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FORTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—THIRD PERIOD

Governor-General
Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce, Companion of the Order of Australia

House of Representatives Officeholders
Speaker—Mr Harry Alfred Jenkins MP
Deputy Speaker—Hon. Peter Neil Slipper MP
Second Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Craig Scott MP
Members of the Speaker’s Panel—Ms Anna Elizabeth Burke MP, Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry Adams MP, Ms Sharon Leah Bird MP, Mrs Yvette Maree D’Ath MP, Mr Steven Georganas MP, Ms Kirsten Fiona Livermore MP, Mr John Paul Murphy MP, Mr Peter Sid Sidebottom MP, Mr Kelvin John Thomson MP, Ms Maria Vamvakinou MP

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

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

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

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

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<td>Bonner, QLD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Washer, Malcom James</td>
<td>Moore, WA</td>
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<td>Wilkie, Andrew Damien</td>
<td>Denison, TAS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Windsor, Anthony Harold Curties</td>
<td>New England, NSW</td>
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<td>Wyatt, Kenneth George</td>
<td>Hasluck, WA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zappia, Tony</td>
<td>Makin, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
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</table>

**PARTY ABBREVIATIONS**

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

**Heads of Parliamentary Departments**

Clerk of the Senate—R Laing
Clerk of the House of Representatives—B Wright
Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—A Thompson
**GILLARD MINISTRY**

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<td>Hon. Julia Gillard MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deputy Prime Minister, Treasurer</td>
<td>Hon. Wayne Swan MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government</td>
<td>Hon. Simon Crean MP</td>
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<td>Senator Hon. Chris Evans</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth</td>
<td>Hon. Peter Garrett AM, MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Stephen Conroy</td>
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<td>Minister for Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>Hon. Kevin Rudd MP</td>
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<td>Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities</td>
<td>Hon. Tony Burke MP</td>
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<td>Minister for Finance and Deregulation</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Penny Wong</td>
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<td>Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Kim Carr</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attorney-General and Vice President of the Executive Council</td>
<td>Hon. Robert McClelland MP</td>
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<td>Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and Manager of Government Business in the Senate</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Joe Ludwig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism</td>
<td>Hon. Martin Ferguson AM, MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency</td>
<td>Hon. Greg Combet AM, MP</td>
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Hon. Simon Crean MP
Minister for Social Inclusion  
Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP
Minister for Privacy and Freedom of Information  
Hon. Brendan O’Connor MP
Minister for Sport  
Senator Hon. Mark Arbib
Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity  
Hon. Gary Gray AO, MP
Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation  
Hon. Bill Shorten MP
Minister for Employment Participation and Childcare  
Hon. Kate Ellis MP
Minister for Indigenous Employment and Economic Development  
Senator Hon. Mark Arbib
Minister for Veterans’ Affairs and Minister for Defence  
Hon. Warren Snowdon MP
Minister for Defence Materiel  
Hon. Jason Clare MP
Minister for Indigenous Health  
Hon. Warren Snowdon MP
Minister for Mental Health and Ageing  
Hon. Mark Butler MP
Minister for the Status of Women  
Hon. Kate Ellis MP
Minister for Social Housing and Homelessness  
Senator Hon. Mark Arbib
Special Minister of State  
Hon. Gary Gray AO, MP
Minister for Small Business  
Senator Hon. Nick Sherry
Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Justice  
Hon. Brendan O’Connor MP
Minister for Human Services  
Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP
Chief of Staff  
Hon. Mark Dreyfus QC, MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister  
Senator Hon. Kate Lundy
Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer  
Hon. David Bradbury MP
Parliamentary Secretary for School Education and Workplace Relations  
Senator Hon. Jacinta Collins
Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Digital Productivity  
Senator Hon. Stephen Conroy
Parliamentary Secretary for Trade  
Hon. Justine Elliot MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs  
Hon. Richard Marles MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Defence  
Senator Hon. David Feeney
Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs  
Senator Hon. Kate Lundy
Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Transport and Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing  
Hon. Catherine King MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers  
Senator Hon. Jan McLucas
Parliamentary Secretary for Community Services  
Hon. Julie Collins MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Sustainability and Urban Water  
Senator Hon. Don Farrell
Minister Assisting on Deregulation and Public Sector Superannuation  
Senator Hon. Nick Sherry
Minister Assisting the Attorney-General on Queensland Floods Recovery  
Senator Hon. Joe Ludwig
Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry  
Hon. Dr Mike Kelly AM, MP
Minister Assisting the Minister for Tourism  
Senator Hon. Nick Sherry
Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency  
Hon. Mark Dreyfus QC, MP
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<td>Leader of the Opposition</td>
<td>Hon. Tony Abbott MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Minister for Foreign</td>
<td>Hon. Julie Bishop MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affairs and Shadow Minister for Trade</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader of the Nationals and Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and</td>
<td>Hon. Warren Truss MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Minister for</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Eric Abetz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment and Workplace Relations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow</td>
<td>Senator Hon. George Brandis SC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attorney-General and Shadow Minister for the Arts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Treasurer</td>
<td>Hon. Joe Hockey MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Education, Apprenticeships and Training and</td>
<td>Hon. Christopher Pyne MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager of Opposition Business in the House</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Deputy Leader of the</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Nigel Scullion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nationals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and</td>
<td>Senator Barnaby Joyce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water and Leader of the Nationals in the Senate</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Finance, Deregulation and Debt Reduction and</td>
<td>Hon. Andrew Robb AO, MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chairman, Coalition Policy Development Committee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources</td>
<td>Hon. Ian Macfarlane MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Defence</td>
<td>Senator Hon. David Johnston</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Communications and Broadband</td>
<td>Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Health and Ageing</td>
<td>Hon. Peter Dutton MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Families, Housing and Human Services</td>
<td>Hon. Kevin Andrews MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Climate Action, Environment and Heritage</td>
<td>Hon. Greg Hunt MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Productivity and Population and Shadow</td>
<td>Mr Scott Morrison MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Immigration and Citizenship</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Innovation, Industry and Science</td>
<td>Mrs Sophie Mirabella MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Agriculture and Food Security</td>
<td>Hon. John Cobb MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Small Business, Competition Policy and Consumer</td>
<td>Hon. Bruce Billson MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affairs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

[The above constitute the shadow cabinet]
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Shadow Minister for Employment Participation: Hon. Sussan Ley MP
Shadow Minister for Justice, Customs and Border Protection: Mr Michael Keenan MP
Shadow Assistant Treasurer and Shadow Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation: Senator Mathias Cormann
Shadow Minister for Childcare and Early Childhood Learning: Hon. Sussan Ley MP
Shadow Minister for Universities and Research: Senator Hon. Brett Mason
Shadow Minister for Youth and Sport and Deputy Manager of Opposition Business in the House: Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP
Shadow Minister for Indigenous Development and Employment: Senator Marise Payne
Shadow Minister for Regional Development: Hon. Bob Baldwin MP
Shadow Special Minister of State: Hon. Bronwyn Bishop MP
Shadow Minister for COAG: Senator Marise Payne
Shadow Minister for Tourism: Hon. Bob Baldwin MP
Shadow Minister for Defence Science, Technology and Personnel: Mr Stuart Robert MP
Shadow Minister for Veterans’ Affairs and Shadow Minister Assisting the Leader of the Opposition on the Centenary of ANZAC: Senator Hon. Michael Ronaldson
Shadow Minister for Regional Communications: Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP
Shadow Minister for Ageing and Shadow Minister for Mental Health: Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells
Shadow Minister for Seniors: Hon. Bronwyn Bishop MP
Shadow Minister for Disabilities, Carers and the Voluntary Sector and Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate: Senator Mitch Fifield
Shadow Minister for Housing: Senator Marise Payne
Chairman, Scrutiny of Government Waste Committee: Mr Jamie Briggs MP
Shadow Cabinet Secretary: Hon. Philip Ruddock MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary Assistanting the Leader of the Opposition: Senator Cory Bernardi
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance: Hon. Teresa Gambaro MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Roads and Regional Transport: Mr Darren Chester MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Shadow Attorney-General: Senator Gary Humphries
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Tax Reform and Deputy Chairman, Coalition Policy Development Committee: Hon. Tony Smith MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Education: Senator Fiona Nash
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Northern and Remote Australia: Senator Hon. Ian Macdonald
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Local Government: Mr Don Randall MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Murray-Darling Basin: Senator Simon Birmingham
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Materiel: Senator Gary Humphries
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Defence Force and Defence Support: Senator Hon. Ian Macdonald
SHADOW MINISTRY—continued

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Primary Healthcare
Dr Andrew Southcott MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Health Services and Indigenous Health
Mr Andrew Laming MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Supporting Families
Senator Cory Bernardi
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Status of Women
Senator Michaelia Cash
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Environment
Senator Simon Birmingham
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Citizenship and Settlement
Hon. Teresa Gambaro MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration
Senator Michaelia Cash
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Innovation, Industry, and Science
Senator Hon. Richard Colbeck
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Fisheries and Forestry
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The SPEAKER (Mr Harry Jenkins) took the chair at 10:00, made an acknowledgement of country and read prayers.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS
Reference to Main Committee
The SPEAKER: In accordance with standing order 41(g), and the determinations of the Selection Committee, I present copies of the terms of motions for which notice has be given by the Members for Lyne, Calwell, North Sydney, Shortland, Canberra, Menzies, Fremantle, Sturt, Makin and Fadden. These matters will be considered in the Main Committee later today.

PETITIONS
Mr MURPHY: On behalf of the Standing Committee on Petitions, and in accordance with standing order 207, I present the following petitions:

Marriage
RETAIN THE DEFINITION OF MARRIAGE BETWEEN MAN AND WOMAN
To the honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:
We, the undersigned citizens draw to the attention of the House of Representatives assembled, that the definition of marriage as "a union between one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life" is the foundation upon which our families are built and on which our society stands. To alter the definition of marriage to include same-sex "marriage", as proposed by the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill, would be to change the very structure of society to the detriment of all, especially children.
We, the undersigned citizens therefore request that the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2009, be opposed.
from 95 citizens

Australian Software Industry
To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives
This petition of Australian software industry members draws to the attention of the House the harm to society of patents that restrict computation and information processing.
Such patents actively inhibit, rather than promote innovation. For small to medium-sized software developers, it is neither viable to search patents, nor defend against patent lawsuits. The government's 2009 Venturous Australia report found that "in new areas of patenting such as software and business methods, there is strong evidence that existing [patent] arrangements are hampering innovation."
The Australian software industry has a long history of innovating without software patents. This shows that patents are not necessary for innovation. Examples include:
• VET (antivirus, 1989)
• Trumpet Winsock (internet connection, 1993)
• rsync (data synchronisation, 1996)
• netfilter/iptables (firewall, 1998)
Further, due to the rapid evolution of software techniques and the context in which they are used, withholding a technique for 20 years renders it effectively useless to society.
In 2008, the "Advisory Council on Intellectual Property" held a public consultation during their Review of Patentable Subject Matter. Microsoft Corporation was the only respondent regarding software. The Australian software industry cannot, therefore, be well-represented in the Review's findings. We were unaware of the public consultation, so could not make a submission.
We therefore ask the House to introduce and pass legislation to exclude computation and information processing activities from patentable subject matter.
from 15 citizens

Marriage
To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives
This petition of the parishioners of the …………………., draws to the attention of the House, the proposed legislation regarding marriage.

We therefore ask the House to consider the petitioners positions on the meaning of marriage and given the variety of domestic arrangements available in Australia, we request that you protect the unique institution of marriage as traditionally understood and actually lived as the complementary love between a man and a woman from 120 citizens

Judicial Misbehaviour

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives

PETITION PRESENTED 21 FEBRUARY 2011

IS AMENDED TO:

This petition of ‘certain citizens and residents of Australia’, draws to the attention of the House the “Urgent need for a Royal Commission of Inquiry” into judicial accountability and the inability to correct unsafe Orders of a Court caused by judicial misbehaviours. The public are denied these rights due to the Cronyism and/or derelictions of duty by certain Officers of the Commonwealth.

June 2010 a Self Represented Litigant father was refused the right to file an application for a Writ of correction (Certiorari) in the High Court, required to cause an inquiry into complaints of "Judicial Misbehaviour" like those within the "Administration of Justice" petitions presented: 23/11/09, 15/03/10, and 24/05/10 refused an investigation/inquiry.

This application for a Writ was claimed to be "AN ABUSE OF PROCESS" in Contempt of s.75(v) of the Constitution, transcript evidence, the grounds presented BY ABUSE OF HIGH COURT RULE 6.07.

We pray Honourable Speaker, and the Public Interest demands "We Seek Leave" it be moved: a pray be made to the Governor-General for an Urgent Royal Commission of Inquiry into:

The acts of Cronyism and derelictions of duty that occur to obstruct judicial accountability. Denials of the right to file Writs for unsafe Family and High Court Orders, Obstruction of: "s.75(v) of the constitution" applications and/or investigations and/or public requests for inquiries into judicial misbehaviour.

We "Seek Leave" this Motion is URGENT Government Business.

from 1 citizen

Australian Republic

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives

This petition of the undersigned draws to the attention of the House that parliamentary questions concerning an Australian republic are debated on party lines and subject to party policy; votes are made along party lines.

The final question of Australia becoming a republic can only be decided by the citizens of Australia and not by political parties. Political parties do not dictate religious beliefs. Therefore it should be accepted that being a republican or a constitutional monarchist is a matter of individual choice and should not be dictated by a political party.

This being the case it follows that debates questions bills and all matters concerning an Australian republic in this house should proceed in a bipartisan manner as though the people themselves have say, as they ultimately will.

I therefore ask the house 'that all future questions, debates, and bills to do with an Australian republic be made and done in a bipartisan manner, not along party lines, and further that future voting on a republic be done by conscience vote, as would be the case in any referendum.

Further, any bills for referendums and matters regarding a republic be presented to parliament, in an unbiased, transparent format that the people can understand, so they may ultimately cast an informed and intelligent vote.'

from 1 citizen

Judicial Misbehaviour

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives

This petition of certain citizens and residents of Australia draws to the attention of the bewildering perversions of justice by certain Officers of
the Commonwealth inducting Family and High Court judges that require the Governor-General cause an Urgent Royal Commission of Inquiry into.

Numerous s75(v) of the Constitution and s33 of the Judiciary Act 1903 Writ applications sought to be file in the High Court to determine and correct judicial misbehaviour obstructed by denial of a right to file hence complaints Of judicial misbehaviour are not determined against the public's best interest and confidence. There have been numerous requests for inquiries into judicial misbehaviour that have been contemptuously refused hearing or inquiry.

There are laws sought that undermine the proper administration of justice in the Family Court put forward by those said above.

We pray, Honourable Mr Speaker, you pray to the Governor-General of Australia for 4 Royal Commission of Inquiry into:

All complaints touching the issue of judicial misbehaviour sent to the Family Court, High Court, Parliament and the Attorney Generals Officers 2004 to 2010 to determine correctness of action taken, if obstructions to justice occurred and/or action needed to be taken.

How the people can cause "Proven judicial Misbehaviour" when complaints to the Courts and Attorney-General are whitewashed or fall on deaf ears.

The Family and High Courts judiciary common practice of abuse of power to pervert justice to obstruct judicial accountability, including at appeal.

We wish to thank your Government for your support of the chaplaincy programme and we are asking you to keep this vital programme alive. We strongly believe in the need to preserve the existing model for the chaplaincy program for the school community. We believe that the role that a chaplain has in being able to get alongside troubled teenagers is very important.

Recently our local newspaper featured an article concerning an alcoholic teenager whose life was spiralling out of control. It was the intervention of a chaplain that made him realise the path he was taking would only lead to disaster. There countless stories of how young people have been helped through the wise council of a caring chaplain.

We therefore ask the House to do all in your power to preserve the existing model for the chaplaincy program, ensuring the special pastoral care services a chaplain brings to a school community is retained

from 24 citizens

**Australian Republic**

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives

This petition of the undersigned draws to the attention of the House that since the last politically biased, narrowly focused referendum on a Republic, demographics in Australia have changed. Increasingly polls show many more Australians want a Republic either when the Queen finally steps down or sooner. Many people are not prepared to accept Prince Charles as our head of state.

Members of this house know, Britain is in a completely different geopolitical and economic region to Australia and as a consequence, both countries aspirations are different. In matters of foreign affairs, trade, defense, and even sport, etcetera, the Queen is obliged to put British interests ahead of those of Australia.

Increasingly, Britain, being a member of the European Union, is more closely aligned to Europe than to Australia.

Are the members of this Parliament prepared to put Australian interests second to those of another country by continuing to share an absent head of
state with priority obligations not only to her own country but to those of Europe as well?
I therefore ask the house that if in future a motion be made, or a bill presented, for a referendum on a Republic at the next Federal Elections, (with other questions concerning a Republic), that such a motion or bill be decided by a conscience vote only.

from 1 citizen

**Human Rights: Falun Gong**

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives

This petition of certain citizens and residents of Australia draws to the attention of the House that Falun Gong is a peaceful meditation practice based on the principles of Truthfulness, Compassion and Tolerance. Falun Gong practitioners in China have been subjected to the most brutal and relentless persecution by the Chinese Communist regime since July 1999, causing thousands to lose their lives from illegal detention and systematic torture. Such conduct stands in blatant violation to all international human rights charters that the Chinese government has itself ratified. According to investigative reports published by human rights lawyer David Matas and former Canadian Secretary of State for the Asia Pacific; David Kilgour, tens of thousands of imprisoned Falun Gong practitioners have been subjected to forced organ harvesting for China's transplant market and lost their lives (www.organharvestinvestigation.net).

We therefore ask the House to request the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister to openly and forthrightly call for an immediate end to the persecution of Falun Gong in China.

from 6,812 citizens

**General Practitioners**

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives

This petition of certain citizens of Australia request that the right to choose and have direct access to their own family GP being a medically qualified practitioner must not be changed or removed and further that the "doctor/patient relationship" remains sacrosanct and without constraints that may adversely affect health outcomes.

from 10,908 citizens

**Racial Discrimination**

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives

This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House:

the concern expressed in the 2010 Report of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination at the continuing gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, despite the Federal Government's expressed support for 'Closing the Gap' on Indigenous disadvantage, the lack of a long term National Action Plan, which is a key commitment of the Close the Gap Statement of Intent that the Federal Government has signed.

We therefore ask the House to:

- Commit to the bi-partisan development of a long term National Action Plan to Close the Gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians
- Address in that National Action Plan all the key contributors to the large disparity in health, wellbeing and quality of life between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

from 38 citizens

**Gorgon Gas Project**

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives

This petition by aggrieved manufacturers/suppliers to the Gorgon gas project.

Australian Regulations are prescriptive based on sound engineering principles, where a certain hazard product cannot be manufactured, sold or installed unless it has been authorised by the Regulator.

The Montara Commission of inquiry finding No. 52 -

b. in assessing application for suspension (whilst a hazard exists) the Regulator conducted little more than a 'tick and flick' exercise,
c. the Regulator (NT DoR) was not otherwise sufficiently diligent in ensuring that principles of good oilfield practice were followed."

We ask the House to embrace the principles of sound engineering which are in the prescriptive standard contained in our Regulations, and we ask the House to discard the performance based approach, where an imported product which has a ASME or EU CE stamp, gets a tick then a flick from our Regulator.

We further ask the House to embrace the legislative powers of the Parliament to ensure that local businesses have a fair opportunity to manufacture and supply goods and services to the resources projects.

from 1 citizen

Australian Republic

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives

This petition of the undersigned draws to the attention of the house, because of our high profile on the world stage, our substantial foreign aid programmes, our growing reputation for assisting other countries when disaster strikes, our commitment to democracy and our reputation for being a reliable friend, ally and trading partner- governments and high profile individuals around the world are increasingly amazed that Australia is not yet a separate independent country with our own Australian head of state.

I therefore ask the house to do everything possible to ensure a Bill be prepared and presented to this house for a meaningful referendum on a Republic and our flag, at the next elections, with these seven questions.

Should Australia become a republic.

Should Australians elect their own Head of State.

Should the duties of our Head of State be ceremonial and of vigilant guardianship, with no power to dismiss a Government

Should all reserve powers, including the power to dismiss a government, be transferred to the High Court of Australia.

Except for necessary changes to our Constitution to become a Republic should the original meaning and wording of our Constitution remain unchanged.

Should there be a preamble to our Constitution acknowledging our original inhabitants and their descendants, all who have since come and their descendants, and all that now make up the diverse people of Australia.

Should the Australian flag be changed

from 1 citizen

School and Workplace Bullying

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives

This petition of the "Principal Petitioner" a "Citizen of Australia" Draws to the attention of the House:

The fact that workplace bullying is still not effectively addressed under current Australian legislation.

Although sexual harassment or discrimination are viewed as sub-sets of workplace bullying, the current legislation does not recognise this relationship. If bullying involves sexual harassment or anti-discrimination then action may be taken.

Under current state workplace health and safety legislation, employers do have a duty of care to provide a safe work environment for employees but still only isolated incidences of bullying have been addressed under current state workplace health and safety legislation.

I therefore ask the House to:

Effectively address legislation and fully recognise school and workplace bullying and introduce changes to legislation by making it illegal and reduce such incidences as well as the continual costly problem for employers and employees.

from 1 citizen

Judicial Misbehaviour

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives

Supplement to the petition to the House 15th March 2010, 24th May 2010, 15th November 2010 and a submission sent on 7th April 2011

This petition of the "Principal Petitioner" and fellow citizens that have been aggrieved by an
administrative decision of a member of the Judiciary and Officers of the Commonwealth as set out in Section 75(v) of the Constitution.

A writ of mandamus to show cause is based on a presumption of misbehaviour. Officers of the Commonwealth, appointed by the Governor-General compounded with liquidators to freeze assets of companies and depositors on a presumption of insolvency.

These Officers (judicators) tendered their submission to the High Court. The High Court failed to set aside orders that were obtained on a presumption.

Where a cause is pending involving interpretations of the Constitution, it is the duty of the Court not to proceed without advising Parliament.

This matter has been referred to the Attorney-General on four occasions, where the petitioners asked the Attorney-General to review his decision on the grounds that the Attorney-General is in breach of the rules of natural justice by disallowing Section 75(v) to the aggrieved citizens.

We the aggrieved citizens ask the House to request the Attorney-General to show cause why he should not be removed from office for being in breach of the rules of natural justice and that his decision was made with the intention of defeating the aggrieved citizens.

We ask the House to address the Corporations Act 2001, Chapter 5—that allows the Courts to compound with Officers of the Courts (liquidators) to use their position to destroy companies and the savings of citizens of Australia.

We further assert that the Treasurer compounded with Senator Xenophon for the $42 billion stimulus package, based on the presumption of GFC.

We the aggrieved citizens pray that the Treasurer be disqualified on Section 44(i) of the Constitution for being in the acknowledgement of allegiance to the G20, which is a foreign power.

We ask The House to embrace the exclusive powers of the Parliament in the interest of the public, the members and the creditors of ADI's being wound up.

from 1 citizen

Public Holidays

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives

This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House that:

- The Fair Work Act does not recognise Easter Sunday as a public holiday in the National Employment Standards. It does recognise Good Friday and Easter Monday.
- Easter Sunday is a day of great significance for the 64% of Australians who identify as Christian and the 30% of Australians estimated to attend Easter Sunday Church services.
- Easter Sunday is part of a recognised holiday break for all Australian people, Christian or not.
- With the exception of Victoria, all mainland Australian States, as well as New Zealand, recognise the significance of Easter Sunday and require shops to close.
- Indeed, the significance of Easter Sunday is widely recognised throughout the Western
world by the fact that shops must close on this day in London, Paris, Rome, Milan and Montreal.

- The Parliament of NSW unanimously legislated for Easter Sunday to be a public holiday.

We therefore ask the House to:

Amend the Fair Work Act 2009 so as to include, in the National Employment Standards, Easter Sunday in the list of recognised public holidays.

from 62 citizens

**Baby Bonus**

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives

This petition of staff, students and volunteers of the River Nile Learning Centre draws to the attention of the House:

The disadvantages and distress of low-income mothers due the fact that the baby bonus payment starts only after the birth of a baby. Many low income mothers-to-be have no savings to buy essential items (pram, cot etc). When the baby bonus payment starts mothers have to make these purchases with a newborn and whilst recovering from the frequent physical implications from giving birth, which is both stressful and difficult and not a good start to motherhood or for the baby.

The baby bonus is payable also to women who give birth to a stillborn baby. There is therefore no reason why the baby bonus could not start from 32 weeks of pregnancy. If there were complications at this stage of the pregnancy and no live baby would be born it would still result in the full baby bonus payment. There would be no risk in women getting "overpaid".

We therefore ask the House to: Improve the delivery of the baby bonus payment by starting instalments from 32 weeks of pregnancy. There are no risks to Centrelink other than needing to confirm a pregnancy at its advanced stage by a medical expert (much like the current form to be completed after birth by the midwife/ doctor). This would make a significant difference to low income mothers-to-be and their babies.

from 17 citizens

**Retransmission Facilities**

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives

This petition of certain citizens of Australia, particularly those residents of the Wandoan District, Queensland, draws the attention of the House to concerns over the decommissioning of self-help analogue television re-transmission facilities at Nathan Road, Wandoan. When this site ceases to broadcast television signals residents wishing to access free to air television will be required to install satellite reception equipment (VAST) at a substantial cost, even after the Satellite Subsidy Scheme is applied. If residents have more than one television they will be required to install an additional satellite decoder for each at their own cost.

We therefore ask the House to take all necessary steps to ensure an increase in the subsidy funding under the Satellite Subsidy Scheme in order to alleviate the financial burden of moving to the VAST system.

from 343 citizens

**Responses**

Mr MURPHY: Ministerial responses to petitions previously presented to the House have been received as follows:

**Caboolture: Superclinic**

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 16 March 2011 regarding a petition seeking funding for a GP Super Clinic in Caboolture.

I note the petition was considered by the Committee on 21 February 2011 and under Standing Order 209(b), as the Minister responsible for the administration of the matter raised in the petition, I am responding within 90 days of its presentation.

In 2010-11, the Australian Government allocated $370.2 million for 28 new GP Super Clinics, building on the Government's previous investment of $280.2 million to establish 36 GP Super Clinics across Australia.

It was announced on 12 August 2010, that the Australian Government would provide up to $15 million to establish a GP Super Clinic in
A local consultation meeting was held at the Caboolture RSL on 16 March 2011, to ensure that the community and stakeholders had an opportunity to raise their issues regarding how best a GP Super Clinic could meet the needs of the local community.

At the consultation it was advised that a competitive Invitation to Apply (ITA) process for the establishment of a GP Super Clinic in Caboolture would be issued in approximately four weeks. The ITA was advertised in national, state and regional newspapers on 16 April 2011 and will be open for a period of six weeks. The ITA documentation, including application forms and the 2010 GP Super Clinic National Program Guide, is available for downloading at www.health.gov.au/gpsuperclinics

GP Super Clinics are a key element of the Australian Government's strategy to build a stronger primary health care system, including a greater focus on management of chronic disease, health promotion and illness prevention and better coordination between privately provided GP services, community health and other state or territory government services.

It is intended that each GP Super Clinic will bring together general practitioners, practice nurses, visiting medical specialists, allied health professionals and other health care providers to deliver primary health care services aimed at addressing the health care needs and priorities of their local communities. This multi-disciplinary, patient centered model of care is attractive to many health care providers.

I would appreciate it if you could convey this information to the next meeting of the Standing Committee on Petitions.

I trust this information is of assistance.

from the Minister for Health and Ageing, Ms Roxon

Australian Software Industry

Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 28 February 2011 on behalf of the Standing Committee of Petitions concerning the two petitions made by members of the Australian Software Industry presented in the House of Representatives on 21 and 28 February 2011.

Under current law computer-related inventions are patentable, provided they meet the same criteria that apply to all other areas of technology. These criteria include that an invention must be new, inventive and provide a practical and useful result involving a tangible, physical or observable effect. Computer software per se will generally not meet these requirements. However, where the software embodies a method that meets these criteria it may be patentable. The petitions show that there is concern within the software industry regarding patents over computer software.

In 2008 the Advisory Council on Intellectual Property (ACIP) commenced a review into the test of patentable subject matter for all technologies. The report was released on 16 February 2011. The report did not recommend the exclusion of software from patentable subject matter.

I note that the petitioners consider that the software industry was not well-represented in ACIP's findings. ACIP consulted widely by inviting public submissions on both an issues and options paper. These papers were advertised on the Government's Business Consultation website, on ACIP's website, and in major newspapers. ACIP also directly contacted a range of stakeholders, including the Australian Information Industry Association and Australian Computer Society.

I regret that the petitioners were unaware of the ACIP review. However, I note that ACIP considered a previous petition by members of the software industry, as well as other similar submissions to the review, arguing for the exclusion of software from patentable subject matter. Before making its recommendations, ACIP also considered Australia's obligations under international treaties. Although there are some exceptions, these treaties require that Australian patent laws must not discriminate between different areas of technology.

The Government is currently considering its response to the ACIP report and will take into account the concerns raised in the petition before making its response.
from the Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, Senator Carr

Bradfield Electorate: Turramurra Post Office

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter dated 16 March 2011, concerning a petition submitted for the Committee's consideration regarding the Turramurra Post Office.

Under the Australian Postal Corporation Act 1989 Australia Post is responsible for the day-to-day running of the organisation, including all decisions relating to the postal network. As far as practicable it is required to perform its functions in a manner consistent with sound commercial practice.

The government believes the decision to close a post office should not be made lightly, that commercial considerations should be weighed alongside community expectations, and that communities should be consulted and engaged before a final decision is made. It is on this basis that the government is working with Australia Post to strengthen the protocols and transparency around the decision making process for the closure of outlets.

In meeting the needs of the community Australia Post occasionally converts or closes a post office that is no longer sustainable for a variety of reasons, including changes to a lease or declining customer numbers and profitability levels. There may also be the need to open a new post office where a new suburb is developing or where there is increased demand. In assessing any closure, Australia Post has an internal review mechanism that looks at all factors including customer usage, proximity to other outlets and overall cost.

The Turramurra Post Office has operated at a loss of $350,000 over the last three years. Following the cessation of counter services at Turramurra Post Office on 28 January 2011, a range of postal products and services became available at a newly established PostPoint at Blockbuster Video at 8 Eastern Road, Turramurra.

Australia Post has advised that the PostPoint has now been upgraded to a Community Postal Agency which offers additional services of weighing and assessment of postage, mail lodgement facilities and bill payments by cheque. Post office boxes have been retained at the former post office location pending identification of a more permanent site. One of the existing red street posting boxes located near this outlet will be upgraded to an Express Post box. The local community is served by three post offices within a 2.5 kilometre radius at Turramurra North Post Office, Wahroonga Post Office and Pymble Post Office.

I trust this information will be of assistance.

from the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Conroy

Kangaroo Island: Oil Leases

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 16 March 2011 regarding a petition asking the House of Representatives to ‘rescind the granting of oil leases off Kangaroo Island, to prevent the risk of irreversible damage to our native and other vulnerable species of life.’ I note the concerns raised in the petition and make the following comments.

The discovery of new petroleum reserves has the potential to reduce Australian energy import dependence and increase supply certainty for the domestic energy market. However, the Government recognises the importance of balancing economic development and preserving the offshore environment.

Prior to inclusion in the release, these two areas in the Duntroon and Ceduna sub-basins off South Australia was subject to a rigorous assessment process. This took into account the multi-use nature of the areas and the potential impact of exploration on the marine environment. This included consultation with state and Australian government agencies whose stakeholders may have an interest, including the Australian Government Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population, and Communities.

Concerns raised during the consultation process were taken into account by the Government in
finalising areas for inclusion in the release. Details on issues specific to areas, such as marine animal migratory routes, that potential explorers need to take into account when assessing and determining how to explore an area, have been included in the release's information package.

Further, additional conditions to protect the environment may be placed on a petroleum exploration title at the time it is granted where this process identifies relevant issues of environmental significance. This is in addition to the stringent environmental standards and reporting requirements set out in the legislation and associated regulations to which all petroleum exploration and development activities in Australian are subject.

I note that if an exploration company places a winning bid on these areas, the exploration permit will grant an explorer an exclusive right to apply for further approvals to undertake exploration operations, such as seismic surveys and drilling.

No petroleum activity can occur in Commonwealth waters unless the activity complies with all relevant Government legislation and regulations. The Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006 (OPGGSA) provides the Regulator with the necessary powers to undertake inspections and audits of all operations to ensure and enforce compliance with good industry practice, approval conditions and other requirements.

The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999 (EPBC Act) regulates the assessment and approval of proposed actions that are likely to have a significant impact on a matter of National Environmental Significance and requires approval by the Minister for the Environment.

The OPGGSA's Environment Regulations and the EPBC Act are very clear that a comprehensive assessment of all significant impacts on the environment must be completed before any exploration well is drilled or before any seismic line is run.

To date these systems have proven very effective, with the offshore petroleum industry operating safely and successfully in some of Western Australia's most precious marine and coastal environments, including Barrow Island and areas adjacent to Ningaloo Reef.

That said, in light of recent events, there have been several reviews of Australia's offshore petroleum regulatory regime aimed at ensuring that our systems are world leading and that we have competent and professional industry operators in Australian waters. These reviews have concluded that Australia's objective-based regulatory framework is robust and sufficiently balances economic and environmental imperatives. The reviews have, however, identified some deficiencies in the administration of this regime and I am taking steps, through the establishment of a single national petroleum regulator to address this.

If thought appropriate I can arrange for my Department to brief the Committee on the processes involved in acreage release and in approving subsequent exploration activities.

Thank you for bringing the concerns raised in the Petition to my attention. I trust this information has been of assistance to you.

from the Minister for Resources and Energy, Mr Martin Ferguson

Marriage

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 16 March 2011 regarding a petition submitted to the Standing Committee on Petitions about the introduction of a national system of registration and certification of same-sex marriages in Australia.

The Australian Government believes that the current definition of marriage in the Marriage Act 1961 'that marriage is between a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life'—is appropriate. A same-sex marriage that takes place overseas is not recognised under Australian law (section 88EA of the Act).

The Government believes that couples who have a mutual commitment to a shared life should be able to have their relationships recognised. The Government supports a nationally consistent framework for relationship recognition to be implemented by the states and territories. New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory have established relationship recognition...
schemes, where the relationship is legally recognised by the act of registration. The Government will continue to encourage other jurisdictions to develop such schemes. Relationships registered under these schemes are also now recognised in a wide range of Commonwealth laws. Recognition of these relationships abroad is a matter for the foreign jurisdiction.

State and territory Registries of Births, Deaths and Marriages have responsibility for registering marriages that occur under Australian law. There are no plans to change the current marriage registration arrangement.

I hope this information is of assistance to the Committee when considering this petition.

from the Attorney-General, Mr McClelland

Same Sex Partnerships Overseas

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 16 March 2011 regarding a petition submitted to the Standing Committee on Petitions about access to marriage by same-sex couples.

The Australian Government believes that the current definition of marriage in the Marriage Act 1961—that marriage is between a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life—is appropriate.

The Government believes that couples who have a mutual commitment to a shared life should be able to have their relationships recognised. The Government supports a nationally consistent framework for relationship recognition to be implemented by the States and Territories. New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory have established relationship recognition schemes, where the relationship is legally recognised by the act of registration. Relationships registered under these schemes are also now recognised in a wide range of Commonwealth laws. The Government will continue to encourage other jurisdictions to develop such schemes.

I hope this information is of assistance to the Committee.

from the Attorney-General, Mr McClelland

Animal Rights: Humane Slaughtering

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 1 March 2011 to Senator the Hon. Kim Can, Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, about the petition requesting CCTV cameras in slaughterhouses, factory farms and dairy farms, submitted for the consideration of the Standing Committee on Petitions. Your letter was forwarded to me as I am the minister responsible for the matter you raised. I regret the delay in responding.

Under the Australian standard for the hygienic production and transportation of meat and meat products for human consumption, abattoir operators must have systems in place to ensure that animals do not endure unnecessary injury,
pain and suffering, and that they have the least disturbance practicable. Systems are in place in all states and territories to ensure that animal welfare in abattoirs is not compromised. Where animals are on-farm or being transported, the Australian Government has no legislative responsibility. State and territory governments are responsible for their own animal production and welfare legislation. The government has played a leadership role by engaging the states and territories to develop model codes of practice for the welfare of animals. These model codes aim to ensure that farm animals are treated humanely and responsibly. The codes are reviewed from time to time to keep them up to date by taking into consideration technological and scientific developments. The codes are being replaced progressively by a new series of nationally agreed standards and guidelines, which will be legislated by the states and territories. All states and territories are now working to implement the first of these, the Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines—Land Transport of Livestock. The government ensures the inclusion of farming industries and animal welfare organisations, including the RSPCA, in these processes.

Thank you for bringing this petition to the government’s attention. I trust this information is of assistance.

from the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Senator Ludwig Bedourie Postcode

Dear Mr Murphy

Australia Post—petition request for a unique postcode for Bedourie

Thank you for your letter dated 1 March 2011, concerning a petition submitted for the Committee’s consideration regarding the allocation of a unique postcode for the town of Bedourie in Queensland.

Under the Australian Postal Corporation Act 1989 Australia Post is responsible for the day-to-day running of the organisation, including all decisions relating to the postal network. As far as practicable it is required to perform its functions in a manner consistent with sound commercial practice.

Australia Post has advised that in the majority of cases, it allocates postcodes that cover an area greater than one locality. Postcodes are assigned for internal delivery purposes and correspond to the delivery centres (or offices) from which mail deliveries are made. Australia Post has noted that the Department of Environment and Resource Management in Queensland is responsible for gazetting locality names and boundaries. Bedourie is a gazetted locality that includes the areas of Amaroo, Boulia, MM Min, Sturt, Toko, Warena and Wills. All of these locations have been assigned the postcode 4829, which has been in place for almost 26 years. Australia Post has also advised that it takes a great deal of care in ensuring that the postcode assigned to a locality, or group of localities, is the one that provides the most efficient mail delivery service. From time to time, Australia Post may make changes to postcodes on the basis of providing either an improved mail delivery service to customers or some other operational advantage.

I am informed that Australia Post has carefully considered the Friends of Bedourie’s request for the allocation of a unique postcode for Bedourie but has not agreed to the request. In this case, the proposed postcode change would not lead to any improvement in Australia Post’s mail delivery service. The change could also cause confusion from an operational, processing and customer perspective, as correspondents would most likely use two different postcodes (i.e. the old and the new).

I trust this information will be of assistance.

from the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Conroy Roads to Recovery Scheme

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter dated 21 March 2011 about a petition regarding funding for the Sorell Bypass/Arthur Highway in Tasmania.

The Arthur Highway is a state road for funding purposes and is the primary responsibility of the Tasmanian Government. The Australian
Government, for its part, has committed $809.6 million for land transport infrastructure in Tasmania over the period 2008-09 to 2013-14. The Australian Government provides a significant level of direct financial support to local governments to assist them to upgrade and maintain their local roads through programs such as Roads to Recovery and the Financial Assistance Grants. Over the period 2009-10 to 2013-14, the Sorell Council has been allocated $1,415,318 under Roads to Recovery. The choice of projects to be funded under the program, their management, scope and timing are at the discretion of the local council to ensure that they reflect local priorities. This could include improvements to the road network in and around Sorell. In addition, $1,983,429 has been allocated to Council as a Financial Assistance Grant for roads and general purpose expenditure in 2010-11.

Thank you for raising this matter.

from the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, Mr Albanese

Intercountry Adoption

Dear Mr Murphy

I refer to your letter of 30 March 2011 regarding a petition from "The Australian Adoption Community" presented by the Member for Forde, Mr Bert Van Manen MP, seeking the establishment of an intercountry adoption program between Australia and Burundi (petition number: 432-723).

As the Australian Central Authority under the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in respect of Intercountry Adoption, my Department has primary responsibility for developing intercountry adoption arrangements with other countries. The Australian Government takes an appropriately cautious approach to this task. It must be satisfied that potential programs are able to fully comply with the principles of the Hague Convention and that the best interests of the child remain paramount.

My Department has conducted assessments to determine whether it would be appropriate for Australia to establish an intercountry adoption program with Burundi. These assessments identified concerns about the adequacy of safeguards to protect children from improper practices. I also understand that efforts are continuing in relation to the repatriation and resettlement of displaced Burundians, with a view to reuniting Burundian children with their families. My Department does not consider that an intercountry adoption program would be viable at this time.

I trust this information is of some assistance.

from the Attorney-General, Mr McClelland

Youth Allowance

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 18 March 2011, concerning a petition regarding the changes to Youth Allowance contained in paragraph 1067A (10E)(a) of the Social Security Act 1991.

In March 2010, the Australian Government introduced comprehensive reforms to ensure that across Australia more university students have fairer access to student income support. The Government's changes to the Youth Allowance eligibility criteria aim to ensure a fairer and more equitable allocation of resources to provide support for students who most need assistance. The legislation giving effect to these reforms was supported by the Coalition.

The Government's student income support reform package ultimately directs more support to students from low income families who are genuinely in need of financial assistance, and significantly reduces access to students from higher income families, who previously represented a substantial proportion of independent Youth Allowance recipients. These reforms have significantly improved financial assistance to students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, including regional students. As a result of these reforms, there has already been a 29 per cent increase in dependent Youth Allowance recipients from rural and regional areas in higher education.

On 21 February 2011, the Government announced that it will remove regional eligibility distinctions between inner regional and outer regional students. To facilitate this, the
Government has brought forward by 12 months a comprehensive review of its student income support reforms. The review will report by 1 July this year, and will have a particular focus on the impact of the reforms on rural and regional students. The review will consider options for new Youth Allowance eligibility arrangements, as well as appropriate savings that can be made to pay for extensions in eligibility. Following the review, the Government will implement new eligibility arrangements eliminating regional eligibility distinctions with effect from 1 January 2012. Further information about the review, including the Terms of Reference are available at: www.deewr.gov.au/youthallowance. I trust the information provided is helpful.

from the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations, Senator Evans

Abortion

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 16 March 2011 regarding a petition on unplanned pregnancy counselling that was recently submitted for the consideration of the Standing Committee on Petitions.

I note that the petition was considered by the Committee on 21 February 2011, and under Standing Order 209 (b), as the Minister responsible for the administration of the matter raised in the petition, I am responding within 90 days of its presentation.

The legislation relating to pregnancy termination is the remit of states and territories, and each jurisdiction has different legislation governing the circumstances where pregnancy can be terminated. The Government respects the rights of the state and territory governments to manage legislation which is relevant to their jurisdictions.

The need for a termination of pregnancy is essentially a matter for the professional clinical judgement of the practitioner concerned, acting in accordance with state and territory laws. GPs have an obligation to advise patients of the possible effects, both physical and mental, that might occur as the result of any medical procedure, including termination of pregnancy. It is an individual woman's decision, made in consultation with her treating medical practitioner, whether to terminate her pregnancy. The Australian Government recognises the importance of supporting women, their partners and families by providing non judgmental access to information, advice and support services on all aspects of pregnancy and up to 12 months following the birth of a child.

The Government's Pregnancy, Birth & Baby Helpline (Helpline) provides a coordinated entry point to a broad range of advice and information related to pregnancy and the first 12 months of a baby's life, as well as information on other maternity related services including specialist and support services.

The helpline provides professional non-directive counselling on pregnancy options that is, maintaining the pregnancy and parenting, maintaining the pregnancy and adopting, and terminating the pregnancy. Evidence-based information on all options is provided to women, their partners and families to assist them in making informed decisions. Callers requesting specific contact information for adoption or termination services will only be provided with this information when the counsellor is confident the caller has been informed of all available options.

Callers to the Helpline are able to obtain advice relating to pregnancy and the demands of a new baby including maternal nutrition, breastfeeding, a baby's development and sleeping habits. Where appropriate, the Helpline directs people to other existing services such as the Australian Breastfeeding Association's 24-hour national helpline, or health direct Australia for advice from a Registered Nurse.

In addition to the professional non-directive counselling on pregnancy options, callers are able to access more general counselling in the antenatal and postnatal periods. The Helpline also directs callers experiencing perinatal depression or grief through miscarriage or stillbirth to peer support services provided through specialist telephone-based perinatal depression and grief support organisations.

I trust that the above information is of assistance.
from the Minister for Health and Ageing, Ms Roxon

Marriage

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 1 March 2010 regarding a petition submitted to the Standing Committee of Petitions about equal access to marriage.

The Australian Government gave its support to an amended notice of motion on same-sex marriage moved by Mr Adam Bandt MP, Member for Melbourne. The amended motion called on Members of Parliament to gauge the views of their constituents on equal treatment for same-sex couples, including marriage. The Government acknowledges that this is an important discussion for constituents to have with their Members of Parliament.

The Government believes that the definition of marriage in the Marriage Act 1961—that marriage is between a man and a woman—is appropriate. The Government also believes that couples who have a mutual commitment to a shared life should be able to have their relationships recognised. The Government supports a nationally consistent framework for relationship recognition to be implemented by the States and Territories. New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory have established relationship recognition schemes, where the relationship is legally recognised by the act of registration. Relationships registered under these schemes are also now recognised in a wide range of Commonwealth laws. The Government will continue to encourage other jurisdictions to develop such schemes.

The Government's commitment to removing discrimination was demonstrated by its reforms in 2008-09 to remove discrimination from 85 Commonwealth laws. These reforms, which passed in 2009, removed discrimination and equalised treatment for same-sex couples in areas of taxation, social security, health, aged care, superannuation, immigration, child support and family law. These reforms extend to same-sex couples the same entitlements and obligations that apply to opposite-sex couples. Equal treatment means some same-sex couples will get access to benefits they could not previously access.

The Government recently committed to introducing protections against discrimination on the basis of a person's sexual orientation or gender status. This will involve the development of legislation to protect against discrimination on the basis of a person's sexual orientation or gender status as part of its review and consolidation of federal anti-discrimination laws into a single Act. The Government will undertake consultation with stakeholders on the proposed single anti-discrimination law.

I hope this information is of assistance to the Committee when considering this petition.

from the Attorney-General, Mr McClelland

Islamic Apostasy Laws

Dear Murphy

I refer to your letter of 16 March 2011 conveying a petition submitted to the Standing Committee on Petitions regarding apostasy laws.

The Australian Government shares the view that persons of any religion or belief should be able to choose freely to follow a new religion or belief, without prejudice. As the petition notes, the right to freedom of religion is established in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This includes the freedom to change one's religion or belief.

Australia continues to work multilaterally, regionally and bilaterally to promote the right to freedom of religion or belief. Australia co-sponsors the United Nations General Assembly's resolution on the 'Elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief'. This resolution urges states to "ensure that their constitutional and legislative systems provide adequate and effective guarantees of freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief to all without distinction, inter alia, by the provision of access to justice and effective remedies in cases where the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief, or the right to freely practice one's religion, including the right to change one's religion or belief, is violated".
Australia also strongly supports the mandate of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief at the United Nations Human Rights Council. The Special Rapporteur identifies existing and emerging obstacles to the enjoyment of the right to freedom of religion or belief and presents recommendations on ways and means to overcome such obstacles.

The Australian Government makes regular human rights representations to countries that place restrictions on the right to freedom of religion or belief or impose the death penalty or other sanctions on the exercise of this right.

Australia also has a long-standing opposition to capital punishment. The Government continues to pursue actively the abolition of the death penalty both in our region and around the world. We work through our overseas missions and in multilateral fora to urge countries to cease executions, establish a moratorium on capital punishment or remove the death penalty from their law, depending on domestic circumstances.

Thank you for bringing this petition to the attention of the Government.

from the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Rudd

Statement

Mr MURPHY (Reid) (10:06): Mr Speaker, I would like to take the opportunity today to briefly discuss the volume of petitions that I have just tabled on behalf of the Petitions Committee and to highlight an emerging trend.

Today's presentation included 19 separate petition matters, representing the views and concerns of a total of 18,443 citizens. If we compare the number of petitions presented by the chair of the committee at the same time last year, on 24 May 2010, we see that fewer petitions were tabled—a total of 13. In addition to the petitions presented by me as the chair of the committee, all members may choose to present petitions that have been found in order by the committee so they may further discuss the issue concerning their constituents and petitioners. There have been 10 presentations by members since the last chair's announcement on 21 March. In contrast there were two in the same period in 2010. This brings the total number of presentations during this period in 2011 to 29—a significant increase on the 15 petitions presented in the same time frame last year.

The increasing number of in-order petitions received this year highlights, I believe, two aspects of the House petitioning process. One is what appears to be an increasing engagement by the people of Australia with the House of Representatives. The other is a greater awareness by Australians of the way the House operates and a recognition that it follows certain rules. In this case, there appears to be a maturing appreciation of the standing orders governing petitioning. Since the establishment of the first Petitions Committee in 2008, the requirements of the House petitioning process have become more widely known and understood.

With increasing acceptance of, and access to, communications and information technology by people of all ages and walks of life, the petitioning requirements are being disseminated widely through the committee's website and communications via a public email address. This is in addition to telephone and postal communications and published information made available by the committee for distribution at members' electorate offices across Australia.

As the committee does not assess petitions on the merit of subject matter but on whether they are worded and collated in line with the specific requirements of the House, all petitions are assessed in the same way. Similarly, all prospective petitioners are offered the same procedural assistance to understand the petitioning requirements before they commence petitioning. This
activity reduces the number of out-of-order petitions received.

Unfortunately not all petitions received by the committee meet the requirements of the House and, as such, cannot be tabled as petitions. It is disappointing to see cases where a great deal of time and effort has been spent on gathering signatures but these will not be recorded as petitions. It is encouraging, however, to see that more and more people are preplanning their petitioning activities by reading the committee's published material and by communicating with members' offices and the committee secretariat before they start signature collection.

COMMITTEES
Education and Employment Committee
Report
Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (10:10): On behalf of the Standing Committee on Education and Employment, I present the committee's report entitled School libraries and teacher librarians in 21st century Australia, together with the minutes of proceedings and evidence received by the committee.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

Ms RISHWORTH: The inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools was begun in the last parliament by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training. I would like to thank the members of that committee for their efforts in assembling a large body of written and oral evidence on the terms of reference. Earlier this year, the chair and deputy chair of the previous committee gave their time to meet with the current committee to relate the views and impressions they had formed during the inquiry. Our committee appreciated their time and the insight they provided to our inquiry and I would especially like to thank the members for Cunningham and Tangney for their presentation.

The inquiry received 387 submissions and took evidence from individual teacher librarians and their professional associations, unions, employer organisations, parents and friends associations, and other stakeholders, both in written submission and at hearings in each state and territory. We are especially grateful to the hundreds of people who participated in the inquiry from right across Australia. In particular, the committee was struck by the passion and enthusiasm that teacher librarians have for their profession.

There can be little doubt of the educational benefits that accompany having a properly resourced school library staffed with an appropriately qualified and dedicated teacher librarian. Teacher librarians are individuals who hold qualifications in both teaching and librarianship. The Commonwealth government has rolled out programs that have made major contributions to the capital resources available to Australian school libraries, such as the Building the Education Revolution and the Digital Education Revolution. Despite these investments and the provision of regular general purpose funding to schools, the Commonwealth has little control or influence on staffing arrangements within schools. In the government sector, issues of hiring, numbers, conditions and duties of staff within schools are the responsibility of state and territory education authorities, or principals within self-managing schools. In the non-government sector, these decisions tend to be very much the responsibility of the schools themselves.
The committee received many examples of situations where school libraries and teacher librarians were used effectively. However, these success stories appeared to be exceptions rather than the rule. The majority of evidence received by the committee detailed cases where qualified teacher librarians were being used for purposes other than in their area of specialist qualification, such as relief from face-to-face teaching, or, often, cases where library staff were not fully qualified teacher librarians. In such cases, the potential contribution of teacher librarians to supporting the development of subject curricula and the digital literacy of other staff and students, as well as keeping libraries' resources up to date, can be compromised. Much of the undervaluation of teacher librarians appears to arise from a lack of knowledge among employers and managers of the potential contribution of libraries and qualified staff to improved learning outcomes.

Our report contains 11 recommendations, which we believe will promote an awareness of the potential of teacher librarians to contribute to educational outcomes of Australian schools. Recommendations include the provision of a minimum level of access to online database resources in every Australian school and increasing awareness of the role that teacher librarians play, through the development of a discrete national policy statement that defines the importance of digital and information literacy. The committee also recommends a longitudinal study to establish the links between library programs and literacy, and a workforce gap analysis of teacher librarians in the Australian context. In addition, the presence of specialist teacher librarians at a school should be included on the MySchool website. These measures will raise the profile of the profession as well as serve to provide better information to families that make up school communities.

There is a stereotypical view of libraries as stuffy rooms full of never opened books and teacher librarians enforcing silence within their domain. This stereotype is in stark contrast to the potential for libraries to be a hub of activity, with teacher librarians putting students and staff in touch with the latest resources.

I would like to thank my committee colleagues, former members of the committee and the secretariat—in particular Glen Worthington and Sara Edson.

I commend the report to the House.

Mr RAMSEY (Grey) (10:15): As deputy chair of the Standing Committee on Education and Employment, I rise to support the chair of the committee in her tabling of the report School libraries and teacher librarians in 21st century Australia. The chair has adequately covered much of the information the committee received and has thanked the appropriate people. This was an inquiry from the previous committee, of which I was not a member. Indeed, only one member of the current committee was a member of the previous committee. It was very helpful to have the member for Cunningham, Sharon Bird, and the member for Tangney, Dennis Jensen, the previous chair and deputy chair of that committee, brief us on where they had got to with the inquiry, which was almost completed. Then some of the organisations came back to re-brief us as a new committee and we did some catch-up in this area. I know the chair fielded quite a number of calls from people in the profession who were very keen that this inquiry be completed, having done all the work prior to the election.

Much of the evidence concerning this inquiry focused on the changing role of teacher librarians insomuch as, as we
progress into the digital revolution and the
digital economy, the way children are
learning nowadays is changing quickly. With
it comes a whole new range of challenges.
Many schools are not particularly well
prepared or have the resources to deal with
many of the things which come along with
the digital revolution. Most of the time we
look upon this as a great opportunity. With
this opportunity comes great responsibility in
the things children can access, the way they
use their time on computers and in the
development of skills to resist cyberbullying.

As the only representative on the
committee of what I call regional
Australia—as often happens—I know that a
lot of small schools will struggle with this
level of expertise. That evidence was brought
to us particularly by the people from the
Northern Territory, who raised this as an
issue. One of the things that occurred to me
was that schools do not always value teacher
librarians as highly as they might. It was
seen that teacher librarians in the private
sector are held in higher regard than they are
in the public sector. In particular, I was taken
by one quote from a principal who said to a
librarian, 'I always try to put my worst
teacher in the library because this is where
they do the least damage.' If that is the
attitude in a school, it is little wonder that
students do not have a positive experience
with their teacher librarian. Where schools
are well engaged with their librarians and
getting the best out of them, teacher
librarians are very high in the hierarchy and
are valued for what they produce and their
use to the school.

