that we could simply transform the Middle East overnight into some sort of democratic utopia. It makes us realise how fragile democracies are and how hard they are to build. You cannot just install a democracy in a country overnight; you first have to build up those democratic institutions that we in Australia have been so lucky to inherit from England. We also need to admit the mistakes that have been made in countries such as Libya. We tried to topple Gaddafi, but all that did was create a vacuum for chaos.

What have we seen in Syria so far, supporting the so-called moderate rebels? This has been an utter disaster. We have seen at least a quarter of a million Syrian deaths. We have seen 11 million people forced from their homes. We have four million people who have actually fled the country—perhaps the largest refugee exodus in modern times. We are seeing the chaos in Europe, with hundreds of thousands of people—close to a million people—on the move. It will potentially transform Europe forever. We have also seen—of most concern—that we have created the ground for ISIS to increase their influence.

If we are going to continue a debate about Syria, I say that the first policy should be about defeating ISIS. That should be the very first, No. 1 policy of this government, of the United
Nations and of our friends and allies. We also need to be very suspicious of the Russians and their actions in Syria. It is very clear that the Russians are only interested in looking after their Mediterranean ports in Syria, rather than actually defeating the terrorists in Syria.

There have been many mistakes that have been made in the Syrian crisis. As I said, we need to work on defeating ISIS first. But what we have done as the government is to take humanitarian steps in this crisis—something I think all Australians should be proud of. To take 12,000 refugees from Syria—yes, in the overall numbers of refugees in Syria, it is not a lot, but 12,000 is still a significant number. We will change those people's lives. It was heartening to see our Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, Minister Dutton, over there in Syria, when he was notifying people from Syria that they had been granted a visa to Australia. I remember one gentlemen standing there—I am sure we all saw it on television—who said, 'I have won the lottery.' To be granted a visa to come to Australia is like winning the lottery. That is something we should all remember every single day, whether we were born here or whether we migrated to this country. We have won the lottery in life. We get to live here in Australia, the greatest country in the world, and not in the tragedy that we see currently going on in Syria. Also, we have been proud to announce an extra $44 million in humanitarian assistance for people displaced by fighting in Syria and Iraq.

Finally, we should give support to our troops currently serving in Syria. As we approach Remembrance Day, we should remember that we have troops actively fighting on the ground today. (Time expired)

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (11:48): In the last sitting fortnight the Deputy Leader of the Opposition called for greater parliamentary scrutiny of the government's response strategy regarding the crisis in Syria and Iraq. I rise today to second the motion and again call for greater scrutiny.

As we all know, the current situation in Syria and Iraq is incredibly grim. Large sections of both countries are currently under the control of ISIS. Australians have seen the horrific actions of ISIS militants and the drastic actions many are forced to take to escape them. We have seen the footage of hundreds of thousands of Syrians and Iraqis who have been forced to flee their homes, waiting at EU borders to try to find safety. We have all seen the image of Aylan Kurdi, whose little body washed up on the shore—that horrific image that will stay with us forever.

There is no question of just how little regard ISIS has for human life. We have seen public executions, we have seen slavery and we have seen systematic sexual abuse. We have seen some of the most unspeakable acts of sexual violence, where rape and sexual abuse are not just a by-product of war but used as a deliberate military strategy to degrade the enemy. Horrifyingly, we have learnt that girls from Iraq and Syria have been stripped and sold and, in some cases, made to undergo over a dozen virginity restoration surgeries. These are just some of the reasons why the international community must fight and defeat ISIS. Our response must be as coordinated and effective as possible, and it also has to be compassionate when it comes to the refugees. I welcome the government's commitment to taking on an additional 12,000 refugees, after Labor called on the government to increase our existing intake.

Labor is now calling on the government to make Australia's objectives in Iraq as transparent as possible. Australians have the right to know what the objectives are, what the strategy involves and what our exit strategy would look like. In 2003, while talking about the
situation in Iraq, the then foreign minister said to this House, 'What is next? What does the future hold for a liberated Iraq?' Those questions remain relevant today. If the government's strategy truly is as effective and well-thought out as it maintains, then it should welcome some scrutiny from this parliament. This is particularly important at a time when the government strategy appears to be mixed, appears to be confused and appears to be constantly subject to change. The government must clarify whether it sees the Assad regime as part of the short-term solution, as part of the medium-term solution or as part of the long-term solution. It has had a position that has jumped all around on this in recent months. It has been all over the place on this and you have seen varying reactions from the Russians in terms of the role that the Assad regime was playing in the short, medium and long term. The government must also clarify our objective in Iraq. What does the strategy aim to achieve and what is the long-term vision?

While I welcome the government's $44 million commitment to the situation in Syria and Iraq, this is more mixed messaging from a government that has also reduced our aid budget for the Middle East and North Africa by 82 per cent. This government cut the foreign aid budget by $11.3 billion in this year's budget, at a time when the UNHCR estimates there are more than 60 million forcibly displaced people in the world. What does this say about the coherence of the government's response and approach? The government's strategy must be clearer and it must be more transparent, because the situation we face is complex, as we have heard today from the member for Wakefield. It has many elements, which include the military strategy, the political strategy and the humanitarian aid and assistance strategy for refugees. Increased parliamentary scrutiny of the government strategy in Iraq is something that I believe many Australians would welcome. I know that most Canberrans would welcome it too. They are entitled to hear the government's plan for how this increasingly complex scenario in the Middle East will be resolved.

Labor is and always has been prepared to support a strategy that will adequately address the horrific humanitarian crises of Iraq and Syria. Labor believes that the Australian people have a right to know what the government's proposed objective is and what the government's strategy is—and to be able to judge whether it will work. It is very important to have the people onside on this issue. We have a number of ADF staff members deployed to the region and it is so important that they actually know the purpose of their mission. One way to secure Australia's confidence in their plan is to open it up to parliamentary debate, and this is what Labor calls on the government—*(Time expired)*

Debate adjourned.

BILLS

Marriage Legislation Amendment Bill 2015

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr GILES (Scullin) (11:54): I am very pleased to rise to speak in support of this very important piece of legislation. I am very pleased that I can put on record again my view in support of marriage equality and making marriage equality a reality now. I am very disappointed, however, that it appears I will not have the opportunity to demonstrate my
support of this bill by casting a vote in support of it. This is the nub of this debate at this point in time. Right now, 226 Australians, members of this House and of the other place, have an opportunity—and I believe also an obligation—to make marriage equality a reality or, at the very least, to bring this matter to a resolution. This parliament must do its job. We are here as legislators to make laws. We are also here to mean what we say, not to dissemble nor to engage in sophistry, especially when it comes to something as fundamental as equality before the law and something also as fundamentally important as determining who we love and how we can recognise those loving relationships.

Opportunity and obligation: the opportunity is still presented by the bill before us now; the obligation goes to the heart of our responsibilities. Since this matter was voted on in the last parliament, the case for change and the case for marriage equality has been made out in the community. I take this time to acknowledge all the activists who have made a difference—Australian Marriage Equality and the individuals in the communities I represent and around the country. They are the individuals who have changed public opinion and demonstrated that there is a clear and significant majority in favour of marriage equality. I say this to them: we will not let you down.

I acknowledge also those who have brought this bill before the House: its sponsors—the member for Leichhardt, the member for Griffith, the member for Denison, the member for Melbourne and the member for Indi—and the other members keen to speak in support of this bill, and I am sure also to vote on it. I also acknowledge on this issue the leadership of the Leader of the Opposition, Bill Shorten, and his deputy, Tanya Plibersek, who have been ardent and fervent advocates for equality in this parliament.

This is a very simple bill before us. It raises a simple choice, an easy one for me, and I suspect for most of us, regardless of our views. So let's get on with it. I keep a postcard on my desk, depicting a couple at their partnership ceremony. They are a couple who were subsequently married in Canberra, before the ACT's laws in favour of marriage equality were overturned. In making this contribution, and every day that I am here, I think of Emily and Ellie, celebrating the joy of others—as they have done—a joy denied to them by this parliament.

I think also of my great friends Stephen and Dennis, the first couple married in the ACT—and all too briefly lawfully married. I think, for them, a second marriage will be something other than a triumph of hope over expectation. I hope it comes soon. I think also of the hundreds of thousands of Australians denied equality before the law, denied the opportunity to have their relationships recognised as mine is. It is simply not fair, and it is not just. I say to Emily and Ellie: I will keep your card on my desk until we have achieved marriage equality in Australia.

To the Prime Minister, who claims to support marriage equality, I say this: this is not a game, and it is not a matter for political calculation. It is a question of leadership. All of us have a responsibility to say which side we are on and vote in this place accordingly. It is all very well, Prime Minister, to speak of exciting times, but less than equal is not exciting and it should not be acceptable. Indeed, it simply is not acceptable.

This question of resolving a matter like this, by way of a plebiscite, raises some broader concerns that go to the heart of how our democracy operates. I am very pleased that we have a representative democracy in Australia. It is a good thing, and so is respecting our
constitutional framework. I note in passing, when this matter came before the parliament in 2004, there was no plebiscite to explicitly deny marriage to many Australians. We should also in this place be mindful of the individual impacts of the plebiscite, especially on LGBTI young people. Many concerns have been expressed; we should take these seriously.

It is a very rare opportunity that this bill presents. In supporting it, we can achieve a great increase in the sum total of happiness in Australia without spending a cent and without costing anyone anything. While it is one thing to make a virtue of necessity, it is galling and offensive to claim this is gross expediency, as has been the case by government members here. The choice is simple for those of us chosen to make laws: if you believe in equality, vote for this bill. After all, it is 2015.

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (11:59): What the motion supported by the member from the opposition will do is redefine the definition of marriage—something that has been defined for centuries. I believe that if we are going to make this change—something in common practice that, as I said, is centuries old—the change should not be made by the 226 people in this parliament; every single Australian should be given the opportunity to decide that in a plebiscite. That is the best way forward on this issue. I would hope that members of the opposition would support that plebiscite and that they would make a commitment to stick with the decision made by the Australian people.

At the next election, if the opposition continue with their current tracks there will be two choices. If you vote for the coalition, every single Australian will get their say on the issue of same-sex marriage through a national plebiscite. If you vote for the opposition, it will be rammed through parliament, changing centuries of common-law practice.

In the last week of parliament our Prime Minister gave an answer to a question which I think is worth repeating, about why a plebiscite is the correct way to go. He said:

He is worried that, in a free debate, there may be some views expressed which he finds unpalatable. Let me tell you, I have great faith in the decency, in the common sense, in the humanity and in the wisdom of the Australian people, and, if there are unruly voices heard, they will be drowned out by the common sense, the respect and the general humanity of our people. We are capable of great things in this country. We have done great things, and one of the greatest things we do is we practise democracy. Every day, we should be able to conduct public discourse in a civil manner—in a respectful manner. I have great faith that the Australian people, in that plebiscite, as they have in one contentious issue after another for the whole time this Commonwealth has been one, will be able to debate this issue in a sensible, civil and intelligent manner so that the Australian people—and every single one of them, not just 226 members of parliament and senators—every single one of them will have their say.

That must be the way forward in this debate: to give every single Australian their say.

So I disagree with the premise of this motion. This is an issue that should be decided by the Australian people at a plebiscite after the next election.

Debate adjourned.

Lung Health Awareness Month

Ms HALL (Shortland—Opposition Whip) (12:02): I move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) November is Lung Health Awareness Month;
(b) 17 November 2015 is International Lung Cancer Awareness Day; and
(c) 18 November 2015 is World Chronic Obstructive Disease Day;
(2) also notes that:
   (a) lung diseases such as asthma, lung cancer and influenza contribute to more than 10 per cent of the overall health burden in Australia; and
   (b) three out of five Australian adults studied by the Lung Foundation Australia reported symptoms that put them at risk of contracting lung disease;
(3) recognises the personal and financial impact that lung disease has on patients; and
(4) acknowledges the effectiveness of pulmonary rehabilitation for treating chronic lung diseases.

Australians are not fully aware of just how important their lung health is. The Australian Lung Foundation encourages everyone to just take one breath and celebrate the gift of breathing, because every time we take that one breath we are taking a breath of life. Lung health is overlooked by many Australians. We take it for granted when we take that one breath in and out, but it should not be taken for granted, because one in seven Australian deaths are because of lung disease each and every year, and Australians continue to ignore the signs of lung disease.

This month being lung awareness month, this parliament joins together to raise awareness of how important our lung health is. There is some key dates. Shine a Light's lung cancer awareness day is on 17 November. That is a day when we can reiterate the message around smoking, but it is wrong to say that every person that develops lung cancer develops it because of smoking. Ninety per cent of the men and 65 per cent of the women who develop lung cancer do so because of smoking. There is a stigma attached to lung cancer and I think there needs to be work done in that space because that stigma contributes to the high mortality rate in relation to lung cancer. World COPD Day awareness walks and events are on this month. That is something that members should encourage their constituents to be involved in.

Lung disease resulted in more than 1.4 million hospital patient days in 2011. If we look at the stats from this year, because there has been a very high incidence of asthma, we will find that that figure is even greater. Approximately 14 per cent of all deaths each year in Australia are a result of lung disease. There is also an enormous economic burden associated with lung cancer. As I highlighted in my motion, lung disease impacts on a person both personally and financially. They are unable to work, unable to socialise, unable to be involved in activities with family or with sport. It is really important that we raise issues around lung awareness and make sure that people actually look for those signals.

As I mentioned, with the high level of lung disease in Australia, we need to look at ways that we can recognise and treat it. It is making sure that doctors are very aware of the symptoms, and making sure that Australians understand that, if they are suffering shortness of breath or if they are coughing up mucus or blood, they really need to talk to their doctor about it.

But there is something that helps a person lead a more normal life, and that is pulmonary rehabilitation. It is a comprehensive program for people with chronic lung disease, which is when people have symptoms of breathlessness and they are unable to perform daily activities.
This program benefits people because they become much more physically active, it reduces breathlessness, it improves the quality of life, it improves mood and motivation, it improves knowledge of lung condition and it increases participation in everyday life activities. This is an option that will link people back into normality. It is not a cure, but it really helps people manage their lung condition. It is something that I believe governments should look to funding.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Price):** Is the motion seconded?

**Mr Watts:** I second the motion.

**Mr ALEXANDER** (Bennelong) (12:08): I thank the member for Shortland for raising this motion promoting lung health awareness, including November as Lung Health Awareness Month, together with 17 November as International Lung Cancer Awareness Day and 18 November as World Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease Day.

The issues raised through these awareness events are of great importance, as one in seven deaths in Australia results from lung disease. This disease is the cause of over 275,000 hospitalisations annually, representing approximately three per cent of all hospitalisations. This equates to more than 1.4 million hospital patient days, and therefore represents a significant issue for our healthcare system to address. This issue is not limited to smokers—2.3 million Australians have asthma and 1.5 million Australians aged over 40 have some form of airflow limitation. Over 11,000 Australians are diagnosed with lung cancer each year. The most important thing we can do for all these people is to encourage early diagnosis—whether it is the four-year-old child with undiagnosed asthma or the long-term smoker suffering from breathlessness that could be a COPD or a malignant tumour.

Over the past few years I have been fortunate to work with and support the efforts of Lung Foundation Australia to promote awareness of this range of illnesses. Recently this included the auctioning of a charity item—two hours of tennis with the legendary Ken Rosewall—supported by me.

**Honourable members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr ALEXANDER:** This item had actually been auctioned for a charity at the Midwinter Ball and was purchased by my good friend Wes Cook from Boehringer Ingelheim, who then generously donated it for re-auction at the Lung Foundation of Australia's annual gala dinner. The bidding for this item, as you would expect, was magnificent. As it approached about $5,000 there were two very keen competitors and, not wanting to see either of them lose, I came up with the great idea of doing two at $5,000 each, so we would raise $10,000 instead of $5,000. Then came the job of going to Ken and saying, 'Mate, you have to do two clinics, not just one.' We celebrated Ken's birthday last week—he turned 81, despite doing four hours of tennis one Saturday morning! What a great man.

More recently my office has worked with the Lung Foundation in the promotion of a new annual event called QUIT4october, a campaign championed by Lung Foundation Australian in partnership with the Association for Smoking Cessation Professionals and generously sponsored by Bennelong-based businesses Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson. The City of Ryde in Bennelong was chosen as one of four pilot locations for this initiative. Following successful programs like Dry July, QUIT4october encourages smokers to have a break from smoking for the month of October. We are conscious this is a big ask with nicotine being such
a addictive drug; however, if even one person learns through this program that they can control their smoking habit, then the campaign would be seen as a success.

Recently I have also written to the health minister in support of the Lung Foundation's application to the MSAC for pulmonary rehabilitation programs and follow-up pulmonary maintenance exercise programs for patients with chronic lung disease to be subsidised by Medicare Benefits Scheme. Pulmonary rehabilitation is an exercise program that is well documented as the most effective evidence-based intervention for improving outcomes for patients with chronic lung disease. This means that pulmonary rehabilitation patients are kept out of hospitals. Currently, pulmonary rehabilitation is conducted mainly in hospitals, and therefore is accessible to only about five per cent of the population, with only 260 programs to meet the needs of more than 750,000 patients. This has a particular impact on people located in regional areas.

Since my maiden speech in this place five years ago, I have spoken of the importance of exercise as a preventive medicine measure. Exercise is the single best thing you can do for your physical health. It is the single best thing you can do for your mental health. Exercising with diet will optimise your results. Exercising with friends or playing sport with friends will also give you social engagement and social health. My tip to everybody is to exercise, to diet and to do it with mates. Win, lose or draw, we will be better off.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (12:13): I am really pleased to support the remarks of the member for Shortland, who moved this motion, and the member for Bennelong, who has also contributed to it. Their contributions are consistent with their support for health promotion initiatives and for raising awareness of public health issues, which they have been doing for quite some years now. Both the parliament and the broader Australian community are very much the beneficiaries of their work, and I congratulate them for that.

As they pointed out, November is Lung Health Awareness Month, with 17 November being International Lung Cancer Awareness Day and 18 November being World Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease Day. Lung disease does not discriminate. It affects men, women, children, smokers, non-smokers and people who have never smoked. Lung disease is common and often underestimated.

The previous speakers gave the House some statistics, and I will continue that precedent. Lung disease affects more than 2.6 million people in Australia. More than 19,000 people die from a lung disease in Australia each year. One in seven Australians 40 years or older has chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, known as COPD, which is the second highest cause of avoidable hospitalisation. Around 10,000 Australians are diagnosed with lung cancer each year, and the latest projections are that this figure will increase by 40 per cent by the year 2020. Over 20 Australians die from lung cancer each day, which is more than breast, ovarian and prostate cancers combined. Lung disease such as asthma, lung cancer and influenza contribute to more than 10 per cent of the overall health burden in Australia. Three out of five Australian adults studied by Lung Foundation Australia reported symptoms that put them at risk of contracting lung disease.

I want to strongly commend the work of Lung Foundation Australia. They believe that research is one of the most effective ways to improve the prevention, detection, treatment and management of lung disease. They are dedicated to finding cures for different lung diseases through funding world-class lung research in Australia. They are investing in the future,
having provided more than $4 million in the past few years to support research. They offer both consumer and professional education in the areas of lung health and respiratory or lung disease. These education programs include annual patient education days in capital cities and regional locations, online training resources, professional committees and forums and a wide range of literature, including a comprehensive website.

People who have chronic lung conditions are often less active and can lose their fitness and muscle strength. By exercising regularly, as the member for Bennelong pointed out, a person's fitness and muscle strength can be maintained or improved. Exercising for more than two hours per week, performing activities such as walking or cycling, can improve the health of people with chronic lung conditions and, as a result, people feel better and stay well. People who exercise regularly reduce their need for hospital admission. Walking is one of the most important aspects of an exercise program for respiratory health and should be combined with some weight or resistance based upper and lower limb exercises.

Lung Foundation Australia are calling on the federal government to increase life-saving research funding as part of November's international Lung Cancer Awareness Month. They point out that every day we breathe about 22,000 times. I have not counted, so I am indebted to them for their assistance in that regard! Most of us do not stop to think about our breathing, but it is something that we ought to be doing. It is time that Australians started taking the health of their lungs as seriously as they take the health of their heart, breasts or prostate, and Lung Health Awareness Month provides that opportunity. Lung Foundation Australia are at the forefront of this endeavour, and I congratulate them on this.

Lung Foundation Australia are calling for more money to go into lung cancer research to fight this disease, find better treatments and aim for a cure. They express concern that the survival rate in relation to lung cancer patients remains low. The five-year survival rate is presently about 14 per cent. Whereas survival rates for breast and prostate cancer have improved dramatically over the course of the past 25 years, the five-year survival rate for lung cancer patients remains low. Lung Foundation Australia believe that lung cancer survival rates will improve if more funding is allocated to lung cancer research.

Mr MATHESON (Macarthur) (12:18): I would like to start by thanking the member for Shortland for this motion, which highlights the important issue of lung disease in Australia. I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of the member of Bennelong and other members here today who have raised lung disease awareness in their respective electorates.

I focused on one lung disease, cystic fibrosis, in my speech last year on Lung Health Awareness Month. I have had the great opportunity to meet and get to know a number of young people living with the condition through my involvement in Macarthur CF Swimathon, which has gone from strength to strength and raised over half a million dollars in its short history. There are over 80 people in Macarthur living with cystic fibrosis. I urge the community to support this fantastic cause, which will host a launch and auction night at Burnham Grove Estate on Friday, 12 February in preparation for the swimathon, which will be held on Saturday, 20 February at Wollondilly Leisure Centre.

November is Lung Health Awareness Month, and there are a number of significant dates including International Lung Cancer Awareness Day on 17 November and World Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease Day the following day, on 18 November. The Lung Foundation aims to ensure that lung health is a priority for all Australians and works to
promote lung health among the wider community, patients and healthcare professionals. Lung disease indiscriminately affects Australians young or old, male or female, smokers or non-smokers, fit or unfit.

A report prepared by the Woolcock Institute of Medical Research last year revealed that lung disease contributes to more than 10 per cent of the overall health burden in Australia. Mortality due to lung disease is significant, with 14 per cent of deaths, or more than one in seven, a result of lung disease. The report found that lung disease was a cause of 276,000 hospitalisations in 2011-12, and more than 1.4 million hospital patient days that year. However, many of us continue to ignore the signs and symptoms of lung disease such as breathlessness and coughing.

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease is progressive, long-term disease of the lung that causes shortness of breath and includes emphysema, chronic bronchitis and chronic asthma. People who unknowingly have COPD may mistake their symptoms as a sign of ageing or a lack of fitness. Lung Foundation Australia estimates that half of the 1.4 million Australians that have COPD do not have a formal diagnosis and therefore are not taking important steps to slow down the progression of the disease. COPD is the second leading cause of avoidable hospital admissions and is incredibly costly. On average a COPD patient costs $5,500 per admission to hospital.

Pulmonary rehabilitation is one of the most effective interventions for COPD and other chronic lung conditions. It is a comprehensive program for people with a chronic lung disease who have symptoms of breathlessness and a decreased ability to perform daily activities. It is tailored to a person's needs and ability so that they can get the best out of their physical and social wellbeing. The benefits of PR include improved physical fitness, reduced breathlessness, improved mood and motivation, increased participation in everyday activities and generally a better quality of life.

Since coming to office our government has worked hard to help tackle lung disease in this country. This year the Commonwealth listed the anti-lung-cancer drug crizotinib on the PBS, which costs $80,000 per patient if not subsidised.

Around 11,500 Australians are diagnosed with lung cancer each year, and this figure is expected to rise by a further 21 per cent by the year 2020. Tragically, more than 8,600 Australians die each year due to lung cancer, and that is more than 23 people per day. For Aboriginal communities the problem of lung cancer is even worse, with Indigenous Australians twice as likely to die of lung cancer than the rest of the population. As part of the Australian-first national approach to Indigenous cancer care the Minister for Health, Hon. Sussan Ley, recently announced $350,000 to continue the Turnbull government's strong commitment to raising awareness and reducing rates of lung cancer in Indigenous communities. Due to the prevalence of lung disease and COPD in Australia, the public needs to be made more aware of the telltale signs of lung disease and the impacts it can have on a person's life and that of their family.

Lung Health Awareness Month is a time to recognise the importance of your lungs, and Macarthur is fortunate to have so many passionate and dedicated people advocating for sufferers of lung disease. In my electorate of Macarthur are some of the highest rates of asthma and lung disease in Sydney. Macarthur also has one of the highest rates of lung cancer in New South Wales. I encourage everyone to get involved in the great work that Lung
Foundation Australia are doing to make our community more aware of the silent killer that is lung disease.

Debate adjourned.

**Australian Cities**

**Mrs PRENTICE** (Ryan) (12:23): I move:

That this House:

1. recognises that Australia's state and territory capitals and other major cities are home to more than two in every three Australians;
2. notes that the population of most Australian cities is projected to increase in the coming decades, creating additional challenges in managing planning, congestion and urban amenity;
3. recognises that the Parliamentary Friendship Group for Better Cities was established in 2014 with the aim of working together to make Australia's capital and major cities more liveable, resilient and productive;
4. congratulates the Prime Minister and the Government for recognising cities policies as a priority of government through the appointment of a Minister for Cities and the Built Environment; and
5. encourages all Members to continue to give strong support to the wellbeing of Australian cities.

As the Prime Minister says, there has never been a more exciting time to be alive than today and there has never been a more exciting time to be an Australian. Introducing this motion, I echo his comments and add that there is also no better time to be living in an Australian city. I say this because never have cities had a greater policy focus than today.

Australia has always had a highly urbanised population by world standards; however, for several decades now this trend has been accelerating. Broadly speaking, we have seen a stagnation and decline in rural and remote populations and a growth in the population of regional centres and major cities. Australians are voting with their feet and moving to larger cities and towns, mirroring a trend seen in virtually all developed nations. At the same time, successive waves of new migrants to Australia have chosen to settle in our major cities to be closer to their communities and support services.

These population movements are gradually changing the character of our large cities. The average Australian city of the mid-20th century was a city of freestanding suburban houses with a backyard. For example, in Brisbane, Australia's third largest city, modern apartment blocks did not begin to appear until the 1960s. While owning a house and a yard has its obvious advantages, the low population density that comes with urban sprawl creates other problems. The per capita cost to government of providing basic services such as electricity, water and sewerage is higher. It becomes uneconomic for government to invest in rapid public transport, meaning communities are reliant on road transport. Commuting times become longer. In recent decades in Australia, our largest cities are beginning to reach the practical limits of urban sprawl. For instance, the greenfield outer suburbs of Sydney currently under development are up to 50 kilometres from the CBD. Faced with such constraints, more and more families are now choosing to trade away the space of outer suburbia for the convenience and amenity of higher density inner city living. But higher density living has its own challenges. While the per capita cost of providing utilities is lower, the lack of space makes town planning even more important. Public transport systems need to
be efficient and affordable. Adequate space must be set aside for essential services such as schools and hospitals.

Australian cities are beginning to encounter these challenges. For example, in decades past the New South Wales government closed and sold off numerous inner urban school sites in Sydney due to low enrolment. Now they face an acute lack of space to provide public education to residents who have embraced high-density living on the Lower North Shore, the inner west and the Sydney CBD. The good news is that, whilst these may be new challenges for Australian cities, they have been successfully managed by urban planners in heavier populated cities overseas for many decades. Residents of global cities such as New York, London, Paris, Hong Kong, Tokyo and Singapore enjoy some of the highest living standards in the world because their governments have had the foresight to invest in the infrastructure necessary to manage population density. There are lessons that Australia can learn from these urban success stories.

I spent a decade serving on the Brisbane City Council, dealing with issues of planning for the future needs of a growing city. During that time and much of my time since, I have been giving thought to how we can do things better to ensure that our cities are well equipped. Better planning requires a coordinated approach between local, state and Commonwealth governments. In recognition of this reality, last year I joined with the member for Scullin and the member for Melbourne to establish the Parliamentary Friends of Better Cities. Our group has been working together with key industry bodies on aspects of cities policy to make our capital and major cities more liveable, more resilient and more productive. Tomorrow we will be hosting a function to hear from the CEO of Infrastructure Australia, Mr Philip Davies, regarding his vision for better infrastructure delivery for Australia's capital and major cities.

I am even more pleased that the work we have done has been acknowledged by government and that a dedicated minister has now been appointed to manage cities policy. It is something for which I have been advocating for many years. I am confident that the new minister will build on the work of our group to meet the challenges and harness the opportunities that the future will bring.

If you want to move to a city, choose Brisbane. It is the best city in Australia—Australia's new world city.

I commend the motion to the House.

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

Mr Varvaris: I second the motion.

Ms MacTIERNAN (Perth) (12:28): There will be some bipartisanship on this. It is good to see that we have the blue team finally—after about 30 or 40 years—actually understanding that they must take an interest in the fate of the cities. They must take an interest because—as the member for Ryan has said—not only does the bulk of Australia's population live in cities but you need to understand the agglomeration benefits cities have that drive productivity. It is the bringing together of these specialised and diverse skills that has always been the engine of innovation and productivity, and that is why cities are punching above their weight in terms of the generation of wealth. Let us hope that they understand that mobility is the key to unleashing this agglomeration benefit. Public transport and the profound understanding that we need to integrate land use and transport planning must be at the heart of this proposition.
It is good to see that the coalition have followed Labor in appointing a minister for cities. Labor has a very proud tradition: we had the Whitlam government with its urban renewal projects; we had the Hawke-Keating government with its Building Better Cities program; and we had the Rudd-Gillard government with its Major Cities Unit, under the leadership of the member for Grayndler. We have been in this place for a long time and we are genuinely very pleased that there are some signs that we have finally got a coalition government along this path.

But I must demur from congratulating the Prime Minister on his particular appointment to this portfolio. I ask: why on earth did he not appoint the member for Ryan, who has demonstrated a deep attachment and understanding to the cities project? It is incredibly hard to see the appointment of Minister Briggs as a meritorious appointment. It is almost bizarre. It is sort of like appointing Barnaby Joyce to the portfolio for animal welfare. The conduct of Minister Briggs in his previous gig was certainly antithetical to all those insights that the member for Ryan outlined previously. This minister wants to plough giant roadways not only through highly valued community wetlands but through inner city suburbs. He is literally the last man standing in support of the Fremantle Eastern Bypass, a highly discredited 1970s plan to drive an expressway through the heart of Fremantle. It is a plan that successive state Liberal governments declined to build because they knew it would be completely unacceptable to the community.

I use this opportunity to urge the Prime Minister to abandon the love child of the Fremantle Eastern Bypass, the Perth Freight Link—now the project that dare not speak its name—and to show that his government really does understand this cities thing by putting the money back into the Perth urban rail project and getting on with the planning for the Outer Harbour. I just find it quite extraordinary that the same minister who was racing around as the minister for roads, the minister for ploughing over suburbs and the minister for ignoring how we integrate land use and transport planning has now, quite bizarrely, been given this job as the minister for cities.

I want to make a final reflection on the comments that were made by the member for Ryan on the issue of inner city schools. This is an issue I have been talking on now for around 10 years. There is absolutely no doubt that, as we have had a resurgence of people living in the inner suburban areas, with families being prepared to stay in more dense formations and stay in apartments well into their breeding phase, we have not provided for the schooling that we need in the inner city area. In Perth, as the Mayor of Vincent, I drove this and finally got a reluctant state government across the line to provide more kindergarten spaces on council land. But the tsunami of babies that we are seeing in the inner city is going to hit high schools in the next four to five years, and I am deeply concerned that, if we do not plan for this now, it is going to undermine that very important agenda that we have about increasing urban density in the inner suburban areas.

Ms GAMBARO (Brisbane) (12:33): I wish to second the member for Ryan's motion on all points. It is an international fallacy that Australians are spread evenly throughout the country's outback. More and more Australians are gravitating towards our metropolitan areas for work, retirement and lifestyle reasons. This has provided both an impetus and a justification for Prime Minister Turnbull to create a Minister for Cities and the Built

FEDERATION CHAMBER
Environment. As the world around us continually evolves, we must persistently place the goal of bettering our cities at the forefront of what we do as a government.

Cities have been neglected by continuous Labor councils, and I want to acknowledge the hard work of Mayor Quirk and the LNP Brisbane City Council in advancing the interests of Brisbane and making it both a world-class city and a city of the 21st century. It is important, more now than ever, that governments do everything they can to fund infrastructure, technology and planning in our cities.

Of course, it is also important to acknowledge the contribution of Australia's rural and regional areas for their production of minerals, fruit and vegetables as well as animal products that have helped fuel this country's economy for more than a century. But it is also integral to acknowledge that, without a symbiotic relationship with our cities, our rural counterparts may not have been world-leading in so many industries. Cities lay claim to the high-tech tractors, the fertilisers, the efficient irrigation systems and even drones which help to contribute to Australia's clean and green image abroad. It is really hard to imagine how some of the most advanced farms in this country could ever operate without simple inventions such as wi-fi, which again was invented in a city. It is because of this symbiotic relationship, a testament to the strength of our cities, that Australia remains an economic powerhouse in comparison to the size of its population.

Cities are, similarly, at the coalface of curing disease and the provisioning of health services, issues that are becoming increasingly important as Australia's population ages. One example of this is the work being done by the QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute in my electorate of Brisbane. The institute not only researches causes and treatments for many cancers but is also investigating parasite genetics and developing new identification and treatment methods for many infectious diseases.

Similarly, cities are the drivers of innovation and lead the charge as are universities, like QUT in my electorate, which is a first-class innovator. Recently the new growth centre at the university was established by the Australian government, which will ensure Australia's mining equipment, technology and services sector is well placed to provide innovative solutions to the global resources sector. The Mining Equipment, Technology and Services Growth Centre—METS, as it will be known—was launched last month at the Queensland University of Technology by the Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science, Christopher Pyne.

The resource sector's continual drive to increase efficiency and productivity will continue. Cities also act as a conduit for many cultures and races that contribute to Australia's national identity. This manifests itself in many ways, from the prolific arts scene, as is the case in my electorate, to the eclectic culinary choices the residents of cities enjoy. Indeed, cities are the economic linchpins in our economy. They are not only the biggest drivers of employment, but also produce the largest output of capital.

My electorate of Brisbane has some of the best education rates in the country. This is not by accident, but rather because cities create a hub for both people and ideas. Just last week the coalition government announced that two local businesses, Cloud Manager and Scio Technologies, would receive just under $1 million in funding between them to help accelerate their businesses to the commercialisation phase. Thanks to the government's commitment to
the advancement of its cities, we are not only building capital that Australia wants to move to but creating destinations that the world envies.

I also wish to join in welcoming the minister for cities' establishment of a cities task force to focus on the three core principles of reform: better integrated urban planning, innovative funding, and the delivery of infrastructure and environmental sustainability. I echo the sentiments of Minister Briggs's comments made in The Advertiser recently that the fiscal constraints of all governments are also very real, so this government is looking at new ways to fund major projects around the country and to attract greater private sector involvement.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler) (12:38): I rise to speak on this motion. I do want to acknowledge the work of Jane Prentice and her ongoing interest in cities, first in her role as a Brisbane councillor and since then as the member for Ryan. Our cities do face unprecedented challenges in the coming decades. By 2031, our four largest capitals—Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth—will have all but doubled in size. The other capital cities—Adelaide, Canberra, Hobart and Darwin—are expected to grow by nearly 30 per cent. Congestion is estimated by Infrastructure Australia to cost the nation $53 billion at this time unless action is taken.

The cities of Australia's future must be more productive, sustainable and liveable. Yet, without leadership and investment from the national government, this challenge becomes even greater. Labor have always recognised cities policy as a priority of the national government. As the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport in the former Labor government, I set about returning cities policy to the heart of government following the coalition's disengagement from the space. Over the period of the Howard government, not a single dollar went into any public transport project around Australia.

In government, we set up the Major Cities Unit, which produced the annual State of Australian cities report to ensure that there was evidence based policy. We established the Urban Policy Forum and we established Infrastructure Australia to drive investment to projects based upon contribution to productivity rather to any particular mode of transport. We released Australia's first ever national urban policy, Our Cities, Our Future. And we invested. When we took office, Australia was 20th among OECD nations when it came to infrastructure investment as a proportion of GDP. When we left office, Australia was first. We doubled the roads budget and we allocated more investment to public transport than all other governments combined between Federation right up to 2007.

The coalition came into government and trashed that record. They abolished the Major Cities Unit, disbanded the Urban Policy Forum and cut funding from every single public transport project that was not under construction. Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show that infrastructure work conducted for the public sector declined by more than 20 per cent after the 2013 election based on the last quarter's figures. This year's budget included a $2 billion cut in infrastructure spending over the next two years over the allocation by the conservative government itself in their 2014 budget.