We made 11 recommendations. Some of
them settled on the idea of trying to promote
this role within schools. It is very important
that principals in particular and school
councils understand what teacher librarians
do, what they will do in the future, how their
role is changing and how they need the
resources and backing to deal with these
problems, many of which we do not even
understand at this stage. We made
recommendations surrounding the
implementation of the new national
curriculum, that appropriate resources should
be provided to librarians so that they
can play an active role in managing that
curriculum and that appropriate databases be
supplied to them in an electronic form so that
when people need materials in schools they
can go to the librarian, much as they do now,
to put their finger on exactly what resource is
being looked for.

Other recommendations we made—and
there is quite a range—surrounded
promoting better relationships between
federal, state and local government to
support school libraries and teacher
librarians. I was given to reflect that in the
part of South Australia I come from it is very
common to have a library which includes the
school and the community library. I thank
the staff of the secretariat for their help
during the inquiry and I thank the chair and
the rest of the committee for their
cooperation.

The SPEAKER: Order! The time
allotted for statements on the report has
expired. Does the member for Kingston wish
to move a motion in connection with the
report to enable it to be debated on a later
occasion?

Ms RISHWORTH: Yes. I move:
That the House take note of the report.

The SPEAKER: In accordance with
standing order 39, the debate is adjourned
and the resumption of the debate will be
made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Report and Reference to Main Committee
Ms RISHWORTH: I move:
That the order of the day be referred to the
Main Committee for debate.
Question agreed to.

Reference

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (10:21): On behalf of the Standing Committee on Education and Employment, I wish to make a statement concerning the committee's inquiry into mental health and workforce participation.

On 3 March 2011, the Standing Committee on Education and Employment adopted terms of reference to inquire into barriers and opportunities to enhancing the participation in education, training and the workforce of people with mental ill health. The committee have received over 40 submissions and continues to welcome submissions from employers, service providers, clients and their families, and experts in the field of mental health.

The committee have conducted site inspections in Melbourne and commenced a program of public hearings and site inspections in Melbourne and Canberra. I take this early opportunity to thank those organisations that hosted the committee and provided some very interesting oral and written evidence to the inquiry. We are seeing some creative and exciting programs helping people with mental illness to get into the workplace. The committee plan to hold further hearings in Adelaide, Whyalla, Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne, with other locations to be announced in due course.

There can be no disputing the fundamental role of employment in the lives of all Australians who have the capacity to undertake it. Work provides economic independence, dignity and a sense of purpose. Many people suffering from mental ill health fail to fully realise their potential because of existing barriers in place; however, they are often capable of achieving at the highest levels in their chosen fields.

The terms of reference of the inquiry focus on what can be done to support people with mental ill health to find and engage with education, training and workforce opportunities. The adequacy of services for people who are afflicted with mental ill health and find themselves on disability support payments is important, but this inquiry is about what can be done to help people avoid the disability stream and minimise impediments that keep people on disability payments in cases where they might otherwise be able to enter education, training or the workforce. This inquiry is about fostering and supporting meaningful and continued engagement with communities and education, training and workforce opportunities.

Without pre-empting the committee's report and recommendations, one important factor in minimising contact with the disability support payment system is the ability to intervene early in cases where a person suffers an episode of mental ill health. Intervention does not just refer to access to mental health support; it is about bringing in employment, training and education opportunities at an early point. An important part of our inquiry will be exploring opportunities to integrate the mental health system with education, training and employment systems. Early intervention is about how quickly someone who has suffered an episode of mental ill health can be exposed to and brought back into employment, training or education.

Another important issue in supporting people with mental ill health back into the workforce or education and training is addressing the stigma that accompanies mental illness. The committee will be looking at this issue. Stigma relates not only to the prejudices relating to mental illness held in wider society but to self-stigma, as these views are reflected back upon and
sometimes eventually owned by the person who suffers mental ill health. The stigma accompanying mental illness manifests itself in, among other things, issues of disclosure.

The focus has been on employment but, as I mentioned, we are also having a focus on education and training. We have already heard evidence about the impact of an episode of mental ill health when a person is younger. It may disrupt their schooling in year 11 or year 12, an important time for getting the literacy and numeracy skills required to take on a job. That is why the committee is looking not just at employment but also at education and training, which are enablers to move people into the workforce. That will also be a focus of the committee. We are looking forward to visiting more examples of organisations that provide employment opportunities to people who suffer mental ill health.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the secretariat, who have put together a very exciting program so far. We look forward to continuing this very important work and making some recommendations that will make a difference to the lives of people with a mental health issue who are trying to access employment and education.

Mr RAMSEY (Grey) (10:26): As Deputy Chair of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment, I rise to support the chair, the member for Kingston, in the comments she has just made to the House about our inquiry into mental health and workforce participation. We have already received a substantial number of submissions and had some hearing days. I think there is an increasing understanding, both in society and in parliament, about the impact that mental illness is having on the society as a whole and on individuals. We must put more resources in Australia into this area, but we also must find new ways to address these issues. One of the things we know is that, the longer people are out of the workforce, the more disconnected they become from society in general. I was given to reflect in this place only a couple of weeks ago that the greatest act of welfare we can do for anyone in this society is to give them a job, because we know that, if they have a job, the likelihood of better outcomes in the rest of their life is much higher. There is a higher likelihood that their children will receive better education and a better diet and that they will be better engaged in society. All these things come with the self-respect and the freedom that a job provides us with.

The fact that someone is sick and suffering from a mental illness does not necessarily mean they are permanently incapacitated and should be put aside from the workforce, although in some cases this is undoubtedly the case. Some of the evidence we have received already underlines the fact that if we could actually get people into work their mental health would become easier to manage and maintain. To do that, we need an understanding in the workforce from employers who are looking to make a workplace that is more accommodating for people and allows them to deal with these issues. We took evidence only two weeks ago from someone talking about a work program where they were offering people two days work a week but it could be in four-hour blocks, so you might elect to come in for two days at the start the week or two days at the end or you might elect to do four mornings or a couple of mornings and a couple of afternoons. We really need to foster that kind of flexibility in the workplace.

I hope we are going to find a bit of that in our inquiry as we move around Australia. The chair was very keen that we should make an attempt to visit the electorates of all
the members of the committee. Because we
know our own patches and we know the
contacts to make, this is a good way of
getting a cross-section of Australia. As I just
said when I was speaking on the previous
correspondence from the committee, as the
only member of the committee who
represents rural and regional Australia I will
be very pleased to have the committee in
Whyalla in two weeks time, because, as
difficult as dealing with mental health is
anywhere, all these things become more
difficult in the country, where you are further
removed from the bulk of services. Whyalla
is quite a substantial city of 22,000 or 23,000
people. I have towns whose populations are
only two or three people. The concept of
delivering mental health and care services
into communities that small is quite foreign
to much of Australia, but I believe it is my
role to try to bring a bit of that to the
committee. I look forward to the inquiry.
(Time expired)

Economics Committee
Report

Mr CRAIG THOMSON (Dobell)
(10:30): On behalf of the Standing
Committee on Economics, I present the
committee's report entitled Review of the
Reserve Bank of Australia Annual Report
2010 (Second Report), together with the
minutes of proceedings.

The latest hearing took place shortly after
the flooding of much of eastern Australia,
especially Queensland, and after Cyclone
Yasi. Australians will never forget the
images of city centres, suburbs and whole
towns under water, still less loved ones,
neighbours or colleagues lost to flash floods
and related incidents. These disasters were
mitigated to a degree by the combined efforts
of the armed and emergency services,
governments at all levels, police and the
general public. The generosity with which so
many Australians donated time and effort to
assist neighbours and strangers alike
revealed a reservoir of civic resilience which
has been reassuring to witness.

While the ultimate cost of the floods and
Cyclone Yasi has yet to be fully quantified, it
is clear that the expenses involved with
replacing or renovating housing, industry
and infrastructure alone will have a
macroeconomic effect, to say nothing of the
impact on household expenditures of all
sorts, the nationwide market for fruit and
vegetables or the export of coal. It is clear
that Australia's economic situation is almost
ideally placed to support the massive task
ahead. While the extreme weather conditions
are expected to reduce real GDP growth
considerably in the last quarter of 2010 and
the first quarter of 2011, perhaps by as much
as up to one full percentage point, growth
should pick up after this.

The stimulus from the rebuilding effort is
expected to bring about a temporary rise in
CPI inflation, most likely to be three per cent
in the June quarter of 2011. After this,
inflationary pressure should ease. Monetary
policy is on target to meet the goals of its
longstanding policy of maintaining inflation
between two per cent and three per cent,
albeit the last inflation figure was slightly
more than expectations of economists in the
market.

The drivers for growth are diverse, but the
principal one is our exceptional terms of
trade. Several times the Governor of the
Reserve Bank of Australia advised the
committee that our current terms of trade
constitute a once or twice in a century event.
This is something we need to make sure that
we continue to plan for, but by any measure
Australia is exceedingly well placed. When
one looks at the measures of unemployment,
debt, our deficit and our growth projections
and compares us to the European community
or to the United States, one can only be glad that we are in Australia and that the government acted in the way it did during the global financial crisis, acting decisively with its stimulus packages. It had a resoundingly good report from the Reserve Bank governor and continues to get great reports from the Reserve Bank governor every time he is before us.

Without the actions of this government in relation to that, without doubt Australia would be in a much worse position. It is worth reminding everyone of the position that Australia occupies compared to those around the world. In Spain, unemployment is at 20 per cent. Unemployment and inflation are on the rise in the United Kingdom. The United States' unemployment rate, while slightly lower than it was six months ago, still has an 'eight' in front of it, and they have enormous fiscal problems. That is not the situation in Australia. We have both fiscal policy and monetary policy moving in the same direction—that is, a tightening of both—which is making sure (1) that Australia is going to be back in surplus, in terms of our fiscal position, by 2012-13, and (2) that we are in the best position possible to capitalise on the mining boom mark 2. Without the extraordinarily important work that the Reserve Bank has done to place us in this position and the work of the Treasurer in relation to our fiscal settings, Australia would not be in the position that it is in today.

In conclusion, on behalf of the committee I again thank the Governor of the Reserve Bank, Mr Glenn Stevens, and the other representatives of the Reserve Bank of Australia for their appearance before us on 11 February 2011. The next public hearing will be on 26 July 2011 in Melbourne. I also thank the committee secretariat for the fine work that they did in supporting us through this process.

Mr CIOBO (Moncrieff) (10:35): I am pleased to rise to speak to the Review of the Reserve Bank of Australia Annual Report 2010 as a consequence of the hearings that the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics held with the Reserve Bank governor and others in February this year.

For coalition members of the committee it was another opportunity to ask the Reserve Bank about predominantly the monetary policy settings and, to a lesser extent and indirectly, the fiscal policy settings of government with respect to the overall management of the Australian economy. As I sat and listened to the chair's contributions in this House only a moment ago I reflected on a number of features of the evidence that was forthcoming from the Reserve Bank governor and on other economic commentary and analysis that has been put forward over the past, say, six months. I fail to understand how such an oblique picture of the management of the Australian economy can be formed by Labor members opposite when, in reality, there is a very different story to be told in the testimony both of the Reserve Bank governor and of economic commentators.

There are several inescapable features of the Australian economy and its management by the Labor government since its election that have come to the front. Of these, there is no doubt that Australia is travelling quite well economically. The reason, though—and this is clear, based on the governor's testimony—effectively comes down to one word: China. There is absolutely no doubt that the Australian economy is travelling exceptionally well as a direct result of the as yet unflagging demand and consumption of Australian resources by China and, to a lesser extent, India. These two countries, crucial to driving demand in our region and more broadly throughout the global
economy, are the reason that Australia has travelled so very well. A second crucial element has been the state of the Australian economy going into the so-called GFC. There is absolutely no doubt that Australia's net asset base, Australia's exceptional healthy surplus and Australia's strong and consistent regulatory framework when it came to our banking system operated to maximise Australia's preparedness to deal with the challenges that were brought forward by the GFC.

Despite claims by the Labor Party and by the chairman of the committee sitting opposite, we cannot escape the fact that, yes, from an economic point of view Australia is still sitting pretty in relative terms but its position relative to other countries has been massively eroded by this government's fiscal and spending recklessness. The mere fact that only a couple of weeks ago we saw Australia's budget position eroded to nearly a $50 billion budget deficit and our net borrowings increased to $107 billion indicates that this is a government whose spending is completely out of control. This is important with respect to monetary policy, because although slight spikes in inflation have been hinted at as a consequence of Cyclone Yasi and the flooding that took place in Queensland, there are also other factors at work that are compounding in the Australian economy in two central veins. The first is to some extent the importation of inflationary pressures from China. For years China was exporting deflation to the world but now we see Australia importing inflation from China. The second is the Labor Party's industrial relations reforms, which have brought about less flexibility and will drive wage price pressures in the future. I note in addition to that a quote from the Reserve Bank annual report. It is, in particular, paragraph 2.22, which talked about some of the pressures on electricity prices, for example. The governor said:

We have not seen, at least to date, large increases in utility prices come primarily from generation costs. In time I think we will, but at the moment it is really about the networking, the distribution expansion that is going on.

That is as clear a sign as you will ever get from a governor of the Reserve Bank that Labor's carbon tax will also lead massively to inflation and that these things will force up interest rates.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott): In accordance with standing order 39(c), the debate is adjourned. The resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Report and Reference to Main Committee

Mr CRAIG THOMSON (Dobell) (10:40): I move:

That the order of the day be referred to the Main Committee for debate.

Question agreed to.

Corporations and Financial Services Committee

Report

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (10:41): On behalf of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services, I present the committee's report entitled Access for small and medium business to finance, together with the evidence received by the committee.

On 25 November last year, the House referred to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services an inquiry into access for small and medium business to finance. While we understood that there had been a number of inquiries by other committees both in this House and in the other place, the committee felt it was necessary to examine the impact that access to finance has on small to
medium enterprises, in particular a number of circumstances coming out of the global financial crisis and also anecdotal evidence from a range of areas with regard to small business being able to carry out its activities. The committee's report for the inquiry was presented to the Speaker out of session on 28 April this year. As Chair of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services, I am now pleased to table that report.

The committee was asked to consider the availability of finance for small and medium enterprises throughout Australia and the terms and conditions on which finance may be obtained. The OECD has praised Australia's economy as one of the more resilient economies throughout the global financial crisis but, nevertheless, the GFC has left its mark on the availability of finance for small and medium business in Australia and, for that matter, around the world. No review of the financial market for small and medium business would be complete without taking that particular financial crisis into account. The committee heard evidence that the GFC caused competition to decrease, with a number of lenders withdrawing from the Australian market. At the same time that that occurred, the global financial crisis resulted in the cost of providing finance also increasing. It was the evidence before the committee that small and medium business can continue to access finance but on terms less favourable than those prior to the crisis. The committee also heard evidence that the GFC prompted lenders to change lending conditions, and at times this was at short notice.

Evidence before the committee also highlighted multiple inconsistent definitions of small and medium business ranging from the way it is applied in terms of banks, policy development, data collection and other areas. A lack of standard definitions means a lack of standardised data. Inconsistency can also lead to misunderstandings when interpreting that data, hindering the development solutions tailored to the challenges faced by the various kinds of small and medium businesses. The committee considers that consistent definitions would assist an analysis of the health of the small and medium business sector and promote more informed policy and practice and, for that matter, would lead to better decision making, a more consistent approach across lenders and a better mechanism to better understand the way that lending, data and definitional issues impact on small and medium enterprises. In a unanimous report the committee has made four key recommendations. These are as follows: (1) that the government assess the value of developing uniform definitions of micro, small and medium business to be applied for data gathering, policy development and analysis by Commonwealth and state agencies; (2) that the Reserve Bank of Australia specifically track the impact of the introduction of the Basel III reforms on the cost of small and medium business finance and residential mortgages in Australia; (3) that the code of banking practice and the mutual banking code of practice be amended to include a standardised notice period for notifying business borrowers of changes to loan terms and conditions that may be materially adverse for borrowers; and (4) that the government undertake further work to explore policy measures which may strengthen the mutual sector as a fifth pillar of the banking system and thereby promote further competition.

Finally, I would also like to express my sincere thanks to all those who provided submissions to the inquiry evidence at the public hearings. The committee received 19 submissions and held three public hearings. I
also want to thank the committee secretariat for their assistance with the inquiry. As always they did good work. I also take this opportunity to thank Dr Ian Holland, who has now moved to another committee but was an instrumental part of the good work of this inquiry. The committee hopes that the implementation of the recommendations will help improve the financial environment for Australia's small and medium business. I also want to thank the committee members for their hard work.

Mr TONY SMITH (Casey) (10:46): I am pleased to speak to the report of the Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services on the inquiry into access to finance for small and medium businesses. The chair has just presented the overview of the committee's recommendations in some detail. I would like to draw the attention of the House to a number of related matters highlighted by the inquiry and the committee's report.

Consistent with the terms of reference from the House, the committee considered the types of finance available, lending competition and the impact of prudential regulation on the availability of finance for small and medium businesses. As the chair has outlined, the committee met with small and medium business representatives, members of the banking sector and members of the mutual banking sector in order to assess the strength of small and medium business finance. I would like to join with the chair and other members of the committee who were part of the inquiry to thank all of those who contributed to the inquiry by providing evidence to the committee through written submissions and at the public hearings which we held around Australia.

The evidence before the committee, as the chair outlined, was clearly that access to finance from lending institutions is, as we know, crucial for the ongoing productivity and growth of the small and medium business sector. Finance from the banks and the mutual lenders is an essential source of funding for small and medium businesses. The global financial crisis had a number of effects on the Australian economy. The committee report points out, at page 11 at the beginning of chapter 2, that Australia weathered the global financial crisis far better than most other countries as a result of its fiscal and regulatory strengths. On behalf of the opposition I welcome the unanimous acknowledgement in this report that it was the fiscal strengths and the regulatory strengths in Australia that the current government clearly inherited that saw Australia see its way through the global financial crisis in better shape than other countries.

The global financial crisis also reduced lending competition nonetheless. That is why the committee has made a number of recommendations, including that the government undertake further work to explore policy measures that may strengthen the mutual sector, as the chair outlined in his contribution just a few minutes ago. As he also outlined, the committee heard concerns from business representatives regarding the introduction of the Basel III prudential regulations. There is overall support for the framework. However, the committee also considers it prudent to track the impact of the new requirements on the cost of finance.

The committee also considered the finance options available to small and medium businesses in regional Australia compared with the finance options available to businesses located in metropolitan areas. Lending institutions presented evidence to the committee of finance options tailored to the agribusiness sector. However, it should be noted that some agribusiness products can
attract higher interest rates. The committee did not receive evidence that clearly indicated a lack of banking competition in regional areas. The mutual sector appears to have a growing presence in regional Australia. Agribusiness shares the challenges of small and medium businesses. However, agribusiness can also face challenges largely unique to their sector. The recent natural disasters are, of course, one example of this, as I am sure Deputy Speaker Scott would appreciate as he represents an electorate affected by the floods. The committee noted with approval the advice of many lenders that they are providing loan assistance to businesses affected by the recent devastating floods and extreme weather events.

Small and medium businesses are essential for the ongoing productivity of Australia's economy. They comprise a critical share of Australia's economy. There are two million businesses employing more than four million Australians. Recognising the significance of small and medium businesses to employment, innovation and economic growth is absolutely vital and the financing of small and medium businesses is an issue of enduring concern for Australian parliaments. The measures that the committee has recommended will promote some improvements in small and medium business finance and, in turn, strengthen the sector and strengthen the Australian economy. I would like to thank members of the committee and the chair who conducted this inquiry.

Corporations and Financial Services Committee Report

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (10:51): On behalf of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services I present the committee's report entitled Statutory oversight of the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, together with the evidence received by the committee.

I am pleased to speak to the committee's May 2011 report, Statutory oversight of the Australian Securities and Investments Commission. Section 243 of the ASIC Act directs the committee to inquire into and report on ASIC's activities and matters relating to those activities to which the parliament's attention should be directed. In preparing the report the committee held hearings with ASIC officials, the Office of Legal Services Coordination and the Australian Stock Exchange. I thank ASIC for its continuing cooperation and assistance and thank the representatives from the Office of Legal Services Coordination and the ASX for the additional insight they provided.

Responsibility for supervision of real-time trading on Australia's domestic licensed markets transferred from the ASX to ASIC on 1 August 2010. This means that the ASX has responsibility for market operation while ASIC has responsibility for market integrity. A key driver of the transfer was to promote efficiency through merging responsibilities for problem identification and investigation. The committee is pleased to note that since the transfer the time taken from identification of a trading problem through to formal investigation has decreased.

The committee endorses the protocols that the ASX and ASIC already have in place to coordinate their enforcement and monitoring activities and welcomes the further development of a protocol to govern continuous disclosure of information between the two bodies. The committee is particularly concerned to ensure that the transfer of responsibilities from the ASX to ASIC leads to measurable improvements in market integrity. We will continue to raise these matters with ASIC as is necessary.
The government also recently granted Chi-X an Australia market licence. On 29 April ASIC released the final market integrity rules that will provide the framework of competition in equity exchange markets. ASIC has also introduced market integrity rules specifically for the Chi-X market, which reflect the rules applying to the ASX. The committee endorses the work of ASIC in consulting closely with the Treasury, with the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission and with industry in developing access arrangements to market operator services. It is expected that Chi-X will commence operation in October or November of this year.

The committee also has had a continued interest in the complaints-handling mechanisms and complaints-handling methods of the regulator. As such, the committee notes with approval ASIC's commitment to continuously improving its complaints-handling process and acknowledges the large number and often sensitive nature of these complaints, which makes dealing with them quite complex. It is worth bearing in mind the scale of ASIC's complaints handling. ASIC receives approximately 14,000 complaints per year. Of these, approximately 21 per cent relate to matters outside of ASIC's responsibilities. For complaints within ASIC's regulatory ambit, policies regarding market integrity, confidentiality and privacy influence the type of response and the level of information the complainant receives.

ASIC's complaints-handling policy requires that it responds to 70 per cent of complaints within 28 days. The committee notes with approval that, for the year to date, 80 per cent of complaints were responded to in that time frame. Responding to complaints promotes market confidence and is a key regulatory function. The manner in which complaints are handled affects public opinion about whether ASIC is effectively fulfilling its regulatory responsibilities. It is apparent from evidence provided to the committee that complaints are thoroughly assessed. The committee expects ASIC to provide complainants with sufficient information and assure them that their complaints have been assessed without compromising the rights of a person investigated or market integrity.

With that said, it still needs to be noted that there still exists or appears to exist a gap between the market's expectations, expectations of consumers within that market and the work of the regulator—the good work that ASIC does. I think it is a role and responsibility of this committee to actually try to bridge that gap, be it a perception gap or a reality gap. I believe, as I know the rest of the committee does, that continual improvement needs to be exercised in this particular area to ensure that there is market confidence and to ensure that the public has the right view of the capacity of the regulator to fulfil its responsibilities.

The committee will hold its next hearing with ASIC next month and looks forward to the opportunity to discuss these and other issues with the new Chairman of ASIC, Mr Greg Medcraft. I take this opportunity to congratulate him on the fine work he did as a commissioner and now in his new role as Chairman of ASIC. I also take this opportunity to thank outgoing chairman, Mr Tony D'Aloisio, for the work he has done and the assistance he has given the committee in recent years. Mr D'Aloisio has made a significant contribution to the Australian community as a whole and to the regulation of the Australian securities market in particular. I also thank the secretariat for, as always, its good work and to thank the committee members for their fine efforts as well.
Mr FLETCHER (Bradfield) (10:57): I too am pleased to speak to the report of the Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services, Statutory oversight of the Australian Securities and Investments Commission. As the chair of the committee, the member for Oxley, has noted, this committee reports to parliament from time to time on ASIC's activities. Let me take a moment to focus on the litigation ASIC undertakes, its work promoting financial literacy and its possible role in the regulation of the not-for-profit sector.

Turning firstly to litigation, a key interest for the committee is ASIC's involvement with both civil and criminal litigation. The committee notes with approval ASIC's compliance, as indicated by the Office of Legal Services Coordination, with the Legal Services Directions, which impose on ASIC an obligation to act as a model litigant. Given the complex nature of the litigation ASIC pursues, the committee considers that ASIC must have ready access to highly qualified and experienced legal counsel to conduct litigation. The committee has previously commented that it is essential for ASIC to have dispassionate and expert legal opinion about the prospects of any proposed litigation.

The exemption from the Legal Services Directions that allows ASIC greater flexibility in engaging counsel expires in June this year. It would be of significant concern were the Legal Services Directions to impede ASIC's access to high-quality legal services and thereby undermine ASIC's effectiveness as a regulator. For this reason the committee submits that the Office of Legal Services Coordination should carefully consider extending the exemption beyond June 2011.

Turning secondly to financial literacy, the committee is keen to support initiatives which promote financial literacy amongst the Australian community as a whole and amongst retirees in particular. For this reason the committee notes with approval the development of the MoneySmart website. This builds on the foundation provided by ASIC's previous website, known as FIDO, and the interactive consumer information and tools provided on that website. The committee takes a keen interest in financial literacy amongst retirees. The committee will closely watch the research ASIC is conducting into financial advice provided to those considering retirement. The committee looks forward to the outcomes of that research.

The third area I wish to address is the question of how the not-for-profit sector is to be regulated. At present, regulation of this sector is fragmented. Multiple agencies have responsibility for the sector, including ASIC. There has been a recent Productivity Commission report into this matter. The report recommended that, as an interim measure, ASIC should assume responsibility for all regulatory functions relating to not-for-profit organisations. The committee is aware that the Australian government is currently considering this proposal. The Treasury is releasing a consultation paper that outlines options for the combined regulatory functions being undertaken by ASIC or the Australian Taxation Office.

I would like to communicate to the House the committee's view that ASIC is an effective regulator; however, the committee is concerned that any suggestion that ASIC should expand its responsibilities carries with it the risk of diluting ASIC's expertise and effectiveness. Accordingly, any move to expand ASIC's regulatory ambit must be appropriately resourced.

Finally, I join with the chair of the committee in thanking Tony D'Aloisio for
his work during his term as chairman of ASIC. Similarly, I join with the chair and the rest of the committee in welcoming Mr Medcraft to the position of chairman of ASIC. Like the rest of the committee, I very much look forward to working with him and his team.

**Regional Australia Committee**

**Reporting Date**

Mr WINDSOR (New England) (11:02): I would like to make an announcement relating to the Murray-Darling Basin inquiry. As Chair of the Standing Committee on Regional Australia, I rise to inform the House that the committee will not be presenting its report on the Murray-Darling inquiry within the time frame requested by the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government. The minister requested that the committee report by May. The substantial body of evidence provided to the inquiry requires—as I am sure everybody is aware—due consideration. The committee is very aware of the need to provide certainty to basin communities, as we have heard time and time again across the basin. The way to certainty is through the timely development and presentation of a basin plan. This is also commonly acknowledged as a fact; however, it is important to find the right balance in the basin. It must take into account the needs of the environment and the communities.

The committee is of the view that it is worth taking a little additional time to make informed recommendations for how to address the issues in the Murray-Darling Basin, particularly considering the failures that came to light with the release of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority's *Guide to the proposed basin plan* in October 2010. The committee is endeavouring to present its report to the House in as timely a fashion as possible. So it is with a sense of courtesy that I notify the House today that the committee will be taking a little bit longer—not too much longer, I hope. As chair of the committee, I congratulate the committee members from all political backgrounds who have worked very well together on this particular report. We are in the final throes of presenting the report. As I said, it is a courtesy today to let the minister and the House know that we will be taking a little bit longer. I also take this opportunity to thank the secretariat for the very diligent and untiring work that they have put in. I think we will present a report to the House that all sides of politics will be proud of.

**DELEGATION REPORTS**

**Parliamentary Delegation to Bhutan and Mongolia**

Ms LIVERMORE (Capricornia) (11:04): I present the report on the Australian parliamentary delegation to Bhutan and Mongolia, 9-21 July 2010. As the chair of the Australia-Mongolia Parliamentary Friendship Group, I present this report to the House on behalf of the delegation members, including the three members who retired at the end of the 42nd Parliament after many years of dedicated parliamentary service. Those members were the Hon. David Hawker MP, the Hon. Bob Debus MP and Mrs Kay Hull MP. The delegation leader, Senator Annette Hurley, will also be retiring from parliamentary service at the end of June. The key aim of the delegation was to visit two countries that are relatively new democracies. In particular, the delegation aimed to gain an understanding of political, economic and social issues in both countries, and to obtain an insight into Australia’s development assistance activities.

Bhutan is a small landlocked country in the eastern Himalayas. Bhutan has recently developed from an absolute monarchy into a constitutional monarchy. Australia enjoys a
modest yet warm relationship with Bhutan, extending back to the early 1960s, with formal diplomatic relations with Bhutan being established in 2002. The initial relationship was based around the provision of aid to Bhutan. The focus of Australia's aid program is now primarily on human resources development. The Australian government will provide approximately $5.3 million in development assistance to Bhutan in 2010-11. Education, through a scholarships program, is the focus of Australia's bilateral assistance to Bhutan. Since 1998, nearly 600 Bhutanese students have studied in Australia through various scholarship schemes. There is now a core of Bhutanese senior to mid-level public servants who have been educated in Australia.

The first members of the parliament of Bhutan took their seats in 2008. His Majesty the King of Bhutan has stated that the country's first democratic government has the responsibility of setting the right examples, laying strong foundations and promoting the best practices of democracy. The parliament of Australia is able to assist the parliament of Bhutan in dealing with the steep learning curve it faces in all aspects of operating a parliament. The parliament of Bhutan is seeking guidance and advice, particularly in the areas of legislative drafting, the development of procedures for both houses and the development of secretariat support for members of parliament in both houses and in their parliamentary committees. The report recommends that the Australian government provide legislative drafting assistance to the parliament of Bhutan. The delegation understands that providing training in drafting is a very resource intensive activity for our agencies. However, that drafting expertise is of vital importance, especially to parliaments that are newly established and still coming to terms with new procedures, practice, roles and responsibilities. The report recognises the value of the Australian parliament's Inter-Parliamentary Study Program; however, it recommends that the Australian parliament investigate the provision of more exclusive access to our parliament for senior parliamentary officials from Bhutan. Short-term residencies for several officials, perhaps over a sitting fortnight, may provide unique opportunities for those officials to learn, through shadowing roles, about our parliamentary departmental functions.

Mongolia is another landlocked country—this time in east and central Asia. Mongolia became a democracy in 1990 after 70 years of Soviet style single-party rule. Australia established diplomatic relations with Mongolia in 1972, with bilateral relations developing further following democratic and free market reforms in Mongolia in the early 1990s. Australia has been a longstanding development partner for Mongolia. Since 1995, Australia has provided more than $50 million in aid to Mongolia. In 2010-11, Australia will provide approximately $7.4 million in aid. Since 1993, the provision of scholarships to Mongolia has been Australia's primary mode of development assistance. The Mongolia Australian Scholarships Program provides 28 Australian development scholarships to Mongolians from both the public and private sectors each year. The scholarships program is highly regarded by the Mongolian government, with graduates including current and former ministers, parliamentarians and senior public service officials.

The delegation met with representatives from Australian businesses with a presence in Mongolia. Companies such as Leighton and Rio Tinto have significant investments in Mongolian mining and resources, particularly through coalmines at Tavan
Tolgoi and the substantial copper and gold mine at Oyu Tolgoi in the Gobi Desert. Australian business has benefited from the presence of an Austrade official on a trial basis in the Mongolian capital of Ulaanbaatar. Australian businesses emphasised the importance of Australian government representation in Mongolia and called for, at best, representation through an embassy in Ulaanbaatar or, at a minimum, permanent Austrade representation. The delegation notes that Mongolia established an embassy in Canberra in 2008.

The delegation was very warmly received, and the delegation members would like to thank the host nations for their friendly hospitality and their willingness to share their experiences with them. I commend the report to the House.

**BILLS**

**Home Insulation Program (Commission of Inquiry) Bill 2011**

**Second Reading**

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (11:09): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Home Insulation Program (Commission of Inquiry) Bill 2011 is a response to a program which has seen, amongst many other things, 200 house fires, approximately 1,500 electrified roofs and a defect rate of 24 per cent across the 150,000 houses that have been inspected to date. That is an extraordinary level of waste that is almost unparalleled in the history of Australian budgetary programs. There must be a judicial commission of inquiry into the scope, the scale, the fraud, the failures, the warnings and the inability to act that has been associated with four tragic losses. This program has been a profound failure. When we heard most recently from the government it acknowledged not only a 24 per cent failure rate across more than 150,000 houses, but also that more than one million homes had yet to be checked. There was no estimate of the rate of failure or of defects in the insulation which had been installed in those one million homes.

I will briefly set out three things in relation to this bill: first, the need; second, the structure; and, third, the broader pattern of failure which necessitates more than ever a full judicial commission of inquiry into the failures of the Home Insulation Program. Let me deal, then, with the need. The program failed on many fronts. It failed to deliver the savings which were expected. We were told that it would lead to 50 million tonnes of emissions reduction between now and 2020. In fact, the government's own reviews have indicated that it will be approximately one-third of that. By its very raison d'être, the program has failed. Much more significantly, as an exercise in government probity, as an exercise in government management and, most importantly, as an exercise in government protection of people's homes and safety, the Home Insulation Program was a manifest failure of each and every aspect of the duty and responsibilities of a modern government.

This was a $2.5 billion program, of which $1.5 billion was spent installing insulation. But what we have seen is that 50,000 foil insulated homes were subject to safety checks and had either safety switches installed or had their foil insulation ripped out. Only a very small percentage of homes were not dealt with in either of these ways and that was primarily because the householders could not be contacted. This program led to 50,000 homes immediately being subject to the work effectively being scrapped at massive cost to the taxpayer. This program led to 150,000 homes being inspected at massive cost to the taxpayer. The program had a 24 per cent defect rate. Almost one in four houses was found to have
been improperly treated and the installation improperly carried. That is an extraordinary rate of failure. We do not know what the rate of failure is for the remaining one million homes. The government claims that it targeted the highest risk homes first. Let us assume that is the case. Is the failure rate in the remaining one million homes 15 per cent, 10 per cent or even a mere eight per cent, or 80,000 homes? These are profound and large numbers because they represent tens of thousands of Australian householders who have been put at risk. We were mocked and ridiculed when, throughout July, August and September of 2009, we warned of each and every risk which came to pass. We called for an Auditor-General's review of the program over 27 August and 28 August 2009. The government rejected it. The government specifically wrote to the Auditor-General to indicate that no such review was necessary. The warnings from the opposition were clear and clarion and were out there for all to hear, but they were rejected by the government.

But more importantly still—and this is the reason why there must be a judicial commission of inquiry—the government received in excess of 20 warnings from its department and agencies, industry and the public about the risks associated with the program. As early as 18 February 2009 senior officials in the Prime Minister's office and the Office of the Coordinator-General received express and explicit warnings about the risk of electrocution, fires, cost overruns and poor quality in the program. The department recommended that the program be carried out over eight years, but it was the ministers, the inner core of this government—the current Prime Minister, the previous Prime Minister, the finance minister of the time, the current Treasurer, and the now-promoted education minister—who argued that they should override the departmental advice to proceed cautiously without haste and with maximum focus on safety. Those ministers have never been held to account, have never been subject to scrutiny and were not the subject of the Attorney-General's inquiry because that is beyond the remit of the Attorney-General. Those ministers were not given the accountability and responsibility tests which Westminster governance should require. So against that background of express, clear and manifest ministerial failure—which should have seen the termination of the commission of the then minister for the environment and now minister for education—we have seen a full failure of Westminster government to ensure that accountability and its associated principles have been put into place.

That is why this bill would inquire directly into what warnings and advice on the Home Insulation Program were received by ministers from industry, from Commonwealth agencies, from state and territory agencies and even from unions, not to mention members of the public and the opposition. The bill seeks inquiry into any decisions made by a minister to reject such warnings or advice, most notably, the five-year recommendation for a rollout, which was overlooked with tragic consequences in terms of the rate of failure under this program. It inquires into what the Home Insulation Program was required of in terms of Commonwealth offices and agencies, state and territory governments and contractors. These pieces of information are fundamental, should be in the public domain, but have never been released into the public domain. The ministerial process has been silent, it has been hidden and it has been done so in a way which has intentionally denied scrutiny, accountability and responsibility of the very people who demanded haste over safety and who have ignored the warnings of industry, the department, unions, the public and the opposition.
I finally put in context the need for this bill. The Master Electricians Australia, who warned of the risk of further fatalities on 16 October 2009, have warned of the same program risks and safety issues in relation to the government's set-top box program as part of the set-top box budget. Those people were ignored and shunned, but they were absolutely correct and they have made similar warnings now. Today we see that the other independent agency, the National Electrical and Communications Association, who also warned of risks of fire, fraud and fatalities under the Home Insulation Program, has pointed to the same risks under the government's hands-off approach to the Solar Rebate Program.

Both organisations, which warned of risks under the Home Insulation Program, which were ignored but were subsequently proven right, currently have extant warnings in relation to the repeated failures, which have now been imported into other government programs. The Home Insulation Program was also a tragic failure. It is time for accountability. This bill must be passed.

Now, once again, the opposition wants to distract and obstruct the government in doing its core business by imposing a commission of inquiry to investigate the program. This is despite the fact that there have already been three major investigations into the program that have been completely supported by government. I will get to those reports soon.

I would like to say right upfront that the government accepts that there were significant design and implementation problems with the Home Insulation Program. We have never walked away from this fact. Since the program was closed in February last year the government has worked extremely hard in dealing with the complex array of issues involved with its closure.

I also want to reinforce how much the government regrets that four young Australians tragically died while installing insulation under the program. These young men were: Matthew Fuller, on 14 October 2009. He was 25 years old and the incident occurred in Meadowbrook, Brisbane; on 18 November 2009, Reuben Barnes, who was 16 years old. The incident occurred in Rockhampton in Queensland; on 21 November 2009, Marcus Wilson, 19 years old. The incident occurred on 20 November in St Clair, New South Wales; on 4 February 2010, Mitchell Sweeney, 22 years old. The incident occurred in Millaa Millaa, North Queensland. I could not possibly imagine how difficult it must continue to be for the friends and families of these four young men in dealing with these tragic losses. The families quite rightly want answers to what happened to their loved ones. To this end, I am aware that these deaths have been the subject of investigations by relevant state bodies. In the case of Reuben Barnes and Matthew Fuller, the companies that employed them have been prosecuted under the relevant state laws. The court hearing into the death of Mitchell Sweeney also
remains ongoing. I am also aware that the deaths of these four young men may be the subject of coronial inquiries. To assist in that process the government has agreed to provide funding for legal representation of the families of those men. It is hoped that the completion of all of these investigations and inquiries will bring some peace to the families involved.

As I said previously, the government is focused on getting on with the job of remediating the Home Insulation Program through our safety inspection programs. The member for Flinders' latest attempt to thwart the government's work is simply yet another political stunt from the opposition, which they have tried and failed with before. The government has been totally transparent in reviewing the Home Insulation Program. We have supported a number of inquiries into the program since its closure, including the Auditor-General's report into the Home Insulation Program, an independent Review of the administration of the Home Insulation Program conducted by Dr Allan Hawke and a Senate inquiry.

Through the last 12 months there has been a distinct pattern in how the opposition deals with issues relating to the Home Insulation Program. Our experience is that the opposition calls for a review, and when they do not get the answer they want they call for another. However, it might be worthwhile just to revisit what some of these reports did investigate and what they actually found to demonstrate that a comprehensive review of the Home Insulation Program has been undertaken.

Following the closure of the program in February last year the government appointed the well-respected former public servant Dr Allan Hawke to do a review of the administrative and design aspects of the Home Insulation Program. The Hawke report found that rapid rollout, wide access to the program for both householders and entrants to the installation industry and ease of transactions were key drivers for program design and implementation. Hawke found that this was appropriate given the key objective of economic stimulus but that it was unreasonable to conclude that a program of this size operating within a largely unregulated industry could ever be delivered without risk. Hawke also found that it was unreasonable to conclude that all of the issues that emerged from the program could have been anticipated or that they were easily remediable. A stronger management structure, earlier implementation of the audit and compliance program and better targeting of compliance effort early in the program could have mitigated the risks to more acceptable levels, but never to zero. Hawke then found that safety and quality risks in the program could not be fully abated and recommended that the government should reconsider proceeding with the insulation component of the REBS. Accordingly, the government accepted this advice in April last year and did not proceed with the new program.

The Auditor-General compiled a report in response to a request by the then Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, Greg Combet, on 3 March 2010. The National Audit Office identified significant deficiencies in the administration of the program, particularly the risk management practices applied by the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts. The main issues identified included ineffective and untimely risk management processes by the department, an overwhelming volume of claims and installations that impacted on effective program delivery, little proactive oversight and response to emerging problems by the department's executive and a lack of
appropriately skilled staff to implement the program. Importantly, the report did not make adverse findings against ministers, including the former Minister for Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, Peter Garrett. In relation to Mr Garrett, the ANAO found that DEWHA's advice to the minister was overly optimistic and contained factual errors.

Despite what the opposition has claimed publicly, I am advised that the Auditor-General had access to all cabinet-in-confidence material when conducting his investigation. Although the opposition is solely motivated by scoring cheap political points, it simply cannot credibly claim that a totally open and transparent review has not been carried out. Incredibly, though, the opposition's main argument for some time in justifying a judicial inquiry is that the government has impeded the Auditor-General from running a fully independent inquiry.

I would just like to remind the opposition what the Auditor-General actually does. The Auditor-General is the independent watchdog for the Commonwealth government. He sets his own terms of reference. He structures his inquiries as he chooses and has extensive powers of access to government documents, including cabinet documents. Such claims that somehow the government has restricted the Auditor-General in how he pursued his investigation of the Home Insulation Program are quite frankly baseless and scandalous. In addition to the Hawke and ANAO reports, the government also fully supported the Senate inquiry into the Home Insulation Program, making available departmental officers and hundreds of pages of documents for the committee to make its deliberations.

What I have described today clearly demonstrates that the government has been completely transparent in reviewing the Home Insulation Program. The Hawke review and the Auditor-General's report both came out with similar findings. The government has clearly accepted those findings. Most importantly, both were comprehensive reports that were targeted at the right issues. The problem though is that the opposition is not interested in what these reports have found. The opposition feels cheated in that the findings it wanted were not identified by either Allan Hawke or the Auditor-General. So in a fit of pique the opposition is now desperately running around looking for a process that may, just may, come up with findings that will satisfy its desire for cheap political points.

So what would a new commission of inquiry achieve? The answer is simple: nothing. The reports undertaken so far have been thorough and comprehensive. A new inquiry would find nothing new and would be a complete waste of taxpayers' money. Importantly, it would distract the government from what it needs to do—that is, deal successfully with the closure of the program. This involves continuing to ensure the safety of households, pursuing those who committed fraud under the program and providing advice to the insulation industry. Just as it did six months ago, by trying to embed a sense of panic in the general public that the government was hiding the results of its safety inspections, the opposition is now trying to create a false impression that the government still has something to hide. Well, the Hawke review and the Auditor-General's report say otherwise. The actions of the opposition today are just the same as they were six months ago: irresponsible, vexatious and time consuming. I ask the House to totally reject this bill and see it for what it is: a cheap and baseless political stunt.
Mr LAMING (Bowman) (11:29): In calling for a commission of inquiry into the pink batts scheme, I support the opposition environment spokesperson who has moved this motion today. While I welcome the words of the government—in particular, acknowledging the tragedies that were inherent in this program—I think it is a shame that this motion involves such heart that the government cannot speak from it today but instead reads a carefully prepared statement that varies not a syllable from what appears on paper and has almost certainly been provided by the minister's office. I think it is a great shame that there cannot be some free discussion in the chamber.

The inquiry conducted by the Auditor-General showed us just a hint of some of the great fiscal policy-making disasters but it goes nowhere near far enough in unravelling the cause of many of these problems. There are 1.1 million Australian dwellings that have now been insulated, and the previous speaker pointed out that the 17 million tonnes of carbon abated, at $140 million a tonne, represents a completely crazy investment if it were purely environmental, and if we want to look at the stimulus effect, which I will focus on today, it was just as irresponsible policy-making.

My role for the first half of this speech will be to look at the context in which this home insulation package evolved from the then Rudd government—what drove this government to be so stubborn that it ignored every warning throughout 2009. I will then move through some of the collateral damage that has often been ignored by the Labor government, and that further underlines why we do need this inquiry for Australians the length and breadth of this nation, many of whom suffered enormously as a result of the government's actions.

Of course, back in 2007, with a newly elected Labor government, optimism was high. There was a massive surplus on the table and this Biafran and starved administration looked forward to spending a lot. They got the tick of approval at G20 meetings, and a small man came back from the large meetings intent on spending every cent. He had the support of finance ministers who were genuinely worried about where the GFC could take Australia. And Treasury obliged, performing TRIM modelling which, in the 2009-10 budget, indicated a massive drop to Australia's real GDP if we did nothing. History will not remember that a government saved us from the GFC. When all nations have negotiated the GFC, history will remember who did it most efficiently and most effectively and who did it wastefully. TRIM modelling of the 2009 budget predicted a 4.5 per cent collapse in Australia's real GDP, based predominantly on US inputs.

What is important is not that a pilot loses control of his instruments but that he heeds those instruments once they work again. The MYEFO in August 2009, a few months after the budget, made it inherently clear that the fiscal gap was only about 40 per cent of what had been predicted months earlier. The coalition joined with this government and supported stimulus 1 without significant question. But with stimulus 2, in the face of the unfolding evidence coming from overseas, and with Australia hitting bottom in March/April but stabilising, the Rudd government ploughed on, ignoring the evidence then, and all that has rolled in sense, that a more cautious and responsible stimulus would have done the trick. So they were left with a $2.4 billion installation package and they were intent on spending every cent of it regardless of the warnings. And that is where it first went wrong.
We had DEEWR, a department that is not usually in the position of rolling out social packages, being responsible for a multibillion-dollar program like few Commonwealth entities are. They provided the government with recurring advice that this program needed to be rolled out not with pedal to the metal but over five years to ensure that training and resources were adequate, that the backlog of other programs was taken care of, that staff accommodation was adequate and that the IT systems could manage the massive movement of money. When an Auditor-General’s report fails to find that the minister had any responsibility for this very program, when the architects of it were the Rudd-Gillard administration, it is utterly clear that we need to look at this one more time and see how many more warnings the environment minister received on his desk and when.

As we passed through 2009 the evidence appeared in electorates around the country. I asked the banana republic question when installers were coming to me saying packages of insulation batts that were $19 were now $32 and rising. It was clear that the stimulus package was being gouged by wholesalers along the supply chain who provided the batts to Australia. So the great stimulus package was actually helping businesses that had no need to be helped. This was a completely overheated subsector of the Australian economy and we had a government that could not see it.

We calculated that the inflation rate in mid-2009 was 317 per cent—a little bit outside the RBA target range! No wonder everyone was in it up to their elbows. Were there any training units? Was there any supervision? Was there any provision of safety advice from this government? I do not expect the federal minister to deliver the safety training but I expect the federal minister to have the wit to realise that, if thousands of young untrained people move into ceilings around this country and start fiddling around with electrical wires and using stapling guns, something needs to be done. And now, hidden as best they could, out come the warnings that were there all the time from state agencies, federal agencies, unions and, most importantly, those who have been installing insulation for decades.

This place owes an apology not just to installers but, in particular, to Northern Australia, the tropical and subtropical parts of this great country, where foil insulation was mostly used because it has a slight advantage in that it does not trap hot air. Foil was very popular in Northern Australia and small companies have done a great job of installing this foil safely for decades. They watched on as a fly-by-nighters came in, lured by the offer of thousands of dollars, hiring schoolkids to carry the stuff up into ceilings. It was an abomination. It is too much to expect this government to be effective; it is too much to expect this lot to be efficient. All families wanted was that this administration protect people. All we can ask of a government is: if you take money from one person and give it to another, make sure you do not leave an abomination; do not leave people damaged and careers destroyed. But it is not limited to home insulation. No, this is not an isolated problem. This was a problem that, as I will show, runs right across the green sector. Those young people who put their studies on hold and those who gave up their small businesses and entered Green Loans training completely lost their training, registration and indemnity fees, as they never had a chance to enter the green economy. This place should be saying sorry. And so for the people who are sitting at home and had a knock on the door—one of the lucky 10 per cent—and had their homes inspected and were told, ‘The insulation is unsafe. Have it removed or we want you to...’
indemnify us.' Then, when the insulation was removed, there was no offer of a replacement. And for those young single mums living in tropical accommodation, for whom it was the first chance in their lives to have some insulation and they then had it taken out with no replacement because that is not part of the program. It is an absolute disgrace for those low-income families in my electorate. They were given that Hobson's choice of having it ripped out and not replaced or signing their life and that of their kids away. That was appalling treatment. And to think 90 per cent of households have never been looked at. We are right to ask: what are the odds of faulty, ineffective, dangerous or flawed installation of insulation—30 per cent, 25 per cent or 20 per cent? Let's see the numbers. But this patronising administration says: 'You're not worthy of knowing the numbers because you might panic. You might not be able to take the truth.' Imagine if a police force refused like that to give data because you might not be able to take the truth. That is the job of a government—to be transparent and honest.

We do not pretend that this was ever going to be a wonderful environmental program, but there was hope that it could abate some carbon. But two-point-something billion disappeared into nowhere and did damage, not just to those immediately but to the many who bought up stock and filled storerooms with insulation, trusting that a government would not let them down. Don't ever forget that this lot told you that vulnerable employees were being fired by SMS through the Work Choices exchange, because this lot fired all of them by SMS. People were up in ceilings putting the foil up and they got an SMS: 'You're fired; the program's over. Bad luck for any insulation you've still got in your possession,' and that was appalling.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The member for Bowman might use another description for the government.

Mr LAMING: It was appalling to treat employees that way, having only a few years before blamed small business for doing the same thing. We expect better of a government. An inquiry is the right way to get to the bottom of it. This minister still skates along without having been brought to justice, and there are many elements of the way these warnings from ordinary Australians were ignored that need to be revealed.

Mr HUSIC (Chifley) (11:39): The government is extremely disappointed that the opposition has decided to introduce this bill into the House. To stand accused by the opposition of not being open and transparent in our management of the Home Insulation Program is simply untrue. As the member for Parramatta outlined previously, the government has always welcomed scrutiny of the Home Insulation Program and we have supported each of the reviews into the program and accepted their findings. The government recognises that there were a number of issues in the design and implementation phases of the program, and we have never denied the fact that, in doing so, we have learnt the lessons from the mistakes we have made. However, what is more important is that the government has worked tirelessly in managing the closure of the program to a level that provides confidence in both householders and the industry, and in managing this closure the government has been completely open and transparent, through our actions demonstrating how baseless the opposition's claims suggesting otherwise have been.

When the current Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency assumed responsibility for the program following its
closure in February last year, he made a number of commitments to parliament, on 10 March 2010, all of which have been addressed over the last year. In particular, the minister stated that he would focus his effort on ensuring safety for householders, providing assistance to industry and dealing strongly with fraud and non-compliance. I would like to now focus on what has been achieved against these objectives so I can highlight the priority the government has given to remediating this program. I also seek to demonstrate how the opposition has sought to derail the government in doing this important job over the last 12 months through its petty and opportunistic stunts.

Safety has always been the government’s main priority in remediating the Home Insulation Program. Accordingly, we established a comprehensive safety inspection plan for both foil and non-foil insulation installed under the program. Under the foil insulation safety program, all houses with foil insulation installed under the Home Insulation Program were offered a safety inspection with the option of having the foil insulation removed or, on the advice of a licensed electrician, safety switches installed. Under the Home Insulation Safety Program the government committed to inspect a minimum of 150,000 households insulated with non-foil insulation. These inspections were targeted based on a risk assessment. Based on independent analysis from the CSIRO and internationally renowned Booz and Company the government will conclude both the HISP and FISP upon completion of the committed inspections. This means that the government will continue to undertake targeted inspections under the Home Insulation Safety Program, HISP, until a minimum of 150,000 inspections is reached. This is expected to be completed by mid-2011. The government will also finalise all inspections under the Foil Insulation Safety Program, noting that there are still a number of households with foil who have either refused an inspection or have not been contactable, despite repeated efforts.

To provide an extra level of reassurance to HIP households, the government will continue to offer inspections to those households who want them, until June 2012. Householders who have safety concerns should contact the safety hotline on 131792.

The government committed to providing an independent analysis of the safety inspection program and to release details of the inspection result. We publicly released this information on 20 April 2011. The overall result showed that around 24 per cent of dwellings do not comply with relevant HIP insulation standards. However, importantly, the CSIRO analysis clearly indicates that non-compliance with the relevant standards does not directly equate to a fire risk and that only a fraction of those houses that fail to comply are exposed to a fire risk.

The CSIRO analysis also clearly indicates that there is always an inherent risk in having insulation installed. The fire incident rate prior to the HIP was around 2.4 incidents per 100,000 homes. I am advised that the current rate for HIP is around 2.5 incidents and falling. Given that the fire incident rate has fallen to the level that occurred prior to the program, Booz and Company found that inspecting homes beyond the current level is not likely to have a material impact on the reduction of risk. The information provided here today is the result of painstaking work by the organisations involved and the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency.

The government’s main concern was that, if we released this data too early without any proper context or analysis, this would only cause confusion and unnecessary
concern among the general public. I am told the government also provided several opportunities late last year to privately brief the member for Flinders on the safety inspection results and consistently explained its reasons for not releasing the data prematurely. The government also explained many times that the decision not to release the inspection results was based on advice provided by the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency.

However, this was not good enough for the member for Flinders and his colleagues. He refused the explanation, he refused the private briefings and he refused to listen to common sense. It is not hard to reach the conclusion that the opposition were ignoring facts and reality because this was an inconvenience in achieving their ambition, which was to use this difficult situation to score cheap political points. So, rather than taking a constructive approach, giving confidence to householders and the insulation industry, the opposition shamelessly moved a motion seeking the immediate and premature release of the safety inspection data. Were they interested in getting the correct facts? No. Did they apply due care to avoid unnecessarily worrying householders? No. Thankfully, the House saw the opposition's actions for what they were—stunts—and voted against the motion.

The government has made the safety of households a pre-eminent objective. We have now reached a sensible way forward in closing down the inspection programs. This would never have been achieved if the member for Flinders and his colleagues got their way with this ridiculous motion.

The government fully accepts that some unscrupulous operators defrauded the program. In his speech to parliament on 10 March 2010 Minister Combet said that one of his four key objectives in winding down the Home Insulation Program was 'to identify and put in place processes to deal with issues of non-compliance and fraud'. He also said that he would 'rigorously pursue those individuals and companies that had engaged in' this behaviour. That is why he moved quickly to request an Auditor-General's investigation into the program in early March last year. Unfortunately, this has been conveniently forgotten by the opposition.