I welcome the change in direction we have seen in recent weeks and support the appointment of a minister for cities, but this change must be one of substance not just titles. Indeed, there is a lot of catching up to do. I am concerned that the minister for cities is working within the Department of the Environment rather than the department that actually drives infrastructure investment. This does not make sense. It appears to have confused the
coalition too. At least five of Mr Turnbull's ministers lay claim to having some level of responsibility for cities. There is Jamie Briggs, the minister. Then there is the minister he report to, the Minister for the Environment, Greg Hunt. Then there is the minister for major projects, Paul Fletcher, who reports to Deputy Prime Minister and the actual infrastructure minister Warren Truss. Then, somewhere in the mix, there is Josh Frydenberg, who is minister for northern development and has responsibility for infrastructure in that part of Australia.

So there has been a lot of talk in the cities policy area but no investment and no real change in substance. The Major Cities Unit remains disbanded. The only policy announcement has been the Gold Coast light rail project stage 2. But that was funding that was a saving from the Moreton Bay rail link. The funding that has been allocated for projects without a proper cost-benefit analysis such as the Perth Freight Link and WestConnex remain still with no business case and no transparency developed.

An elected Labor government will invest directly in public transport and in our cities. We will restore Infrastructure Australia to the centre of government activity to ensure that funding decisions on major projects are made on the basis of demonstrated public benefit. We are committed to cities policy and we will invest in our nation's cities to ensure they are productive, sustainable and liveable long into the future.

Mr ALEXANDER (Bennelong) (12:44): I am pleased to speak on this motion and recognise the member for Ryan, and recall the work that we did in forming the sustainable cities task force when we first joined this place. The settlement of Australia has occurred in the absence of planning, resulting in a constant of measures being undertaken to address the challenging situations that have evolved. This random behaviour has produced a full spectrum of challenges, from regional and rural settlement and the learning of the meaning of the tyranny of distance to the recent counter-trend of ever-increasing urbanisation.

The rapid concentration of settlement in our cities has created some serious challenges that must be overcome for us to maintain optimal growth, productivity, competitiveness and quality of life. The imbalance of settlement has produced an extraordinary imbalance of cost of living. Our biggest cities rate as amongst the most expensive in the world to buy land—an extraordinary situation when you consider that our greatest asset is land. However, all is not good in these most expensive cities, born in part out of the decay and decline of our regions because of the lack of planning for and commitment to infrastructure. Their capacity is limited and therefore the capacity for growth of Australia is compromised. It is overdue to replace the pattern of random settlement and infrastructure programs produced in haste to react to a situation as a constant catch-up emergency management with long-term planning for our cities and strategic settlement to restore balance.

The Prime Minister should be recognised for his initiative in appointing a dedicated Minister for Cities and the Built Environment. In his position of holding office, the decision to form a parliamentary standing committee is the most genuine demonstration of the importance of cities to our future and the fact that it is essential to form a common strategy to build an unshakeable foundation through planning and timely commitment to infrastructure that will survive any government. The task now before the minister and the standing committee is to develop policy that addresses the imbalance between our cities and our
regions—that combines to relieve the cities of growth beyond their infrastructure capability through strategic decentralisation.

I have long been on the record to champion decentralisation. It is difficult to retrofit infrastructure into our major cities while they are bearing the full load of growth—to put out the fire while you are adding more fuel. The strategy must combine the retrofitting of infrastructure into our major cities with planning, while a plan for strategic decentralisation is undertaken. In the work done with the member for Ryan on the sustainable cities project, it became very clear that cities are not islands—that they need connectivity—and that the imbalance of cost of living in our major cities compared to the decay of regional areas needs to be addressed.

One of the most misunderstood pieces of infrastructure—which has long been debated in this place, without much success—is the role of high-speed rail, the purpose of high-speed rail. The Sydney to Melbourne air route is the third busiest in the world in terms of flights, the fourth busiest in terms of passengers. So there is a role for high-speed rail to connect those two cities. But that is missing the point. The worldwide experience with high-speed rail is that it is the most essential piece of infrastructure to strategically decentralise—to take the pressure off major cities and allow regional areas to grow. With high-speed rail, cities outside the southern highlands, around the Goulburn area, around Shepparton and around Albury could grow to be significant cities. Their land prices would be competing with the very high cost of land in Sydney and Melbourne. When you bring into the strategy the opportunity of value capture there is a perfect storm to effect a value capture of the uplift in property values created by high-speed rail to fund the high-speed rail and to effect a plan of decentralisation to optimise the growth of Australia.

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (12:49): I rise today to speak about the city that I represent: Canberra, our nation's capital. Canberra has been my home for close to 30 years. I love this city and I love this community. The nation's capital is home to around 360,000 people, some of who are the most altruistic people I have ever met.

Canberra is home to our national memorials, like the Australian War Memorial, the National Gallery, the Portrait Gallery, the High Court, the National Library, the National Botanic Gardens, the Mint, the Arboretum and the list goes on. Canberra is the heart of this nation's democracy. It is a city that was built by a federated nation. Without Canberra, there would be no Australia. To borrow the words of Sir Henry Parkes, the crimson thread of kinship runs through us all. Those threads are drawn together in this city, in our nation's capital, Canberra. They run from every corner of this nation, those crimson threads, and the knot that binds them is this House in this nation's capital, in the city that I represent, Canberra.

During my time here I have seen Canberra flourish, and I have also seen it suffer. There is a clear trend that has emerged in that ebb and flow over time. Under Labor governments Canberra prospers, while under coalition governments Canberra suffers—just like it did in 1996, when I lost my job. I was with Foreign Affairs, and I was one of the 15,000 public servants that lost their jobs here in Canberra, and 30,000 right throughout the nation. We were all victims of the Howard government's public service job cuts. At that time, non-business bankruptcies jumped sharply, in 1995-96 by 38 per cent, and again in 1996-97 by 17 per cent, while business bankruptcies jumped in 1996-97 by 38 per cent. I remember 1996 and seeing local shopping centres resemble ghost towns. The newsagent closed, the hairdresser closed,
the video store closed. And they closed because incomes and wage earners just disappeared—they left town.

We have seen the same contempt for the public service under this government, which has cut more than 8,500 public servant jobs here in Canberra, 17,000 public service jobs right across the country. We read late last week that there is a new round of cuts coming. Even though we were promised that there was not going to be a new round of cuts, Prime Minister and Cabinet has announced that it is getting rid of 200 jobs by Christmas. There are suggestions that there are more on the way, not just in PM&C but in other government agencies.

CommSec's October State of the states report says the ACT's economy is the sixth best performing in the country. That is second last. It says that the ACT’s indicators are mixed and the jobless rate is rising. So I find this motion frustrating. The member for Ryan is encouraging all members to continue to give strong support to the wellbeing of Australian cities, and that is a great sentiment. But I ask: where is the government when it comes to support for Canberra? Where is the government's support for our nation's capital? Where is the support for the wellbeing of this city and the support for its infrastructure, its work force, its economy? This year's budget included no—zero—new infrastructure spending for the ACT. Contrast that to when we were in government, and the millions that were invested in the Majura Parkway, which everyone would be familiar with as they fly into the airport; millions invested in trade training centres; and millions invested in school halls, libraries and facilities to enhance the primary school experience.

I note the member's motion congratulating the Prime Minister for recognising cities policy as a priority of government through the appointment of a Minister for Cities and the Built Environment. I am now calling on the Prime Minister and the new Minister for Cities and the Built Environment to recognise Canberra, to invest in Canberra, to stop denigrating its work force, to stop cutting its work force, and to start investing in new infrastructure. I have a few suggestions. They can start with the Australia Forum, a new convention centre here in Canberra. The member here suggested high-speed rail. Bring it on. Bring on high-speed rail. The studies have shown that the link between the eastern seaboard and Canberra would be most efficient and economically effective for the first round, so bring it on. Canberrans want it now.

Until now, this government's approach to Canberra has seemed to just be cut, cut, cut. I am sick and tired of coalition governments' continued contempt for my home. I will continue to stand up for my community. I will continue to stand up for Canberra. I will continue to stand up for our proud service to democracy and the businesses that support it.

Ms SCOTT (Lindsay) (12:54): I rise today in support of the motion put forward by the member for Ryan. The Turnbull government recognises Australian cities as the powerhouses they are, through management, investment and the appointment of the Minister for Cities and the Built Environment. I note the motion recognises that two-thirds of all Australians live in capital cities. As it stands, Western Sydney is one of the largest economies in Australia, with the Penrith local government area alone having a gross regional product of $7.61 billion. The Penrith region is also home to some 200,000 people, and that number is likely to swell to 260,000 by 2031. What does this mean? This means we have to plan for some 30,000 new homes. We need to create an additional 50,000 jobs just to account for the new residents
moving in. That is before we take account of the fact that two-thirds of our current local workforce have to commute out of the region every single day for work. This is a huge challenge for Western Sydney and requires big thinking.

Future major developments across the region include a proposed science park at Luddenham; a sports academy, entertainment and leisure precinct at Penrith Panthers; a health, education and innovation precinct that should alone create 13,000 new jobs; and the planning of the Western Sydney Employment Area, an area of some 10,000 hectares which is substantially within the Penrith LGA—the state government suggests that as many as 200,000 jobs might be possible in this space. But no longer can we see innovation as something that can be defined by the inner urban areas of capital cities. We need to look at the outer regions as well and at what innovation can happen in our greenfield sites. Western Sydney is in a key, prime location for this. We also need to look at the collaboration between the universities, industry, business and government to ensure that the best attributes and potentials of all of our cities are realised, ensuring the development and growth success of our cities, particularly in growth regions like Penrith.

Western Sydney University's innovation corridor strategy is a prime example of such university driven collaboration for the building of better cities. Barney Glover, the vice-chancellor of Western Sydney University and the chair of Universities Australia, said: The Innovation Corridor sends a signal, regionally, nationally and abroad, that Western Sydney is an exceptional and thoroughly capable place to build and grow the world's best innovation based enterprise. The Commonwealth's and NSW government's recent investment in large-scale infrastructure across the region provides additional security and capacity for the region. These are great words. The Western Sydney strategy defines the opportunity of the outer corridor, with work already underway on many of the projects—for instance the Sydney Science Park, a 250-hectare site with fully-integrated commercial and residential properties and a town centre, providing 12,200 jobs in high-end research. The Western Sydney University's Werrington Park Corporate Centre, or Sydney HQ, and the new federally co-funded administration building is another such project.

We have international companies wanting to come and invest and innovate in our region. The Penrith Panthers Rugby League Club's expansion includes developments such as mixed-use accommodation, as well as leisure, lifestyle, retail and sporting facilities, including the Panthers academy and the multi-use, world-class Western Sydney Community and Sports Centre, which will essentially be an indoor rugby league field on a timber-sprung floor and, when not hosting sporting activity, will be the third largest exhibition space in New South Wales.

The planned Western Sydney Airport will act as a transport feeder to many of these visionary developments and will connect our region to the world. But, for it to work, we have to make sure that we get all of this right. That includes roads, and I am proud to be part of a government that has invested $3.6 billion into the road infrastructure across Western Sydney, not only through the Western Sydney Infrastructure Plan—WestConnex and other projects will also get our region moving. We are a prime example of a growth city. We are a prime example of where the future of our region will go. I am proud to be part of a government that now has a minister in charge of this to ensure we get this development right.
Ms RYAN (Lalor—Opposition Whip) (12:59): I rise today to speak about cities. The electorate of Lalor is one of the fastest-growing electorates in the country. The bulk of the electorate is in the city of Wyndham, which has grown from a population of 90,000 a decade ago to a population of over 200,000 today. It has gone from the shire of Werribee, known as a country suburb surrounded by green wedges, to a city butting up against the city of Hobsons Bay. In this place I note high recognition for Werribee, but most members of this place would not recognise the city of which Werribee is now the centre.

People come to live in Wyndham because it is affordable and because it is welcoming. It is now home to people from 120 countries of origin. Young couples come from other suburbs, often closer to the city, to build their first home. Families come to build their second, larger home. This growth brings challenges, not least of which is city policy. With the right policies in place, Melbourne's west and Wyndham can be at the centre of 21st century Australian innovative industry. With the right policies in place, the outer suburbs and growth corridors of our cities, including Wyndham, can be places of equity rather than disadvantage. Australia is the world's most urbanised nation, and cities matter. They are home to four out of five Australians and produce 80 per cent of our GDP.

But we have wasted two years under this government—and 10 years were wasted under John Howard—with no clear city policy. Two years is a long time in a growth corridor. Today, despite this private members' business motion, I question whether the Turnbull government has a plan for sustainable, liveable cities. I question that because I stand today following the shadow minister for infrastructure and cities, the member for Grayndler; and I follow the member for Perth—because Labor has a plan for cities. In opposition we have maintained our focus on cities. I stand here as a member of the caucus committee for cities. Sitting behind me is the member for Scullin, who chairs that caucus committee. We have been out talking about cities for two long years while this government has done nothing about city policy. Where I live and where the people I represent live, that is two long years without any policy.

Many will have spoken about the limitations and inequity that are being built into our cities while we ignore city policy. The book City Limits by Jane-Frances Kelly and Paul Donegan highlights some of the issues being faced in the electorate of Lalor and in other growth corridors across this country. It identifies that more than 50 per cent of people are moving to suburbs over 20 kilometres from the CBDs in our country—that is where I live. It highlights the emerging drive-in-drive-out suburbs that we are developing which are having a huge impact on the balance of family life for people living in my electorate. Allowing such a trend to continue leads to entrenched inequity. I have mentioned this in speech after speech. Labor in government addressed these issues. In government we delivered the regional rail link which has made such a difference in my electorate. The former Labor government provided $3 billion to fund it—it was the biggest Commonwealth investment in any public transport project in the nation's history.

On top of that, Labor has understood the importance of city development and city policy. We had RDAF funding and major infrastructure projects in regions. Labor worked with state and local governments to deliver much-needed infrastructure in growth corridors. But under this government we now have a Prime Minister who was in charge of delivering one of the most important infrastructure projects this country has seen—the NBN—and who has failed
to deliver on the promises he made. He has taken longer, stretched out the delivery time and increased the cost of that project.

I stand here as a proud member of the Labor caucus, a proud member who can say that a Labor government will deliver for cities, because we have already done the policy work on cities. We have the runs on the board for cities. Our approach will be evidence based, using business cases to leverage private sector funding. Our $10 billion infrastructure financing facility will unlock billions of dollars in the private sector to build the cities that we need for the future, to ensure that the people who live in my electorate are not disadvantaged by the number of kilometres they live from the Melbourne CBD.

Mr Giles (Scullin) (13:04): I am very pleased to be able to participate in what is a very important debate, and I thank the member for Ryan for bringing this matter before the Federation Chamber. In part this is a motion that is appropriately bipartisan. But there are some matters, as my friend the member for Lalor touched upon, where there remain key and important distinctions between the positions of the major political parties, notwithstanding the change in attitude following the change of Prime Minister that we have seen.

The motion before the House notes the work of the bipartisan Parliamentary Friendship Group for Better Cities, a group that I co-chair with the member for Ryan and the member for Melbourne. I think it is appropriate that the work of this group is recognised in terms of the role it has played in elevating the discussion in this place and more broadly in public discourse around urban policy. The Parliamentary Friendship Group for Better Cities has brought together a diverse range of stakeholders linked by a common concern for urban Australia, the places where 80 per cent of us live and where more than 80 per cent of our GDP is generated. The health and wellbeing of our cities is vital to the health and wellbeing of Australians, and the diversity of involvement in the better cities group has been an exemplar of how this public policy debate should play out in the future. We have seen the involvement of not only stakeholders that might be traditionally associated with urban policy, such as those concerned with infrastructure, but also groups like the landscape architects and the Heart Foundation as well as groups concerned with active transport options, looking at the health and wellbeing of those who live in urban Australia as well as some of the more traditional bricks-and-mortar aspects of urban policy.

Urban policy is of course an evolving area of public policy and of national government responsibility. Labor's story has recognised since the sixties the critical role of national government in shaping the environment in which most Australians live, particularly in the most urbanised nation in the world, a nation I like to think of as perhaps the world's most suburban nation. My friend the member for Lalor talked about the drive-in drive-out suburbs, a concern that goes to the heart of Labor's engagement with the shape of our cities, particularly rapidly growing major cities like Melbourne and Sydney where, increasingly, affordable housing is located a long way from employment opportunities and from social and leisure opportunities for people to enjoy. This poses real questions for quality of life as well as questions for productivity—looking, at one level, at the depth of labour markets that are on offer. This is a matter of great concern to me. I think of a conversation I had only the other day with the executive members of a residents' association at the northern end of my electorate. One of them, an accountant from Deloitte, explained to me that she was no longer able to continue in her work simply because the commuting time, combined with her
responsibilities for her children, meant that it was no longer viable. What a loss to her and what a loss to our community. Similar stories can be told across my electorate, and I know they are also told in the electorate of Lalor and right across suburban Australia. This is why it is so important that we do more than mouth the words about an interest in cities policy.

The words the Prime Minister has delivered and the appointment of a Minister for Cities and the Built Environment are of course to be welcomed, but they open up the conversation that the parliamentary friendship group has been leading. It has not been leading this conversation in isolation. Labor has continued since leaving government in September 2013 to set an agenda for urban Australia. The shadow minister, the member for Grayndler, has set out a 10-point plan for urban Australia and the role of national government. We have also very recently announced an innovative approach to infrastructure funding. In respect of both of these critical announcements we are yet to hear the view of the government. Indeed, there are many signals that we should still be concerned. While the Prime Minister has spoken about evidence based decision making, we have not seen that in respect of a range of significant infrastructure announcements in Victoria, where there still seems to be an enthusiasm for the East West Link despite the evidence coming in. It is one thing to talk about an enthusiasm for public transport—and indeed to be fond of a selfie on a tram. It is another to think about the role and responsibility of national government in ensuring everyone has an opportunity to live in productive, livable and sustainable cities.

Debate adjourned.

Sitting suspended from 13:00 to 15:58

STATMENTS BY MEMBERS

Richmond Electorate: Byron Lighthouse Run

Mrs ELLIOT (Richmond) (15:58): I rise today to talk about the ninth Byron Lighthouse Run, held on 18 October in Byron Bay, which is part of my electorate of Richmond. This is a great local event that I strongly support, and it has raised close to $120,000 for charity since it began. This year, almost 1,000 participants took part in the three events: a 10-kilometre run, a 6.7-kilometre walk and a kilometre dash for kids. The biggest team was from Southern Cross University, with 64 members. This event engages a whole community. The oldest participants were 84 and the youngest was seven.

I would like to congratulate Corey Samuelson and Amanda Watson, who finished first in the male and female categories respectively. Participation is a key facet of this great community event, with the $10,000 in prizes awarded not only to winners but also to random participants just for being part of this great day. The proceeds raised go to both local and international causes. Half of the more than $20,000 raised this year was donated to Rafiki Mwema, a charity based in Kenya and run locally in Lennox Head. It focuses on addressing violence and sexual abuse. The other half went to local health care, with proceeds going to technology facilitating better and earlier diagnoses of prostate, liver and breast cancer. So a whole array of charities benefitted from the moneys raised.

I would like to congratulate everybody involved. I am very proud that in our local area we have such fantastic programs. I admire them for their great work for our community, and for the work that they have done at both an international and a local level for the moneys that are raised. For everyone who participated, congratulations to all of you.
Barton Electorate: All Saints Grammar School

Mr VARVARIS (Barton) (16:00): On Friday night, I attended the 25-year celebration for All Saints Grammar School, an exceptional coeducational Orthodox Christian school in Sydney. Since its inception in 1990, the school has achieved tremendous success in its pupils' academic achievements and, importantly, their overall development. The school prides itself on the diversity of its curriculum to help students thrive, focusing not just on intellectual activity but also on that of cultural and sporting programs.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the dedicated teachers and families whom together, as a community, are collaborating to ensure their children fulfil their potential. This is a school that actively joins forces with the community to achieve shared goals. The connection this great school has with the All Saints parish of Belmore also deserves recognition for the role it plays in the students' development of their Christian ethos and values. These pupils are proud of their Greek heritage as Australian Greek Orthodox Christians and enjoy the school's wonderful motto, 'Let us stand well'.

The event was a wonderful evening, a night of much celebration for the school teachers and the board to reflect on 25 years of achievement under the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia. A school which serves its community is a beacon of light for the students and their families. I have no doubt, that the current students of All Saints Grammar will be our leaders of tomorrow.

Indi Electorate: Advanced CFA Youth Crew

Ms McGOWAN (Indi) (16:01): I am delighted to tell the house about the Advanced CFA Youth Crew training, and the pleasure I had at attending their graduation day last Thursday at Tallangatta fire station. A cluster of three schools—Tallangatta, Corryong and Mount Beauty secondary colleges—have been successfully running this course since 1997. The current coordinators—congratulations on a fantastic job!—are Joy Campbell and Shaun Thorpe, and special thanks to Kimberley Taylor for your work. Funding is provided by the Department of Human Services, with support from CFA brigades in Tallangatta, Corryong, Mount Beauty, Tawonga, Eskdale and many neighbouring branches.

Without the support of the volunteer members, the program could not be operated. Sixty-three young people—21 from each school—who are students in years 9 and 10 are selected via a competitive process to participate in this two-year program. The training days are rotated and held at each school's home twice a year to share the travel. The program includes an overnight camp at Howmans Gap. The students compete in theory and first aid training, and also participate in team building, fire skills management activities and leadership.

I was so pleased to be part of the graduation program on Friday, and I would particularly like to talk about leadership, courage and community, because this is what these students absolutely demonstrate: leadership in helping fight fires, but being team leaders; courage in being out there taking the first steps and being brave; and then contributing back to their community in so many ways. Well done to all concerned; terrific effort!

Banks Electorate: St George Art Society

Mr COLEMAN (Banks) (16:03): Last Friday night, I attended the St George Art Society's annual art show. We have many talented artists in the St George region, and indeed in my electorate of Banks. It was terrific to attend the annual show. The society was formed

FEDERATION CHAMBER
back in 1944, and for 71 years the annual arts show has been held. If we reflect on all the things that have changed in our world in that time, it is somewhat comforting to think that the St George art show has been on every single year.

Jean Harrow, who is the president of the art society, does a fantastic job, and there were scores of paintings there on the evening. There were seven different categories of awards. One of the awards that I presented was the Wal Chandler Award for traditional paintings in oil or acrylic; I also presented the overall Award for Excellence. It was sad that Mitzi Tilley was not present that evening, although many of her paintings were on display, and many of the members of the society spoke of her with great fondness. The society is open to all artists and goes from strength to strength, and I certainly, along with many other members of my community, look forward to attending the annual art show again next year.

Breast Cancer

Ms HALL (Shortland—Opposition Whip) (16:04): On Friday, 30 October, I held a breast cancer morning tea where over 100 women in the Belmont area came along and donated to breast cancer research. It was a fantastic morning and we had some wonderful speakers: Anna Fitzgerald from the Australia and New Zealand Breast Cancer Trials and Lisa from the Hunter Breast Cancer Foundation. In addition to that, we had the wonderful Carolyn Bear there with the beautiful jewellery she makes, which I am wearing today. She donates the profits to breast cancer and ovarian cancer research. We had a number of women there who had previously had breast cancer. The most recent case was five months ago, and the person who was the longest breast cancer survivor there has survived it for 35 years. It was a very informative morning and it was a very fun morning. We managed to raise in excess of $1,500 for breast cancer, which we divided up between the Australia and New Zealand Breast Cancer Trials and the Hunter Breast Cancer Foundation. I thank everybody who was involved in the morning, including Joanne Connors, who was there with her fashion wear and apparel, for the wonderful fashion parade that she put on that day.

Moore Electorate: Infrastructure

Mr GOODENOUGH (Moore) (16:06): Construction works are well advanced on the Reid Highway upgrade project, which represents the long-awaited $108 million investment in local road transport infrastructure. The Reid Highway is a major east-west transport and logistics link for commuters and the regional economy, connecting Moore with the Malaga industrial area, Perth Airport and major highways, including the Great Eastern Highway, the Tonkin Highway and the Great Northern Highway. Significant earthworks, construction of ramps and road carriageways and bridge-widening works over the Mitchell Freeway have resulted in the night-time closure of the freeway over the weekend. The federal government has contributed $67.2 million towards the project, whilst the WA state government has contributed $40.8 million. The Reid Highway will be widened between Marmion Avenue and Erindale Road and grade separation will occur at the Malaga Drive intersection, which carries about 75,000 vehicles per day. The upgrade eliminates sets of traffic signals and the need to merge for motorists. The project will improve safety and traffic flow, easing traffic congestion and travel times during peak hours and delivering benefits to residents of Moore.
Canberra Electorate: Baseball

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (16:07): I rise today to say, 'Go Cavs!' The Cavs, the Canberra Cavalry, is Canberra's baseball team and, just yesterday, the Cavs beat the Sydney Blue Sox in an absolute nail-biter to remain top of the Australian Baseball League ladder. Over the past few years, the Cavs have enjoyed enormous success. Led by head coach Michael Collins, the team won the Claxton Shield in the 2012-13 season. It was a great privilege for some of the team members to come out to my electorate office to showcase this amazing shield and share it with the people of Canberra. In the same year, they also took out the 2013 Asia Series in Taiwan, proving they have got what it takes not only in Australia but also throughout Asia—throughout the world. As loud and proud supporters of the Cavs, my staff and I are looking forward to watching the guys play at the Narrabundah Ballpark against the Melbourne Aces on 20 November. It is going to be a great night; we have got all the team—my team—there cheering on the great Cavs and we are going to have a great night. I really cannot wait to cheer the Cavs on from the sidelines with my fantastic team. I wish the boys the best of luck for this season and I congratulate them on their great start to the season so far. I know Canberrans will be cheering you on this season. We are very, very proud baseball supporters here in Canberra and no matter where the Cavs end up on the ladder this year, they will make us proud and Canberra is proud of them. Go Cavs!

Corangamite Electorate: Infrastructure

Ms HENDERSON (Corangamite) (16:09): Last Thursday I was delighted to tour the $6 million Shell Road Reserve sporting pavilion in Ocean Grove with the Greater Geelong Mayor, Darryn Lyons, and representatives of Ocean Grove sporting clubs. This is a wonderful commitment: $3.5 million from the federal government that we delivered as an election commitment and another $2.5 million from the city of Greater Geelong. Construction is well underway, in fact very close to being finished. During construction it provided some 100 jobs. So it has been a great project, particularly for the Ocean Grove Football and Netball Club, the Surfside Waves Soccer Club and the Ocean Grove Cricket Club.

As a government, we are very focused on the importance of building stronger communities, and this is a great example. It will be fantastic not only for our local school and sporting groups but also for all our local community organisations. I am very pleased that Mayor Lyons has joined my calls for a perimeter fence around part of the reserve. There is a very dangerous intersection on the corner of Shell Road and Grubb Road. With all the children and families that use the reserve, a perimeter fence around at least some part of that reserve is very important. Our government is very proud to be investing in communities right across Corangamite, including of course Ocean Grove.

West Papua

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (16:10): I recently met with representatives of the National Council of Churches in Australia about human rights violations in West Papua. A delegation of 11 church leaders from Australia, the US and Fiji visited West Papua earlier this year to see for themselves the situation in that territory and to offer moral encouragement to a people who have experienced international isolation. In 2014, when Indonesian President Joko Widodo was still a presidential candidate, he declared that there would be a new deal for West
Papuans. As President, he declared in May this year that foreign journalists would be welcome to visit West Papua. However, the rules governing media access remain unclear.

The NCCA reports that political prisoners remain in prison and that harassment, torture and extrajudicial killings of West Papuans—including children—by Indonesian security personnel continue. On 29 September, two high school students were shot in Timika. On 8 October, a number of West Papuans, including students, monks and a local journalist, were beaten and arrested while conducting a peaceful demonstration against the Paniai massacre of five teenagers by Indonesian police last December. Much of the killing is allegedly being carried out by the elite unit called Detachment 88 of the Indonesian National Police, which I am informed has been trained and armed by Australia since the Bali and Jakarta terrorist attacks. As the AFP noted, in a response to the ABC's 7:30, 'Indonesian law does not differentiate between terrorism, separatism and insurgency'. It would extremely concerning if Australia is facilitating serious violations of human rights in West Papua. I call upon the Australian government to investigate, to call for accountability, and to cease any assistance to D88.

Lyons Electorate: Willow Creek

Mr HUTCHINSON (Lyons) (16:12): It was a real honour for me last week to host the Prime Minister in the Derwent Valley town of New Norfolk. I was particularly pleased that the new Prime Minister chose the electorate of Lyons as the first stop on his visit to Tasmania. More than 200 community members attended a breakfast at the historic Willow Court. It was the first public event held in the refurbished Bronte building at Willow Court and the facility showed off its potential for future such events. It is now the subject of a full assessment by the National Heritage Council for inclusion on the register.

A dedicated team led by council works manager Charlie Crosswell worked into the night during the week before Mr Turnbull's visit to finish the painting and landscaping at Bronte. The large crowd, keen to meet the new Prime Minister, enjoyed a breakfast spread prepared by the Magra Country Women's Association. One of the guests to chat with Mr Turnbull was 92-year-old Mr Ken O'Brien OAM, a long-time Derwent Valley resident who owned and operated a business in New Norfolk for many years. The last time Mr O'Brien met an Australian Prime Minister at New Norfolk was in 1954 when Sir Robert Menzies and Dame Pattie were special guests at a public gathering at the theatre. When Mr O'Brien realised, he was horrified that all they had were a couple of kitchen chairs for them to sit in. As the story goes, he raced back to his shop and proceeded to find chairs that were more suitable for a Prime Minister.

Blair Electorate: The Colinton Boys

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (16:13): Last Saturday I had the privilege of attending the commemorative service for 'our boys' memorial at Colinton, which is a town that no longer exists. At the beginning of World War I, it had 211 people, and 44 young men and boys went to fight in World War 1. I want to congratulate the Brisbane Valley Heritage Trails and Elizabeth DeLacy for her wonderful book, The Colinton Boys, released last Saturday, which tells the story of these 44 young men who went overseas to fight on behalf of Australia. Colinton township does not exist anymore, but at its height it had a dairy factory—which was later closed down. It is north of Toogoolawah and before you get to the Blackbutt Range in South-East Queensland. I also congratulate the local committee that has been at the forefront of making sure this story is rescued for posterity. It is incredible that the story of these 44
young men, who were not always treated well when they came back, has not been told. The dairy factory that many of the men worked in was closed down not long after they came back, and not all of them had great and glorious lives afterwards. This was a time when Australians did not always treat their young men well when they came back from war. It is a great history lesson for all of us. We should treat the men and women who make sacrifices overseas on our behalf much, much better.

Mr LAUNDY (Reid) (16:15): Tomorrow, Australians of Turkish descent in my community of Reid, like Turkish people worldwide, will pause to remember and commemorate the life of a great visionary and one of history’s great leaders—Mustafa Kemal Ataturk.

2015 is the Centenary of Anzac, and for Australians of Turkish decent, in particular, it is a special commemorative day to remember Ataturk, or, as they know him, ‘father of the Turks’. Much has been said about this historic figure this year. His high regard for the Anzacs who fought at Gallipoli is well known and his tribute to them is immortalised for all to see on memorials in both Gallipoli and closer to home in Anzac Parade, Canberra. What may be less known was Ataturk’s important role after the war in creating a modern, secular Republic of Turkey from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire. He founded the Turkish parliament and was elected its first president in 1923. He instituted reforms in a range of areas. He instituted equal rights for women, reformed the language and introduced a new alphabet and lexicon, established modern banking, encouraged the formation of industry and sought, above all, to raise the literacy and education levels of his countrymen and countrywomen. I join with the Turkish-Australian community and all friends of Turkey in commemorating the passing of a great man, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, on the 10 November 1938—a visionary then and now.

Melbourne Electorate: Yarra City University of the Third Age

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (16:16): I stand in parliament today to congratulate the Yarra City University of the Third Age on the occasion of its 10th anniversary. Since it was founded in 2005, the U3A Yarra City has made an outstanding contribution to the community in my electorate of Melbourne. U3As are part of an international movement that encourages people to take part in lifelong learning for pleasure. There are no exams, no degrees awarded and no formal qualifications required. Rather, U3As are about putting into practice the values of lifelong learning, social connection, friendship and community.

U3A Yarra City has 200 members and is entirely run by volunteers. In its 10 years, U3A Yarra City has run classes on a wide range of topics as well as talks, events and leisure activities. There are currently over 50 courses to choose from. Its courses are open to all people of the third age in Yarra for one very low joining fee. I encourage Yarra residents to get involved with their U3A as learners, teachers or by providing support. This Wednesday, members of U3A Yarra City are coming together to celebrate this important milestone. I would like to take this opportunity in our federal parliament to warmly congratulate all of those who have given their time to make U3A Yarra City what it is today. To the U3A Yarra City community, I say thank you for all you have done to make Melbourne a great place for all.
Mr HOWARTH (Petrie) (16:18): I rise to quickly congratulate all the year 12 students in my electorate of Petrie. Well done on 12 years of education. You have worked hard, and I am sure the future will hold great things for you.

I have a couple of quick tips that I want to pass on. First, if you are studying next year, whether at university or TAFE, try to also get a part-time job. Having a part-time job gives you some experience as well as the academic credibility when you apply for a job. It looks great on your resume when you have finished. Second, set yourself goals for each year. After New Year every year, set yourself some goals for the year and a make five-year plan as well—and do not give up if you do not achieve them at first. Third, have some mentors. If you want to be a plumber, a teacher or an entrepreneur, find someone in that field that you can talk to and get some great tips from when you leave school. So, my three tips for year 12 leavers are: get a part-time job while you are studying, set yourself goals and find yourself a mentor.

Finally to all the year 12s: well done, once again. Stay safe during schoolies week. Have a great Christmas and ensure that you stay busy and active in the new year. The best thing you can do is to not sit around, but stay really busy and active. That will look great on your resume when you enter the full-time workforce in the near future. Congratulations again!

Mrs ELLIOT (Richmond) (16:19): I rise today to speak about the success of Gonski funding in my electorate of Richmond. Of course, this funding is so important and so vital because it ensures that every Australian child gets a high-quality education no matter their background. It is presenting great results in my community, and we certainly need to see Gonski funding continuing. I would like to give an example. Ballina High School recently celebrated their Gonski-funded programs as part of National Gonski Week, which ended on 1 November. The meeting they had emphasised the very crucial nature of funding for schools such as Ballina High. They had a very long list of successful programs at the school, including subsidising iPads for first year students and a bus service to ensure drivers could take kids to other schools, which allowed them to offer more subjects to their students. This all happened with funding of nearly $700,000 through Gonski.

However, new research reported by the New South Wales Teachers Federation reveals that the Liberal-National government's funding cuts to Gonski will rip a projected $2.67 billion out of public schools in the 2018-20 period alone. That is a huge amount and it will be devastating to many schools, particularly those in regional and rural areas. As the federal member for Richmond—which will soon include Ballina—can I make it very clear that I will always oppose these cruel cuts to our education funding, and I will continue to advocate for high-quality education programs such as the Gonski scheme, which makes a huge difference to the lives of so many of our regional and rural students.

Ms LANDRY (Capricornia) (16:21): The coalition government promised to get on with the job of fixing up Queensland's Bruce Highway, and that is exactly what we have been doing. Recently I had the pleasure of officially launching a project that will make the highway safer in my electorate of Capricornia. Our government has spent $8.5 million to engineer two
new overtaking lanes between Sarina and Koumala. We have delivered a new one-kilometre northbound overtaking lane and a 1.1-kilometre southbound overtaking lane 7.3 kilometres south of Sarina. This is great news for the local area, as more than 5,000 vehicles travel on this stretch of rural highway every day.

Keeping the Bruce Highway moving is vital for Queensland's economic performance. These new lanes will not only help to make the highway safer but also reduce time spent on the road by locals, visitors and our freight industry. The federal coalition government has committed $6.1 billion to fix up the Bruce Highway over the coming years. I thank the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development Warren Truss for his input into fixing up the Bruce. Sarina's overtaking lane project has been funded by the Australian government as part of its $175 million overtaking lanes program.

Indi Electorate: Mars Petcare Australia

Ms McGOWAN (Indi) (16:22): I rise to talk about manufacturing, which is alive and well in Indi. Particularly, today I would like to talk about Mars Petcare Australia and acknowledge their fantastic investment in Albury-Wodonga. MPA has three pet food factories in Australia: in Wodonga, in Bathurst and in Wacol in Queensland. The Wodonga site is also the Australian business headquarters. It is an Asia-Pacific regional hub centre for R&D, commercial and engineering, and it is a global service centre. It is the largest pet care supply centre in the Asia-Pacific region. As the largest supplier of the Australian pet food market, Mars Petcare also generates over $100 million per annum in export sales. It employs over 500 people in manufacturing and corporate functions. It has an estimated supplier ecosystem of an additional 500 jobs. There is over $130 million per annum in expenditure with suppliers. It is currently on an expansion path, and I am really grateful and pleased that Mars has made Albury-Wodonga its centre.

There are three other areas I would briefly like to touch on that Mars is responsible for: freight and infrastructure services, using quality raw material services, and building excellent supply relationships. Mars Petcare relies on both road and rail freight to manage time-critical delivery of products to customers throughout Australia. It needs world-class regional road and rail infrastructure. It also relies on services such as energy, gas and electricity, for managing the manufacturing. (Time expired)

Swan Electorate: Bentley Hospital

Mr IRONS (Swan) (16:24): I rise to speak about an important health service in my electorate, the Bentley obstetrics service. I recently got hold of Report on review of maternity services in metropolitan non-tertiary public hospitals in Western Australia, and that is what the Bentley Hospital comes under. The report was about a review of the current provision of maternity services in WA metropolitan non-tertiary hospitals, which was undertaken back in May 2015. The emphasis was on safety, quality, staffing and efficiency in the management of low-, moderate- and medium-risk pregnancies.

Part of the report is of interest to my constituents, particularly in Swan and around the Bentley area: in 2014 Bentley Hospital undertook 1,045 births—an increase of 162 from 883 in 2012-13. These were low-risk deliveries in CSF 3 facility. The nursery facility is also CSF 3 or level 1. The model of care is predominantly medical, consisting of specialist and GP obstetric care. In the report they say that now the Fiona Stanley Hospital is open this service
should be closed. But I remind the Minister for Health in WA that he did say in a speech back in February 2012, in the Western Australian parliament, that once the target reached 1,000 deliveries he would consider upgrading that facility and not closing it.

Shortland Electorate: Charlestown Caring Group

Ms HALL (Shortland—Opposition Whip) (16:26): The Charlestown Caring Group is a very important part of the electorate of Shortland. It provides services to frail aged people. In September I attended their annual general meeting. At that annual general meeting I heard about their achievements for the past year, how their business had grown and how they had gone from strength to strength. All this happens while they are providing a fantastic service to the people of Charlestown and the surrounding areas. It is important to note that there are many volunteers that are working with Charlestown Caring Group. It is through the fantastic effort of these volunteers coming in week after week, that the Charlestown Caring Group can provide support and service to the elderly.

This year, Charlestown Caring Group was a finalist in the Lake Macquarie Business Excellence Awards. But it was not a one-off; they were finalists in 2014 as well. They are an organisation that has put in place quality improvements, and they are very much in tune with the changes to the Aged Care Act. I congratulate the coordinator, Margaret Morgan. I know that they will continue to go from strength to strength and provide this outstanding service to the people of Charlestown and the surrounding areas.

Queensland Organised Crime Commission of Inquiry

Mr LAMING (Bowman) (16:27): Queenslanders from the Tweed to the Cape were shocked last week when the Labor state government chose to politicise child sexual offences and child exploitation in the Byrne Queensland Organised Crime Commission of Inquiry. They used that inquiry as an excuse to say that the LNP had gone soft on child exploitation, when in fact nothing in that report of 200 pages bore any testament to that. They made that claim all week, when in fact there were 732 police focused on child protection compared to just 100 in Taskforce Maxima at its highest. We know the money was significant: $6.7 million over four years to the CCC, $14.2 million over two years to Queensland Police, $360 million extra for policing and cops on the beat. And at any time police knew they could ask for more, as they can with most respectable state governments.

At no time did we interfere with internal decisions of resourcing of the police, as it should be. The penalties are extremely strong. Hetty Johnston commended, at the time, A-G Jarrod Bleijie for mandatory life imprisonment of repeat offenders, increased penalties for child exploitation material offences, the new grooming penalties and one-year penalties for removing a bracelet as a repeat sex offender. These are very serious matters. There is not a single representative of this country—state, local or federal—who does not have the strongest views on child exploitation and sex offenders. It should never become a toy for party political gain as it did last week in Queensland state Labor. Every Queenslander, as every Australian would be, would be appalled at that move.

Canberra Electorate

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (16:29): Yesterday I had the great pleasure of attending the annual Jennings Germans get together at the Harmonie German Club here in Narrabundah. I really enjoyed the opportunity to catch up with Canberra's German
community, particularly the Jennings Germans, who helped build Canberra. This is a great story. In the 1950s, 150 young German men came to Canberra to work for AV Jennings. Jennings had a contract to build 1,850 homes here in Canberra in just two years. A labour shortage meant that they had to look overseas for workers. So they got carpenters and they got bricklayers from Germany—young men who arrived in Australia, in Canberra, in 1951 and 1952 and built very distinctive homes in Yarralumla, in Ainslie, in O'Connor, in Harman and also in Narrabundah. I am very keen to ensure that some of those houses are preserved and not bulldozed.

Some of the Jennings Germans went back to Germany but others fell in love with sweethearts, they fell in love with Canberra, they fell in love with both, and they decided to stay, which was great for our community. I want to thank the Jennings Germans for their contribution to Canberra in building our nation's capital. I also want to let them know I will be working with them to get recognition from the ACT government in the honour walk. Time is running out. There are only 25 of them left. I will work with the community and Jennings to ensure that these Jennings Germans get the recognition they deserve.

Hinkler Electorate: Education

Mr PITT (Hinkler) (16:30): I had the great pleasure last week of opening the Mount Sion trade training centre at Shalom Catholic college. I congratulate Principal Dan McMahon, who has done a fantastic job to secure funding for over $11 million worth of buildings which were opened last week at Shalom College. The trade training centre will be able to turn out students with a high level of vocational education and training before they go into the work force, skills which are essential to help them secure the thing which is most important to them, and that is a job.

Principal McMahon in his speech spoke about the combination of professionalism and humility. As an example, he spoke about the All Blacks. Whilst I was disappointed in the loss, as all Australians were, this was something I did not actually know about the All Blacks. They have a tradition that after each and every game two All Blacks, regardless of their seniority, clean out the dressing sheds—they rake up all the bits and pieces of strapping and boots and mud and bits and pieces—to demonstrate that all players in the team are equal. So professionalism and humility, which I am sure will come from the students of Shalom, will serve them well in the future.

But the trade skills that they will learn will teach them to be able to secure positions as tradespeople, as trainees, and they will then go on to provide desperately needed skills in this country. There is a shortage, right now, of successful tradespeople, people who know their jobs. These things are absolutely critical to the future of the nation. I certainly congratulate Principal McMahon and all of the team at Shalom, and I wish them all the best with their new trade training facility.

Christmas Island

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (16:32): I would like to read to you this poem, written by a man detained on Manus Island. On the day that we have learned of the tragic death of Fazel Chegeni, I ask the House to reflect on these words. The poem's name is Freedom:

I'll find you in each place you are living
Even if you are above the clouds or in the sky
I'm always thinking about you
There is something I need to ask:
Can I fly and be with you?
I'll give you my youth and will let you take my life, if you show me how I can reach you.
I ran until my shoes wore out.
I made a boat and sailed the sea to find you.
I left my home
And used my bare hands to build a boat.
I heard that if I see you
There is no longer politics
I heard if I find you there will be no innocent bird in a cage
Yet a storm has forced me into a dark land.
I will continue to search for you
I heard you exist
For now, they say that I am free
Just without freedom.

Deakin Electorate: Deepavali

Mr SUKKAR (Deakin) (16:33): One of the most exciting aspects of my electorate in Deakin is that it is such an ethnically diverse part of Melbourne, with people of so many cultural backgrounds. This of course means there are so many different cultural celebrations that we have in our community. One of the largest of these is the thriving Indian community, which celebrates its annual Deepavali festival at this time of year. Deepavali, also known as the festival of light, is a highly popular Hindu festival celebrated by placing lights around the home and inviting friends and family to exchange gifts.

Across the Deakin electorate a number of celebrations have taken place to mark the festival. Last month, members of the Indian community marked the occasion through a local drama, and 60 local children took part in that. Hundreds of attendees were there. This weekend more than 500 members of the Australian Bharatha Brahman Samaj, led by Mr Vasan Srinivasan from the Australian Multicultural Council, gathered for a Deepavali festival and dinner. The dinner was a huge success. Additionally, the Punjabi club of Victoria and Tandoori Junction, based near my electorate, led by Param Jaswal, held their own festival celebrating Deepavali, which was also supported by over 700 local community members. I would like to thank Vasan, Param and all those involved in Deepavali celebrations in Melbourne's east and wish them a very happy Deepavali for 2015.

Richmond Electorate: Coal Seam Gas

Mrs ELLIOT (Richmond) (16:35): I am very pleased to talk about a massive community victory that we had on the New South Wales North Coast. It really is a win for all of those who have been fighting harmful CSG mining in our region for many months and for many years. Last week, we had the New South Wales government announce their decision to buy back Metgasco's three Northern Rivers petroleum exploration licences—or PELs, as they are known. They were PEL13, PEL16 and PEL 426. The government announced that because of a massive community campaign in which we made it very clear that we opposed harmful coal
seam gas mining within our region. I congratulate all of the people who worked so hard for this announcement. It is undoubtedly a huge community victory.

Whilst this PEL buyback is a significant step forward, the only way to permanently protect the North Coast is for the Liberal and National members in the New South Wales government to support New South Wales Labor’s Coal Seam and Other Unconventional Gas Moratorium Bill 2015. They need to support that bill to make sure we have permanent protection into the future. Whilst this announcement last week was a great victory, we want to have permanent protection in place. The only way we can do that is by making sure we have that bill in place, so I implore the Liberal and National members of the New South Wales parliament to support it.

I would like to congratulate all of those community members who have worked tirelessly for months and years to ensure that we have a gas field free North Coast. They have signed petitions, attended rallies and gone to so many protests to make sure we have a gas field free North Coast.

**Forde Electorate: Canterbury College**

**Mr VAN MANEN** (Forde) (16:36): It is always a pleasure to stand in this place and recognise some of the wonderful achievements of the young people in our communities. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate four year 10 students from Canterbury College who took part in the Junior Secondary Schools Culinary Challenge at Queensland TAFE. In teams of two students Jessica Lord, Alexander Noney, Kaitlyn Randle and Taneisha Richardson competed against 17 other teams from around Queensland. The students had to work with a chef to present a meal in 90 minutes. They also had to work out costings and ingredient constraints, and they had to incorporate at least two Indigenous ingredients. The students also had to demonstrate certain skills, including turning vegetables and deboning chicken. The competition was highly competitive and the meals were outstanding, but in the end the panel of six judges declared the team of Jessica Lord and Alexander Noney the victors, winning first place in the state. Kaitlyn Randle and Taneisha Richardson also did very well, placing third overall. Jessica, Alexander, Kaitlyn and Taneisha worked very hard over the past couple of months, practising their dish after school so that they could take part in the state finals. This is a fantastic result for the school. I would also like to mention chef mentor Adam Gleaves and their teacher Mrs Ingram, who both worked tirelessly with their students to prepare them for this competition. Congratulations to the students and well done to Canterbury College.

**Shortland Electorate: Belmont Community Child Care Centre**

**Ms HALL** (Shortland—Opposition Whip) (16:38): On Thursday last week I officially opened the Belmont Community Child Care Centre's extension. This is a childcare centre that has been operating in the Belmont area for 26 years. It is run by the community. It has fantastic outcomes. Walking into that centre on Thursday, the one thing that struck me was just how happy all of the children were. Not one child was crying. I went outside to the area that has been extended, a whole new section. The 'kangaroo room' has been added, with a fantastic outdoor area. The outdoor area has a number of activities—water activities and little stepping stones. It is a drawing room that is accessible from both the outdoor and the indoor areas. The children were enjoying the activities they could undertake there.
I would like to thank the staff at the childcare centre and to congratulate Lake Macquarie City Council for the support they have given to the Belmont Community Child Care Centre and Daracon Engineering for the work they have undertaken on the site. What they have achieved is something that is going to benefit so many young people into the future. This is a centre that is light and airy and provides quality care for the children in Belmont and surrounding areas.

**Dobell Electorate: Rural Fire Service**

*Mrs McNAMARA (Dobell) (16:39):* Over the last six months I have been honoured to meet the men and women of the numerous RFS brigades in my electorate of Dobell to personally thank them for their contribution to our community. A couple of weeks ago I was privileged to visit Wamberal Rural Fire Service. Earlier in the year the team was involved in providing widespread support during the April catastrophic storms that hit the Central Coast—serving, helping, rescuing, clearing and cleaning up the damage. It was great to meet and personally thank Captain Danny Long and Deputy Captain Tanya Shepherd and the amazing men and women of the Wamberal brigade.

Deputy Captain Tanya Shepherd advised that they are busily preparing for the summer fire season on the Central Coast. She reinforced the importance for residents on the Central Coast to get on board their 'Fire has a plan: do you?' campaign and prepare a bushfire survival plan. I encourage all residents of the Central Coast to make a plan to prepare their home and their families to stay safe in the event of bushfire threats this summer. To Danny and the Wamberal RFS, thank you for making me welcome and especially for your hospitality, particularly the outstanding cupcakes. To all our Central Coast volunteer RFS members and emergency service personnel, thank you for keeping our community safe, particularly during bushfire season. As we entered into the bushfire season, to all of you I say, 'Please stay safe.'

**Nallaratnam, Mr Sivarasa**

*Ms BURKE (Chisholm) (16:41):* It saddens me today to talk of the passing of Sivarasa Nallaratnam or Siva, as we all knew him, a towering member of the Tamil community in Victoria. I spent many happy afternoons with Siva at cultural events and saw in action his dedication not only to his ethnic community but to the community as a whole. Siva was a Justice of the Peace for many years; President of the Victorian Tamil Senior Citizens Benevolent Society and served twice as President of the Victorian Tamil Senior Citizens Committee. He was an active member of the Interfaith Network, where he worked tirelessly to bring together ethnic groups and faith based groups—and it worked very well within the City of Monash. He was also a member of the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria, a member of the Housing for the Aged Action Group, a member of the South-Eastern Radio Association, an active member of the Victorian Public Tenants Association and a member of the Victorian Public Transport Union.

He loved life, but he loved giving back to his community. He saw a need to be involved. He is survived by his wife, son and daughter and many grandchildren. I am saddened that I could not attend the funeral service last week in Springvale. I hear it was overflowing. Siva touched so many people's lives by his dedication to his community, but he never forgot where he came from or the struggles of his homeland. All he was looking for was peace and resolution. He spoke often and fondly of keeping alive the Tamil language and dance. He will be greatly missed by the community.
McMillan Electorate: Project Enlighten

Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (16:42): On Friday night it was a pleasure to be at the Anzac Centenary at the Yallourn Newborough RSL. For their project, the Enlighten Energy in the Park, together with an Unveiling and Light Dedication ceremony, we were ably hosted by the President of the RSL, Troy Hutson and Mrs Hutson and Steve Moy and Mrs Moy. It was marvellous evening for the community to come together around this event that has taken six years to finally fulfil the objectives of placing power and lighting infrastructure into the park.

In a memorable way, they have provided a place of reflection, remembrance and community participation. The project entails a tribute by means of placing lighting and power in the cenotaph park adjacent to the RSL. It includes lighting of the garden area, a unique lighting system over the cenotaph and three in-ground lights shining upward into our magnificent Lone Pine tree. The podium with the dedication plaque, which pays tribute to all service men and women who have served in all conflicts, was also unveiled. A sheltered alcove area has been erected for official engagements. It also acts as a seating area and houses the electricity infrastructure. It is also a dedication wall with a tribute to Sir John Monash.

It was a marvellous evening put on by this organisation, the Yallourn Newborough RSL, who have put in enormous amounts of work not only into their clubrooms but into building their community participation in a town that has suffered the slings and arrows of change, we might say.

Canberra Electorate: Little Wars Convention

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (16:44): Yesterday I attended the Little Wars convention at the Vikings club in Conder. This was a new experience for me, where I got the opportunity to meet with war gamers who took the time to talk to me through their passion. I know war gamers are often the subject of derision, but I was impressed by the knowledge and attention to detail of the gamers that I met and by their commitment to getting young Canberrans involved in war gaming.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Prentice): Thank you, Member for Canberra. Lovely comments. The time for members' statements has expired.

COMMITTEES

Treaties Committee

Report

Debate resumed on the motion:


The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Prentice) (16:45): There being no speakers, the debate is adjourned and the resumption of debate will be made an order of the day for the next day of sitting.

PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION

Valedictory

Mr McCORMACK (Riverina—Assistant Minister to the Deputy Prime Minister) (16:45): It is a great pleasure to rise to speak on the retirement of Joe Hockey. Joe Hockey first expressed his political ambitions at about the age of 14 years when he announced as a
schoolboy that he could solve the American hostage crisis in Iran. That was Joe. He was not on top of each and every one of his classes, as an article in *The Sydney Morning Herald* indicated, but according to this particular article he grilled his history teachers. He liked debating. Election as a student councillor in year 10 transformed him. 'It had a very positive impact on my self-esteem,' Joe said later. 'I didn't think I was worthy of anyone's votes.'

He qualified to study arts at the University of Sydney. He said he did not like his initial year, likening it to going from a small fishbowl to the ocean, but he embraced university life after going into St John's College on campus. In his third year, after transferring to law, in a shock victory he was elected president of the students' representative council, campaigning with a speaker plonked on top of his Peugeot 504. He later led a protest against the Hawke government's introduction of HECS fees in Martin Place in the late 1980s, telling a crowd, 'This is the rebirth of student activism in this country.'

He cut his early political teeth as a staff member in the office of former Nationals state leader George Souris, the long-serving member for Upper Hunter. He certainly would have learned a lot under George Souris, who was an MP in state politics for more than a quarter of a century and justifiably earned life membership of the New South Wales National Party. So Joe, like so many other Liberals, worked alongside and for a senior National Party colleague. That is what the coalition are good at: we are good at being all-embracing for both rural and regional Australia as well as for capital cities. We get on with the job of fixing up the debt we usually get left with. When Joe Hockey became the Treasurer of this great nation he certainly had a big job to do, and he got on with it with aplomb.

I believe he had one of the most difficult roles to play in the Abbott government, if not the most difficult, and that was being Treasurer and being saddled with that huge debt legacy. Sure, some of the policies that were brought forward in last year's budget were not popular. They were rejected, and Joe was left to wear a lot of that criticism, including public criticism, but he always served with the nation's best interests at heart. As a National Party member I have to particularly reflect on his decision to reject the Archer Daniels Midland takeover of GrainCorp. It was vital to the people I serve in the Riverina, vital to the people who grow wheat. And it was a controversial decision; it really was. I see the member for Grayndler acknowledging that. It was highly contentious. It had been sitting idle, gathering dust on the Labor Treasurer's desk and was seen to be a bit of a booby trap when we won government in September 2013 because—as many would know—of the National Party's die-in-a-ditch attitude about the attempted ADM acquisition and the Liberals' free-market policy of 'let the market rip'. There was a clash of ideas, and Joe Hockey was left to carry the can. He knew that it was going to be controversial. He knew that the National Party, following a meeting in Rockhampton, were not going to cop ADM taking over GrainCorp—were not going to wear that—so it was a very difficult position. I was on an aeroplane on the way to an electorate appointment in Griffith. When I alighted at the airport—I can see the member for Grayndler here; I acknowledge that I was in the terminal which Labor funded and Warren Truss opened—

*Mr Albanese interjecting—*

**Mr McCormack:** That was one of the only ones—and I did acknowledge the member for Grayndler at the time. I got to the terminal and was greeted with the news that the ADM
proposed takeover had been rejected by Joe Hockey, the member for North Sydney, the Treasurer. He said in his media release:

After long and careful deliberations, I have today made an order under the Foreign Acquisitions and Takeovers Act 1975 … prohibiting the proposed acquisition by Archer Daniels Midland Company … of 100 per cent of the shareholding in GrainCorp Limited.

It was an important, brave, bold decision, because previously only two other attempted foreign acquisitions had been refused. One was Peter Costello's refusal of the Shell bid for Woodside Petroleum in 2001. The other was the attempted takeover by Singapore of the Australian Stock Exchange in 2011. So this was setting a new benchmark as far as agribusiness was concerned. It was a rather controversial start to the coalition's government. It received round condemnation from Labor and from many others besides. But it was the right decision, and I certainly compliment Joe Hockey on that. He was not a man frightened of taking brave, bold decisions in the national interest. That is what set him apart from the treasurers in the Labor government in those six sorry years before we took over.

At the time I was very outspoken in my praise of the fact that good sense had prevailed. As I said in a media release:

The Treasurer's task was to apply the national interest test to this proposal and I am very pleased to see that having weighed the evidence, the Treasurer has quite rightly rejected this takeover.

I highlighted the benefits of the rejection for Riverina and eastern state growers. Riverina growers were provided with certainty at a time when they were coming to the end of that year's harvest. Our $9 billion a year grain harvest, along with up-country silos and storage sites, rail, ports and other critical infrastructure, would remain in Australian hands, and decisions would not be taken by a boardroom in far-off Illinois in the United States of America. Our farmers feed the nation and the world. We know that. This decision gave growers certainty.

You only have to see the benefits that that decision has realised. GrainCorp is now investing in up-country silo storage sites. They are doing it in large licks at Junee and Ardlethan in my electorate, and in other places as well. I am not quite sure whether GrainCorp would necessarily have made those investments had they been taken over by ADM. In fact the price of wheat, and indeed how much wheat would be grown, would be determined way off in the US, depending on the Canadian harvest and on the success of the American harvest. That would have determined how much wheat we grew here and what price our farmers would receive.

That stopped and certainty started with Joe Hockey's rebuttal of that particular takeover. The booby trap left by Labor was not a booby trap after all, because he showed moral courage, he showed fortitude and he stood up against what would have been a terrible outcome not just for Australian growers but also for the nation itself. I compliment Joe Hockey for that particular brave decision and I compliment him for his political career. He was a larger-than-life figure. It sounds like I am talking about him in the past tense. I am politically, but I know he has a lot more to give to this nation and to international diplomacy. I know that he will continue to be a great advocate both here and abroad for Australian markets, Australian business, Australian jobs and, indeed, Australia. I compliment him on his wonderful service to our nation as far as being a parliamentarian is concerned. I am a little sad that the only person in the lower house other than me whose birthday is on 2 August has left
the stage, but I am sure that the arena will be much larger for Joe in the future. He has a lot more to give, and I look forward very much to seeing what he does in the future for the benefit of this great nation. Thank you, Joe Hockey, for your services.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler) (16:55): I am pleased to be able to add a contribution to the statements that have been made on the retirement of Joe Hockey, and I join with the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and others, who have acknowledged that Joe Hockey has been one of the most significant figures in the House of Representatives and in Australian politics over the last two decades.

Like me, Joe was elected on 2 March 1996, and immediately after his election he was appointed as chair of the Sydney Airport Community Forum. The Labor Party had made, in the latter years of the Hawke and Keating governments, what I regard as a very bad decision to defer the construction of a second airport for Sydney and to proceed with the third runway. It was the deferral of the construction of a piece of infrastructure that has remained necessary for Sydney; it is still necessary for Sydney and for the nation today. Sydney is Australia's global city, and when the third runway, the parallel runway running north-south at Sydney airport, was opened a decision was made to shut the east-west runway. That was a very bad decision indeed because not only did it lead to considerable insurrection amongst the residents to the north and south of the runway, who suffered from an absolute concentration of noise, it also led to people who had up to that point supported the second airport being at Badgerys Creek, such as the Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils and all its member councils, to reassess their decision. It became a debate about aircraft noise rather than a debate about the economic future of Sydney, about jobs and about the nation.

Joe Hockey, in his position as the chair of the Sydney Airport Community Forum, had a series of public meetings around Sydney to develop the long-term operating plan for that airport. There was consultation and cooperation with me personally as a member of that community consultation committee. I had been member of the community consultation committee prior to my election to the national parliament, and I had been involved in what led to the acquisition of more than 150 homes and public buildings, including a church—the oldest Coptic Church in Australia—and other public facilities, in Sydenham. There was also the insulation of more than 10,000 homes, schools, hospitals, churches and other public buildings.

Joe Hockey, during that period, was prepared to come down to Sydenham in my electorate and to sit down in the lounge rooms and the kitchens without media, and we talked through some of the solutions. One of the problems that had occurred was that many of these homes were very much of working people. They were fibro homes. I remember sitting in a house in Tempe that was due to be insulated, yet the walls of the house literally did not meet the floor of the house; there was a gap. Therefore it was completely impossible to get adequate insulation into that home.

Joe Hockey, I think, from that period on showed himself to be someone who was concerned with people. At the end of the day we can have our ideological differences in this place, but the reason why we are here is to assist the lives of people. Joe Hockey and I have major ideological differences about the role of government and the way in which the state can have an impact compared with the free market. I probably am closer to Mr McCormack and
some of the Nationals in that respect than either of us would be to Joe Hockey's free market approach.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Henderson): We are all close to Mr McCormack, I have to say.

Mr ALBANESE: Joe Hockey's statements, for example, about the age of entitlement are ones that I would have fundamental disagreement with, and from my perspective I think the people who feel entitled are quite often the big end of town and the corporate sector, who believe that their entitlements override the rights of working people over issues such as penalty rates, for example, that many people need simply to be able to survive. Notwithstanding that, Joe is someone with whom you could have an ideological or political discussion that was not personal but recognised that differences can be there but you can still have respect for people—and Joe Hockey is someone who has my respect.

Of course, eventually we got there in terms of the second airport. As did Joe and other members who had an interest, while I was the minister I certainly consulted with the process of searching for an appropriate site. In the end it is pretty clear that we came back to where we began, at Badgerys Creek, as the best site. I certainly think that I have played a role in making that decision a reality. Sometimes it needs oppositions, not just governments, to be a part of decision making.

I travelled very early on with Joe and his dad, Richard, to the Middle East—to Egypt, Jordan, Palestine and Israel. Joe and I established the Parliamentary Friends of Palestine, something that was not without controversy and is probably more controversial for the conservative side of politics. But I think that experience—when I sat with Joe and his dad, who was, of course, born in Bethlehem, in the beach camp at Gaza and looked at the humiliation which Palestinians were forced to undergo in queuing to try to get across to get work each and every day, and the ongoing extreme poverty and lack of rights that people were subjected to, and also the lack of rights for the Israelis when you saw very young people with guns bigger than they were standing on corners in Jerusalem—made it very clear that you cannot have security in those circumstances, where essentially Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Ramallah are really just suburbs of the one place. It is a very small place in terms of the distance. I was very privileged to have Joe's wonderful father, Richard, there as well. It was a visit on which we got quite close to each other on a personal level. We got to visit Petra as well, which was an amazing experience.

If there is one criticism that I would have of Joe Hockey, though—and I will finish my contribution with this—what is it with Nickelback and his music taste? It is a tragedy that he does not understand Nick Cave or the Smiths. Someone of his generation really has no excuse for having the taste in music which he does. He quite rightly has been criticised for it and I join in that condemnation today.

To Melissa and his children, I wish them all the best and thank them for the sacrifices they have made as his family. I certainly wish Joe all the best in terms of his appointment. I was asked about it publicly and made it clear that I do not believe that because someone is on the other side of politics they should be denigrated and we should say they should not make a contribution to public life in some other fashion. I think Joe, as a former Treasurer and senior minister, is someone who could, and no doubt will, make a further outstanding contribution to serving his nation. I thank him for it.
Mrs WICKS (Robertson) (17:06): Much has been said in this place about Joe Hockey and particularly about his career, his contribution to parliament, to politics and to our nation since his election to this place in 1996. It is really true that Joe's contribution to our nation and our national debate has been quite significant. His legacy is one of which he can justly be quite proud. His political CV alone is quite impressive: Treasurer of Australia in the Abbott coalition government; in the Howard government, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service, Minister for Human Services, Minister for Small Business and Tourism, Minister for Financial Services and Regulation; and in opposition in the intervening years, the shadow Minister for Health and Ageing and Manager of Opposition Business and shadow Minister for Finance as well as shadow Treasurer.

But as impressive as his public service record is—and it is indeed impressive—I believe that leaders often make their impact in other, more subtle ways. They leave in their wake another rich and potent, albeit often unseen, legacy that may never be publicly acknowledged but which nonetheless is equally significant, or at least it is to those who experience it. Often leaders, particularly in politics, act as mentors to those who aspire to similar goals to serve their community in public life. For me, Joe was certainly one of those people. Today I wish to acknowledge Joe in this way, because I know that the role he played in backing me and becoming somewhat of a mentor, particularly in the early years of my involvement in politics, reflects a story of many other Liberal Party members whose political careers and perspectives have been shaped and influenced by Joe Hockey.

Joe was the first federal member of parliament to really back my political ambitions quite a few years ago now when I was a member of the Young Liberals in New South Wales serving on the Young Liberals state executive as vice-president and seeking to one day run for president. After hearing a fairly impromptu speech given at a Young Liberal dinner function some 14 years ago now, Joe came up to me and told me in no uncertain terms that he had decided to back me to run for Young Liberal president for the next year. True to his word, his met me for coffee, confirmed his support and then backed me all the way that year to stand for nomination for what at the time was considered to be the highly coveted position of president of the New South Wales Young Liberals. I have to say it is a position that remains fiercely contested to this day. I remember that year quite well. Joe would not back down. He would not hear of me backing down either that year. Joe has an indefatigable belief in people and I was certainly the beneficiary of his belief that year.

While I regret to inform the House that I lost my bid to become the New South Wales Young Liberals president that year against a formidable opponent and, may I say, rather young opponent at the time—Alex Hawke—I learnt a lot from that experience. I remain grateful for the opportunity that it provided me as it helped me create other new opportunities to serve the Liberal Party and to gain new skills in politics, campaigning, innovation and leadership. To this day, I have to say I now follow somewhat in Joe's footsteps as I actively seek to give back to other young political aspirants what Joe and others afforded to me. I seek to mentor, support and fiercely back our next generation of political leaders.

Some 10 years later, in 2012, I received another call from Joe. I had been seriously considering a request from senior party representatives to stand as a candidate for the seat of Robertson, and in fact I was on my way across the Harbour Bridge to discuss it further—
perhaps somewhat aptly—when Joe called. Serving my community as the member for Robertson was a childhood dream, a dream I had held fiercely since I was 15 years of age, but life, as it does, got in the way and some 25 years later my husband and I had two very young children. Mollie-Joy had just turned one and Oscar was just about to start preschool that year. I had a fantastic job, and the opportunity to run, with all the associated challenges of juggling a family, particularly a young family, while on one income and campaigning full time in what was to be a very fiercely contested seat, made this childhood dream seem somewhat of a pipe dream. I had been involved in politics for long enough to know that public life even as a candidate involves tremendous personal sacrifice, and I think we can all say that.

As I was weighing this up in my mind, I answered Joe's phone call. He said: 'It's Joe here. I want to talk to you. I hear that you are considering running as the candidate. Don't get me wrong. I think you will make a great candidate.' Joe was always a great backer of people, but he said: 'I want you to consider the impact it will have on your family. I want you to understand how you will actually have to manage this and what you will have to do with two young children. This is what I do.' He proceeded to spend the next 10 or 15 minutes just sharing with me some very personal details of that struggle to balance the challenge of a young family with the demands of politics. I have to say I remain ever grateful for that very decisive phone call, because I got off that phone call and, far from deterring me, it actually spurred me on. It made me realise that if Joe could back me again then we could actually succeed. It made me realise that, if people could understand that this was a unique challenge and a difficult sacrifice that all of us make to one degree or another but that it can successfully be done, then we can actually do it.

I might say, though, that Joe was the only person who ever actually placed on record the fact that this is indeed a sacrifice and it does involve huge, tremendous and ongoing juggling, and I will be forever grateful to him for that, because it is this determination of Joe's to never lose sight of his most important calling as a husband and a father, and to exhort me to never lose sight of my most important calling as a wife and a mother, that I think is the mark of a great man indeed. It points towards something deeper: that Joe is an investor in people, as the member for Grayndler referred to earlier. He certainly invested in me and, I know, in many others who are similarly now in parliament or about to enter parliament. But, even more importantly, his legacy in this place, beyond his contribution to public discourse and national decision making, is his obvious investment in his family, and I know much has already been said about that. In associating myself with the remarks others have made, let me add my thanks for his very timely conversation and his words of wisdom that he gave me that day.

Let me close by acknowledging Joe Hockey's tremendous investment in Gosford, my home town. I want to place on record my thanks and appreciation for his strong backing for our plan for a better future on the Central Coast, for more local jobs and local job opportunities, starting with the coalition's commitment to deliver 250 to 300 new jobs to Gosford with the location of part of a Commonwealth agency that we were able to make in the lead-up to the 2013 election. I want to thank him for doubling that commitment as Treasurer in his first budget of 2014 and for boldly backing the city of Gosford by announcing 600 new jobs for Gosford in a purpose-built building. Joe told me many times of his determination to see cranes in the sky and economic activity thriving in a city that to date has been more known for its past than its future—but now, I believe, not for long.
So as we begin to see this vision become a reality, as the people of the Central Coast begin to think cranes in the sky over Gosford are the new normal, as we see new buildings and restoration of older ones that have stood neglected for too many years, and as we see more new businesses in Gosford have a go and get ahead—to cite Joe—I will remember how Joe and many others in the coalition government backed our great city. When coffee shops start opening in tiny lanes and bigger streets; when after-work bars and restaurants are the norm and not the exception in Gosford; when not just 600 Commonwealth employees pour into Gosford city each day but hundreds more alongside them who now have a new local job opportunity thanks to the chemist, the accountant, the solicitor's firm, the Imperial Centre and the construction businesses; when all of this becomes the new normal for our city, I am sure it will be not only me but thousands of other coasties who will join me in saying, 'Thank you, Joe.' Thank you for believing in us. Thank you for believing in our potential future and in the fact that we can see a better tomorrow than what we have today in Gosford, on the Central Coast and beyond.

If I could raise a glass in parliament today, right now, I would ask you all to charge your glasses in a toast to Joe, a true believer in family, in people, in cities and in Australia. So thank you, Joe. I look forward to being able to invite you back to the Central Coast one day in the not-too-distant future for a cup of coffee in a thriving city that is the Gosford of tomorrow.

Mr PASIN (Barker) (17:16): Today I rise to talk about a great Aussie bloke, someone I am proud to—

An honourable member: Stand up!

Mr PASIN: I was not going to speak about myself! A great Aussie bloke, someone I am proud to say I can call a colleague, or at least now a former colleague, and someone, sadly, that I only got the opportunity to serve in this place for two years. Joseph Benedict Hockey entered service in this parliament some 19 years ago. He has served with remarkable distinction. Whilst it is sad to see him leave this place, I hope he will now have more time to spend with his beautiful family—his wife, Melissa, and his children, Xavier, Adelaide and Ignatius—as he embarks upon the next step in his professional life. The now former Prime Minister would often say that each and every one of us in this place is honoured not only to be here but also to be a volunteer in this cause—it is our families who are the conscripts. So to Melissa, to Xavier, to Adelaide and to Ignatius, I say thank you for offering your husband and father to national service.

Joe's story is that of so many Australians: his father was a migrant born in Bethlehem and his parents ran a small business. Joe's election in 1996 capped a promising career in finance and banking. In his first speech, Joe reflected on his personal principles. Unsurprisingly, they are principles that are fundamental to the Liberal Party and they are principles that he has stayed true to ever since his election: the inalienable rights of the individual, a belief in parliamentary democracy, a commitment to improve our society through reform, and equality of opportunity not equality of outcome. These were fundamental pillars for Joe, as they are for our party.

In 1996, Joe reflected on the importance of rebuilding the nation's accounts. Perhaps then he did not know that in 2013 he would be tasked with that role all anew, but as Treasurer. It was a theme he also reflected on, of course, in his valedictory speech some 19 years on. Joe has left an indelible mark on this nation's story, and, whilst he leaves a legacy, he also leaves

FEDERATION CHAMBER
us with much to do. We should seek to build on Joe's achievements and harness his legacy to
propel this nation into a new era of prosperity. As Joe highlighted, we have some significant
challenges ahead of us. There is still, as I have said, much to do. We must have the courage to
reform and adapt our policies across all areas of government. We must respond to the new
realities facing the Australia of today. As Joe continually raised throughout his career, a
taxation system needs reform if it is to respond to a 21st century economy. We must seek to
lower the income tax so that people and companies are given more incentive to take risks and
garner rewards. In the globalised economy in which our high-tech manufacturing and service
industries are competing, it is crucial that we do not forget or forgo the opportunity by having
exorbitant income tax levels. It is crucial that we encourage the next wave of business and
entrepreneurs to set up shop in our beautiful country. As Joe so wisely asserted, they will not
do that in the face of unnecessarily high taxation.