Minister Combet also supported the engagement of a forensic auditor to investigate how fraud was perpetrated under the program. A number of activities were undertaken on 2 March this year aimed at targeting those who allegedly committed serious fraud under the program. This involved a joint operation between the Australian Federal Police and the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, in which 35 search warrants were executed across three states. Concurrently, the department launched a comprehensive debt recovery program aimed at recovering all debt owed from fraudulent and non-compliant activities. These activities were the direct result of the, again, painstaking and difficult work undertaken by the department and in the KPMG forensic audit.

This work has enabled the AFP and the department to identify how the fraud was committed under the program and those who committed the fraud. Obviously, while investigations are continuing, the government will not be making public comment on specific detail. To do so would be irresponsible and put in jeopardy the painstaking work being carried out by the authorities. Any reasonable person would understand this—anyone, of course, other than the opposition.
In the member for Flinders' media release of the same day, he demanded to know:

… how much the Government is seeking to recover from those targeted in current fraud investigations;

So, while complex investigations into these matters are ongoing, before the investigations are even complete, the member for Flinders would like to know specific details of how much money is to be recovered—again, simply a cheap political stunt that does nothing other than demonstrate that the opposition does not want us to manage the closure of the program effectively.

The government provided a $56 million assistance package to the insulation industry once it decided not to continue with the program, and we remain committed to assisting the industry as much as we can. The government will continue to liaise with industry and state and territory governments over the next few months to determine other contributions that might be made to improve standards. The opposition, however, would have you believe that they have the insulation industry's interests at heart. Nothing could be further from the truth, for the opposition's policy is that the government inspect all 1.2 million homes that had insulation installed under the program. Through this position, the opposition is immediately bringing into question the credentials of hundreds of legitimate installers who did the right thing on the program. (Time expired)

Mr VAN MANEN (Forde) (11:49): The Home Insulation Program was the lead story in the $3.9 billion Energy Efficient Homes stimulus plan. However, the government failed miserably. The Home Insulation Program ended up being a monumental waste of time and money. Not only was there enormous financial loss to many involved but there was also tragic loss of life. Yet there remain risks to home safety due to the poor quality of many insulation installations. This is the purpose of the Home Insulation Program (Commission of Inquiry) Bill.

The number of jobs created was lower than promised and the runs created did not last as long as promised. A review in 2010 found a third of the 14,000 properties surveyed appeared to have faulty or dangerous insulation, resulting in a loss of any potential environmental benefits. The Auditor-General found there were more than 4,000 potential cases of fraud and 207 home fires. The environmental benefits were not even evident because much of the insulation was faulty.

To date, not one minister or official has been held to account for this botched scheme, with ministers exempted from the Auditor-General's inquiry. Although the government has agreed to carry out inspections on homes, they are only committed to inspect 200,000, which falls very short with in excess of 1.1 million properties at risk. At this time, 95,000 inspections have been carried out, with 30 per cent of the homes inspected in March 2010 having problems, including serious safety concerns. These problems concerned quality of insulation, fire and safety risks and fraud—all of which were warned about before the program. This failure of ministerial accountability must be addressed. The government are continuing to hide the facts, figures and reports that the public, as well as the families of the victims, have a right to know. Every home placed at risk must be inspected to prevent further injury or death.

The Auditor-General's report found that the federal government put stimulus over the safety of workers and homeowners with this scheme. Whilst the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water,
Population and Communities suggested a five-year rollout for the plan due to weaknesses in IT systems capability, a shortage of accommodation for staff, recruitment, training and other challenges and serious backlogs with existing programs, this time frame did not meet the government stimulus objective for the program—and we have seen the consequences.

In my electorate of Forde, one of my constituents, a lady by the name of Jennifer Wingate, an elderly pensioner, called an electrician in to find out why her downlights were failing. The result was that the ceiling was on fire. She was later told by firefighters that in another 15 minutes or so the house would have been in flames. The electrician was also at risk of electrocution, as the ceiling was live. I personally visited Mrs Wingate's property. There was already insulation in the ceiling before the new, faulty insulation that caused those problems was installed.

The government must come clean about the safety figures as well as what warnings and advice on the home insulation program were received by ministers from industry, Commonwealth agencies and state and territory agencies. It has been reported that in excess of 20 warnings were received by the government about the risks associated with the program. The government must also advise whether the program had adequate measures in place to ensure that appropriate compliance, safety and quality standards were met. It is only through a properly constituted commission of inquiry with broad terms of reference that these important questions can be answered. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (11:54): I rise to speak on the Home Insulation Program (Commission of Inquiry) Bill 2011, and it will be no surprise that I speak against the bill. As the honourable members for Chifley and Parramatta have outlined, the government is focused on getting on with the job of remediating the home insulation program through its safety inspections. We have made significant progress towards delivering on our clear commitments under the home insulation safety plan, and the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency last month provided a comprehensive update of progress to date. Throughout the process we have been open and transparent in encouraging a number of inquiries into the program through the responsible and considered release of data.

From the outset our plan has been to work to restore confidence in the retrofit residential insulation industry. This approach is supported by the insulation industry but not by the opposition. Instead, they would like to score some cheap political points and try to get a headline or two while doing nothing to work constructively. They prefer to be destructive to the home insulation industry. At each stage of the remediation process, the opposition have sought to publicly distort the facts around this issue, which has served to undermine public confidence in the inspection programs and the insulation industry in general.

In November, the opposition moved a motion in the House to push for the early release of data from the home insulation safety inspection programs. This followed several offers by the government last year to provide the opposition with private briefings on the safety inspection results. If the member for Flinders were truly concerned about this issue, he would have taken up the offer for these private briefings. Instead he seems more interested in boosting his public profile. At the time, the government explained that we intended to act on the advice of the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency that to release the data
prior to it being analysed would create misleading representations of results, cause unnecessary alarm in the community and undermine confidence in the industry. Of course, the opposition was not interested in any of these things, but the House did not support the motion when it came to a vote in February.

As we know, the government has now released all of the data in the appropriate form, following the analysis by the CSIRO and Booz and Company. As the government has repeatedly maintained, this considered release was the responsible course of action and has ensured that householders have been provided with the appropriate analysis of data so that its release would not cause unnecessary worry. However, causing unnecessary worry with fear campaigns is clearly not something that concerns the opposition when it comes to home insulation. Throughout this process we have seen attempts by the opposition to undermine the industry and distort the facts. Just last month, the Leader of the Opposition told an audience of business leaders in Melbourne that the government had installed 'combustible batts' in homes across the country. This might be one of the Leader of the Opposition's one-liners that he goes around repeating. In his budget reply speech there were a few one-liners to get the audience laughing—the opposition are full of negativity but have absolutely no plan. While the opposition leader seeks to undermine confidence, provide inaccurate information and denigrate properly done work by reputable installers, we on the government benches will continue to work to restore confidence in this industry.

This bill represents yet another political stunt from the opposition. Rather than assisting the industry, a royal commission would open this issue yet again, treading over ground that has already been covered through a number of inquiries that the government has previously supported and undertaken into the closure of the program. As I have stated, the government intends to restore confidence in the industry. The retrofit residential insulation industry is worthy of support. If you listened to the opposition you would think that somehow all insulation was bad. In fact, insulation is an effective way to improve the energy efficiency of homes. It keeps heat in during winter and lets heat out during summer. In terms of bang for your buck, it is one of the best things that householders can do to improve comfort and save energy in their homes. But you would not know that from listening to the opposition. The government's focus is on restoring confidence in the retrofit residential insulation industry, and I urge the opposition to get behind the government and the industry in this approach.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The time allocated for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

COMMITTEES

Electoral Matters Committee

Appointment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) (12:00): I have received a message from the Senate informing the House of the appointment of senators to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters for the committee's inquiry into funding of political parties and election campaigns. Copies of the message are on the chamber table and details will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings.
BILLS

Sex and Age Discrimination Legislation Amendment Bill 2010

Consideration of Senate Message
Bill returned from the Senate with amendments.
Ordered that the amendments be considered at the next sitting.

Customs Tariff Amendment (2012 Harmonized System Changes) Bill 2011

Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2011

Child Support (Registration and Collection) Amendment Bill 2011

Customs Amendment (Anti-dumping Measures) Bill 2011

Reference to Main Committee

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter—Chief Government Whip) (12:01): by leave—I move:

That the following bills be referred to the Main Committee for further consideration:

Customs Tariff Amendment (2012 Harmonized System Changes) Bill 2011

Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2011

Child Support (Registration and Collection) Amendment Bill 2011

Customs Amendment (Anti-dumping Measures) Bill 2011

Question agreed to.

COMMITTEES

Climate Change, Environment and the Arts Committee

Report

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (12:02): On behalf of the Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and the Arts, I present the committee's report entitled Advisory report on bills referred 24 March 2011, together with the minutes of proceedings.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

Mr ZAPPIA: by leave—The advisory report of the Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and the Arts into bills referred on 24 March 2011 considers three bills relating to the proposed establishment of a carbon farming initiative; namely, the Carbon Credits (Carbon Farming Initiative) Bill 2011; the Carbon Credits (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2011; and the Australian National Registry of Emissions Units Bill 2011. The Selection Committee referred these bills to the committee on 24 March 2011. The bills were also referred by the Senate to its Environment and Communications Legislation Committee on 25 March 2011. The two committees have therefore conducted parallel inquiries into these bills.

Before I turn to the content of the bills I draw the attention of the House to the fact that concurrent referral of identical bills to committees of both houses is a rare occurrence. However, under the new parliamentary arrangements in the 43rd parliament, and particularly the expanded role of the Selection Committee, it is possible that this may occur more frequently. The committee is of the view that, for such reviews to be fully effective, they should avoid perceptions of duplication among inquiry participants and other stakeholders. On this basis, the committee deliberately sought not to duplicate the Senate committee's inquiry but to broaden and extend the range of evidence obtained by the two committees. For this reason, the committee has focused its report on a number of specific issues raised in written submissions and during its public hearing.
The committee heard broad support expressed by inquiry participants for the intent of the bills. The bills were generally welcomed as a means to engage the land sector in greenhouse gas abatement activities and described in terms of the opportunities that would be created. The committee did however note six key areas of concern: additionality, permanence, native title, methodologies, natural resource management plans and perverse outcomes. I will briefly comment on each of these.

The committee found that there was a high degree of uncertainty surrounding the definition of ‘additionality’ and those projects that would be included on the so-called ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ lists. For many, the bill's requirements surrounding permanence were considered excessive and a disincentive to participation. Permanence will apply to sequestration projects, where the requirement is that sequestration must be maintained on a net basis for 100 years. On balance, the committee supported the permanence requirements and the risk of reversal buffer as they are key elements to maintaining the integrity of the scheme and ensuring abatement is genuine. The committee notes that landholders have the freedom to terminate their project at any time by relinquishing credits they have received.

The committee heard a number of issues relating to the bill's treatment of native title and particularly non-exclusive native title. The committee noted that the government is continuing to consult with relevant stakeholders to refine the native title elements of the scheme.

The bills are designed to achieve abatement in a manner that is consistent with protection of the natural environment, and one of the mechanisms to achieve this is a requirement that project proponents consider regional natural resource management plans.

The committee received mixed evidence as to the quality and overall value of these plans and considers that more work is required in this area.

The need for adequate funding to support research and development was a recurrent theme. Specifically, the committee takes the view that support for research and development is essential for methodology development. The committee considered that the government must be rigorous in monitoring impacts of the scheme to avoid perverse outcomes, such as competition with agricultural land or adverse effects on water availability. The committee recognises many concerns centre on how the legislation will be implemented. The committee has urged the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency to make its proposed regulations publicly available as soon as possible. The committee took particular interest in comments surrounding carbon literacy and has urged the department to promote this in both ongoing consultation and implementation of the scheme. Many participants cited the lack of carbon price as a significant impediment to participation in the scheme. However, when questioned, inquiry participants took the view that it was better to proceed with the scheme now than to wait for a price. The committee also took the view, as did a number of participants, that the first review of the scheme, scheduled for 2014, will be an opportunity to review and refine it. The committee has therefore recommended that each of the three bills be passed, and my colleagues on the committee look forward to hearing the views of the members of this House on the proposed legislation when it is debated.

I take the opportunity to thank my colleagues on the committee and also the secretariat for the work they undertook in order to assist the committee with its findings on this matter. As you would be
aware, Madam Deputy Speaker Burke, as a member of that committee, there was a huge amount of work undertaken in order to try to bring this matter back to the House as quickly as possible. I thank all members who participated. I commend the report to the House.

Dr WASHER (Moore) (12:08): by leave—I rise to speak on the advisory report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and the Arts on bills referred on 24 March 2011. As the committee chair has noted, this report considers three bills relating to the proposed establishment of a carbon farming initiative, namely: the Carbon Credits (Carbon Farming Initiative) Bill 2011, the Carbon Credits (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2011 and the Australian National Registry of Emissions Units Bill 2011.

This legislation has multiple objectives. Firstly, it seeks to help Australia to meet its objectives under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto protocol to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Secondly, it intends to create incentives for people to undertake land sector abatement projects. Thirdly, it seeks to achieve carbon abatement in a manner that is consistent with protection of the natural environment. The committee heard about the opportunities that the proposed scheme will create for engagement in land sector-based greenhouse gas abatement projects. That said, as the chair has outlined, there were a number of issues raised with the committee and I will specifically focus on some of them.

In the report the committee has recognised the need for ongoing consultation with a number of stakeholders. The committee heard evidence about the bill's treatment of native title, for example, and the issues that this has raised for non-exclusive native title holders. The committee is also aware of the concerns of the WA government about the relationship between native title holders and other stakeholders under the bill. In this regard, I note that the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency has stated at paragraph 4.51 of the explanatory memorandum of the Carbon Credits (Carbon Farming Initiative) Bill:

Given the practical and legal complexity of the interaction of the scheme with native title, the Government intends to undertake further consultation with a broad range of stakeholders and complete detailed legal analysis before reflecting a considered approach in amendments to the bill.

The committee has supported ongoing consultation on this issue. Generally comments about consultation have been positive so the committee is optimistic that a satisfactory solution can be achieved. The committee also emphasised that consultation should be ongoing with key stakeholders who have identified disincentives to participation in the scheme. The committee also recognises the need for improved carbon literacy among landholders and potential participants in the scheme.

The committee found that the uncertainty surrounding matters that are to be addressed in regulations, such as the positive and negative lists, was a significant issue. The committee concluded that the government should make the proposed regulations for the scheme publicly available as soon as possible. For many people it will be this detail that will determine the level of support and participation.

The committee received a range of evidence about possible perverse outcomes. Environmental groups emphasised that carbon credits issued under the scheme must represent verifiable, genuine additional abatement. Others commented upon the
potential impacts on water availability and biodiversity. Several participants also told us that the scheme could lead to competition for agricultural land and land use change, leading to community, economic and social impacts. The need for adequate funding to support research and development, especially in the development of methodologies, was raised by many. The committee considers that support for the research and development that is essential to methodology development must be forthcoming.

In conclusion, while recognising that the government is continuing to undertake consultation and refine operation of the scheme, the committee took the view that the principle of the bills should be supported. On behalf of the opposition members of the committee, we believe that key issues need to be resolved through the Senate process with appropriate amendments including but not limited to: permanence, additionality, protection of Western Australian sovereignty of land use, transparency of the regulations and protection of prime agricultural land. I commend the report to the House.

Procedure Committee Report

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (12:13): On behalf of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure, I present the committee's report entitled Interim report: monitoring and review of procedural changes implemented in the 43rd parliament, together with the minutes of proceedings. I seek leave to make a short statement in connection with the report.

Leave granted.

Ms OWENS: The outcome of the federal election on 21 August 2010, and the finely balanced numbers, provided an opportunity for non-aligned members to pursue a more open parliament by seeking to change some of the habits and practices that had been developed over decades of substantial majority governments on both sides. Changes to House practice and procedure to support a new style of parliament were agreed during the negotiations between the political parties and non-aligned members in the period between the election and the formation of government. They were expressed in the Agreement for a better parliament: parliamentary reform and are embodied in procedural changes, many of which were in amendments to the standing orders that were introduced into the House and passed on 29 September 2010, the second sitting day of the current parliament. The agreement was founded on the role of all members being the role of local members and the parliament's institutional role and authority separate from executive government. It sought cultural as well as procedural change. When the changes to standing orders were made, it was contemplated that their impact would be monitored and commented on at an early stage by the Procedure Committee. At the time the committee began this report, the House had sat for just five weeks, enough time to make some early observations but insufficient time to comprehensively review the changes in action. Consequently, this interim report will be followed by a more considered report after there has been more time to observe the impact of the changes.

As part of its initial review, the committee held discussions with the Speaker, the Clerk, party whips and members. On behalf of the committee, I take this opportunity to thank those colleagues who attended for their time and contribution to what were constructive discussions. I also thank those who provided written submissions to the committee's inquiry.

In keeping with the Procedure Committee's responsibility to scrutinise the practices and procedures of the House, this
report is principally a technical review. It sets out the various changes agreed to and the means by which they are being implemented. It does not evaluate them as substantive and fulfilling of initial hopes or otherwise. It documents the early days, tells of the initial reactions of members and suggests some initial fine-tuning. The word 'reform' connotes improvement and correction. Whether the 43rd parliament ushered in a period of procedural reform and strengthening of the parliamentary institution or simply a period of change—of a different framework—remains to be seen, as does whether or not the objectives of the changes have been met or will be met.

I would like to take this opportunity to raise one issue that was presented strongly by backbenchers from both sides of parliament, and that is the length of the sitting day and the increased workload of the additional sitting hours. I am not sure that it is ever politically wise to raise the issue of working hours as a member of parliament but I am well aware from the contributions of my colleagues that it is not wise to be silent on this matter, either. Members of parliament recognise that parliamentary work is the central role of representatives, but members of parliament have the same responsibility as all members of the community to consider the balance between their health, their ability to do quality work and a healthy relationship with family. Many members of parliament regularly work 12-hour days both in parliament and in their electorates, but there is a strong view that the new hours, which extend the parliamentary days beyond that, are not sustainable. Consequently, we have asked for a moderation of hours at this early stage of the review process.

I conclude by thanking my colleagues on the committee for their work and the secretariat for their support throughout the course of the inquiry. I commend the report to the House.

**BILLS**

**Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2011-2012**

**Appropriation Bill (No. 2) 2011-2012**

**Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 1) 2011-2012**

_Seed Reading_

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (12:18): I was very proud to be able to sit in the chamber for my first budget as a member of this parliament and government and listen to the Treasurer deliver a strong budget that will deliver so much opportunity for so many Australians. It is a budget true to the values of the Labor Party—true to our commitment to education, to training and skills, to better public infrastructure, to better health care and to support for families. It continues our commitment to the dignity of work and making sure that all Australians are given to the right tools, the right incentives and the right opportunities to succeed. It is a good Labor budget that makes the difficult and challenging decision to keep our economy strong while ensuring that those who need assistance are not left behind. The budget builds on Labor's strong economic record and will ensure that we are back in the black by 2012-13. It is good for Australia and it is good for Canberra. I am very proud of this budget.

I am a person deeply committed to education. As I have mentioned time and again, I believe that education holds the answer to many of society's problems. It is, as I have said before, the great empowerer. It transforms a person. It not only provides a means to make a living but also creates a positive identity and a sense of purpose. I was therefore very pleased to see that this
budget includes such a strong focus on education, particularly in the provision of skills and trades. I have been a strong advocate of vocational and trade education since the late 1980s, when I was president of the student union at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. The RMIT is the oldest workers college in the world and has a long and proud tradition of educating carpenters, electricians, plumbers, engineers and architects to name just a few of its streams.

Unfortunately, vocational and trades education was neglected under the Howard government, which has resulted in the massive skills shortage that we currently face in this nation, a skills shortage that left unchecked could impact on Australia's productivity. It was not that long ago that I spoke in this place about the difficulty of getting a tradesperson in Canberra and the impact that this was having on the economy and growth of this city. In fact, I was reminded about the cost of Canberra's skills shortages when we called in a plumber on Saturday. He was there for 15 minutes and we were charged $440.

The budget includes over $500 million for a new Workforce Development Fund to provide funding for training and workforce development in areas of both current and future need. Under this program, business and professional associations will be able to apply for funding, ensuring that training is driven by the needs of the workforce, creating a direct link between training, workforce development and growth. It is expected that this fund will deliver 100,000 new training places over four years. This budget also invests over $100 million to help mentor apprentices through their training. This important program stems from the findings of the Apprenticeships for the 21st Century expert panel, which highlighted the need to improve apprentice retention. Currently only 48 per cent of apprentices complete their training, and retention is particularly difficult in the first year. This program is aimed at providing the right guidance and mentoring to young apprentices to make sure they understand and can benefit from the opportunities of learning a trade—opportunities I strongly underscored to the bricklayers I recently met at CITEA, in the electorate of my colleague the member for Fraser. As I said, they will be the self-employed millionaires of the future. If nothing else, Saturday's experience affirmed that. The program will also provide targeted mentoring to particularly vulnerable groups who face additional barriers to participation, such as Indigenous Australians and people from a remote or regional area.

CITEA trains all sorts of apprentices, some from difficult backgrounds who have faced many challenges. CITEA's staff know firsthand the difficulties these apprentices face and the challenges they must still overcome. However, they also know the changes that can happen in someone's life when they learn a trade and how it can transform a person and give them purpose. That is why the apprentices and staff I met at CITEA were very encouraged by the focus on trades and skills in this budget—in particular, the mentoring package—because it will mean they will have more support to continue the great work they are already doing.

This skills package also includes $100 million to develop a new apprenticeship model to deliver high-quality skills more quickly and a $281 million support package for additional tax-free payments to encourage apprentices in critical trades. The $1,700 bonus is expected to support 200,000 apprentices over four years. In all, over 4,000 apprentices in my own electorate of Canberra may benefit from these investments in their skills.
This budget also continues Labor's proud heritage of delivering quality health care to all Australians. We were, after all, the party that introduced a universal healthcare system to this country with Medibank. We are investing $2.2 billion in mental health care over five years, and we are doing this because we recognise that nearly all Australians either will suffer from a mental illness or will know someone who suffers from a mental illness at some point in their lives. This package will reform a system that is, at times, driven by crisis. The package will now focus on early intervention and prevention. We are investing an additional $1.5 billion of new money into mental health, which complements our recent measures, including $443 million to tackle the problem of suicide. Our package includes $492 million for prevention and early intervention services for children and $220 million to improve access to the primary healthcare system for people with mental illness.

One in four Australians aged between 16 and 24 will experience a mental illness or substance abuse disorder, but only 25 per cent of these people will access help. This is why we are investing in the continued sustainability and expansion of the Headspace program. By 2015-16 there will be 90 Headspace sites, meaning that thousands of young Australians will not have to deal with this crisis alone. It is estimated that at its full capacity 72,000 young Australians will be helped through Headspace each year—a huge figure. I am proud that this government is continuing Labor's tradition in health care, in this case the development of a national mental health system.

This is a budget that also helps small business. There are approximately 2.7 million small businesses in Australia, accounting for around 96 per cent of Australian business. Up until August last year I ran one of those businesses, so I know firsthand the pressures and challenges faced by people in small business. That is why this government will make changes to allow small business to claim up to $5,000 as an immediate tax deduction for motor vehicles acquired in 2012-13. The government will also reduce pay-as-you-go instalments for 2011-12 for the majority of small businesses. This will have the benefit of freeing up cash flow for 2.7 million small businesses. As a former small business owner, I can attest that this development is most welcome. This budget also provides $7.1 million to continue the Small Business Support Line. This line has already received 30,000 calls and emails and is widely appreciated by small business owners.

Earlier this month I held my first free forum on how to start your own small business, because during my 10 years in business I was constantly asked how to go about setting one up. The forum gave me the opportunity to outline the basic steps. During the forum, potential small business owners were also linked with mentors and support services. In my discussions with those who attended, I found that they were very pleased with the actions of this government in providing support to them.

This is also a budget that continues this government's commitment to supporting the development of our near neighbours. Two-thirds of the world's poor live in our region. Eighteen of our nearest 20 neighbours are developing countries. Apart from the strong moral imperative to help those less fortunate than ourselves, it is also in our national interest. By ensuring that our neighbours have access to food and clean water, to health care and to education, we build trading partners and help to combat regional instability and terrorism. For all of those reasons, this government is committed to
helping those in extreme poverty. This budget includes $1.9 billion over four years for new measures. This includes $492.8 million to expand Australia's development partnership with Indonesia, $124.5 million to improve enrolment and completion rates in education in the Pacific islands and $433.1 million to improve water sanitation and hygiene internationally but with a particular focus on the Asia-Pacific. We do this in spite of the call from those opposite, because we know it is in Australia's interests and that it is the right thing to do.

Finally, I could not leave my speech here on the budget without addressing some of the statements made by those opposite, in particular the calls to slash and burn the Public Service. I said in my first speech in this chamber that I would defend Canberra and those Canberrans who dedicate their lives to serve their country and to deliver critical services. I said in my first speech that public service should be lauded, not derided. The member for North Sydney continues to talk about the impact of this budget on families but so glibly ignores the impact of the opposition's policies on 12,000 Public Service families, many of them in Canberra. It is as if public servants are not people—as if they are not mothers or fathers or sisters or brothers. The fact is that federal Labor continues to provide a stable employment base across the Commonwealth Public Service despite the challenging global economic conditions and unprecedented national disasters. Labor is still on track to return the budget to surplus in 2012-13. So ill-considered are the opposition's policies on the public service, they cannot even get the numbers right. The member for North Sydney claims that the Public Service has increased by 20,000 under the Labor government; the truth is that it is less than half that figure.

Mr Hockey: Your budget papers are wrong then.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DGH Adams): Order! Member for North Sydney, there are standing orders of the House and they will be upheld.

Ms BRODTMANN: When the member for North Sydney talks about an organisation that delivers the best services to our citizens, and supports the activities of Australians across our country and around the world, he has a responsibility to get his numbers right. To so recklessly condemn 12,000 families to unemployment—and to seem to do so with such little concern and inaccurate figures—makes me wonder how he expects to run this economy. He is a risk to Canberra and a risk to Australia.

This budget is a strong budget that delivers on key reforms to health and education and to the structure of the economy. Most importantly, it is a Labor budget that is good for Australia and good for Canberra. It is the right budget for its time and I commend it to the House.

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney) (12:31): I would hope the member for Canberra does not leave at this time because I would like to respond to an issue that she chose to raise. There are three pieces of legislation here that the parliament is being asked to deal with, and two of them are explicitly appropriation bills. Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2011-2012 is the primary budget bill to appropriate money from the Consolidated Revenue Fund for 'the ordinary annual services of government and related purposes', and that is $72.85 billion. There is a second bill, the Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 1) 2011-2012. The key purpose of this bill is to appropriate funds from the Consolidated Revenue Fund for expenditure within parliamentary departments. This totals $180 million. I note that the Department of
the Senate appropriation is $22 million, the Department of the House of Representatives appropriation is $23 million and the Department of Parliamentary Services appropriation is $135 million.

The third bill we are being asked to vote upon, which I would like to talk a little bit more about, is the Appropriation Bill (No. 2) 2011-2012. This bill has two key purposes. The first is to allow annual appropriations for services that are not the ordinary annual services of government, including portfolio allocations and allocations to particular states and territories. But it is the second part of Appropriation Bill (No. 2) 2011-2012 where the coalition will be seeking to move amendments later in this debate to appropriately reflect the significance of the proposed amendment to the Commonwealth Inscribed Stock Act to increase the limit 'on the face value of stock and securities' that can be on issue under the Treasurer's standing borrowing authority. The total appropriation in this bill is $7.4 billion. We do not have any dispute with the appropriations. We stay clear to our word that we will not oppose appropriations.

What is rather interesting is the fact that this government has chosen to roll amendments to the Commonwealth Inscribed Stock Act into an appropriation bill. This is clearly in defiance of the recent precedent, which was the Commonwealth Inscribed Stock Amendment Act 2009. The government has done this in a manner that seeks to remove substantive debate about the fact that they want to increase the borrowing capacity of the Commonwealth from $200 billion to $250 billion. When the last amendment to the Commonwealth Inscribed Stock Act occurred it was under a separate piece of legislation that specifically increased the borrowing limit of the Commonwealth by $125 billion, from $75 billion to $200 billion.

From memory, at that time it was the Minister for Finance and Deregulation who introduced the bill. He did not have much to say about it at the time. When we specifically asked questions about it there was nothing more than obfuscation from the then Prime Minister and the Treasurer in response. However, I well recall a speech I gave on 4 February 2009 in relation to that bill. At that time, I pointed out that the change to the borrowing limit of the Commonwealth was not an appropriation and therefore that bill, which represented little more than one page, would inevitably be the beginning and not the end of the borrowing program of the Commonwealth.

There were lots of critics but I would say to you that I was right. Here we have buried in an appropriation bill an amendment to the Commonwealth Inscribed Stock Act that allows for a blanket increase in the borrowing limit of the Commonwealth from $75 billion to $200 billion. Previously there needed to be a declaration by the Treasurer but now the Treasurer is seeking to waive that declaration and simply have the money allocated instead. The Treasurer will say, 'This is an appropriation because there is a section in the Appropriation Bill (No. 2) that allocates for an appropriation to buy back our securities.' The fact of the matter is that in this budget the government is saying that it is getting back to surplus. Reading the press conference of the Leader of the House yesterday, you would have thought that the government has actually delivered a surplus. Frankly, no, that is not the case. It is not delivering a surplus this year, as the budget papers quite explicitly reveal. In 2009-10 the underlying cash balance was $54.8 billion; in 2010-11 it will be $49.4 billion, which is a significant deterioration from what was in MYEFO; and in 2011-12 the deficit will be $22.6 billion. The appropriation bill that the parliament is actually going to vote on
allows for a deterioration in the budget deficit, not an improvement in the budget cash bottom line, and that is all at a time, as the budget papers reveal, when the economy is going to grow faster—it is going from 2¼ per cent growth in 2010-11 to four per cent growth. So the economy is growing faster, but the deficit is getting bigger.

We often hear the government talk about how it is going to create half a million jobs. In fact, business creates jobs, although I will come back to the Commonwealth Public Service in a moment. But employment growth is actually slowing, from 2¼ per cent today to 1½ per cent in the forecast period, 2011-12 to 2012-13. Far from it being a badge of honour that the government is overseeing an economy creating half a million jobs, it actually represents a slowdown in the pace of employment growth. On top of all that, the unemployment rate is expected to grow from five per cent in the current year—a little below actually but in the reported figures it is five per cent—to 4¼ per cent and then 4½ per cent.

This is a failed Labor budget. The truest words the Treasurer said on budget night were that it is a Labor budget. It is a Labor budget: it has growing debt, a growing deficit and slowing jobs growth. However, the government inherited the best terms of trade in nearly 140 years. As I illustrated to the Press Club the other day, when you look at the graph that is in the budget papers about the terms of trade you will see emphatically that the terms of trade have been far more generous to the current government than they were to even the previous government. The government is fond of saying that we had rivers of gold in mining boom mark 1. As I said at the Press Club, it is all part of one mining boom. If you look at the terms of trade graph—and few have bothered to do that—you will see a continuation of the generous terms of trade from, effectively, 2005-06 onwards.

This is a Labor budget because the gains have been squandered, because the opportunity has been lost and because the Labor Party has chosen, yet again, to increase the size of the Commonwealth debt without proper explanation. I imagine that is the most frustrating issue for everyday Australians. This government is asking everyday Australians to cut their own costs and to rein in the family budget, yet the government is failing to do so itself.

It is rather disappointing that the member for Canberra repeats allegations made by the Special Minister of State about staffing levels but does not stand by to hear the explanations, which are in the government’s own budget papers. I urge the member for Canberra to read her own budget papers—page 6-51 of Budget Paper No. 1, Estimates of Average Staff Levels: 2006-07, 238,623; and then 248,214; up to 250,566; up to 258,321; up to 261,891; and up to 262,995 in 2011-12. I give credit to this government. I said business was in the business of creating half a million jobs, but the government is giving it a fair old shake. It is employing 1,100 more public servants in this budget alone, 200 of which are in the Prime Minister’s own department. The old Treasurer has got a bit of an increase, too—50. In our day we used to boast that Treasury was quite a lean department. The Public Service has increased by more than 20,000 employees since Labor was elected. The government says, ‘Where are your cuts?’ and we say, ‘Well, we are going to have to make 12,000 public servants based in Canberra redundant within two years,’ through natural attrition, I should say. It asks where are our cuts. On the one hand, it says that our cuts are phoney but, on the other hand, it accuses us of cutting the Public Service.
This is a typical Labor budget that leaves everyday Australians behind. How? Because everyday Australians are struggling with increased costs of living. They are the forgotten Australians. They are not just the forgotten people or, as my leader said, the forgotten families; they are the forgotten small businesses, the forgotten pensioners, the forgotten self-funded retirees and the forgotten veterans. Whilst there is a huge and significant benefit associated with the mining boom, unless there is the opportunity for others to participate—if they become the victims of the transition in the Australian economy rather than the beneficiaries of it—Australians will become resentful. They will do that on the back of the rising cost of living. Bananas are at $3.50 now and the defenders of the government say, 'Oh, that was Cyclone Yasi.' Yes, it was. There is always an excuse, and often they are legitimate. But it is what people have to pay for, such as more for rents and housing, for electricity, for water and sewerage, for education and for health. Yes, there may well be 1,000 good excuses, but the bottom line is that everyday Australians are feeling the pain associated with a higher cost of living. The government is making it worse by imposing a carbon tax, by imposing a mining tax and by imposing a flood levy. If you want the simple answer as to how the coalition will reduce the everyday burden of the cost of living, look no further: we oppose the flood levy, we oppose the mining tax and we oppose the carbon tax. They are taxes on Australians and they will flow through in one form or another to every Australian. You can only squeeze the lemon so hard. On top of all of that, as so many economists have pointed out rather emphatically, it is the case that there is nothing in this budget that is going to reduce the upward pressure on interest rates.

My colleague, the shadow minister for finance and member for Goldstein, will have something to say about the sneaky way this government has put in an increase in the credit card limit of the Commonwealth to $200 billion. From our perspective, as I said at the National Press Club, this budget was a lost opportunity. This budget was the last chance to do something for everyday Australians and, typical of a Labor budget, they blew it.

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (12:46): The one thing this budget confirms is that unelected miners are writing the skills, immigration, fiscal and revenue policies of this country. Budgets are about more than dollars and cents and balancing the books; they are about setting priorities for the government and, as a result, the nation. They are budgets to find the economic goal settings of the months and years ahead and, as a result, shape the life of the country for the times to come. In short, budgets define a vision and a plan for Australia. This budget was an opportunity to define a new direction for this country. Unfortunately, whilst there were some small steps down the right path, there were no giant leaps down the path of sustainability, compassion and equality.

There are five key things this budget should have done to ensure Australia's prosperity. Firstly, go through our spending with a Green eraser and redirect about $10 billion in subsidies away from fossil fuel industries and use them to fund clean energy skills and industry policy that would make Australia a world leader. Secondly, assist those parts of the economy struggling from a high Australian dollar and the pressures associated with the mining boom. Thirdly, safeguard Australia's future by establishing a sovereign wealth fund which could pay for the green infrastructure Australia needs, like high-speed rail. Fourthly, rethink the $3.1 billion big business corporate tax cut in light of the decline in revenue and the government's cave-in on the mining tax.
Fifthly, help the tens of thousands of refugees and migrants already in this country, who have great skills and capacity and are either unemployed or underemployed, before going for a cheap quick-fix of imported labour. Instead, we had more of the quarry vision that has dominated the thinking of successive governments in this country.

In short, this is a miners' budget. It is a miners' budget that aims to stoke the fires of the mining boom but puts little into preparing for when the boom might end. It is a miners' budget that fails to protect the structural revenue base of the government and, instead, hands back money to the big corporations including the big mining giants. It is a miners' budget that penny pinches from the poor and cuts government programs because of its unwillingness to take on the mining magnates. It is a miners' budget that squanders the opportunity to prepare for the future through starting a process of establishing a sovereign wealth fund, despite recommendations from Treasury and most credible economist.

There are good things in this budget. The investment in mental health, a first down payment on the Greens' plan for a dental healthcare scheme and reform to the fringe benefits tax are long overdue and are to be welcomed. One cannot escape the fact that lack of political courage to stare down the miners or break out of the political straitjacket and arbitrary timeline for return to surplus means this budget and this government is not taking on the big tasks facing this country. Political courage is what is needed—political courage to stare down an opposition leader who is so focused on winning that any semblance of economic responsibility has been jettisoned; political courage to take on the big polluters, who have joined the opposition leader in a fear campaign against one of the most important reforms this country will ever undertake, which is crucial to our economic prosperity and, I believe, our survival as a viable nation; political courage to really think beyond the mining boom, not just rhetorically but concretely, and to put in place a plan for our economic future.

Last week the President of the United States, Barack Obama, showed great political courage when he gave a very important speech setting out the United States' policy towards the Middle East and North Africa, supporting the wonderful movements towards democracy and shifting US policy on Israel and Palestine. But, in the same speech, he also made clear what he saw as the future for economic development in the region and the world. He said:

… some nations are blessed with wealth in oil and gas, and that has led to pockets of prosperity. But in a global economy based on knowledge, based on innovation, no development strategy can be based solely upon what comes out of the ground …

Every current and future Australian Treasurer should put those words on their desk or office wall and read them every day. It is this insight, this common sense, which is prevalent in the US but is missing from this budget.

Yes, Australia is an enormously wealthy country and the economy is booming. We have emerged strongly from the global recession, partly because of an economic stimulus package, which was backed and improved by the Greens, which created hundreds of thousands of jobs. Now, as the budget papers show, the mining boom is driving growth in the economy, investment in mining will amount to $76 billion by the end of this financial year and we will have the highest terms of trade in 140 years. Unless we manage this boom properly, and unless we are prepared to take the gains and invest them wisely in other areas of the
economy and prepare for the future, we will have squandered an enormous opportunity. As we know, and as the budget papers reinforce, we are in a two-speed economy and the pressures of this two-speed economy are having negative impacts on non-mining sectors. In my own state of Victoria, which does not share in the direct benefits of the boom in mining projects in the same way as others, the costs of this two-speed economy are increasingly obvious. The demand in the mining sector is putting upward pressure on labour and capital costs and restricting investment, particularly in infrastructure, and the higher dollar, in part driven by the mining boom, is making it harder for manufacturers, tourism and our international education sectors. But this budget has no real plan for these problems and they are mirrored in many other areas of the economy.

With the exception of a passing mention of aged care, the investment in skills training is focused on propping up those sectors that are doing well already. The investment in skills is welcome, but it is distorted by the needs of the big miners, with its stated purpose being to support the resources sector. It is in effect a skills budget for a one-speed economy. Even then, much of the spending is back-ended and pushed out past the forward estimates. Thirty-five per cent of the National Workforce Development Fund does not kick in until 2014-15. The funding of $3 billion to reform training goes beyond the forward estimates and a third comes from existing programs. The $558 million National Workforce Development Fund takes $200 million of funding from the existing Critical Skills Investment Fund.

The holy grail of reforming vocational education and training is a worthwhile quest many governments have promised to follow before, but its success will rely on cooperation from the states and the $1.75 billion in spending allocated in the budget is not there until 2012-13 and is then spread over five years, with $800 million taken from the existing Productivity Places Program. For all the rhetoric on building the future workforce, there is no specific plan to train people for the new clean economy. Regardless of the worth of this skill package, it hardly adds up to a comprehensive plan to deal with the two-speed economy and it certainly does not equate with a plan for our economic future after the mining boom.

Whilst the average national unemployment rate is currently about 4.9 per cent, there is a group of people who were not mentioned in the budget at all—that is, those who have come here in humanitarian and refugee streams and their families, amongst whom the current unemployment rate is around 11.7 per cent. The unemployment level for tertiary educated migrants from non-English-speaking countries is four times higher than their Australian-born counterparts. If you are a tertiary educated migrant from a non-English-speaking country and are lucky enough to have a job, you are twice as likely as an Australian counterpart to be working in a low-skilled occupation. The Greens believe everything must be done to support local workers in employment, including the tens of thousands here under humanitarian and family programs, before we fly in short-term workers. Away from the glare of the budget spotlight, miners have again shown their capacity for unwarranted influence by securing a government back down on the $5,000 local training levy that was originally the other half of the deal to import overseas workers via enterprise migration agreements. At an absolute minimum, the $5,000 levy should be reinstated.

Many members of this place would know the former member for Melbourne Lindsay Tanner. He has had many interesting things
to say in the last few weeks about the sideshows that have come to dominate the media cycle and much of politics, but he has also said that a key question for Australia is: what will we sell the rest of the world in 15 years time? I think it is a good question. This budget's answer to that question is coal, but we need a better answer. We need a real industry policy to ensure the long-term sustainability and growth of the manufacturing sector in this country. We need a plan for the tourism and services sectors of the economy and we need a plan for education, innovation, science and technology. Instead, we have seen small but significant cuts to the areas of research. To the government's credit, we did not see mooted cuts to the National Health and Medical Research Council, which the Greens opposed and were the subject of a spirited public campaign led by scientists from my electorate of Melbourne. However, we did see cuts to the cooperative research centres' budgets and other areas of science that again represent a failure to understand what President Obama is warning us about. I believe investment in science and innovation combined with strong industry policies is the key to Australia's future economic prosperity. It is investment in research and development that will be crucial to the clean energy revolution, will define the 21st century economy and will enable us to tackle climate change. It is investment in science and innovation that will enable us to create sustainable industries that can take us beyond the mining boom.

We only get to dig up our minerals once. We need to follow the lead of other countries that have had large resource wealth and put in place a sovereign wealth fund, a fund that can enable us to take the gains of the mining boom and fund the infrastructure and industry policies that will be needed over the coming century and help us make a transition to an economy that is beyond that of a quarry vision. This budget could have made a start on that task by establishing a sovereign wealth fund. There are about 37 countries that have such funds. There is currently $5 trillion in sovereign wealth funds around the world and this will double to $10 trillion by 2015. Under the coalition, and now under Labor, the mining boom has been squandered. There are many investments a sovereign wealth fund could make. For example, it could underpin investments in important future infrastructure such as high-speed rail, which could rapidly carry Australians in clean, fast, efficient and cheap transport from Sydney via Canberra to Melbourne in three to four hours. The Greens would fund that through a proper resource take from the mining giants.

On 2 May last year, Prime Minister Rudd and Treasurer Swan announced that they would introduce the mining super-profits tax based on the Henry tax review. The mining industry campaigned against the tax, spending $22 million on an advertising campaign and as a result they got $100 billion stripped out of the people's revenue over the next decade. Of course, the Leader of the Opposition's plan is worse. He opposes a mining tax altogether, which would strip $140 billion over the next decade compared with the Henry recommendations. So the mining corporations, who employ just two per cent of Australians, would under the opposition leader's plan deprive the other 98 per cent of $140 billion over the coming decade. We now know that the mining tax should have been framed to collect little in the early years but crank up in the second half of the decade, but unfortunately the mining tax agreed to by the Treasurer and set out in this budget looks as if it will behave like the fuel excise—falling as a share of GDP when the budget in fact needs it to grow. At the same time, this budget
continues with the government's plan for a cut to the corporate tax rate, letting the big corporations keep another $3.1 billion in their pockets at the expense of the taxpayer. The Greens support a tax cut for small business. Small business provides 47 per cent of total employment, or around five million jobs, in this country. Compare that with the mining industry's 206,000 jobs. And we would also take to the budget with a green razor. We would remove the fossil fuel subsidies, which total between $10 billion and $12 billion a year, including fuel tax credits, which add up to $5 billion a year. We would keep the fuel tax credits for farmers, which cost just $680 million of that $5 billion.

These tax credits means that, while ordinary Australians pay 38c tax per litre of fuel, the big mining corporations pay nothing. So every time an everyday Australian goes to the petrol browser they know they are paying 38c more in tax than these massively wealthy mining corporations getting their fuel in the same country.

This budget continues the 'quarry vision' of past governments; trapped in the headlights of the China boom, the government cannot see what might be coming in the future. This budget fails to give a boost to those in the slow lane of the economy; instead the government has chosen to put a foot on the accelerator of those in the fast lane.

The mining boom offers enormous opportunities but they are not being taken. We can start to plan for a different direction and a different future. We can ensure our future economic prosperity beyond the mining boom. An innovative economy, prosperous and sustainable, with compassion and equality, is possible; we just need the political courage to get there.

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of The Nationals) (13:01): No wonder there were so many leaks before budget night; this budget was never going to hold water! There were no surprises left by budget night; Labor had cynically leaked all sorts of stories so that they could get uncritical media coverage over the week leading up to the budget. Now that the budget is available for public scrutiny, journalists and the public know why Labor wanted free air for its version of what is in the budget. So much of the rhetoric surrounding this budget was simply empty air, Sussex Street spin, overblown statements which were completely over the top and not reflective of what is actually in this budget. Indeed, this is a budget that lacks vision and lacks direction; there is no plan for the future of this country.

The Prime Minister and the Treasurer have both said on numerous occasions that this is a true Labor budget that underscores Labor values. I think that statement is actually truthful. All the big taxes, all the cuts in particular areas where Labor has always shown a vendetta, are the true Labor values. With overblown rhetoric, they claim enormous programs when, in fact, there is nothing of substance to back them up. A classic and particularly cruel example is the $2.2 billion announcement on mental health. This announcement of funding actually covered up a cut in mental health spending in the 2011 budget. A cut was sold as a $2.2 billion increase in mental health care. The reality is—and the previous member referred to this—that much of the announced expenditure programs are not even in the forward estimates. And that is true of the mental health initiative. There is very little action provided in this budget. You have to wait until beyond 2015 to get this increase in expenditure. So Labor has produced a big program but has not produced the money that is required.
What about the $1.4 billion regional package? Only $300 million of that is provided in the entire forward estimates of this budget. The Independents, who thought they had achieved some kind of breakthrough for regional Australia, have apparently been bought off with just $300 million over four years. That is less than would have been provided in routine programs for regional areas under the previous government. Regional areas, above all, have been very poorly treated by this government in this budget. The classic example of them all is the $1 billion that the minister for infrastructure announced as new funding for the Pacific Highway. In fact, there is not going to be any road built with that money at all.

This budget has no clear vision and no clear plan. There is $19 billion worth of new expenditure initiatives but there is $22 billion worth of cuts. We are told that that made this government really vicious with the knife, that they were really out there to save money and make cuts that really hurt. But one-third of the much lauded $22 billion in spending cuts is actually new taxes. That is not really a cut at all. What it actually is doing things the Labor way. Labor values higher taxes. And, of course, it is the families that will have to bear this load.

Labor's legacy to Australian families since coming to government is really a tale of shame: electricity prices up 51 per cent, water up 40 per cent, health costs up 20 per cent and grocery prices up 14 per cent. Homeowners have endured seven interest rate rises and we have been told to brace for a couple more before year's end. And, of course, inflation is on the march and shows no sign of abating.

Nothing in this federal budget will ease those pressures on families struggling to pay ever increasing bills—in fact, their plight will get worse. Bracket creep will gouge an extra $11.6 billion from Australian families by 2013-14. By doing nothing in this budget to alter tax rates, Labor will in fact be forcing more families into higher tax brackets. This is the first budget in eight or nine years that contains no tax cuts. That is Labor's values all right, that is a Labor style budget. The effect will be that the percentage of the Australian population paying the highest rate of tax will rise from 18 per cent to 24 per cent by 2013-14. A quarter of all taxpayers will be on the top rate—and that is Labor's vision, Labor's values. There is nothing or creative or innovative about that. It is just an outright tax slug.

Then the changes to family tax benefits A and B mean that middle-income earners are worse off. The flood tax is another chip at middle Australia. There was no need for other governments of both political persuasions to have new taxes for Cyclone Tracy, Cyclone Larry and the 10-year drought. Those events did not need special taxes but, under this Labor government, the flooding in Queensland and other states is another excuse to implement yet another Labor tax.

Means testing of the private health insurance rebate is particularly mean and dumb. It slugs people who take responsibility for their own health care and it will see the public hospital queues overrun. In the end it will cost taxpayers twice as much as Labor hopes to save from the cuts. Deloitte, in its study of the impact of these rebate cuts, has estimated that the government will save about $1.9 billion by reducing the rebate but the cost to the public health system of this change will be $3.8 billion. So a cut to the rebate, forcing more people into the public health system, will actually increase the cost of health care to the taxpayers of Australia by $3.8 billion. I know that this is a goal that Labor has been pursuing ever since they
came into office. They hate private health insurance. They hate the private health system and they have been trying to hack away at it. The government has been defeated twice previously in the parliament on this issue and I hope that the Independents and others who have a key influence in this area will realise that the proposition is no better now than when it was defeated on previous occasions. Middle Australia is to be forgiven for feeling under siege by the Gillard government, because, frankly, it is.

While all of this is underway the carbon tax is still to come. The carbon tax is an all-consuming black hole from which there is no escape. It starts on 1 July 2012, like the mining super tax, but there are no details in the budget—except that the government has found $13.7 million to run a publicity campaign to try and ease the public's rightful concern about the fact that this tax will affect them every time they move and every time they seek to do something.

The government has also failed to lift its gaze beyond the urban sprawl, and lacks any vision for regional Australia. People in the bush got some lip service and hollow rhetoric but little by way of new benefits. Take the grand infrastructure claims by Minister Albanese. New funding for flood-proofing Queensland's Bruce Highway might have sounded good as part of the spin but these are exactly the same projects that Labor had canned earlier this year. They just reannounced them and pretended that this, somehow or another, was new money. But the money had been taken from other projects in Queensland. Indeed, two of the most important road-building projects in the whole of the state—Minister Albanese has gone on the public record time and time again advocating their importance—namely, the Ipswich Motorway and the Bruce Highway upgrade from Cooroy to Curra, were canned. Minister Albanese has repeatedly described the Cooroy to Curra section of the Bruce Highway as the most dangerous section of highway in the whole of the state, yet now he is taking $325 million off the reconstruction of this accident prone section of the highway, as well as the Ipswich Motorway, so that he can refund projects he axed only a few months ago.

The Cooroy to Curra section is in my own electorate. In this budget it failed to get the funding it desperately needs so that the project can be continued. Labor has never matched the coalition's commitment to complete this work by 2020; now they have taken money away from a job that is already under construction. This demonstrates clearly that Labor has no commitment to building the infrastructure of Australia; they are just interested in big announcements and big spin. They fail to deliver when it really matters.

The Treasurer told us to expect a billion dollars for the duplication of the Pacific Highway from Sydney to the Queensland border but when you looked at it there was no new money. The billion dollars is made up of $700 million that has been provided previously to the highway and $270 million syphoned from other projects in New South Wales. The minister conceded in his own press release on this billion-dollar announcement that it would not build one centimetre of extra bitumen. If we want some road built the New South Wales government will have to put up the money. There is no duplication; there is just more duplicity from this government.

Then there are the extra 6,000 skilled migrants that will come to regional areas, but that NFF has said that agriculture alone need 80,000 extra skilled positions. But wait: there's less! The Treasurer flagged extra payments to encourage apprentices but
neglected to tell us that agricultural and horticultural apprentices are specifically excluded from the training program. That shows how out of touch this government is with regional life. It increased the fringe benefits tax provisions that directly affects regional businesses and farmers. Regional people have to travel longer distances and they will be hit hardest by these changes to the fringe benefits tax rules.

There has not been a budget since Labor came to office that has not taken the razor to the department of agriculture. Again, another $32.8 million has been slashed from its operational budget. In every budget Labor has slashed expenditure for this department, which is now a shell. It has no capabilities to deliver programs for Australian farmers, in spite of the fact that the farm sector drives $155 billion a year in economic production—12 per cent of GDP—and $32 billion a year in exports and supports 1.6 million Australian jobs.

And the budget continues to perpetrate Labor's flawed approach to the Murray-Darling Basin, cutting $400 million from investment in water-saving infrastructure across the basin. They continue with their lazy buy-out approach, which will not deliver the results that can produce a prosperous and effective regional Australia. Labor promised $1.4 billion for the Regional Development Fund, but it took $400 million out for flood recovery and that left just $1 billion. But on budget night the government only outlaid $300 million over four years—with 70 per cent held off until well after the next election. You have to trust Labor, if it does get re-elected, to produce the money for regional development after the next election. Another example of how Labor treats regional Australians with contempt is the knowledge that over half of the $800 million to be provided for projects in regional Australia is going to build roads around Perth airport. It seems Labor defines regional Australia as the roads around Perth airport. I know the roads around Perth airport need upgrading. The coalition intended to provide funding for that project but from the roads budget, not from the regional development budget. We are told that is another example of Labor's values and how it demonstrates its commitment to the regions.

Despite enjoying the most positive terms of trade in 140 years, Labor is taking us all towards a $107 billion debt. Every day, Labor will have to borrow $135 million and pay $18 million in interest just to pay its bills. This is not a budget that delivers for Australia; it is a budget of debt that lacks vision and will place a huge burden on future generations.

Mr MELHAM (Banks) (13:16): This is the 22nd budget that has been delivered since I entered the parliament in March 1990, and I think it is the same for the previous speaker, Mr Truss. We have seen a lot of budgets in our time and, quite frankly, you can summarise the budget recently delivered by the Treasurer in the following terms, 'It is a budget for the times.' Shortly after this government was elected in 2007, it was confronted with the global financial crisis, a worldwide economic crisis about which the figures are now just in. We were told that if we did nothing there would be an extra 200,000 on the unemployment queues. The government did something. The Labor government engaged in a stimulus package that involved social housing, money for pensioners and money for schools.

When Labor took office in November 2007 there were 10.7 million employed persons in Australia. In April 2011 there were 11.4 million employed persons in Australia. That equates to 734,000 new jobs since Labor came to government. That is a proud record for the Labor Party. That is not
something that just happened and that would not have happened if we had behaved like a moo cow, watching passing traffic and doing nothing. The government was activist. The Labor Party have always held at its core the importance of jobs. Without a job, you cannot pay your mortgage and you cannot protect your family. Underpinning this particular budget is that the rate of unemployment is forecast to fall to 4½ per cent by mid-2013, which will create another half a million jobs. Jobs, jobs, jobs: that is the hallmark of this government.

In the Treasurer's budget speech, he pointed out that in the past year we have created over 300,000 jobs. If one looks around the world, one will see that, while employment in Australia has grown by almost seven per cent since the end of 2007 and 5.3 per cent since the middle of 2008, across the OECD employment has fallen by 1.4 per cent and 1.8 per cent respectively. Employment fell by 14 per cent in Ireland, which has been affected the most by the global financial crisis. Every G7 country has experienced either a fall in employment or negligible jobs growth since the end of 2007 and the middle of 2008, but not Australia. That is because the government has acted appropriately. It has not taken the approach of slashing and burning that the opposition would have—or done nothing, another alternative from the opposition. The opposition have said they would not have done what the government has done since 2007. We now have a period in which to compare our record with the global record, and we stand up as the envy of the rest of the world in relation to our employment situation.