Joe was faced, following his appointment as Treasurer in 2013, with the massive task of
getting our nation's finances in order. It is crucial that we continue his fiscal reforms. Whilst
we enjoy an excellent quality of life, we cannot continue to commit intergenerational theft. As
we continue to overspend, we are taking resources from our children and, indeed, our
grandchildren. The actions Joe Hockey took as Treasurer and, indeed, throughout his
parliamentary career, worked towards rectifying this unconscionable state of affairs. Perhaps
one of Joe's most important contributions was his articulation of the age of entitlement in
which Australia finds itself. In his final speech he noted the steps we have already taken to
remedy our financial position, which sees us taking money from our children tomorrow,
borrowing to pay for consumption today. Joe strove to deliver a fair and sustainable
distribution of resources that would insulate our quality of life without suffocating it for future
generations. Whilst Joe's message was a difficult one, it was a necessary one.

To some extent, Joe, like he did when he played rugby, took the hits for the team. Joe's
commitment, resolve and inspirational message continue to be relevant, and his legacy is
clear. He faced a hard task: spending less is always much harder than spending more. Joe did
not shirk his responsibility, and I think that should never be forgotten. There is a still a
significant amount that we will have to do if we are going to wind back the unsustainable
welfare system that we have allowed to develop in this country. The age of entitlement must
end if we are to maintain our pursuit of prosperity. There is no doubt Joe Hockey articulated
this challenge, and he should be lauded for his resolve. Even in his valedictory speech, Joe
continued to make many full contributions to the national debate, and I am sure he will
continue to do so in the future. His voice will be sorely missed in this place.

Not only did Joe make significant progress towards reducing spending, he also announced
a historic small business package. His belief in Australian small business, no doubt informed
by his parents' experiences, was absolutely infectious, and his optimism for the future was
d palpable. This year's budget was perhaps the best for small business in our nation's history. As
Joe said, it was all about tax cuts, not more government spending. Joe exemplified the Liberal
Party way. He backed small business to grow. Measures he introduced through our small
business package saw small business regain confidence, the confidence it needs to grow. It
was through these measures that small businesses across the country returned to employing
young Australians in greater and greater numbers. It was measures introduced by Joe that
delivered more choices for Aussie farmers. It was measures introduced by Joe that gave
families chances, through better child care, to seize previously unachievable opportunities. By giving small business the space it needs to succeed, we grow and strengthen our economy. Joe knew that and everyone in this place does, too. We are now seeing those dividends from Joe's investment, and we will see them long into the future.

Not bad: from a family-run small business to Treasurer of the Commonwealth of Australia. Joe's journey is one which is an inspiration to all Australians. But I must say it is a massive disappointment, because I had always planned to have Joe Hockey in my electorate to call bingo at Murray Bridge. I just thought that the nation's leading bean counter calling bingo in a small country town would be a great thing. Maybe he will do that once he completes his obligations for the nation elsewhere. I suppose it is an open invitation to Joe. If he ever wants to join me in Murray Bridge to call bingo at the local hotel, I am sure they will have him.

Once the haze that permeates the often opaque realm of politics disperses, I know the Australian people will recognise Joe's industry and his achievements. In an interview shortly after his election as Treasurer, Joe was asked what he wanted to do as Treasurer. He took the opportunity to act on his first words in this place. He said that he wanted to make a contribution and that he wanted to repay the debt that he owed Australia. To Joe and his family: I think the debt is well and truly paid and paid with interest. I thank Joe for his service to this nation and I wish him every success in his future endeavours. He will certainly be missed, but I doubt that he will be forgotten.

Mr BUCHHOLZ (Wright) (17:25): While I was preparing this speech for the Hon. Joe Hockey, I thought, 'Should I get stuck into him and make it a roast, or should I pay tribute to some of the things that he achieved for our country?' I would like to mix it up, but I don't want to miss! Not many people will read these speeches, but I know when Joe finds some time in the future he will sit and read these speeches. So I will open my comments by saying: Joe Hockey, you are a good man—and I will explain why.

I, like many Australians, first met Joe Hockey on Sunrise where he would take his bat out for his weekly political sparring session with none other than Kevin Rudd. I thought to myself, 'Who is this bloke?' I was new to politics and not a member then. I thought, 'He is going somewhere. This fella is going to go all right.' Rudd and Joe impressed me equally with their political wit and banter. When I came to parliament I had the opportunity to sit, talk, drink and smoke with Joe Hockey. I got to see a side of him that many other Australians probably have not seen as yet, and it is one of the reasons I can testify that he is a very good man.

He can be lazy on a touch football paddock, though, and he became quite relaxed when playing on the Senate ovals. Religiously, on a Tuesday morning early in the piece, Joe would come out for his weekly fitness bout and play touch football. But towards the end he thought that he was above the game. In the touch football world you have to lean over and actually ground the ball. But not only was Joe's politics taking him around the globe; he was also watching far too much gridiron football. When he ran across the try line, he would just throw the ball on the ground. Everyone on both sides knew that Joe was not going to accept that it was anything other than a try!

He was a great fundraiser for me and many of my colleagues in Queensland and, I am sure, right around the country. When I brought him to Queensland I never had a problem selling tickets at a high-end table in our CBD or filling a hall somewhere in the electorate. The reason
Joe could fill a hall or a high-end table at a fundraiser was that he got it. He could empathise with the small business groups. He had a couple of acres up in North Queensland and he used to give an 'I am a pastoralist' type speech. But everyone saw through it. He was not very good in that space. But he was really good in the small business space. Joe often shared his frustrations with the returns on the farm block that he had and still has in North Queensland, that the money was just not there and how he was always perplexed as to how the industry survived. But it bought him credibility and empathy, irrespective of how pathetic his stories sometimes were.

He once told me a story in the chamber during a division. He had just come from a weekend function at Peter FitzSimons's place. For those of you that do not know, Peter is that red-bandanna-wearing, staunch socialist type bloke. My question to Joe was: 'What are you doing going to his party?' He said, 'We're good mates.' Joe had just attended Peter's 50th birthday and had given a speech about Peter at the function. This was at a time when Joe was fairly large. In his speech, Joe said, 'Many of you would be surprised that I'm here tonight. But when Peter dies I will more than likely be one of his six pallbearers. That is how close we are.' In response, when it was Peter's time to get up he said, 'Yes, that's right. He will be one of my six pallbearers. And when Joe dies I will more than likely be one of the 16 pallbearers that takes him!' I think their passion and commitment was more around the love of rugby and the challenging of minds, because both of them were extremely articulate.

I have spoken about his investments in Queensland and how loved and revered he was by the small business sector. I want to briefly speak about his 'age of entitlement' speech—one of his finer speeches, I would dare say. I am still perplexed today as to why he had to go to London to address the Institute of Economic Affairs to do it. I am sure it was choreographed, in a way. Some of the things he ran with included:

Entitlement is a concept that corrodes the very heart of the process of free enterprise that drives our economies.

He had spent considerable time preparing for this speech, and it was truly going to be a speech for which he needed to have an unencumbered audience. That tyranny of distance, I think, helped project him and put him on that international platform. One of the comments I picked up on after reading the speech a number of times, which would have been very difficult for him to say—or very easy for the media to pull apart—and which I thought was a really strong sentence was:

The problem arises, however, when there is a belief that one person has a right to a good or service that someone else will pay for. It is this sense of entitlement that afflicts not only individuals but also entire societies.

In saying that, he was not saying that we did not have to look after those who could not look after themselves. It was about an ideology that the age of entitlement was over. No longer, as a society, if we were going to grow and if we were going to have that economic opportunity into the future, could we have the ideology that somebody else was going to pay for our prosperity. It is truly one of his more defining speeches.

Occasionally, in the latter part of his serving in this parliament, we would have to have conversations that were awkward, but he was always gracious. We had a function to mark the end of his service in this parliament, and I was humbled to be invited with a very small handful of members of this House who went and spent that evening with him.
Joe used to always say to me, irrespective of the 'come to Jesus' chats that we had occasionally, 'Scotty, you're a good man.' I opened this speech by saying, 'Joe, you're a good man.' I will close this speech with: when you find time, when you are sitting somewhere in this world trawling through Hansard, know that you are truly a good man, Joe Hockey. I thank you for your contribution to this parliament and to our nation. Thanks, brother.

Mr EWEN JONES (Herbert—Government Whip) (17:33): In starting this speech and in listening to the previous contributions, I am struck with the same sort of feeling as must have come before Elizabeth Taylor's eighth husband on their wedding night: you know what to do, but you just do not how to make it interesting! There have been a fair few things said about Joe Hockey.

I first met Joe Hockey when I was a candidate in 2010. Like the member for Wright, the first thing that struck me was that the persona of the man on the TV and that of the guy sitting next to me in the car were exactly the same. That is the mark of Joe Hockey. He is who he is, and he is proud of it, but he is also not very quick to admit to making an error.

Soon after hopping in the car in Townsville—we were heading in from Kirwan towards the city—he was telling me about his property near Atherton in Far North Queensland and said, 'We're heading in that direction.' I told him we were going the wrong way. Joe twisted and turned and debated the point until he convinced himself that he was right. He is a man who loves an argument and who is willing to stand up for what he believes, and to berate people until they give up.

The thing about Joe Hockey that not many people outside this place actually saw was his innate goodness. He has as many friends on the other side of the chamber as on this side. He will pose for photographs with anyone at any time, most of the time suffering less than glorious invitations. He understands his place in Australia and that perception is reality.

After I was elected in 2010, I was struggling with my maiden speech. I always admired Joe Hockey so I had a look at his maiden speech. Now, my seat is a marginal one and, while Joe Hockey's maiden speech was a very good read, for me to stand there and talk about the three principles of liberalism and the Battle of Beersheba was not going to go over real well in my electorate and was a step too far.

Soon after that I was part of a conversation with him and I mentioned that I was having all sorts of trouble with my speech. He suggested a cup of coffee and we talked about what it means to give a maiden speech. He gave me a good hour of his time. He asked me if I had a story about my life or an event around which you could say what you stood for. I told him a story about being left behind at a service station when I was a child and how that had affected me throughout my life. He got me to link that to a narrative that, while I was the member, no-one would get left behind. I remain proud of that speech. It remains relevant and essentially outlines my core values and what I want to achieve here for my community. That is exactly what Joe Hockey told me it should be about.

Joe Hockey, to me, was what a senior member of the team should be. He was accessible, forthright and supportive. He was the man who rang me when I first won my seat. He was the man who said, 'Oh, I'd love to,' when I told him my teenage daughter was there and would like to talk to him. Oh, how he must have enjoyed that conversation.
Joe Hockey was the man who calmed me when, in my second campaign, I rang him, shrilling down the line at him about the latest attack on me. He said, 'Mate, mate, calm down, calm down; you've got this.' He spent 25 minutes talking me down from my nervous peak when he was going to be the next Treasurer of the country and he was the busiest man in the world. He talked me down from the nervous peak in which I found myself. He had a way about him where you could just sit there and see his smile and nature coming through the phone line at you.

I am unashamedly a fan of Joe Hockey. This place will greatly miss him. He has the ability to be normal when all around him want to be something else. That ability is to be admired. It is an honourable trait. I remember when we were debating the Malaysia Solution. Some accused Joe of hyperbole, of overreach. I saw the son of an immigrant talking about his children and would not countenance, under any circumstances, sending children to Malaysia.

As Treasurer, I saw a man who wanted the best for his country, a man who tried to address the errors of past governments, a man who tried to get our structural deficit in some sort of order. He gave a speech to the Australia Institute where he said you have to do three things when you have a problem. You have to tell people what the problem is, you have to explain to people what you are going to do about it and you have to take them with you.

I saw a man who was beset by a Senate crossbench which was solely interested in promoting the single cause of their own celebrity. I saw a man who was beset with bad timing and a re-run of the Western Australian Senate election which ruled out all the ground preparation which would normally be associated with telling the people what the problem was around the first budget of a new government. But I also saw a man who never gave up. I think history will be a lot kinder to Joe Hockey when the books are written about what John Howard, Paul Keating and Julia Gillard had to contend with with the crossbenchers in comparison to Joe Hockey and the eight disparate crossbenchers of the 44th Parliament and the problems he had to endure.

I remember John Lennon being asked whether he agreed with the proposition if it was not for the Beatles, Ringo would not be famous. John Lennon answered that Ringo was always going to be famous. Ringo was just too big a person to be caught in the mundane, the everyday.

Joe Hockey will continue to be a famous Australian. His place in our country will continue to grow. He will touch many more lives in this country and he will continue to make this country a better place. He will, because he is a great Australian. He loves this country and he wants the best for it and all Australians.

Joe Hockey has not died. He lost his job and is now looking for other employment. The thing I like most about Joe Hockey is that he understands, better than most, that he is not the first, nor will he be the last, Australian to fall to such a fate, certainly not in this place. Certainly it happens to hundreds and thousands of people every day. Joe Hockey left here with his head held high.

He loves a joke, even at his own expense. He loves his family. He loves his community. He loves a cigar. He loves his wife. He loves his sense of duty to his country. I count myself lucky to have known him and to have worked with him. I thank him for the time he has given me and for the suits, including the one I wear at this moment. I thank him for the time he is
yet to give me, the advice he will supply and the example he will set. I will always be a Joe Hockey fan. I will miss him dearly from this place but I will not miss him from my life because, whether he likes it or not, he is now a part of it.

Mr FLETCHER (Bradfield—Minister for Territories, Local Government and Major Projects) (17:40): I am very pleased to rise to speak on the topic of Joe Hockey the former member for North Sydney. It does seem very difficult, almost unreal, not to be able to refer to Joe as the Member for North Sydney but, of course, he has now officially resigned from the parliament after a distinguished parliamentary career of nearly 20 years.

Joe Hockey as a politician was a genuine and authentic personality, a powerful political brand, one of the most recognised politicians in the land and recognised as somebody who people could tell was in real life exactly the same as the man they saw on television. I say that having known Joe since I first met him at Sydney university when we were both at least 25 years—in fact closer to 30 years—younger than we are today. Joe was active in student politics. He was active in just about every aspect of university life. He threw himself into university life with great vigour and enthusiasm, as he has thrown himself into life and politics for many years with great vigour and enthusiasm.

There was always a sense about the young Joe that he had a vision for the possibilities of politics. This calling, which attracts all of us in this place, sometimes leaves us shaking our heads but at its best can deliver outcomes that can be achieved in no other walk of life. It is that sense of the possibilities of politics to improve the lives of the people you represent which animated and motivated Joe Hockey throughout his political career. From the first moment that I got to know Joe at Sydney university there was a very clear sense about him of the possibilities of politics. That, I think, is what the Australian people responded to and why he became one of the best known politicians in Australia—because people could sense an authenticity, a genuineness about this man. They could sense that in real life he was as funny, as caring, as decent, as compassionate as his public persona suggested.

Joe, of course, has enjoyed a long and distinguished parliamentary career. He has been one of the most successful federal politicians on either side of politics in the last two or three decades. He entered this parliament at a very young age—he was 30. Perhaps by the standards of the member for Longman that is not young, but by objective community standards that is young. His career in this place started and rose very quickly. He came in in 1996. He was quickly assigned a prominent role by the then Prime Minister, John Howard, in relation to Sydney airport—a topic of great political controversy at the time. The Sydney Airport Community Forum was a body which attracted a lot of scrutiny. Following the 1998 election, he was made a minister—remarkably young to be a minister—and for the rest of his political career, save just a few days in the last few weeks, he was on the frontbench. It is a record of very distinguished political achievement in a number of portfolios. It is a remarkable mix. He was Minister for Financial Services and Regulation, Minister for Small Business and Tourism, Minister for Human Services and Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations. When the coalition went into opposition, he was shadow minister for health, he was shadow minister for finance and of course for over four years he was shadow Treasurer, a role he discharged with great distinction before going on to serve as Treasurer of the nation for two years—also discharging that role with great distinction.
There is one other aspect of Joe that I would like to comment on because it is particularly of interest to me as a member representing an electorate on the North Shore of Sydney. It is not always easy to represent the North Shore. The North Shore can sometimes be misunderstood or the subject of attack. Sadly, when Julia Gillard was Prime Minister, she engaged in a disgraceful attack on the North Shore, describing its residents as 'cosseted' and suggesting that, in some way, people on the North Shore live a privileged life, protected from the daily exigencies and realities of life in a way that most Australians could only envy. That is a completely inaccurate description of an area of Sydney which is remarkably diverse and changing very fast, but an area whose residents are passionately proud of where they live.

If my electorate of Bradfield is one of the electorates representing the North Shore, Joe's electorate of North Sydney is another one. North Sydney covers the lower North Shore and Bradfield covers the upper North Shore. Those who have lived on the North Shore for some time will engage in lengthy discussions about precisely where the dividing line between the lower North Shore and the upper North Shore is to be found, but I think few would contest the proposition that the electorate of North Sydney principally represents the lower North Shore, as well as some other areas, and that the electorate of Bradfield principally represents the upper North Shore. The point I wish to make about Joe Hockey is that he has been a passionate supporter, defender and champion of the North Shore of Sydney not just because it is his political duty but also because it is an absolute passion for him. He has spent most of his life on the North Shore, he grew up on the lower North Shore and he went to school at St Aloysius on the lower North Shore. His family real estate business, Hockey's—the business established by his father—is a very well-known business on the lower North Shore.

When Joe Hockey entered the parliament in 1996, he did so at the same time as another then young newly elected member of parliament, also representing a North Shore seat, my predecessor in the seat of Bradfield, Brendan Nelson. Indeed, as history now records, for a number of years Brendan's accommodation, when in Canberra, including during his time as Minister for Defence, was the garage of Joe's house here in Canberra. When Brendan retired and a by-election was held in Bradfield on 5 December 2009, at one point during the by-election campaign I was out campaigning with Joe Hockey, who was incredibly supportive and helpful during the campaign. He said to me at one point, 'Of course, mate, if you want it, Brendan's spot in the garage is available for you.' I was touched beyond words but, nevertheless, it took me only a few seconds to decline that offer. Even so, I do want to put on record now my gratitude to Joe Hockey was prepared to offer me Brendan's spot in his garage! I also want to acknowledge the friendship between my predecessor Brendan Nelson and Joe Hockey. They came into the parliament at the same time, they worked closely together and they have both flown the Liberal flag with great distinction in those two adjoining electorates.

I want to conclude by expressing my thanks to Joe Hockey, firstly for the personal support that he has given me in my time in the parliament. Arriving many years after him, he was generous with his encouragement, advice, support and friendship. Whenever I called upon him he was always there to assist.

I also want to express my gratitude, and I am sure the gratitude of so many people in the electorate of North Sydney, for the service he provided to that electorate and for the work he did in standing up for and championing the North Shore of Sydney. I want to express my
thanks on behalf of the people of Australia, because a parliamentary career of the length and distinction of Joe Hockey's is one that does not come along very often. It is a remarkable effort. He has contributed an enormous amount across the many portfolios in which he has worked. He has always worked to advance the interests of this nation and to advance the interests of Australians. Across the many diverse portfolios in which he has worked, Australians have good reason to be grateful for the effort and the contribution that he has made. Thank you, Joe Hockey. Good luck with what your career now holds. You are only 50; you have many years of contribution left and you have much to be proud of for your time in this parliament.

Mr CHRISTENSEN (Dawson—The Nationals Deputy Whip) (17:50): I would very much like to associate myself with the comments made by the minister and to add to them. Until his recent retirement, Joe Hockey was one of those larger-than-life characters in this place. It is sad that he has left this place, and I do not know that we ever—when we leave here—leave the political arena for good. I am sure that there will be commentary from Joe in the future, probably regarding this government and no doubt regarding future governments of the other political persuasion, but Joe was one of those larger-than-life characters.

I have to say, without a doubt, I was a Joe Hockey fan before I came into this place and I remain a Joe Hockey fan. I can remember back in the 2010 election when I was running a campaign and we were not sure whether the LNP was going to win the seat. Apparently the polling showed that one day I was in front and the other day Labor was in front. Joe came into the seat to help bolster my chances and we did a bit of a walk around one of the shopping centres there and had a coffee and a bit of yarn with the locals. It was the first time I had seen Joe in the flesh. His ability to interact and engage with just everyday people was what I thought was remarkable. Here was this person whom I had seen only on Sunrise or when interviewed on news shows and the rest, and here he was walking around the local Kmart with me, pumping hands as we walked along and talked to people about all sorts of problems.

Obviously there are a lot of critics out there of Joe, in his role as Treasurer. In short, there were measures in Joe's 2013-14 budget that I did not particularly like, but I have to say that he was a very brave Treasurer. He was a Treasurer who tried to do a lot for this nation, particularly around the issue of debt control, and that is something that, as a nation, we have got to get to grips with. You cannot continue to spend more than you earn. If you do that forever and a day, you are headed off the fiscal cliff. Joe knew that—he saw it and he put measures in place to ensure we would not be careering off that cliff into the future. He started us on the path of moving away from this country, ultimately, going into sovereign default, because that is what ultimately happens if you continue to spend more than you earn. Eventually, the day of reckoning comes.

We find that when we look at countries like Argentina. Argentina had comparable living standards with Australia for many, many years, until their debt came to such a stage that they could not repay it, and so everything came a gutser for Argentina. Look at that country now and you will see the ramifications of debt that is out of control. You see broken-down infrastructure everywhere—people who torch buses and trains when they break down, because they are that frustrated with government services not working. That is the kind of thing that Joe probably foresaw if we did not do something here—a country that has First World living standards falling into the Third World because of debt that cannot be repaid. He
put us on a path that will set us right into the future—a return to surplus but, more importantly, a return to money in the bank, as we had in the Howard era. Now, it is a long, long path, because, quite frankly, there are so many spending commitments out there, which sectors of the public are wedded to, that mean we cannot do this easily. Joe tried to do that in a way that was quick and that was going to get to that ultimate solution we need as a nation, but it was probably a bit too much for the public to swallow.

But he will really always be—in my books, and I am sure in many people's books—held up high as a Treasurer who attempted to do the right thing by this nation by getting us onto the path of fiscal credibility once again, and his legacy will live on past this parliament and past this era of politics. We will remember him as someone who was brave enough to call out the end of the age of entitlement. It is something that we need to get a grip on in this nation. The government is not there to dole out endless cheques. The government is there for basic functions that the private sector and the public cannot deal with themselves: things like defence, aged care—and even that probably pushes the boundaries a bit in some ways—and health services, the basic services that a society needs to function. It is not about $900 cheques, school halls and all these frivolous, pointless activities the government gets involved in basically in order to jag votes. Joe knew that, and he tried to be as pure as he could be as Treasurer along those lines. Ultimately, as I said, it was a bridge too far for some. But, because of his efforts, we are going to be indebted to him for a long time to come.

Mrs SUDMALIS (Gilmore) (17:57): I rise today to speak about Joe Hockey, who was probably one of the first politicians, apart from Joanna Gash, that I ever had the luxury to meet. The occurrence was in Batemans Bay back in 2007 or late 2006. He had been invited to open a temporary office down in Batemans Bay. He came down, duly cut the ribbon and did all the official things. Then he said, 'Come on. Let's walk around. Let's go and see some people here, have a little chat to them and see how they're going'—just the everyday, consummate politician.

We walked around the streets and met some young kids. They said, 'Mr Hockey, Mr Hockey!' He said, 'Yeah?' They said, 'You went to Kokoda. We just went to Kokoda.' It was a group of young Indigenous children in Batemans Bay who had saved hard, worked hard and done an amazing thing. They had been inspired to do the Kokoda Trail themselves. Those young people followed Mr Hockey around almost the whole of Batemans Bay as if he were the Pied Piper of Hamelin. They were asking him questions, and he was never resentful and never stopped answering them. He was just always there for them, and, once I was elected to parliament, I found Joe Hockey to be exactly the same in the House. He never gave me the brush-off. If I had a problem with an issue or if there was a policy decision I was not sure of, Joe would say: 'Come in and tell me how you feel. Let me know what your constituents are telling you. I am open to their suggestions.' He is just an all-round, everyday guy, and I found him very approachable and very easy to talk with, but he made sure I was on my mettle with certain policies. One of them was the universal access to education, which I considered to be an excellent initiative from the previous government, and he made me fight for that. He said, 'Are you sure this is the right thing to do?' I said, 'It absolutely is,' and he was flexible enough to say, 'Okay, well if we need to do that, then you need to see this minister and that minister and talk to them, advise them and work with them.' Ultimately, we had a very good outcome on that issue.
In the way that I have learnt from the openness of such an amazing politician, I think his presence and his humour will be sorely missed. Wherever Joe is going next, I hope every aspect of his life is as full of the fun, as full of the professionalism and as full of the compassion he has shown while he was working in this House. He was truly one of the big characters in the House of Representatives, and he really will be missed—I think every single one of us will miss him.

Ms HENDERSON (Corangamite) (18:00): It is my great pleasure to rise and pay tribute on this motion to the former member for North Sydney, the honourable Joe Hockey. Many wonderful words have been spoken today about Joe Hockey. He was a member of parliament like no other. He made an incredible contribution to his electorate, to this parliament and to the nation.

I actually resided in Joe Hockey's electorate before he was elected—from 1989. I moved to Sydney to work for the ABC. This was in the heady days of Ted Mack, when an independent held the seat. I lived in McMahons Point, in the heart of Joe Hockey's electorate of North Sydney. From the time that Joe was elected, in 1996, he very quickly consolidated the seat into the very strong Liberal seat that it is today, and we members of the Liberal Party would expect to hold the seat in the upcoming by-election.

Joe Hockey was—and I still find it difficult to think about Joe in the past tense, because it is still with great sadness, and also having resigned so quickly and left the parliament so suddenly. It is with great sadness that I record that Joe Hockey is no longer here in this parliament. He made an incredible contribution from the very early days when he was elected, holding many portfolios both in government and also in opposition, and, of course, in 2013 he became Treasurer. He was a person who never forgot from where came. He was a great family man. He was a great supporter of small business. He was a great adherent to strong Liberal values. If there is one speech that I commend to students of politics, it is Joe Hockey's valedictory speech. I thought it was a wonderful speech. Many of us in the chamber had tears our eyes. It was emotional. It was humble. It encapsulated the great contribution that he made, and it was also brave and courageous.

I want to read one part of Joe Hockey's valedictory speech that really made an impact on me. He said:

All my life I've subscribed to the principles of modern liberalism. In my maiden speech I defined them as protection of individual rights, defence of parliamentary democracy, a commitment to positive reform and equality of opportunity. It's true but it must be said, if you don't have core beliefs then you have no core. When you're asked to make very difficult decisions that have a huge impact on people's lives, without a guiding philosophy, you'll inevitably be indecisive, or worse, inconsistent. There is no doubt that Joe Hockey was called upon to make some very difficult decisions, and some of those decisions in the 2014 budget did not resonate. But let us not forget—and I do not want to dwell too much on the politics of this—that he inherited an extremely difficult fiscal situation, one in which he knew that we as a nation could not continue to spend more than we earn. As unpopular as some measures were, he took that task to heart, he grappled with it, and he delivered. As we have heard today, most recently from the member for Dawson, some of those measures were difficult. But the former Treasurer of this great country understands that at the moment we are borrowing $100 million a day just to pay the interest, which is absolutely unsustainable. The former Treasurer made enormous inroads into cutting
the debt and the deficit. Though there is still more of a journey and it is extremely difficult, he has set us on the path of fiscal repair, and for that we owe him a great debt.

The member for Robertson spoke about the former member for North Sydney as being a great investor in people. For me he was very much that sort of person—warm, gregarious, fun; a great people person. I remember he came to my electorate on one particular visit—in fact before I was elected he visited on four separate occasions—and I took him for a stroll down the main street in Torquay. He was so loved—people loved what he had to say, they admired him and they felt an enormous connection with him. That is one of Joe Hockey’s great successes—he has a unique ability to connect with others. I particularly want to pay tribute to Joe Hockey for the many wonderful initiatives that he introduced in this year’s budget: the enormous investment in small business; the enormous investment in child care; the difficult decisions that had to be made. As a man who grew up in a small business, who understands the value of hard work, who understands the value of family enterprise, Joe Hockey understands better than most that building small businesses right around the nation can transform us economically.

Joe Hockey, along with former Prime Minister Tony Abbott, was instrumental in making a number of very significant investments in my electorate: as the duplication of the Princes Highway—a commitment first made back in 2010—and the upgrade of the Great Ocean Road, for example. Joe Hockey made the decision to bring an Australian Bureau of Statistics centre of excellence to Geelong. It will open in early 2016, bringing with it 250 jobs. He was incredibly focused on the importance of investing in jobs and growth; that was his job every single day. I spent a lot of time with Joe. I felt he was someone who was a great mentor to me, and I am particularly sad as I felt there were many more years of mentoring to be done. I hope that perhaps, in another way and in another life, that that might continue. Joe was very supportive of establishing an Advanced Manufacturing Growth Centre in Geelong to invest in the smart jobs, the jobs that drive innovation, the jobs of the future. In so many ways—underpinned by our free trade agreements, underpinned by agriculture and by food processing across my electorate—he recognised the big economic challenges for our nation. He can look back upon his 19 years here in this parliament, I think, with great pride.

I want to wish Joe’s wife, Melissa, all the very best, along with his children, Xavier, Adelaide and Ignatius. Given that we are all going to live longer and work longer, Joe Hockey is obviously still a relatively young man. He has an enormous contribution to continue to make to this nation. I wish him all the very best. I thank him deeply and sincerely for his friendship, his guidance and his belief in me.

GRIEVANCE DEBATE

Question proposed:
That grievances be noted.

Liberal Government

Ms HALL (Shortland—Opposition Whip) (18:09): My grievance relates to Liberal Party governments’ commitment to and fetish with small government and the impact that that is having in this country.

Ms Henderson interjecting—
Ms HALL: I could have quite easily interjected on the previous speaker when she was making her speech, so I suggest she keeps quiet now. This government, the Turnbull government and the Baird government in New South Wales, are driven by the belief that good government is small government and that services and programs are better delivered by the private sector. You need only look at the impact this has had in other countries throughout the world. The Turnbull and Baird governments would like to see Australia become a replica of the United States. They have a philosophy: they are totally driven by this belief of a hands-off approach to government. They support laissez faire capitalism. They are all about promoting private property rights—

Mr Christensen interjecting—

Ms HALL: and I hear agreement from the member for Dawson on the other side—whilst cutting expenditure rather than raising revenue.

I think the Australian people look to government to do a little bit more than abrogate their responsibility and pass everything off to the private sector. This government comes to this debate with the premise that Australia is a country that has big government. That is quite false, because Australia has one of the smallest governments in the developed world, and one of the lowest-taxing governments. The ideologues on the other side of this parliament would like to see us in a situation where basically government just operates as a board of directors, does nothing and passes everything off to the private sector. That is not good enough. It is not good enough to transfer the functions of the government to the private sector.

A couple of examples come to mind of where Liberal-Nationals governments have done this. I remember when the CES was operated by the Commonwealth. I remember that the CES actually led to people getting jobs; it was about people getting jobs. Compare that to the situation we have at the moment where the main emphasis is on the job service providers making a profit, where some most horrendous scams have taken place and where job seekers are recycled and recycled. They are unemployed, but those providers continue to get their money.

Look at the issues around Medicare and private health insurance. The questionnaire that the minister sent out really shows her philosophical bent—the bent of this government that health care would be better provided by the private sector and that the best way to pay for it is not through Medicare but through private health insurance. It is all about propping up private health insurance.

Look at education. The Liberal Party governments have a very strong record of transferring funds to private schools. The majority of students and the majority of children in this country attend public schools. That takes me to TAFE. There has been quite a debate about TAFE, particularly in the state I come from, where we have the Baird government, with its Smart and Skilled program, taking money out of TAFE, while we on this side of the House believe TAFE is something you should invest in. Our policy is that 70 per cent of all the VET funding should go to TAFEs. But we have seen enormous exploitation of people who are involved in the vocational training through these private providers. I have at least two people per week coming through my office with problems regarding these private providers. I will talk more about that in the House of Representatives.
This is a government that is committed to dismantling the welfare system and making sure that people who look to government for support really have to struggle to get it. There is no commitment whatsoever. This has an impact on equity and sustainability. Never in Australia's history has the gap between those people who have a lot of money and those people who have very little money been wider. Never has the gap between the rich and the poor been greater. This is something that the hands-off approach of the Liberal government seeks to perpetuate. It impacts on research and innovation and leads to job losses.

Let us look at the Public Service. I believe that over 12,000 jobs have been lost in the Public Service. The work still needs to be done, so what happens? Those jobs are outsourced to the private sector. Then you look at the cost and the bottom line. They say, 'It demonstrates that money is being saved in the operation of the Public Service.' But that is just transferring the bottom line to another area. I believe the government fails in that area. It argues that it is about improving efficiency and effectiveness and eliminating waste and duplication. With job losses and outsourcing we are just moving the cost away from the government and paying considerable amounts of money to the private sector.

There is the abolition of government bodies like the preventative health body. This will lead to an increase in preventable diseases and chronic illness and the cost will be felt in a different area. More money will be spent in primary health care whilst the simple fact of having a preventative health body to ensure that the right policies are being rolled out would prevent that.

I bring you to my favourite area. In my Shortland electorate office at the moment the number one issue has been Centrelink and Medicare. I put on the table that Shortland is an older office, but we have been inundated with people coming in and complaining about the fact that they cannot get an appointment when they go to Centrelink. They are pointed to a computer and told that they have to log onto the computer or go home and use the myGov website.

Ms McGowan interjecting—

Ms HALL: It is a really big problem, and the member for Indi backs me up on that. It is the same with Medicare. It is abysmal, appalling, the way this hands-off, small government approach to government is impacting on the lives of ordinary people, the people that I represent in the parliament. Government is elected to provide services and programs for people, not to direct people towards computers. It is obvious in New South Wales where they have sold off the ports, they are selling off the electricity and in Newcastle they are privatising the buses. There is the amalgamation of councils, councils that are operating extremely well—councils like Lake Macquarie council that reaches every benchmark that is required, and more. You can consider the implications for the environment and the competition with the laissez-faire approach of letting mining companies and other developers operate without putting in place proper environmental controls. It is a hands-off approach.

It is not good enough. We need a government that is prepared to govern. We do not need a government that is prepared to take its hands off the wheel. We need a government that believes in governing for all Australians, not a government that is committed to small government and a hands-off approach to delivering—(Time expired)
Liberal Party

Mining

Mr CHRISTENSEN (Dawson—The Nationals Deputy Whip) (18:19): I had one grievance, but I probably have another one now, after hearing that last speech. My goodness! To stand up in this place and argue for big government and to argue against small government—

Ms Hall: I did not argue for big government.

Mr CHRISTENSEN: You did. You argued quite clearly against the philosophy of small government. If you are against small government, ipso facto you are for big government. There is no other choice; it is either small government or big government.

You argued against things like the creation of Centrelink. We heard a hark back to the days of glory when the CES helped people. I will tell you about the CES and what the CES did. My father lost his leg to cancer. My father went to the CES and said, 'I want a job. I want to work. Give me something to do. I will do anything that's on the books that I can do.' The bloke at the CES looked at him and said, 'Mate, you can't do anything. Just go on the pension. That's it for the rest of your life.' He would not take that for an answer. He went and got a job, not because of big government, but out of his own initiative and private enterprise. He started a business creating high-performance racing car parts—a business that he continues to this very day.

I just found it unbelievable, hearing that long litany of complaints against the private sector and this argument in favour of big government, going back to the past, to the glory days of the Commonwealth Employment Service, and getting rid of what essentially is a working system, where we have Job Network providers out there incentivised to look for work for individuals. What we just heard is quite unbelievable.

The main grievance that I wanted to raise this evening is also with regard to jobs. Last week I undertook a jobs mission to India on behalf of my electorate. It was something that I self-funded and something I made the community aware I was going to do. The main purpose of that meeting was to visit the head of a mining company, or, at least, a company that has mining interests. I met with Mr Gautam Adani, who is the chair of the Adani Group, which is developing the Carmichael mine in Western Queensland. It is also wanting to develop a railway line which runs from the Carmichael mine to the port of Abbot Point, of which they currently have ownership via a 99-year lease from North Queensland Bulk Ports, a state government-owned enterprise. They are wanting to expand that port so that they can get more coal shipments through.