One of the reasons that the public might not have necessarily appreciated what has happened is that there have not been the dole queues that we have been used to in the past—when either side were in government—and a shortening of those queues. What has happened is that jobs have been protected and jobs have been created. I remember going to the opening of some social housing in Hurstville and an employee of the company that had built those houses saying, 'Without the government's involvement in the social housing program, we would have lost our jobs.' You need growth in the economy to create employment. You need the multiplier effect. For every dollar that is put into the economy there is $4 that is washed around the economy, and that goes towards employment. I think the government's priorities are right. These are not easy times. These are difficult times.

We have committed to being back in the black in two years time. No-one has managed to punch a hole in that argument. There has been a bit of rhetoric, but we have not seen a credible economist saying that the budget figures are bodgie or dodgy. It has now been some time since the budget was delivered. The only people who will be unhappy if the budget goes into the black in a couple of years time are the members of the opposition. They are big on rhetoric, but no alternative budget strategy was presented by the Leader of the Opposition on the Thursday night after the budget. They produce a lot of rhetoric but no alternative programs. 'Yes, we'd cut, too,' they say, but they will not tell us where they are going to cut.

As I said, this is, in the main, a budget for the times because, for me, a Labor representative in this place, the most important thing is employment in the community—lowering the unemployment rate, getting it down to 4.5 per cent. I know there is a suggestion that interest rates may go up in the next 12 months. Well, whoop-de-do! Interest rates go up and down, but I am not a slave to interest rates. I do not
apologise; I am a slave to a reduction in unemployment because I have seen the devastation in my community, in Bankstown and Hurstville. I can remember 1996, when the former Keating government was defeated and the subsequent conservative budget came down and slashed and burned. In the space of a couple of years, from 1996 to 1998, youth unemployment in the Canterbury-Bankstown region went from 17½ per cent to 34½ per cent as SkillShare programs were closed down and slashing and burning occurred. I believe there needs to be restraint; I am not arguing against restraint. But we need to do it in an appropriate manner.

I do not apologise for regional Australia getting extra money, because there are extra costs involved in living in regional Australia. I have no problem with creating infrastructure for regional Australia—Queensland and Western Australia—because, without that assistance, those communities would not be able to survive. I believe—and I have said it before in relation to Indigenous Australians—true equality requires differential treatment to bring us up to the same level. That is why I do not have a problem with regional states such as Tasmania, Western Australia and Queensland getting a little extra funding in percentage terms compared to New South Wales and Victoria. In some respects it is easier to produce infrastructure programs in Victoria and New South Wales—although, as has been documented, New South Wales has not had a good record in recent times.

At the federal level, continuing to create employment opportunities requires cooperation with our state colleagues because a lot of the efficiency and a lot of the productivity is going to come out of the states. Instead of Sydney commuters being stuck in ‘parking lots’ on the way to work, the infrastructure there needs to be looked at.

You need to have those roads flowing. You need properly funded public transport. When I was the opposition spokesman on housing and urban development and local government, I was amazed by the number of people who were actually employed within a small distance of their home. These are the issues for Greater Western Sydney on which it is important for us to work with the state government. That government is now of a different political persuasion, but the principles are the same irrespective of the politics of the particular government—to make sure that the people of Western Sydney are not neglected. We need to ensure that because that is where the growth is, in that south-western corridor—future housing development at Bringelly and business development on the old Badgerys Creek site. Our budget is an important budget for driving the economy and no-one has yet come up with any credible debunking of the projections of 500,000 jobs in the next two years and of a reduction to 4.5 per cent unemployment.

The one area of the budget about which I do have reservations relates to the efficiency dividend, which was first introduced in 1986-87. If my mathematics are right, this is its 25th year in operation. The efficiency dividend is designed to get blood out of a rock in relation to the public service. My particular concern arises out of the fact that for the last three years—I was elected on 13 May 2008—I have served this House as a representative on the National Library of Australia Council. That three-year term ended on 12 May. I did not seek to do another term and I note, Mr Deputy Speaker Adams, that you will be representing the House on the National Library of Australia Council.

In the three years that I was a representative, I did not miss a meeting. I had access to a lot of information and I was
able to observe the staff and members of the council. This nation is well served by those on the council and by the staff of the National Library of Australia. I think that is true of the National Archives of Australia, the National Museum of Australia and the Australian War Memorial—all those places that are national institutions, that are cultural institutions. I believe that it is not necessarily appropriate for the efficiency dividend to operate on those cultural institutions the way it operates on other public service bodies. I believe the government should have a look at the overall operation of the efficiency dividend in relation to cultural institutions, because I think increasing the efficiency dividend from 1.25 per cent to 1.5 per cent will do great damage to those cultural institutions.

This is the first time in 22 years that I have spoken against an effective Labor measure and I have done it as the parliament’s representative, and due to the experience I have gained on behalf of the parliament, on the National Library of Australia Council. I believe there has to be another way of extracting those savings, whether they can be obtained from elsewhere in the particular portfolio or whether the government of the day can assist those institutions by quarantining certain aspects of their operations from the efficiency dividend. I think this is a matter that transcends party politics. I do not believe it is something that is being done deliberately, but this is one of those instances where, in my humble opinion, one size does not fit all. That is why, in my view, the operation of the efficiency dividend needs to be looked at in relation to these cultural institutions. There is much being done by all those cultural institutions in terms of the preservation and retaining of our history and our heritage. I know that the National Library is going through a digitisation program. It should not be in a situation where there is some evidence before the Senate estimates committee, which I do not want to fully go into—that was on Monday, 21 February 2011—where there were some details about the effect of the efficiency dividend. Those institutions should be handled in a sensitive way and given a level of flexibility and assistance from the government. You see, we can find money. I know the War Memorial engaged in a wonderful political campaign and got a lot more money than they expected but that is not the conduct the National Library, the Archives or the Museum should have to engage in to, in effect, protect their institutions. The War Memorial did all right. The government was never going to win that debate. I would urge my approach on the government and I know it would have the support of the other side. Senator Trood, who finishes up in June, has been an excellent representative on the council and we worked together without playing politics in this regard. I commend my comments to the government in relation to the efficiency dividend. (Time expired)

Mr ROBB (Goldstein) (13:31): This budget confirmed in my mind that the Gillard government has all the look of one of those dodgy companies before they hit the wall. They put out a glossy annual report, they fill it with heroic assumptions and at the same time their debts continue to grow and on the sly they push for an extension to their credit limit. We have seen these companies. You know when it happens that they have been all front and no substance. It is like a company which has never turned a profit, like this government has never turned a surplus. Everything it touches turns to custard yet they tell us to trust them, that the best years are ahead of us. Does this ring true? Does it sound similar? This is what we have seen now for many months, in fact for years. They implore us to ignore their
dreadful track record and to believe them, as an article of faith, when they claim they are getting back into the black. It is forever in the never-never; they never talk about the present. You have not heard anybody here today on the other side talk about the massive deficit last year and this year, the increased deficit this year over what was expected and the massive deficit next year. They are talking about some time well into the future. As Alan Kohler, a respected economic commentator said:

Any decent CFO would have been embarrassed by this budget. Revenue forecasts made just six months ago have proved to be way too high, yet spending has gone on regardless. What's more the optimistic forecasts remain just as optimistic.

Mr Kohler is on the money. He fingered this. This is a budget where forecasts have been shown to be rubbery and inaccurate again and again, yet the spending continues at this rate. It has the look of a shonky company that is about to hit the wall. The truth is that this government has all the look of a company in distress. It is acting without direction and it is concealing information. No credible company would deliver an annual report which ignored publicly announced revenue and expenditure measures.

The carbon tax, worth in the order of $11½ billion each year, does just this. No credible company would use accounting tricks to remove major new investments from the balance sheet; yet massive new investments are being made without so much as a cost-benefit analysis. So we see what they have done just with that budget treatment of the NBN, what will cost taxpayers $18.2 billion over the forward estimates—and, of course, a lot later—and we see nothing of it. None of the treatment of this NBN is disclosed. If this government were a publicly listed company, all of this information would have to have been disclosed. It would not be good enough for a CFO to ignore continuous disclosure obligations; yet the Treasurer and the Minister for Finance and Deregulation are happy to do just that.

Under the Corporations Act, companies must disclose any information that would have a material effect on the entity's finances. Think about the NBN. Think of the tens of billions of dollars being spent on the NBN. A lot of what is being done—a lot of the assumptions, a lot of the actions, a lot of the decisions—has a material effect on the entity's finance. All of this is withheld, not disclosed. The Corporations Act—an act brought in by a previous government and supported by this government—would require this disclosure of any publicly listed company, yet actions within the Corporations Act required of public companies are ignored by this government.

Despite the fact that every Australian taxpayer is a government shareholder, Labor does not hold itself to the same standards it expects of business. Such is the level of nondisclosure the government, if it were a publicly listed company, would be investigated for a breach of the Corporations Act. In fact, ASIC provides guidance regarding disclosure obligations and the government could do worse than take a note. This budget is all smoke and mirrors. This government has not met its obligations to support the ethical and effective running of the budget in the way in which it requires the ethical and effective running of companies. None of the standard procedures that are required by the Corporations Act and enforced by ASIC apply to the running of the business of government under this administration. It tells you a lot. They are running blind on the other side. There is, in many respects, an administration which is deluding itself. It is an administration which
lacks direction. It is an administration in which the public has lost confidence.

This budget died overnight because it confirmed the view of typical Australians that this government cannot be trusted. What they saw was more of the same. It confirmed the view that has led to the great anxiety that is out there. Why have people across the country in the last 12 months gone from a minus one per cent savings rate to a plus 10 per cent rate? There are unprecedented levels of saving in this country amongst all the mums and dads and others out there. People are anxious. They feel vulnerable. They feel that this government has lost control. They feel that if something happened overseas they would not be prepared. They think that the government is not prepared. This budget confirmed that anxiety. People thought, 'This is just more of the same.' There is no interest in this budget except to the extent that it reinforces people's view that this government is a dysfunctional and dangerous government in many respects.

That 10 per cent increase in savings across the population is a reflection of millions of households who are seeking to live within their means. They feel, despite the great Chinese opportunity that is presented, the way in which we are blessed with resources demanded in the region and the way in which we have got the highest terms of trade in 140 years—despite all of that—that they are burdened by cost of living increases that they are finding insurmountable. They are waking up at night worrying about how they can meet their expenses. They are feeling anxious. They are paying off the mortgage. They are paying off the plastic. They are putting money in the bank. In fact, there has been $75 billion more saved this year by average Australians than is saved under our usual savings rate. People are seeking to live within their means and be in a position to deal with financial stress, yet all the while this government keeps spending, spending, spending; it keeps borrowing, borrowing, borrowing; and it keeps taxing, taxing, taxing.

This is a government that shows no example, is irresponsible, is dysfunctional, has no authority, has no leadership and is creating a crisis of confidence amongst the community. No wonder retail has been under enormous pressure. You take $75 billion out of the normal spending of the Australian community and you put enormous pressure on retail.

While families are trying to live within their means, the government is not. This is exemplified by a couple of numbers in this budget. Before this budget, this government was in the market every day for two years borrowing $100 million a day, competing with small business and mid-sized business, pushing up interest rates, putting enormous pressure on mortgages and, in the process, accumulating more and more debt.

Here is a budget that was supposed to be tough. That is what we got told for weeks: 'This is going to be a tough budget.' Yet, after the budget, it is not $100 million a day that this government is in the market for; it is $135 million a day—pushing up interest rates, denying small and medium sized business money to roll over their commitments, squeezing small business. This is a tofu budget in terms of spending.

Dr Southcott: Not as healthy!

Mr Robb: Certainly not as healthy. The gross debt grows massively under this budget. While the government keep spending, the debt keeps going up and up. It grows massively, and they are trying to tell us they are acting responsibly. Then, in the middle of that, we find buried in Appropriation Bill (No. 2) 2011-2012 an amendment to the Commonwealth Inscribed Stock Act 1911. This has never happened
before. This sort of amendment has never been buried in an appropriation bill. They want to raise the debt ceiling from $200 billion to $250 billion and eliminate the special circumstances clause.

Again, this has all the smell of a dodgy company before it hits the wall: delusional management team, heroic assumptions, never turned a profit and promises that the best years are ahead of us, yet a growing debt while pushing an extension of the credit limit on the sly. The Treasurer, away from the spotlight, had the Assistant Treasurer creep into this House on budget night after the speech was given and quietly introduce what had the appearance of a standard appropriations bill, but on the sly what this government did was slip in a proposal to lift the Commonwealth debt ceiling by another $50 billion. It has already raised it by $150 billion or $125 billion. It hoped nobody would notice. Well, we have noticed and something needs to be done about it. To that end, I move the following second reading amendment:

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:

(1) condemns the government for incorporating in an annual appropriation bill provisions to increase the limit on government borrowings above the total of $200 billion;

(2) recognises that a special case must be made for such a significant increase in borrowing limits and that the government must explain any special circumstances that it believes justify such an increase; and

(3) demands that the parliament be given the opportunity to consider separately and vote on the proposed increases in borrowing limits set out in Part 5 of Appropriation Bill (No. 2) 2001-12 and on any occasion on which the government seeks to increase Commonwealth debt above $200 billion.

If this government is going to be reckless with Australia's money and increase debt willy-nilly while everyone is trying to live within their means, the parliament must scrutinise any increase above $200 billion. It must give its approval. The government must come into this House and, instead of removing the clause for special circumstances, it should be required to explain why this borrowing limit has to increase.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper): Order! I regret that the standing orders require me—it being 1.45—to state that the debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 43. The debate may be resumed at a later hour and the honourable member will have the opportunity of continuing for the balance of his time. The seconding of that amendment will be dealt with at that appropriate time.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Domestic Violence

Mr LAMING (Bowman) (13:45): Domestic violence, whether it is psychological, emotional or physical, is a scourge on society. In last three or four years the national awareness week for domestic violence has fallen away completely and, worse, in the most recent budget by the Treasurer, Wayne Swan, a very paltry $8.5 million over four years was committed to helping practitioners more effectively identify domestic violence and successfully refer cases to referral services.

I ask: what referral services? The Women's Legal Service in Brisbane sees 4,000 people a year and deals with 5,000 through their helpline but turns away 16,000 women and children every year. That is evidence that we are underinvesting in domestic violence services. We need to do more, yet what does this Treasurer do? He cuts $12.2 million through efficiency
savings. What kind of Treasurer moves domestic violence services referral points from the Department of Health and Ageing to the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and then calls it an efficiency saving? It is $12.2 million that we need to invest back into domestic violence services but we will not because this government cannot run its budget. This government keeps running budget deficits and simply cannot look after the most vulnerable in society.

We had a national awareness program that fell away four years ago. This government should step up and do more but they have not. We know, regardless of socioeconomics, that domestic violence—as we have seen in newspaper headlines and through other media—results in some appalling stories. Together we can do more, but it does not start by finding efficiency savings through the 2011-12 budget.

Australian Three Peaks Race

Mr LYONS (Bass) (13:47): I rise today to bring to the House's attention the Three Peaks Race, a major sporting event on Tasmania's calendar. The Three Peaks Race combines the sporting disciplines of offshore sailing and endurance mountain running along the east coast of Tasmania. The race starts at Easter each year at Beauty Point on the Tamar River near Launceston and finishes in Hobart on the Derwent River. The course includes Mount Strzelecki, Freycinet and Mount Wellington—a gruelling task for runners. It also includes amazing scenery across beautiful and remote Tasmania.

This event is particularly impressive as it is run by a dedicated group of passionate volunteers. Since the first race was conducted in 1989, the event has grown and now includes international competitors—a credit to the organisers. I challenge mainland yachtyes to have a go at this most challenging sailing race in Australia. I commend the volunteers and hope that Tasmania can attract even more competitors in next year's Three Peaks Race.

Ryan Electorate: Anzac Day Writing Competition

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (13:48): The Ryan electorate is fortunate to have many RSL sub-branches and is also home to the Gallipoli Barracks at Enoggera. As happens every year, the 2011 Anzac Day ceremonies and marches saw a huge turnout of our local residents to honour the services of the men and women of our defence forces. Mr Merv Brown and the Gaythorne RSL sub-branch continued a special competition which they initiated in our electorate last year. It is designed to encourage school children to learn about and commemorate our servicemen and servicewomen and to increase their understanding and appreciation of the work undertaken by our defence forces.

Last year, they held the inaugural Anzac Day writing competition for local schools, through which students could express in their own words 'what Anzac Day means to me'. After the success of last year's competition, this year the RSL posed the question: what roles have women played in wars and peacekeeping missions in which Australia has been involved? The calibre of entrants was outstanding, and I was honoured to be invited to attend the presentation ceremony to award some of these talented young writers. The aim of the competition, to help educate our young students on the importance of servicemen and servicewomen, was clearly achieved. I thank the president of the Gaythorne RSL sub-branch, Mr Merv Brown, the branch secretary, Cathy Toms, and all involved for their valuable contribution to the Anzac legacy. (Time expired)
Canberra Electorate: Advocacy for Inclusion

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper): I call the honourable member for Canberra, who, in getting this call, emerges as the person who has had the most calls for the 90-second statements since the election.

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (13:50): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I rise today to laud the contribution of Christina Ryan, the general manager of Advocacy for Inclusion, which is based in Pearce in my electorate. I understand that Christina, when she ran for the ACT Legislative Assembly in 2001, was the first woman who uses a wheelchair to run for any Australian parliament. She is a strong, vocal and tireless advocate on social housing, disability rights and gender equity. Her particular passion is women with a disability and she is a tenacious advocate on the local, national and international stage.

Last year, Christina was the only Australian woman with a disability to attend the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, in New York. Christina represented Women with Disabilities Australia, a group of committed, frighteningly intelligent and savvy women who have alerted me to the individual, systemic and societal discrimination suffered by many women with a disability—and some of their stories are chilling. In March this year, she was also a member of the official Australian delegation to the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

Christina has sat on many community boards and is the ACT board member of the Disability Advocacy Network Australia. Canberra is blessed to have Christina Ryan advocating for those with a disability and human and women's rights. On behalf of the people of Canberra, I congratulate and thank her for the work she has done, and is doing, at the local, national and international level to raise awareness and to advocate for the rights of the disabled, particularly women.

Macquarie Electorate: Sport

Mrs MARKUS (Macquarie) (13:51): Recently, I recognised eight local sporting champions from the Blue Mountains and Hawkesbury at an afternoon tea. These truly exceptional young sportsmen and women have competed in a variety of sports. The Local Sporting Champions program involves federal members of parliament nominating individuals for greater recognition and financial support.

Jack Bangel of Bilpin competed in hurdles at the All Schools Championships in Melbourne. Determined to qualify, he competed in this competition against those in the age group above his. Jack is very committed, training four days a week. He is also a member of the Australian under-17s development squad for hurdles.

Mitchell Chaston of McGraths Hill has competed in the last four national championships in BMX and in the World Titles at Adelaide in 2009 he was placed 12th. Mitchell has been training as part of the State Talent Squad, and he dreams of one day competing at the Olympics, in BMX.

Lachlan Weber of Winmalee competed at the National Swimming Titles in Adelaide. Lachlan has been training since he was seven and was surprised to have qualified for the National Swimming Titles. Lachlan and fellow swimmers Cameron McElroy, Jack Kemp and Ryan Nichols formed the relay team and were placed 10th in the titles. This great achievement demonstrates the hard work of swimmers at the Springwood Swimming Club.

Shannon Usher of Katoomba competed in tumbling at the NSW State Aged/Elite Championships. Shannon has been tumbling...
I congratulate them and their parents for the contributions they make— (Time expired)

Bass Electorate: Agfest

Mr LYONS (Bass) (13:53): I would like to congratulate the efforts of Rural Youth for their organisation and for their running of Agfest, which is held at the beginning of May each year in Tasmania. Agfest is a three-day-long showcase of all aspects of agricultural and associated industries. Agfest is a great, family-friendly event that has something for all—from tractors, four-wheel drive demonstrations, irrigators and livestock to gourmet food and craft sheds.

As I mentioned before, Agfest is run by the Rural Youth Organisation of Tasmania—a not-for-profit organisation that is made up of volunteers aged between 15 and 30 years. The first event was held in 1983 and has grown to be a significant rural event each year. This year it is estimated that approximately 60,000 people visited the agricultural field days.

The success of Agfest is a testament to the hard work and dedication of the team of volunteers that put Agfest together. I thoroughly enjoyed my time at Agfest, and I would challenge all mainland people involved in agriculture to get involved in Agfest in Tasmania. I congratulate the hardworking team on their efforts.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper) (13:54): For the benefit of honourable members, both the member for Canberra and the member for Bass have each now presented 20 of these statements since parliament resumed.

Broadband

Ms LEY (Farrer) (13:54): Today I seek to be a useful information source to the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy. The minister will be enlightened to know that some residents in the south-west of my electorate of Farrer now enjoy the benefits of digital television, but this is only after being forced to buy a new digital television set after the government funded set-top box provided to them proved faulty and broke down after one month. I say 'some' residents because this only applies to parts of the NSW-Victorian border not suffering from the new illness of 'digital black-spot disease'.

The minister could be enlightened further if he visited the town of Barham, where 50 households that were receiving an adequate analog signal now have either patchy digital service or, in some cases, nothing at all. The government's own digital ready taskforce has admitted that the new transmitter the government funded to service the area is not doing so.

I say to the minister: if this government can find an extra $300 million to install free, possibly working set-top boxes, surely it can find money to assist those with no television signal at all. The minister might want to re-enlighten himself with his own comments from last year when he said, 'Digital television will bridge the city-country divide, giving access to the same number of TV channels no matter where they live.'

Blair Electorate: Building the Education Revolution Program

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (13:56): Last Saturday I had the honour and privilege of opening the Sustainable Science Centre in Kilcoy State High School. Its principal, Ross Robertson, gave a passionate defence of the Building the Education Revolution at the opening of the Sustainable Science Centre.
With $1.565 million in funding, this centre is where science, technology and agriculture meet. It is a fantastic facility. Students learn about the production of wine. They have grown the largest corn I have ever seen in my lifetime; it is huge. They also grow potatoes. They have chooks. They have lots of gardens. The students, who are mainly from agricultural backgrounds, have the benefit of seeing how science and technology can assist farming in the Kilcoy region.

Mr Deputy Speaker Slipper, this is an area that you used to represent and that I now have the privilege of representing in this parliament. This project is one of many in the Somerset region. About $20 million is being put into the Somerset region—a fairly traditional, conservative voting area in my electorate.

Also present at the opening was the mayor of the Somerset region, Graeme Lehmann, and many other dignitaries from the Kilcoy area. This is a wonderful facility. It has created jobs and it sustained jobs during the global financial crisis. This is yet again a demonstration of the federal Labor government's commitment to jobs and to regional Australia.

**Carbon Pricing**

**Mr CHESTER** (Gippsland) (13:58): The Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency was on Gippsland ABC radio last week, when he almost tied himself in knots trying to avoid the word 'tax'; it was all about a carbon price. Like the smiling assassins now walking into the chamber, he said 'carbon price' at least 20 times, but he painfully avoided using the word 'tax'. The people of Gippsland are not buying it. In fact, they are not buying anything this government is selling.

Everywhere I go in Gippsland I receive the same message: there is a sense of embarrassment about this Prime Minister. Gippslanders believe the Prime Minister is out of her depth, and they simply do not trust her. And why should they trust her? What happened to the East Timor solution, the citizens assembly and cash for clunkers? I have found myself having to defend the Prime Minister. I am a generous man: I tell them she is not that bad. But then they ask me about the fundamental breach of trust on carbon tax. I think she may have us on a technicality with that one. Before the election, this Prime Minister said there would be 'no carbon tax under a government I lead', but it is becoming abundantly clear that she is not leading anything. As we know, Kevin Rudd is running foreign policy, Bob Brown is running domestic policy and this Prime Minister is running out of excuses.

It is hard for the Australian people to follow a leader who has no idea of where she is going. It is no wonder that people in my electorate are telling me that they are embarrassed by this Prime Minister.

**McEwen Electorate: Building the Education Revolution Program**

**Mr MITCHELL** (McEwen) (13:59): Last week I had the pleasure of attending Building the Education Revolution, or BER, ceremonies across my electorate at Lakes P-9, Highlands Primary School and Bolinda Primary School. All of the schools I went to were very pleased to have this investment in jobs and infrastructure for their students now and into the future. Not one of them complained—unlike those opposite. In fact, some of them said that it was the first time in 20 years that they had federal government infrastructure spending on their school. It took a Labor government to deliver that after so many years of neglect.
CONDOLENCES

Hon. Ralph James Dunnet Hunt AO

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:00): I move:

That the House record its deep regret at the death on 21 May 2011 of the Honourable Ralph James Dunnet Hunt AO, a Member of this House for the Division of Gwydir from 1969 to 1989, place on record its appreciation of his long and meritorious public service, and tender its profound sympathy to his family in their bereavement.

Ralph Hunt was born on 31 March 1928 in country New South Wales and later became a farmer and a grazier. He was a member of that generation who grew up in depression and war, a generation tempered by their experiences and determined to build a better nation. In the Menzies-Fadden era, Mr Hunt became an active member of the Country Party in 1953, and he held several party positions over three decades, including federal chairman in 1968-69. He served in local government in the north-west region of New South Wales for 12 years.

Mr Hunt was subsequently elected to this House, in 1969, representing the seat of Gwydir, whose people re-elected him as their representative on nine occasions over two decades. For almost half of those years he served as a minister in successive coalition governments: as Minister for the Interior from 1971 to 1972, Minister for Health from 1975 to 1979 and Minister for Transport from December 1979 to March 1983. Mr Hunt also served as opposition spokesman on the environment during the Whitlam years, defying stereotypes to support the preservation of Fraser Island and the dedication of the Great Barrier Reef as a marine park.

There is also the great story that Lionel Bowen told about Ralph Hunt's role, along with Peter Nixon, in securing passage of the Schools Commission Bill in 1973, bringing to an end the long and bitter saga of state aid to non-government schools. Kim Beazley Sr was recovering from a heart attack, so Lionel Bowen had been entrusted with the legislation, and the Liberal Party threatened to block the new needs based funding model. Ralph Hunt and Peter Nixon went to see Bowen and said, 'There are a couple of schools in our electorates that need a little bit of topping up; could you help us?' The department reported back that a top-up for rural schools would cost another million dollars, so Bowen agreed and gave it to them. As a result, the whole of the Country Party crossed the floor and voted with the Whitlam government—a great example of country MPs standing up for country interests, and it took men of the calibre of Ralph Hunt and Peter Nixon to do it.

These are fairly basic biographical details that give only an outline of the long and purposeful life of Ralph Hunt. Those who knew him inside and outside the parliament will speak of him with more authority than I can, but I do record the common consensus that Mr Hunt was a capable and respected minister, he was respected across party lines and he was a devout coalitionist in the years when some in the National Party were tempted to go it alone.

When he retired in 1989, Mr Hunt left an honourable record of service to his electorate, to this parliament and to our country. That service was rightly acknowledged with an award of an Officer of the Order of Australia in January 1990. Today we therefore express our gratitude for the life and work of Ralph Hunt. We mark his passing with respect and we offer the condolences of the House and the nation to...
his wife, Miriam, their three children and the other members of his family.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (14:04): I rise to support the motion moved by the Prime Minister. Yes, Ralph Hunt was an MP for 20 years in a demanding rural seat. He was Minister for Health for four years, at a time of significant policy readjustment, and he was the deputy leader of the federal parliamentary National Party for three years—one of the most tumultuous periods in that party's history.

We like to think that we live in unique times, but it is interesting how much does not change. Certainly, looking through old speeches of Ralph Hunt, his concerns today remain our concerns and the concerns of just about every rural member of this parliament. Those concerns are highlighted by difficult markets, inadequate infrastructure and securing water supplies in the face of climatic uncertainty—just as much of an issue back in the 1970s as it is today. But at least the Copeton Dam was finally completed during his time as a local member, and I am sure the shade of Ralph Hunt would be happy to see that the Copeton Dam is now being upgraded and is almost full.

As health minister, Ralph Hunt managed to reconcile universal access to affordable and available services with a strong private health insurance sector. I regret to say that his legacy was somewhat eroded in subsequent years, only to be restored by the excellent work of health ministers in the Howard government.

But Ralph Hunt's steadfastness was well illustrated by his response to the 'Joh for Canberra' push. He was actually directed by Sir Joh's backers to seize the National Party leadership from the then leader, Ian Sinclair, and then to keep that seat warm for the Queensland Premier. Ralph Hunt's response was that that would not save Australia from a bad government—showing a very sensible attitude. The important thing is always to do what is necessary to save Australia from a bad government. That is what Ralph Hunt did then and that is what others have tried to do subsequently. Ralph Hunt was widely regarded on both sides of this chamber as one of the gentlemen of the parliament. He was living proof that it was possible to be a 'serious and competitive person in public life without sacrificing decency or humanity. His successor as member for Gwydir asked me to tell the parliament today that he found Ralph Hunt a thoughtful and considerate mentor, not only to him but to many of his contemporaries in the National Party. John Anderson recalls the standard advice that Ralph Hunt used to give young members of parliament or, indeed, young would-be members of parliament. He would say, 'Never forget that you will be hated by some who support you and liked by some who oppose you.' John said that he liked to translate this somewhat Delphic advice as: if you try hard enough you can win over almost anyone—and that is probably not a bad motto for a fine and distinguished member of this House to be remembered by. On behalf of the federal parliamentary Liberal Party and the federal coalition, I pass on to Ralph Hunt's widow, Miriam, and children our condolences and our best wishes for the future in this sad and difficult time.

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of The Nationals) (14:09): The Nationals have lost one of the great legends of our party with the passing of Ralph Hunt. Ralph worked tirelessly for the people he represented and stood strong on the issues. He was always a gentleman, as other speakers have mentioned, and he certainly earned the respect and the admiration of his colleagues across the political divide. He was one of those people who graced every function he
attended. He was an adornment to the causes that he represented and he always undertook his representation with dignity and decorum. Nonetheless, he was a fierce champion for rural and regional communities. He was noted for his loyalty and his dedication and his integrity. In any fight, those are the attributes of the people you want on your side.

As others have mentioned, he was born in Narrabri. He became a local farmer and grazier at Collarenebri. Between 1956 and 1968, he was a councillor on the Boomi Shire Council and held the position of vice-president for six years. His father, Claude, was one of the key figures in the establishment of the Country Party, particularly in northern New South Wales. Ralph had a significant career within the party organisation. He served as state and federal president of the Australian Country Party and played a pivotal role in establishing the Young Australian Country Party, particularly in New South Wales.

In June 1969 he won the seat of Gwydir in a by-election. He was appointed Minister for the Interior in the Gorton-Anthony ministry in February 1971 and held that position until the defeat of the government at the 1972 election. Upon winning the 1975 federal election, Ralph was appointed as the federal Minister for Health in the Fraser-Anthony government. In December 1979 he was made Minister for Transport, and that portfolio was extended in 1982 to include construction. He was Deputy Leader of the National Party between 1984 and 1987.

Ralph was also the federal treasurer of the party for more than 12 years and was instrumental in the redevelopment of the party’s secretariat here in Canberra, John McEwen House. He retired in February 1989 and was honoured for his distinguished contribution to public life by being made an Officer of the Order of Australia. Ralph was honoured for his 60-year contribution to the Nationals at our federal conference in Canberra last year.

We all knew him, and we knew him fondly. As the Leader of the Opposition said, he was someone you could go to for advice, and he was particularly keen to nurture young members of parliament and to tell them of some of his own experiences. Lessons learnt from Ralph Hunt were good lessons and lessons well worth learning.

At this time, the Nationals in particular extend our deepest sympathy to Ralph's wife, Miriam—‘Mim’, as she was known to her many friends—and their three children. I would particularly like to thank them for giving us all so much of Ralph's life and the energy and commitment that he contributed to public life, to the Nationals and to regional Australia.

The SPEAKER: As a mark of respect, I invite honourable members to rise in their places.

Honourable members having stood in their places—

Debate adjourned.

Reference to Main Committee

Mr ALBANESE: by leave—I move:

That the resumption of debate on the Prime Minister's motion of condolence in connection with the death of the Hon. Ralph James Dunnet Hunt AO be referred to the Main Committee.

Question agreed to.

Senator Andrew Murray Thomas

The SPEAKER (14:14): Order! I inform the House of the death on Saturday, 14 May 2011 of Andrew Murray Thomas, a former senator who represented the state of Western Australia from 1975 to 1983. As a mark of respect to the memory of Andrew Murray Thomas I invite honourable members to rise in their places.
Honourable members having stood in their places—

MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:15): I inform the House that the Minister for Trade will be absent from question time for the next sitting fortnight to attend meetings of APEC trade ministers in the United States and meetings of the OECD in Paris. The Minister for Foreign Affairs will answer questions on his behalf. The Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, Defence Science and Personnel and Minister for Indigenous Health will also be absent from question time as he is returning from leading a veterans’ delegation to mark the 70th anniversary of the Greece and Crete campaigns. The Minister for Defence will answer questions in relation to defence science and personnel, the Minister for Defence Materiel will answer questions in relation to veterans’ affairs, and the Minister for Mental Health and Ageing will answer questions in relation to Indigenous health on his behalf.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Asylum Seekers

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (14:15): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer her to death threats against guards at the Darwin and Inverbrackie detention centres, a homemade bomb found at the Villawood detention centre and a full-scale riot at the Christmas Island detention centre—which had to be retaken by force. Given that there are now three critical incidents a day in a system in crisis, will the government join the coalition in supporting a full inquiry by this parliament into this system in crisis?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:16): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. What I would say to the Leader of the Opposition is that I am well aware that he and his spokesperson, the shadow minister, have been out playing politics on this. We all know, of course, that they are not interested in the policy, because, if they were interested in the policy, presumably they would be supporting an inquiry that looked at not only detention now but also detention under the Howard government and that looked at, for example, the breakout from Woomera. Do we remember that? Perhaps it could look at the incarceration of an Australian, Cornelia Rau. Do we remember that? Perhaps it could even traverse the children overboard affair and the deliberate misleading of the Australian people at an election.

As the Leader of the Opposition well knows, the government has been very transparent about circumstances in detention centres. What I would say to the Leader of the Opposition is: before he throws around words, he ought to acknowledge, for example, that incidents are of course catalogued and they can range from something like a very simple health complaint by an asylum seeker through to something more serious.

In relation to incidents in detention centres, the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship has ordered inquiries. They are publicly known, and the opposition has the opportunity in Senate estimates to ask any questions that it genuinely has on the policy. But what I would say to the Leader of the Opposition is that at some point he has to work out whether he is only interested in the politics of this or whether he is interested in the policy. If he is genuinely interested in the policy, he may want to let us know. But, as we know from characterisations by senior members of his own frontbench, policy is not his strong suit.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (14:18): Mr Speaker, I ask a
supplementary question. Prime Minister, given your answer, will you mind confirming to the House that the total number of boat people in detention in November 2007 was just six? Would you also mind confirming to the House that the total number of boat people who have arrived in the first three months of this year is almost three times the total number that arrived in the last six years of the Howard government?

Mr Albanese: Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The supplementary question must relate to the substance of the original question. That certainly does not, and it quite clearly was out of order.

The Speaker: Order! It is probably no more out of order than the original question and response. On that basis I will allow the supplementary, but I would remind members that there is far too much debate in both questions and answers—even though debate is allowed in answers.

Ms Gillard (Lalor)—Prime Minister (14:20): If the Leader of the Opposition is interested in fact then, yes, I can confirm that an Australian was incarcerated in a detention centre under the Howard government; yes, I can confirm that the then minister for immigration referred to a child as ‘it’ under the Howard government; yes, I can confirm that there was a mass breakout from Woomera under the Howard government; and, yes, I can confirm that this government has taken steps to address the difficulties we saw in detention under the Howard government—most particularly, difficulties relating to the treatment of women and children.

Climate Change

Mr Husic (Chifley) (14:21): My question is to the Prime Minister—

Mr Randall interjecting—

The Speaker: The member for Canning will learn to sit there quietly. He is warned!

Mr Husic: Thanks, Mr Speaker. My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister update the House on the report released today by the Climate Commission titled The critical decade? Why is this decade critical for our climate and why is it critical to set a price on carbon?

Mr Randall interjecting—

Mr Albanese: Prime Minister, on a point of order: You have warned the member for Canning. He continues to interject across the chamber and to the gallery.

Mr Randall: Mr Speaker—

The Speaker: The member for Canning will resume his seat. Mr Randall interjecting—

The Speaker: The member for Canning will resume his seat! First of all, I thank the Leader of the House for the misspeak and the promotion. That is okay; usually I do the misspeaks. Regrettably, there were so many other people interjecting from both sides that, if the member for Canning was actually still interjecting, I missed that. But he certainly will not jump to his feet and think that he can just take the call. He has been warned and he is now on a slippery slope. I remind members that a warning is the precursor for a naming. I remind members, especially those to the rear of the chamber, that a motion to withdraw a member can be moved only after I name them. So if it happens, I have named them. I have seen plenty of movement about doing numbers in the chamber under the present circumstance and I am just making sure that I remind people what happens if I ever need numbers to support an action myself. The Prime Minister has the call.
Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:24): Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I thank the member for Chifley for his question—although it does now seem some time ago. His question was on a very important topic, namely climate change, and the important report by the Climate Commission that came out today entitled The critical decade. That is an important title, because in this report we have climate scientists confirming that climate change is real and that action is needed on climate change. This is a report that has been extensively reviewed by a range of expert climate scientists, including the CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology. Will Steffen, who worked on this report, has also been working with Ross Garnaut and his team as they have undertaken an update of the climate science.

This report shows that between 2001 and 2010 the global average temperature was nearly half a degree higher than the average temperature from 1961 to 1990. That makes it the warmest decade on record. As the sea is forced to absorb more carbon dioxide it is becoming more acidic, with a 15 per cent decrease in calcification rates over the past two decades which affects natural icons like the Great Barrier Reef. On the west coast of Australia, sea levels have risen by more than a centimetre per year since the 1990s. Around two-thirds of that rise has come from increased sea temperatures and melting ice caps. With rising sea levels come risks of extreme weather events. A sea level rise of only half a metre by the turn of the century can lead to very different risks for different seas. In Sydney or Melbourne's coastal areas, for example, a once-in-100-years extreme weather event could happen almost monthly.

Opposition members interjecting—

This is very important information and I am not at all surprised by some of the jeering that has broken out on the other side, because senior members of the coalition, like Senator Nick Minchin, have come out against this report and confirmed their climate change denial. We know that the Leader of the Opposition stays in climate change denial, which is why he is prepared to go around and front a scheme that the member for Wentworth has rightly said cannot work and would be hugely costly. They are the actions of someone in climate change denial. We would say to the Leader of the Opposition that he should be pursuing the example of conservatives that are trying to lead for the future, like Prime Minister Cameron in the United Kingdom, who has announced very deep cuts in carbon pollution and who has said that this will position the UK as a leading player in the global low-carbon economy, creating significant new industries and jobs.

This report confirms that climate change is real, that to tackle climate change we must cut carbon pollution, and that the most efficient way of cutting carbon pollution is to put a price on carbon. I am determined and the government is determined that we will do just that. We will not succumb to the Leader of the Opposition and his team's climate change denial nor will we follow him down the path of a costly scheme that cannot work. We will price carbon. It is a critical decade and it is a critical year for those who believe in climate change.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER: I inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon members of a parliamentary delegation from the People's Republic of Bangladesh. On behalf of the House, I extend a very warm welcome to our visitors.
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Asylum Seekers

Mr MORRISON (Cook) (14:28): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to a statement in this House that it is completely untrue that Malaysia and not Australia would choose the 800 people Malaysia will take from Australia under her five-for-one people-swap deal. Can the Prime Minister confirm that Malaysia will not have any right of veto under her proposal?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:28): I say to the member who asked the question—a member who is known for playing politics in this area rather than anything associated with the policy, most graphically demonstrated when he played politics with the funerals of asylum seekers—that we are working with Malaysia on an innovative transfer agreement. As part of that transfer agreement, we would bring to Australia people who are genuine refugees, who are processed in Malaysia and who are already there now and are waiting a resettlement opportunity. The processes we would go through would be comparable to the processes we go through when we take other refugees in other parts of the world under the humanitarian—

Mr Abbott: I rise on a point of order on relevance. The Prime Minister was asked, 'Would Malaysia have any right of veto over the 800 going to that country?' She should answer yes or no to that question.

The SPEAKER: I will listen carefully to the Prime Minister's response. It would assist if those who are making the noise that prevents me from hearing her sat there in silence.

Ms GILLARD: My recollection is that the quote that the shadow minister is using is a statement that I made when I was asked about the selection of people under the humanitarian intake to come here, but I am happy to describe both parts of the arrangement. As I was saying before the Leader of the Opposition took his point of order, in terms of our increased humanitarian intake, the shadow minister would be aware that we take humanitarian intake from around the world. We have processes to do that. We are looking to increase our humanitarian intake. I know that there are some days when the opposition opposes that; there are some days when they are prepared, in pursuit of political deals, to offer to double the humanitarian quota, with the $3 billion cost that that would imply. That was the approach taken by the Leader of the Opposition in the lead-up to government being formed.

On the issue of the asylum seekers to be returned, we are working with Malaysia on the transfer agreement. Its aim is to break the people-smugglers' business model. As I have said to his House before, I am not ruling in or ruling out arrangements in relation to that 800. But the message to people-smugglers is clear: if you risk coming here on a boat then the risk that you run is that will end up in Malaysia at the back of the queue. I say to the opposition that there does come a point at which their playing of politics with this is genuinely destructive to the national interest. They ought to contemplate what they are doing as they approach that point.

Climate Change

Ms O'NEILL (Robertson) (14:32): My question is to the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency. Will the minister outline recent findings on the climate science and what the government is doing to meet these important economic and environmental challenges? How have these findings been received? What is the government's response?
Mr Chester interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Gippsland seems to think that he has had the call on a number of occasions today. He seemed to take a great interest in Noddy. He can go out and read about Noddy, Big Ears and the rest if he likes. But while he is here he will sit there quietly.

Mr COMBET (Charlton—Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency) (14:32): Credible climate scientists around the world have been telling governments for some time that carbon pollution is contributing to climate change. The government respects the scientific advice. A new peer reviewed report out today from the Climate Commission—and the Prime Minister referred to this report in an earlier answer—summarises the latest science and makes clear that climate change is happening faster than previously thought.

The report's central message is that the next 10 years are critical in our efforts to deal with this significant economic and environmental challenge. The report spells out significant risks to human health, to agriculture, to cities, to infrastructure and to natural heritage from the more severe climate impacts over the longer term. Importantly, so that people can see this clearly, it sets out the evidence pertinent to the warming of the atmosphere, the sea level rises that are being experienced and the risks to icons like the Great Barrier Reef. The report concludes that an economic transformation is needed to achieve the reductions in carbon pollution we need to avoid severe impacts from climate change.

The report and its findings were welcomed today by the shadow minister for climate action, the member for Flinders, who said in a media release: 'There is bipartisan support in Australia in support of the science of climate change, as presented in the report.'

The problem for the member for Flinders is that he does not have a policy to deal with the threat that climate change represents. The report's findings make it clear that direct action measures, so-called, which rely almost entirely on tree planting and soil carbon, are not a credible way to tackle climate change.

The SPEAKER: Member for Mackellar, I make it clear that I am giving you the call for a point of order with nothing else included.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop: My point of order is that there is a need for a direct answer to the question on the science and the threat to people's property. Could the minister include in his answer whether he thinks that his own waterfront properties are at risk?

The SPEAKER: I invite the member for Mackellar to leave the chamber for one hour under 94(a).

Mr COMBET: So-called direct action measures, which rely almost entirely on tree planting and soil carbon, are not a credible way to tackle climate change, according to this report, and yet the Leader of the Opposition today in the media claimed otherwise. He never lets facts get in the way of a fear campaign. What is needed is a carbon price, as advocated by the government, to cut pollution and to drive investment in clean energy. They are still a rabble over there on this issue and on the science in particular. In total contempt for the shadow minister's stated position on the climate science, Senator Minchin has been out today speaking for the climate science deniers, and he had this to say:

The so-called Climate Commission is a Labor government-appointed committee of known climate alarmists, selectively appointed—

Mr Abbott interjecting—
Mr COMBET: The Leader of the Opposition is saying it is true. We just heard from the shadow minister that there is bipartisan support here. Senator Minchin goes on to say:

… selectively appointed to further the cause of global warming alarmism.

And of course Senator Minchin, who owns the Leader of the Opposition who installed him, wrecking action on climate change—a noted climate science denier—is the one who thinks it is a communist conspiracy.

We have had the member for Tangney out today as well. He said the following this morning: 'Over the last 10 years there's been no increase in the globe's temperature.' It just so happens that that contradicts the findings of the World Meteorological Organisation, NASA and the CSIRO. Facts cannot get in the way of fear in this important issue and it is time the Leader of the Opposition took public policy responsibility and took the credible science seriously. (Time expired)

Mr Christensen interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Dawson should be very careful. I remind him that he is in the House of Representatives chamber, not outside kicking dust. The member for Bennelong is waiting patiently for the call. He will get it when the House comes to order.

Asylum Seekers

Mr ALEXANDER (Bennelong) (14:39): My question is to the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship. Given that Malaysia is not a signatory to the United Nations refugee convention, what formal guarantee has the minister received from the Malaysian government to 'provide protection for persons seeking asylum, pending determination of their refugee status' as required by the Migration Act?

Mr BOWEN (McMahon—Minister for Immigration and Citizenship) (14:39): I thank the member for Bennelong for his question and I welcome the opposition's new-found interest in the rights and protection of asylum seekers in Australia. I refer the honourable member for Bennelong to the commitments made by the Prime Minister of Malaysia in the joint statement with the Prime Minister of Australia, which indicated that asylum seekers would be treated with dignity and respect if they were processed in Malaysia. I also refer the honourable member to my numerous public statements that the negotiations on the operational details are continuing with Malaysia and that the government will be providing further information as those negotiations are completed.

I also bring the honourable member's attention to the statements by the UNHCR, both in Geneva and Australia, that this arrangement represents a significant step forward and presents the opportunity to improve protection for asylum seekers throughout the Asia-Pacific region. I understand the frustrations of the opposition, who are willing this arrangement to fail. I understand that the opposition are devastated that the government has reached an international agreement to break the business model of the people smugglers at the same time as we are increasing our humanitarian intake. I understand their sensitivity, but they will be disappointed as we continue to implement this innovative and bold arrangement.

Dalai Lama

Mr WILKIE (Denison) (14:41): My question is to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, as you would be aware, the Dalai Lama will visit Australia next month. Will you be meeting with the Dalai Lama? If not why not? If you are planning on meeting
with him, will you be meeting with him in his capacity as a spiritual leader and representative of millions of Tibetans? Again, if not why not?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:42): I thank the member for Denison for his question. I am aware that the Dalai Lama is visiting next month. He is a frequent visitor to Australia in his capacity as a religious leader and also as a Nobel laureate. We welcome him on this visit. I know he has an active program around the country. As I believe members of the House are likely to be aware, representatives of successive Australian governments have met with the Dalai Lama unofficially and privately. This is very much a reflection of Australian community expectations. I expect on this visit that members of the House and members of the government will have similar opportunities to meet him. As to my own plans, at this stage I do not have a meeting scheduled with the Dalai Lama. Any such decision will be taken closer to the time.

Climate Change

Mr CHEESEMAN (Corangamite) (14:43): My question is to the Treasurer. Why is tackling climate change important for our economy and what action is the government taking? How has this approach been received and what is the government's response?

Mr SWAN (Lilley—Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer) (14:43): I thank the member for that very important question. This is a very important report. It points to the fact that we do need to act on climate change, that we need to reduce our carbon pollution, if we want to have a prosperous economy and if we want to grow sustainably into the future and create the jobs that we require for our children and for our grandchildren.

Dangerous climate change will have a dramatic impact not just on our environment but on our economy. This has been demonstrated by report after report. It was demonstrated first and foremost by the Stern report many years ago and then demonstrated by the Garnaut report and again demonstrated today. We on this side of the House absolutely understand that the costs of inaction on climate change are far greater than the costs of action. We understand that. We understand that the only growth strategy for the future is a growth strategy which puts in place lower carbon pollution. That is the only sustainable way forward to continue to create jobs. To do this, and to put in place a price on carbon, it means that we get investment in the renewable energy of the future. But to do all of this you need to have a clear economic vision for our future. This government does have a clear economic vision for our future, but unfortunately those opposite have no such vision whatsoever. That was on display in this House when the Leader of the Opposition gave his non-budget reply. It was on display again at the Press Club when we had that appalling performance from the shadow Treasurer only last week. It was probably the worst in history from a shadow Treasurer at the Press Club.

What we know is that this is all about something far deeper than their incapacity to put forward an alternative economic policy; it is about the fact that the Leader of the Opposition denies the science of climate change. That is absolutely at the core because this Leader of the Opposition will not make the hard decisions. This Leader of the Opposition is unwilling and incapable of facing up to the big decisions our country needs to make—whether it is bringing our budget back to surplus, taking action during a global recession or dealing with dangerous climate change. He is absolutely incapable of
making those hard decisions because what he wants to do is the politically opportunistic thing and not the right thing by the country.

Mr Pyne: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, the Treasurer was not asked a question that had anything whatsoever to do with the answer he is giving, and I ask you to draw him back to the question that he was asked.

Mr Albanese interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order! Whilst interjections are out of order, the Leader of the House, in a reverse point of order, is repeating the question, which is a typically crafted question that talks about how the approach is being received and the government's response. This does open the door but, as I have said in the past, it is not an invitation for total debate. The Treasurer will relate his answer directly to those two aspects of the question.

Mr SWAN: I was asked about the consequences of not taking action. We on this side of the House are determined to take action and, of course, the wreckers opposite are going to try to stop us taking the action which goes to the very core of economic prosperity in this country. Of course, they are doing that because the Leader of the Opposition does not believe in the science. His puppeteer and the man who installed him in his job, Senator Minchin, was out there today making it clear that the Liberal and National parties do not believe the science of climate change.

There are some on the other side who do believe in the science of climate change and do understand its importance to a prosperous economy. We had the member for Wentworth completely repudiate the Leader of the Opposition on this question last week, but he is so incapable of making a tough decision that he could not even discipline the member for Wentworth. He could not do any of that because what we have is a Leader of the Opposition who will not face up—

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind the Treasurer that it is the government's response to how a particular policy approach is being received that the question asked for—not anybody else's.

Mr SWAN: As I move around the community, Australians say to me: 'Please take some action on dangerous climate change. It is a threat to our future.' It is not a threat understood by any of them over there because at their core they are all climate change deniers.

Mr Tony Smith interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order! If the member for Casey was warned, he has just been very lucky. He is now definitely warned.

Asylum Seekers

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (14:49): My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. I refer the foreign minister to the now abandoned East Timor regional detention centre proposal, the Manus Island regional detention centre—which is now on hold—and the five-for-one swap deal with Malaysia, which appears far from concluded. When will the foreign minister act to end this ongoing regional humiliation of Australia by taking charge of the shambles that has become Australia's border protection policy?

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Sturt is warned.

Mr Billson: Give us the spider!

The SPEAKER: The member for Dunkley is warned.

Mr RUDD (Griffith—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (14:50): The honourable member's question suggests that the government has a regional reputational
difficulty on this matter. Having just been in the region, let me tell you that those opposite, during the period that they were in office, did not just have a problem of regional reputation—there was an absolute foreign policy disaster in the region through the actions on the part of the Indonesian government at the time, under President Megawati, to open the doors because those opposite did not know how to manage the relationship with Indonesia, and on and on it went.

From those opposite there was also the extraordinary spectacle on the eve of the election, which the Prime Minister just referred to, when the country was absolutely misled on the question of children overboard. Let it not be forgotten that those opposite collectively stood by when one of their senior ministers went to the Australian people and delivered a fundamental untruth to them—and they know it. One other thing that those opposite failed to deliver during their period in office was any regional processing agreement. The shadow foreign minister asks what has been engaged by my portfolio in support of the work done by the immigration minister. Let me tell her: through the work that we have taken most recently in the Bali process, for the first time there is now a regional framework agreement which can be applied to all countries within the region. Secondly, for the first time it contains within it a provision for regional processing centres. Thirdly, it contains within it the buy-in of the International Organisation for Migration. Fourthly, it contains within it the buy-in of the UNHCR. Mr Speaker, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition asked what we have been doing on the question of regional countries. Let me tell you: that framework was concluded and agreed with myself and the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship in Bali just several months ago. It is on that basis that we are engaged in subsequent bilateral engagements.

In their many years in office, not one single element of progress was made in concluding such a regional processing agreement, which is why they earned the comprehensive condemnation of the UNHCR and other agencies in the humanitarian field across the world. We have engaged the international community, the international organisations, as was all regional states. Look at the statement which was produced out of that conference in Bali. That is what our portfolio has been doing. That represents a fundamental change from what her government achieved in the past.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER: Order! Before giving the call to the member for Hunter, can I say I am reliably informed by him that we have present in the gallery this afternoon Chris Tremain, the Senior Whip in the New Zealand House of Representatives. On behalf of the House, I extend a very warm welcome to our visitor. I usually say 'even though he is a member of the whips club', but he is warmly welcomed.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

The SPEAKER: I call the Chief Opposition Whip, the member for Hunter.

Mr Fitzgibbon: Very generous of you, Mr Speaker.

The SPEAKER: The Chief Government Whip—sorry! It was a Freudian slip about whips, whatever side they are on, and their actions to me. The Chief Government Whip has the call.
Higher Education

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter—Chief Government Whip) (14:54): My question is to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, how have the government's changes to youth allowance increased the participation of rural and regional students in higher education, and how does the budget assist students in gaining the skills they need to prepare for work?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:54): I thank the member for Hunter, the Chief Government Whip, for his question. It is a great question which enables me to inform the House of some very good news. The budget, of course, was all about jobs and opportunities for Australians, because for people in this country having the benefit of work is a fundamental part of being sure that you can make a life for yourself and your family. To get that all-important job, then be able to get the next job and a better job requires that people have access to opportunity. Since the budget, we have been talking about the budget's measures to spread opportunity to people who have been locked outside the benefits and dignity of work; the budget's measures to spread opportunity through enabling Australians, young and old, to upgrade their skills through our $3 billion investment in skills.

These policies build on reforms that this government has already delivered, most particularly reforms in education. Today I want to focus on the reforms in our university system—another way we are spreading opportunities to Australians. This morning I visited the University of Canberra, where I met a number of students who are benefiting from our youth allowance reforms. We have seen a 23 per cent growth in the number of undergraduate places since 2009.

Mr McCormack interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Riverina is warned.

Ms GILLARD: I would have thought that were something that every member of the parliament could celebrate: more students having an opportunity to get a place at a university. I would have thought that would receive shared congratulations. That means 23 per cent more people are having the benefit of that kind of opportunity.