When I sat down with Mr Adani in Adani House in Ahmedabad, India, my first message for him was that the majority of North Queenslanders and people from the electorate of Dawson are very supportive of that mine going ahead, as well as the expansion at Abbot Point and the connecting rail line. My second message for Mr Adani was that we are ready for the work that his mine and his project will bring. We are ready for the business opportunities that his mine and his project will bring. We are ready, willing and able to work. We are eager to see the Carmichael coal project up and running, delivering jobs and economic growth for our region—right from Central Queensland up to North Queensland—as well as providing a
valuable source of electricity for people in India who currently do not have that and who are suffering from energy poverty.

As you know quite well, Madam Deputy Speaker, there are many people over there who resort to burning things like cow dung in order to heat their homes and to do simple things like cooking. As a result, there are so many different ailments that come up—like respiratory ailments—that lead to death, in some instances. This is important for India to bring people out of energy poverty up into—at least—the middle class and to increase their living standards. You are only going to do that through something sustainable that is in place, such as electricity. I have to say, it was my pleasure to go and actually have a look at what was being achieved over there, which is basically all under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, who is really looking at bringing India up to First World living standards.

So, as I said, North Queenslanders are ready, willing and able to work. We want to get working on that Carmichael coal project. I hate to put up a prop, but that message was sent through these postcards here, which basically say, 'Mr Adani, we're ready to get working.' The message that went to Mr Adani was from thousands upon thousands of local residents who were happy to sign up to this message: I support the Adani Group's Carmichael Mine project, the Abbot Point expansion, and the connecting rail line. Our region has supplied the workforce and services needed to build and operate mines in the Bowen Basin and we are ready to build your vision for the Galilee Basin and the people of India. We welcome the Adani Group to North Queensland and want you to know that we're ready to get working.

Those postcards were delivered in person by me in Ahmedabad. I sat down last Monday with Mr Adani and a suitcase full of those postcards, and I assured him that there was support for the project amongst the wider community. He seemed genuinely surprised and delighted to see such support, because the only feedback he receives is what he reads in the media and reports on the extreme greens' latest attempt to block the mine through frivolous court challenges. So he was very eager to see those postcards, and he said he was going to take them to the next board meeting. It was clear from our meeting that the Adani Group are committed to developing the Carmichael coal project, but the frustration was also evident. They are perplexed by how slow and difficult it is to get a project going in Australia. They are perplexed by how easy it is for extreme green groups to block a project based on misinformation campaigns and lawfare.

After meeting with the chairman, Mr Adani, I also inspected a coal-fired power generator that they have at the port of Mundra on the north-west coast of India, something that Adani have taken control of. The power plant that I went and had a look at has supercritical technology in it, which means lower emissions are produced in the generation of electricity. These are the types of high-efficiency, low-emission facilities that the extreme greens should be supporting. University of Queensland Energy Initiative director Chris Greig has suggested that new high-efficiency, low-emissions technology would produce 30 to 50 per cent fewer emissions. When Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Australia, he said India would address climate change by reducing emissions in power generation, using nuclear, hydro and clean coal technology, and they are using it. The greens do not support any of those.

Next door to the power generator that I inspected in Mundra is another generator. They are both adjacent to the port, which is the largest coal-importing terminal in the world, and they are built next to that port for a reason. Each of those power plants requires 16 million tonnes...
to be put through it in order to get the power generation it needs. That is about 100 ships each—200 ships coming through that port. Those two generators—and I have to say there are more to come; they probably need at least another two and possibly three built in the next five years—are designed specifically to use imported coal, and if that coal is not imported from Australia it will be imported from somewhere else. They want it to come from their Carmichael mine. Currently they are taking it from Indonesia.

So there is a healthy dose of irony in the court challenge to the Carmichael mine approval which was lodged today by the Australian Conservation Foundation. It is ironic because their argument is that if coal is burnt it is going to release emissions, increase climate change and affect the reef. But the alternative, if it is not burnt, is that coal from another country is going to be burnt instead, which would release more emissions because it has higher ash content and, by their own argument, would have a greater impact on climate change and the reef. Australia has some of the best coal in the world. It is high in quality and low in ash and produces far fewer emissions when it is used for power generation. The extreme greens would do well to compare the typical energy content of Australian coal, at 12 to 14 per cent ash content, and that of the typical coal that comes out of foreign countries, where we have figures of 30 to 45 per cent ash content. There is about 50 per cent more energy content in Australian coal.

What should also be important to extreme greens is the conditions that come with mining coal in Australia. It is mined here under strict environmental regulations and strict labour laws. If the frivolous lawsuits and delaying tactics of the greens were successful and the coal were not mined here in Australia, it would come from somewhere else that may have poorer conditions for the environment and for workers. So let's get real. Let's get on with the job of creating jobs through the Carmichael mine. (Time expired)

Infrastructure

Mr CONROY (Charlton) (18:29): Our population has grown and continues to grow, and this has led to a dramatic increase in the need for housing and more livable cities. We need a long-term plan for our infrastructure needs—to build public transport and roads, schools and housing. When we do this it has to be done in a way that promotes jobs and growth and ensures sustainability and support for social cohesion. The piecemeal approach to infrastructure planning is flawed, but unfortunately it continues to prevail. This is not because planners and communities do not know what is needed, but rather that too many essential projects succumb to a lack of funding or political will. Indeed, under this government, the outlook is glum. The ABS recently found that public sector investment in infrastructure had fallen by 20.1 per cent for the June 2015 quarter compared to the last quarter when Labor was in government.

In his submission to the Senate inquiry, shortly after the election of Liberals to government and their intention to gut the scope and function of IA was revealed, the authority's then chief executive made a scathing submission in which he said:

There is an air of unreality about our infrastructure planning.

This is appalling. Building the public infrastructure our country needs should not be reminiscent of an episode of Utopia. We in this place have been entrusted by the people and the communities we represent to deliver what is in their best interest. Playing politics is not
good enough, and those who do so are doing a disservice to the people they have been elected
to serve.

I am proud that Labor have said that in government we would establish a $10 billion
dedicated infrastructure fund that would consider, plan and fund the major infrastructure
projects this country desperately needs. At the heart of this policy is an empowered
Infrastructure Australia, an independent decision maker, to ensure priority is given to projects
that will deliver the greatest benefit. We are not afraid to remove politicians from a process of
identifying which major projects the Commonwealth should support. We will appoint an
expert panel to determine the investment mandate, and, for the first time, Infrastructure
Australia would have the ability and flexibility to pursue financial arrangements that leverage
investment from the private sector and superannuation funds, in particular, as well as from
government.

There is around $2 trillion in the pool of national superannuation savings in this country
which could drive major infrastructure investment across the country. It would be a similar
model to that of the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, which the last Labor government put
in place, which from around $1.4 billion of commitments so far has created around $3½
billion of renewable, energy efficient and low-emissions projects. For every dollar of
government finance, the CEFC is leveraging around $2.20 in additional investment from the
private sector. More importantly, the technologies being supported will achieve around 4.2
million tonnes of carbon abatement and grow new industries.

Labor also has a longstanding commitment to progressing the planning and construction of
high-speed rail along Australia’s eastern seaboard from Brisbane to Melbourne via Newcastle,
Sydney and Canberra. The benefits of high-speed rail are enormous and will have a
transformative effect on regions like mine. Linking Newcastle and Lake Macquarie with our
capital cities in a fast, convenient and reliable way will literally change the way we live and
work. For many in the southern areas of Lake Macquarie, and certainly further south on the
Central Coast, the commute to Sydney is already a necessity. However, it is well known that
the Newcastle-to-Sydney route can take longer today than it did in the 1930s on the old
Newcastle Flyer. With a high-speed rail network in place this journey could potentially be
reduced to around 40 minutes.

The most recent planning document released by the department of infrastructure under the
former Labor government set a blueprint for the high-speed rail corridor through Newcastle
and Lake Macquarie. In it a station had been earmarked at Cameron Park in my electorate, a
logical location given its proximity to the M1 motorway and the Hunter Expressway, and very
accessible to the burgeoning population centres of the lower Hunter and Lake Macquarie. Of
course, this is only a preliminary design, and the eventual location may be further north or
south of this. Nevertheless, we know that this corridor must be quarantined and that the
planning work must progress with cooperation across all jurisdictions. The recent bill to
establish a high-speed rail authority is vital to this process. I note and commend the New
South Wales government for their commitment to work with the Commonwealth to preserve
the high-speed rail corridor.

High-speed rail will unlock the potential of regions such as mine and those of other
members in this place. Without putting words in her mouth, I know the member for Indi
realises the potential for her own community in linking it up to Melbourne and Sydney. When
we talk about infrastructure and transport, we are talking about the future. We are looking at what we need to see our economy grow and to see our industries become more efficient and sustainable. And we are making decisions on how best to make that happen. Yet far too often the debate around these issues is hijacked by unhelpful politicking, and far too often I see this in my own region.

When Labor’s infrastructure fund was announced, I was disappointed to hear the member for Paterson, my fellow Hunter region MP, take to local radio to criticise the plan because it did not extend the funding to the Glendale interchange, a strategic infrastructure project that is widely recognised as a priority project for our region. Whilst I welcome the member’s keen and newfound interest in the Glendale interchange and trust this will extend to lobbying his own government for further federal funding, there are a number of reasons why these comments are unhelpful and should be called out as blatant politicking. First, construction of the Glendale interchange is for the most part the responsibility of the New South Wales government. Whilst I am an unwavering proponent for this project, it is not nationally significant in terms of the scale that Infrastructure Australia needs for projects, and the member for Paterson knows this. Furthermore, the New South Wales government has not nominated the project as a priority to Infrastructure Australia, a necessary precursor for consideration by the authority. Finally, the member for Paterson should know that the infrastructure minister and his department are currently considering an application from Lake Macquarie City Council for funding for the Glendale interchange through the National Stronger Regions Fund. This is a more appropriate source of federal funding for a project of this kind. Whilst the council’s application for the first round was knocked back, I remain hopeful that it will be successful this time.

The member for Paterson failed to understand that developing a $10 billion infrastructure fund for projects of supreme national significance unlocked, freed up, traditional federal government outlays for investment in projects at the next tier down, such as the Glendale transport interchange. This is the beauty of using the private sector for projects that have a direct commercial payback—using the $10 billion fund. It frees up traditional government outlays for projects that, while they are very significant for regions, are not at that nationally significant level.

In the case of Glendale, work has been divided into two stages, with roadworks in the first phase of stage 1; the construction of the Pennant Street bridge in the second phase of stage 1; and the construction of a road and rail interchange, including a new railway station, in stage 2. Lake Macquarie City Council successfully lobbied the state and federal governments to support construction of the first stage, and a total of $37.5 million has been raised from all three levels of government to progress the first phase in roadworks. However, more investment is needed in order to see the Pennant Street bridge built, and I am informed that in addition to the council’s application to the second round of the National Stronger Regions Fund an application has been made to the state government through the Hunter Infrastructure and Investment Fund. Whilst the council has some responsibility when it comes to getting the interchange built, ultimately it is the New South Wales government that must do the lion’s share. I have already called on the New South Wales government to allocate funding from the sale of the Port of Newcastle towards this project, but so far this has not been forthcoming.
The New South Wales government sold the Port of Newcastle, or leased it for 99 years, for a record price of $1.7 billion. When they released the prospectus for this sale, they made a commitment that they would spend half that money in my region. They failed to do that. Of the $1.7 billion, they have only allocated somewhere between $400 million and $500 million for my region. Importantly, most of that money is going into the heart of Newcastle, in the CBD, to rip up a heavy rail line and replace it with a light rail line. This money could be much better spent in my region, the western suburbs of Newcastle and northern Lake Macquarie.

So I call on the New South Wales government to do the right thing, to invest the further $400 million or $500 million, that represents a fair commitment to my region, from the lease of the port. I call on the member for Paterson to work with the other MPs in that area to welcome positive announcements no matter who they are from—in this speech I welcomed the commitment from the state Liberal government—and to work with us to deliver vital infrastructure for our region. We are a small region, but we have got a loud voice. We have produced tremendous wealth for Australia. We have got a great population that is growing very rapidly. And we need infrastructure urgently. By only working as a team, by moving aside petty politics, by saying, 'We want high-speed rail; we want the Glendale transport interchange,' we can boost our region, take pressure off cities such as Sydney and make the eastern seaboard a great place to work and live.

Mr WILLIAMS (Hindmarsh) (18:39): For too long South Australia's attention has been fixated on the next big thing, looking over the horizon for something that will save us—if we need saving at all. We have had people touting the Olympic Dam expansion by BHP Billiton for a number of years and, more recently, the Future Submarine Project. The Commonwealth Games has recently popped up as well. They are all said to be projects that will save South Australia's economy. While I do not for a moment not support any of these projects proceeding, they should not in isolation be seen as something that will magically save our economy. The South Australian community has become unfortunately too obsessed with the magic bullet. We are not focused enough on the bigger picture: the growth in Asia and the opportunity that that brings us. Henry Ford famously said, 'If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said "faster horses"'. Faster horses would not have revolutionised society as the steps that Ford took most certainly did—and innovation was one of those many years ago. Through innovation and enterprise Henry Ford created a product for the market that would not have existed otherwise.

The Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, has spoken at great length about innovation. That will be one of the driving factors of his time as Prime Minister. We can decide to either embrace the future or be overtaken by others who will. On a recent visit to Adelaide the PM was impressed by the products and innovation of Philmac, a local company in my electorate. The company is 85 years old, as he mentioned today in question time. It makes plumbing fittings and facilities for agriculture and irrigation. It is a niche exporter making valves. It is employing almost 300 people and is about to employ another 30 people. It is driven by innovation with its products.

We have much to be optimistic about, as the Prime Minister said in a major speech last week. He said:

The transformation of the middle class in Asia is extraordinary. This … is the first time for 300 years that half of the world's middle class are living in Asia.
So the opportunities for us are absolutely extraordinary ... There has never been a better time to be an Australian business. This is particularly the case in certain sectors of the economy, such as health, with the trade agreements coming into force. In China tariffs of up to 10 per cent will be eliminated across a range of pharmaceuticals, vitamins and health products once our FTA comes into force, hopefully before the end of this year. For example:

'It really opens up the opportunity for the Chinese consumer to buy a whole range of Blackmores products and for us to offer them,' chief executive Christine Holgate [said].

Sales in its Australian-based operations were up 43 per cent, a result Ms Holgate attributed to increased demand for vitamins from Chinese tourists in Australia, the nation's ageing population and more investment in branding and research.

There are some real opportunities there across the spectrum. She noted:

'Companies like Blackmores are extremely well placed to capitalise and are employing additional people in anticipation of continued growth in markets like China.'

And:

... the opening of the latest free-trade zone in China last November had created a substantial opportunity for the group, which was one of the few companies in the vitamin and health supplement space to secure a licence to trade directly into that zone.

... ...

The emerging entrepreneurial activity by local Chinese expats and tourists had opened a whole new sales channel for the company, adding an estimated $65m to Asia-destined sales.

... ...

Rival companies such as Swisse Wellness and Vitaco are also looking to China for growth.

I want to elaborate further on the opportunities with the Chinese agreements. We know that they will create thousands of jobs—billions of dollars coming into our economy with the trade agreements across South Korea, China and Japan. To put the historic China free trade agreement in context, Australia and New Zealand commenced negotiations with China in 2005, and New Zealand finalised its agreements in 2008. Since that time New Zealand's dairy growth has been close to 900 per cent, while our dairy sector grew by around 150 per cent.

New Zealand's free trade agreement with China has been an enormous boost for their economy, while dairy farmers across Australia have had to wait. It is industries and companies that will lead the charge to maximise the opportunities that have been laid by the federal government in this space.

I now turn to investment in infrastructure. Governments need to be making the right investments in key infrastructure in a creative and imaginative way, especially when funding is limited. There are a number of infrastructure related projects in South Australia that offer great potential for our economy. Some have existing federal government funding while others have raised funding with key organisations. Let me go through a few. First, there is $1 billion for the upgrade of South Road, which I have been fighting for in terms of the Torrens Road to River Torrens section. It will create around 1,000 jobs in South Australia and unlock travelling time along the North-South Corridor. Secondly, there is the South Road Darlington Interchange and Flinders University. Flinders University promotes an innovation precinct that
thrives on connectivity and driving integration and innovation with the Tonsley business park. Hopefully it will deliver around $1.6 billion in private capital investment, around 11,500 new jobs, over 10,000 new residential units and a trebling, importantly, in international student numbers at Flinders, bringing a further $200 million per annum into the local economy. I know that New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland all have more international students than my state, but South Australia must do better and can do better and take advantage of the opportunities that Asia presents in terms of international student numbers.

Moving on to health and health services, the Medical Research Future Fund is, as we know, the biggest endowment of its kind in the world, and we know it is a game changer. Last week I met with Mr Steve Wesselingh, the executive director of SAHMRI, the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute, and he spoke positively of the opportunities for the MRFF:

The MRFF is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to change the landscape of medical research in Australia, delivering benefits to the health of Australians while helping secure our nation’s future through the maintenance and creation of the high value jobs that we so desperately need.

The John Chalmers centre, also known as SAHMRI 2, is a major project involving a cancer-destroying proton therapy facility valued at over $200 million. In other areas of health and medical products, BioSA are proposing a bio-innovation accelerator with around $40 million of funding sought from government to help create more success stories like BresaGen, Bionomics and GroPep in the biotic space.

In other infrastructure, the Glenelg Jetty Hotel is a $250 million project that is centred around an iconic hotel on the jetty and function centre. An upgrade of the Memorial Drive sports complex is close to $180 million. That will benefit not just tennis, the traditional tenant of Memorial Drive, but basketball, netball and squash, among other sports. The recently announced Northern Connector project in South Australia to build the North-South Corridor to help transport our goods to overseas markets is another billion-dollar project. On major road projects, the Strzelecki Track to the Cooper Basin upgrade will cost $450 million. According to the South Australian government, this will result in over 2,500 jobs in the oil and gas sector, as well as hundreds of millions of dollars of investment. The question I ask is, if this was proposed in 2014, why has the South Australian government not funded it? Instead they have decided to commit $160 million to the O-Bahn track in the city. South Australia is benefiting from the federal government's record spend on infrastructure. The Commonwealth government is now investing a total of close to $3 billion in South Australian infrastructure—the biggest single investment of any Commonwealth government. But not all of these projects can be funded by state and federal governments, as taxpayers’ money does have limits. We will need to look at innovative funding models to get some of these projects over the line.

Finally, in terms of major government initiatives, I want to address the defence sector. We are well placed to take advantage of the coalition government's commitment to develop a sustainable shipbuilding industry for the first time in Australia's history. With over 30 per cent of Australia's in-country spend and sustainment budget, we can take advantage of the billions of dollars that the government will spend on defence. With the Future Frigates project, there are about 2,500 long-term shipbuilding jobs that otherwise would have been lost. As people know, I have been fighting for more jobs in the sector—in particular the Future Submarine Project, which we are closer to making an announcement on. But the Future Frigates, in itself,
is around $40 billion and, importantly, the federal government has fast-tracked both this project and the patrol vessels.

In conclusion, our economy in South Australia, like in Australia, is suffering from transitioning from the mining boom and the decline in manufacturing to a knowledge-based economy where we need to be more innovative and entrepreneurial. For a number of years, South Australia has been sitting below the national average and below trend, so we have missed out, but we cannot be left behind going forward. We must take advantage of these opportunities and we must show ambition and enterprise to achieve our potential. The road ahead is full of opportunities—we cannot be left behind.

**Indi Electorate: Telecommunications**

Ms McGOWAN (Indi) (18:49): I congratulate the member for Hindmarsh on those inspiring words, which fit in very well with what I have to say, because I am also talking tonight about infrastructure—in particular telecommunications infrastructure.

My grievance tonight is about telecommunications in rural and regional Australia. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the findings of the recent *Regional telecommunications review 2015* report and to call on the government to accept all of the recommendations as a matter of urgency. The *Regional telecommunications review 2015* has a number of really key recommendations: to invest in filling market gaps; creating a government consumer communications fund to subsidise essential regional services; expanding the universal service obligation to include mobile phones and internet and have a new customer communications standard; establishing a whole-of-government approach to internet coverage in disaster-prone areas; optimising long-term satellite service capacity and performance to enable the lifting of restrictions; and increasing NBN fixed wireless footprint, including proactive investment. As the previous member said, the Turnbull government messages are about innovation being the key to our future—that we are open for business. But this will only be made possible in rural and regional Australia with government funding towards telecommunication infrastructure.

February 2016 marks the seventh anniversary of Black Saturday. Communities in bushfire-prone areas still have little or no mobile phone coverage, and many missed out in round 1 of the Mobile Black Spot Program. Indi still has approximately 100 black spot areas, and it is imperative that these areas be given priority in terms of having access. But, in making this grievance speech, I acknowledge that much has been done. We have had progress—for example, the Mobile Black Spot Program round 1 was an excellent program delivered with great professionalism. Over 30 towers were funded in my electorate—and I repeat that we came in the third most well-endowed towers in the whole of Australia. I am very grateful to the various people who were involved in that work, which I will pick up on in a minute.

The NBN rollout is also progressing very well in Indi, with over 55,000 residences to be connected over the next three years and over 40 fixed wireless towers to be constructed. It is clear that there is no one person or one group responsible for all of this work. It is a community process, so we have had many, many individuals who have taken up the work. We have had local governments, and I would like particularly to acknowledge representatives of the Mansfield LGA, who are in the House tonight, and to thank you for the leading role you and your organisation has played, particularly in forming and helping to form the Indi telecommunications advisory group and for doing the planning and the background work to
enable us to make a solid case. I acknowledge the Victorian state government, who put in $20 million for the Mobile Black Spot Program, which has made a huge difference; and the federal government for the work that it has done. The telcos, mostly Telstra in my electorate, have done a really good job as well, and even the former member for Indi—it was so good to see her in parliament today—has had a role to play, and I acknowledge her work in 2013, as reported in The Border Mail by David Johnston.

So it has taken a whole-of-community approach to get the success we have achieved, but it is still not nearly good enough. The review clearly shows that these programs by themselves are not enough to address the serious impediment to regional Australia reaching its potential. Our vision—or the Prime Minister’s vision—of an innovative, competitive and creative nation is something we all share in this parliament, but we have a long way to go before we are there. I would like to read into Hansard a message from one of my constituents particularly illustrating the poor service that is very common, unfortunately: ‘Dear Cathy, a further update regarding current debacle. NBN technician turned up. Got up on the roof and did his tests and then informed me that I do not have enough strong signal to connect. He quoted a reading of 94.9 decibels with the borderline being 96. I was informed that it would continually drop out and would be no good. I therefore cancelled the order. I attempted to reconnect to Telstra, and they have continually informed me that it is now possible but it would take five working days to connect. I have had three such appointments.

I attended the Telstra shop in Wodonga and was informed that Telstra had sold the port I was using to another customer and that they have no others. They offered their apologies but stated that they could not do anything further. I note that on all the websites they are still saying I am in an NBN area, when in fact I am not. This does not say much for a government and for a Telstra. They spruik about what great products they have but do not deliver on their service.

There are many such stories, and I regularly hear from constituents about the business trouble they have. For example: Rosemary McGuigan in Glenrowan West and the trouble she has with her travel business; Jan Ash from Howqua and the problems she has with her accommodation; Sally Townsend and the problems that they have with internet; and the very sad story of Murray Taylor from Tallandoon, whose wife is recovering from cancer and they are not able to access the services that they need.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I know that, coming from a regional area yourself, you appreciate this and it is not news to you. Our telecommunications report says that we need to take a whole-of-government approach to this, we need to make the investments and we need to get over this little hump and enable all of rural and regional Australia to reach its potential. In March this year I presented to the House a private member’s bill, called the Charter of Budget Honesty Amendment (Regional Australia Statements) Bill. In it, I called on the government to report twice a year on what it is doing in terms of achievements for rural and regional Australia, to release this report at the time of the budget and MYEFO, and to tell the people of rural and regional Australia how our taxpayers’ dollars are being used to give us the services that we need.

In this speech tonight I would like to remind the government of some of the things that were outlined in that private member’s bill. In particular, section 19C details the content required of the twice-yearly statement, including the likely economic, social, cultural and
environmental impacts on regional Australia of key government initiatives. Wouldn't it be great to know that our taxpayers' money is being targeted to meet our needs and is not lost in a general amorphous gap?

We specifically called for a regional Australia statement to be prepared twice a year having regard to the economic, social, cultural and environmental impacts of government initiatives; the economic drivers for regional communities; and the disproportionate effects that government initiatives may have on regional communities due to the lack of infrastructure. Specifically, these are: mobile phone coverage, reliable internet coverage and access to public transport. We talked about the lack of access that people living in regional communities have to government services due to cost, long-distance times and relying more and more frequently on the internet. We talked about the lack of competition in regional communities and how this absolutely adds to our cost of living and also to the cost of doing business. This is so much the case with telecommunications—we need much, much better competition.

We need a whole-of-government approach to dealing with these particular issues. In bringing my comments to a close tonight, and acknowledging my wonderful volunteers and thanking you all for coming and for the gift of your time, I also say to the government that we have the MYEFO coming up before the end of the year, and it would be an absolutely ideal time for the government to say that (1) it will accept the recommendations of the telecommunications review and, even more importantly, (2) it will actually itemise how budget measures are impacting either positively or negatively on rural and regional Australia.

My final comment is about this tidal wave of technology that is enveloping the world. It is so important that rural and regional Australia has access to that, but it is not just going to happen. It will only happen if the government has an absolute commitment to putting rural and regional Australia at the centre of its policies and to reporting back to us on what it has done and how our taxpayers' dollars are being used to give us the infrastructure we need to do our bit of the heavy lifting to make Australia the wonderful country it can be.

Ms SCOTT (Lindsay) (18:58): The Lindsay electorate is home to one of the largest independent egg producers in Australia: Pirovic Family Farms. The Pirovic family produces in the vicinity of 600,000 eggs each and every day and, in the process of that, they employ some 130 people. They are a modern farm and, like most egg operations around Australia, they are adapting to the challenge of producing large-scale free range eggs. While it might seem to be a simple case of opening the cage door, it is in fact a lot more complicated.

The first consideration is: how do you protect the birds from disease, such as Newcastle disease, avian or bird flu? A lot of people think that it is just a matter of what 'free range' is. In fact, a lot of people do not realise there are many inconsistent definitions. The average man on the street might think that 'free range' is birds that are uncaged. But that still poses a question: should farmers be keeping hens at 15 birds per square metre—the standard—or should that number be as low as seven or eight, as the 'free range' definition applies?

While this is still going on, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission is also trying to keep the industry accountable with its proposed common law standard that to be free range most hens can and should go outside on most ordinary days. This poses the question: how many chickens by proportion is 'most' and what defines an ordinary day? The industry is
calling out for the ACCC to be more actively involved and to behave in a more collaborative manner, to ensure that there is a level playing field for all and consistent information for consumers, and also to protect the farmers through a basic standard—not to mention a very basic form of protein and an essential food group.

The question is: are we working with the right standard? Legally, this means that at any time 51 per cent of hens are outside the sheds. But how do you monitor this? The reality is that we are not dealing with machines. It is not a simple case of flicking a switch and half the birds are automatically outside. If the weather is too hot or too cold the hens, like you or I, will gravitate to the sheds. If you are running a farm with 100,000 birds, how do you count that you have 51,000 birds outside at any particular time? For some, these might seem silly questions, but the reality is that egg operators are being asked to comply with these guidelines.

With that in mind, egg producers have been working with New South Wales farmers to find a more workable definition. They are proposing a definition that says, firstly, that hens have unrestricted access to a range during daylight hours; secondly, that laying hens in free range systems are confined within a ventilated hen house; and, thirdly, that hens have access to and are free to roam and forage on an outdoor range area during daylight hours in a managed environment.

In Senate estimates two weeks ago, ACCC chair Rod Sims said that the commission would only be prosecuting the extreme elements of the industry. I therefore urge the commission to formalise the evidence given to the Senate estimates by codifying a workable free range definition. The industry believes that if these standards are applied, the ACCC will be able to enforce a workable definition for all players. Perhaps that should be a starting point for a serious discussion on what constitutes ‘free range’.

**Mental Health**

_Mrs McNAMARA_ (Dobell) (19:03): Mental illness is prevalent in all aspects of society and no longer is it the shameful family secret to be locked away in the institutions of the past centuries. Mental illness does not discriminate. It can and does affect and impact all of us. Mental illness is a serious medical issue. It cannot be overcome through just willpower and it is not related to a person's character or intelligence.

The impact of mental illness within the Australian population is becoming increasingly apparent with 45 per cent of Australians aged 16 to 85 having experienced a mental disorder at some point of their life. This equates to 7.3 million Australians. One in five Australians aged 16 to 85 experiences a mental illness in a year.

But it is encouraging to know that the issue of mental health is being taken with the seriousness it requires. Recently, a mental health conference was held in my electorate of Dobell which coincided with World Mental Health Day on 10 October. I was honoured to be requested by the organisers to open this conference, an honour that I humbly accepted. Hosting a gathering of outstanding professionals in their fields, a broad range of mental health specialities, is an achievement for the Central Coast, and I was proud to be part of this event as the only local member of parliament in the region to officially open the summit addressing a major national health issue. It demonstrates not only the role that government can play in
accepting and beating mental health challenges but also the role of the Central Coast community.

One of the topics raised at the summit was the increasing number of returned servicemen and servicewomen who are experiencing mental health issues upon their return from active service—in particular post-traumatic stress disorder. It was identified that there is an increased need for mental health services to specifically cater for our returned servicemen and servicewomen, as the types of mental health issues they experience can be unique and must be catered for appropriately. It was a privilege to be able to attend the summit, and I again thank Sue Rigney and her team from HealthCare for organising and hosting the event.

On the Central Coast 4.5 per cent of hospital admissions in 2011-12 were of a mental health nature, and statistics highlight the growing need for accessible mental health services for our community. Mental illness usually strikes individuals in the prime of their lives, often during adolescence and young adulthood. All ages are susceptible, but the young and the old are especially vulnerable. Alarmingly, it is estimated that 65 per cent of people with mental illness do not access any treatment and that 72 per cent of males do not seek help for mental disorders.

On the Central Coast we are lucky to have the provision of quality support organisations, though I appreciate the need for more services and increased resources and funding. Quality support services in the community keep people well for longer and more connected with their family, friends and community, with a better quality of life, at less cost than psychiatric hospital beds. As our understanding of the impact of mental illness grows, it is important that we look at new ways to provide services and assistance to our community. Daily I am made aware of the impact of mental health issues, particularly on the Central Coast. When I hear stories of eight-year-olds presenting at school, self-harming and saying they are depressed, it shows we have a serious problem on our hands. Our statistics are frightening, and the pressure being placed upon existing services is reaching breaking point. And, while there are numerous reasons for the growing demand for assistance and support, the prevalence of substance abuse on the Central Coast is a stark reminder of the need to act. The rise of 112 per cent in the usage of methamphetamine and ice over the previous two years is indicative of the crisis we are facing on the Central Coast as well as across the country.

In May this year I convened the Central Coast Ice Summit to address the serious rise in the use of methamphetamines and their impact on families and the broader community. In raising this issue I note that the final report on tackling ice in our community has been presented to the government, and outcomes and recommendations from this report are expected to commence implementation shortly. A multipronged approach to combat usage of this dangerous drug is no doubt required, and I am ready and willing to support education, increased access to health services for addicts and the enforcement of the law against those associated with this fatal substance. Addressing the use and availability of ice can certainly help limit one significant cause of mental illness, and I am hugely supportive of curbing the impact of ice in our community to see a reduction in psychotic incidents occurring at our emergency departments.

On the Central Coast we are known for our beaches, lakes, valleys and sporting achievements to name just a few, but sadly there is a darker side for which unfortunately we are nationally known. This includes high rates of domestic violence and, up until recent years,
one of the highest rates of youth suicide. In discussing mental health in our community it would be remiss of me not to mention the topic of suicide. The most recent data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics indicate that 172 Central Coast families have been directly impacted by suicide in suburbs across my electorate in recent years. A Senate committee inquiry that was held in 2010 estimated that the number of people immediately affected by one suicide is six. However, I maintain that there is no possible way to determine how many people are truly affected by something of this nature. I mention this sobering figure to reflect on how deeply mental health issues affect our community. In acknowledging the far-reaching impact of suicide, it is easy to see how a community-based approach to addressing this issue can be successful. I am fortunate to represent an electorate with a number of organisations who share my interest in reducing mental illness and its effects on our community.

The work of the Gosford North Rotary Club, through their Save Our Kids' program, is a hugely beneficial and important cause. The volunteers of Gosford North Rotary Club, particularly Lester Pearson and Michael Sharpe, undertake a number of initiatives to reduce youth suicide. Earlier this year, there was media attention regarding the work undertaken by the Gosford North Rotary Club, highlighting a total of $50,000 which was raised by volunteers to fund the Save Our Kids project. I thank the entire Gosford North Rotary Club for their efforts. I am sure the whole community acknowledges the great work they do, particularly in this endeavour. I am also proud to be a financial sponsor of this program, and I thank the other sponsors in my community for their commitment to the Save Our Kids program.

Many members of this House would be familiar with the work undertaken by Lifeline to reduce the incidence of suicide. I wish to bring awareness to their rollout of training programs, which are a great way to ensure everyone is able to respond to suicide risks should they arise. Lifeline's Accidental Counsellor workshop is one program which equips those who are willing with the ability to step into the role of counsellor momentarily and to respond accordingly to people at immediate risk of suicide, if a professional is unavailable.

When consulting with the Dobell Youth Advisory Committee, I raised the issue of mental health. For the benefit of those not familiar with this committee, the Dobell Youth Advisory Committee is a group that I established. It consists of students from local schools who provide me with direct advice and input into issues affecting young people. In addressing the issue of mental health with this talented group of young people, I was able to coordinate a roundtable workshop on the subject of mental health. I was very fortunate to be joined by representatives from headspace and also the Central Coast Children & Young People's Mental Health. We asked the committee to tell us what they believed were the main causes of stress and anxiety among young people. Naturally, the role of social media and cyberbullying was front and centre. They did say that the best way to address stress and anxiety is through the proven tool of peer mentoring.

As I mentioned before, the impact of suicide is one felt by entire communities, and this is particularly so for the Central Coast community, given the tight-knit nature of our region. Many members will be familiar with suicide in their own communities; however, every once in a while we are confronted with a case which is reported in the media and we are all prompted to rise to attention. As recently as last week, the story of Rhys McNaughton was in the Daily Telegraph, reminding us all about suicide in young people. Known affectionately as
'Zeffa' due to his likeness to actor Zac Efron, Rhys was a popular young man, a talented sportsperson, aspiring model and heading towards a career in teaching. To the outside, this Central Coast-born young man was the last person to be considered at risk. His friends have now commenced an awareness and fundraising campaign through the Movember website in an attempt to spread the word about their efforts to raise awareness and funds for mental illness. This also includes a plea to Ellen DeGeneres and an open letter to Zac Efron to gain support.

The silent nature of suicide is the most lethal. Raising awareness to ensure those who battle inner demons are comfortable to discuss the issues they face has to be a priority if we are to reduce the rate of youth suicide. In addressing this, I take my role as the local member as a very important one in working on how we can reduce the impact of mental illness within our community. (Time expired)

Australian Human Rights Commission

Ms CLAYDON (Newcastle) (19:14): The Australian Human Rights Commission was established in 1986 as Australia's national human rights watchdog. While the commission's overall remit has expanded over time, its overarching role remains clear. It is here to see that human rights and fundamental freedoms are understood and respected in law, policy and practice. Its job is to work towards an Australia in which human rights are respected, protected and promoted, to find practical solutions to issues of concern, to advocate for systemic change and to raise awareness across the community.

As an independent statutory organisation, the commission plays a vital role in upholding the rights of all Australians and, indeed, of everyone who arrives in Australia. They operate without fear or favour, not to silence dissent or to shield governments from what they might not want to hear. In recent times, they have been critical of both the current government and the opposition, based on their independent assessment of a range of issues. Under their current President, Professor Gillian Triggs, the commission has made a number of significant achievements, albeit in the face of an unprecedented attack on its independence and its work from the Liberal government.