When we look at youth allowance, we see an extra 21,000 university students are now receiving youth allowance. In just 12 months, the number of dependant students from disadvantaged backgrounds receiving the maximum youth allowance student payment has increased by 108 per cent—it has more than doubled. The number of regional and rural students receiving student youth allowance has increased by 22 per cent. For those who genuinely care about the fortunes of rural and regional students, that is good news. In total, more than 107,000 young people have benefited because they are now receiving youth allowance the first time or because they are receiving more in their payment. More than 36,000 of these young people are from rural and regional areas. Once again, that is something I would have thought would be received as good news. There has been a 50 per cent increase in the number of regional and rural students receiving dependant youth allowance. In the past 12 months more than 240,000 university students have received start-up scholarships, with 55,000 of those students coming from rural and regional areas, and 36,000 students have received relocation assistance, which has of course gone to students from rural and regional areas too.

For those who care about opportunity in our society, for those who care about turning around the trend under the Howard government of the participation rate of rural
and regional kids in university going down, the good news is we have turned that trend around and participation is going back up. That is a great thing for rural and regional Australia. It is a great thing for those who celebrate a fair distribution of opportunity in our society.

**Carbon Pricing**

*Mr HUNT* (Flinders) (14:58): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to update paper No. 6 of the Garnaut Climate Change Review which, at page 26, recommends:

- Targeted structural adjustment assistance for any regions that are vulnerable to large-scale loss of livelihood as a result of the implementation of a carbon price.

Will the Prime Minister identify the regions that will suffer large-scale loss of jobs as a result of her carbon tax? Do they include Townsville, Mount Isa, Whyalla, Kwinana, Port Pirie, the Illawarra, Gladstone, the Hunter Valley or Geelong?

*Ms GILLARD* (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:58): I thank the member for his question and I understand that the member who asked the question would be struggling today. He is a man who wrote a thesis on why an emissions trading scheme and pricing carbon was the most effective way of dealing with carbon pollution. Since then he has sold his soul and pretended that the direct action measures of the Leader of the Opposition can work. Of course, today, the shadow minister opposite has crashed right into this report that verifies that climate change is real. It also verifies that to tackle climate change you need to cut carbon pollution and that, so-called, direct action measures are not enough. If you are going to cut carbon pollution the most efficient way to do that is to put a price on carbon. The shadow minister who asked the question actually knows that. Of course, putting a price on carbon does drive a change in our economy. It is meant to drive a change in our economy, as we put a price on carbon businesses that are big polluters then innovate and change to reduce carbon pollution. Of course we want to see carbon pollution reduced and that is what pricing carbon is all about.

We will work with Australian industry and business to protect Australian jobs, which is what the roundtables that the minister for climate change has been running are about, by working directly with Australian industry. In terms of job prospects for the future, what the shadow minister would know if he was being forthright with the parliament is that we cannot afford, in jobs and prosperity of Australians, to have our economy fall behind the standards of the world. There is a reason that we have to transition our economy. If we do not transition our economy we will miss out on the clean energy jobs of the future.

I say to the shadow minister, given his membership of the Liberal Party, that he is probably more likely to look to David
Cameron on these questions than he is to any member of the Labor Party, and I would suggest to him that he does. Prime Minister Cameron, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom—who, if he were in this country, would be the holder of a Liberal Party ticket—is driving deep cuts in carbon pollution in his economy because of his view that it is positive for the jobs of the future and positive for employment growth in the United Kingdom.

Mr Hunt: Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order in respect of relevance. The question related to which regions would suffer large-scale job losses.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Manager of Opposition Business already raised the matter of relevance in what was one of his better constructed points of order, and I would have thought that the member for Flinders would realise that. Again, I say to the whole House that, whilst debate can be directly relevant—and that is not the problem, even though I think there should not be debate in either the question or the answer—I remind the Prime Minister that she must directly relate her response to the question.

Ms GILLARD: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I was asked about jobs and pricing carbon and I am talking about jobs and pricing carbon. I say to the shadow minister that, rather than go out and politically look for fear in this debate, he should take the same course as conservative Prime Minister David Cameron who is out there with deep cuts to carbon pollution and is saying to the people of the United Kingdom that he supports those changes because he supports responsible government and he supports jobs growth in his economy. The shadow minister should actually be honest with the Australian people about that.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order! I am sure there will be plenty of opportunity down the track to have the debate, but question time is not one of them.

Mr Pyne: Mr Speaker, I ask the Prime Minister to withdraw the inference in the final phrase of her answer to that question—if you can call it an answer—before the parliament moves on.

The SPEAKER: Order! In response to the Manager of Opposition Business, there was nothing at the time that struck me as requiring withdrawal.

Ms GILLARD: Mr Speaker, if members of the opposition find the suggestion that they should be honest offensive, I withdraw it.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order! I say to the House that it is preferable that the withdrawal is just a withdrawal, but I also indicate to the Manager of Opposition Business that this withdrawal was couched in a similar manner to the withdrawal that he expressed on the last sitting day. I acknowledge that that is not a defence. I remind members that, if they are going to withdraw, they simply withdraw. The member for Greenway has waited patiently and now has the call.

Budget

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (15:06): My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer outline to the House the importance of a clear plan to return the budget to surplus? How is this approach being received and what are the consequences of not taking fiscal policy seriously?

Mr SWAN (Lilley—Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer) (15:07): I thank the member for Greenway for that very important question. I spent last week
travelling around the country talking to businesses and to families about the importance of bringing our budget back to surplus and, of course, keeping our economy strong. I particularly enjoyed my visit to Cumberland Ford in Sydney, where I spoke to the workforce and to a group of very good, ambitious and hard-working young apprentices. In particular I met with Justin Poore, who is in the NRL with Parramatta, and another very impressive apprentice by the name of Justin James, who had just won the Ford apprentice of the year for the whole of the country. I spoke to them about the importance of having a better trained workforce and the importance of improving our apprenticeship system, particularly retention in the apprenticeship system. As I moved around the country I spoke to communities right across the country about the importance of better healthcare, the importance of better education and the importance of investing in mental health. I spoke to them about all of these things and, of course, doing all of those into the future is only possible if you can bring the budget back to surplus, and bring it back to surplus in 2012-13, so we do not compound the pressures that will come from the mining boom. It is very important we do not compound those pressures when that investment pipeline hits top gear. This is the quickest return to surplus on record. This is what Tim Toohey from Goldman Sachs has had to say about the government's fiscal policy: 'represents the biggest fixed fiscal contraction since 1970 when comparable data commenced.' This was highlighted in the Reserve Bank board minutes, which were published last week: 'members also noted the prospect of significant domestic fiscal consolidation over the next couple of years.'

Bringing the budget back to surplus is all hard work. Hours and hours are spent in the ERC doing the really tough grind of expenditure restraint, something not done by those opposite when they were in power, when they went on a spending spree at the height of the mining boom mark 1. There was no expenditure restraint during that period. We all know what happened then: 10 interest rate rises in a row from those opposite. We had the budget reply this week from the shadow Treasurer, where he proved there was no plan whatsoever to keep the economy strong, there was no plan to return to surplus, despite the fact he had told everybody the week before that we could come back to surplus next year. There was no demonstration of that and he could not offer a single alternative saving. So what we have is a federal opposition that has no alternative economic policy, none whatsoever. We have a Leader of the Opposition who gave a speech in this House that barely mentioned jobs and a shadow Treasurer who went to the Press Club and maybe mentioned them once. Both of them did not mention the floods or their impact on our economy at all, which just shows how unqualified they are to assess our economic situation, let alone to do the hard work that we need to do to make sure our budget comes back to surplus so we can maximise all of the opportunities that will flow from the mining boom. They are simply incapable of doing the hard work. They are not up to the job. They are totally incompetent.

**Carbon Pricing**

**Mr HARTSUYKER** (Cowper) (15:10):

My question is to the Minister representing the Minister for Sport. I refer the minister to the 23 soccer clubs within the North Coast football zone in Cowper, which have a total annual electricity bill in excess of $100,000 to light soccer fields. Will the government compensate sporting clubs like these for the increase in electricity prices as a result of the carbon tax, or does the government expect
these costs to be met through higher club fees?

Ms KATE ELLIS (Adelaide—Minister for Employment Participation and Childcare and Minister for the Status of Women) (15:11): I thank the member opposite for his question. In response I would advise him to talk to the clubs about which he is talking about the record levels of investment that this government has put into both infrastructure, something that he is not prepared to ask questions about, and also sports funding with a record increase to ensure these clubs are supported at a level they never have been before.

Mr Hartsuyker: Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The question was very specific. It asked about increased electricity costs and compensation to the clubs for those increases in electricity costs.

The SPEAKER: The minister is responding to the question.

Ms KATE ELLIS: In response to that I am quite happy to once again outline to the opposition the facts of why the government is acting on this and the process that we are going through. We are working with the multiparty committee to both work through the details of what a price on carbon will look like as well as look at assistance arrangements. Perhaps, rather than going out and scaring clubs in this community and in the community more broadly, he might want to get on board and work productively with us and with the other members of this parliament who are at the moment taking seriously our responsibility to act on climate change, which we know is real and we know must be addressed.

Mining

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (15:13): Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism. How will the decision by the Western Australian government to increase royalties on iron ore impact upon the mining industry and the government's Minerals Resource Rent Tax?

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON (Batman—Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism) (15:13): I thank the member for Fremantle for her question. She understands the importance of the mining industry in Western Australia and perhaps more importantly cooperative Commonwealth-state relations. Last week, for the second time since it was elected, the Barnett government has substantially increased iron ore royalties without any consultation with industry. This represents a major challenge to the future growth of the mining industry in Western Australia. It also represents a major challenge to the whole Western Australian community.

Ms Julie Bishop interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition is warned.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON: There are a number of key issues that go to those concerns. Firstly, the truth of the matter is that by its decision the Western Australia government may have created an outcome that means it has kicked an own goal. The outcome of the increase in royalties has sent a very strong message to the Commonwealth Grants Commission that the WA economy has a huge capacity to actually increase its revenue. In essence, we could end up with a situation by which the Western Australian government could very likely lose more in GST revenue than it gains in additional royalty payments. Despite that, we remain committed to the independent review of Commonwealth Grants Commission arrangements, which we have already announced in cooperation with the Western Australian government.
I turn now to the issue of the Western Australian mining industry. We remain committed to our undertaking to the mining industry to credit royalties. In that context, the challenge for the Western Australian mining industry is that the second increase in royalties is paid by mining companies in Western Australia, which are paid in both good times and bad times. For the small end of the mining industry in Western Australia, I remind the House that very few of them, under the MRRT, will actually pay a dividend to the Commonwealth because we are only taxing super-profits. For those companies, therefore, there is nothing to be credited in terms of the operation of the MRRT. They will bear the full impact of the increase in mining royalties, the second increase put in place by the Western Australian government since it was elected.

I turn now to the issue of infrastructure spending. The Commonwealth government stands by its commitment to increase infrastructure spending in Western Australia, especially the Gateway project, which goes to a potential huge improvement in productivity because of the problems around the Western Australia airport not only for the mining industry but for the whole of the Western Australian economy, including the all-important tourism industry. The only potential reduction in infrastructure spending—and, I might say, as a result of the introduction of the MRRT and the PRRT. What amazes me is the deafening silence from the opposition about the revenue grab by the Western Australia government; it borders on hypocrisy. During the course of last year they walked up and down St Georges Terrace, led by the member for Curtin, taking every donation they could get and promising to oppose increases in mining tax. (Time expired)

**Carbon Pricing**

Mr IAN MACFARLANE (Groom) (15:17): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to comments by the chief executive of TRUenergy in which he confirmed that a carbon price will add $300 to the household electricity bill and that, overall, electricity prices are set to double in the next six years. Will the Prime Minister admit that the best way to keep power prices down, while delivering new investment in the power generation industry, is for the Prime Minister to keep her promise that: ’There will be no carbon tax under a government I lead’?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (15:18): I thank the member for Groom for his question. Of course, the member for Groom is the person who, before the last election, verified that, whoever formed government after the election, electricity substantially increase infrastructure spending in Western Australia.

I also want to raise the all-important question of the underlying assumptions of the budget. If you actually examine the Western Australian budget proposition in terms of the impact on the Commonwealth budget it is just plain wrong because the assumptions are entirely different. We will be able to maintain our surplus and meet all our commitments for small business infrastructure spending—and, I might say, our capacity to increase superannuation—as a result of the introduction of the MRRT and the PRRT. What amazes me is the deafening silence from the opposition about the revenue grab by the Western Australia government.
prices were going up. He was speaking frankly to the Australian people about underinvestment in infrastructure and the fact that investment in infrastructure needed to occur. He said that was going to flow through to consumers and it was nothing to do with a price on carbon. He told people the truth then; I hope he is prepared to continue to do that.

On the question of the statements by the CEO of TRUenergy, I and the government are very conscious of the need for certainty in short- and long-term carbon pricing to send the right signals for investment in long-lived assets—and, of course, electricity generation necessarily involves long-lived assets. That is why we are working on carbon pricing and will announce full details of the scheme in the middle of the year so people can see what is being proposed with certainty. What the CEO of TRUenergy stated yesterday—and it is very clear—was this:

The industry has actually been very supportive of an emissions trading regime and lots of us within the industry operate in other jurisdictions that have an emissions trading regime.

That is, the CEO of TRUenergy was out there, working as he does in a sector that makes long-lived investments, understanding the need for an emissions trading scheme—and, of course, we will get to a full cap-and-trade emissions trading scheme following a fixed-price period. He then specifically rejected the view that a so-called direct action policy would be sufficient to transform the energy sector—and that, I think, is a very important piece of information for the House.

Now, who else has been telling us about so-called direct action over the last seven days? Well, it is none other than the member for Wentworth, who went on national television and verified that, effectively, this is the scheme you have when you are really a climate change denier; it cannot work and it will cost Australians $18 billion. We know that, in 2020, the impact on Australian families will be $720 per year.

Mr Pyne: Mr Speaker, on a point of order: far from being directly relevant, the Prime Minister is verballing the CEO of TRUenergy and members of the opposition frontbench. I would ask you to draw her back to the question she was asked about her promise before the election.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order in the way it was couched. But I remind the Prime Minister that she should be directly relevant. I think she was starting to stray slightly, and I remind her that she should get back to the direct response that she had given up until that point.

Ms GILLARD: I was asked about comments by the CEO of TRUenergy, carbon pricing and electricity. Let me conclude with this. Having given consideration to the view of the CEO of TRUenergy about emissions trading—maybe the members of the opposition do not like the facts, but these are the facts—I say the following: we need to send a certain price signal to those in electricity. That is what we will do with carbon pricing. Our carbon pricing scheme will meet what Australians want. They want effective action on climate change and they want assistance with their cost of living pressures.

The scheme proposed by the Leader of the Opposition will do the direct opposite—no effective action on climate change and a direct cost to Australian families with no assistance and a worse cost of living. We will keep working with Australian families and we will get this job done.

China

Mr CRAIG THOMSON (Dobell) (15:23): My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Will the minister inform the
Mr RUDD (Griffith—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (15:23): I thank the honourable member for his question. As the budget makes clear in this year's economic outlook the Chinese economy, together with the other emerging economies of Asia, is expected to drive strong demand for Australian exports in the future, which is good for Australian economic growth and good, also, for Australian jobs.

This is reflected in some of the profound changes we have seen occur in the Chinese economy over the last 20 years or so. It is worthwhile the House paying attention to one or two of these key facts. The first is this: 20 years ago—in 1990—the Chinese economy was the same size as ours; right now China has the second largest economy in the world. Sometime within the next decade, or the one following that, China will be the largest economy in the world. In terms of its impact on global merchandise exports and imports China is now the world's largest merchandise exporter and the world's second largest merchandise importer. But what is really important to Australians and Australian businesses is that when it comes to the future of the commercial services sector the Chinese economy is also growing apace. In 2010 China became the fourth largest exporter of commercial services in the world and the third largest importer of them as well.

These are profound changes coming out of the Chinese economic growth model and they are being driven so much by China's emerging cities. Six provinces, by 2020, will have provincial economies larger than US$1 trillion each and we will have 93 Chinese cities, each with populations of 5 million or more. These are rewriting the history of the global economy as we progress through the 21st century. For Australia and our exporters this has profound implications. China is already our largest trading partner—$100 billion—and I say to those opposite that they should bear in mind the fact that Australia's trade with China has doubled since 2007. This is important for Australian jobs.

There are profound policy changes underway in China right now. The previous growth models, which depended on exports and labour-intensive manufacturing, are changing to new growth models, which are based on domestic consumption, quality growth and environmental services as well as the importance of the services sector more generally. This is the change which we are categorising as China 2.0 because it has big implications for the future of Australian exports to China: financial services exporters, construction services, architectural services, green design, environmental services—areas where we have such great strength, including education and tourism services.

Australian exporters must begin to work through the implications that this has for their future export strategies in China. Over the weekend I was with 200 or 300 Australian business representatives in Guangzhou. We have 700 Australian companies in southern China. Australian business needs to be right across this country in the future, and in the major emerging cities that I referred to before. The trade minister and I will be taking this message out to the Australian business community in order to make sure that it is aware of these new opportunities in the services sector and in the major new cities of China as well.

Later in the year the trade minister and I will take a delegation to China to prosecute those interests on the ground. I say to this
House that these are profound changes for the global economy and for Australia and we have to be in it to win it. *(Time expired)*

**Budget**

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of The Nationals) (15:28): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to her comments on 20 May. She said:

... we will ... be adjusting expenditure for Western Australia to protect the federal budget.

Does she stand by that statement or does she agree with the Minister for Resources and Energy, who told the House just a few minutes ago that there will be no cuts for West Australian infrastructure in Commonwealth funding?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (15:28): The member asking the question has just misrepresented what the minister said to the parliament. I endorse what the minister said to the parliament. He is absolutely right. I suggest you read every word of it because it was not summarised in your question. In fact, what you said then was directly in contrast to what the minister said.

**Immigration**

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (15:29): My question is to the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship. Will the minister please update the House on the progress of the investigation into settlement services in the Hunter region.

Mr BOWEN (McMahon—Minister for Immigration and Citizenship) (15:29): I thank the honourable member not only for her question but for her very proactive engagement in this issue. On 4 April this year the member for Newcastle telephoned me to express her concern about some issues around settlement services and housing for refugees in Newcastle. I told the honourable member that I would arrange an independent investigation and asked her to put those concerns to me in writing to enable that investigation.

I received the honourable member's letter the next day, and Ernst and Young were engaged to undertake the review on 12 April. I have received the findings of the investigation conducted by Ernst and Young, and I released them publicly a short time ago. They do not make for pretty reading. Ernst and Young's investigation identified that a number of humanitarian clients had been adversely affected by substandard service delivery by the service providers in the Newcastle region, a consortium led by Navitas English and including accommodation services provided by Resolve FM. The report identifies some instances of substandard housing, rental charges not necessarily related to market conditions, inappropriate charges for property damage and poor quality household goods, and identifies that there have been less than healthy relations between service providers and local community groups. I have instructed my department to undertake immediate action in response to the findings of the report and I am receiving regular updates. Certain claims have already been referred to the New South Wales Police.

The report also raises concerns regarding the department's management of its service providers in Newcastle and recommends a more active and involved approach to contract management to mitigate the risks of inadequate service delivery in the future. I have asked the department to audit all refugee housing across the country to ensure that the issues identified in Newcastle are not more widespread. I have also asked Professor David Richmond to conduct an independent review on the adequacy of the performance measures and framework as well as the department's contract management processes for the new
settlement services contracts. In addition, I have asked the secretary of my department to consider whether any departmental staff were in breach of their obligations under the APS code of conduct as set out in section 13 of the Public Service Act.

The Ernst and Young report also makes observations about the financial management of some of the service providers. In light of those findings, a detailed forensic audit is to be undertaken of Resolve FM’s financial management under the Hunter region contract. I have asked for this audit to take place urgently, and the department will take further action on any matters that arise out of that audit.

While the allegations relate to services provided under contracts entered into in 2005, this does not present any excuse for what has happened. The service providers, and the department in managing the service providers, must do better. I am confident, however, that the combination of the new Humanitarian Services Settlement program, which commenced in April this year—with Newcastle now being identified as a separate region, not as part of the Sydney region—and the other measures I have outlined will ensure that refugees who are settled in the Newcastle area receive appropriate support.

Australia does have a good record when it comes to settling refugees. This has been recognised by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres. But we do need to do better in relation to the issues that have been identified in Newcastle. I thank again the member for Newcastle for bringing these issues to my attention and look forward to working with her and other members in the Newcastle region in implementing the report’s recommendations.

Ms Gillard: Mr Speaker, I ask that further questions be placed on the Notice Paper.

PRIVILEGE

Mr DUTTON (Dickson) (15:33): Mr Speaker, I raise a matter of privilege under standing order 51. During question time on Thursday 12 May, in answer to a question from the member for Banks, the Minister for Mental Health and Ageing made the following statement:

The opposition has been out there suggesting, among other things, that this $2.2 billion is back ended. It is natural, of course, that transformative reform will involve an element of scaling up, but the parliament should be very clear that the two biggest injections of new money in this package are in year 1 and year 2, and the new money in year 5, out of the $2.2 billion, is just $50 million, about two per cent of the total package.

The budget document Delivering better hospitals, mental health and health services, on page 24, provides a table of programs and spending for new budget initiatives. That table shows that in year 1—

Mr Albanese: Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. This is clearly not a matter of privilege. This is a matter where the shadow minister is engaging in political debate.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the House will resume his seat. I am listening carefully to the member for Dickson. He has indicated to me that he wishes to raise a matter under standing order 51. I will listen to the matter, on which I hope his presentation to me is not going to go on much further but that he will provide material that I can look at.

Mr DUTTON: That table shows that in year 1 $47 million is new spending and in year 2 $210 million is new spending. The table also indicates that the biggest injection of new funding occurs in year 5—that is outside the budget estimates—and amounts
to $490 million. Quite clearly, the proposed spending on mental health in this budget is back-ended into years 4 and 5—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member will not debate it but will indicate the matter he wishes to put before me.

Mr DUTTON: Certainly, Mr Speaker. Further, to establish the prima facie case, clearly there is no mix-up of figures. The minister stated clearly ‘the parliament should be very clear’ on what he was saying. The Manager of Opposition Business raised this matter in the House last Thursday and asked the minister to correct the record. The minister refused to do so. I submit that the minister has deliberately set out to mislead this House and the Australian people on what has been portrayed as a cornerstone of this budget, and this matter should be referred to the Privileges Committee. Mr Speaker, I table for your consideration the government’s own document, which details the fact that this is back-end loaded and that the minister misrepresented, and I seek also to table a copy of the Hansard which details the minister’s quote.

Mr Albanese: You don’t table Hansard.

Mr DUTTON: Thanks for your help!

The SPEAKER: Order! I will look at this matter and report back at the earliest opportunity—sorry; there is a point of order.

Mr Albanese: Mr Speaker, I have a submission on that matter that has been put forward by the shadow minister. The government was aware of this issue because the opposition have been trying to haw a story around the media in the past week and have been unsuccessful and therefore have come in here and tried to use the issue of privilege—

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr Pyne: Mr Speaker—

Mr ALBANESE: I am making my submission; sit down.

The SPEAKER: Order! Both of you will sit down or you will be invited to leave the chamber as a job lot. Often I am accused of ruining the theatre of this place, but this is a farce. The best way for me to deal with this is to minimise the discussion and debate on it, and I was willing to do that. If accusations of deliberate misrepresentation are contained in this matter, that should have been addressed in a motion. But I am willing to take the material away, the only purpose being to examine it—because I wish to minimise the argy-bargy that it appears people want to enter into. I was aware of some proposed proceedings later in the week, on Thursday. I have not bothered to review those, but everybody should be very careful about how these very important aspects of parliamentary procedure are used. That is my final statement on this.

AUDITOR-GENERAL’S REPORTS

Reports Nos 40, 41 and 42

The SPEAKER (15:38): I present—

Mr Dutton interjecting—

Mr Albanese interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order!

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order! I have to resort to this type of tactic to get some order and recognition that, when I am making a statement, it is one of the few occasions that I think there should be respect for some of the institutional aspects of this place. I present the following Auditor-General’s performance audit reports for 2010 2011: No. 40 Performance audit: management of the Explosive Ordnance Services Contract, No. 41 Performance audit: maintenance of the Defence Estate, and No. 42 Performance audit: the Establishment, Implementation and Administration of the Council Allocation
Component of the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program.

Ordered that the reports be made parliamentary papers.

**DOCUMENTS**

Presentation

Mr ALBANESE: Documents are presented as listed in the schedule circulated to honourable members. Details of the documents will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings and I move:

That the House take note of the following documents:


Debate adjourned.

**COMMITTEES**

Selection Committee

Membership

The SPEAKER: I have received advice from the Chief Opposition Whip that he has nominated Ms Marino to be a member of the Selection Committee in place of himself.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (15:41): I ask leave of the House to move a motion for the appointment of a member to serve on the Selection Committee.

Leave granted.

Mr ALBANESE: by leave—I move:

That Mr Entsch be discharged from the Selection Committee and that in his place Ms Marino be appointed a member of the committee.

In speaking to that motion, I find it absolutely extraordinary that the Chief Opposition Whip has been stood down from the Selection Committee. One of the things that we did when we established the new processes in the parliament was to agree that the Chief Government Whip and the Chief Opposition Whip would be the key people from the government and the opposition in determining the issues that came before the Selection Committee and that private members would be given increased rights as a result of the formation of that committee.

What we see now is that people are being replaced—indeed, we have the extraordinary proposition of the Chief Opposition Whip writing to the Speaker of the House of Representatives to replace himself as a member of the Selection Committee. We see members of the Selection Committee coming along to that committee with pre-typed resolutions having been given to them and not participating in the spirit in which that committee was established. It is of great concern, and this typifies the abuse that is occurring with regard to the Selection Committee, whereby it is being used to try to distort the outcomes of this parliament and try to defer the discussions of legislation and other business before this House. It is quite extraordinary that this has been occurring. Of course, the member who is replacing the Chief Opposition Whip was herself replaced during the previous sitting.

The fact is that the opposition are at war with themselves, not just in terms of leadership but when it comes down to minor committees of the parliament, including this committee. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Manager of Opposition Business) (15:43): In speaking to the motion, it probably would have been wise if the Leader of the House and the Chief Government Whip had found out why the Chief Opposition Whip has chosen to
remove himself from the Selection Committee for one day: because his partner is going into hospital tomorrow and he is returning to North Queensland to be with her during a very serious operation. He is only discharging himself from the Selection Committee for the period in which he is away from the parliament. When he returns it is expected that he will be returning to the Selection Committee and that the member for Forrest will be removing herself from it. There is no provision in the standing orders for that to be done on a temporary basis, so it fell to the Chief Opposition Whip to remove himself for a period of 24 hours until he returns from North Queensland.

I am embarrassed for the Leader of the House. I am sure he was not aware of that. I would ask him to return to the dispatch box and apologise for what was a very low act—done, I assume, in ignorance. I am sure that if he had known that was the case he would never have made such an absurd contribution, which is now in the record of Hansard and which I have now had the opportunity to clarify.

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter—Chief Government Whip) (15:44): I am compelled to make a contribution given that the Manager of Opposition Business suggested that I should have done something to better inform myself on the reasons for the decision to discharge—albeit temporarily, as I understand it—the Chief Opposition Whip. I do not have forewarning of these matters. I found out about this matter fairly late in question time today.

In response to the contribution by the Manager of Opposition Business I will say that if the opposition are moving to do something, I think, very substantial—that is, to stand down the Chief Opposition Whip from the Selection Committee—they may have seen fit to consult the Chief Government Whip on the matter. If they had done so, on the basis of the Manager of Opposition Business's contribution, we would have been better informed.

My understanding is that the motion moved by the Leader of the House made no reference to the discharge or the appointment being temporary. So how was the Leader of the House to have known that the opposition were doing something so extraordinary as to remove the Chief Opposition Whip from the Selection Committee for one day? Why would you? Unless it is the intention of the opposition tomorrow to suddenly politicise the Selection Committee—something we have worked very hard not to have happen—what other reason would they have to move a procedural motion in this place to replace the Chief Opposition Whip for one day? It was absolutely reasonable for the Leader of the House to reflect on the issue given that we were given no explanation whatsoever and given that there was no reference in the motion to the issue being temporary.

I assume that the Leader of the House is now going to have to rise on Wednesday to discharge Ms Marino and reappoint the Chief Opposition Whip, and I ask members of the opposition, particularly the Manager of Opposition Business, who is very fond of interjecting, if that is the case because, if that is the case, that is rather extraordinary.

Question agreed to.

BILLS

Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2011-2012
Appropriation Bill (No. 2) 2011-2012
Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 1) 2011-2012
Second Reading
Debate resumed.

Mr ROBB (Goldstein) (15:48): Earlier, I was addressing the underhand and deceptive
way in which this government has sought to increase the Commonwealth debt ceiling from $200 billion to $250 billion. In order that this parliament has the transparency that should be granted by any responsible government on a matter of this consequence, I formally move the amendment previously circulated in this chamber: 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:

(1) condemns the government for incorporating in an annual appropriation bill provisions to increase the limit on government borrowings above the total of $200 billion;

(2) recognises that a special case must be made for such a significant increase in borrowing limits and that the government must explain any special circumstances that it believes justify such an increase; and

(3) demands that the Parliament be given the opportunity to consider separately and vote on the proposed increases in borrowing limits set out in Part 5 of Appropriation Bill (No. 2) 2011-12.

Rather than live within its means, this government is not only increasing taxes and spending but also increasing government debt. At a time when millions and millions of Australian families are seeking desperately to live within their means and to meet their cost-of-living expenses, and at a time when a government is increasing debt in such magnitude, to massively lift this debt ceiling without proper parliamentary scrutiny is totally unacceptable. It has never before happened in this chamber that this sort of measure would be included within an appropriation bill. Trying to hide this measure under the cover of an appropriation bill has confirmed the fears and the anxieties of millions of Australians about the competency and trustworthiness of this government. This is a failed government. It is a dysfunctional government. I urge this House to support the amendment that is now before them.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Is the amendment seconded?

Mr TONY SMITH: I second the amendment.

Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (15:50): David Lloyd George, the founder of the modern welfare state, said:

We put no burden upon the necessities of life of anyone. We are taxing surplus. We are taxing luxuries. If a man has enough after maintaining his wife and family, and can spare something upon whisky and tobacco, why should he not afterwards contribute towards the pensions and defences of the country?

We propose a great scheme in order to set up a fund in this country that will see that no man suffers from hunger in the dark days of sickness, breakdown in health, and unemployment which visits many of us. This is what we are going to do. These schemes for the betterment of the people …

This government is also putting in place schemes for the betterment of Australians. We are implementing a carbon price to deal with dangerous climate change—a carbon price that will operate by taxing the 1,000 biggest polluters—putting a price on pollution that recognises the damage that that carbon pollution does to future generations. We are helping families by providing assistance in those crucial times of need. We are implementing a minerals resource rent tax so that Australians get a fair deal for the subsoil resources that are their birthright. The Labor government helped Australia to navigate the global financial crisis. When the largest downturn since the Great Depression beckoned, we listened to Keynesian economics. We put in place a timely, targeted and temporary fiscal stimulus that protected around 200,000 jobs and tens of thousands of businesses. We used the
opportunity to invest in long-term infrastructure, roads and school infrastructure that future generations will benefit from.

This budget is delivering the fastest fiscal consolidation of the modern era. Just as we implemented Keynesian economics in the downturn, we are implementing Keynesian economics in the upswing, through rapid fiscal consolidation. We are reforming our system of taxation. We want the Australian taxation system to be simpler and fairer. We want it to be a system that most efficiently delivers essential social, educational and health services while providing the incentives to keep our economy growing.

I want to focus today on the tax incentives introduced in the most recent budget, because I think that these are initiatives which have received too little attention and that this budget that is marked by its deep commitment to lasting tax reform. The government has announced 12 measures since the 2010-11 budget to reform our taxation system, including (1) a measure that removes the unintended tax incentive for people to drive further than they need to in order to obtain a large tax concession by reforming the statutory formula method for valuing car fringe benefits. That measure implements recommendation 9(b) of the Henry tax review. (2) We have improved participation incentives for couples without children by phasing out the dependent spouse tax offset, consistent with recommendation 6(a) of the Henry review. (3) We are better targeting tax incentives by replacing the entrepreneurs tax offset, consistent with recommendation 6(c). (4) We are improving small business tax rules by replacing the entrepreneurs tax offset with a small business tax package that includes a $5,000 immediate deduction for motor vehicles, consistent with the intent of recommendation 29. (5) We are improving certainty for investors by allowing infrastructure projects of national significance to carry forward losses with an uplift factor to maintain their value. (6) We are increasing support for families by increasing family tax benefit part A payments for 16-to-19-year-olds, recognising that the cost of looking after teenagers does not go down. (7) We are reforming family payments by reducing the overlap between family tax benefit part A and youth allowance. (8) We are improving regulation and reducing red tape for the not-for-profit sector by establishing the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission. (9) We are improving certainty for the not-for-profit sector by introducing a statutory definition of ‘charity’. (10) We are improving tax system governance by committing to a principles based approach to tax law design. (11) We are allowing the Board of Taxation to initiate its own reviews of how tax policies and laws are operating. (12) We are establishing a New Tax System Advisory Board.

This budget and these important tax measures build on the Gillard government's long-term plan to strengthen our economy and make the Australian tax system simpler and fairer for business and the community. In the case of the entrepreneurs tax offset, it has long been recognised that it is poorly targeted for small businesses. There is little evidence that it has acted to encourage the establishment of small businesses. More than 80 per cent of small businesses were eligible for the offset. Rather than allowing a small business to grow, the entrepreneurs tax offset encourages businesses to structure affairs in a particular way despite the market opportunities which might be present. The assistance provided is a fairly low level of assistance to very small businesses. The maximum claim is $2,500 but the average entrepreneurs tax offset claim was less than
$500, with 70 per cent of claims being below $600. That is a small amount of money for a fair bit of paperwork. The vast majority of claimants have income from sources other than business income and nearly all are individuals. Under the entrepreneurs tax offset, it is possible for taxpayers to recharacterise their income as business income—for example, by working as a contractor instead of as an employee in order to claim the ETO.

The entrepreneurs tax offset is difficult to administer and adds to the complexity of our tax system. There are better and more effective ways to help small businesses: such as the $5,000 immediate deduction for motor vehicles from 2012-13 that was a hallmark feature of this government, such as reducing the GDP adjustment factor for pay-as-you-go instalment taxpayers to four per cent for 2011-12, such as simplifying and increasing the instant asset write-off threshold to $5,000 from 2012-13, and such as providing a head start to the reduction in the company tax rate for small businesses from 30 per cent down to 29 per cent from 2012-13. Around 2.7 million small businesses stand to benefit from these measures. The savings from abolishing the entrepreneurs tax offset will fund those progressive measures for assisting small businesses. Those savings will be reinvested into the small business tax reform package.

We are also modernising Australia’s taxation system by removing antiquated notions about gender roles. The dependent spouse tax offset was introduced back in 1936 at a federal level, although some of the states had their own small programs at the time. During the second reading debate in this place, one member justified the measure, saying that he felt it was the duty of a husband to maintain his wife and therefore it was right and proper that he should receive a deduction for it. I do not think these are sentiments that would be shared by most 30-somethings in the labour force today. This is a measure for families without children, and I think that most modern-day couples would not expect the government to provide a tax break in the case where one partner chooses not to work. This measures is not just about removing antiquated notions but about encouraging greater workplace participation, because it phases out the dependent spouse tax offset, which penalises work for stay-at-home spouses. And, as we know, increasing participation is absolutely critical in a modern Australia with our businesses facing skills shortages. Work is a good way of maintaining contact with the community and a first job is a stepping stone to a better job. We in the Labor Party are strongly committed to the dignity and value of work.

If a dependent spouse earns more than $282, under the current program the entitlement reduces by $1 for every $4 that the dependent spouse’s income is above this threshold. The effect of that is to put in place a 25 per cent tax rate additional to current marginal tax rates on the first $10,000 earned by a so-called dependent spouse. This measure will be progressively phased out for those aged 40 years and below. And, importantly, those taxpayers who are invalid or permanently unable to work or are carers or who are aged 40 or above will not lose their benefits.

The budget also introduces important measures to fix the current system of fringe benefits taxation for cars. The existing statutory formula method for determining the taxable value of car fringe benefits delivers a greater tax concession the further a car is driven. Anecdotes in my own electorate about people who pass the keys onto their teenage child to drive to the coast for a weekend do not reflect the way in which most Australians would want to see their tax expenditures used. Car fringe benefits arise
when an employee uses a salary sacrificed or employer provided car for private use. Under the statutory formula method, a person's car fringe benefit is determined by multiplying the relevant statutory rate by the cost of the car. These statutory rates are designed so that a person's car fringe benefit decreases as the distance travelled by their vehicle increases. People can therefore increase their tax concession by driving their vehicle further. The AFTS Review reported evidence that this is exactly what people do.

We are removing the current incentive for people to drive salary sacrificed and employer provided vehicles further to increase their tax concession and in the process burn more fuel and damage the atmosphere. We are reforming the statutory formula method by replacing the current statutory rates with a single rate of 20 per cent that applies regardless of the distance travelled. This reform will only apply to new vehicle contracts entered into after announcement on budget night. It will not affect people who have already entered into contracts, and will be phased in over four years.

People who use their vehicle for a significant amount of work related travel will still be able to use the operating cost and log book method to ensure that their car fringe benefit excludes any business use of their vehicle. Over the forward estimates, this reform will result in an increase in revenue of $970 million, an increase in GST payments to the states of $50 million and a reduction in other expenditure of $33.9 million.

We are also helping small business through the immediate depreciation deduction, which now applies to motor vehicles. The additional benefits that we are putting in place will assist many small businesses in Australia. The vast majority of businesses operating in Australia, around 96 per cent, are small businesses. They often experience greater cash flow difficulties than their larger counterparts. The Gillard government looked after those small businesses when the global downturn happened. We did that because we recognised that small businesses were much more vulnerable than large businesses, which are better able to smooth over the economic cycle. Our economic reforms recognise that small businesses are very much the lifeblood of the Australian economy. We are reforming things like the entrepreneurs tax offset in order to assist small businesses and to give small business owners the certainty that they need in assisting our economy.

With taxes, we build society. Tax reform needs to be grounded in good, strong economics. It needs to reflect the values of Australian and we need to recognise when those values change. When values about environmental protection change, we need to reform fringe benefits systems that create perverse incentives to drive cars further. When norms about dependent spouses change, we need to reform old tax laws that are based on outdated 1930s notions. We need to keep on making these updates because we in the Labor Party recognise that economic reform is not something that we do once and then forget about. It is an ongoing process. It is important that we engage in that ongoing process and use opportunities like the Henry tax review, which has laid down many of the key principles important in devising the architecture of Australia's tax system. It is important that—as we in the government do in the case of climate change—we listen to the advice of economists and take into account that our tax system needs to be shaped by expert advice. Those in the opposition are sometimes too willing to go for the quick sound bite and too willing to ignore expert advice on climate...
change and tax reform. We in the Labor Party are committed to ongoing economic reform and to improving our tax system so that it is simpler, fairer and as efficient as possible.

Ms LEY (Farrer) (16:05): I am delighted to rise today to speak on the three budget appropriation bills, which are being debated concurrently, and also the amendment moved recently by the member for Goldstein. I can summarise in one sentence the response of my constituents in the electorate of Farrer when I consult them about it: 'When all the indicators tell us that Australians are doing so well and whenever we pick up a newspaper, read the business pages, turn on the radio and listen to our respected business commentators we are told that as a nation we are doing well, why do we as a family feel that we are doing badly, that we are pressured with cost of living increases at the fuel bowser, in the supermarket and particularly in the area of child care?'

That summarises, as I said, the confusion that people are currently feeling in response to the budget. The government talks very much about a budget that focuses on savings, but on one hand it is saving while on the other hand it is spending. It is saving about $21 billion but the budget turns around and delivers about $18.1 billion in additional spending. So the government cannot be taken seriously when it talks about wanting to bring the budget back into surplus and keeping the economy strong.

In November last year we were told that the deficit for 2010-11 would be $41½ billion, but on budget night it was revealed that it had blown out to almost $50 billion. In November we were told that net debt would peak at $94 billion and on budget night it was revealed that that figure is now $107 billion. Not only that but net debt is set to stay above $100 billion for at least the next four years. The government continues to borrow $135 million a day, and interest on Labor’s debt will be a staggering $7 billion a year. As we point out quite often, once the budget is back into surplus it will not mean that all the debt that has been accumulated during the period of Labor being in office will have been repaid. It will not; the budget will just be in surplus. There is a huge task ahead of us. I know these big numbers often do not mean much to people when they are talked about in the way that I just have, but imagine what we could do with $135 million a day. Imagine what projects we would all find in our electorates and what worthwhile spending we would all want to support.

This is a narrowcast government without imagination. I forgive people for a lot of things but I never forgive them for lack of imagination. The constraints they are under because of this requirement to service this huge budget deficit mean that there are very few things they could do even if they had the imagination to do them. I know it is easy to hark back to the time when we were in government and to how good those days were—they certainly were by comparison—but when I go back to those times the thing I remember is that we as a government had flexibility. This government does not have the flexibility to move within the constraints of the enormous debt burden that it has given itself.

There might have been legislation on the table during the Howard government that was not quite right. We could talk about ways we could fix it. We could find some additional funding to address a certain problem. I remember, for example, managed investment schemes and an Australian Taxation Office determination that really affected people in my electorate who had made investments. A sensible, mature discussion meant that they could be looked
after. There are many other examples. I remember that exceptional circumstances support for farmers during drought did not extend to those who were irrigators. We talked about it and we worked out that that was not reasonable. More money was found to support irrigated agriculture, because the budget was strong and government had the capacity to do that.

My real criticism of this budget is that the government does not have the capacity to move and everything is constrained. I want to reflect on the response within my electorate of Farrer but also from the perspective of being the opposition spokesperson for employment and child care. Cost of living is coming up for us as local members more than is any other single issue, and child care is absolutely critical to that. We saw in the press this week that childcare centres had been forced to use collection agencies to extract unpaid debts from families. That just goes to show how close to the wind many of our childcare private provider and community provider businesses are.

Just last week I was in the electorate of my neighbour, the member for Parkes, between Dubbo and Coonamble. I visited Coonamble Children's Services, which is a community childcare centre. It is a good example of why child care has to work for the families that use it. Without this childcare centre, many people in the town of Coonamble could not work. That is the point. One of the members of the committee is, I think, a stenographer. She said that if she is not there in the town of Coonamble to work as a stenographer people will have to go to Dubbo to get their medical services, which is quite some distance—two hours down the road. If the childcare centre is not there, she is not going to be able to carry out her job. So we lose the participation of that person but, more importantly, we lose the medical service in this small town, along with the childcare service when it is affected.

This was a community childcare centre just struggling to make ends meet, if I can put it like that. This is not a result of the times; this is a result of the government's national quality framework. We in the coalition support improved quality standards. We support anything that gives us high-quality child care, but we have an important key difference from the government: we say that we already do have a strong, very high-quality childcare sector in this country. The Minister for Employment Participation and Childcare does not seem to actually be the minister for child care; she seems to be the minister who complains about child care and criticises our childcare sector against every measure we stack up, and we stack up very well.

This quality framework is demanding that small centres employ staff who have higher levels of qualifications than they already do. They need to change the ratio of staff to children, particularly babies, and they need to jump through an enormous series of bureaucratic hoops, which, as I have said many times, involves—picture this, and it is real—a childcare worker with a toddler on one hip and a clipboard on the other ticking off boxes and making sure that the bureaucrats somewhere, should they ever want to check out what actually happened on the paper trail, have that paper trail secured, never mind so much the care of the children. Of course, this is the wrong approach. It goes against any common sense that you could muster.

The national quality framework—and the government has done nothing in the budget to step away from that—is going to add to the real costs for families. It is going to mean that childcare centres put up their fees. It is going to mean, as we have seen in the press
today, that childcare centres have to use debt collection agencies to collect debts as small as $50. That is, as I said, how close their businesses are sailing to the wind. They have no fat in the system. They have no savings. They are operating from day to day in their accounting. Every cent that comes in needs to be there to pay for wages or, for example, to pay for locums. I visited a childcare centre in eastern Sydney. While some of their staff are training, they still need to keep the ratios where the government is demanding they be. There is no flexibility in that but, more importantly, the trained quality staff are not available to fill these positions; they are using agencies. The cost of employing an agency person is skyrocketing to up to $100 an hour. A childcare centre in eastern Sydney may well be able to afford that, but certainly a rural and regional one cannot. From my point of view, there are real alarm bells in the childcare sector in this country. Generally, this was a budget that was defined by its broken promises and backflips. As has been pointed out, it is rife with class warfare, gimmicky stunts and destined to add to the white elephants before it: pink batts, building Julia Gillard's memorial halls, cash for clunkers and so on. The Productivity Places Program was the flagship of the Prime Minister's attempt to solve the skills crisis, but the funding for the Productivity Places Program has been redirected to fund $360 million for the Trades Apprentice Income Bonus, $94 million to the New Enterprise Initiative Scheme—where was this funding previously?—and $399 million over four years towards the Building Australia's Future Workforce package. What this highlights is the sheer waste and ineffectiveness of the Productivity Places Program, which was so great that even the brains behind it had to concede that it is better off being discarded to the scrapheap of irrelevant, ineffective government programs.

To many, that sounds like a bit of mumbo jumbo, but what I am saying is that one grandiosely titled program has been replaced by another, money has been moved around and more bureaucrats have been employed in the process. The government is talking about incentives and places as if somehow these are all going to translate into jobs—they may; they may not. What we really need to solve the skills crisis is a concerted effort by the government to address what some of the fundamental problems are, for example, in apprenticeship training. Also, there is no program to bring people with the right skills to Australia and keep them here, and the economy lacks the flexibility to change when required.

I also want to touch on the National Broadband Network because it is very important to rural and regional constituents. As a member of the Joint Committee on the National Broadband Network, I have gained a very interesting insight into what is going on. I have been very disturbed about the cost, the quality and the future, particularly for my constituents. In a public hearing last week I asked the CEO of NBN Co., Mr Quigley, when those who are outside the 93 per cent fibre footprint could expect to get an improvement in their broadband services. This group of Australians has not been promised speeds of 100 megabits per second but only 12 megabits per second—which is better than they are getting now and they will take that. When I asked when that might reasonably be expected to happen or when work might reasonably be expected to start, it was clearly in the never-never.

I was disappointed that the question did not really seem to have occurred to the NBN Co. management. I do not want to be unfair, because I am going to demand that they
bring back answers to our committee. It is not good enough to just say that they are delivering fibre to 93 per cent. I know it does sound like a lot—and I have great concerns about their ability to do that, by the way—but while rural, regional and remote Australians know they will not get the same deal as those in the capital cities they do want to have some expectation of improved services, particularly given that at the last election many of them considered increased telecommunications as one of the reasons they voted the way they did. Maybe they did not believe Julia Gillard and Kevin Rudd when they talked about those increases and improvements—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The honourable member for Farrer should refer to the Prime Minister and the foreign minister by their titles and not by their names.

Ms LEY: I apologise and I acknowledge that you are completely correct. The National Broadband Network and increased broadband services are vote changers and can be game changers, but the rationale behind this government's re-nationalisation of Australia's telecommunications system is not going to deliver that in a cost-effective manner. We know there has not been a cost-benefit analysis of the NBN. We know that every time we look at the numbers they are skyrocketing. We know that rural and regional constituents are not particularly important unless they happen to be strategically located so that the Prime Minister makes a fuss of them, but that is not happening for the vast majority of rural and regional Australians.

The government has not yet demonstrated to me that fibre to the curb, fibre to the node or fibre to anywhere but the premises would not deliver a much better solution. As I say to people, 'If I have fibre to the premises, why should I be able to sit and watch Toy Story 3 in 3D on delayed telecast with the massively increased bandwidth that comes to my house, without producing a single productive thing for the nation, when somebody who lives next door to me who may be a pensioner is paying for that through increased taxes?' The scale of the spend is absolutely frightening.

I want to mention one more thing because it is critical to the electorate of Farrer—that is, water. As a member of the Standing Committee on Regional Australia, along with Tony Windsor and many of my good colleagues on both sides of this place, we are shortly going to be recommending a course of action. It is important that the government acknowledges that the Murray-Darling Basin plan in its current form, or even in the form it is at now and moving to—I guess we do not know exactly where that is—really has to service the needs of rural communities that depend on water.

As I have said many times, it is possible to get a balance between irrigated agriculture and the environment. It is not a zero-sum game; you do not need to have one or the other. It is time that the government listened to those rural communities and understood their perspective when they voice their real concerns about the effects of this plan on their future. I am delighted to have been a member of that committee. I know that we have done some good work. In travelling the country, we have heard the truth and it is important that we reflect that in this place when it comes to a final report. (Time expired)

Mr HAYES (Fowler—Government Whip) (16:21): I am proud to stand here today in support of Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2011-2012, Appropriation Bill (No. 2) 2011-2012 and Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 1) 2011-2012. This
budget reflects Labor's values. It maintains a strong economy so we can provide services to all Australians, particularly to those who need them. I am talking about families who are struggling with the rising cost of living, the unemployed seeking to get back into the workforce, the disabled in our community and the young generations who I see working pretty hard at school and who are taking advantage of training and higher education opportunities.

The Treasurer made it pretty clear in the lead-up to the budget, and as a consequence of the budget, that this budget steers us onto the path of bringing us back into surplus by 2012-13. I think that is a pretty remarkable objective and one that is being realised in this budget. It is remarkable because on this government's watch there has been a global financial crisis of proportions not seen in 70 years and there have been a number of devastating natural disasters. These have all required the government to act decisively for the benefit of Australians as well as to protect our economy. That makes Australia one of the strongest economies in the Western world, especially when you consider that our terms of trade now are the strongest they have been in 140 years and national government debt is among the lowest in the world. Australia's national debt is down to 7.2 per cent of GDP, as opposed to that of the United States, which is 72 per cent of GDP, and that of Great Britain, which is 75 per cent of GDP.

That brings me to what is probably one of the most important issues in this country: unemployment. Unemployment in this country is nearly half that of other industrialised nations. Our unemployment rate presently is 4.9 per cent, compared to nine per cent in the United States and 7.8 per cent in the UK. Those are the facts and they are the boundaries within which this budget has been constructed. The budget will create another 500,000 new jobs. That is on top of the 700,000 jobs that we have created since 2007. It is important that in this debate we get the facts right. Whilst we talk about these numbers and try to be positive about this country, we are met with sloganeering from those opposite. It has started already, and we are going to hear it time and time again.

Last Friday I visited Hoxton Industries in my electorate. They employ over 150 people, all of them people with disabilities. They are the beneficiaries of $1 million under a program aiding the employment of disabled people. I greatly enjoy visiting Hoxton Industries because it is a place where the effects of this Gillard budget really can be seen. It is a fact that without this funding these jobs would not be there. I am proud to be part of a government that gives priority to providing employment opportunities for disabled people.

On my visit I was struck, quite frankly, by just how important it is to have a job. It is more than just the job; it is the sense of being part of a community, the sense of having fulfilment. Really, it is the sense of family. I also enjoy my visits there because I get to meet a lot of the mums and dads of the employees. The mums and dads are about 80 years old, and their kids are in their 30s, 40s and 50s. This is something we do as a community. Nicole Bruce, a friend of mine, is the General Manager of Hoxton Industries and she often speaks to me about this and how this must always be family focused.

Visits such as these remind me that the economy is much more than a set of numbers and that the government's role goes beyond balancing the fiscal spreadsheet. It is about helping people by providing opportunities through strong health and education systems, training programs and support for the disabled and ageing. The central tenet of this government is to keep unemployment low.
Satisfying employment is unashamedly the centre of community wellbeing and is one of the core values of Labor. Contrast this with the attitude of the opposition, who think this year’s budget is another opportunity for hollow sloganeering backed up by an incredible lack of detail. Throughout budget week—it was not all that long ago, so we can all remember it—the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Treasurer, Joe Hockey, were out there at every opportunity giving a sound bite about how they would bring the budget back to surplus one full year before the Labor government. That they were doing so is a matter of fact. If you cannot remember it, you can get the Hansard and check that is what they said. It reminds me of an old saying that if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. That was the whole issue: they went for the sound bite, saying they would bring the budget back to surplus one full year ahead of Labor, but they failed to give any indication of what programs they might cut. Sometimes we got a little bit of insight, such as when we saw the Liberal Party infighting about which programs might be sliced. Sometimes, in all that confusion, the Leader of the Opposition actually indicated they might even increase some programs. But when it all got too desperate for them to say how they would bring the budget back to surplus, they reverted to form. They said, ‘Stop the boats!’ They went straight back to the immigration debate as a way of diverting people’s attention from their lack of detail on what they would do if they had the opportunity to control this budget. That was the contribution of the alternative Prime Minister and the alternative government: absolute, dead-bottom zero.

I will speak a little bit about my electorate of Fowler. In the last election I moved from the seat of Werriwa and had the honour of taking on the seat of Fowler. Whilst the community of Fowler is not all that far away from Werriwa, it has a number of significant differences. My electorate of Fowler is the most multicultural electorate in the whole country, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Being in the electorate of Fowler has enabled me to work very closely with community groups on their issues and to help them deliver a stronger community. When I was elected I made five key commitments to things that I believed could make a real difference to the community. I will take a little bit of time and update the House in relation to them.

Firstly, I made a commitment that I would work to ensure I would be available to the community and that I would run an office dedicated to servicing the needs of both individuals and the community alike. Central to our jobs as members of parliament is to make ourselves as available as we possibly can. I have sought to do that in the new community of Fowler by, in addition to my electorate office, having three outreach offices. One is in Cabramatta, one is in Green Valley and one is in Miller. Those offices are held each week and people know they can come to the office and see me with or without an appointment. Sometimes it is difficult to get to my office because of lack of public transport and, unfortunately for a
lot of people, lack of time. What I have pledged to do is make myself available to the community when they need me and make sure I am there in their times of need. I am very indebted to the various groups that operate in my electorate. They do a fantastic job. They have shown great generosity in welcoming me as their new local member and I look forward to working closely with them into the future to deliver a stronger community in Fowler.

Secondly, I work with organisations that support the disadvantaged, the homeless, the disabled and the aged to assist them in their vital role. It was always one of my strong focuses when I was the member for Werriwa, and it is something I bring with me to Fowler. A little earlier I mentioned my experience with Hoxton Industries where I visited, again, last week. This coming Friday I will be holding a disabilities forum in my electorate with a view to formulating a discussion paper to present to the Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers. I am looking forward to hearing from all persons working in the disability sector or, more importantly, from those who are disabled as to what we, as a government, can do to help make their lives a little easier. I would like particularly to thank Lucy Reggio and Grace Fava for their assistance in the preparation of this event. I know they do sterling work in our community and provide wonderful opportunities for our children. They give those with a disability not only hope but a real sense of inclusion in our community.

Through government I hope to create more local employment opportunities, particularly those between 15 and 24 years of age. Giving a person a job is giving a person a future. There is a saying that you can give a person a fish to eat or you can teach them how to fish, which will sustain them. This is something we are working very hard on locally. We know that giving young people a start and access to employment is giving young people a future. That is something that I will stay very focused on. I am proud of the fact that, in the budget, provision was made to help young people get into a job through training and through the greater provision of education. That is something that is certainly absolutely essential in my electorate of Fowler.