Rather than treat information provided by the commission and others, like Amnesty International, as an important input for policy improvement and development, this government prefers to shoot the messenger. Earlier this year, the former Prime Minister, the Member for Warringah, accused the commission of a 'political stitch-up' over their inquiry into children in detention—an inquiry, I must add, that was highly critical of both the former Labor government and the current government. The current Attorney-General, Senator George Brandis, said in February that he felt that the impartiality of the Human Rights Commission had been fatally compromised and that he had reached the conclusion that Professor Triggs should reconsider her position. The former Speaker, the Member for Mackellar, joined them, when she broke from the tradition of speakership impartiality by accusing Professor Triggs of partisanship in a televised public debate.

In spite of this open criticism and an obvious lack of resources—which I will come to shortly—the Human Rights Commission continues to do vital work to protect the rights of all Australians. In recent times it concluded The forgotten children: national inquiry into children in immigration detention (2014), completed a review into the treatment of women in the Australian Defence Force, continued the important 'Racism. It Stops with Me' campaign,
and are currently undertaking the *Willing to work: national inquiry into employment discrimination against older Australians and Australians with disability*. This work sits alongside the day-to-day operation of its information and complaints service, which continues to grow in the volume of inquiries, with complaints up 16 per cent in the most recently reported data.

As I mentioned at the outset, the commission’s remit has increased over time, usually in line with the introduction of new legislation. Today, it operates to ensure freedom from discrimination on the basis of age, disability, race, sex, sexual orientation, intersex status and gender identity. The individual commissioners defend the rights of those experiencing discrimination and give voice to those who often do not have the opportunity to have a voice of their own. It is vital that the commission is adequately resourced to undertake its work and that individual commissioners are dedicated to specific areas of need within the community. As it stands, this is not the case, and there is a lack of dedicated focus in areas of great need; most notably, in the role of Sex Discrimination Commissioner, which continues to sit vacant, and the lack of a dedicated full-time Disability Discrimination Commissioner.

This lack of resources is easily fixed. It is a matter for government, and to leave these positions vacant speaks volumes to the priorities of this Liberal government. In September, Elizabeth Broderick stepped down from the role of Sex Discrimination Commissioner, vacating a role she had held for eight years. A number of significant gender equality measures were introduced during Ms Broderick’s time in office: a national paid parental leave scheme, two weeks of dad and partner pay, the right to request flexible work under law, the number of women on boards doubled, domestic violence was very much acknowledged as a workplace issue and, importantly, one of the strongest repositories of data was generated through the Workplace Gender Equality Agency to enable evidence based policy.

While these achievements are noteworthy, as acknowledged in Ms Broderick’s own closing address as commissioner there is still much work to be done: sexual harassment in the workplace is widespread, with one in four women sexually harassed in the workplace in the last five years; more than 75 women have been killed through acts of violence in Australia this year alone; women continue to be under-represented in leadership positions, in the community, in business, in boardrooms and in parliament; the majority of unpaid caring work, whether for a child, a family member or friend with disability is undertaken by women; and the gender pay-gap for a full-time working woman over a typical 45 year career equates to about $700,000. These are undeniable facts, and a fully-employed Sex Discrimination Commissioner is required to redress these gross inequities and help deliver real change. The role of Sex Discrimination Commissioner must be filled as a matter of urgency. As the UN Women Australia Executive Director Julie McKay said last month about the situation:

*You would never have your CEO role vacant indefinitely.*

The role of Disability Discrimination Commissioner, too, has never been more important. Twenty per cent of Australians live with disability and about 37 percent of discrimination complaints received by the Human Rights Commission are related to disability. People with a disability face a significantly higher risk of poverty than the average Australian, with some 45 per cent of people with disability living in poverty today. We are also at an unprecedented stage of transition for people with disability as some 460,000 Australians join the National Disability Insurance Scheme—a once-in-a-generation social and economic reform to support
a better life for Australians with significant disability and their families and carers. In his closing address to the National Press Club last year, our last dedicated Disability Discrimination Commissioner, Graeme Innes, said that while significant progress had been made in making transport and buildings more accessible, there are still significant challenges for people with disability in finding jobs and for delivering equal justice to people with disabilities. Now, more than ever, we need a full-time disability discrimination commissioner—and a minister as well would be a good start!

While these positions continue to sit vacant, the government has conveniently found the time to appoint a wind farm commissioner. Instead of focusing on the needs of the 20 per cent of Australians with disability, or indeed the needs of half the population, Australian women, who are more likely to experience discrimination based on their sex, the government is focused on their own need to shore up support for their own benefit in passing their legislation through the Senate. Graeme Innes has described the decision to appoint a wind farm commissioner ahead of a dedicated disability discrimination commissioner as follows:

This is saying to people with disabilities, 'your place in the pecking order is below some lobbyists who want to make sure that the numbers are obtained in the Senate'.

I agree with Mr Innes—this is a disgraceful situation. The new Prime Minister has had an opportunity to right this situation but to date he has chosen not to. Under his lead a wind farm commissioner has been appointed, not a sex discrimination commissioner or a dedicated disability discrimination commissioner. While the Prime Minister refused to be drawn in on criticism of Professor Triggs when his colleagues lined up their attacks earlier this year, describing her—and I agree—as 'a very distinguished international academic', he has yet to back Professor Triggs and the Australian Human Rights Commission by ensuring they have enough commissioners working on the identified needs of the Australian community. Prime Minister, it is time to step up and walk the talk.

No amount of feel-good rhetoric will suffice—we need action now. This is a test of your values and your priorities. What kind of government do you want to lead? Is it one that will embrace robust discussions, one that does not shy away from criticisms and strives for continuous improvement? That is what the Australian people expect of you, and that is what we deserve—nothing less.

Private Health Insurance

Ms KING (Ballarat) (19:24): I wish to give voice to the grievance of millions of Australians with private health insurance who now find themselves the target of what can only be described as a push-poll designed to justify making them pay higher premiums. In launching this survey the Minister for Health highlighted smokers, posing the question of whether smokers should pay more for health insurance because of the additional burden they place on the health system. It is a very emotive issue. It is true that the question of whether different premiums should be charged for smokers is indeed there within the survey. But when we finally went to the survey itself last night, it was pretty obvious that there was a much more serious agenda at work here to justify not just higher premiums for smokers but also higher premiums for older Australians, higher premiums for Australians with health risk factors and higher premiums on the basis of gender. I can only assume that somehow gender has been included, because women tend to be higher consumers of health for various reasons but largely to do with childbirth, who frankly have the temerity to want to start a family.
In short what is being proposed here is the dismantling of Australia's system of community rating, enabling health funds to price policies on the basis of risk. This is coming at a time when even the United States, through the Affordable Care Act, is trying to make sure or put in place measures to move private health insurers away from offering policies on this basis. But this is what the minister wants to have a consultation about.

I want to take a few minutes here tonight to outline precisely what is at stake here and who the government now has in its sights. The minister in various interviews highlighted smoking and young people doing adventure sports as examples of these risk factors, but she is well aware, and we are all aware, the single greatest risk factor for health insurers which, unlike smoking or adventure sports, is simply unavoidable. Any doubt that age in fact is one of the principal targets of this exercise is immediately put to rest when you go and take the survey. It begins by explaining community rating and how that prohibits insurers from charging people different premiums on the basis of their age, health or likelihood to claim and that they must provide cover to anybody who seeks it. But then it goes on to explain that:

The private health insurance benefits paid for different age groups vary significantly. The average hospital treatment benefits which private health insurers pay for people in different age groups is approximately:

- $440 per year for 20-24 year olds
- $630 per year for 40-44 year olds
- $3,360 per year for 70-74 year olds

It then declares that:

Some people have suggested that community rating should be relaxed to allow insurers to vary premiums to account for age, sickness or lifestyle factors which increase a person's health risk.

It then asks whether insurers should be permitted to vary their premiums for a range of factors which it then goes on to list includes smoking, age, gender or health risk.

Having just read that, it then singles out people over 75 and suggests that they are a huge burden on the health system. It is pretty clear what answer the government is trying to lead people to have. It wants health funds to be allowed to charge people, including older Australians, more for health insurance and has created a push poll to provide it with the justification for this decision. It is deeply discriminatory and a deeply unfair proposition.

The discrimination of course does not end there. The survey also asks if health premiums should be priced according to gender. Any reading of the health statistics makes clear what that is about. The two peak periods for the use of the health system are, as mentioned, old-age and, for women, their child-bearing years. When the survey asks, 'Should help insurers be allowed to charge patients according to gender?' what it is really asking is: 'Should they be allowed to charge women more for having babies?' Finally the survey also asks: if different premiums should be charged according to a person's health or health risk factors. Let us be clear here: this goes way beyond smoking because, when you scrap community rating and say that people should pay more on the basis of their health risk, where do you stop? Where do
you draw the line? Should people be charged more because they are overweight? What about those who drink an extra glass of alcohol beyond the NHMRC recommendations? Or those with fit fixers who do not register 10,000 steps a day? What about people with a family history of cancer or heart disease? Or women whose mothers have the BRCA gene for breast cancer? How soon before a health fund can compel people to have a genetic test before writing a policy?

We already have an issue before the courts at the moment where travel insurance is being discriminatory against people with mental health problems. That is the slippery slope this government has embarked upon with this particular survey.

After yesterday insisting she was not afraid to ask these sorts of questions, the minister has been running a million miles an hour away from this survey today, insisting she has no intention of slugging anyone any more and this is all just some sort of academic exercise. Well, can I say, Minister, this is not some sort of university research project; this is a Commonwealth Department of Health survey, a government survey, and you do not ask these sorts of questions in this sort of survey unless you are trying to get an outcome and, at the very least, are seriously considering these changes. If you are not, why ask the questions in the first place?

The changes, of course, do not stop there, with just who we should slug more to pay for health insurance, because another question clearly signals this government's intention to introduce private health insurance into currently Medicare-only-funded services, by asking whether the current ban on health funds covering general practice should be lifted. Respected health economist and former Secretary of the Commonwealth Department of Health Stephen Duckett has spelt out what this could lead to: the undermining of universal access to health care, the fundamental principle of Australia's Medicare system. Under Medicare, Dr Duckett points out, the existing high rate of bulk-billing, which is around 84 per cent of GP consultations, acts as a lid on prices by encouraging other doctors to bulk-bill or it keeps fees down. If health insurers could cover GP visits, they might pay doctors more than the Medicare rebate, changing the market dynamics entirely, or they could do special deals with GPs for their members and require them to only visit these GPs for a set few, leaving patients who cannot afford private health insurance with what is left of a residual system.

So let us be clear about what is at stake here. If the government were to proceed with this measure, it would mark the breakdown of the universal health insurance scheme that is Medicare and take us down the path of an American two-tiered system. The minister keeps saying, 'That's not my intention.' It is the consequence of the decision you take, if you go down this pathway, that you will be introducing a two-tiered American health system. You can pretend all you like that it is not your intention, Minister, but in fact it is the consequence of the action that you take.

The government has already had a couple of goes at this, of course. It had a go through its $7 GP tax, its $20 GP tax for short consultations and its $5 GP tax for non-concession card holders. Now it is doing it through the four-year freeze on Medicare rebates, which is designed to drive down bulk-billing and has already had an influence on the billing practices of general practitioners.

Once again, here we have a push poll seeking to justify an outcome to undermine universal health care, rather than spelling out the benefits of the existing Medicare system and the
crucial role played by the Commonwealth acting as the universal purchaser of these particular services and the impact that has on price. The minister justifies this on the basis that there is great dissatisfaction with the existing private health insurance products, which she says is leading to people downgrading their policies. The fact that private health insurance membership continues to rise and is now at 47.4 per cent seems to have escaped the minister's notice. However, there is no doubt that members are dissatisfied. They are dissatisfied because this government has increased the private health insurance premiums twice now, for the highest amount in almost a decade, and members are getting less back for what they pay. So it is no wonder people are saying that they are not getting value for money, when the government has hiked up premiums such a huge amount. This minister clearly has an agenda here when it comes to private health insurance. She is not protecting consumers. She is not putting consumers first in this debate at all, no matter how she pretends she is. Frankly, this survey should be withdrawn.

Banks Electorate

Mr COLEMAN (Banks) (19:34): I am very pleased this evening to have the opportunity during this grievance debate to talk about a number of important organisations in my local community that I have been able to visit in recent weeks. We have a very strong and cohesive community in Banks. There are many reasons for that, but one of the reasons is the strength of the local P&C community. We have about 50 schools in my electorate.

Just yesterday, Hurstville South Public School held a Lego fair, which they called the St George Brick Fair. It was a very well attended event. I counted several hundred people in the time I was there, so I think you could safely put it in four figures for the attendance over the day. We all happily paid our $6 entry fee to the P&C. It was a terrific event. The school hall was full of elaborate Lego creations. We have all at various stages in our lives put together Lego models but nothing quite as spectacular as we saw at Hurstville South Public School yesterday. Over 500,000 blocks were involved in the display and it was really impressive. A play area was set up for kids who were perhaps inspired by some of the big Lego creations to have a go themselves. It was really good stuff from the Hurstville South Public School.

I would like to congratulate the president Brenton Hamdorf and Warren Mak, who was really instrumental in the day. Warren and I corresponded about me coming along and I was very pleased to be able to do so with my family yesterday afternoon. He is very passionate about the school and, indeed, about Lego. The principal Phillip Rouland was there too, providing support to the P&C who organised such a successful event. To the school, particularly the P&C, congratulations on a very well promoted and successful event. I look forward to attending next year as well.

Also last week, I had the opportunity to visit the Narwee Baptist Church's creative crafts group. This group has been meeting for more than 30 years in the church hall, and it is a very large group. About 100 people each week meet and do a range of creative crafts. They have tables set up with the different themes. There will be an embroidery table, a card-making table, a bag-making table, a crochet table, a jewellery table and so on. The group was founded by Christine Clausen some 30 years ago and still gets together every week under Christine's guidance. Not only does it provide an important social outlet for the people who gather each week; it has also returned a very positive contribution to our broader community through some very generous donations to local charities and to students.
Each week, the people who come along pay $5 towards coffee, tea and biscuits. It may be that there is little profit in that $5 and that gets donated each year to local charities. This year, the charity in question is motor neurone disease, an awful disease, and the group are on track to raising many thousands of dollars. Also over the past 30 years, the group has facilitated training for nurses through providing $5,000 scholarships. Twenty-one witnesses have been supported. So that is over $100,000 worth of scholarships from the Narwee Baptist creative craft group. I would like to thank the church for enabling the creative craft group to meet each week and to use the church facilities. It really is a fantastic group and I was very pleased to visit.

We also have an important community centre located in Kingsgrove. The Kingsgrove Community Aid Centre has been around for a very long time and is really a focal point not just for Kingsgrove but for the broader St George community. It is very well led by its charismatic CEO Ann Farah Hill. Ann leaves local representatives such as myself in doubt as to the needs of the Kingsgrove community centre and the broader community. I always appreciate getting her frank advice on what is required for the centre and for our community more generally.

My electorate has the highest proportion of Australians of Chinese background of any electorate in the nation—around 20 per cent of all people being of Chinese background. The Kingsgrove Community Aid Centre, through running classes for both the Cantonese-speaking group and the Mandarin-speaking group, provide a lot of support—especially to elderly people—in the Chinese Australian community. The seniors social-support group is one of the particularly important activities, but they do a lot more too—childcare services, language classes, art therapy, autism support groups and a whole lot more.

Earlier this year, the then Minister for Communications—now Prime Minister—visited my electorate to help me in honouring some of our great local volunteers. Mr Yuchun Zhao of the Kingsgrove Community Aid Centre was recognised at the Volunteer of the Year awards night for his work assisting the Chinese community through the Kingsgrove Community Aid Centre. To Mr Zhao, to Anne Farah-Hill and to all of the scores of people who are involved in the Kingsgrove Community Aid Centre, thank you for what you do for our community.

A couple of week ago, on Sunday, 25 October it was good, again, to be joined by the Prime Minister and my colleague the member for Barton at the annual Being Greek Festival at Carss Park. The electorates of Banks and Barton both have very substantial populations of Greek background. Each year, for the last four years I believe it is, the festival has been organised by the Kogarah Greek orthodox church and supported by the Kogarah City Council. Carss Park is a magnificent spot, and we gathered there this year to enjoy some fantastic food, dancing, cultural entertainment and, I might say, a very fine speech by the Prime Minister who talked about the incredibly close bonds between Australia and Greece.

The festival is generally held around the time of Oxi Day—famously, the day in which the Greek people stood up and said, 'No!' to the advancing Germans during World War II. The importance of that day in Greek culture is not to be underestimated. There were many thousands of people at the event and it was a tremendous celebration. I thank the Greek Orthodox parish at Kogarah and, indeed, Kogarah City Council for their efforts.

Also, recently, I attended the Penshurst War Widows Guild and it was a humbling meeting. Many of the ladies in the Penshurst War Widows Guild are widows of World War II veterans.
While I would not be so impolite as to reveal their ages, you can see that these are women who have been in our community for a very long time. As someone who was born in the 1970s, it often strikes me that my generation has not been required to make the same level of sacrifice as those gone by and no-one no more so than the generation represented by the Penshurst War Widows Guild.

I would like to thank Julie Taylor, the president, and Freda Thompson, the treasurer, and thank the ladies of the War Widows Guild for the hospitality they showed me. I would like to thank them, again, on behalf of our community, for the extraordinary contribution their husbands and they themselves made to the security of our nation. We would not be here if it were not for them.

Moreton Electorate: Road and Rail Infrastructure

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (19:44): I rise to speak about transport in my electorate, an inner city electorate in the southern suburbs of Brisbane. I have a confluence of transport nodes in Moreton. My northern boundary is the Brisbane River, where the Brisbane CityCat travels into the city. Then, if I am going anticlockwise, the next major motorway would be the Ipswich Motorway, which connects the people from the west in Toowoomba all the way down to Melbourne, I suppose, connecting onto Ipswich Road or straight through to Granard, Riawena or Kessels roads. Then, moving around in an anticlockwise way, there is the Oxley Road, where people from south of Moreton—Forest Lake and Heathwood and those big growth corridors—move north into the city or to one of the big employers on the northern side of the river, the University of Queensland, travelling over the Indooroopilly bridge. Also, there is the Ipswich train line, which pulls people from right out at Ipswich into the city of Brisbane up through Graceville and Chelmer. There is even a spur line that goes across to the port of Brisbane, which does not take passengers anymore but which does take coal through to the port of Brisbane. Moving further around towards the east there is Ipswich Road, the continuation of the Ipswich Motorway, which takes large numbers of cars and trucks into the city. I have also got 19,000 business in Moreton, and many of them are serviced by Ipswich Road.

In terms of planes, trains and automobiles, Archerfield Airport is a general aviation hub and also the start of where Brisbane Airport planes line up on the old tractor beam, I suppose you would call it, from Archerfield to Eagle Farm. The next road around is Beaudesert Road. Then the next major transport link would be the interstate train line, which takes transport from Perth all the way through Melbourne and Sydney to Acacia Ridge. Just a little bit further north of the Acacia Ridge train depot is Tennyson—the start of the goods transport which goes all the way through to Cairns. Further east is the Beenleigh train line, which takes passengers all the way from the Gold Coast right through to the city of Brisbane. Obviously, lots of buses go through this area as well. I will particularly mention the buses that go up Mains Road, which is a major route from the south, in Beaudesert, right through to the city. In fact, Mains Road is the second-busiest busway in Brisbane, even though it is a road and not a busway. The next road around, at my eastern boundary, would be the South East Freeway, which has a busway next to it and a bike path.

All of these transport routes come through Moreton. Moreton is a confluence of transport nodes. It is important that I detail the sort of transport that comes through Moreton because I want to particularly talk about some opportunities to invest in transport infrastructure in
Moreton. I was pleased to see in a media release on 28 August that the Labor lord mayoral candidate, Rod Harding, announced his commitment to establishing a $650 million suburban congestion busting fund. One of the first projects he committed to was the Coopers Plains rail crossing. He said:

The first new project will be the construction of a rail overpass to remove the Coopers Plains open level crossing. With Coopers Plains consistently listed among the most dangerous and congested level crossings in Brisbane, this long-awaited rail overpass will vastly improve safety and save motorists up to 20 minutes during peak hour.

Having sat at the Coopers Plains rail crossing, I do attest to long delays. It is good to see that the Labor candidates for the Brisbane City Council—my local councillor Steve Griffiths, Stanley Hsu and Mukhtar Wesseh-Nah-Konteh—have all got behind this great initiative, as has the state member for Sunnybank, Peter Russo. When that announcement was made by Rod Harding, Michael Roth, the public policy officer for the RACQ—also located in Moreton—said in response:

Upgrading the Boundary Road level crossing is on our list of priority transport projects for Brisbane and Wynnum Road is desperately in need of an upgrade to ease the traffic congestion motorists face morning and afternoon.

I say that because this has been an issue for a long time. I will quote a former member for Moreton. Often in this chamber I quote Sir James Killen, who was the member for Moreton from 1955 to 1983, a member for 28 years. I am not going to quote him; I am actually going to quote Gary Hardgrave who made a speech about this overpass in 1996. He said:

Tonight I rise to speak about the Coopers Plains level crossing in my electorate. This is a very dangerous level crossing and an overpass should have been built there some 25 years ago.

By my maths, that would have been 1971, right in the middle of Sir James Killen's time as member for Moreton. He went on:

Lack of an overpass contributes to the problems which cause one of Brisbane's most congested intersections, the intersection of Boundary, Orange Grove and Beenleigh Roads at Coopers Plains. Lack of an overpass has caused small business to decline in the general Coopers Plains area and it has also, unfortunately, caused several fatalities—

That was Gary Hardgrave back in 1996. Unfortunately, he spent 12 years as an MP, but he put no funding into this grade separation. Unfortunately, nothing happened during his 12 years. It is time that we acted on this. I saw that RACQ spokesperson Paul Turner, in June this year, described the crossing as one of two ‘major crisis points’ in the Brisbane transport network. In fact, in 2012, RACQ included the Coopers Plains rail crossing in their list of 'target 10 Queensland transport projects'. In 2013, the Coopers Plains rail crossing was named by rail industry group TrackSAFE as one of the level crossings that drivers rate as the most dangerous in Queensland.

Just down the road, the second-busiest intersection in Queensland, the Kessels-Mains Road intersection, is something I funded. I secured $300 million to fund it. It came in under budget at $280 million, a grade separation on the south side. In fact, one of the first things I did as the member for Moreton, while the gentleman opposite was wandering around out of office, was to open the Elizabeth Street rail crossing. These were two federally funded grade separation projects on the south side of Brisbane. That is to be contrasted with what the Campbell
Newman government did when they were in power for three years. They funded two projects—

*Mr Howarth interjecting—*

**Mr PERRETT:** I will take that interjection. They funded two projects on the north side of Brisbane—

*Mr Howarth interjecting—*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr John Cobb):** Order! The member for Petrie is warned.

**Mr PERRETT:** ignoring the south side. Only federal projects funded by Labor on the south side have been opened. Unfortunately, Campbell Newman, when he was in office—even though his transport minister was an MP in my electorate—neglected the south side. As I said, we saw the Elizabeth Street grade separation, which got rid of the delay at Acacia Ridge of 13 minutes, and the Kessels-Mains intersection at $280 million. But when the state LNP government were in office, under Campbell Newman, we had stooges. We had the member for Yeerongpilly—who I think joined the Palmer United Party and then became an independent—the member for Sunnybank and the member for Stretton who were complete stooges when it came to implementing something for the south side. They were silent on this neglect.

When the ALP came to office back in 2007, unfortunately when it came to investing in infrastructure, according to the OECD, we were 20th in terms of spending as a proportion of GDP. When we left office in 2013, we were first when it came to investing in infrastructure. We set up an independent body, Infrastructure Australia, and when they recommended at arms-length 15 projects, how many of those projects did we fund? Fifteen of those projects, including Brisbane's Cross River rail project.

We know that traffic congestion costs us money. At the moment we are estimating it will cost us about $13 billion this year. By 2031 that will be out to $50 billion. What do we do? We need to invest in infrastructure—things like the Cross River Rail project which, as everyone on the south side knows, is a pinch point for all traffic right through from the New South Wales border to the city of Brisbane because of that one crossing, being the Grey Street rail bridge. It is a growth corridor all the way through to the Gold Coast. We have got Liberal National Party representatives. Unfortunately, under Prime Minister Abbott, before he got knifed in the back by Malcolm Turnbull, right through to the Gold Coast they have not funded the Cross River Rail project. When they do—by necessity they will fund the Cross River Rail project—every one of those extra trains that goes on the train line will go through the boom gates at Coopers Plains. So we had the member for Moreton, Gary Hardgrave, saying back in 1996 that we need to fund the upgrade at the Coopers Plains rail crossing. Now we need to do whatever we can to secure funding.

Unfortunately, the Labor government in Queensland went to an election on keeping a promise, basically. They did not do the backflips like those opposite have done. They said, 'We will not sell these assets.' That therefore excludes them from the asset recycling money. That therefore means that Queensland is not able to access the money that we need to invest in important public infrastructure such as the Coopers Plains rail crossing. And it is not good enough. *(Time expired)*
La Trobe Electorate: Infrastructure

Mr WOOD (La Trobe) (19:55): For many constituents in my electorate of La Trobe, one of the great frustrations we face is being stuck in traffic. I cannot think of something more frustrating, actually, especially every day if you are travelling to work, to the CBD on the Monash Freeway. Over the last three weeks I have surveyed my electorate with regard to the Monash and other transport issues. I knew the residents of La Trobe were very passionate about something happening about the Monash and the upgrade.

I will give a bit of background on the Monash and why we are in this situation. It goes back many years, when we had a state Labor government. I think the transport minister was Peter Batchelor. He announced, he boasted, that the Monash Freeway had been delivered early and under budget. But they actually cheated a little bit because they cut off one lane to save time and money. So that has left us in an awful situation where everyday fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, children, residents of La Trobe, are stuck on the Monash.

The growth in this part of Victoria is incredible. For those who know the area, they know that Soldiers Road and Clyde Road every morning and every afternoon during peak hour are, in a term, chockers with traffic. Every day residents need to travel to the CBD, including those from Narre Warren, Narre Warren North, Narre Warren South, Berwick, Beaconsfield, Officer—all these are big, big growth corridors or growing suburbs—and right across to Emerald, Cockatoo, Gembrook and up through the Dandenong Ranges. The electorate of La Trobe is growing very rapidly, and also the neighbouring electorate of McMillan, which also uses the Monash, going through the Pakenham way.

The City of Casey and Cardinia Shire has a population of 378,000, and that is expected to grow to 667,000. In Cardinia the current population sits at just over 90,000. In 20 years time this will increase by 93 per cent. That population will increase by 2036 to over 174,000. The city of Casey is one of Australia's fastest growing regions. Its current population is 288,000. It is the third fastest growing municipality in Victoria and the eighth fastest growing municipality in Australia. The projected growth of the City of Casey by 2041 is 492,000. When these figures are combined, including suburbs covering the Dandenong Ranges in the council municipalities of the Yarra Ranges and Knox, it is incredible how much growth there will be in the future. That is why I have been so passionate. I have spoken about the Monash Freeway so many times and raised it with the former Prime Minister and the current Prime Minister, Mr Turnbull, who I know through our conversations has a very strong interest in doing something about the Monash.

Each day from the city of Casey over 72,000 residents use the Monash, of which 46,000 travel towards the CBD and 1,300 of those travel further to the western suburbs. That is from one council alone. Like I said, if you include Cardinia Shire, Yarra Ranges and Knox, it is incredible how much traffic congestion there will be in the future if nothing happens. We need to reduce the congestion now. We need to reduce the traffic delays and get La Trobe and the south-eastern corridor of Victoria moving again.

The coalition government is working towards this. As I said, I have had conversations with the Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull. He understands my concerns. I also thank my federal colleagues, in particular the member for Aston, Alan Tudge, whose constituents also use the Monash; Russell Broadbent from McMillan; Tony Smith from Casey; Michael Sukkar from Deakin and Bruce Billson from Dunkley—and a special thanks to Minister Greg Hunt, who
also understands why the Monash Freeway is so important to the outer eastern suburbs and also to Victoria. The state Labor government, under Daniel Andrews, have been very focussed on the western side of town and the Western Distributor. I have no issue with the Western Distributor. However, it cannot be to the peril of residents in the south-eastern suburbs of Victoria, especially my electorate of La Trobe. That is just unfair.

The Monash Freeway upgrade is a tangible solution, creating an extra lane from the space in the central median strip; converting emergency lanes into fully operational lanes—the experts tell me emergency lanes are a thing of the past, because once a car or truck breaks down in the outer lane then basically that lane cannot be used until the truck or car is moved; that is why we can use current emergency lanes—increasing entry ramp management, with signalling systems and longer ramps; and managing overhead roadway signals, providing direction to drivers about closed lanes, merging needs, changed speed restrictions and advised traffic conditions. Our roads need to be smarter. Managed roadways, experts tell me, are the way to go—opening more inbound lanes during morning peaks and opening more outbound lanes during the evening peaks. I am proud to be in a team that is doing something about this.

I also congratulate the Treasurer, Scott Morrison, who wrote a letter recently to the state Treasurer of the Labor government in Victoria, Mr Tim Pallas, about allowing the $1.5 billion of federal funding which had been committed to the East West Link—we are very committed to that project, but we cannot have the money sitting there forever—to be used by the state government, providing it is for projects agreed to by the federal government. In that letter the Treasurer specifically mentioned that the Monash is a key project.

To the residents of La Trobe: I will not give up on the Monash. That is why I have raised the Monash in parliament so many times. That is why I conducted a survey in my electorate to ensure I had the voice of my whole electorate to support the upgrade of the Monash and also to send a very clear message to the state Labor government and Daniel Andrews that we must fund this project jointly, because the residents in La Trobe and the outer suburbs of Melbourne deserve better. No longer should they have to put up with being stuck in traffic day after day. The reason I have put my hand up to ensure the Monash Freeway is a major priority is because in politics it is quite easy sometimes to say, 'It is someone else's responsibility.' I could have said, 'Let's let the state government worry about this,' when residents contacted me saying it is a state government issue—but, no. My federal counterparts and I are taking up the challenge, but we need the state Labor government to get on board.

That also brings me to other issues raised in the survey. Residents in La Trobe are concerned about public transport. I support federal funding for public transport, and I always have. Another issue raised, which is also linked very closely with the Monash, is congestion on the Clyde Road and congestion at the Beaconsfield exit points, which is otherwise known as the diamond exchange. If the diamond exchange had on and off ramps linking it to O'Shea Road, that would take a mighty burden of traffic away from Clyde Road during peak hour. Also, an extension of Thompsons Road and O'Shea Road would create an opening for traffic between La Trobe, McMillan and also Holt. These projects alone could open up local employment opportunities.

In closing, I repeat that I am very focused on, and committed and dedicated to, ensuring that the Monash Freeway is upgraded and that it is upgraded not as a short-term fix but as a
long-term fix for all residents in La Trobe, to ensure that people are not wasting their time stuck in traffic but are actually spending more time at home with their families.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Conroy): The time for the grievance debate has expired. The debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 192B. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr HOWARTH (Petrie) (20:05): I move:
That the Federation Chamber do now adjourn.
Question agreed to.

Federation Chamber adjourned at 20:06.
QUESTIONS IN WRITING

Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet: Corporate Credit Cards
(Question No. 451 Amended)

Mr Conroy asked the Prime Minister, in writing, on 22 September 2014:
Since 7 September 2013, how many corporate credit cards have been issued to departmental staff, and what is the total cost of all transactions made on them.

Mr Turnbull: As the Honourable Member is aware, I was sworn in as Prime Minister on 15 September 2015. As the honourable member's question relates to matters before that date, I am advised by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet that The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

From September 2013 to January 2015, credit cards were held by approximately 32% of the Department's staff to use for legitimate business needs. Credit cards are issued to staff for legitimate business purposes and within guidelines that have existed under successive governments. Credit cards are managed through two credit card systems. It would be an unreasonable diversion of resources to attempt to determine the total cost of all transactions during this period. This longstanding practice and the guidelines covering issuance of credit cards to staff is a matter for the Secretary.

Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet: Executive Training
(Question No. 502)

Mr Conroy asked the Prime Minister, in writing, on 21 October 2014:
Since 7 September 2013 to 30 June 2014, what training has been provided for (a) Executive, and (b) Senior Executive Service, level departmental officials, and what (i) total sum has the Minister's department spent, and (ii) is the breakdown in cost, for such training.

Mr Turnbull: As the Honourable Member is aware, I was sworn in as Prime Minister on 15 September 2015. As the honourable member's question relates to matters before that date, I am advised by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet that The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

During the period 7 September 2013 to 30 June 2014, the Department did not capture training data in a way that would readily allow separate answers to be provided for Executive (EL) and Senior Executive Service (SES) employees. To attempt to provide this information would be an unreasonable diversion of Departmental resources.

During the period 1 September 2013 to 30 June 2014, the total expenditure on centrally funded training was approximately $1250 per employee. This average training budget per employee was approximately half what it was in 2011-12.

Training for employees of the Department is a matter for the Secretary.

Grimes, Dr Paul PSM
(Question No. 766)

Mr Fitzgibbon asked the Prime Minister, in writing, on 12 May 2015:

In respect of the termination in March 2015 of Dr Paul Grimes PSM from his position as Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, (a) what instigated initial consideration of terminating Dr Grimes; (b) for how long was the prospect of terminating Mr Grimes under consideration; (c) when and how was the decision to terminate Dr Grimes finalised; (d) who made the final decision to terminate Dr Grimes, and (e) what statutory provisions govern this decision-making process.
Mr Turnbull: As the Honourable Member is aware, I was sworn in as Prime Minister on 15 September 2015. As the honourable member's question relates to matters before that date, I am advised by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet that The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a) and (b) As the House was advised on 16 March 2015, in the previous parliamentary sitting fortnight the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet drew to the former Prime Minister's attention that there were some issues between the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture and the Minister for Agriculture. Mr Thawley was asked by the former Prime Minister to look into this matter. He did so and made a recommendation and that recommendation was acted upon.

(c), (d) and (e) Dr Grimes' appointment as Secretary of the Department of Agriculture was terminated by the Governor-General under section 59 of the Public Service Act 1999. Section 59 provides that the Governor-General may, on the recommendation of the Prime Minister, terminate the appointment of a Secretary. Before recommending to the Governor-General that the appointment of a Secretary be terminated, section 59 requires that the Prime Minister must receive a report about the proposed termination from the Secretary of the Prime Minister's Department. The Secretary of my Department provided a report under section 59 on 11 March 2015, which had been prepared after consultation with the Australian Public Service Commissioner.

Grimes, Dr Paul PSM
(Question No. 767)

Mr Fitzgibbon asked the Prime Minister, in writing, on 12 May 2015:

In respect of the termination in March 2015 of Dr Paul Grimes PSM from his position as Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, (a) on what date did the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) provide the then Prime Minister with the report(s) on the proposed termination, and (b) how many reports were provided to the then Prime Minister by the Secretary of the Department of the PM&C.

Mr Turnbull: As the Honourable Member is aware, I was sworn in as Prime Minister on 15 September 2015. As the honourable member's question relates to matters before that date, I am advised by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet that The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a) 11 March 2015.
(b) One.

Grimes, Dr Paul, PSM
(Question No. 768)

Mr Fitzgibbon asked the Prime Minister, in writing, on 12 May 2015:

In respect of the termination in March 2015 of Dr Paul Grimes PSM from his position as Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, (a) on what date did drafting commence on the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's (PM&C's) report(s) to the then Prime Minister about the proposed termination; (b) on what date did the then Prime Minister seek a report from the Secretary of the Department of the PM&C about the proposed termination; and (c) in what form was the then Prime Minister's request made to the Secretary of the Department of the PM&C for this report.

Mr Turnbull: As the Honourable Member is aware, I was sworn in as Prime Minister on 15 September 2015. As the honourable member's question relates to matters before that date, I am advised by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet that The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
(a) drafting of the report commenced on 11 March 2015; and
(b) and (c) as the House of Representatives was advised on 16 March 2015, in the previous parliamentary sitting fortnight, the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet drew to the attention of the former Prime Minister that there were some issues between the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture and the Minister. The Secretary was asked to look into this matter. The Secretary did so and made a recommendation to the former Prime Minister. That recommendation was acted upon.

Grimes, Dr Paul, PSM
(Question No. 769)

Mr Fitzgibbon asked the Prime Minister, in writing, on 12 May 2015:

In respect of the termination in March 2015 of Dr Paul Grimes PSM from his position as Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, (a) what was the involvement of the Australian Public Service Commissioner (APSC) in this matter; (b) on what date(s) did the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) consult with the APSC ahead of the preparation of the Secretary of the Department of the PM&C's reports about the proposed termination; (c) in what form did consultation(s) by the Secretary of the Department of the PM&C with the APSC occur; and (d) who was involved in the Secretary of the Department of the PM&C's consultation(s) with the APSC.

Mr Turnbull: As the Honourable Member is aware, I was sworn in as Prime Minister on 15 September 2015. As the honourable member's question relates to matters before that date, I am advised by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet that The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a) In accordance with section 59 of the Public Service Act 1999, the report from the Secretary of the Prime Minister's Department about the proposed termination of the appointment of the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture was prepared after consultation with the Australian Public Service Commissioner.
(b) 11 March 2015.
(c) and (d) The Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet consulted the Australian Public Service Commissioner orally.

Grimes, Dr Paul, PSM
(Question No. 770)

Mr Fitzgibbon asked the Prime Minister, in writing, on 12 May 2015:

In respect of the termination in March 2015 of Dr Paul Grimes PSM from his position as Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, (a) on what date did the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet commence drafting the then Prime Minister's recommendations for His Excellency the Governor-General on the proposed termination; (b) on what date was (i) a draft version, and (ii) a final version, of these recommendations provided to the then Prime Minister or his office; and (c) on what date were these recommendations transmitted to Government House.

Mr Turnbull: As the Honourable Member is aware, I was sworn in as Prime Minister on 15 September 2015. As the honourable member's question relates to matters before that date, I am advised by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet that The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a) Drafting of the Executive Council papers commenced on 11 March 2015.
(b) Executive Council papers were provided to me for approval and signature on 11 March 2015.
(c) The Executive Council papers were provided to the Official Secretary to the Governor-General on 11 March 2015.

Grimes, Dr Paul, PSM
(Question No. 771)

Mr Fitzgibbon asked the Prime Minister, in writing, on 12 May 2015:

In respect of the termination in March 2015 of Dr Paul Grimes PSM from his position as Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, (a) did the then Prime Minister undertake any consultation(s) prior to the termination, either before or after the formal instigation of the process, and (b) was any formal or informal advice sought by the then Prime Minister as to (i) the process to be undertaken, (ii) relevant considerations to be taken into account, (iii) appropriate consultation processes, (iv) legal matters, or (v) any other matters related to this case; if so, who sought the advice, when, from whom was it sought, when was the advice provided and in what form was it provided.

Mr Turnbull: As the Honourable Member is aware, I was sworn in as Prime Minister on 15 September 2015. As the honourable member's question relates to matters before that date, I am advised by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet that

The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

As I advised the House in response to a question without notice on 16 March 2015, the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Mr Thawley, drew to my attention that there were some issues between the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture and the Minister for Agriculture. I asked Mr Thawley to look into this matter. He did so and made a recommendation to me and that recommendation was acted upon.

Grimes, Dr Paul, PSM
(Question No. 772)

Mr Fitzgibbon asked the Prime Minister, in writing, on 12 May 2015:

In respect of the termination in March 2015 of Dr Paul Grimes PSM from his position as Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, (a) when, and how, was Dr Grimes informed of his termination; (b) who informed Dr Grimes of his termination; and (c) was Dr Grimes afforded: (i) procedural fairness or natural justice; and (ii) an opportunity to respond to the matter of his termination; if so, in what form did he respond.

Mr Turnbull: As the Honourable Member is aware, I was sworn in as Prime Minister on 15 September 2015. As the honourable member's question relates to matters before that date, I am advised by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet that the answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a) and (b) On 10 March 2015, the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Mr Thawley, consulted Dr Grimes by letter in relation to Mr Thawley's view that the establishment of a relationship of strong mutual confidence between Minister for Agriculture and Dr Grimes was not a realistic prospect and that it was unlikely that

Dr Grimes could adequately fulfil the statutory role of Secretary as the principal policy adviser to the Minister. That letter also advised that Mr Thawley was considering what advice he should provide to the former Prime Minister, in particular in relation to section 59 of the Public Service Act 1999. Following the meeting of the Executive Council on 12 March 2015, the Deputy Secretary Governance, Ms Kelly, contacted Dr Grimes by phone to advise that his appointment had been terminated.

(c) Yes. Dr Grimes was given the opportunity to respond to the letter of 10 March 2015. Dr Grimes concurred with Mr Thawley's assessment by letter.
Grimes, Dr Paul, PSM  
(Question No. 773)

Mr Fitzgibbon asked the Prime Minister, in writing, on 12 May 2015:

Prior to, or after the termination in March 2015 of Dr Paul Grimes PSM from his position as Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, did Dr Grimes speak with, or otherwise contact, the Public Service Commissioner about this matter.

Mr Turnbull: As the Honourable Member is aware, I was sworn in as Prime Minister on 15 September 2015. As the honourable member's question relates to matters before that date, I am advised by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet that The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

No. The Public Service Commissioner has advised that there was no contact.

Grimes, Dr Paul, PSM  
(Question No. 774)

Mr Fitzgibbon asked the Prime Minister, in writing, on 12 May 2015:

In respect of the termination in March 2015 of Dr Paul Grimes PSM from his position as Secretary of the Department of Agriculture: (a) what is the unexpired portion of Dr Grimes' employment contract for that position; and (b) was the aggregate cost of entitlements paid out to him under Part 5 of the relevant Determination made by the Remuneration Tribunal.

Mr Turnbull: As the Honourable Member is aware, I was sworn in as Prime Minister on 15 September 2015. As the honourable member's question relates to matters before that date, I am advised by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet that the answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a) Dr Grimes was appointed as Secretary of the Department of Agriculture on 18 September 2013 for a period of five years.

(b) In accordance with the Remuneration Tribunal's Determination 2014/11: Departmental Secretaries – Classification Structure and Terms and Conditions, Dr Grimes was entitled to be paid 12 months' Reference Salary, i.e. his Total Remuneration of $670,210 less the rate of the Employer's Superannuation Contribution.

Grimes, Dr Paul, PSM  
(Question No. 775)

Mr Fitzgibbon asked the Prime Minister, in writing, on 12 May 2015:

(1) Were there any concerns about the operations or outcomes of the Department of Agriculture between September 2013 and March 2015 (the tenure of the former Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, Dr Paul Grimes PSM); if so, on what basis.

(2) Has the Department of Agriculture undertaken any Australian Public Service Commission-led Agency Capability Assessments since September 2013; if so, what was the result of each review.

(3) What were the Department of Agriculture's results in the Comcover Risk Management Benchmarking Survey in the calendar years (a) 2010, (b) 2011, (c) 2012, (d) 2013, and (e) 2014.

Mr Turnbull: As the Honourable Member is aware, I was sworn in as Prime Minister on 15 September 2015. As the honourable member's question relates to matters before that date, I am advised by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet that the answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

QUESTIONS IN WRITING
(1) The Prime Minister advised the House in response to a question without notice on 16 March 2015, that in the previous parliamentary sitting fortnight the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet drew to his attention that there were some issues between the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture and the Minister for Agriculture.

(2) No.

(3) The Department of Agriculture publishes its summary benchmarking survey score from the Comcover Risk Management Benchmarking Survey in its annual report.

Order-In Pty Ltd
(Question No. 778)

Mr Conroy asked the Prime Minister, in writing, on 12 May 2015:

In respect of the $110,000.00 tender to Order-In Pty Ltd for banquet and catering services (CN2994952), what were the banqueting and catering services for, and if for a particular function(s), (a) what function(s), (b) who from the Australian Public Service Commission attended, and (c) what was the full menu(s).

Mr Turnbull: As the Honourable Member is aware, I was sworn in as Prime Minister on 15 September 2015. As the honourable member's question relates to matters before that date, I am advised by the Australian Public Service Commission that the answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

The $110,000 is the estimated value of orders to be placed during the period 1 March 2015 to 30 December 2015 with Order-In Pty Ltd, a provider sourced from the Australian Securities and Investments Commission's National Catering Panel. This represents a reduction of $20,000 when compared to the period of 1 March 2014 to 30 December 2014.

The orders relate to catering for participants attending training programs in the Commission's Woden Training Centre. The Commission offers a range of training programs that are attended by participants from Australian Public Service departments and agencies. The amount allows for the provision of a modest morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea for an estimated 7,333 participants at an average cost of $15 per participant.

Carmichael Mine Project
(Question No. 795)

Mr Wilkie asked the Prime Minister in writing, on 12 May 2015:

What meetings or phone conversations has he, the former Prime Minister or any other Minister or their staff had concerning the financing of the Carmichael Mine Project in the Galilee Basin with representatives of the (a) Australia and New Zealand Banking Group Limited; (b) National Australia Bank Limited; (c) Commonwealth Bank of Australia; and (d) Westpac Banking Group.

Mr Turnbull: As the Honourable Member is aware, I was sworn in as Prime Minister on 15 September 2015. As the honourable member's question relates to matters before that date, I am advised by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet that the answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

The Department is not aware of any meetings or phone conversations the former Prime Minister may have had with the banks concerning the financing of the Carmichael Coal Mine in the Galilee Basin.

The Department is unable to answer this question as it relates to other Ministers or Departments.
Communications and the Arts: Hospitality Expenses
(Question No. 812)

Mr Clare asked the Minister representing the Minister for Communications, in writing, on 18 June 2015

What are the details of all (a) hospitality (including but not limited to food, drink, events, activities, entertainment and travel) provided in or outside of normal work hours to, and (b) gifts received and enjoyed by, Mr Nihal Gupta since assuming the position of SBS Chairman on 17 October 2014, and specifically, what was the (i) monetary value of each hospitality provided and gift received, (ii) time and date of each hospitality provided and gift received, and (iii) name and title of any public office holder(s) accompanying Mr Gupta at hospitality events.

Mr Fletcher: The answer to the member’s question is as follows:

(a) See below table
(i) See below table.
(ii) See below table.
(iii) N/A – no officials accompanied Mr Gupta.

(b) One gift (a glass water pitcher) was received at the Book Launch event held at the Australian Defence Force Academy.
(i) Unknown (estimated value $100).
(ii) 5 August 2015.
(iii) N/A – no officials accompanied Mr Gupta.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date/time of Event</th>
<th>Title of Event</th>
<th>Type of Event (i.e. Dinner, Cocktail)</th>
<th>Location (i.e. Flight)</th>
<th>Value of hospitality (inc travel expenses)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30 October 2014</td>
<td>SBS Board Meeting</td>
<td>All day meeting</td>
<td>SBS Artarmon Office</td>
<td>Food $32.00 pp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 December 2014</td>
<td>SBS Board Meeting</td>
<td>All day meeting</td>
<td>SBS Melbourne</td>
<td>Food $44.00 pp TA $432.00 Flights $746.75 Taxis: $206.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 January 2015</td>
<td>Prime Minister Afternoon Tea with Indian Cricket Team</td>
<td>Afternoon Tea</td>
<td>Kirribilli House</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 January 2015</td>
<td>Reception to Celebrate Australia Day</td>
<td>Reception</td>
<td>Parliament House Canberra</td>
<td>Covered own costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 February 2015</td>
<td>U.N. Interfaith Forum</td>
<td>Forum</td>
<td>Parliament House Canberra</td>
<td>Flight $451.50 TA $416.00 Car Hire $80.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 February 2015</td>
<td>NITV Launch 2015 Programming Slate</td>
<td>Launch</td>
<td>Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Islander Studies Canberra</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 February 2015</td>
<td>Board Strategy Day</td>
<td>All day meeting</td>
<td>SBS Artarmon Office</td>
<td>Food $27.00 pp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 February 2015</td>
<td>SBS Board Meeting</td>
<td>All day meeting</td>
<td>SBS Artarmon Office</td>
<td>Food $24.00 pp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date/time of Event</td>
<td>Title of Event</td>
<td>Type of Event (i.e. Dinner, Cocktail)</td>
<td>Location (inc travel i.e. Flight)</td>
<td>Value of hospitality (inc travel expenses)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 April 2015</td>
<td>SBS Board Meeting</td>
<td>All day meeting</td>
<td>SBS Artarmon Office</td>
<td>Food $32.62 pp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 June 2015</td>
<td>40th Anniversary Radio</td>
<td>Celebration</td>
<td>SBS Artarmon Office</td>
<td>Food $20.85 pp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 June 2015</td>
<td>NITV Songlines on Screen</td>
<td>Reception and Launch</td>
<td>Sydney Town Hall</td>
<td>$75 car hire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 June 2015</td>
<td>Launch Refugee Week</td>
<td>All day meeting</td>
<td>Warrawong High School</td>
<td>$550.00 car hire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 June 2015</td>
<td>SBS Board Meeting</td>
<td>All day meeting</td>
<td>SBS Artarmon Office</td>
<td>Food $35.87 pp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 July 2015</td>
<td>40yr SBS Radio Melbourne</td>
<td>Reception</td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>Flight $559.21 TA $370.00 Car hire approx. $300 Food and beverages $104 pp Food $84.50 pp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 July 2015</td>
<td>40yr SBS Radio Sydney</td>
<td>Reception</td>
<td>SBS Artarmon Office</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 July 2015</td>
<td>Helpmann Awards</td>
<td>Industry Awards Ceremony</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>Food $50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 August 2015</td>
<td>Book Launch</td>
<td>Australian Defence Force Academy</td>
<td>Canberra</td>
<td>Food $60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Talent Development Program**

*(Question No. 837)*

Mr Conroy asked the Minister representing the Attorney-General, in writing, on 10 August 2015:

In respect of the $13,000 tender to 'Australian Public Service' (CN3250442), (a) what specific training program will be delivered, and by whom, (b) where and when will the training program be delivered, (c) how many departmental staff will attend the training program, and (d) what outcomes does the Minister's department wish to achieve through the delivery of this training program.

Mr Keenan: The Attorney-General has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

(a) The SES Band 1 Talent Development Program is designed and delivered by the Australian Public Service Commission, in partnership with Social Leadership Australia, an external training provider.

(b) The program commenced on 31 August 2015 and will conclude on 18 February 2016. Module one (31 August – 4 September 2015) was held in Gerringong, NSW. The remaining program days will be held at various locations in Canberra.

(c) One Attorney-General's Department SES Band 1 officer will attend this program.

(d) The SES Band 1 Talent Development Program targets high potential Band 1s and is designed to accelerate their leadership development.
Artbank
(Question No. 842)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister representing the Minister for the Arts, in writing, on 10 August 2015.

In respect of the $10,560 tender (CN3249702) to Artbank for the provision of art, what goods have been leased and where are they located.

Mr Fletcher: The answer to the member's question is as follows:

Three artworks have been leased:

- Dick Nguleingulei Murrumurru, *Untitled (X-Ray Kangaroo)*
- Jeffrey Smart, *The Overpass*
- Ray Crooke, *Outstation, North Queensland*

These artworks are located in the Executive Wing of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Level 5 RG Casey Building, John McEwen Crescent, Barton, ACT, 2600. Meetings are held in this location with senior foreign government representatives, Australian and foreign business leaders, and diplomatic representatives.

Given the payment is GST exempt, the cost of this contract is $9,600.00.

Australian Government’s Artbank Program
(Question No. 843)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister representing the Minister for the Arts, in writing, on 10 August 2015.

In respect of the Australian Government’s Artbank Program, (a) which Government departments currently lease artworks through the Artbank program, and (b) what sum does each department spend on leasing these artworks.

Mr Fletcher: The answer to the member’s question is as follows:

Artbank is an art rental program established in 1980 by the Australian Government. It is a very successful program that has been supported by successive governments over the last 35 years. The program has dual objectives: it provides direct support to living Australian artists by purchasing their work; and stimulates a wider appreciation of Australian art both in Australia and overseas by renting these works to workplaces, embassies, other public places and private homes. The leasing program plays an important role in promoting Australian culture and diplomacy in overseas embassies. The Artbank program is largely self-funding. The income earned from the rental of artwork is used to support artists and meet the operational costs associated with running the Artbank program.

Artbank's information management systems are such that they do not enable this information to be extracted and compiled easily. To collect this information would be an unreasonable diversion of departmental resources.

Supertrawler: Geelong Star
(Question No. 849)

Ms McGowan asked the Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources, in writing, on 11 August 2015:

(1) What permissions/restrictions will the Geelong Star super trawler be given to fish within Australian waters.
How will the Government ensure that the fishing approvals given to the *Geelong Star* comply with the Government's National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development, in particular the Fisheries Ecosystem Management goals which seek to encourage interagency cooperation around a framework of resource stewardship.

Does the Government have the necessary resources to accurately monitor and regulate the activities of vessel operators; if not, what resources are needed.

What financial benefits are directly attributable to super trawler fishing in Australian waters and to what extent will the Australian economy benefit directly from super trawler fishing.

How will the Government assure the Australian people that ecological damage is not occurring due to by-catch, re-catch and other unreported percentages of total catch.

What scientific and judicial oversights are in place to enforce fishing quotas and prosecute companies for ecological damage related to super trawler fishing.

From where is the Government's long term plan for the future of super trawlers in Australian waters available.

Mr Joyce: The Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

(1) The *FV Geelong Star* is subject to the same rules and restrictions as any other Australian flagged vessel fishing in Commonwealth waters and the Small Pelagic Fishery (SPF).

The *FV Geelong Star*'s allowable catch is limited by the operator's individual quota. The Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) sets these quotas based on scientific research and independent stock assessments for commercial species in the SPF.

In addition, the *FV Geelong Star* has a Vessel Management Plan (VMP), approved by AFMA that details management and operational procedures to ensure interactions with seabirds and marine mammals are minimised.

(2) In performing its functions, AFMA must pursue the objective of ensuring that the exploration of fisheries resources is conducted consistently with the principles of ecologically sustainable development. This includes having regard to the impact of fishing on non-commercial species and the long term sustainability of the marine environment.

All vessels within Commonwealth fisheries, including the *FV Geelong Star*, must operate in a manner consistent with all applicable legislation and policies. This includes all obligations under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* (EPBC Act) in relation to threatened, endangered and protected species.

In addition, the SPF is assessed by the Department of the Environment against the Australian Government *Guidelines for Ecologically Sustainable Management of Fisheries – 2nd Edition* for the purpose of the EPBC Act approvals.

(3) As the Commonwealth fisheries regulator, AFMA has the necessary powers and resources to enforce the conditions imposed on all boats fishing in Commonwealth fisheries.

(4) The Australian Government has enforced a ban on vessels more than 130 metres in length so they are not permitted to fish in Australian waters.

While the definition of a supertrawler is a matter of conjecture the government does not view vessels 95 metres in overall length, such as the *FV Geelong Star*, to be in the supertrawler category. Therefore in relation to the *FV Geelong Star*, in addition to fishing levies and company tax, the Small Pelagic Fishery Industry Association (the Association) has advised that the *FV Geelong Star* based in the Port
of Geelong will create jobs directly and indirectly with flow on economic activity for local provisioning, fuel supply, cold storage, packaging and transport suppliers. The operator of the vessel, Seafish Tasmania Pty Ltd, estimates spending at least $20 million per year on wages, goods and services in the Geelong region. The vessel is operating with a crew of 34 employees, including 6 Europeans and 28 employees recruited in Australia. Where demand exists, fish caught by the FV Geelong Star will be supplied to domestic markets, with the remainder being sold to west African countries and other international markets.

(5) An annual levy is charged to all Commonwealth fishing concession owners, including Seafish Tasmania. The levy is payable to government and the funds are used to support fisheries science and other costs associated with managing Commonwealth fisheries.

(6) The government has a strong legislative and policy framework for managing fisheries and AFMA, as an independent regulator, ensures this framework is enforced. AFMA uses observers to conduct scientific sampling, monitor catch limits and interactions with protected species. In addition, an electronic monitoring system, including cameras, has also been installed to monitor fishing activity and compliance with management arrangements. The Department of the Environment administers the EPBC Act which includes specific approval processes related to obligations arising from the EPBC Act.

Catch, bycatch and protected species interactions in the SPF are publicly reported by AFMA on a regular basis.

(7) AFMA works with fishing industry experts, marine scientists and other key stakeholders to ensure that:

- catch limits are set to ensure sustainable fish stocks for the future
- fishery management arrangements and fishing gear used reduces the impact on the marine environment while allowing for efficient fishing.

AFMA is responsible for enforcing fishing quotas and monitoring catch within Commonwealth fisheries through a catch documentation scheme, electronic monitoring (cameras etc), logbooks, observers, audits and inspections. AFMA is also responsible for prosecuting companies for any ecological damage that violates the provisions of the Fisheries Management Act 1991, Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984 and the Maritime Powers Act 2013.

(8) The government has permanently banned all vessels over 130 metres in length from undertaking fishing related activities in Commonwealth waters.

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade: Staff Contracts

(Question No. 852)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

In respect of recruitment, training and service contracts undertaken by the Minister's department(s) in 2014-15 (a) how many new staff contracts were entered into, and of these, what are the relevant staffing levels, and (b) what total sum was spent on recruitment, and of this, what is the breakdown for (i) recruitment agency fees, (ii) advertising, (iii) assessment processes, and (iv) other associated costs.

Ms Julie Bishop: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a) For the financial year 2014-15, 71 new non-ongoing APS contracts (hires and rehires) were entered into. The staffing levels of these were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>APS3</th>
<th>APS4</th>
<th>APS5</th>
<th>APS6</th>
<th>EL1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

QUESTIONS IN WRITING
(b) The total sum spent on recruitment in financial year 2014-15 was $326,523.35. This was significantly less than the $703,984.30 spent on recruitment in 2012-13.

The breakdown of recruitment spending was:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>$43,152.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment services, including assessment</td>
<td>$210,343.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising and promotion</td>
<td>$26,461.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT related</td>
<td>$42,235.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>$4,331.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Attorney-General’s Department: Staff Contracts

(Question No. 854)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister representing the Attorney-General, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

In respect of recruitment, training and service contracts undertaken by the Minister's department(s) in 2014-15, (a) how many new staff contracts were entered into, and of these, what are the relevant staffing levels, and (b) what total sum was spent on recruitment, and of this, what is the breakdown for (i) recruitment agency fees, (ii) advertising, (iii) assessment processes, and (iv) other associated costs.

Mr Keenan: The Attorney-General has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

(a) For the purposes of our response, "new staff contracts" refers to any engagements into the Attorney-General’s Department whether ongoing, non-ongoing or casual employees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>APS1</th>
<th>APS2</th>
<th>APS3</th>
<th>APS4</th>
<th>APS5</th>
<th>APS6</th>
<th>EL1</th>
<th>EL2</th>
<th>SES1</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attorney-General’s Department - Core</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defence Abuse Response Taskforce</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal Commission Child Abuse</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade Union Royal Commission</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>530</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) (i), (ii) and (iii) The department is unable to provide information on total sum and the breakdown, as this information is not captured in the department's financial information system in a manner that is easily obtainable. It would be an unreasonable diversion of resources to manually gather the information.
Department of Social Services: Staff Contracts
(Question No. 858)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Social Services, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

In respect of recruitment, training and service contracts undertaken by the Ministers department(s) in 2014-15, (a) how many new staff contracts were entered into, and of these, what are the relevant staffing levels, and (b) what total sum was spent on recruitment, and of this, what is the breakdown for (i) recruitment agency fees, (ii) advertising, (iii) assessment processes, and (iv) other associated costs.

Mr Porter: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

In respect of recruitment, training and service contracts undertaken by the Minister's department in 2014-15:

(a) 250 new staff contracts were entered into.

The table below outlines the relevant staffing levels:

Total Number of New APS Employee contracts in DSS 2014 - 2015 Financial Year = 250

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification Level</th>
<th>Number of Contracts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entry Level</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APS Level 4</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APS Level 5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APS Level 6</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Level 1</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Level 2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Affairs Officer 1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Affairs Officer 2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Affairs Officer 3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Public Affairs Officer</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Legal Officer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Legal Officer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES Band 1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES Band 2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES Band 3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) The total sum spent on recruitment was $1,330,265.08

The breakdown was:

(i) Recruitment Agency Fees $406,683
(ii) Advertising $166,109.99
(iii) Assessment Processes $587,059.42
(iv) Other associated costs $170,412.67

Department of Human Services: Staff Contracts
(Question No. 859)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Human Services, in writing, on 17 August 2015: :

In respect of recruitment, training and service contracts undertaken by the Minister's department(s) in 2014-15, (a) how many new staff contracts were entered into, and of these, what are the relevant staffing levels, and (b) what total sum was spent on recruitment, and of this, what is the breakdown for (i) recruitment agency fees, (ii) advertising, (iii) assessment processes, and (iv) other associated costs.
Mr Robert: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a) The total headcount of non-ongoing employees (including intermittent and irregular employees [IIEs]) that were externally recruited to the Department of Human Services for 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015 by substantive classification is outlined in the table below.

Non-ongoing staff (including IIE) recruited to the Department of Human Services - 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substantive Classification</th>
<th>Non-ongoing staff recruited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other (Trainees / Graduates / Cadets)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APS 1</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APS 2</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APS 3</td>
<td>1,771</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APS 4</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APS 5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APS 6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub Total</td>
<td>1,913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EL 1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EL 2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub Total (EL)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (including SES)</td>
<td>1,921</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) In respect of the recruitment of non-ongoing (including IIE) staff are as follows:

(i) Nil

(ii) There was a cost of $1,955.14, including GST, for advertising as part of a targeted recruitment strategy.

(iii) Nil

(iv) Nil

Department of Industry, Innovation and Science: Staff Contracts

(Question No. 860)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

In respect of recruitment, training and service contracts undertaken by the Minister's department(s) in 2014-15, (a) how many new staff contracts were entered into, and of these, what are the relevant staffing levels, and (b) what total sum was spent on recruitment, and of this, what is the breakdown for (i) recruitment agency fees, (ii) advertising, (iii) assessment processes, and (iv) other associated costs.

Mr Pyne: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a) There was a total of 349 commencements during 2014/15 financial year.

For the period 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015, the Department recruited a total of 125 ongoing staff (45 engagements, 13 promotions from external agencies, 55 permanent transfers into the department, and 12 temporary transfers into the department).

Ongoing Staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Number of Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APS 1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APS 2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
224 non-ongoing contracts were entered into during the 2014-15 financial year, of which 49 were for casual employees.

Non-ongoing and casual staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Number of Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APS 3</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APS 4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APS 5</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APS 6</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EL 1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EL 2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES Band 1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES Band 2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(i) Information on payments to recruitment agencies is not kept centrally. To provide a total figure on recruitment costs would be an unreasonable diversion of resources.

(ii), (iii), (iv) The total cost of recruitment advertising, assessment processes and other associate costs is $201,159 (GST inclusive). A breakdown of these costs is provided below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recruitment costs $ (GST inclusive)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>75,541</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment processes</td>
<td>57,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other associated costs</td>
<td>68,418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>201,159</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Department of Veterans' Affairs: Staff Contracts

(Question No. 862)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, in writing, on 17 August 2015.

In respect of recruitment, training and service contracts undertaken by the Minister's department(s) in 2014-15, (a) how many new staff contracts were entered into, and of these, what are the relevant staffing levels, and (b) what total sum was spent on recruitment, and of this, what is the breakdown for (i) recruitment agency fees, (ii) advertising, (iii) assessment processes, and (iv) other associated costs.
Mr Robert: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a) A total of 93 new non-ongoing staff engagements were entered into from 1 July 2014 to 31 June 2015.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staffing Levels</th>
<th>New Non-ongoing Staff engagements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APS2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APS3</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APS4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APS5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APS6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EL1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) New non-ongoing staff may be engaged from a temporary employment register managed by DVA or when required from recruitment agencies. Non-ongoing staff are engaged across the business and it would be too resource intensive to isolate these specific costs.

Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet: Casual Staff Contracts
(Question No. 868)

Mr Conroy asked the Prime Minister, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

In respect of labour hire firms contracted by the Minister's department(s) in 2014-15, (a) how many positions were filled using casual staff from labour hire firms, (b) what sum was spent on the provision of these casual staff, and (c) what roles did these casual staff fulfil.

Mr Turnbull: As the Honourable Member is aware, I was sworn in as Prime Minister on 15 September 2015. As the honourable member's question relates to matters before that date, I am advised by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet that the answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

The Prime Minister is advised by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet that:

Total contract value for labour hire contracts is $12,225,142 (GST incl.). A copy of the list is at Attachment A. The details of individual contracts have been reported on AusTender.

The information required to respond to Parts (a) and (c) is not readily available as the Department's financial management system does not capture information at this level. To attempt to provide this information would be an unreasonable diversion of departmental resources.

Attachment A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supplier Name</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AccessibilityOz Pty. Ltd.</td>
<td>134,145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ajilon Australia Pty Ltd</td>
<td>394,879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aristech Pty Ltd</td>
<td>658,944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canberra Consulting Resources Pty Ltd</td>
<td>280,236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candle ITC</td>
<td>449,310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDTS Australia Pty Ltd</td>
<td>16,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clicks Recruit Pty Ltd</td>
<td>1,005,028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davidson Recruitment</td>
<td>22,215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFP Recruitment Services Pty Ltd</td>
<td>457,751</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective People Pty Ltd</td>
<td>74,498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>face2face Recruitment Pty Ltd</td>
<td>24,862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplier Name</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greythorn Pty Ltd</td>
<td>299,640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hays Personnel Services (AUST) Pty Ltd</td>
<td>3,709,454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoban Recruitment</td>
<td>12,165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizon One Recruitment Pty Ltd</td>
<td>1,177,425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hudson Global Resources Pty Ltd</td>
<td>121,975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infront Systems Pty Ltd</td>
<td>52,360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosaic Recruitment Pty Ltd</td>
<td>478,175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omaha IT Services Pty Ltd</td>
<td>211,640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oobe Pty Ltd</td>
<td>34,320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People Bank</td>
<td>558,618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randstad</td>
<td>559,006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Razor IT Systems Pty Ltd</td>
<td>316,448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saltbush Consulting</td>
<td>281,420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SirsiDynix Pty Ltd</td>
<td>16,852</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOS Recruitment</td>
<td>77,847</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synergy</td>
<td>51,975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Westbourne Group</td>
<td>104,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UXC Connect Pty Ltd</td>
<td>62,907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wizard People</td>
<td>30,622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zallcom Pty Ltd</td>
<td>11,550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acumnet Contracting and Recruitment Pty Ltd</td>
<td>84,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ernst &amp; Young</td>
<td>75,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folk Pty Ltd</td>
<td>30,448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPMG</td>
<td>29,590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oakton Contracting &amp; Recruitment Pty Ltd</td>
<td>140,066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPC IT Pty Ltd</td>
<td>70,278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readingroom Pty Ltd</td>
<td>15,964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SME Gateway Ltd</td>
<td>53,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>12,225,142</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Attorney-General's Department: Casual Staff Contracts**

(Question No. 872)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister representing the Attorney-General, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

In respect of labour hire firms contracted by the Minister's department(s) in 2014-15, (a) how many positions were filled using casual staff from labour hire firms, (b) what sum was spent on the provision of these casual staff, and (c) what roles did these casual staff fulfil.

Mr Keenan: The Attorney-General has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

The Attorney-General's Department is unable to provide information on the number of casual staff from labour hire firms, as these employees are not paid through the department's human resource system and it would be an unreasonable diversion of resources to gather the information from the financial system.
Department of Social Services: Casual Staff Contracts
(Question No. 876)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Social Services, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

In respect of labour hire firms contracted by the Ministers department(s) in 2014-15, (a) how many positions were filled using casual staff from labour hire firms, (b) what sum was spent on the provision of these casual staff, and (c) what roles did these casual staff fulfil.

Mr Porter: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

The Department does not hire any casual staff.

Department of Human Services: Casual Staff Contracts
(Question No. 877)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Human Services, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

In respect of labour hire firms contracted by the Minister's department(s) in 2014-15, (a) how many positions were filled using casual staff from labour hire firms, (b) what sum was spent on the provision of these casual staff, and (c) what roles did these casual staff fulfil.

Mr Robert: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a) The Department of Human Services (the department) had 476 contractors engaged through specialist contracting companies.

(b) The department spent $71,975,012.24 on contractor engagements through specialist contracting companies.

(c) ICT and asset accounting services.

Department of Industry, Innovation and Science: Casual Staff Contracts
(Question No. 878)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

In respect of labour hire firms contracted by the Minister's department(s) in 2014-15, (a) how many positions were filled using casual staff from labour hire firms, (b) what sum was spent on the provision of these casual staff, and (c) what roles did these casual staff fulfil.

Mr Pyne: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

Payments to labour hire firms for the employment of casual staff is not held centrally. To provide this level of detail would be an unreasonable diversion of resources.

Department of Veterans' Affairs: Casual Staff Contracts
(Question No. 880)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, in writing, on 17 August 2015.

In respect of labour hire firms contracted by the Minister's department(s) in 2014-15, (a) how many positions were filled using casual staff from labour hire firms, (b) what sum was spent on the provision of these casual staff, and (c) what roles did these casual staff fulfil.

Mr Robert: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a) and (c): During 2014-15, DVA had a total of 372 contracted labour hire personnel engaged. Breakdown as follows:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division/State</th>
<th>Number of contracted labour hire personnel</th>
<th>Roles/skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business Reform &amp; Defence Relations</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commemorations &amp; War Graves</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate (including ICT)</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>Predominantly technical or financial specialists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health &amp; Community Services</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Client service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Service delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>DHOAS subsidy advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>DSHI insurance advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Services, Assurance &amp; Deregulation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Branch</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW Office</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD Office</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Client service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehabilitation &amp; Support</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC Office</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VVCS</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>Administration; Counselling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VRB</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>372</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Additionally, DVA contracts professional health advisors.

(b) Labour hire staff are engaged across the business and it would be too resource intensive to isolate these specific costs.

Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet: Contracted Services Payments

(Question No. 886)

Mr Conroy asked the Prime Minister in writing, on 17 August 2015:

In respect of fees for late or delayed payment of contracted services or products by the Minister's department(s) in 2014-15, (a) which services or products do these fees relate to; and (b) what sum was spent.

Mr Turnbull: As the Honourable Member is aware, I was sworn in as Prime Minister on 15 September 2015. As the honourable member's question relates to matters before that date, I am advised by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet that The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a) The services and/or products that attracted a fee for late payment in 2014-15 comprised IT software purchases, contractor services, other outsourced providers, work in progress intangible asset acquisitions, cabling repairs, maintenance services and consultancy services.

(b) Total fees paid by the Department in relation to late payments for the 2014-15 Financial Year were $6,095.88 (GST incl.).
Department of Human Services: Contracted Services Payments  
(Question No. 895)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Human Services, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

In respect of fees for late or delayed payment of contracted services or products by the Minister's department(s) in 2014-15, (a) which services or products do these fees relate to, and (b) what sum was spent.

Mr Robert: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a) The Department of Human Services (DHS) maintains payment statistics on invoices that are paid late to suppliers that self-identify as small business (less than 20 staff), in accordance with the Finance Circular (2012/02 Procurement On-Time Payment Policy for Small Business). DHS does not track the service or product to which the late payment relates.

(b) In 2014-15, a total of $4,817.21 interest was paid by DHS to suppliers that identified as small business for invoices that were paid late.

Department of Industry, Innovation and Science: Contracted Services Payments  
(Question No. 896)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

In respect of fees for late or delayed payment of contracted services or products by the Minister's department(s) in 2014-15, (a) which services or products do these fees relate to, and (b) what sum was spent.

Mr Pyne: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

For the 2014-15 year, $353.70 in late payment fees were paid in relation to the following services and products:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Late fees paid in relation to the following services or products</th>
<th>Amount spent on services or products</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consultancies</td>
<td>$29.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Works</td>
<td>$162.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Fees</td>
<td>$50.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contractor Fees</td>
<td>$37.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemicals</td>
<td>$11.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printing</td>
<td>$63.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Department of Veterans' Affairs: Contracted Services Payments  
(Question No. 898)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

In respect of fees for late or delayed payment of contracted services or products by the Minister's department(s) in 2014-15, (a) which services or products do these fees relate to, and (b) what sum was spent.

Mr Robert: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

For the period 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015 the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) paid $1,926 in interest on late payments. The majority of the fees related to payments to recruitment agencies.
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade: Office Space  
(Question No. 906)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

In respect of office space leased or owned by the Minister's department(s), (a) where are these offices located, (b) how much space (in square metres) is each office, (c) how much of this space is currently unused, and of this, what is the cost of (i) rent per month, (ii) utilities, including electricity and/or gas, telephone and internet, (iii) office furniture and/or hired equipment, including artwork and plants, and (iv) any other associated services.