Another commitment I made was to bring greater awareness to the issue of domestic violence and the impact it is having on our community. There is absolutely no excuse for domestic violence and much work needs to be done in this area. The primary aim of our efforts is to protect the victims and protect our children from domestic violence. Of course, it is not a pretty picture in the south-west of Sydney. I sponsored a detailed report on domestic violence in Western Sydney, which I commissioned through the ANU graduate program, and it was tabled last week. Domestic violence is something I want to be engaging my electorate on and ensuring that people understand that domestic violence is out there, that it needs to be spoken about and discussed, and that people need to take responsibility for it. I am calling on all men to get up and take the pledge that we will not stay tolerant, accepting or silent in respect of domestic violence. This is something I certainly want to be focused on in my electorate.

Lastly, when I was elected, I said I would give whatever support I possibly could to the police in my region, who do valuable work in protecting our community. I have had a long commitment to working with the police.
In the main I have been their advocate on various issues in state and territory police jurisdictions as well as the Australian Federal Police. I try to give the police in my electorate all the assistance I can because they do a fantastic job, sometimes under very, very difficult circumstances. I acknowledge that the police are a particular class of person; it takes a very special person to put on a police uniform and go out there day after day and do what is necessary to look after the community. I know, Madam Deputy Speaker D’Ath, you know that because your husband, George, is a policeman in Queensland and does a sterling job up there. (Time expired)

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (16:36): I spend a lot of my time out and about knocking on doors and going to the shopping centres in Cowan because, like so many other members of this place, I have no interest in sitting behind my desk or playing golf when there are opinions to be listened to and people to be seen in my electorate. It is certainly clear that there are two federal issues that I continually hear about from my constituents—that is, border control and the carbon tax. Therefore, I will take this opportunity today to speak on these issues I continually hear about. However, before I do so, I note that within the budget the share of GST flowing to Western Australia is forecast to decline again to below 70 cents in the dollar, with the mining tax also forecast to redistribute wealth away from Western Australia. This redistribution of wealth away from those who produce it is something like socialism.

Given the time available, I will focus on the two key issues and I will begin with border control. I can say this is a great source of irritation for my constituents. They do not like the money being spent to deal with the government’s soft and ineffectual policies regarding the boats and they do not like the toleration of riots, the sabotaging of boats and the endangerment of Australian Navy personnel, and they do not like the free giveaways, the special deals with those who come by boat and the pathetic deal with Malaysia. My constituents see that the lives being lived in facilities paid for by the Australian taxpayers are good. The high-quality food, the free goodies, the gym and the unrestricted internet access all stand in stark contrast to what the people get from their own government. That really irritates those on fixed incomes and they know that, if it were not for the policies of this Labor government, Christmas Island would not be full, the numerous detention centres around Australia would not be being built and operated and buildings would not have been wasted. Therefore, I support the establishment of an inquiry into the crisis in the immigration detention network. Intense scrutiny of the government’s policies is now required as we know that there are as many as three critical incidents a day within the network. Apart from these incidents, the inquiry would also look at a cost blowout of some $3 billion, the record number of detainees and the massive blowout in the average time a person is detained. Clearly there is a need for these matters to be ventilated.

With regard to the immigration and border control system, I want to get specific on a number of points regarding the comprehensive failures by the government. I will begin with the Malaysia deal. I would say that the Karen people in Cowan know I support their cause and support their resettlement in Australia. I have said that on many occasions since I was elected in 2007. I supported the shadow immigration minister when he spoke of exchanges of those who come by boat with those who have been stuck behind refugee camp wire or have been approved as refugees. I support such
exchanges, particularly where a person who jumps the queue is exchanged with a person who has been waiting in the long queue. Yes, I support that sort of arrangement. We would pay for the person we receive and the other country would pay for the person they receive—one for one. Yet that is not what we got from the government. We got a four-year deal where the Australian taxpayer pays for 4,800 people at a cost of $292 million. We take 4,000 at $55,000 a head and give them 800 at $95,000 a head and we pay the whole bill. This is desperation and desperation will cost the taxpayers another fortune.

Malaysia is not a signatory to the refugee convention, something that the Labor Party used to have a problem with. From the latest reports it has been said that the deal is not finalised yet. The minister says that the one hundred asylum seekers that have arrived since the deal was announced will be processed overseas, but the Malaysian Minister for Home Affairs is reported as saying that only those who arrive after the deal is signed off will be part of the exchange. Here we have got a deal where Malaysia ships out 4,000 refugees and accepts just 800 asylum seekers. This is a bad deal where Australia loses in every respect. It looks bad and it is. The only thing that really surprises me is how the government, the Prime Minister and the minister for immigration can come into this parliament and proclaim that this deal is something they are proud of. It is unbelievable. They should be ashamed and everyone who sold out the national interest should be ashamed as well. This will go to the regional processing centre fiasco. In many ways, the regional processing centre idea signalled the government’s absolute loss of control on the issue to our regional neighbours. This is like a poker game where you bluff on nine hands in a row and, with sweat running down your face, your opponents know that on the 10th hand you are going to be bluffing again. The Malaysians saw this government coming and they knew how desperate the government was, so they got a great deal. What makes it worse is that the Malaysian High Commissioner let the cat out of the bag when he said that Malaysia would exercise discretion over who it would accept. The Prime Minister on the last Tuesday in question time actually said that Malaysia would not determine who was sent here, but we will be carefully watching this point because everything this government says unravels in these matters.

That brings me to Papua New Guinea and the announcement of the intent of the Labor government to now establish a processing centre on Manus Island. Clearly the East Timor regional processing centre has now been consigned to the thought bubble scrapheap and replaced with the Papua New Guinea regional processing centre, which seemed to come as a surprise to the PNG government. Yet I understand that they are not opposed because they know that the government will pay and they will negotiate fiercely, probably settling on a cash amount five times what the PNG government would have wanted in the first place. In the future, historians will look back on this moment and say that the only regional centre created by this government was a regional embarrassment centre, clearly in the ministerial wing.

Manus Island is an interesting location. A lot of members of this place spoke harshly of the original plan that established Manus
Island under the Howard government. *Hansard* is littered with rebukes and commentary from Labor MPs mentioning Manus Island and railing against the actions of the Howard government. The list is of course extensive and no doubt former members are probably quite happy that they did not have to confront the hypocrisy that is now evident. The former members for Charlton, Fremantle, Corio and others certainly had a go at the Howard government and the island. Of course, there are still members here that spoke so strongly against Manus Island, including the member for Melbourne Ports and the member for Lingiari. The minister for immigration even had a go at Manus Island and offshore processing in 2006. Minister Crean, Minister Garrett, Minister Burke and the defence minister made much of the backlogs in 2004—all strangely quiet now with the re-emergence of Manus Island. The much-maligned so-called Pacific solution, which was so strongly railed against by Labor members of this place in the past, seems to be back again because the government are desperate and will ditch any so-called principles that they claimed to have had to try to cobble together some facade of an answer to this problem they created. While I say the so-called Pacific solution is back, the government's failures will continue and the taxpayers will continue to pay for cost blowouts because the Labor government will not reinstate the key aspects of the Howard government border protection policy, including temporary protection visas. They should embrace the coalition's policies to provide the real deterrents that are required to stop the boats.

The other great problem for this government is the view of the Australian people on the protests, riots and part-time rooftop stunts. We know that the inability of the government to control and manage the ever-increasing stock of detention facilities around the country is a source of great embarrassment for them. In question time on 10 May the minister refused to specifically answer a question without notice about whether rooftop protestors had been allowed to get down off the roof and even charge their mobile phones—a part-time protest—and, Minister, the people know this; they have seen it and they are not happy. And then there was the destruction of the Villawood detention centre buildings in April—the computer room, kitchen and medical centre all destroyed—let alone the home-made bomb the minister read about in the papers recently. And what about the significant destruction of facilities at Christmas Island, which will seek no charges laid or accountability levelled at those who caused the destruction. Even today there were reports of assaults on guards on Christmas Island. Australians will want that dealt with appropriately, including the refusal of visas and the laying of charges. And then there was the explosion of SIEV36. This caused death and injury but there were no charges laid or visas rejected—another justifiable cause of outrage in the Australian community.

There is a big difference between the comprehensive failures of this government and the system that worked. The system that worked was our system; it stopped the boats through temporary protection visas and utilising offshore processing facilities, including Nauru and Manus Island. Of all those who were sent to these facilities just 42 per cent eventually made it to Australia. As I said, the one for five deal with Malaysia will cost $292 million. It is the latest example of a budget blow-out, and it will cost more than the so-called Pacific solution ever cost. So the people of Cowan are right to ask about the waste of money, the terrible deals done, the terrible policy statements that are later
rescinded or die a quiet death. Free nose-hair trimmers and cigarettes, destroyed facilities and massive budget blow-outs—those who jump the queue are not only above the law but also get a load of freebies that our pensioners and those on fixed incomes would love to be able to access.

The second issue I want to raise in this debate is the carbon tax. Born of a lie, the carbon tax is a set of numbers that the government have kept out of the budget to help fix their figures. I will just go through the realities of what may well end up being the greatest deception in the history of this country. Although the Prime Minister's outright political self-serving lie in the week before the last election was a big deception, the assertion that Labor's carbon tax will do anything for global temperatures is the greatest deception in our national history. It will do nothing more than fleece money from Australians and make our employers less competitive; it will do nothing but give the government money.

Today it was reported that the government's own climate commission, bought and paid for with taxpayers' dollars, had handed down its first report—hand-picked, and consensus therefore guaranteed. What do they say? Firstly, they say that everyone agrees with them that anything that is currently proposed in Australia will only slow carbon growth in the atmosphere—but to reduce carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, the reduction of carbon dioxide will pretty much have to stop altogether. And that, of course, will cause those who subscribe to the theory of anthropogenic global warming to urge deep cuts here in Australia. That is right: let us say the world. Switch off everything now and we can save the world but of course, unfortunately, there is still the rest of the world. It was not reported in the papers today what effect the rest of the world's current plans will have on the climate, so I will be looking to that in the detail of the report.

Let us look at the claim that a carbon tax will reduce carbon output. We know that carbon dioxide makes up around 395 parts per million in the atmosphere. But 97 per cent of that is naturally occurring, so human produced CO\textsubscript{2} accounts for just three per cent of the CO\textsubscript{2} in the atmosphere, or just 0.00001185 per cent of the atmosphere. But that is not the bottom line for this country because Australia produced just 1.8 per cent of that figure. That means Australian production of CO\textsubscript{2} amounts to 0.0000002133 per cent of the atmosphere. That is the figure against which this failure of a government wants to apply a multibillion-dollar tax, to reduce that figure by five per cent. So this Labor government's multibillion-dollar tax will result in the reduction of CO\textsubscript{2} in the atmosphere by 0.00000010665 per cent. This is just another example of a failure of a policy that will do nothing for the environment and will only damage this country and reduce the standards of living for Australians—an absolute disgrace.

I have described this carbon tax as the greatest deception in the history of this nation. It is a fraud and it is a disgrace. But we should not be surprised, because it is like so many other Labor government programs that naturally turned out to be inefficient, ineffective and record-breaking in terms of their exorbitant costs. The whole global warming theory has been proven again and again around the world to be an excuse for profiteering, fraud and political advantage.

I take this opportunity to thank my constituent Neil Sullivan for his recent visit to my office. He handed me pages of references to carbon trading frauds in Europe. Indeed, if you do any internet searches for carbon trading fraud you will find hundreds of listings related to this
problem. Billions of dollars have gone missing as organised crime has targeted the weaknesses inherent in the system. Of course, that was recognised back in September 2009 when the Guardian newspaper reported an overhaul of the European Union's VAT system to stop fraud, and to do so before the Copenhagen summit. In spite of that action, the fraud on VAT related carbon remains a problem in 2010. It was also reported at the start of this month that European spot markets for carbon credits were prone to fraud, and they were shut down for 15 days after a large online fraud took place.

These are the same problems that confront this government—a government that has resided over numerous failed programs that have cost the taxpayers large amounts of money. I certainly find it difficult to be comfortable with any assurances this government makes about fraud and rorting when there have been so many examples of such failures that the Labor government has initiated.

I said at the outset that the two major issues raised with me by my constituents are border control and the carbon tax. These are big issues and they represent a fundamental breach of faith with the people by this government. On border control, the government is tasked to maintain the control and integrity of the immigration system, and they have achieved neither. They cannot even ensure that those who break the law are held accountable for their actions.

On the carbon tax, not only is it a terrible lie that has been told to the Australian people for political expediency, but the suggestion that it will in some way be effective in reducing carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and thereby reduce global temperatures is an even bigger lie. These are two of the many issues on which the government, if it really believed in itself, would seek an election to demonstrate its mandate. The reality is that the only thing this government now believes in is the maintenance of power, and sadly that overrides all other considerations.

Mr HUSIC (Chifley) (16:51): I rise to speak in support of Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2011-12 and the cognate bills. These bills solidify the foundation of the Gillard government's budget, our work and commitment towards a stronger economy and better communities for all Australians. In particular, I will endeavour to speak on what this budget will deliver for constituents in Chifley in education, health, local infrastructure, jobs and training, to ensure improved pathways to opportunity.

The budget required difficult decisions necessary to deliver $22 billion in savings, and I commend Treasurer Wayne Swan. I note the presence in the House of the Assistant Treasurer and I also recognise his contribution to delivering a solid, economically responsible budget despite the challenges Australia faces as a nation, with natural disasters such as cyclones and floods in Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales, and what those did to our bottom line. The budget remains on track for a surplus in 2012-13. It is also important to set the context. Australia is in transition between slow, sluggish growth during the GFC and rapid growth with a return to surplus.

I would like to begin my contribution to this debate by highlighting this government's record on building a strong economy. We are set to experience a surge in investment never seen in this country before, with business prepared to invest in a way not witnessed previously. It is a reflection of the confidence of business in the direction of the economy. To ensure that the economy travels as far and strongly as possible, this budget is taking action on two fronts—infrastructure
and skills. Without skilling up our workforce and drawing back into the workforce as many people as we can, we will continue to be plagued by skills shortages. We certainly require an ‘all hands on deck’ approach, which is the focus of the budget, aiming to build a stronger workforce, particularly as the economy is set to take off. I will return to these two issues later.

I reflect on the hardest hitting time since the Great Depression. The government's policies during the recent economic downturn provided families in Chifley and across the nation with the support they needed, via the economic stimulus. Instead of slashing jobs we created 750,000 new jobs since coming into government. As much as the opposition would like to omit this achievement when talking about the collapse of financial markets in 2008, or even acknowledge a return to surplus well ahead of any major advanced economy, the government's economically and fiscally responsible budget has moved to ensure that we are heading towards a surplus by 2012-13. We have outlined our plans to achieve this.

On top of this we have delivered $47 billion of tax cuts. For a person on $50,000, we have cut their tax by $1,750 per year. And we did this with an eye to ensuring we kept tax as a share of GDP at or below the level we inherited—on average 23.5 per cent. This year we are at 21.8 per cent.

The previous government, on the other hand, was the highest taxing government of all time—peaking at 24.1 per cent of GDP in 2004-05 and 2005-06. Back then it was 24.1 per cent; today it is 21.8 per cent. Unfortunately, the opposition have on occasion expressed a wish to do the same as us in terms of returning to surplus, but, minus a plan to illustrate this to the public, there is no substantial proof.

It is worth looking at where we are compared to those beyond our shores. The figures that strike me are the unemployment rates of major economies like the United States and United Kingdom, who are still struggling with unemployment rates that are double Australia's unemployment rate of 4.9 per cent. In fact, approximately 30 million jobs were slashed across the globe during the aftermath of the global financial crisis. The government is building a strong economy for the long-term gain of the country. It is forecast that the economy is to grow by four per cent and that unemployment rates will go down to 4.5 per cent.

As the member for Chifley, I can say that this budget is creating jobs, creating opportunities for the 4,000 apprentices in the Chifley electorate—this budget is about building Australia's future workforce—and training and skilling up Australians to experience the benefits of work. Particularly in an area such as ours, this is an especially critical objective. These 4,000 apprentices in Chifley will be provided with a $1,700 trades apprentice income bonus to encourage them to complete their critical trade qualifications. These apprentices will also benefit from $100 million for a national apprenticeship program and the $281 million support package for additional tax-free payments. And in the area of vocational training we are investing $3 billion over six years including $1.75 million for reform of the training system—this is in partnership with industry—to deliver skills in demand.

Soon students in Chifley will also be able to attend trades training centres at local high schools in the electorate, such as Loyola Senior High and Wyndham, Tyndale, Doonside and Evans high schools. During the December period last year, I visited about 30 schools and I have seen the next exciting phase of the Building the Education Revolution roll out—with Doonside and
Blackett School BER ceremonies in December 2010 and the opening of Tregear Public School library and refurbishments in March 2011. Only recently I went to St Aidan’s Primary School and saw the work that was being done there in Rooty Hill.

It has truly been fantastic to see principals, school staff, parents and tradespeople working together to deliver these important projects for the whole school community. Now that these projects have been completed teachers and students in our local schools will be teaching and learning in 21st century facilities that they richly deserve and can be proud of.

We are providing families in Chifley from Doonside to Tregear with increased support to ensure that children stay on at school and longer, in secondary school in particular. I point to the fact that about 8,000 local families will benefit from the extra $4,200 that will be provided to children aged between 16 and 19 receiving family tax benefit A. This is an important measure, particularly as I am especially keen to see an increase in retention rates in an area where retention rates have been stubbornly lower than the national average.

The education tax refund will also be extended to school uniforms to help with education costs for families, from 1 July of this year. I welcome this measure wholeheartedly because of what it will do to help families with costs such as sports uniforms. This is on top of refunds for books and other school items and will make getting students back to school, with the items they need, easier. It will certainly not be the be-all and end-all in helping boost retention rates but it will be a major encouragement to those families that are keen to see their young children stay on in school longer and build their bases of personal skills.

In terms of health care within Chifley, the government has delivered on a number of fronts, including a boost for Mt Druitt and Rooty Hill primary health care, with $250,000 from the primary health care infrastructure grants program, helping health facilities undertake a broad range of treatment for patients and helping ease the pressure on hospital emergency departments. The government has also invested $4.5 million for more emergency beds and equipment at Mt Druitt Hospital, under the historic National Health and Hospitals Network Agreement. Nationally, $419 million is being invested in headspace and EPPICs. We are fortunate to have a headspace presence in Mount Druitt, which I have had the honour and privilege of visiting, seeing firsthand the work they are doing in offering support to young people in Chifley. The government’s $2.2 billion mental health package acknowledges the need to provide greater support in this area, and our commitment has received particular support for its focus on early intervention.

I mentioned earlier that the budget is delivering in terms of infrastructure, and that is certainly the case in Chifley. Chifley and other Western Sydney residents are set to benefit from a $10 million Smart Technology trial for the M4 motorway to improve safety and tackle congestion in a city in which it is estimated that about $8 billion in extra cost is generated each year because of congestion. As a federal government we are also investing $100 million in the Suburban Jobs program. This program is designed to encourage employment growth closer to where people live, to help deal with, among other things, the congestion that comes with the growth of our cities.

Moreover, some $4.1 million of funding will be extended to Blacktown City Council. Some of that will be to upgrade local parks.
Importantly, the bulk of it will be directed to completing the Mount Druitt community resource hub, for which I was keen to lobby for support, along with my predecessor, the former member for Chifley Roger Price. That community resource hub will provide training and community meeting facilities.

The capability of the library in Mount Druitt will also be upgraded and people will be enabled to access the internet, in an area where broadband access rates are lower. People have problems from a family income perspective in being able to get home connections. Through Blacktown council, through the resource hub, we will be able to provide students access to something that demonstrably has an impact on people's education and transforms their lives. I am proud that the government has been able to add $4 million in funding to $4 million in funding from Blacktown council to develop that resource hub. It is taking shape at a rapid pace, right before our eyes, in Mount Druitt. On top of that, another almost $1.4 million funding will be provided to Blacktown City Council to maintain and upgrade local roads, which, as always, are of keen interest to local residents.

On investing in skills and nation building, the NBN is the largest nation-building project in our history. For residents in Chifley it will deliver affordable high-speed broadband. It is a great investment which will provide abundant economic and social benefits. I have spoken in this place about the fact that some suburbs in the Chifley electorate will be among the first in all of Sydney to access the high-speed internet network. It will be a boon for Western Sydney and particularly for those households and people who have raised with me over the year their frustration, particularly in suburbs such as Woodcroft and Doonside, about being unable to access internet for their families, for their work at home and for their businesses. The NBN is something they have long been after and will ensure that they are either in the same or in a better place than the rest of Sydney.

This is possible because of the range of decisive measures taken by the government, investing in the nation while at the same time ensuring that we are pulling back. It is worth noting we are engaged in the fastest period of fiscal consolidation that has been seen in four decades. The government will not stand in the way of businesses trying to access money for the purpose of the investment that I reflected upon earlier. We will see that fiscal consolidation having great benefits for the economy. While we are pulling back the amount of money that we are drawing upon in the economy, we will also make sure that we are investing in the skills and infrastructure needs of the nation. I am delighted to support the way that the government has been able to achieve those objectives in the way that it has in this budget. This year's solid budget will deliver for Australian families and it will return us to surplus. We have committed to providing savings for the future. The budget will look after the most vulnerable and, most importantly, support families. I commend the budget to the House.

Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (17:05): I never like to make references, if I can avoid it, without referring to the last two or three days of my life experience. In the last week in North Queensland we had the final coup de grace for the Babinda sugar mill, leaving a town of about 4,000 people with no employment. The town does not have much, if any, tourism. It has a few bananas, but very few, and a little bit of farming. It is basically a town of one industry. That was sugar, and the sugar mill has closed.

Last week, when I was addressing the ETU conference in Victoria, I was telling the
ETU delegates—of which there were nearly 1,000—that we are no longer a mining country; we are a quarrying country, and that is a big difference. I was probably more a miner than anything else before I came into this place. I worked my own mines and I also worked as a labourer in the Mount Isa mine, so I have seen it from all angles. The costs in Australia are so high that one of the five major mining companies in Australia has already decided that it will not be doing any more processing in Australia: Xstrata. As I was actually delivering the speech to the delegates in Melbourne, Victoria, little did I know that back in my home town, if you like, Mount Isa, it was being announced that the copper smelter would close and the copper refinery in Townsville would close. In a mining country, if you dig it out of the ground and turn it into metal, you export metal. If you are a quarrying country, you dig it out of the ground, upgrade it a bit and it concentrates, and send it overseas. We are a quarrying country. The vast bulk of our revenue comes from quarrying coal and iron ore, and it will now come from quarrying copper. The biggest copper producer in the country will now be quarrying copper.

I got the good news some three or four days ago that three of the major dairy farmers in my area were going out of dairying. The Malanda dairy factory has gone from 240 farmers down to about 55 farmers. It is very hard to see how our factory can survive. The towns of Malanda, Atherton and Millaa Millaa are all dependent upon that dairy factory. If you switch from dairying, which is a high-employment industry, to cattle raising, there is very little employment whatsoever. Obviously it does not take much energy to see that the fences are up and there is water in the trough—that is really all that has to be done with cattle.

Having said that, the last week was a week of disaster for North Queensland; we have also had the announcement by Treasury officials which, in my opinion, amounted to a confirmation of the prognostications that the Australian dollar is going to go to US$1.70—an exchange rate of 170c. Even if that figure is 150c, foreign tourism in this country is being absolutely devastated by a dollar that has risen from 60c to over 100c. If it continues to rise, there is infinitely more disaster on the way for the base metals industry, the cattle industry, the tourism industry and the sugar industry.

I was at the Esplanade in Cairns recently, late at night, to get a quick take-home meal, and there were only three cafes open. I asked the taxi driver, 'Have you blokes got a holiday today or something of that nature?' He said, 'No.' There used to be 23 cafes open till 2.30 in the morning on the Esplanade in Cairns and now there are only three open after midnight. That is a fair barometer of the state of play.

Having said a series of negative things, let me praise the government. They deserve very high praise for their actions during the global financial crisis. All right, if some of the money was wasted they deserve a good kick in the backside for that, and we praise the opposition for delivering the kick in the backside. But the opposition can stand condemned—very worryingly condemned—because there was no doubt that their rhetoric constantly and continuously was opposed to the borrowing and spending of money by the government. If there is some other way of getting yourself out of a recession or a depression, then I would like to know about it. I strongly recommend that the people in the opposition do a bit of reading. I strongly recommend John Maynard Keynes, Hjalmar Schacht, Aiko Takahashi or John Kenneth Galbraith to them. With the smallest amount of reading in economics they would understand that, if you have a recession or a depression, you have to spend money. The
very worrying, disturbing and scary thing is that they were saying exactly the same thing from 1932 all the way through to 1939—and we had the worst depression of any country on earth, even worse than America’s. At least America got the message, although pretty late in the day. Takahashi had got the message very early on, Hjalmar Schacht got the message very early on and, of course, John Maynard Keynes was saying it before the depression. If he had been listened to, there would have been no depression. For the opposition to be once again repeating the mistakes and having a very superficial knowledge of economics is very, very worrying.

Having praised the government for their action during the GFC, which they richly deserve, in spite of the tenacious attack from the opposition, I see that in the budget there is an allocation of $950 million to deal with the effects of Cyclone Yasi, which is half of the budgetary allocation of $1,800 million. We have been terribly worried that all of this money is going to go to Brisbane, because the Brisbane government, in a most extraordinary decision, set up an authority to dispense the money in Brisbane, comprised of Brisbane people and based in Brisbane—and the legislation referred to the ‘flood disaster recovery authority’. The word ‘cyclone’ was not there and the North Queensland members of the Queensland parliament all voted for it. I saw the legislation and was on the telephone to the Prime Minister's office within three seconds. They thought they were going to pass through this parliament legislation which did not mention North Queensland and the destruction of Yasi.

For what it is worth, I think that the losses caused by Yasi in money terms—not in terms of the loss of life; there was a very great tragedy in the south-east corner of the state—will be worse than were suffered in the south-east corner. I say that because in the banana and sugar industries alone the losses will go very close to $1,000 million, before we get to the destruction of housing and the complete destruction of Dunk Island and Port Hinchinbrook, to give but two examples. Finally, with the clean energy corridor, the government and, particularly the Treasurer, deserve to be singled out for the highest of praise here. We also thank very sincerely the Leader of the Opposition, because I think he has a very genuine commitment to building a transmission line to take power. 'Nation building' is a term often used. The Rudd government carried out two initiatives that future generations of Australians will praise them greatly for. There is the building of a national information highway—and, again, it may not be built in the most cost-effective way, but at least they are building it—and the building of a national energy highway. To a very large degree, I think the Treasurer can claim to be one of the architects of that initiative. We are hopeful and confident that the clean energy corridor will provide four per cent of Australia’s petrol requirements, two per cent of Australia’s electricity demand and it will be clean and renewable and forever—that, once built, it will be there indefinitely.

Many other speakers have canvassed other issues in the budget, and it is sometimes hard to see the budget except in terms of interest rates and balanced budgets. This place has a primitive, simplistic love affair with balanced budgets. One of the reasons that I have always been an admirer of Kevin Rudd—and the word 'restraint' leaps to mind—is the restraint shown when he was running the state of Queensland. There was a very restrained approach to the spending of money, and it was a hallmark of his administration in Queensland.

I do not think that anyone would question that I was one of the inner kitchen cabinet of
the Bjelke-Petersen government. He very kindly nominated me to be the Premier on numerous occasions—along with Lin Powell, who, I might add, would have made an excellent Premier of Queensland. I am not so sure that I would have, but Lin would have. I was one of the inner group in that government. That government was regarded as the greatest achieving government in Australian history in terms of economic achievements and nation building. The person who most said that was in fact Peter Beattie. At the burial of Bjelke-Petersen he said: 'This man and this government created the coal industry of Australia and the tourism industry of the state of Queensland.' He should have added that they also created the aluminium industry.

We had the most unbalanced budget in human history, I would think. In the space of two or three years we borrowed $3,000 million to build a railway line from nowhere to nowhere. A little moth-eaten coastal town called Gladstone had this giant railway line built out to a railway site called Blackwater. There was not a single mine anywhere near that railway line, but they believed that if they built that railway line the mines would open. Les Theiss said, 'I can't open a mine unless I've got a railway line to get the stuff out,' and the government said, 'We're not building a railway line until you build the mine'—and it was chicken and the egg. Along came Ron Cam and this man called Bjelke-Peterson and the chicken and the egg argument was no more.

Similarly, they built a power station—one of the four biggest power stations on earth at the time—and they did not have a single customer for it. But they believed that, if they built that power station, they would have a massive amount of the cheapest electricity available anywhere in the world and it would attract an aluminium industry—and that is exactly what it did.

I have never been enamoured of balanced budgets. If you go out and spend money on self-indulgence, building tunnels, bridges in Brisbane and speeding up traffic flows in Sydney, that is good—I am not saying it is a bad thing to do—but do not say that that is nation building. That is what I would put under the heading of 'self-indulgence'. I have represented city areas in Townsville and Cairns and, yes, we have had to do a bit of that self-indulgence as well. But where has the nation building been? Where are the dams, the ports and the railway lines? Where have those things been?

I will conclude on the issue of interest rates. Australia has five per cent. The RBA sets our interest rates at five per cent. The last time I looked, in the European Union, the EU, it is one per cent, in America it is 0.1 per cent and in Japan it is 0.1 per cent. Why are we out of step with the rest of the world? It is costing us. It is driving our dollar through the roof and wrecking our export industries. (Time expired)

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (17:20): It is quite a challenge to follow the member for Kennedy. He is a passionate advocate for his area and for the issues that he believes in. I rise to voice my support for Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2001-2012 and the related budget bills before the House. This is a solid budget that charts a course to surplus, supports more Australians going back to work and delivers on the Gillard government's commitment to a fairer Australia—and it does all of this in the context of putting a price signal before Australians on harmful greenhouse gas pollution.

This budget is not a wasteful, vote-buying exercise but a responsible economic blueprint to ensure that Australia remains a competitive, modern economy and a society where no-one is excluded or forgotten. As
was said on budget night, it is a Labor budget. The Treasurer, Mr Swan, made that very clear. I think back to some of the more recent budgets from those opposite—the Howard-Costello efforts of 2006-07. Former Prime Minister Paul Keating referred to Mr Costello as being the laziest Treasurer of all time—that he just sat back in his hammock and had a push every now and then and that he did not have a reform agenda or actually take any positive steps in terms of looking to where Australia needed to be in 20, 30 or 40 years time. Thankfully, the Labor Party is around to do things like that—to be a bit adventurous and to be prepared to look over the horizon. The Gillard-Swan budget supports Australians who are doing it tough. The mining tax measure will ensure that all Australians can benefit from the mining boom. Australians should never forget the economic wizardry of Treasurer Wayne Swan. It helped save Australia from the period of economic recession which plagued almost all other economies in the dark days of the global financial crisis. Let’s look at the scoreboard and compare Australia’s performance with some other countries before the GFC and after the GFC. In future years, when they write economics textbooks there will be special pages and chapters devoted to Wayne Swan and the team around him that was able to come up with this incredible response to the global financial crisis. I think that history will be much kinder than some of the negative comments that come from those opposite—they will be consigned to the back pages of history. It is hard to appreciate the benefits of something that never happened, like the global financial crisis, especially when there are big fear campaigns. But we all know, especially the Labor Party, what a recession does. We know how it hits homes, how it hits individuals and communities and how whole postcodes can be dragged down. A recession would have meant thousands of Australians without work. There would have been much higher government debt, much higher inflation and lower living standards. As I said, the human cost comes with it as well. The stimulus put in place by the Labor government ensured that this never happened. The crisis did have a massive impact on government revenue, and this can be seen in the bottom line today as detailed in the budget papers.

I am often surprised about what makes headlines in the budget. There used to be a much more detailed process in terms of media attention. Budget items were gone through step-by-step by the Treasurer and by opposition members in their responses. But the last two years have been quite strange. There has been quite a derailment of that whole analysis process. It has been an attempt at a media exercise rather than a budget reply speech. It is quite strange. A case in point is the opposition endeavouring to beat up so much controversy regarding a program to ensure pensioners do not get left behind in the transition to digital television. As country Victorians will tell you, this has been rolled out in lots of parts of Australia and there have been no problems at all. Often it is the funding programs that do not grab the headlines that make the most significant impact. One that I am particularly proud to talk about—especially in front of Minister Shorten, who I know was particularly passionate about this in his former role—is the extra support for students with disability in Australian schools. The budget delivers $200 million in new funding to support students with disabilities and their teachers. It is a great initiative. I am sure it has got some Shorten fingerprints on it and it is part of the Rudd-Gillard government’s response in an area where, unfortunately, not every opportunity has been taken in the last 20 or so years. I am proud to be part of the
former Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee that put out the report *Access all areas*, which has shaped some of that. We are waiting on the government response to all of those recommendations.

This funding is available to all schools—government, Catholic and independent. We do not care what the sign over the gate says; it is for all schools that teach students with a disability. It will enable these schools to provide better support for these students, including speech and occupational therapy at school and access to special equipment such as audiovisual technology to assist students to learn and engage with their classmates. I know there are other former teachers in the chamber at the moment, such as the member for Braddon. As former teachers, we know how some little technology can ensure that a student with disabilities is able to do just the same as everybody else—especially modern technology. The funding also provides additional in-class support from teacher aides and allied health professionals and an adapted curriculum tailored to meet the needs of students who do have disabilities. The funding will also support teachers—very important people in the process, especially in the context of the past 20 years of mainstreaming of people with disabilities. It will help teachers improve the planning and delivery of lessons and also activities to better engage support staff and curriculum experts and to access expert advice to learn. These are common-sense measures and $200 million will go a long way towards making sure that students with disabilities get as much support as possible as early as possible so that they can be mainstreamed. I understand that there are more than 164,000 students with disabilities attending our schools. This funding will be welcomed by them, their families and their teachers.

The budget also delivers $147 million to support families with young children with disabilities. Through Better Start for Children with Disability, we will make early intervention services more affordable for parents and carers. From July, children up to seven years of age who have been diagnosed with cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, fragile X syndrome, sight or hearing impairments will be eligible for services under the program. These are early intervention services and that is what is most important, because they are able to provide support before children enter into patterns of behaviour that are particularly difficult for schools. The early intervention services include speech pathology, audiology, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and psychology. Children will have access to a total of $12,000 in flexible funding for early intervention services and will be able to use up to $6,000 in any one financial year.

We all know how important these measures are in order to transition people from primary school to high school and then an even more difficult time, I would suggest, from high school to the workforce. Obviously the hope would be to have as many of the 164,000 people as possible transition to a job that gives them some dignity and independence. Obviously, there are other supported measures. I was at a service run by the Wesley Mission at Rocklea in my electorate last Thursday. The service is called MailpaQ. Rocklea was hit by floods and unfortunately they lost their lifts and a lot of their customer stock. People with disabilities pack the material. Thankfully, through the government's Temporary Viability Support funding, which supports Australian disability enterprises facing short-term financial difficulties—this service has also had to do some rebuilding because of the natural disasters; had they had to close, all of these people would have lost their jobs—they got $27,000 from the Australian government to purchase a truck to
make deliveries and a further nearly $70,000 to make up for the loss of customer stock. It was great to see the pride on the faces of these guys when I was there with Parliamentary Secretary McLucas on Thursday.

These measures build on our proud record of delivering for people with disability, because we want all people to enjoy equal opportunity for employment, education and access to goods and services. We have already increased the disability support pension and carer payments. We have doubled funding to the states and territories under the National Disability Agreement and launched the National Disability Strategy. The government is also considering its response to the House of Representatives inquiry into the Access all areas that I mentioned earlier. I am particularly proud of the BER buildings in Queensland, and particularly the ones in my electorate that I know of, which were all built to the disability standards.

There were 39 projects in 24 schools within the electorate of Moreton. I attended the opening of the Graceville State School last year. It has a lift so that the many students who have access problems are able to access the new library. Wellers Hill State School, which is also in my electorate, has not opened yet, but when it does it will have similar lift facilities. I was lucky enough to be at MacGregor State School, which is the biggest state school in Queensland, with about 1,200 kids. Their new facilities are called the Tharenou Centre after the long-term principal Steve Tharenou. That centre also has a lift. At the same time, they opened a liberty swing, the first liberty swing that I had seen at a school. It is a swing for people in wheelchairs. They are able to have the experience of being on a swing. I have a two-year old and I know how much time I spend pushing him back on forth. It is good that kids in wheelchairs can also have that experience. That was kindly funded by the Sunnybank Community Club. They are not cheap; not cheap at all. It was great to see that. It was opened on the same day as the centre.

What do these BER buildings and their universal design features say? They illustrate that the Labor government believes in giving everybody an opportunity. The Tharenou Centre is a case in point. Simple changes, such as the architectural approach of having a lift and exceptionally wide verandas suit people in wheelchairs. But it is also great to have extra wide verandas to keep the classrooms cool under the hot Queensland sun. These BER buildings are examples of the Labor government stepping in and providing opportunities and an economic vision. Admittedly, the BER strategy was an economic stimulus strategy rather than an education strategy, but it turned out to be a fantastic contribution to making a fairer society.

The schools in my electorate that do not have lifts—because obviously lifts are very expensive—have made sure that they have those universal design features, so they have ramp access. Examples include Eight Mile Plains State School, Robertson State School, Runcorn Heights State School and Sherwood State School. They have ramp access, which is good for parents, grandparents and students who have disability problems.

I have learnt a lot about lifts since January this year, when the floods went through my electorate and 5,200 properties were affected. A simple lesson that people have learnt is that the last person out should put the lift at the top and walk down the stairs rather than walking out the bottom. We have had so many lifts damaged because the last person out left the lift in the basement. Obviously, when you get two or three metres
of water go through, that is not a great way to treat a lift.

This budget before us is all about being a Labor budget and it confirms the fact that Labor has an economic vision. Despite the tough times, despite to the budget that have come with the cyclones in Queensland, the floods in Victoria, the floods in Queensland and other natural disasters. The Gillard-Swan budget is to be commended. I am sure when in time we look back we will see that it made a significant contribution to the future of Australia.

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (17:35): I rise today to address the package of appropriation bills for 2011-12. This is a budget that asks families in my electorate of Paterson to do it tough so that the Gillard Labor government can be weak. This is a budget that makes local people pay for the waste and recklessness of the Gillard Labor government, which has wasted their money through failed programs like school halls rip-offs, pink batt fiascos and border protection blowouts. This budget would be a joke if it was not so serious.

One of the most important things in a regional area like Paterson is roads. They are the highways to opportunities that allow my constituents to access education, health services and employment, to name but a few things. But there is not a single new cent—new cent—in this budget for roads. There is $1.75 billion for the border protection blowout, but nothing to boost safety for tens of thousands of drivers. Take for example the feasibility study into the F3 orbital link. That funding has been delayed now until 2015-16. And I am still waiting for the press release from the member for Robertson, Deborah O’Neill, who made much of that promise before the 2010 election and in her maiden speech here in this House. But she has been strangely quiet. Labor did designate $10 million for upgrades to Bucketts Way, which passes through my electorate, but it comes from the existing funding in the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program and is to be spent entirely in the electorate of Lyne. Why? Because Labor sold its soul and shook hands with Rob Oakeshott, the member for Lyne, to take power, and now it is willing to put that deal ahead of the people. I have always been proud of my local councils when it comes to such road funding. Great Lakes, Taree and Gloucester councils have always used a tripartisan approach to the Bucketts Way funding, and that has had some great results. For example, when the previous coalition government delivered $20 million for Bucketts Way, each council chipped in to get the work done to a great standard across the entire length from Taree through to Medowie. This budget undermines that cooperative and productive approach the people of Paterson are so proud of.

The coalition will identify a problem and create a solution. By way of contrast, the Gillard Labor government finds a solution and creates a problem. Labor’s plan to give pensioners television set-top boxes has caused a huge outcry in my electorate. Here we have pensioners struggling with the cost of petrol, groceries and health care. Figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics released on Monday 16 May show that the cost of living for pensioners has increased by 4.1 per cent over the year to March, well above the official increase of 3.3 per cent. For families the figure was 4.9 per cent, and it was even worse for welfare recipients at 5.1 per cent. Yet Labor wants to help pensioners out by blowing hundreds of millions and spending at least double the real cost per household to install set-top boxes.

This will become, as the Leader of the Opposition put it, the building the entertainment revolution. It will not work,
and I can tell you why. Firstly, Labor obviously has not learnt the lessons of its expensive Home Insulation Program. That scheme put local businesses in my electorate, such as the Battmen in Forster, under severe financial stress. It caused scams to run riot, encouraged unsafe work and saw the cost of insulation blow out. Master Electricians Australia has already warned the government about the risks associated with this new scheme but, true to form, this government will not listen.

That is not even the worst part. In my electorate of Paterson there are whole suburbs that will not and do not get any terrestrial digital reception at the moment because they are relying on analog. When that is switched off next year they will have nothing. So what on earth are these residents going to do with a set-top box? Perhaps they could use it as a paperweight, a stool or a footrest. It is like giving the people a plate with no food to eat. This Labor government has a choice. It can upgrade the television towers in my electorate or it can force people to use satellite instead. Satellite will not have all the local programs, news or advertising. This seems like an easy choice, yet in this budget there is no money to upgrade the self-help transmission site at Elizabeth Beach. This means that each household at Elizabeth Beach will have to apply for Labor's satellite subsidy. I have done the sums, and it will cost Labor more to pay the satellite subsidy to the households in Elizabeth Beach than it would to just upgrade the tower in the first place. Such is the incompetence and waste we have come to expect of this government.

In these appropriation bills Labor has promised to establish a new aircraft noise committee to examine possible solutions for mitigating aircraft noise in Port Stephens. Labor says the committee will examine all options, yet it does not say a single word about implementing those options or committing any money to implementing those solutions. Worse still, the Labor government seems to think this satisfies its 2010 election commitments. This is nothing but an insult to the people of Port Stephens, who are burdened by the current ANEF 2025 through no fault of their own. Their homes could be rendered worthless and their livelihoods are now in a state of limbo. These people—my constituents—were promised a new ANEF by the end of last year. They are still waiting.

This government should be ashamed of its lack of action and for breaking an ironclad promise. Then again, this Prime Minister, in the same week she promised to lift the ANEF, also promised that no government she led would have a carbon tax. The member for Newcastle should also be ashamed for letting down cancer patients across the Hunter. The Calvary Mater hospital missed out on an MRI Medicare licence in the budget despite being our region's largest cancer services providing hospital. On 26 October last year, in a speech in this House, the member for Newcastle said:

I am pleased to say that the state government has this year installed an MRI machine at the Mater hospital, and I am working closely with the Minister for Health and Ageing, Nicola Roxon, knowing that they will require some support for the operation of that MRI. The Calvary Mater hospital is the largest oncology service deliverer in New South Wales. So what is Mrs Grierson's excuse for the nondelivery—that the machine is not operational? In a detailed submission earlier this year the Mater management explained that the scanner would be operating from 30 May, a whole month before this budget takes effect. As the Newcastle Herald reported on 13 May:
Mater medical staff council chairman Aidan Foy said the omission from the budget package was outrageous.

'Inability to get Medicare coverage for it will cause really serious problems for the large number of outpatients we see who will need MRIs,' he said.

'It is completely incomprehensible why a major cancer centre would be denied a Medicare licence for an MRI [scanner].'

That it now may be funded in 18 months shows how much the member for Newcastle takes her people for granted.

Labor just is not able to make the tough decisions. It proclaimed $22 billion in savings but actually soaked up $19 billion of that in new spending. Of the $3 billion remaining, $1.8 billion is revenue from a new tax, the flood levy. So, from a budget of approximately $360 billion, the Labor government has saved just $1.2 billion. That is like saving $1.20 from $360. I would not want to put Treasurer Wayne Swan in charge of my piggy bank account.

I now turn to the impact of this bill on one of the portfolios for which I am shadow minister. The budget is the annual opportunity for a government to show what they believe in and what their priorities are. There is still a lot of uncertainty about what exactly the Gillard government believe in, but this budget proves that they do not believe in the Australian tourism industry. Since Labor was elected in 2007, total annual government spending has ballooned to $406.5 billion, a 49.5 per cent increase, yet the Gillard government's annual investment in Tourism Australia has now gone backwards by $16.2 million in real terms. In this budget the Gillard government prioritised things like the $308 million overpriced set-top box giveaway and the $10 million gift to the union movement so they could build a new website. At the same time, the Gillard government levied a $6.2 million efficiency dividend on Tourism Australia, the statutory authority charged with marketing Australia to the rest of the world. It is very interesting to see this $6.2 million efficiency dividend levied on Tourism Australia because, according to the Minister for Tourism, there were no more efficiencies to be had at Tourism Australia. I would like to draw the attention of the House to question in writing No. 58, which the minister answered in November last year. I asked the minister what cost saving initiatives had been identified at Tourism Australia for 2010-11 but had not yet been implemented. His answer? Nil. So in November last year, the very time the Minister for Tourism would have been putting in his bids to Finance, the very time he would have been preparing submissions for the Expenditure Review Committee, he said there were no corporate cost savings to be had at Tourism Australia in 2011-12. This can only mean one thing: the marketing activities of Tourism Australia will be cut because of this efficiency dividend. At the very time we have a surging Australian dollar, at the very time our two biggest tourist source markets, Japan and New Zealand, have been hit with natural disasters and at the very time when this industry needs the support of the government, Labor are cutting the marketing activities of Tourism Australia.

But this is not the only bad policy decision of the Gillard government that will make it harder for the 500,000 Australians who work in the tourism industry to keep their jobs. This government is doing all that it can to make things harder for our tourism operators. In addition to cutting funding for Tourism Australia, this government has increased tourist visa fees by 33 per cent and increased the tourist departure tax by 24 per cent, while cutting the very services it is meant to pay for by $34 million. In fact, the government's
own budget papers said the Gillard Government:

... will reduce operational staff allocated to the passenger facilitation function across the eight Australian international airports.

So the government is making it more expensive for tourists to come to Australia, and reducing the very services they first see when they hop off the plane. The Gillard government completely bungled the tourism industries' industrial relations framework with their so-called modern awards, which were so modern it took us back about two decades!

This government spent more than $100,000 operating the National Long-Term Tourism Strategy Steering Committee. They spent $17,165 on printing 500 copies of the Jackson report—more than $34 for each copy, nearly $1 per page. I would hate to see the Minister for Tourism in charge of printing a Grisham novel. You can just imagine it: walking past the airport bookshop and seeing *A time to kill, 'Now just $491 a copy*! The government's extravagant printing budget would be less offensive if they had actually done something with the recommendations in the report, and they have not. I have to say there is a lot of good work in the Jackson report. Many of the recommendations informed the tourism policies the coalition took to the last election. But where is the government's action? They are bogged down in bureaucracy.

The template that became the hallmark of the Rudd government—review, report, repeat—is still alive and well in the Gillard government. The other hallmark of the Rudd-Gillard government has been their inability to balance the books. In this budget, the government announced new savings for 2011-12—the appropriation I am speaking on today—of $3.7 billion, but then it announced new spending measures of $6.3 billion. So the budget position has worsened by $2.6 billion because of the policy decisions taken in this budget.

The tourism industry is wearing the burden of Labor's debt and deficits without having got any of the benefits. The Treasurer's incompetence is making it harder for tourism operators in two ways. Firstly, the Treasurer's reckless and undisciplined spending is putting upward pressure on interest rates. Not only does this make it more expensive for Australian tourism operators to borrow money but also it is a significant factor in the appreciating Australian dollar, which is making Australia a much more expensive tourist destination. Secondly, when the government are out in the market borrowing money to finance their spending habits, they are crowding out private investors who are seeking to borrow money for tourism assets. The tourism industry needs investment and the last thing it needs is for the government to be competing with private borrowers in the marketplace for finance.

The tourism industry deserves more than a throw-away line in the Treasurer's budget speech. The tourism industry deserves a government that will deliver real money and real action to support the industry, and the Gillard government stands condemned for failing to deliver it. What we see from this government is waste, mismanagement, recklessness and an abandonment of the industries that require the support of the Australian government. This government has failed the simple test of one that is there for the betterment of Australia.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM** (Braddon) (17:49): The member for Paterson just gave his doomsday delivery on the budget and the policies of this government—his usual approach since he has been in opposition. I remind the member for Paterson of a couple of things. He goes on about the lack of an
analog signal in his electorate. He is well aware that he would have black spots anyway.

*Mr Baldwin interjecting—*

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM:** No, you sit and listen for a moment; we listened to you. This government has continued that program and will be moving to a conversion to digital, as he well knows. If he wants to go on about the rollout of digital terrestrial tower signals and continue to claim that that is cheaper for those people in black spots to receive than satellite reception then why not talk about the ongoing maintenance costs associated with terrestrial signals from towers? Of course he will not do that because he knows that the satellite system is the only sensible system to provide digital television. I see he is leaving the chamber—as he always does when anyone raises anything about his comments on his own electorate. What he also does not comment on is the fact that satellite transmission of digital signals will involve not only all the channels available in the metropolitan areas but also a local news coverage on a specific designated television channel for his area. But, of course, he does not tell the people of Paterson about that, so I will for the record.

He also trumpeted the same sorts of arguments on the program to provide set-top boxes for older Australians. We all know that the cost is not just the cost of the set-top box itself. We know it involves a suite of programs to support the installation of the set-top box. It involves the wiring and antenna orientation, if that is required. It also involves support service for over 12 months thereafter to ensure that the users of the set-top box are getting the right services and using the set-top box correctly to get the digital signal. So it is part of a whole range or suite of associated things provided. Those opposite know that, because they supported the legislation when it came into this House. This has been in process now for some months and those opposite supported it.

But News Limited come along, with a few of those on the other side, to ape an argument on this. And of course out it comes—here we are looking at another example of the so-called installation fiasco. It is absolute nonsense. Those on the other side know it. News Limited know it, but it is not in their interests to promote anything positive. We are quite happy to support older Australians who need support in setting up for the coming digital conversion. It has worked in Mildura, it has worked in other places and it will continue to work. But those opposite do not want to talk about that.

The other thing that was trumpeted by News Limited and aped on the other side was this great so-called class warfare allegedly driven by this budget. When you look at the figures for the family tax benefit—both what is given and suspended for some time—you can see that it is an absolute nonsense. In the main, families will in fact be much better off because of this budget, and the figures substantiate that. But is that what is in the media? No, it is all about so-called class warfare and how middle-class families have been hit unnecessarily by this budget.

What we tried to do with this budget was to be fair and to be responsible and, through it, we are trying to achieve the aim of getting the budget back into surplus by 2012-13. That is exactly what the budget sets out to do. It is made up of savings of $22 billion and it has a number of expenditures to assist families, to assist the economy and, in particular, to assist small businesses. Whilst doing that, it aims to keep the parameters of our economy in check so that we can, indeed, go into surplus as promised in 2012-13.
Listening to the member for Paterson, who echoes the arguments about the economy of many on that side, you would never believe we went through a financial crisis. According to the member for Paterson, we have done nothing to maintain this economy in its relatively sound position compared to other countries—to keep the economy strong and in a better position to service our debt than most countries, if not every other country in the world. Those opposite know we have done that. They may quibble about where we spend money and where we may have savings, but the Leader of the Opposition, in his reply to the budget, could not specify savings. He would not specify where the revenue will come from for any expenditures. All we got was this headland vision of waffle and negatives all the way.

If you look for the Leader of the Opposition's line-by-line reply to this budget, his detailed criticism of it—and indeed when you look for that in the media—it is missing. Any substantive analysis of this budget is essentially missing. I expected to hear that detailed criticism from the other side, but all we got was what Tony Abbott is very good at—slogans and vague comments. When he is asked to be accountable, he cannot be accountable.

That inevitably led to the sorts of tensions that arise in those opposite. We know that the member for North Sydney was upset by a number of the so-called assessments by those opposite and we know that he has been in conflict with his leader. We know that others on that side are greatly disappointed by the Leader of the Opposition's inability to provide anything of substance.

The Leader of the Opposition is calling for a change in government—'Let us go to an election,' he begs. Why would he want to go to an election? Is it that we do not have any legislation passing through this place? I do not think so. Indeed, substantial amounts of legislation have been passing through this place and there will be more. Is it because this legislation has no substance? No, it is not. Legislation passes through this place, the Australian economy continues in its development and this House continues to function. So, gee, Tony—Leader of the Opposition—why do you want another election? Tony was upset that, when he thought he could bribe and buy his way into government with members from the crossbenches, they saw through it. In fact the more he offered them, the more they were determined that he was not fit to govern this country—and nor is he.

Even if our polls may not be as high as one would expect, I will tell you what—the Leader of the Opposition's polls are no cause for comfort for him or those opposite. So what does that tell you? You can argue that there may not be substance in everything we do here, but I tell you what—there is no substance in the Leader of the Opposition and those opposite know it. If you were hoping for a little miracle this year, forget it. This parliament will go its course. The Australian people expect that and that is exactly what will happen. Things change, my friends, as you will see.

I think this budget provided a fair balance to the Australian people and to people in my electorate in particular. I refer to some comments in my local newspaper. I would not say that the commentator is a big fan of Labor. I would say that he is pretty independent. He says of the budget in part that there are:

Many worthy budget measures, some less so and some icebergs coming up.

That is quite a reasonable assessment from his point of view. We will see. We all know that there is legislation on very important
matters affecting the economy coming up. I think many Australians are looking forward to this playing out, and play out it will. The commentator from my local newspaper, apart from raising a few problematic things, says:

… the welfare-to-work measures are needed and excellent.

Those on the other side, in their feigned interest and care for those on welfare, claimed that what we were trying to do was beat people with a stick rather than support them. When you actually look at the measures we are implementing, you see that they are indeed to support, to encourage, to enhance programs which exist now, to get people who are dependent on welfare into work, in particular to try to isolate areas of need that require support. In my area, the municipality of Burnie has been designated as one of 10 areas requiring further assistance. That is on top of all the programs that exist currently and there is funding available to support personnel and further programs, driven from the bottom up, to assist people who are on welfare into work and into training. As the commentator from The Advocate goes on to say:

… the welfare-to-work measures are needed and excellent. As are $2.2 billion to fight mental illness and targeting skilled migrants at regions that need them.

Australia must maximise its workforce, especially given population ageing and the significant opposition to immigration; with many opponents struggling to differentiate between refugees and the skilled migrants needed in the mining boom.

There were not masses of new, locally specific announcements, and nor should there have been.

This is a time for belt tightening and a time when regional rorts should be kept to a minimum.

That is not to bug worthy government spending— and I am very pleased to see this— such as the North-West and Northern funding for job-creating ventures, which appears to have been a great success.

Indeed, this government, along with the Tasmanian government, provided $17 million for business enterprises in the northwest in particular and in the north—in the light of the paper mills closing and the closure of Tascot Templeton, the carpet factory in East Devonport, and McCain's processing plant, or part thereof, in Circular Head—who put their own money in as well to grow their businesses. In fact, they had something like 121 applications, with many more millions of dollars to invest. Thirty-five projects were successful and provide already 200 jobs, and indeed look to fulfil the target of 400 jobs. So that is working very well in my electorate and is an excellent investment in our region, along with the people who are making it happen. The commentator from The Advocate goes on:

Also, for all its issues, the Rudd stimulus was a positive for the economy.

But now it is time to rebuild the nation's bank balance.

On a final note, many economists have made light of the government's desire to return to surplus by 2012-13.

They may be technically right, but they are also mistaken.

Having the national books in the black would be a big psychological plus in an economy where public confidence has taken a battering.

I think that, in a sense, is a fair assessment of this budget, warts and all. It offers fair savings and reasonable expenditure in areas of need, particularly trying to grow the economy, to grow jobs, to grow apprenticeships, to grow skills and training and, of course, to support education. I would also thank the government to this point for its selection of part of my region to receive extra assistance to support jobless families, young parents who are unemployed and the
long-term unemployed. Unemployment is entrenched in some parts of my region and needs this extra support. *(Time expired)*

Mr WYATT (Hasluck) (18:04): I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Gillard government’s Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2011-2012 and cognate bills proposed by the Labor government as part of the 2011-12 federal budget. I would like to start by talking about the bedrock of this country—the family. The coalition supports smaller government in Australia, government which trusts its people with the ability to manage their own affairs, choose where they want to live and work and where to send their children to school.

The coalition supports choice and allowing the economic and social flexibility for Australian families to better their own situation through hard work, commitment and a fair go. Sadly, these are opportunities and visions not shared by the Gillard government with its bureaucratic and centralised approach to governance. Families must be given support by the government to grow and not be suffocated through higher taxes. Australian families are forgotten by this wasteful and reckless spending. Families in Hasluck know that, since Labor was elected, electricity prices are up 51 per cent, gas prices are up 30 per cent, water prices are up 46 per cent, education costs have risen 24 per cent, health costs have risen 20 per cent, rent costs have risen 21 per cent and grocery prices are up 14 per cent.

A $26 a tonne carbon tax will add 25 per cent more to electricity bills and 6.5 cents a litre more to fuel bills, which are already skyrocketing. But who knows what the final price on carbon will be? The real power behind the government, the Greens, are touting figures of $40 and $50 a tonne and as late as last week Senator Sarah Hanson-Young of the Greens signalled the price should be $100 a tonne.

The Australian public and business sector needs consistency and is not getting it. The family tax benefit freeze on indexation will also hit Hasluck families hard. A family with two children and a stay-at-home parent stand to lose up to $147 worth of benefits, while a family with both parents working will be $116 worse off. Families struggling to make ends meet on an income of $45,000 will also be hit. To quote directly from the *Australian* newspaper on Thursday, 12 May:

Unlike the changes to family tax benefit thresholds, this savings measure will hit even the lowest-income families.

This short-sighted measure encapsulates the pain Hasluck families will have to suffer due to the poor fiscal management of the Gillard government. In only four budgets, federal Labor has turned a $20 billion surplus into a $50 billion deficit and $70 billion in net assets into $107 billion of debt. This government is still borrowing $135 million every single day.

Hasluck is in desperate need of infrastructure, health and social projects to make its economy more productive and its streets safer and to give its people better access to health services. Just one day of borrowing by this reckless government would alleviate many of these issues. For example, the Perth to Darwin Highway in the north of Hasluck has been identified by all of the area’s state politicians and infrastructure experts as being of critical need to the state’s transport infrastructure. Heavy haulage transport taking machinery and goods to the north, which is fuelling our resources boom, is being woefully neglected by this government. Trucks are forced to operate within a curfew; gigantic mining trucks being transported up north are fighting for space on a rural road with holiday-makers trying to visit the Swan Valley. It is a serious
Today I would like to discuss the need for an urgent upgrade to the busy Hasluck Freeway in the north of the seat. I am disappointed that the Machinery Preservation Club will not receive the $300,000 needed for new premises and funds for its national rally. The Gateway WA project will also receive needed funding to alleviate traffic and issues of accessibility.

I am disappointed. Nearly all of the commitments I made to the electorate before the election will go unfulfilled in this budget. Labor has not put any money into the solar towns program for Forrestfield, which a coalition government would have put $300,000 towards. I am disappointed that the Kalamunda Shire of Kalamunda has impressive plans for the area but lacks the funding to see it realised in the next financial year. The residents of Hasluck should not have to put up with a lack of recreation facilities for themselves and their families, and the government needs to take action in this key area.

Other issues of infrastructure are the need for an improved Roe Highway and Berkshire Road interchange. Heavy haulage barrels down the Roe Highway before it gets to the area of the planned Perth to Darwin Highway. The Shire of Kalamunda is so frustrated that it is taking the step of writing to ministers for action. Once again, this is not a new problem. Shire President Don McKechnie calls it a 'dangerous intersection' that cannot be funded under the black spot program due to the cost. The WA Department of Main Roads put the funds needed to start work at roughly $11 million. Just two hours of Labor's borrowing would fix this terrible intersection—just two hours. Think about that for a minute. I ask those opposite to try and explain this situation honestly to the Australian taxpayer and to the people of my electorate. They deserve better.

It is not just roads either; Hasluck is in desperate need of parks and recreation facilities. The three local governments—the City of Gosnells, the City of Swan and the Shire of Kalamunda—have all expressed to me their urgent need for funding towards their projects. The local playgrounds at parks throughout Hasluck need an urgent upgrade. I was shocked to discover during the election campaign several parks which regularly had needles, bottles and smashed glass hidden in the sand. Residents have taken it upon themselves to keep these parks clean, but there is so much more to be done. For example, the community of Wattle Grove needs funding for parks and open space. The Shire of Kalamunda has impressive plans for the area but lacks the funding to see it realised in the next financial year. The residents of Hasluck should not have to put up with a lack of recreation facilities for themselves and their families, and the government needs to take action in this key area.

I am disappointed. Nearly all of the commitments I made to the electorate before the election will go unfulfilled in this budget. Labor has not put any money into the solar towns program for Forrestfield, which a coalition government would have put $300,000 towards. I am disappointed that the Kalamunda Districts Rugby Union Club renovation and expansion will not get the $1 million to make it a reality. I am equally disappointed that the Machinery Preservation Club will not receive the $450,000 needed for new premises and funds for its national rally. I am, however, pleased to see $1.2 million for the road link between Elmore Way and Kalamunda Road in High Wycombe, which would have received this same amount if the coalition were in government, under a commitment I made prior to the election. Likewise, the Gateway WA project will also receive needed funding to alleviate traffic and issues of accessibility.

The Gillard government is spending well over $1 billion of the people's money next
year to house and treat asylum seekers that have flooded to this country under Labor's failed border protection policy. In the electorate of Hasluck, we have asylum seekers being housed in a local caravan park. The cost of all this alternative housing is adding up and this is reflected in the budget. A solution to this issue needs to be urgently found, and a deal with Malaysia will not fix the government's problems.

Let me turn to education, an area close to my heart and one that I have considerable experience in. Our young people are in desperate need of federal leadership on this issue and are sadly neglected by the Labor government. Schools across this great nation are forced to go cap in hand to P&Cs to find funds for the most basic of services. Labor's budget shows it is going horribly wrong in this portfolio and lurching from one crisis to the next.

The budget reveals a blow-out to the Computers in Schools program, with the total cost now coming to $2.4 billion. Think about that sum of money for a moment. Two point four billion dollars is $110 per person in Australia. When you break that figure down further, into the number of working Australians, it is well in excess of $200 per person across this country. Originally, $1 billion was set aside to give every year 9 to year 12 student a computer at school, and the government has still only delivered just over 400,000 of the proposed one million computers. Just last year, only 1,476 of the required 5,902 computers were delivered in Hasluck. That means that 4,426 year 9 to year 12 students in my electorate are missing out.

Couple this with the government's freezing of the trades training centres for every school until 2015-16, according to this budget. Hasluck relies on trade training centres to offer its young people an alternative pathway to university and to ensure we maintain the domestic capacity to produce skilled workers. But this government is screaming for more skilled people in this country to keep our economy strong and then does this. Mr Christopher Pyne, the shadow minister for education, said:

I didn't think the rollout of this program could possibly go any slower. After three-and-a-half years only 70 trade training centres are operational out of a promised 2,650 and now a freeze will mean further delays. Remember, this policy was the centrepiece of the education programs announced by Labor in 2007. The so-called education revolution was going to build a trades training centre for every high school. These are damming words for a poorly managed portfolio under the Gillard government.

Hasluck is in desperate need of more training and skilling opportunities not only for students but also for those who wish to reskill themselves to enter the workforce. I have met a number of constituents who have hit unnecessary barriers to accessing training opportunities. We should be funding real and achievable programs to utilise our entire population to provide the workforce for the future.

Then there is the class war policy of penalising students who pay their HECS debts upfront. Upfront repayment bonuses will be slashed from 20 per cent to 10 per cent and the early repayment bonus from 10 per cent to five per cent. This is a short-sighted policy and penalises families who have worked hard to put their children into higher education and wish to enjoy a benefit from paying tuition fees earlier. These are not necessarily rich parents. I have met many mothers and fathers in Hasluck who believe that one of the most important things they can do is to provide their children with a good education and they work hard to do
this. It sends the wrong message to Australia that, if you work hard and try not to get into debt, there is no reward. Hasluck families will once again be hurt by the ill-advised change to the HECS regime.

I turn my attention to health, one of the most important responsibilities for government. Aside from the bungled administration of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and the growing list of medications not put on the PBS by Labor leaving families at risk, there is an issue with growing bureaucracy and waste. Dental reform is missing from this budget and it is an area of severe neglect on the part of the government. I come to dental rebates, which are missing from this budget, and this is a serious concern for the country as a whole. Dental health is a relatively inexpensive problem to treat initially but one that costs hundreds of millions of dollars in the long term. Poor dental health leads to heart disease and other complications. A few thousand spent on a patient with bad teeth can save hundreds of thousands of dollars that would be needed to manage this patient long term with cardiologists, nurses and a hospital bed, not to mention the social exclusion this person suffers as a result of the impact that this has on the family.

The decision to move the reform back to the 2012-13 budget is a typically short-term, headline-grabbing, poll driven, political decision-making stunt by the government. In Gosnells, there is a severe shortage of GPs to treat the growing population of young families and new Australians. If you want an indication of what things are really like for GPs, speak to Don Prendergast, at the Swan Medical Group, who has lived and worked in the area for many years. People such as Don are on the front line and stress the importance of early access to good primary health care in order to prevent future complications from arising.

Access to primary health care should be universal to all my constituents but, unfortunately, this is not the case. Too often, I hear families rationing and sharing medication because they cannot get to see their GP who bulk bills or they cannot afford the $65 consultation fee to get a script off those GPs who refuse to bulk bill. This is a disgrace. The long-term effects are devastating and we should be providing as much support as we can. Whilst the funding has been allocated to mental health, which is long overdue and greatly needed in the industry, the government has failed family members who act as carers. There is a significant number of constituents in Hasluck who care for a relative. They are dedicated people who are sons, daughters, parents, friends, cousins or grandparents and who do outstanding work in our community, yet there is little place to support them.

The government measures for the seat of Hasluck do not fully address the extent of need that is required. I hope that in future years, as we approach future budgets, my advocacy and the arguments that I will put forward will become a focus of the work that I undertake in the fight to gain their share of the federal budget for the programs that are needed. It is important, as I said in my maiden speech, that ministers are there for all Australians, that in the allocation of resources for infrastructure programs and services all families in this country be considered equally in the context of need and also in the context of economic development and opportunities that in life need to be afforded to them by government.

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (18:19): It is a pleasure for me to be able to speak on Appropriation Bill (No.1) 2011-2012 and the other appropriation Bill. The budget is all about responsibility, it is about opportunity, it is about getting the economic fundamentals and the balance right and it is
about getting Australia back on its feet as a result of Australia having suffered a significant set of circumstances. I remind the opposition that we had a global financial crisis, a crisis that was the most severe that this country has faced for 75 years. This government took the hard decisions—and the correct decisions—to ensure that the way we structured the economy and the budgets kept people in jobs, that we kept the economy going, that we kept business working and that that would progressively over a period of time keep the Australian economy ahead of comparative economies in the OECD and the rest of the world.

To that effect, today our economy is the envy of almost every other comparative economy in the world. These countries acknowledge the good work that this government did during that crisis and where we sit today. I hear members across the chamber bleating on and complaining about debt and how it is the end of the world. You would think that we were living in a vacuum, that somehow we were isolated from all the things that took place right around the world and that Australia never had this greatest financial event in 75 years or that we have had some of the greatest natural disasters that this country has seen, in some cases, for generations. You would think we were living in a vacuum.

Those opposite talk about debt and what that debt costs per day. Name me anybody who has created wealth in this country who has not borrowed. Name me one. Name me one country in the world that has not created wealth and jobs by not borrowing. The fact is that if you do not borrow, if you do not do it right and if you do not do it at the right time, you leave the economy weak and struggling. This government did not do that. We did what was necessary to ensure that people would remain in jobs, that the economy would stay strong, and that people were looked after on the way through—vulnerable people, people who need government assistance, people on pensions and people who need the government to support them at their time of need—and that is exactly what we have done. That is exactly what this budget is about. It is a responsible budget that goes through a set of measures that will get us back in the black—as has been said many times—to ensure that this economy will be exactly where it ought to be, and that is to provide for ordinary people, for businesspeople and for the economy. It is also about ensuring that there is a fair distribution as to what is commonly referred to as the two-speed economy. But we in this place should all acknowledge that it is a multispeed economy. In different parts of different states the economy runs at different speeds. The only way we can make sure that everybody has an opportunity to take part in that economy is to provide a budget that does exactly that—and that is what we have done.

It is just a simplistic boneheaded argument from the opposition that budgets are all about one thing—a magical surplus. This is where they stick the spare money under the mattresses in their bedrooms; they do not spend it on the people who need it. What sort of economic logic is that? This is the sort of argument you get from the members opposite. They talk about infrastructure and about how the interest bill from one day's deficit could pay for a particular road. They do not have a lot to speak about on infrastructure. They were in government for those long 12 years and rivers of gold flowed into Canberra no matter what they did. There was a reason they had surpluses—which, by the way, they never predicted; they always had an unexpected surplus. Why didn't they spend those surpluses then on the roads in Western Australia, Queensland and other parts of the country that needed to be
repaired? It is not as if those roads have changed since then.

The only government that has spent any significant amount of funds on infrastructure in this country is the Labor Party—Labor governments. Labor has been the only government over generations to take the tough decisions. If there is anyone who could be blamed for today's deficit, it would be the opposition for not having spent the money in the first place when it was available, when the rivers of gold ran into Canberra, on the necessary infrastructure to keep the economy strong. Now we hear those opposite complaining that 'poor old Western Australia doesn't have enough roads; it has goat tracks and potholes'. Where were you when you were in government for 12 years, when there was an abundance of surpluses? You could have spent the money, but you preferred to stash it under your bed, to hang on to it for a rainy day—which would never have eventuated under the Howard government—and expected everything to be rosy. What about all the poor people who missed out? What about the jobs you didn't create? What about the boom times that could have been even bigger and the money, if properly spent, that would have meant that today we would not have to invest money in infrastructure, because that would have already been done?

I do not hear too much coming back from the other side about road, rail and ports—all the things we had to do from day one when we were elected in 2007. That is the reality. That is the track record of this government when it comes to budgets and spending. This is reflected in a whole range of other areas, including skills investment—investment in people. We are about making sure that when there is a boom we take the profits from that boom and spend it in the right areas. But we are also about making the right people pay. When we start talking about mining and a boom—the boom gets bigger and bigger in the resources sector—we should make sure that those who are benefiting from that boom provide a greater share of the benefits to the Australian people. We can then spend more on infrastructure and so do more with that economic boom.

But I do not recall that being part of the ideology, of the agenda or of any budgets when the Howard government was in power. What we have done in this budget is focus very squarely on the things that build on the resources boom and that build for a future when we will not have a resources boom. That is the reality. There might be a further 20 years of a so-called resources boom but that boom for Australia might vary. It might graduate up and down depending on the Australian dollar or on the prices of resources. So we need to start making some very serious economic decisions today. If we are going to have a skills shortage, we need to invest in skills training so that Australians can get those jobs. We will not need to have more 457 visas in place to import skills when we have Australians in those skilled jobs.

This is when we need to spend it and this is when we are spending it. We have done this in really difficult economic times. No-one was expecting the massive tragedy, the devastation, that we saw in the Queensland floods and with Cyclone Yasi in the north of that state, the fires in Western Australia or other disasters that occurred right across the country. We are squarely focused on what needs to happen. Trades apprentice income bonuses are about making sure that we support apprentices in the right areas of the economy. We know that employers want to put apprentices on, but they need a helping hand and so we are doing that for them. We also want to make sure that apprentices stay in an apprenticeship, that they follow it through—and so we are making sure of that. In my electorate alone there are 3,336 apprentices who will benefit from this
investment. Thousands of young people will be given the skills and the opportunity through this government's budget and through this program.

When it comes to training, we are going to invest $550 million in a new workforce development fund that puts industry at the heart of the training system. We have to work with industry—something that the opposition might find a little bit unusual. We have to work with all stakeholders in industry and with the workers in industry to make sure that we do this right. We will deliver 130,000 new training places over four years. That will help to balance out the boom-and-bust days that we experience from time to time in this economy. In terms of incentives for employment, in the electorate of Oxley there are about 1,419 very long-term unemployed people who have not had work for two years or more. We have very specific programs to break that cycle of unemployment because that is where we need to make investments. If we can break that cycle we can break the generational unemployment cycle. We actually provide something for people. We also provide something for the economy and something beyond what just one simple budget can do. Better skills is something that I am really proud of. We have invested in a whole range of areas. We have invested in bricks and mortar with the Building the Education Revolution—halls, libraries and science labs—and we have also invested in people, in skills. We have invested in teachers and in getting the national curriculum right. In taking those big leaps forward, those big steps, we want to make sure that education is front and centre in everything that this government does.

I heard something about dental care. I remember that there were masses of opportunities for dental care in those 12 years of the Howard government that never materialised. The Howard government always talked about it but, when the rivers of gold were running into Canberra, there was no dental care for those most in need of it. Under this government, we will continue to break down this problem and give people the assistance they need—an extra $53 million to establish a voluntary dental internship year, an extra 150 internship places and money to go into dental care, particularly for pensioners. We want to support more families. In Oxley in particular, 5,700 local families will be eligible for an extra $4,200 per child between the ages of 16 and 19 because of a significant change to the family tax benefit. We are investing in people who need it and we are investing in the right areas of the economy. We are getting the balance right in a very tough budget and economic year to make sure that those who get the assistance are those who need it the most.

We are not stopping there. We are also helping small business and manufacturing. We are doing more to lower the company tax rate than any other government has done in this country. Building on top of the $5,000 for asset write-offs, there is an immediate deduction in the 2012-13 budget for purchased motor vehicles. This will provide some $350 million in further cash flow to benefit small business.

In digital assistance we are providing $31.8 million over three years to provide eligible pension recipients across Queensland with professional assistance to convert their televisions from analog to digital. We are also co-locating a number of one-stop shops for Australians who are seeking access to Australian government services. This is often a complaint, so we are going to co-locate these. In my electorate it will be at the Mt Ommaney shopping centre. Disability services are getting an enormous injection with an additional $1.6 million being spent on people with disabilities in the
electorate of Oxley. There are also the much heralded and very necessary mental health programs that we are putting forward.

This has been a good budget. It is a tough budget, but it is a fair budget that gets the balance right and will get us back in the black.

Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (18:31): The Australian people delivered a verdict at the last election that was unexpected by the nation, by the government and by the opposition—that is, a hung parliament. It was a verdict that said, 'We do not have confidence in either of you to the point where we will give you a mandate to govern.' So that mandate was transferred to Independent members of this parliament. In speaking to many Australians, as I do as a local member, the people's understanding of the hung parliament and the arrangements that followed was that they were given another Labor government. But what happened was that the government actually changed hands at the last election. Did we have a Labor government beforehand? Yes. Do we have a Labor government today? Yes, we do, but it is a changed Labor government. So at the last election campaign we had a change of government.

The change of government entailed a deal between the Prime Minister of the day and her leadership and a small number of Independents elected across the nation. To do that deal, particularly with one group—the Greens—the Prime Minister had to make concessions on things that she had previously, and genuinely, said she would not do. She had to literally oppose what she had said during the election campaign. We do not know all the details that were thrashed out in those meetings; we were only onlookers of the evening news. What we do know is that during the election campaign the Prime Minister said, 'Under my future administration there will not be a particular tax.' The Prime Minister then called that tax a carbon tax. She very clearly said to the Australian people, 'Under my future administration'—as she understood it at the time—'there will be no carbon tax.'

We as a nation took that at face value. As much as people say that they do not believe politicians, they do believe prime ministers and opposition leaders will do what they say they will do. If they say they will not do something, people believe that they will not do it. So a misunderstanding of the deal that the Prime Minister had to do with the Greens is a misunderstanding of the change of government because there was not only a change of government on election day because we had a hung parliament but also a change of government in the ensuing days and weeks of discussions with the Independents over what areas the government would need to change its position on.

The Prime Minister could have come out at that time and laid out before the people of Australia: 'To form government I have had to agree to these specific issues to get the support of the Independents. I know I said that before the election, but for us to form government we have done a deal with the Independents.' If the Prime Minister had then said immediately, 'This is the deal that I have done and part of the deal is that we are to introduce a carbon tax' the Australian people could have accepted that that was the deal. But to ignore it was to leave the Australian people out of consideration and bring them to a place of disappointment because they were not included in the process of government that they had just voted on.

Disappointment is one of the most difficult emotions to deal with, as anybody who has been disappointed knows, and it is a lingering emotion. So today the broader
nation—from the top of Queensland to southern Tasmania, from the west to the east—is disappointed with the government, because it says it is now going to introduce a carbon tax. That disappointment, by my reckoning from the Australian people that I meet with, is palpable. It is expressing itself in many ways, particularly through disappointment with the current Prime Minister. All issues become manifestly greater than they would otherwise have been because the people now feel that, no matter what the government does, the voice of the Prime Minister cannot be trusted. I do not know what the way back is for the government, but I know that my opposition to the carbon tax does not stem from the pure politics of, 'They want it; we don't.' My opposition to the carbon tax comes from the fact that many of the workers in my area—I once represented all of the power stations in the Latrobe Valley and I now represent many of the workers in the Latrobe Valley—can see themselves once again being the patsy for a political decision that needed to be made in order to take government.

The other issue is the test of a budget. The test of a budget for me is, bottom line, how we look after our most vulnerable—our frail elderly, our very young children, our disabled and those who have mental difficulties. I think that, in a bipartisan mood, mental health has come to the fore, and I believe we are progressing. But when it comes to our frail elderly, our youngest children and our disabled we still have a long way to go—and that is the test of the budget. The other test for me is what has happened in previous budgets that is still happening and being spruiked today, by the Treasurer in this case. I have heard previous speakers talking about skills training. In this government's last three budgets they have spoken about and funded skills training. Does that mean the money that was funded in the last two budgets did not work and so today we must still talk about skills training?

Mr Danby: No, because we've got to keep on going.

Mr BROADBENT: No, it is not a matter of keeping on going; it is a matter of rejigging the money each year to pretend that you have done something new on skills training. In truth, you have not. Every year you have reannounced, under a different name, a different package—and still we struggle with skills training. This is an indictment of a Labor government whose focus should be on making those programs work year after year, not just reannouncing them year after year.

It is very clear that, in our nation at the moment, families are struggling with the cost of living. I give you the example from Victoria of electricity prices, which have increased by between 30 and 40 per cent, mostly because of the former Bracks-Brumby government's determination to set a benchmark of 20 per cent of power having to be produced by renewable energies. What did they actually achieve? Between 3½ and five per cent of that target. It is great to get a front page article on renewable energy and what they are doing about it purely for the votes, but when the rubber hits the road you see that they have not reached their target and you read about it in a small article on the third page of the paper.

Cost of living is extremely important to families with mortgages. I am in a big mortgage belt area and people are concerned mostly about the uncertainty that pervades government at the moment. That concern manifests itself in many ways. We believed that we were in the running for some funding through the budget for the Warragul hospital—the West Gippsland healthcare centre. It received zilch, nothing, nano. I believe that 19 projects were funded across...
the nation, but none for Gippsland, although we are going ahead with some roads programs which will be beneficial.

I return to my farmers and say this: I owe John Howard because he was extremely important to all of the farmers across my electorate. Through the drought years, for 13 years, the Howard government never once walked away from a farmer. In fact, you might be surprised to know, Mr Deputy Speaker, that over those years the Howard government, with John Howard's signature on each one, spent $2.424 billion—that is, $2,424.1 million—on those farmers over that time. That does not count all the expenses that went into our farming communities. There was a direct concern and care for farmers who were suffering through that drought period. Each one of those farmers remembers that McMillan, of all places, was one area that was not in the funding stream because we just did not fit the criteria—but our farmers suffered in exactly the same way.

I stand here at this time when, except for Western Australia, we are beginning to face the end of the drought and the results of all that has happened over 13 years in the full knowledge that, to the best of the ability of this parliament, the previous government and this government, we have supported those farmers through thick and thin. We will continue to support our rural communities through thick and thin.

I have some dreams that I would like to happen. I would like future governments to invest in aged care to the point where bonds were taken into high care. I have never moved away from that, from 1996 to this day. I would like to see money poured into our public secondary colleges across this nation, where every child in Australia, every teenager, can expect equal education, and that we retrain and re-fund our public education system. I would like to see cutting edge research on renewables rather than unsubstantiated expenditure in the area of a carbon tax of which we do not know the framework, where it will go or who will be paying. I would like to see cleaner emissions from our transport fleet of cars and buses.

We have great opportunities in this country to make a real difference not only nationally but to the world. We are good thinkers and we are good innovators. We can from this day forth take those opportunities and bring them to the attention of the world. (Time expired)

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (18:46): I want to address a number of aspects of the budget that have not been remarked on by other people, and I want to start off with the government's determination to make an input in the area of homelessness. Recently in St Kilda we have seen the benefits of this government's commitment to do something about the issue of homelessness. Recently in St Kilda we have seen the benefits of this government's commitment to do something about the issue of homelessness. In March, along with the Minister for Social Housing and Homelessness, Mark Arbib, I opened the St Kilda community housing project. This project was supported by the Australian government social housing initiative and had transformed a 20-room shared facility boarding house into a rooming house with 34 self-contained apartments of a decent standard. This project has yielded tremendous results for the individuals who are able to recommence their lives, often by getting back into housing and, therefore, back into employment and back into the community.

The government should be very proud of some of its activities in the areas of homelessness, and the opening of the centre followed a wonderful co-achievement with the Salvation Army initiative, along with private
and government money, has transformed an area of Prahran along Dandenong Road into one of the paradigms of how a decent society can treat people who are in an unfortunate situation of homelessness.

I must say, in all of the reactions to the budget I was astonished at the shadow Treasurer's assertion that the global financial crisis was a hiccup. I think this illustrates the difference in the attitude of this government and the perspective that this government has from the opposition. The shadow Treasurer wants to be the Treasurer of this nation—a nation that has had the chair of the G20 because of the respect in which Australia is held—and he says that the global financial crisis is a hiccup. What is 21 per cent unemployment in Spain? The young people there are in the squares demonstrating because 45 per cent of people under 30 have no work. Is 15 per cent unemployment and a completely ruined economy in Ireland a hiccup? Is the fact that Greece is virtually bankrupt a hiccup? Some people have no perspective. Australia is in a very strong financial situation largely due to the activities of this government and the solid way the Treasurer handled the global financial crisis.

I would like to turn to the issue of our investment in education and the much derided and attacked Building the Education Revolution. Let us not talk falsely as those opposite do about this government's funding of new school classrooms. In nearly every electorate that I know the money has been spent in the most efficacious way possible. We are a growing country with large numbers of children entering schools. This expenditure on schools, classrooms in particular, has come at a perfect time for many schools across the nation—government, independent and the Catholic school system.

The debate about school funding has been drowned out by people like radio compere Neil Mitchell at 3AW, who laughably refers to 'school halls without doors'. This is such a joke. Mr Deputy Speaker, I am sure that in your electorate and in the electorate of every member, if you go to see the buildings that have been built as a result of the BER you will see such pride from the school communities and such intelligent use of the money in every educational system.

It was very enervating for me to read in the *Herald Sun* about 'school halls without doors' after going to open St Columba's Primary School in Elwood, or Mount Scopus Primary School in Mayfield Street, or at Lauriston outside my electorate, or Shelford Anglican Girls' School in my electorate, or St Kilda Primary School or Caulfield Junior College, where my children used to attend. The is a complete transformation of the educational atmosphere in which our kids are studying now, right across Australia, thanks to this laughably called 'school halls without doors'. It is a complete transformation and has achieved its purpose of employing large numbers of tradesmen, who would otherwise have been unemployed during the global financial crisis. I ask Mr Mitchell and the coalition: if the investment in new school buildings, classrooms, science and language centres and playing fields is a waste of time, why do federal and state coalition members continue to turn up to every school, not only in my electorate but around the country, to bask in the thanks of grateful school communities? Why do the editors of the *Herald Sun* and journalists like Peter Mickelburough fail to respond to invitations from schools that they attack in their newspapers to come and see what has been achieved, not just with the government money but often with the government money leveraged with money from school communities who have built even better
facilities than would have been possible if they had just used the government BER money?

Recently I represented the government at an opening at Lauriston Girls School, a very famous school in the electorate of Higgins. It is not in my electorate but I was asked to represent the government and I did. Lauriston is a wonderful school and has long been a beacon of girls education. The member for Higgins, Kelly O'Dwyer, was there as well, which is fair enough since she is the local member. She seemed very supportive of Lauriston Girls School, as she should be. However, whenever the member for Higgins has had the chance she has risen to speak in this House and in press releases of the government's funding of school building being a crime against the taxpayer. What incendiary language! It certainly was not the language used when we were at Lauriston Girls School for the wonderful ceremony for the opening of the new facility they have there at the back of an Italianate building, which they have now been able to completely refurbish.

This overblown hyperbole and incendiary language does Neil Mitchell, the editors of the Herald Sun and their journalists and the coalition no good at all. I ask them: what school funding would you cut? What schools would have their BER programs cut? Would the coalition call the investment in the refurbishment of classrooms at the Victorian College for the Deaf a crime against the taxpayer? I think not. It is one world in here and one world out there. They are all at the opening of these schools and they are all criticising it in here.

To my dismay, these overblown falsehoods extended to the Melbourne newspaper the Herald Sun. Last year journalists Peter Mickelburgh and John Masanauskas claimed in their article 'You pay $150m for rich schools' that Caulfield Junior College was a rich private school. Caulfield Junior College is in fact a government school. Perhaps in the inverted snobbery of the Herald Sun because this government school looks so good, has such good academic results and was able to use its BER money so effectively, these people think it is a private school. In fact it is a government school that has used the BER money. Again, if you had been there at the ceremony, Mr Mickelburgh or the editors of the Herald Sun, you would have seen that it has completely transformed the educational circumstances in which our Australian children work. In fact, we can say that under this government we have seen a golden era of investment in our schools. If we do not invest in providing our children with the best equipped schools and the best resources, we do not only ourselves but also the nation a disservice.

Let me turn to the wisdom of the idea of free-trade agreements. Australia has been a leader in the export of agricultural commodities since the 19th century and a significant supplier of processed foods to the world, mostly to Britain. Since the creation of the EU—and there is certainly no need to detail this to the House—with its multitude of supports for its own agriculture, Australia has had to turn to other places in South Asia, North Asia and the Middle East. We have very good exports to those parts of the world and there is a substantial and growing demand for fresh and processed products in the food services sector. Processed food now constitutes 15 to 20 per cent of retail consumption in Turkey, and the largest market in the region for such foods is Saudi Arabia, where 80 per cent of retail food is imported consumer ready. Food service markets to hotels, resorts and restaurants is growing rapidly. In the UAE 200 new hotels are expected within five years. The food
service industry provides a great opportunity for Australian food processing and exporting. Market access in the Middle East is said to be improving with barriers such as laws on food additives, high tariffs and prohibition of processed foods being reduced.

This would be all well and good if it were to actually work like that. However, many countries have replaced their old tariff protection with excessively strict quarantine, labelling and packaging controls. I certainly understand the need for Australia's exporters to places like Turkey to pay attention to product labelling requirements, religious and health restrictions on food additives and alcohol, product testing, turnaround times and specific documents needed for imports, a large number of these countries, including Turkey, are using both tariff and non-tariff barriers to make Australian products non-competitive in their marketplaces. It is particularly annoying when products in a similar area, such as fruit juices, are imported into Australia with minimal tariff or non-tariff barriers.

I want to turn finally to what the Lowy Institute calls the diplomatic deficit in Australia—that is, the shrinking of funding in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. This is something that has occurred not just during this government but over the past 20 years. DFAT's diplomatic corps has shrunk very substantially. I want to read an excerpt from a very significant paper presented to an inquiry into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade by Dr Paul Monk:

While the Federal public service grew by a whopping 25 to 30 per cent between 1996 and 2008, DFAT contracted by 11 percent. Over the past twenty years, DFAT's diplomatic corps shrunk by nearly 40 per cent, from 870 overseas based staff in 1989 to 537 in 2009. While monies passed through DFAT for various purposes had increased by hundreds of millions of dollars per annum over the past decade, its operating budget had suffered seriously. Indicative of the relative neglect of DFAT is the fact that its resourcing has shrunk over the past decade from 0.43 to 0.25 percent of Federal government spending.

The most significant consequence of this reduction, both relative and absolute, in resourcing for DFAT has been what the present Secretary, Mr Dennis Richardson, described as the near incapacitation of our overseas representation in several crucial respects. One of the starkest indices of this is that Australia has fewer overseas missions (89) than all but four members of the OECD. Those four are the Slovak Republic, Ireland, New Zealand and Luxembourg and far fewer than the OECD average 150.

There are 120-plus missions of various countries here in Canberra. There are countries of more than 50 million people in which Australia is unrepresented. I can think of one in particular—Ukraine. We had representation this morning from the Ukrainian embassy here in Canberra. Ukraine is a country of 50 million people. It is full of technical universities, particularly in its eastern half, which produce very capable mining engineers—something you would have thought Australia would be very interested in, particularly with our important skills based migration program—but this is a country where Australia is completely unrepresented. It is very difficult for people from Ukraine to get visas to Australia. They have to apply for a visa to Moscow, and once they are in Russia, they are able to apply for a visa to Australia. This is the effect our under-representation overseas is having.

In contrast to the member for McMillan, I am very supportive of this budget and the Prime Minister. I think this budget's contribution to skills training and mental health, and the government's responsibility in bringing the budget back to surplus, are very good elements. But Australia must do more to ensure that as a big, confident and wealthy...
country we have proper representation overseas. We need to look very closely at where our foreign missions are based, and we need more of them.

Dr STONE (Murray) (19:02): I rise to speak in the debate on the 2011 appropriation bills. It is breathtaking that the Labor government has performed so true to form. They got their hands on the steering wheel of government and in record time have driven us into debt and deficit. Yes, we all know about the global financial crisis, but it hardly touched us in comparison to other developed countries because of our strongly regulated banking sector. We did not have all those dodgy debts. A legacy of the Liberal government is our strongly regulated banking sector. And, of course, we have the ongoing strong performance of China, our major customer, which continues to grow on the back of our country's natural resource bounty.

We have the best terms of trade on record. The Rudd-Gillard government inherited a surplus of over $20 billion but it has been squandered. The budget was only a few days ago, although it feels like a lifetime ago. When we were listening to the budget I looked around at my colleagues and, instead of seeing them triumphant at the thought that the public would not like it and would swing even further towards us, I could see the despair and massive disappointment on the faces of my rural and regional colleagues. They realised it was going to be another two years before we could set the record straight and once again put to proper use in a magnificent country all those taxes, excise and customs payments made to the Treasury of Australia.

It is understandable that the public response to this budget was disbelief in some quarters, great despair in others, and a strong sense of: 'Bring on those next two years, we need a change of government.' Who can forget the stimulus package with $900 payments to the living, the dead and some lucky people in New Zealand? Who can forget the pink batts debacle where installers lost their lives and house fires were commonplace? Now that we are in winter, the elderly, especially in my area, are still discovering that the insulation that the government paid for does not in fact exist over most of the ceilings in their house—it was a shonky deal from start to finish—and they are still nervous and distressed that there will be fires in their ceilings.

But there is an extra $111 million in this budget to try and do more to mop up and secure the houses that had pink batts put in them. Imagine how we could spent that money. The whole pink batts debacle cost the nation more than $2.4 billion. Imagine how many rural students could have been supported in their living away from home study costs with a share of those millions or billions. Instead we have seen a massive drop in students even applying for university places in the so-called inner regional areas, which in the case of southern Australia extends from the outskirts of Melbourne to Deniliquin. What an absurd way to divide the country.

The government acknowledges that we have a massive skills deficit in regional Australia. With this budget, we were told to be cheerful because they are going to boost the regional skilled migration scheme by 6,000 people or perhaps more. But, at the same time, they have taken away opportunities and chances for university study for year 12 graduates who could have been that next generation of skilled people. How absurd, how short-sighted and how cruel. There are a lot of families in my electorate who are yet to have the first member of their family attend university. The hopes of those families are now dashed
for another generation—or at least until we get back into government.

Rural areas typically do not have courses like medicine, engineering, science, law, architecture, economics and languages. It is not a case of going to your local TAFE or campus of a university, because those courses are not there. The list of courses that are missing from rural Australia goes on and on. How much did this government put into more regional university courses, places and campuses? Not very much at all. So what has happened? If you are in the so-called inner region—Labor’s inane boundary delineation—and you earn a couple of salaries of, say, $70,000 and $30,000, or two incomes of $50,000, you are, Labor has told us, a rich family and you do not deserve to have support. We are told that middle-class welfare, first and foremost, was the target of this budget. Well, for families in the inner region earning $100,000—part of the Murray electorate—their sons and daughters now find it impossible to go to university and study away from home because it costs about $20,000. If the income of your family is only $100,000 gross and there is more than one child—there are perhaps two or three who want to go to university or who are finishing secondary school, which is expensive too—then you will have to give up on the dream of your sons or daughters attending university.

The way the rules have been changed for independent youth allowances are so impossible and improbable that it is impossible for students to get to university now via the coalition’s independent youth allowance scheme. I have to tell students who come to me begging for a change: ‘I am sorry; the regional Independents in the House of Representatives failed to support the amendment that came through from the Senate, which would have fixed this. So we’re going to have to wait, perhaps for another two years, until the government changes and we can do right by Australia’s next generation of country students who have the capacity to go to uni.’ What a cruel, terrible thing for a family to have to contemplate—their sons and daughters have the marks to go to university but they just cannot afford it.

Interestingly, I went to an Independent Retirees meeting in Shepparton last week. Usually, the Independent Retirees concerns are about superannuation, interest rates and the cost of utilities. Guess what the concern of the independent retirees of Shepparton was. It was a big group—the there were about 60 of them—and their concern was the inability of their grandchildren to be able to afford to go to university due to the impacts of Labor’s independent youth allowance scheme. That is what my independent retirees were so sad about. They had, for all their lives, anticipated that their grandchildren would be able to go to university with government support. Now they see their most earnest desires and wishes thwarted. I think that is tragic. It is also unforgiveable.

The government, as I said, has killed off the next generation of skilled workers and professionals from rural Australia, and they stand condemned for it. It is not that every cent in this budget or the previous two budgets has been sensibly and carefully spent. Let us think about Grocery Watch, Fuel Watch, Cash for Clunkers and the My School website. It just goes on and on. This year’s Labor budget has locked in at least $4,700 of debt for every Australian man, woman and child. We will have to pay at least $18 million a day of interest payments on this debt. And it will grow; we know that—this is a Labor government, after all—and we have to assume most of these payments will go offshore.
I have mentioned the pink batts and the other obscenities like Grocery Watch and Fuel Watch but I think the My School website is going to stand out in the annals of history as one of the most destructive things that was ever done in Australia to our excellent education and to our teachers' capacity to do what they need to do in schools. I am talking in particular about NAPLAN. We have subverted the teaching of our grades 3, 5, 7 and 9. In my electorate I have had reports from parents that in composite grades 2-3 or 3-4 a whole half year is spent teaching the grade 3 NAPLAN. How tragic for those families that their kids are not being taught a full curriculum. The kids are being focused on the NAPLAN. Why?—because it is published on the websites as a name-and-shame exercise.

In my electorate I only had two schools that were listed as above satisfactory. The rest were unsatisfactory. Are my schools all so terrible? No, my schools are in very low socio-economic status communities. We have just gone through seven years of drought and then a flood. We have a very large population of refugees from Africa and the Middle East. The students from those areas have only been in Australia for one, two or three years but there are no criteria in the NAPLAN results or in the My School website that allow for this very challenged school population. We have a lot of Indigenous students too; there is some compensation or consideration of their performance in schools.

Why is it that a government would produce a scheme like this—‘name and shame’; let's look up the website—and they think it is succeeding when there are hundreds of thousands of hits? It does not then look at the results and pump into the schools that appear not to have made the grade appropriate funding for extra support for specialist teachers, aides specialising in English language needs or special additional teaching capital. No, that has not happened. All we have is the naming and shaming. I am dreading the next round. I know that in the schools in my electorate the teaching is often superb but the families are often extraordinarily challenged. We have schools where every child comes on a bus so you cannot have after-school activities. I was in one school last week—Lockington Primary School—that had over 150 dead computers. When I say 'dead' I mean that they are seven or eight years old and they do not work. Those computers are lying in corners gathering dust—and probably mice and redbacks—right now. There are only about five working computers of modern vintage in that school of over 100 students. And that school is supposed to be competing, eyeball to eyeball, with schools which are well endowed and have modern computers, or at least computers that work. That is the sort of thing that my schools are dealing with, and they are not being supported. I think that is disgraceful; in fact, it is disgusting.

And there has been no extra money in the budget for biosecurity. Is that why in the apple and pear fire blight interim risk assessment protocol that has just come through, the New Zealand farmers are not required to do anything on top of their normal picking and packing process under which their apples go to their local domestic market? Not a single different or additional protocol or process is required for those fresh apples to leave their fire blight infested and infected orchards, to be put into a container and come across to Australia, where Coles and Woolworths will choof them up to the apple-growing areas or, more importantly, the pear-growing areas of Australia, where the bacteria, I have no doubt, will be released to our currently disease-free orchards.

In my area we grow over 80 per cent of Australia's pears. You can imagine what my
growers are thinking. It is not just apple and pear fire blight bacterial disease that will come in on the fresh fruit; there are other pests that we know will piggyback on those fresh apples, and not a single additional protocol is being required. It would appear, too, that no Australian biosecurity staff will be involved in the New Zealand exercise. In other words, it is the no-frills, cheap-and-nasty exercise of just bringing it on in. Why?—because the Prime Minister said in her speech in the New Zealand parliament the other day, 'Oops! Sorry, we've kept your apples out too long, really. We didn't mean to. Bring them on in; we don't care anymore.' She got a standing ovation. There is no real mystery about why: when I was in New Zealand just a week or 10 days after that they were still gobsmacked that a prime minister would suggest that a prime minister would suggest that it was only market issues or commercial issues that had kept the apples out of Australia for all those years, given they have that disease and we do not. What an extraordinary thing for our Prime Minister to say in their parliament!

Of course, New Zealand is famous for its kiwi fruit. They have now got a bacterial canker, which they got very quickly from Italy. Italy's commercial kiwi fruit orchards are now devastated by a bacterial canker. New Zealand picked it up almost immediately, and guess what—our biosecurity and quarantine services are still allowing fresh kiwi fruit into Australia from Italy and New Zealand. They have said, 'Oops! Better not bring any plant material—that could be a bit dodgy—or, perhaps, pollen. We'll think about that.' We are being exposed to enormous to risk via a scaled down Biosecurity Australia, which is told, 'No more money—just get smarter.' Biosecurity has not been too smart lately, and I cannot imagine what they are going to do other than continue to leave us exposed to diseases in our country, where we do not even have the legally available streptomycin that in New Zealand they saturate their apples in before putting it into the domestic market.

I could go on declaiming and despairing about the lack of research and development money for rural and regional Australia, for agribusiness enterprise and for the Bureau of Meteorology for telemetry. We were flooded out in my part of the world. We lost $2.2 billion worth of my farmers' livestock and equipment because there were no warnings with no working telemetries in the rivers, the regulated streams. The Bureau of Met needed more money to provide those. Guess what—no more money for the Bureau of Met. As far as future floods go, we will just have to keep the old fingers crossed because, again, this government does not seem to connect the dots.

This government does not seem to understand what needs to happen in this country. They do not care about future generations who will live beyond their own electorates. That is a shocking disgrace in a parliamentary democracy. I am afraid we might have two years before the next election. A lot of people in my electorate simply cannot wait that long.

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (19:17): I am pleased to be speaking in this important debate on the appropriation bills. This has been a difficult budget to frame because it has had to be framed in the context of a patchwork economy, where we are dealing with inflationary pressures. In some regions and sectors where investment is booming, the labour market is tight, while in other areas and sectors—like the retail sector and regional Australia—people are feeling the pinch. They are indeed doing it tough.

It has been a budget where we have had to deal with the residue from years and years of
neglect in areas such as infrastructure and mental health. We have had to balance where we can inject additional and much needed funding at the same time as investing in long-term needs such as skills and skill development.

In framing budgets such as this there have traditionally been two approaches. The first approach was very popular under the former government, and that was the Santa Claus approach. The Treasurer would stand up on budget night and act like Santa Claus, ensuring there was a present under the tree for every constituent group. Nowhere was this Santa Claus mentality on the annual budget process more prevalent than in the former government's treatment of pensioners. Year after year pensioners would have to wait until budget night to know whether the Treasurer would deign to grant them their annual one-off bonus and enable them to continue to pay their utility bills and meet their fortnightly payments.

With our approach to the budget, we did away with all of that and readjusted the annual pension so that we had a record increase in pension payments of up to $128 per fortnight for people on the maximum rate. Contrast that to the Santa Claus approach to the budget. The approach of Labor in government puts the principles of economic and social responsibility ahead of the annual Christmas, Santa Claus, approach, handing out lollies and goodies but neglecting the national interest. Our approach to the budget reflects our values and takes into account the long-term national interest.

This budget is about returning the budget to surplus before too long but also managing the different pressures within the economy and focusing on long-overdue national needs, such as mental health, with a $2.2 billion mental health initiative, and also ensuring that we do not leave people behind with the growth that we anticipate over the next three years. It is about ensuring that those people who were left behind in previous years, in previous mining booms, are not left behind as we move through mining boom mark 2. This budget is about the future, not the past. It is about balancing the needs of today with the task of building the economy of the future. It is about jobs, skills and education and training, which are the building blocks of economic participation and productivity.

This is a Labor budget because it is built on the foundation stone of the over 750,000 jobs we have created since we came to office and because it anticipates the creation of half a million jobs over the next few years. It is a Labor budget because it is focused on jobs and on not leaving people behind.

In this time of relative prosperity, compared to what is going on in the rest of the region and the world, it is easy to forget what a success story the Australian economy is. Around the world there are unemployment rates of eight, nine and even 10 per cent. In some countries, through the global financial crisis, millions of jobs were destroyed. The loss of a job is catastrophic. It not only derails an individual's aspirations and life plans but affects their whole family. It affects people's sense of confidence and identity. We know this on our side of the House and that is why we have given priority to creating and protecting jobs. That is the cornerstone of this budget. It is also a budget which is about improving support for Australian families, with additional support for low- and middle-income families and families with teenagers. Next year, this government will spend $32 billion on assistance to families through the family tax benefit, the childcare rebate and the baby bonus and paid parental leave schemes. As
we do this, we are also prioritising the next generation of workers.

I was very interested to hear the member for Murray stand up recently in this place and express her concern for school funding. I hope we enjoy the support of the member for Murray when the review into school funding reports towards the end of this year and we try to reform a system of school funding which, frankly, has been distorted by the actions of the former government. I hope we do enjoy the support of the member for Murray because the sorts of principles that will inform our approach to school funding will be of great benefit to students in electorates such as mine and, I suspect, such as hers.

The member for Murray addressed the issue of the access of regional students to higher education. It is a fact that in just one year there has been an increase of 21,000 university students receiving youth allowance as a result of the reforms to the system made by our government last year. In just 12 months, the reforms to the youth allowance have seen a 15 per cent increase in the total number of university students receiving youth allowance. That is 135,000 students in March 2010 compared to 156,000—an increase of 21,000—this year. There has been a 108 per cent increase in the number of dependent university students from disadvantaged backgrounds receiving the maximum rate of youth allowance, many of them from my electorate of Throsby, and a 22 per cent increase in the number of rural and regional university students receiving youth allowance. The member for Murray may do well, as may other members in this place, to look at these statistics because she will realise that the changes to youth allowance and other associated reforms are actually benefiting students from rural and regional areas. More than 36,000 of the 107,000 young people who are now eligible for youth allowance for the first time and who are receiving more money than ever before come from rural and regional areas.

My electorate of Throsby covers a region of great economic and social diversity. While there are many areas of economic prosperity and wellbeing, Throsby also contains some areas of great disadvantage, with higher than average unemployment, particularly long-term and youth unemployment. I see the member for Gilmore in the chamber. She would know that suburbs that are now part of her electorate also fit this description. It is my belief that governments of all persuasions have failed people in these suburbs and more needs to be done to ensure that we do not hand disadvantage from one generation to the next through intergenerational dependence on welfare. My electorate of Throsby was once an area where manufacturing was the biggest employer and now it is the services sector which accounts for the biggest percentage of employment, including in the construction, retail and healthcare sectors, which have nearly doubled over that period.

In this story of economic transformation we know that some people have been left behind and they remain a challenge for the government to assist, which is why I am very pleased that in this budget we have identified 10 regions that require particular attention throughout the country. One, in the local government area of Shellharbour, which falls partly in my electorate of Throsby and partly in the electorate of the member for Gilmore, has been identified as a priority area for place based initiatives. What this is all about is identifying those people who are either at risk of long-term unemployment or have been long-term unemployed, identifying the barriers to employment and putting in place local and personal solutions.
We have identified teen parents as one of these groups. I am very pleased that we will be putting in excess of $40 million towards assisting teen parents and jobless families to re-enter the education system and re-engage with education, job training and jobs to ensure that they increase not only their own life chances but those of their children. If we do not do something about this as we enter mining boom mark 2, we will ensure that once again we have failed this group of people and we will condemn not only these young parents but perhaps their children to a lifetime of welfare dependence and disadvantage. I am very proud that the Gillard government has identified this area and this group of people as a priority in this budget. I look forward to working with the member for Gilmore and the agencies in the Shellharbour local government area to ensure this program really does work.

We are doing this all in the context of bringing the budget back into surplus by 2012-13. This will entail the largest and fastest fiscal consolidation that has ever been seen in this country or is likely to be seen anywhere around the world. We are able to do this because the economic fundamentals are very strong and because the prospects for the economy are good. We are able to do this because we have taken some tough decisions in terms of budget cuts. Spending is something that members opposite obviously love to speak about or see their frontbenchers speak about, but, interestingly, when it has been their turn to stand up and speak in this debate as representatives of their local constituencies, it is a love that dare not speak its name. Speaker after speaker have talked about the areas where they would like to see more money being spent, but not one of them has suggested areas, particularly areas in their own electorates, where they believe spending should be cut. We are proud of the fact that in difficult economic circumstances we are taking the tough decisions which will enable us to bring the budget back into surplus by 2012-13 and ensure that we deal with the priority areas of mental health and skills development, ensuring that we have the workforce and the skills to meet mining boom mark 2, and that we spread the wealth that is created by that mining boom beyond the mining states and the mining regions to other regions and other sectors of the economy at the same time that we ensure that we do not leave people behind and we deal with the long-term issues of neglect, such as mental health.

I would like to conclude on an issue that was raised by the member for Banks in his speech in this debate, where he talked about his support for the government doing everything it could to ensure that we were spending in the most effective and efficient way possible. He made a contribution to the debate about the efficiency dividend, which has been increased in this budget by 0.25 per cent to 1.5 per cent. This is an annual cut to the running costs of public sector agencies, or the majority of public sector agencies. I have in a former life been very critical of this as a blunt instrument. I stand shoulder to shoulder with every other member on this side of the House on the need for the government to find savings and efficiencies wherever possible. I believe that the public sector needs to ensure that it is able to perform its functions in the most efficient and effective way possible. But I maintain my belief that I think that the efficiency dividend is a very blunt instrument, and I would like to work with all members of this House and others to ensure that, in the years to come, it can be replaced by a much more sophisticated instrument that does not disadvantage the sorts of agencies that were alluded to by the member for Banks—the small cultural agencies and the small central agencies—and also those agencies that are
providing welfare and other assistance to the most needy in society. *(Time expired)*

**Mrs GASH** (Gilmore) (19:32): In his opening line of the budget, the Treasurer said: ‘The purpose of this Labor government, and this Labor budget, is to put the opportunities that flow from a strong economy within reach of more Australians.’

In the aftermath and in the cold light of day, I am struggling to identify how the nation’s newfound wealth is being delivered to the constituents of Gilmore. Nowhere can I find what I would call an investment in the future for the region. In fact, if anything, it is over reliant on good luck rather than good management, with perhaps a vague promise of things to come provided we all maintain the faith.

An unfortunate fact of life is that the longer we leave things the more expensive they will become—but, ultimately, less affordable. As an example, perhaps the most profound symbol of economic opportunity along the South Coast of New South Wales is its primary freight route, the lifeline feeding the many businesses that support the population growth of the South Coast—that being the Princes Highway. In turn, these businesses generate jobs and income to support families, setting the criteria for future growth and development not only of the community but each individual within it.

There is nothing in this budget that says we will profit from it and nothing in this budget that lends a hand along the way. The Princes Highway has been totally ignored. Extending Main Road 92 from Nowra to Canberra has been ignored. The need for a third bridge crossing over the Shoalhaven River to ease a natural transport choke point has been ignored. That is only the tip of the iceberg, and I will return to this issue further on.

This budget is increasingly becoming an irritant to the broader community. Surveys have shown an overwhelming rejection of the budget within days of it being delivered. Some have described it as the worst budget in 20 years—and rightly so. In fact, I have written this one off, as have the majority of Australians. But what I want to itemise here are the things we need, not what the government thinks we need to have. Our pensioners do not need set-top boxes while their teeth are rotting for want of attention from the public dental health system, which may as well be non-existent.

How long has Labor, both state and federal, been carping about the need for better dental services yet have done nothing about it? In fact, they have removed the highly successful and popular coalition Medicare Dental Scheme and replaced it with a vague promise of better things to come. It is being marketed as something far superior, but we just do not know the details. Sounds like a rehash of the NBN program that has blown out to 10 times the cost first promised with 10 times the time line for delivery.