Ms Julie Bishop: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(a) Office Location</th>
<th>(b) Office Space (sqm)</th>
<th>(c) Space Un-utilised</th>
<th>(i) rent per month</th>
<th>(ii) utilities, etc</th>
<th>(iii) office furniture etc</th>
<th>(iv) other associated services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RG Casey Building, John McEwen Cres Canberra</td>
<td>45,382.00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 Macquarie Street, Canberra</td>
<td>916.00</td>
<td>916.00</td>
<td>This lease was terminated by the Department on 10 August 2015 when the property was vacated by staff. Until that time, all space was utilised fully.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>255 London Cct Canberra</td>
<td>9,167.00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levels 10 &amp; 12, 20 Allara Street, Canberra</td>
<td>1,667.50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 5 Annex, 20 Allara Street, Canberra</td>
<td>1,502.00</td>
<td>1,502.00</td>
<td>This lease was terminated by the Department on 31 August 2015 when the Department moved out. Unused time was less than one month.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levels 2, 3, 4, 6, 40 Allara Street Canberra</td>
<td>3,062.00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ground &amp; Level 2, 44 Sydney Avenue Canberra</td>
<td>3,463.00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1, 77-79 Hunter Street, Newcastle</td>
<td>222.80</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 10, 123 Pitt Street, Sydney</td>
<td>815.30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 7 &amp; 8, 26 Lee Street, Sydney</td>
<td>1,833.60</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 5, 22 Mitchell Street, Darwin</td>
<td>315.80</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levels 16 &amp; 17 150 Charlotte Street, Brisbane</td>
<td>1,492.00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torres Strait</td>
<td>68.00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Office Location</td>
<td>(b) Office Space (sqm)</td>
<td>(c) Space Un-utilised</td>
<td>(i) rent per month</td>
<td>(ii) utilities, etc</td>
<td>(iii) office furniture etc</td>
<td>(iv) other associated services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treaty Liaison Office Commonwealth Centre Victoria Parade, Thursday Island Level 5, 55 Currie Street Adelaide</td>
<td>607.80</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Level 1, 111 Macquarie Street, Hobart</td>
<td>336.00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Level 2, 747 Collins Street, Melbourne</td>
<td>2,432.00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Level 14, 55 Collins Street, Melbourne</td>
<td>485.00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Level 17, Exchange Plaza, 2 The Esplanade, Perth</td>
<td>825.00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Department of Employment: Office Space**

*(Question No. 907)*

**Mr Conroy** asked the Minister representing the Minister for Employment, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

In respect of office space leased or owned by the Minister's department(s), (a) where are these offices located, (b) how much space (in square metres) is each office, (c) how much of this space is currently unused, and of this, what is the cost of (i) rent per month, (ii) utilities, including electricity and/or gas, telephone and internet, (iii) office furniture and/or hired equipment, including artwork and plants, and (iv) any other associated services.

**Mr Pyne:** The Minister for Employment has authorised the following answer to the honourable member's question, as provided by her predecessor:

(a) The Department of Employment is primarily located in Canberra but has offices throughout Australia. All current tenancies are listed in Attachment A. *Copies of Attachment A can be obtained from the House of Representatives Table Office.*

(b) Total nett lettable area of each tenancy leased by the Department of Employment are listed in Attachment A.

(c) The nett lettable unused space are listed in Attachment A. In relation to unused space:

(i) Gross rental costs have been provided for each tenancy in Attachment A

(ii) costs for utilities, telephone and internet charges are not readily available and it would involve an unreasonable diversion of the Department's resources to ascertain such information.
(iii) costs for indoor plant hire and office furniture are not readily available and it would involve an unreasonable diversion of the Department's resources to ascertain such information. There are no costs associated with equipment or artwork hire.

(iv) there are no other associated costs.

**Department of Social Services: Office Space**

*(Question No. 912)*

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Social Services, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

In respect of office space leased or owned by the Minister's department(s), (a) where are these offices located, (b) how much space (in square metres) is each office, (c) how much of this space is currently unused, and of this, what is the cost of (i) rent per month, (ii) utilities, including electricity and/or gas, telephone and internet, (iii) office furniture and/or hired equipment, including artwork and plants, and (iv) any other associated services.

Mr Porter: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a) The locations of office space leased by the Department of Social Services (DSS), including under Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with other Commonwealth agencies, are listed in the table at Attachment A.

(b) The net lettable area (square metres) for each lease is in the table at Attachment A.

(c) At 18 August 2015, approximately thirteen per cent of DSS leased space was unused at an estimated total cost of just under $615,000 per month. This figure is inclusive of rent, utilities, equipment and other associated services. Most of these costs are incurred whether or not space is occupied. The estimated cost is therefore likely to be higher than the actual cost of the underutilisation of the space. In addition, DSS inherited over 9,000 square metres of largely vacant space as a result of the Childcare Machinery of Government changes. This space is under MOU to the Departments of Education/Employment, at a cost of approximately $208,000 per month. DSS is working towards consolidation and reductions in leased office space in the future and actively pursues sub-leasing of surplus space to other organisations.

**Attachment A**

**Department of Social Services Accommodation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Leased premises</th>
<th>Net lettable area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>Tuggeranong Office Park</td>
<td>33045.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>Corinna Street Phillip</td>
<td>1711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>Holwell Street Greenway</td>
<td>3105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>Aviation House Phillip</td>
<td>2657</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>Sirius Building Phillip</td>
<td>14628</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>280 Elizabeth Street Sydney</td>
<td>2607.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>100 Creek Street Brisbane</td>
<td>3431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>Stanley Street Townsville</td>
<td>729</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>Waymouth Street Adelaide</td>
<td>2034.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>100 Melville Street Hobart</td>
<td>844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>595 Collins Street Melbourne</td>
<td>4609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>90 Collins Street Melbourne</td>
<td>498.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>15-17 William Street Perth</td>
<td>1852.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>Woods Street Darwin L7</td>
<td>1326.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>Woods Street Darwin L2</td>
<td>1410.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>Woods Street Darwin L3</td>
<td>1393.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>81264.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Human Services, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

In respect of office space leased or owned by the Minister’s department(s), (a) where are these offices located, (b) how much space (in square metres) is each office, (c) how much of this space is currently unused, and of this, what is the cost of (i) rent per month, (ii) utilities, including electricity and/or gas, telephone and internet, (iii) office furniture and/or hired equipment, including artwork and plants, and (iv) any other associated services.

Mr Robert: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a) and (b) The Department of Human Services (the department) has an extensive and geographically diverse office property portfolio, all of which is leased with the exception of Wadeye, Northern Territory which is owned. Attachment A provides details on where these offices are located and how much space (in square metres) is each office.

(c) As at 1 September 2015, three of the properties listed in Attachment A were vacant. The department is in negotiations with the respective landlords to achieve early termination of these leases. Monthly rent remains payable on these properties until early termination is finalised. All furniture and fittings considered reusable have been redeployed to other sites. A copy of Attachment A can be obtained from the House of Representatives Table Office.

Details of the three properties are in the following table:

**Department of Human Services: Office Space**  
*(Question No. 913)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Employment/Education sites (MoU)</th>
<th>DSS sqm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>19 Stanley Street Townsville</td>
<td>195.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>255 Elizabeth Street Sydney</td>
<td>4029.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>250 St Georges Terrace Perth</td>
<td>1502.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>215 Adelaide Street Brisbane</td>
<td>1222.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>414 Latrobe Street Melbourne</td>
<td>1583.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>L 11, 11 Waymouth Street Adelaide</td>
<td>840.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>188 Collins Street Hobart</td>
<td>343.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>9373.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Sites occupied under MoU with other agencies (per person basis)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>Port Augusta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>Alice Springs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>Rockhampton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>Mt Isa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>Cairns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>Batemans Bay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>Shepparton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>Mackay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>Newcastle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>Bendigo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>Orange</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Details of the three properties are in the following table:
Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, in writing, on 17 August 2015.

In respect of office space leased or owned by the Minister's department(s), (a) where are these offices located, (b) how much space (in square metres) is each office, (c) how much of this space is currently unused, and of this, what is the cost of (i) rent per month, (ii) utilities, including electricity and/or gas, telephone and internet, (iii) office furniture and/or hired equipment, including artwork and plants, and (iv) any other associated services.

Mr Robert: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

The table below indicates (a) where the offices are located; (b) space in M²; and (c) how much space is unused.

With regards to the cost of (i) rent; (ii) utilities costs; (iii) office furniture or hired equipment, including art work and plants; and (iv) any other associated services that is attributed to the unused portion of the Department's net lettable area, the answer is nil. The Department does have vacant desks across all sites but does not have sufficient vacant space in a contiguous form that could be sublet to another agency. Given the small amount of unused space / desks, the cost of having this space is negligible.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Offices</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Street Address</th>
<th>Size in sqm</th>
<th>Vacant space</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>DVA</td>
<td>Parramatta</td>
<td>Suite 41, 60 Station Street East, Parramatta</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>VAN</td>
<td>Tweed Heads</td>
<td>Shop 45 Tweed Mall, 2485</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>VAN</td>
<td>Toowoomba</td>
<td>99 Russell Street, 4350</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>VAN</td>
<td>Townsville</td>
<td>Level 1, 520 Flinders St, 4810</td>
<td>522</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>VAN</td>
<td>Launceston</td>
<td>105/287 Charles Street 7250</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>VAN</td>
<td>Tweed Heads</td>
<td>Suite 7, Wharf Central, 75-77 Wharf St</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VVCS</td>
<td>Site</td>
<td>Street Address</td>
<td></td>
<td>SQM</td>
<td>Vacant space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>VVCS</td>
<td>Deakin</td>
<td>6-8 Champion St, 2600</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>VVCS</td>
<td>Parramatta</td>
<td>Level 1, Suite 1, 110 George Street, Parramatta</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>VVCS</td>
<td>Aitkenvale</td>
<td>Suit G2/340 Ross River Rd, 4817 (Townsville)</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>VVCS</td>
<td>Spring Hill</td>
<td>15 Astor Terrace, 4000</td>
<td>625</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>VVCS</td>
<td>Adelaide</td>
<td>Ground Floor, 99 Frome Street, 5000</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>VVCS</td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>Level 4 / 440 Elizabeth Street, 3000</td>
<td>691</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>VVCS</td>
<td>Applecross</td>
<td>7 Kintail Road, 6153</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VAN &amp; VVCS</td>
<td>Site</td>
<td>Street Address</td>
<td></td>
<td>SQM</td>
<td>Vacant space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>VAN / VVCS</td>
<td>Broadbeach</td>
<td>Level 3b &amp; 11 Niecon Tower 17 Victoria Avenue, 4218</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>VAN/VVCS</td>
<td>Lismore</td>
<td>Suite 6 &amp; 8, Conway Court, 17</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>VAN/VVCS</td>
<td>Newcastle</td>
<td>Suite 1 &amp; 2 Grd flr 6 Auckland St, Newcastle 2300</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>VAN/VVCS</td>
<td>Winnellie</td>
<td>U1 Winnellie Central, 14 Winnellie Road</td>
<td>685</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>VAN/VVCS</td>
<td>Maroochydore</td>
<td>Shop 2/129 Horton Parade 4558</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>VVCS</td>
<td>Wodonga</td>
<td>81 Hume Street, 3690</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHER</td>
<td>Site</td>
<td>Street Address</td>
<td></td>
<td>SQM</td>
<td>Vacant space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>Car</td>
<td>Woden</td>
<td>Car Parks Only - Centraplaza</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>File Store</td>
<td>Cannon Hill</td>
<td>996 Wynnum Road 4170</td>
<td>1415</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>File Store</td>
<td>Port Melbourne</td>
<td>620 to 622 Lorimer Street, 3207</td>
<td>1923</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>File/Archive</td>
<td>Villawood</td>
<td>120 Miller Road, Villawood 2163</td>
<td>752.6</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

32 Properties
Department of Communications: Office Space
(Question No. 917)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister representing the Minister for Communications, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

In respect of office space leased or owned by the Minister's department(s), (a) where are these offices located, (b) how much space (in square metres) is each office, (c) how much of this space is currently unused, and of this, what is the cost of (i) rent per month, (ii) utilities, including electricity and/or gas, telephone and internet, (iii) office furniture and/or hired equipment, including artwork and plants, and (iv) any other associated services.

Mr Fletcher: The Minister for Communications has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

(a) In 2014-15 three office spaces were leased by the Department:
   (i) Level 1, 44 Sydney Avenue, Forrest ACT 2903
   (ii) 38 Sydney Avenue, Forrest ACT 2903
   (iii) Level 18, 31-33 Market Street, Sydney NSW 2000.

(b) Space in square metres for each office:
   (i) 1650 m²
   (ii) 9464.3 m²
   (iii) 710 m²

(c) Not Applicable.

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade: Offices Efficiency Upgrades
(Question No. 924)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

In respect of the Minister's departmental office(s), has the building(s) received energy efficiency upgrades; if so, (a) when, and (b) how has this upgrade affected (i) average energy use, and (ii) average energy cost.

Ms Julie Bishop: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

Adelaide: 55 Currie St.

The owner of the building has improved the NABERS rating from 4.2 to 4.7, calculated on a rolling monthly basis. This was achieved by upgrade works to the base building airconditioning and control systems. As DFAT occupies 610m2 out of a total of 26,000m2 the impact to DFAT in average use and average cost has been negligible.

No other building occupied or owned by the Department has received a building energy efficiency upgrade.

Department of Human Services: Offices Efficiency Upgrades
(Question No. 931)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Human Services, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

In respect of the Minister's departmental office(s), has the building(s) received energy efficiency upgrades; if so, (a) when, and (b) how has this upgrade affected (i) average energy use, and (ii) average energy cost.
**Mr Robert**: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a) The Department of Human Services (DHS) is committed to its obligations under the Energy Efficiency in Government Operations policy and has an ongoing programme of introducing energy efficiency measures when undertaking building fitouts and refurbishments. This includes upgrading lighting and air conditioning systems as well as introducing other energy efficiency initiatives such as installing window shading, insulation, motion sensors in meeting rooms and double glazed windows. Over the past eighteen months DHS has also undertaken a Halogen Light Upgrade Project for fifteen sites. Halogen downlights in each of the sites were replaced with more efficient LED lighting.

(b) This information is not available for the ongoing programme of energy efficiency measures. In respect to the Halogen Light Upgrade Project, it will take eighteen months to gather sufficient data to report on the energy and costs related to this project.

**Department of Industry, Innovation and Science: Offices Efficiency Upgrades**

(Question No. 932)

**Mr Conroy** asked the Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science on 17 August 2015:

In respect of the Minister's departmental office(s), has the building(s) received energy efficiency upgrades; if so, (a) when, and (b) how has this upgrade affected (i) average energy use, and (ii) average energy cost.

**Mr Pyne**: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

The department's buildings have undertaken a number of energy efficiency upgrades, in particular:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Upgrade</th>
<th>When</th>
<th>Effect on Energy use</th>
<th>Effect on Energy cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Industry House Data Centre (DC) upgrade</td>
<td>Throughout 2014-2015</td>
<td>Reduction in DC energy* use: - 3% - Data Centre 1 - 14% - Data Centre 2</td>
<td>22% reduction in DC energy costs - saving of $79,940 in the last year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questacon - Parkes Installation of photovoltaic solar power system</td>
<td>December 2014</td>
<td>In the period 1 January 2015 to 31 July 2015, energy use was 55,850 kWh lower than the same period in 2014</td>
<td>In the period 1 January 2015 to 31 July 2015, energy costs were $23,520 lower than the same period in 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry House Initial testing and annual re-commissioning of lighting levels</td>
<td>December 2009 to current</td>
<td>Estimated 10% reduction in tenant light and power energy use per annum (average of 162,470 kWh per year).</td>
<td>Estimated reduction in energy cost of $29,700 per annum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA State office Lighting retrofit using LED and compact fluorescent alternatives</td>
<td>May 2012</td>
<td>29% reduction in energy use since 2012. Note: There has been a 59% increase in staff over that period.</td>
<td>2% increase in energy cost since 2012. Note: The cost of electricity has increased by 43% per kWh from 24c to 34c.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD State Office Bulk re-lamp with more energy efficient lamps</td>
<td>August 2015</td>
<td>Estimated 10% reduction in energy use (approximately 12,320 kWh per annum)</td>
<td>Estimated 10% reduction in energy costs (estimate $3,850 per annum).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Department of Veterans' Affairs: Offices Efficiency Upgrades  
(Question No. 934)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, in writing, on 17 August 2015.

In respect of the Minister's departmental office(s), has the building(s) received energy efficiency upgrades; if so, (a) when, and (b) how has this upgrade affected (i) average energy use, and (ii) average energy cost.

Mr Robert: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

As the Departmental properties are all leased, any efficiency upgrades would be the responsibility of the building owner. The Department does not undertake work of this nature.

Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet: Consultants  
(Question No. 940)

Mr Conroy asked the Prime Minister in writing, on 17 August 2015:

In respect of the use of (a) consultants, and (b) contractors, by the Minister's department(s) in 2014-15, (i) what total sum was spent, (ii) what services were provided, and (iii) which firms provided the services.

Mr Turnbull: As the Honourable Member is aware, I was sworn in as Prime Minister on 15 September 2015. As the honourable member's question relates to matters before that date, I am advised by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet that The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

In accordance with the Commonwealth Procurement Rules, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's contractor and consultancy contract notices valued at or above $10,000 (GST Inclusive) are published on AusTender (www.tenders.gov.au). The contract notice will detail the supplier and the value of the commitment.

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade: Consultants  
(Question No. 942)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

In respect of the use of (a) consultants, and (b) contractors, by the Minister's department(s) in 2014-15, (i) what total sum was spent, (ii) what services were provided, and (iii) which firms provided the services.

Ms Julie Bishop: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(1) Details of contracts valued at or above $10,000, including consultancies, are available on AusTender. This includes the cost, subject matter, and supplier details of the contract. Details of the consultancy arrangements entered into by the department each financial year are also published in the department's annual report.

(2) To provide details of contracts awarded valued at less than $10,000 would entail a significant diversion of resources and, in these circumstances, I do not consider the additional work can be justified.

Department of Human Services: Consultants  
(Question No. 949)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Human Services, in writing, on 17 August 2015:
In respect of the use of (a) consultants, and (b) contractors, by the Minister's department(s) in 2014-15, (i) what total sum was spent, (ii) what services were provided, and (iii) which firms provided the services.

Mr Robert: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a) The Department of Human Services (the department) engaged the following firms to deliver consultancy services in the 2014-15 financial year. The department classified these contracts as consultancies based on the criteria for defining consultancies issued by the Department of Finance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AusTender CN Number</th>
<th>Consultant Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Contract Price</th>
<th>Expenditure as at 30/06/2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CN2630551</td>
<td>Deloitte Actuaries and Consultants Ltd</td>
<td>Independent actuary review of Comcare premium</td>
<td>$28,875</td>
<td>$28,875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CN3234552</td>
<td>Greencap - NAA Pty Ltd</td>
<td>Audit services</td>
<td>$60,500</td>
<td>$ -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CN2721461</td>
<td>Information Integrity Solutions Pty Ltd</td>
<td>Provide privacy assurance advice and support</td>
<td>$80,000</td>
<td>$59,969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CN2911242</td>
<td>KPMG</td>
<td>Review of human resource services within the department</td>
<td>$55,594</td>
<td>$55,593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CN3170852</td>
<td>KPMG</td>
<td>Health compliance assurance</td>
<td>$77,396</td>
<td>$ -</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) To provide a detailed list of the use of contractors by the department in 2014-15, the total sum spent, the services that were provided and the firms that provided the services, would require a substantial manual effort and an unreasonable diversion of resources. Information about the department's contracts is publicly available on AusTender.

Department of Industry, Innovation and Science: Consultants
(Question No. 950)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

In respect of the use of (a) consultants, and (b) contractors, by the Minister's department(s) in 2014-15, (i) what total sum was spent, (ii) what services were provided, and (iii) which firms provided the services.

Mr Pyne: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

The requested information is available in the Department of Industry and Science 2014-15 Annual Report. A copy of the report is available at the following address:


Department of Veterans' Affairs: Consultants
(Question No. 952)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, in writing, on 17 August 2015.

In respect of the use of (a) consultants, and (b) contractors, by the Minister's department(s) in 2014-15, (i) what total sum was spent, (ii) what services were provided, and (iii) which firms provided the services.
Mr Robert: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
(a) (i) in respect of the use of consultants in 2014-15, the Department of Veterans' Affairs spent $11.03M.
(ii) and (iii) information about services and providers is available on AusTender at www.tenders.gov.au.
(b) (i) in respect of the use of contractors in 2014-15, the Department of Veterans' Affairs spent $28.5M.
(ii) and (iii) information about services and providers is available on AusTender at www.tenders.gov.au.

Attorney-General's Department: Media Monitoring
(Question No. 962)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister representing the Attorney-General, in writing, on 17 August 2015:
What sum was spent by the Minister's department(s) on media monitoring and associated services in 2014-15.

Mr Keenan: The Attorney-General has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:
The cost of media monitoring for the Attorney-General's Department and ministerial offices for 2014-2015 was $449,969 (GST exclusive).

In addition, the department's media monitoring service was extended to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, the Defence Abuse Response Taskforce, the Royal Commission into the Home Insulation Program and the Royal Commission into Trade Union Governance and Corruption.

The total cost of media monitoring for the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse for 2014-15 is $249,412 (GST exclusive).
The total cost of media monitoring for the Defence Abuse Response Taskforce for 2014-15 was $4,363 (GST exclusive).
The total cost of media monitoring for the Royal Commission into the Home Insulation Program for 2014-15 was $1,064 (GST exclusive).
The total cost of media monitoring for the Royal Commission into Trade Union Governance and Corruption Program for 2014-15 was $7,877 (GST exclusive).

Department of Social Services: Media Monitoring
(Question No. 966)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Social Services, in writing, on 17 August 2015:
What sum was spent by the Minister's department(s) on media monitoring and associated services in 2014-15.

Mr Porter: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
The Department of Social Services spent $349,240.81 (GST ex) on media monitoring and associated services in 2014-15.
The contract was also varied in 2014-15 to reflect increased media monitoring responsibilities brought about by Machinery of Government changes that included the addition of Early Childhood and Child Care from the Department of Education.
Previous years' spending was:
FY 2008-09 - $360,496.85
FY 2009-10 - $324,233.82
FY 2010-11 - $412,881.42
FY 2011-12 - $317,618.91
FY 2012-13 - $286,332.07
FY 2013-14 - $310,790.11

**Department of Human Services: Media Monitoring**
*(Question No. 967)*

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Human Services, in writing, on 17 August 2015:
What sum was spent by the Minister's department(s) on media monitoring and associated services in 2014-15.

Mr Robert: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
The Department of Human Services spent $248,445 (including GST) on media monitoring in 2014-15.

**Department of industry, Innovation and Science: Media Monitoring**
*(Question No. 968)*

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science, in writing, on 17 August 2015:
What sum was spent by the Minister's department(s) on media monitoring and associated services in 2014-15.

Mr Pyne: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
The total cost of media monitoring services for 2014-15 is $440,180 (GST exclusive).

**Department of Veterans' Affairs: Media Monitoring**
*(Question No. 970)*

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, in writing, on 17 August 2015:
What sum was spent by the Minister's department(s) on media monitoring and associated services in 2014-15.

Mr Robert: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
In 2014-15, the Department of Veterans' Affairs total expenditure on media monitoring and associated services was $280,432.00 (GST Exclusive).

**Department of Communications: Media Monitoring**
*(Question No. 971)*

Mr Conroy asked the Minister representing the Minister for Communications, in writing, on 17 August 2015:
What sum was spent by the Minister's department(s) on media monitoring and associated services in 2014-15.

Mr Fletcher: The Minister for Communications has provided the answer to the member's question is as follows:
The total expense for media monitoring and associated services provided to the department in 2014-15 is $564,740 (GST excl.).

**Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet: Market Research**

(Question No. 976)

*Mr Conroy* asked the Prime Minister in writing, on 17 August 2015:

What sum was spent by the Ministers department(s) on market research and associated services in 2014-15, and what policy areas did this inform.

*Mr Turnbull:* As the Honourable Member is aware, I was sworn in as Prime Minister on 15 September 2015. As the honourable member's question relates to matters before that date, I am advised by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet that The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

The Department does not record data in a way that would readily allow an answer to be provided to this question. To attempt to provide this information would be an unreasonable diversion of departmental resources.

**Attorney-General's Department: Market Research**

(Question No. 980)

*Mr Conroy* asked the Minister representing the Attorney-General, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

What sum was spent by the Minister's department(s) on market research and associated services in 2014-15, and what policy areas did this inform.

*Mr Keenan:* The Attorney-General has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

During 2014-15 the Attorney-General's Department spent $461,519 (GST exclusive) on market research and associated services to inform the following policy areas:

- Countering Violent Extremism
- Royal Commission into Child Abuse
- National Security Hotline
- Australian Cybercrime Online Reporting Network (ACORN)

**Department of Agriculture and Water Resources: Market Research**

(Question No. 982)

*Mr Conroy* asked the Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

What sum was spent by the Minister's department(s) on market research and associated services in 2014-15, and what policy areas did this inform.

*Mr Joyce:* The Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Market research organisations</th>
<th>Research scope</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essence Communications</td>
<td>Community attitudes towards Australian fisheries management</td>
<td>$198,308.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This research informed the fisheries policy area.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor Nelson Sofres</td>
<td>Research and recommendations on employee change</td>
<td>$37,789.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Market research organisations
Australia Pty Ltd management approach
This research informed the department's executive and is being used for internal communication purposes.
Total cost (GST inclusive) $236 097.86

Department of Social Services: Market Research
(Question No. 984)
Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Social Services, in writing, on 17 August 2015:
What sum was spent by the Minister's department(s) on market research and associated services in 2014-15, and what policy areas did this inform.
Mr Porter: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

Department of Human Services: Market Research
(Question No. 985)
Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Human Services, in writing, on 17 August 2015:
What sum was spent by the Minister's department(s) on market research and associated services in 2014-15, and what policy areas did this inform.
Mr Robert: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
The Department of Human Services spent $2,025,941 on market research and associated services in 2014-15. This cannot be attributed to individual policies but rather has been expended on the provision of the customer satisfaction surveys and the identification, design and shaping of products which enhance online service delivery.

Department of Industry, Innovation and Science: Market Research
(Question No. 986)
Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science, in writing, on 17 August 2015:
What sum was spent by the Minister's department(s) on market research and associated services in 2014-15, and what policy areas did this inform.
Mr Pyne: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
The requested information is available in the Department of Industry and Science 2014-15 Annual Report. A copy of the report is available at the following address:

Department of Veterans' Affairs: Market Research
(Question No. 988)
Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, in writing, on 17 August 2015.
What sum was spent by the Minister's department(s) on market research and associated services in 2014-15, and what policy areas did this inform.
Mr Robert: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

In 2014–15, the Department of Veterans’ Affairs undertook market research to assist in the development of mental health programmes and client services. The total expenditure was $120,693.41 (GST inclusive).

Department of Communications: Market Research
(Question No. 989)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister representing the Minister for Communications, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

What sum was spent by the Minister's department(s) on market research and associated services in 2014-15, and what policy areas did this inform.

Mr Fletcher: The Minister for Communications has provided the answer to the member's question as follows:

The Department incurred expenses of $461,325 (GST excl.) for market research and associated services over the period 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015. This covered the following areas:

- The Retune communication campaign with expenses of $432,850 (GST excl.). The Retune campaign related to the Digital Television Switchover – Spectrum Restacking Assistance programme. The campaign continued through to the end of 2014 with market research activities supporting the programme during that time.
- Stay Smart Online Program with expenses of $23,353 (GST excl.). The programme is a whole of Government initiative designed to promote the Government's online security and safety messages to the Australian community.
- A total of $5,122 (GST excl.) on associated Departmental activities. To list each item for market research expenses would require an unreasonable diversion of Departmental resources.

Department of Finance: Market Research
(Question No. 992)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister representing the Minister for Finance, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

What sum was spent by the Minister’s department(s) on market research and associated services in 2014-15, and what policy areas did this inform.

Mr Morrison: The Minister for Finance has supplied the following answer to the honourable member's question:

Market research expenditure 2014-15—Department of Finance*

The Medibank-related item in this table relates to the successful Medibank Private share offer which returned $5.7 billion in proceeds, to be re-invested in job creating infrastructure.

Transaction costs for the Medibank Private share offer were provisioned in the 2014-15 Budget, providing a total of $90.9 million over two years to support the sale (Budget Paper 2, p.117).

The full value of the DBM Consultants Pty Ltd contract was reported on Austender on 20 November 2014.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Expenditure ($, including GST)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Market research organisations</td>
<td>Market research service for the Medibank Private share offer</td>
<td>590,009.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Monday, 9 November 2015

Organisation
Orima Research Pty Ltd
Orima Research Pty Ltd
Orima Research Pty Ltd

Purpose
Web accessibility national transition survey
Online survey of information and communications technology systems and assets
Measurement of the satisfaction of customers of the government's advertising arrangement with the delivery of services being provided by the master media agency

Expenditure ($, including GST)
14,400.00
54,032.00
22,819.60

Total payments over $12,565
681,260.60

Total payments under $12,565 *
25,050.00

Total payments
706,310.60

* This table has been compiled using the reporting Requirements for Annual Reports for Departments, Executive Agencies and Other Non-Corporate Commonwealth Entities with regard to advertising and market research. Under these requirements, Departments are required to disclose payments of $12,565 or more for advertising and market research.

** For the purpose of responding to this question, payments under the threshold have been included but are shown as a total only.

Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet: Advertising
(Question No. 994)

Mr Conroy asked the Prime Minister in writing, on 17 August 2015:

What sum was spent by the Minister’s department(s) on advertising and associated services in 2014-15, and what policy areas did this relate to.

Mr Turnbull: As the Honourable Member is aware, I was sworn in as Prime Minister on 15 September 2015. As the honourable member's question relates to matters before that date, I am advised by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet that The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet spent $902,005.82 (GST exclusive) on advertising and associated services in 2014-15. Breakdown of expenses are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Cost (GST exclusive)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G20 Operations</td>
<td>$460,325.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Affairs Group</td>
<td>$126,883.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment (across the Department)</td>
<td>$86,513.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visits Coordination</td>
<td>$76,240.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAIDOC</td>
<td>$70,017.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceremonial Coordination</td>
<td>$46,949.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations</td>
<td>$19,304.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Security Legislation Monitor</td>
<td>$14,056.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office of Township Leasing</td>
<td>$1,714.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>$902,005.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Total cost of advertisement reported above is greater than the amount reported in 2014-15 PM&C Annual Report ($684,763.76 GST exclusive). The annual report guidelines as approved by the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit (under Public Services Act 1999) state that transactions less than $11,422.73 (GST exclusive) or those that relate to production and distribution are not required to be reported in the annual report.
Attorney-General's Department: Advertising
(Question No. 998)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister representing the Attorney-General, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

What sum was spent by the Minister's department(s) on advertising and associated services in 2014-15, and what policy areas did this relate to.

Mr Keenan: The Attorney-General has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

During 2014-15 the Attorney-General's Department spent $2,953,448 (GST exclusive) on advertising and associated services in relation to the following areas:

- National Security Hotline
- Australian Cybercrime Online Reporting Network (ACORN)
- Ministry for the Arts
- Royal Commission into Child Abuse
- Countering Violent Extremism
- Royal Commission into Trade Unions
- Staff recruitment

Department of Social Services: Advertising
(Question No. 1002)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Social Services, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

What sum was spent by the Minister's department(s) on advertising and associated services in 2014-15, and what policy areas did this relate to.

Mr Porter: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

From 1 June 2014 to 30 June 2015, the Department, including the Social Security Appeals Tribunal (SSAT) spent $1,135,958 on advertising. This figure comprises:

- Campaigns Total — $453,879
- Non-campaign advertising (including recruitment) — $682,079

All figures provided are GST exclusive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ADVERTISING</th>
<th>Financial Year 2014-15 (1/7/2014 to 30/06/2015)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CAMPAIGN</td>
<td>$453,879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aged Pension and Pension Concessions campaign:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Covers television, online, digital, search engine, print, radio, print handicap radio, out of home (via InfoMed))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NON-CAMPAIGN</td>
<td>$682,079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recruitment:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$156,795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other non-campaign:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$525,284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(RFTs, EOIs, discussion papers, funding rounds, programs, international agreements, etc)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Attribution to individual policy areas would require a significant diversion of resources.
### Department of Human Services: Advertising

**Question No. 1003**

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Human Services, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

What sum was spent by the Minister's department(s) on advertising and associated services in 2014-15, and what policy areas did this relate to.

Mr Robert: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

The Department of Human Services (the department) spent $2,684,340 on advertising and associated services in 2014-15. The most significant cost is for White Pages' entries. The department has national listings in multiple regions. Other costs include public notices and tenders.

### Department of Industry, Innovation and Science: Advertising

**Question No. 1004**

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

What sum was spent by the Minister's department(s) on advertising and associated services in 2014-15, and what policy areas did this relate to.

Mr Pyne: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

The requested is available in the Department of Industry and Science 2014-15 Annual Report. A copy of the report is available at the following address:


### Department of Veterans' Affairs: Advertising

**Question No. 1006**

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

What sum was spent by the Minister's department(s) on advertising and associated services in 2014-15, and what policy areas did this relate to.

Mr Robert: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

In 2014–15, the Department of Veterans' Affairs undertook advertising relating to the promotion of policy and programmes to inform Veterans about client services and mental health programmes; commemorative activities; and recruitment. The total expenditure was $516,315.98 (GST inclusive).

### Department of Communications: Advertising

**Question No. 1007**

Mr Conroy asked the Minister representing the Minister for Communications, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

What sum was spent by the Minister's department(s) on advertising and associated services in 2014-15 and what policy areas did this relate to.

Mr Fletcher: The Minister for Communications has provided the answer to the member's question as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ADVERTISING</th>
<th>Financial Year 2014-15 (1/7/2014 to 30/06/2015)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>$1,135,958 (GST exclusive)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Department spent $3,900,304 (GST excl.) on advertising and associated services over the period 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015. This covered the following main activities:

- The Retune communication campaign with expenses of $3,787,819 (GST excl). The Retune campaign related to the Digital Television Switchover – Spectrum Restacking Assistance programme. The campaign continued through to the end of 2014 with advertising and other communication activities to support the rollout of the programme during that time.

- The Stay Smart Online programme with expenses of $57,208 (GST excl). The programme is a whole of Government initiative designed to promote the Government's online security and safety messages to the Australian community.

- A total of $55,277 (GST excl) on associated Departmental activities. To list each item for these advertising expenses would require an unreasonable diversion of Departmental resources.

**Department of Health: Advertising**

(Question No. 1011)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Health, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

What sum was spent by the Minister's department(s) on advertising and associated services in 2014-15, and what policy areas did this relate to.

Ms Ley: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

In 2014-15 the Department of Health conducted the following advertising campaigns:

- National Tobacco Campaign;
- National Drugs Campaign;
- National Bowel Cancer Screening Campaign;
- BreastScreen Australia Campaign; and
- Health Star Rating Campaign.

The total amount spent was $24,967,435 (including GST). Expenditure relates to creative agency head hours, concept testing and evaluation research, and media buys.

**Department of Social Services: Office Equipment**

(Question No. 1020)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Social Services, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

What sum did the Minister's department spend in 2014-15 on the purchase and/or lease of (a) food and beverage equipment, and (b) exercise equipment, for staff in the (i) Minister's office, and (ii) departmental office(s).

Mr Porter: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a) Food and beverage equipment:

(i) During 2014-15 $161.82 was spent on food and beverage equipment for staff in the Ministers' office

(ii) During 2014-15 $7,900.06 was spent on food and beverage equipment for staff in the departmental offices.

(b) Exercise Equipment:

(i) No funds were spent on exercise equipment for the Ministers' office.

(ii) No funds were spent on exercise equipment for staff in the departmental offices.
Department of Human Services: Office Equipment
(Question No. 1021)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Human Services, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

What sum did the Minister's department spend in 2014-15 on the purchase and/or lease of (a) food and beverage equipment, and (b) exercise equipment, for staff in the (i) Minister's office, and (ii) departmental office(s).

Mr Robert: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a) (i) The department spent $44.85 (excluding GST) on food and beverage equipment in 2014-15 for the Minister's office.

(ii) The department spent $91,006 on food and beverage equipment in 2014-15.

(b) (i) Nil.

(ii) In 2014-15, $614 was recorded in the financial management system for the purchase of exercise equipment for the department.