With the track record of this government, I am not holding my breath, but I do want to say this: for the Shoalhaven campus of the University of Wollongong, the coalition government delivered a medical faculty for both doctors and nurses. The idea was that students trained in regional and rural areas were more likely to stay and work in rural and regional areas. The same can apply to the supply of dental practitioners prepared to work in the public health arena. If they are genuine about delivering better dental care to the regions, I would like this government to deliver the Shoalhaven a dental training facility.

While on the subject of health, I would like to briefly touch on the issue of the government’s Medicare Local Scheme, which displaces the Division of GP’s model.
In my opinion, the Shoalhaven Division of GPs was a very efficient organisation. It served its community well because, as part of that community, it could relate to the issues of concern. The government's alternative, amalgamating the Shoalhaven and Illawarra divisions into a larger bureaucracy, has effectively de-localised the service. I suspect what will emerge is a less responsive organisation, focussed more on mass delivery rather than on specific targeting. This is no reflection on the doctors themselves; rather the inevitable encroachment of government bureaucracy.

The de-personalisation of communities is being accelerated under a government that is hooked on growing bureaucracies. Bigger is not always better, and I think the government is learning a harsh lesson from some of its more ill-starred programs, like the pink batts, the NBN and the BER. It is costing us huge sums of money for questionable returns—money that can be better spent on regions like Gilmore which have genuine unmet needs and are regularly hostage to city-centric Labor governments. Huge sums of money are being wasted to prop up a discredited government—and the lesson has still not been learned.

This government is persisting with introducing a carbon tax despite the fact that the majority of Australians do not want it. It is a tax which will add to the sky-rocketing cost of living that many Australians, big and small, rich and poor are concerned with. Electricity prices are sky rocketing for no apparent reason, other than what seems to be a catch-up phase after years of neglect by successive New South Wales Labor governments. They tried to tell us that the money was going back into New South Wales but what they failed to explain was that, in their view, New South Wales stood for Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong. Even in those terms I do not think that Wollongong was particularly well served. Having picked up some of the southern region of Wollongong—namely the Shellharbour area—I am surprised at the neglect those areas have endured. Despite year after year of being taken for granted, lacklustre politicians, corrupt local councils or exploitation, Labor—thanks to the influence of the unions—kept being voted back in. I often scratched my head wondering how people could be so blind but now it seems the penny has dropped and Wollongong is no longer the super-safe Labor stronghold it once was.

Shellharbour relies significantly on the fortunes of the Port Kembla steel industry complex, both directly and indirectly. Yet this government wants to kill the goose that lays the golden egg by imposing a carbon tax. The CFMEU and AWU, many of whose members work in the steel and allied industries, support the carbon tax. How is this possible? I thought they were fighting for the worker. The ex-ACTU lawyer, official of the Community Services and Public Sector Union and now member for Throsby, who is still sitting in the gallery, recently put a motion to parliament strongly advocating the introduction of a carbon tax. His supporting statements made no mention of protecting the interests of the very members he once represented. They are gone and forgotten, it seems. It is a sad reflection of the narrow political ideology of the union leadership, who it seems will gladly sacrifice the interests of the very workers they purport to represent for their own political advancement.

What well-known Labor powerbroker is often quoted as saying 'whatever it takes'? BlueScope Steel has made it publicly known that it cannot compete on the world stage with one hand tied behind its back. I was told that if their competitors paid the same tax they would have no objection. In a highly
competitive market, where overseas labour costs are well below Australian standards, why impose an own-goal penalty when there are other ways of reducing carbon emissions? It is plain stupid.

At a time when the government is saying we are living in boom times, how is it that economies are being imposed? If we are living in boom times, why are family benefits being cut? And if we have to make savings to bring the budget into surplus, why are we blowing money hand over fist on asylum seekers, pink batts, set-top boxes, school computers and overpriced school halls and libraries which, in some cases, are not even wanted? If things are going so well, why is the government seeking the approval of parliament to increase its borrowing limits?

The public health system is a basket case, yet this government wants to discourage private health insurance, which actually lessens the pressure on the public hospital system. That is why we will continue to oppose cuts to private health insurance. The government is cutting PBS payments and yet is funding 24-hour superclinics even where there is some question as to whether they can be fully staffed as first intended. In fact, the only promise made by Labor for Gilmore in the last election was that the Shellharbour superclinic would be open by last Christmas. We do not even have a plan yet, and the well-promoted clinic for Shellharbour still has not opened its doors. Clearly, this is another false promise made to win votes. Again: whatever it takes.

The Leader of the Opposition was criticised for not detailing a budget position in his budget-in-reply statement. What he did do was outline a vision and a plan for the future—not a series of questionable promises that rely more on good luck than on good management. Besides, what would be the point for a government that stopped listening years ago and is obsessed by the polls and its own political survival? Over the last 12 months, representations have been continually made to the federal government urging them to increase infrastructure funding in Gilmore—funding that will stimulate economic investment and growth for the region. It is time for this government to show some financial maturity by stopping the frivolous spending, ending the carbon tax uncertainty and redirecting funding to projects that will really produce benefits.

A few short weeks ago, the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government visited Gilmore. I thank him for keeping his promise to me to visit Gilmore. During that visit, four projects which are vital to the growth and wellbeing of Gilmore were put to him through a council briefing. Gilmore needs to have the ability to tap into the mainstream economy, and for that we need an enhanced freight transport route to the markets in Victoria and Canberra. The Gilmore leg from Nowra to Nerriga was finally completed last year. While tourists appreciate the improvement, freight transport remains denied. This road has to be completed now from Nerriga, through Tarago and onto the Federal Highway, but that is now the responsibility of Goulburn-Mulwaree and Palerang Councils. Shoalhaven is anxious to have the matter expedited to enhance economic and commercial opportunities, so our fundamental infrastructure need is anchored to Main Road 92. We asked the minister to assist us with funding in three significant investments. We asked jointly with Goulburn-Mulwaree and Palerang Councils for the upgrading of Oallen Ford Bridge, which currently has a five-tonne limit. Shoalhaven also wants a utility augmentation of the Albatross Aviation Technology Park to satisfy Commonwealth requirements to
move civilian contractors off the base. Main Road 92 spills at Nowra Hill and it can be argued that it offers little benefit for the lower Shoalhaven in the Milton-Ulladulla areas, which also have a need to improve their arteries. That is why we have asked that Turpentine Road be sealed—some 12 kilometres that connect to Main Road 92. This would encourage greater use by freight carriers to move freight between Ulladulla and Canberra via Main Road 92 rather than using the challenging Kings Highway from Batemans Bay.

We also asked for funding to help rejuvenate the Shellharbour marina project. It is central to the growth of Shellharbour and the economic benefit of its residents. The minister remarked to me how impressed he was with the international standard of Shoalhaven industry and the way we worked with neighbouring Kiama, Shellharbour and Goulburn councils. I hope the minister has come away with a better understanding of the challenges and constraints the Shoalhaven currently faces and the integral role these projects will have to play in advancing not just the Shoalhaven but the entire Illawarra and South Coast areas. I would again like to thank the member for Hotham for his visit. It was an absolute pleasure to host him. I would also like to thank the Shoalhaven City Council for the generous use of their chambers. With world-class manufacturing and aviation facilities expanding and developing in Nowra, Gilmore can become one of Australia's key economic hubs.

In concluding, I would like to mention a couple of other matters. Much has been said about this budget in the media, much of it not very flattering. My role as a member is to bring to the attention of government the views of the people I represent. There are two significant issues in the Gilmore community. Firstly, this government has allowed itself to become hostage to the Greens agenda. We want a government that has the strength of character to stand on its own two feet and not be beholden to minority radical interests. Secondly, stop the boats. Australians hate queue jumpers and they hate money being spent on people who ignore the rules. Two billion dollars has been cut from family benefits, with the cost of processing asylum seekers having risen by $1.7 billion. Families are doing it tough. Grocery prices are going up, fuel prices are going up, power prices are going up and health costs are becoming unaffordable. The great Australian dream of owning your own home is slipping away for many Australians. Our population is ageing. The strength of our dollar is the enemy of our export industries and the tourism industry.

We did not elect Senator Bob Brown to run this country but that is what is happening with the blessing of this government. It is wrong on so many fronts and this government must now show the strength of character to stop wasting our money on its faulty ideology. We want real investment, investment that will return dividends in bucket loads.

The Prime Minister got elected on her promise that there would be no carbon tax. Now that she has broken that promise she has no mandate. Under the conventions of the Westminster system that binds all ministers of the crown—and if she had any sense of decency—she should go back to the people. If she refuses to do so then she is repudiating centuries of democratic principles to which Australians expect their government to subscribe to and honour.

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (19:45): I have been listening to those opposite talking today on these bills. What a carry on. I want to address a couple of areas raised in this carry on, the first being the NBN and the
comments by those opposite about how it is not an investment and how it has not been explained—according to them—in the budget. They do not believe that this is an investment in our future. Only last week, Armidale was switched on. The enthusiasm of that community and their local member was matched only by the wet blanket of the member for North Sydney, who said, 'When the button was pressed, I thought there goes $18 billion.' It continues to amaze me how adept those opposite are in having an opinion on something that they know nothing about.

We had the member for Gilmore in here calling for investment in the regions. She is getting an investment in Kiama Downs, which is near her region. And the member for Throsby agrees with me. If you want to know what the biggest investment ever is going to be—one that will drive local jobs and drive transformational reforms in health and education—you need look no further than the NBN.

On the topic of people having opinions on things that they nothing about, it is interesting that one of the centrepieces of budget reply of the member for Warringah was that the coalition would rollback and scrap the NBN and replace it with a cheaper network using a variety of technologies. So we would go back to the policy that those opposite took to the last election—the gift that keeps on giving. I lamented the demise of the member for Casey as the shadow communications spokesperson. But now they want to talk about how we should have a variety of technologies, which is the policy that they took to the last election. What a vandal. He says that the way this country will go forward is by scrapping the largest infrastructure project in Australian history, which not only is underway but is being switched on regional areas and is about to move to second release sites, including Riverstone in my electorate. Yet again, the Leader of the Opposition has shown that he does not understand the NBN or the budget.

It was interesting to hear the Leader of the Opposition say that we do not need the NBN because speeds of up to 100 megabits were already potentially available to almost every major business and hospital and schools by using a high-speed cable already running past one third of Australian households. That is right: one third. Do not worry; if you live on the east coast, you will be fine. But the other 70 per cent—all of regional Australia and outer metropolitan Sydney—will be left behind. This is the fantasy land legacy left by the wasted Howard years: this delusion that Australia was doing just fine in terms of broadband development while we fell further and further behind.

We know that the Leader of the Opposition used his reply not to bring anything of substance to the debate but just to attack the NBN and call for a market oriented solution for the need for faster broadband. The market has failed. The NBN is the only investment in broadband that will exist in many parts of regional Australia—like Armidale—and in outer metropolitan Sydney, like the new estates in the north of my electorate. We do not need to take my word for it. The United Nations official overseeing communications said: 'The way that I see it here, Australia has undertaken the largest infrastructure project ever. Three to five years from now, Australia will be number one in broadband in the world.' That is a quote that you would never have heard until the NBN project was commenced in this country.

I note that the Minister for Finance and Deregulation has belled the cat here. The Leader of the Opposition and his continual arguments about the NBN figures in the budget. The Leader of the Opposition argued that the investment in the NBN could be
used to fund roads and other projects. What he fails to understand—as all those opposite fail to understand—is that the government's $27.5 billion contribution is an investment; an investment on which this country will get a return. You do not need to look any further than the fact that the biggest driver of GDP in any country in the world is ICT development. Australia did not even have a policy on ICT when those opposite were in government.

The carry on regarding the NBN in this budget process has been matched only by the mocking of some elderly and other vulnerable people in our community by those members opposite. For these people, TV is their only point of contact with the outside world. I am talking about the digital switchover and the household assistance scheme, which has been successfully rolled out to something like 40,000 households already. Many of these people who have been and will be provided with assistance live alone. They have no-one else to rely on. Those opposite would prefer to leave them in the dark so that when the analog switchover date comes these vulnerable people will turn on their TVs and get nothing. For those opposite, this is just a big joke. I find that absolutely disgraceful, particularly considering that the consumer expert group that advised on the formation and implementation of this policy includes member organisations such as the Country Women's Association, National Disability Services and the Deafness Forum of Australia. It is an absolute disgrace that those opposite should seek to mock these kinds of people in this way. I will also point out that it is no wonder that the vast expanse of the digital society regards the Leader of the Opposition as a joke when it comes to digital policy in this country. I bet he would be hard pressed to name the digital switch-over date of his own region, let alone that of every other region in Australia. I also point out that the $350 figure is an average cost of the assistance package for households. It is not merely a set-top box; it is a set-top box that is accessible for the elderly and for people with special needs. It includes installation, rewiring, antenna adjustment, demonstrations and access to a free hotline for 12 months following installation.

You need look no further than a recent article in the Sydney Morning Herald headed 'Set-top boxes a lifeline for elderly'. I quote: Critics of the federal government's plan to provide pensioners with set-top boxes have underestimated the importance and cost of providing continuing technical help to the elderly and people with special needs … Television is the main point of contact with the outside world for many people …

The article was quoting Chris Mikul of Media Access Australia. It looks at the case study of a pensioner who bought a set-top box so that her analog TV could receive a digital signal. She then had to spend $300 on a new antenna, and the technician helped her to set the system up and taught her how to switch between broadcast television, DVDs and videos.

As I have said, this has been rolling out to tens of thousands of Australians already. I do not believe that pensioners and vulnerable people should be left in the dark when it comes to this issue. I also point out that if you want to look at the rationale for this you can go back a few years and find it. Have a look at the Digital Action Plan for Australia, which says:

The Government recognises that some Australians may find it difficult to make the switch to digital—due to either personal circumstances or geographic location. Digital Australia will be prepared to provide information and technical support to communities and individuals who may find the switch a little more challenging.
It is interesting: that is the Digital Action Plan put in place by Senator Helen Coonan in late 2006 when she was the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts. I find it absolutely ludicrous that those opposite should criticise a scheme that is actually based on a policy that they sought to implement when they were in government.

I happen to care about older Australians and their participation in the digital economy, which is why last week I was very pleased to visit the Seventh-day Adventist aged-care facility in Kings Langley, which benefited from $6,700 under the Broadband for Seniors Kiosks program. This provides free broadband access, computer training and up-to-date technology to help seniors keep in touch with their families and friends. It was a delight to be able to go to this facility and see how this government is investing in ensuring that no-one is left behind when it comes to the digital revolution, not only when we make the switch from analog to digital but also as broadband is rolled out and made accessible.

I mention a couple of other projects in Greenway that have benefited under this budget. Last week I had the pleasure of visiting the Riverstone Neighbourhood Centre with the Parliamentary Secretary for Community Services. We announced expanded federal government support for emergency relief services under this budget, and that provides vulnerable people with assistance with groceries, clothing, transport and pharmacy vouchers. These emergency relief services are crucial to supporting some parts of my community. There was $400,000 set aside in the budget for emergency relief providers in Greenway. It was greatly appreciated by service providers, including the Riverstone Neighbourhood Centre. To quote Ms Barbara Rowe, the administrator of the centre, 'All the volunteers were so appreciative of the fact that the federal government was able to deliver to them on this point.'

In their words, advocacy for the needs of residents in Riverstone has its unique challenges. It is geographically located on the edge of the Blacktown LGA, it is on the fringes of Penrith and the Hawkesbury and there is a risk that governments incorrectly perceive Riverstone to be well served by neighbouring facilities and services, the result being that Riverstone is too often overlooked. It gives me great pleasure to say that the funding announced for Riverstone’s emergency relief services was certainly not an oversight. The Riverstone Neighbourhood Centre does an outstanding job in administering this emergency relief to many people who may be struggling in the northern parts of Greenway. As the workers and volunteers attested when the parliamentary secretary and I visited, the GFC was devastating to so many families who are still attempting to recover. Some people are struggling as a result of this patchwork economy that we find ourselves in, and this government is committed to helping those people in their times of need. One of the most important elements is that this funding comes in a three-year contract for service providers, which gives them the certainty to continue providing their services.

The other aspect of this budget with which I am particularly proud to be involved is its jobs focus and it jobs focus on Western Sydney. We have seen the investments of $100 million in national apprenticeship mentoring as well as a $281 million support package of additional tax-free payments to encourage apprentices in critical trades to complete their qualifications. In Greenway there are over 3,000 apprentices who stand to benefit from this investment. It is of immeasurable benefit to young people in particular. I was delighted last Monday to be
joined by the Treasurer at Cumberland Ford in Blacktown to see firsthand the benefits of investing in local apprenticeships. I thank Mr David Stevenson and Mr John McInerney from Cumberland Ford for their commitment to producing apprentices who are work ready and who are skilled up and to ensuring that they can deliver in the workforce. During our time at Cumberland Ford I met with the Ford Apprentice of the Year for 2010, Mr Justin James, who told me that taking up an apprenticeship was the best decision of his life.

I am so pleased that this government realises the need for a highly skilled workforce, and that is why we are investing in training skilled workers in their apprenticeships. This budget will work to support 200,000 trade apprentices over four years in skills shortage occupations to stay in their training and to get a job.

As so many people in my electorate tell me, so many of the social ills that are raised with me as I go around the electorate and speak to people are the result of young people and others not having long-term employment and not having meaningful training that makes them job ready. This investment is exactly what the residents of Greenway have been asking for. One of the key indicators of someone’s health, as we know, is whether they have a job—whether they are healthy in terms of not only their physical health but also their mental health and the dignity that work provides to ensure that they can contribute to society. I would like to end by talking about the investments in health that are also being made in Greenway. Last week I joined the Minister for Health and Ageing at the Children’s Hospital at Westmead to announce the changes under the federal budget where children under the age of 16 will get MRI scans more quickly and cheaply, and there will be new licences for more than 60 existing MRI machines across Australia. That includes an upright MRI machine for the Western Imaging Group in Blacktown. I am extremely grateful to the Minister for Health and Ageing for responding to the many representations I have made about the need for more licensed MRIs in the seat of Greenway.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms K Livermore): Order! The debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 34. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting. The member for Greenway will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Fiscal Strategy

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (20:00): I move:

That this House:

(1) notes that as the world emerges from the Global Financial Crisis:

(a) in Australia unemployment of 5 per cent is low by international standards; and

(b) the Australian Government’s Debt to GDP ratio is lower and its fiscal consolidation faster, than in most comparable countries; and

(2) agrees that the Gillard Government’s fiscal strategy to assist business and communities to recover from this crisis while managing inflation and removing the structural deficits from the Federal Budget is the right course of action for Australia’s long term economic prosperity.

As the financial year draws to a close, it is timely to remind ourselves that while our economy is recovering and our finances are in good shape, this is not the case for the rest of the world. Had it not been for the decisive action of the Labor government, things could have been very different. Our economy
would be different and our recent budget would be very different.

In 2008 Lehman Brothers collapsed and the world stood on the precipice of an economic collapse. Australia, almost alone in the world, avoided the worst of this and is now in better shape than almost any other country in the world. It is good news that many economies are now emerging from the global financial crisis and that unemployment in many countries is slowly edging downwards. In Australia, in responding to the global financial crisis, the Labor government unashamedly put jobs first. We did this by injecting $42 billion into the economy. We injected cash and confidence into the economy in 2008 to ensure that the retail sector did not collapse. We guaranteed bank deposits and assisted financial institutions to access funds to ensure confidence and a line of credit so that the doors of businesses were kept open.

We invested in our schools, in our communities, and in our roads, rail and ports to ensure that jobs were protected and that productive capacity was built so that when the economy did recover we would be well placed to capitalise on it. By putting jobs first we have seen the creation of over 300,000 new jobs in the last year alone and over 37,800 new jobs created in April this year. There will be an additional 550,000 jobs created over the next three years. While the world shed 30 million jobs through the global financial crisis, in Australia over the last four years we have created in excess of 700,000 new jobs. What this means is that we now have record numbers of Australians at work and that is something that all members in this place should be very pleased with.

There was, of course, an alternative which was preferred by the coalition: to do nothing. Indeed, in 2008-09 they appeared to be a lot more fond of markets than they are today because their answer back then was to leave it to the market to sort itself out. Their answer was to say to hundreds of thousands of Australian workers and thousands of small businesses that it was more important for the government to balance its books than for them to balance their books. The coalition's answer was to say that they would rather have people out of work or out of business than lose some political advantage in saying, 'We have achieved a surplus at the end of this financial year.' If we followed that advice we would be in the same position as those countries whose unemployment today is double that of ours and there would be hundreds of thousands of Australians out of work. So when those opposite talk about debt and deficit what they are actually saying is that they would prefer higher unemployment over Australians having jobs.

Let us talk about debt. There has been a bit of a contagion running through the coalition over the last 20 years—that is, that debt is always a bad thing. They have not had a monopoly on that. A number of state governments have had the same disease and the net result of that has been a rundown in our public and social infrastructure. Let us say a few things about our debt. Sometimes going into debt is the most economically responsible thing for a person, a business or a government to do, particularly when that debt is funding investment in something that will create value over the long term or when that debt is managing a cash flow that is certain to pick up some time down the track. We believe that our strategy of going into debt to ensure that Australians were kept in jobs and that the doors of businesses were kept open was the responsible thing to do.

You cannot be a Keynesian while the economy is on the way down and not be one when the economy is on the way up again. So we have taken steps in this budget to
bring the budget back into surplus. The steps that we have taken to give priority to jobs were the right things to do but now, as the economy is picking up, we need to bring the budget back into surplus. We need to do this in a way that acknowledges that we have a patchwork economy and that not all areas are doing so well, and this budget achieves that balance. We are doing this by imposing real spending restraints and this is going to be the fastest fiscal consolidation seen in this country since the 1960s. This has been achieved despite significant revenue weaknesses from the legacy of effects of the GFC, with revenue write-downs in 2010-11 and 2011-12 of $16.3 billion, and the natural disasters that have had such social and economic impacts in our country over the last nine months.

By contrast, the last five Costello budgets delivered an average of 3.7 per cent growth in spending per annum, while our fiscal strategy sets a cap on real spending growth of two per cent per annum. This budget delivers spending growth across the forward estimates at an average of one percent per year—the lowest in decades. To put this in context, this is the lowest real growth rate in government spending over five years since the 1980s. The budget outlines $22 billion of savings measures which continue this government's work in repairing the long-term structural position of the budget. I have not heard any suggestions in the speeches of those opposite during the debate on the appropriation bills, but we have heard many lectures on how to manage the economy. I have to say it is a bit hard for members on this side of the House to accept lectures on financial management from those opposite, who presided over the national disgrace that was the $1 billion wasted in fattening up Telstra for privatisation, the $250 million wasted in the Networking the Nation rort and the absolute national disgrace of IT outsourcing that we are having to unpick month by month and year by year—because it has been nothing but a rort. While we are talking about rorts, what about the regional rorts program, which the Australian National Audit Office just gave up on. The Audit Office absolutely gave up on it. The members opposite do not like the fact, and feel some embarrassment, that the same government that presided over the IT outsourcing and the regional rorts presided over the AWB scandal, the $2 billion in advertising over their term in government to promote such things as the Howard government's Work Choices legislation. While we are on it, they also are embarrassed by their misplaced priorities and their incapacity to find savings or long-term revenue.

Let us look at their confused position on mining taxes. Apparently, it is all right for a tory government in Western Australia to tax mining companies—to increase royalties on mining companies—but it is not all right for the federal government to try and get a fair share of the return on our minerals wealth to do things such as reduce the tax impost on small businesses, increase superannuation savings for ordinary working Australians and fund much-needed regional infrastructure. So it is a bit hard for us on this side of the House to cop lectures on fiscal restraint from those on that side of the House after we have looked at their record—the greatest rate of growth in spending in two decades, rort after rort, scandal after scandal, waste after waste. Look at the over $46 billion in infrastructure deficit.

Members opposite seem to think that a surplus is a thing in and of itself. They do not understand that a surplus is not an end in itself. A surplus does have a purpose at the right point in the economic cycle—it is not an end in itself. Debt is not always evil. Sometimes going into debt is the most
responsible thing for a government to do. If those opposite could take home those economic lessons and we could get some bipartisan support on these issues, then the state of our national finances would be in a better condition and we would not be having to deal with the horrible deficit that we have had in infrastructure spending, skills and education that this government is proud to be dealing with.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms K Livermore): Is the motion seconded?

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (20:10): I second the motion. Unfortunately, this motion is a sad reflection on how hopelessly out of touch this government is as they wallow in dangerous self-delusion. Let us dissect this motion line by line to demonstrate how hopelessly and out of the touch the member for Throsby is and how he is part of the most incompetent and untrustworthy government in living memory.

This motion makes reference to the global financial crisis. Now one thing about the global financial crisis is that it was not global. The main drivers of growth in our region are the economies of China and India and during the peak of the financial crisis in North America and Europe, China continued to grow strongly with quarterly growth rates of 6.8 per cent and 6.2 per cent. Likewise, India also continued to grow strongly during this period with quarterly growth rates of 6.1 per cent and 5.8 per cent. That is why many respected commentators refer to the period as the 'North Atlantic Financial Crisis'. Therefore, with the strong growth of China and India, the prudential reforms to our banking sector implemented by the Howard government, together with the Howard government leaving a healthy budget surplus, many sectors of the Australian economy were shielded from the worst of the financial crisis.

This motion talks about unemployment. A fortnight ago we had the Treasurer, when handing down one of the most uninspiring budgets ever delivered in this House—a budget that was all about debt, debt and more debt—blabbering on about jobs, jobs and jobs. But even before the ink, the very red ink, was dry on the last budget the Bureau of Statistics released figures showing 49,100 full-time jobs were lost in April and even the participation rate fell as many simply gave up looking for a job. This comes at a time when this motion states that many countries are emerging from the recent financial crisis. Yet, in April, Australia went backwards with 49,100 jobs lost.

While on unemployment, one would think that the member moving this motion would be fighting against the high of rate unemployment in his local area. The member represents a region where youth unemployment stands at over 33 per cent and, further, has one of the worst overall unemployment rates in New South Wales and a disturbingly low participation rate. So we would expect the member for Throsby to come into this chamber and stand up and fight for his constituents. That is what he was elected for. We would like to see you in here with a motion calling the House's attention to the shocking rate of unemployment in the seat of Throsby, stamping your fist on the table and demanding action. Instead, not only do you snub your nose at your constituents and serve up this dribble but, even worse, you want to punish them with a job-destroying carbon tax.

This motion makes the claim that the Australian unemployment rate is low by international standards. To make any meaningful comparison we need to compare Australia with countries in our region. And the majority of countries in our region have substantially lower unemployment rates than Australia. For example, Singapore has an
unemployment rate of 1.9 per cent, Malaysia 2.8 per cent, Hong Kong 4.6 per cent, Taiwan 4.5 per cent and Japan 4.6 per cent. They are all countries in our region that have substantially lower unemployment rates than Australia. Even further afield, countries such as Norway at 3.2 per cent, Switzerland at 3.4 per cent, Denmark at four per cent and Austria at 4.3 per cent also all have significantly lower unemployment rates than Australia.

Although there is much media attention to the headline 'Unemployment rate', a more accurate measure of the performance of the economy is the underemployment rate. In February this year there were 886,000 underemployed workers across our nation in addition to the 583,000 unemployed workers. So, combined, we have over 1.4 million Australians either unemployed or underemployed at a rate of 12.8 per cent—hardly something to get excited about.

This motion refers to the Australian government's debt to GDP ratio and implies that it is not a problem by making comparisons with comparable countries. Such rationalisation is highly concerning as, not only is it delusional, it fosters a very dangerous complacency that says it is okay for this government to continue on its reckless spending spree, adding to our national debt mountain by $135 million every day. The rationalisation that it is okay to indulge in a reckless spending spree because other countries have greater debt levels is the same type of a rationalisation used by an alcoholic who drinks 10 schooners a day and thinks he does not a problem because he compares himself with someone that drinks 10 bottles of whisky a day. If we are going to make a meaningful comparison of debt to GDP ratio we should be comparing Australia with countries that are similarly bestowed with natural resources and are major mineral exporters. When we look at countries such as Chile, Sweden, Norway and Finland they are all running comfortable budget surpluses.

This motion likes to talk about international financial comparisons. Unsurprisingly, the member for Throsby does not talk about international comparisons of interest rates. Simply, this is because we have the highest interest rates in the developed world. I have a list of all the developed countries of the world and interest rates, and Australia is dead last of all the developed countries. That means Australian families make higher mortgage repayments and Australian small businesses are placed at an internationally competitive disadvantage, all due to this government's mismanagement of the economy.

This motions talks about fiscal consolidation, but what fiscal consolidation? There has been no fiscal consolidation. We have had the exact opposite. Under this government Australia has gone from a $20 billion surplus to a massive $50 billion deficit. This year alone the deficit has blown out by a further $8 billion. In 2011-12 there is already a forecast of a further blow-out of $10 billion.

Let us take a quick look at the Gillard government's fiscal strategy that this motion refers to. Thanks to the Gillard government's fiscal strategy after inheriting a surplus, Australia now faces debt-servicing costs that are headed towards $7.5 billion a year or $20 million a day. To borrow a phrase from the member for Wentworth, the only way to describe the Gillard government's so-called fiscal strategy is an orgy of frenzied spending and borrowing, a strategy of live for the day, spend everything that comes in and more, say whatever it takes to cling to power, and the future be damned.

Now let us have a look at how the Gillard government is managing inflation to which
this motion refers. For the year to March the headline inflation is running at 3.3 per cent, which is well above the RBA's target band, risking further interest rates increases. This is at a time when the surging dollar should be making just about everything that gets imported into the country cheaper. However, the inflation situation for many Australians is much worse than the official figures as each household has different expenditure patterns. For example, pensioners are likely to allocate a greater proportion of their weekly expenditure on food and health services. Therefore, while the official increase in headline inflation is 3.3 per cent over the year to March, the cost of living experienced by families has increased significantly higher at 4.9 per cent. For pensioners the increase was 4.1 per cent and for other welfare recipients it was 5.1 per cent. The Gillard government's management of inflation is only going to further deteriorate when the government pushes ahead, punishing families with a carbon tax.

Finally, this motion concludes with talking about the right course of action for Australia's long-term economic prosperity. It is now almost a year since the Prime Minister admitted, in a rare moment of honesty, that this Labor government had lost its way, but since then the Prime Minister has taken us further off course. Never, not even since the dying days of the Whitlam government and their dealings with Khemlani, has our nation's long-term economic prosperity been threatened by such irrational and incompetent economic policies. The only way to get our great nation back on track and on the right course and to secure our long-term economic prosperity is to change the government.

Mr HUSIC (Chifley) (20:20): I rise to support the motion moved by the member for Throsby, and I do agree with him that the global financial crisis was and is widely recognised as the most severe economic downturn since the Great Depression—one of the worst economic events to hit us in about 75 years. Three years after this crisis first impacted on the United States and then spread through the world some nations are still struggling to salvage their economies. Some economists are doubtful that the world has come through the worst of the recession. Australia fared better than most. If only all the world economies were able to boast the unemployment rates that we have and the economic growth that we have in the shadow, as I said before, of one of the worst economic events in 75 years. Through the course of this debate and whenever we talk about the GFC, there are two things that stand out from the opposition. One is claiming ownership of the surplus and that this helped us through. I do remember the way that surplus was built up. That surplus was built up by the highest taxing government in Australian history. As I said in this place earlier today, we ensured that tax as a share of GDP was at or below the level we inherited—on average 23½ per cent. This year we are at 21.8 per cent. Those opposite always tell us how they got their surplus but the previous government was the highest taxing government of all time, peaking at 24.1 per cent of GDP in 2004-05 and 2005-06. They cut spending by seeing childcare spots go. People in my neck of the woods who were trying to get childcare could not get it. They lowered funding for schools, especially government schools. They strangled TAFE funding and we saw the miraculous event of the them duplicating the TAFE system in direct competition with TAFE. GP bulk-billing rates were drying up before our eyes. Hospital funding was cut by $1 billion. Now, in one of these cute rewritings of history that we see, they are attempting to say that they
had some sort of crystal ball that gave them some inkling about the financial crisis and that this helped shield us from what we experienced. In actual fact it was their underspend on social spending that put us in the position where we had the surplus at the level that we did.

The second thing we get is comments from those opposite, particularly those in leadership positions, saying that we should have done what other countries did. I noticed that what was absent from the member for Hughes's walk around the grounds, so to speak, was that he never mentioned New Zealand. I am intrigued as to why he did not mention it, because the Leader of the Opposition had a lot of good things to say about New Zealand last year when he was quizzed on The 7.30 Report by the shrinking Chris Uhlmann, who is doing a great job of transforming himself. He said:

CHRIS UHLMANN: But you would have spent money as well. The Coalition actually backed the first stimulus package, didn't it?

TONY ABBOTT: Yes, which was about a quarter the size of the second stimulus package, which we opposed.

CHRIS UHLMANN: But certainly that money was necessary and it appears to have done the trick.

TONY ABBOTT: But at high price. And if you look across the Tasman, New Zealand has done just as well it seems as Australia without going into anything like the same level of debt and deficit that we have.

Gee did that provoke a response! You had a whole bunch of people come out saying 'What is Tony Abbott on?' For example, Laurie Oakes said that he did very little to refute allegations of economic ignorance by making that reference—Australia without going into anything like the same level of debt. The truth was that New Zealand had 15 months of economic contraction during the GFC, not three, and an unemployment rate, which was the same as Australia's at 4.3 per cent before the GFC, now at a 10-year high. The National Business Review said in 2009: Since 2003 New Zealand's rate has generally been around a percentage point lower than Australia's but New Zealand has now been in recession for well over a year while recession hasn't arrived across the Tasman.

In fact, John Key looked at a model to improve the New Zealand economy and he said, 'Our vision is to close the gap with Australia by 2025.' Tony Abbott is pointing to New Zealand as a model for getting us through the GFC when in actual fact—(Time expired)

Mr FLETCHER (Bradfield) (20:25): When it comes to matters of economic management, this government's capacity for self-congratulation is apparently limitless. We have this loyal apparatchik, the member for Throsby, putting forward this motion congratulating in extravagant terms his colleagues on their economic management. I was reminded of Winston Smith, the protagonist in Nineteen Eighty-Four, who in the late stages of that novel, after he has been broken, sits there cheering the fact that they are at war with Oceania—or was it Eurasia—and running the party line. That is what we have got this evening. We have got this government's relentless capacity to congratulate itself on economic achievements which have not yet been achieved. Day after day the Treasurer comes into this chamber and congratulates himself on a return to surplus which has not happened and shows no indication of happening for at least the next year and we are supposed to believe it is going to happen the following year.

It puts me in mind in Stephen Holland. Remember Stephen Holland, the Superfish, who was going to win the gold medal in the 1,500 metres in 1976? I remember being trouped down in primary school to watch this
one event in the 1976 Olympics that Australia was going to win. On the Wayne Swan model, Stephen Holland, the Superfish, would have been congratulating himself for several years that he had won the gold medal. But he did not win it; he won the bronze medal. On the Wayne Swan model where you congratulate yourself for your achievement before you actually deliver it, Mr Dewey, the presidential candidate who was famously shown in the Chicago Tribune headline as having won the presidential election against Truman, would have been congratulating himself for several years—'I've won. I am the president.' But in fact he had not won. Yet on the Wayne Swan model you congratulate yourself on the surplus before you actually deliver it. Who can forget Mr Scott, who thought he was going to be the first to the South Pole. But he wasn't; he did not get to the South Pole first because Mr Amundsen the Norwegian got there first. Mr Scott never got to the South Pole first. Of course, on the Wayne Swan model, he would have been congratulating himself—'I got to the South Pole first.'

We have a government here which has a track record of congratulating itself on economic performance without actually delivering the performance. I am also reminded of the prayer of Saint Augustine: Lord make me pure, but not just yet. What could better summarise the approach of Wayne Swan to deficits? Wayne Swan tells us: 'I know deficits are bad; unfortunately in 2008-09 we had a deficit. I know deficits are bad; unfortunately in 2009-10 we had a deficit. I know deficits are bad; unfortunately in 2010-11 we have got a deficit. Lord make me pure, but not just yet. I will not be pure in 2011-12 either, but in 2012-13 I will be pure. I will deliver a surplus.' It is this self-congratulatory approach to economic management, quite unsubstantiated by performance, quite unsubstantiated by the facts, which is replete in this motion this evening. This motion is about as pure an example of a non sequitur as you will ever see. We are told, firstly, that Australia has unemployment of five per cent—premise No. 1. We are told that Australia's debt-to-GDP ratio is low—premise No. 2. And then we are given the conclusion that this is because of the marvellous economic management of Julia Gillard and Wayne Swan. That is a textbook example of a non sequitur. A non sequitur is a rhetorical structure in which the conclusion does not follow from the premise. And I will tell you one thing: it certainly does not follow as a conclusion that the reason we have a low debt-to-GDP ratio is that Wayne Swan and Julia Gillard have their hands on the economic levers. We have a low debt-to-GDP for one reason and one reason only: John Howard and Peter Costello were managing the economy of this country for 11 years and in 2006-07 they handed over an economy that was in fantastic and world-beating shape. Unfortunately, the vandals are inside the gate and they have been remorselessly trashing the economy ever since.

Debate adjourned.

Israel

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (20:31): I move:

That this House:

(1) restates its support for the motion moved by the then Prime Minister and passed by this House on the sixtieth anniversary of the State of Israel, and in particular:

(a) acknowledges the unique relationship which exists between Australia and Israel, a bond highlighted by the commitment of both societies to the rights and liberty of our citizens and to cultural diversity;

(b) commends the State of Israel's commitment to democracy, the rule of law and pluralism; and
(c) reiterates Australia's commitment to Israel's right to exist in peace and security, and our continued support for a peaceful two-state resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian issue; and

(2) notes with concern the fraying of the traditionally bipartisan support amongst Australia's political parties for the State of Israel, and in particular the:

(a) resolution by Greens councillors on Marrickville Council for a boycott of Israel, supported by Labor councillors;

(b) policy adopted by the NSW Greens for an Israel boycott;

(c) decision by the NSW Labor Party to preference the Greens candidate for Marrickville ahead of other candidates who did not support an Israel boycott; and

(d) decision by Labor and Greens councillors on Moreland City Council, Melbourne, to allow the anti-semitic group Hizb ut Tahrir to use Council premises in August 2010 despite Hizb ut Tahrir publicly calling for the slaughter of Jewish people, and its enthusiasm for Osama bin Laden.

It is appropriate at this time, when the world's attention is fixed on the tumultuous events in the Middle East and North Africa, that the Australian parliament reaffirm its support for the motion moved by the then Prime Minister and passed by the House on 12 March 2008 which celebrated and commended the achievements of the state of Israel on its 60 anniversary. As the world has watched those tumultuous events unfold, new-found voices in the Middle East and North Africa have broken through decades of political oppression in the region, bringing hope to people long forgotten by their rulers. So rapid and unexpected was this transformation that world leaders hesitated, unsure of the implications of the political avalanche that was occurring in the Middle East and beyond.

Australians will always stand alongside other free and democratic nations in championing the cause for individual liberty, greater freedoms and necessary political and economic reforms. While the world must hope that the removal of these regimes might lead to a better future for the region's people—a future in which economic opportunity and individual betterment replace fear and hatred—that outcome is far from assured. Throughout the recent turmoil Israel, the region's only true democracy—in fact, the beacon of democracy—has understandably watched these events unfold with trepidation that the changes sweeping the region could bring forth a new strategic environment more hostile to Israel than the one just passed.

While the world is right to rejoice in the democratic aspirations of the people of the Middle East and North Africa, Australians should never forget that Israel is the one country in the region where democratic rights and freedoms have existed interrupted since the establishment of the modern state of Israel in 1948. It has been said that a nation is born out of the fire and brimstone of war, but for Israel this has been the reality of its entire history. Australia has been, and will continue to be, a true friend and committed supporter of the state of Israel and its people. Australia's ties to Israel are deep, with our shared interests incorporating that bond of common values that unites free nations around the world. At the heart of our friendship is a shared belief in democracy, individual liberty, equal rights and the rule of law.

The British author HH Munro one said of the island of Crete that it had produced more history than could be consumed locally. The same could be said of the regions surrounding Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. To borrow President Obama's words from his speech last evening to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, Israel is a small nation in a tough neighbourhood. On my first visit to Israel I was struck by the geographic proximity of
the protagonists in the history of Israeli-Arab relations. Everything is just a stone’s throw away. Unless you have visited Israel and the surrounding region it is difficult to comprehend and appreciate the history and the complexity of relations. In 2009 I met with Israelis and Palestinians in Jerusalem and Bethlehem and I travelled to the Lebanese border and to the border in the south. The people live with an overwhelming anxiety and fear born from decades of conflict.

In recent times Israel has come under renewed criticism and attack by some in the international community who seek new avenues to isolate the nation diplomatically and economically. In Australia this task was taken up by the Greens dominated Marrickville Council, which passed a motion to support a ‘boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign’ against Israel. The motion called on the Marrickville Council to ‘boycott all goods made in Israel and any sporting, academic, government or cultural exchanges’ and was passed with the support of Greens and Labor councillors. Despite reports that 63 per cent of Marrickville residents opposed the boycott, Marrickville Mayor Fiona Byrne campaigned at the March 2011 state election, in which she was a candidate, for a statewide version of the boycott were she elected to the New South Wales parliament.

The House should note that the Labor Party did a preference swap with the Greens and Ms Byrne in her campaign to win the state seat of Marrickville ahead of candidates who did not support the odious BDS campaign. Ms Byrne did not win the seat and the Greens senator-elect Lee Rhiannon expressed disappointment that the Greens did not campaign hard enough on the platform of the BDS campaign against Israel. The BDS campaign is an outrageous and prejudiced attack against the people of Israel, and the actions of the Marrickville Council supporting it must be condemned. Israel is not perfect—no country is perfect—but it does not deserve the virulent abuse levelled at it by the Greens and their fellow travellers.

The coalition is deeply disappointed that the traditionally bipartisan support for the state of Israel amongst Australia’s major political parties has frayed in recent years. Rather than condemn the Greens or their motion of support for a boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign, Labor Party councillors voted alongside them. As Senator Brown rightly pointed out, Kevin Rudd’s Labor party is as every bit responsible for the outcome.

It is evident that the formal alliance struck by the Prime Minister between the Labor Party and the Greens in order to cling to power extends to all the way to the inner suburban councils of Sydney. Many of Australia’s trade unions are also heavily involved in the push for a wide-ranging boycott, divestment and sanctions regime against Israel. In an instruction manual for supporters of the boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign, 21 Australian trade unions are committed to a full or partial BDS. These are the same trade unions which play such a leading role in the Australian Labor Party, including in the selection of its political representatives, both in this place and in state parliaments around the country, and in the decision on who leads the federal Labor Party, as we witnessed with the removal of the first-term Prime Minister Kevin Rudd last year.

The Marrickville Council resolution came shortly after another public outcry when Labor and Green councillors on the Moreland City Council allowed the anti-Western, anti-Semitic group Hizb ut Tahrir to use council premises to hold a public meeting. According to its spokesperson,
Israel 'is an illegitimate state and occupation; it has to be removed.' Australia must take a robust stand against those who deny the right of Israel to exist. The Prime Minister must reassure Australians that as a result of her government's alliance—a formal alliance we witnessed with the signing of a document by the Greens senators and the Prime Minister—that our country's foreign policy will not be held hostage to Greens extremism. The coalition believes that a boycott, divestment and sanctions regime against Israel will only serve to inflame tensions on all sides, harming the chances of a peaceful resolution to the long-running conflict in the Middle East.

Under the Howard government the coalition strongly supported the road map to Middle East peace and urged both sides to stay committed to negotiating a lasting peace. The coalition is firmly committed to a sustainable solution of two independent and economically viable states, where the Israeli people and the Palestinian people can live their lives in peace and security within internationally recognised borders.

Israel embodies our faith in the fundamental human desire of people the world over to live their lives in freedom. That is why this evening I seek the support of this House for this motion that not only restates our support for the state of Israel but notes, with great concern, the resolution by the Marrickville council for a boycott of Israel that was supported by Labor councillors. They should stand condemned. I commend this motion to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott) (20:40): Is the motion seconded?

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

Ms VAMVAKINOU (Calwell) (20:40): The Middle East conflict is a serious matter, which requires a serious approach. With this motion as it stands, the member for Curtin, the coalition spokesperson for foreign affairs, has proven that she is incapable, unable or unwilling to comprehend and respond to serious and complex foreign policy issues in a responsible and constructive manner.

Paragraph 2 of this motion is a 'cheap political shot', reducing the issue to its lowest common denominator of scaremongering wedge ethnic politics, and opportunistic point scoring.

Three years ago, this parliament moved an unprecedented motion congratulating Israel on the occasion of 60 years of statehood. No other country has enjoyed such privilege, and it is indicative that the state of Israel has many friends in this parliament.

Tonight I want to speak to the member for Curtin's motion, and whilst I begin by acknowledging Israel on the occasion of its 63rd year anniversary, I want also to note that there is a dual narrative, whose genesis can be traced to the creation of the state of Israel. On the one hand, Zionist leaders sought to create a home for Jewish people in Palestine. In doing so, another injustice was perpetrated with the expulsion and dispossession of the Palestinian people from their ancestral homelands.

The member for Curtin's motion makes no mention of the Palestinian displacement of 1948, known as Al Nakba, meaning 'the catastrophe', but this House cannot in all fairness commemorate the founding of the state of Israel by ignoring the subsequent plight of the Palestinian people. The two have become intrinsically linked and the security of both Israelis and Palestinians rests on acknowledging these two conflicting narratives upon which any peace process has to begin.
For me, the following passage encapsulates the other narrative neglected in this motion, the Palestinian Nakba:

A 13-year-old Palestinian boy was forced to leave his home in the Galilean city of Safed and flee with his family to Syria. He took up shelter in a canvas tent provided to all the arriving refugees. Though he and his family wished for decades to return to their home and homeland, they were denied that most basic of human rights. That child's story, like that of so many other Palestinians, is mine.

These are the words of Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian President—the man, who, despite much adversity and controversy, stands ready to make peace with Israel.

We are into the sixth decade of contrasting narratives—the birth of a state for one people, and dispossession and exile for another people. So we cannot commemorate Israel's creation, without reference to the over 400 Palestinian villages and towns that were cleansed, depopulated, destroyed and renamed. We cannot ignore the expulsion of some 750,000 Palestinian refugees in 1948, who, now into their third generation, number 4.8 million people scattered in refugee camps in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and elsewhere.

While this motion commends 'Israel's commitment to democracy, the rule of law and pluralism', Israel's parliament, the Knesset, has recently passed the so-called Nakba law coupled with the Admissions Committee law. These laws, as Israel's oldest newspaper, Haaretz, put it on 25 March:

... are the latest in a growing list of disgraceful legislation whose entire purpose is to discriminate against Israel's Arab citizens, intimidate them and deny them their rights ... 

Haaretz's editorial goes on to warn that apathy and silence 'encourages the instigators of racism, creating a convenient fertile ground for them to continue their disastrous activities'. I recently returned from that part of the world, and I saw firsthand the vibrancy of Israel as a highly developed, cultured and sophisticated society. Yet, despite its prosperity and development, one thing continues to elude it: security and recognition by its Arab neighbours. And, whilst Israel prides itself on being a contemporary and cosmopolitan democracy, beyond Tel Aviv the realities on the ground reveal a darker side to the state of Israel: the imposition, maintenance and expansion of a wall that segregates, separates and alienates people on the basis of their race, religion and identity. In conjunction with the illegal settlements ever encroaching on Palestinian land and restrictions on family contact and on movement through a debilitating permit system and checkpoint regime, it is not hard to see that the alternative to peace is violence born out of despair, frustration and dejection.

This motion is right to reiterate Australia's commitment to Israel's right to exist in peace and security. It is a security that people crave; however, it is a shared security, predicated on Israel's ability to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians. The Palestinian people also have the right to live in peace and security. They also have the right to move freely without sanction within the borders of their own Palestinian state. They have the right to prosperity and growth. They too are a sophisticated, intelligent, industrious and cultured people who have great potential to grow and develop their society and their economy. I saw evidence of this potential in towns such as Ramallah, where Palestinians are building the institutional infrastructure as they prepare for statehood. They do this against incredible adversity.

Yet it is impossible for this potential to be fully realised amidst the trauma of an occupation which spans checkpoints, closures, home demolitions, settlements, the separation wall, the permit system, the two-
tient system of roads and access and control over water and agriculture as well as the crippling effect of the blockade on Gaza. A peace settlement will bring enormous benefits for both states and the region as a whole, eradicating a major source of global discontent and stabilising a region bereft of peace and stability.

It has been 20 years since the Oslo agreement and 16 years since the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, a pragmatic, visionary leader, a man who carried the hopes and aspirations of his people as he led them through a process that has since stalled and hindered in the 'politics of fear and hate'. Resolution to this protracted and costly issue requires wisdom, courage, fortitude and a sense of fairness, and, like all difficult issues, timing is imperative.

Unfortunately, whilst the current political leadership in Israel hesitates in engaging in a real and substantial way with the peace process, I can inform the House that the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, has conveyed to us in no uncertain terms that the Palestinians are ready to make peace. They are ready to make a deal on the 1967 borders, on 22 per cent of their original ancestral borders. If this motion was sincere—which I am afraid it is not designed to be—in trying to advance the Middle East peace process, it would at least make reference to international law or include the following:

The borders of Israel and Palestine should be based on the 1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps, so that secure and recognised borders are established for both states.

These are the words of US President Barack Obama from his Middle East address last Thursday, and I endorse them.

The Middle East is rapidly changing. We are all familiar with the sweeping events of the Arab spring. We may not yet know what this spring will yield, but one thing is certain: key to peace and stability in the Middle East is the unresolved Palestinian question.

The truth is that Israel's current predicament in respect to the peace process is making it increasingly isolated and vulnerable. That is why, now more than ever, it is incumbent upon its friends, such as Australia, to reassure them and encourage them to re-engage with the peace process. Proclaiming that Israel has no peace partner to negotiate with because of the split between Fatah and Hamas holds no currency now, as Hamas and Fatah recently reconciled at the behest of President Abbas. It is disingenuous and highly short-sighted of the Israeli Prime Minister to proclaim that Fatah must choose between peace with Israel or Hamas. You cannot keep changing the goalposts.

Australia can play a helpful and decisive role in encouraging the Israeli leadership to return to the negotiating table. In fact, the Palestinian leadership expressed their gratitude for the very active and supportive role that Australia is playing in assisting this process. Along with other friends of Israel, such as the US, Australia needs to work towards convincing it to return to negotiations.

The motion notes with concern the alleged 'fraying of the traditionally bipartisan support amongst Australia's political parties for the state of Israel'. I cannot speak for other parties but, as a member of parliament for the Australian Labor Party, I say to the member for Curtin that she is extremely mischievous in her imputation. The state of Israel enjoys strong bipartisan support from this government because we on this side of the House have always been committed to a two-state solution, but we are also committed to the rights of the Palestinian people to the
same peace and security within their own state. This is the case in both the ALP national platform and our policies in government.

I move:
That paragraph 2 be omitted.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott) (20:50): Is the amendment seconded?

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

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Manager of Opposition Business) (20:51): I was delighted to second the motion of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition with respect to the state of Israel and our support for it and the condemnation of the Marrickville Council, the Greens and their fellow travellers in the Labor Party who supported both the Greens and the BDS campaign. It is not surprising to me that the member for Calwell, in her 10-minute speech on this motion—in spite of the fact that one half of it was entirely devoted to the Greens’ stance on the Marrickville Council—at no point condemned the Greens, the Marrickville Council or the unions within the Labor Party who support the boycotts, divestments and sanctions campaign. I would not expect the same from the member for Melbourne Ports, but I was disappointed. I note with absolute clarity that the member for Calwell at no point addressed that part of the motion and instead chose to depart from even government policy, let alone coalition policy, in her condemnation of the state of Israel. The boycotts, divestments and sanctions campaign is a particularly pernicious and sophisticated campaign. It seeks to undermine the state of Israel through its enemies on the left by what is supposedly a victimless campaign. Apparently nobody will be hurt by the boycotts, divestments and sanctions campaign. It is a far cry from the campaigns of the left against the state of Israel in past decades and a far cry from the bad public relations campaigns of the terrorists who have attacked the state of Israel for decades. It is much better PR to come up with a non-dangerous sounding campaign like boycotts, divestments and sanctions. It is a far cry from pushing wheelchair-bound disabled people off the Achille Lauro. It is a far cry from shooting Israeli competitors during the Munich Olympics. It is a far cry from the bombing of the World Trade Center during September 11. It is a far cry from shooting kindergarten children in northern Israel. The people who have promoted the boycotts, divestments and sanctions campaign have learnt their lesson from bad public relations. They have suckered in not only the Greens but, unfortunately, also members of the union movement that is affiliated with the Labor Party. I know that those people's views are not shared by all members of the Labor Party and I expect a much better contribution to the debate from the member for Melbourne Ports, who has stood by the state of Israel throughout his entire political career.

The boycotts, divestments and sanctions campaign was given credibility by the Durban I conference, which passed a motion endorsing the BDS and suggesting that member states, organisations and unions join up with the BDS. Having failed to conventionally defeat the state of Israel militarily since 1948, the proponents of the BDS campaign have chosen a more insidious method in order to undermine and delegitimise the state of Israel. This BDS campaign is about the delegitimisation of the right of the state of Israel to exist. That is exactly what it is about. It has been put on the same level as the South African apartheid regime. The proponents of the BDS say that Israel is just like South Africa in the pre-apartheid-abolition period—in that period from the sixties right through to the eighties.
and the nineties when apartheid ruled South Africa. All of it is designed to suggest to soft-headed people in the West that Israel is just like the South African apartheid regime. The campaign is designed to undermine its very legitimacy.

There are five elements to the BDS campaign. These include the desire to make Israel a pariah state; the use of lawfare through the international courts, through the United Nations and through reports like the Goldstone report to undermine the state of Israel; and the demand for an intergenerational refugee status on the right of return for hundreds of thousands of people who have left the state of Israel a very long time ago. But the very worst part of the BDS campaign is that it undermines the attempts at harmony between Palestinians and Israelis. The member for Eden-Monaro knows exactly what I am talking about because he was with me in Israel last December when these matters were debated. The worst part of the BDS campaign is that it undermines the capacity for peace in the Middle East. It undermines harmony between Palestinians and Israelis. It undermines the capacity for business connections and academic connections and, worst of all, even down to the lowest level, it opposes things like the AFL team that is made up of Palestinians and Jewish Israelis travelling to Australia to show harmony between Israeli and Palestinian people. I condemn the Greens and the Labor Party for their support of it. (Time expired.)

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (20:56): Australia and Israel share a close relationship and deep friendship based on our historical support for Israel and our shared commitment to freedom, security and democracy. It is a country of 7.4 million people and 22,000 square kilometres, less than four times the size of my electorate of Blair. During the dark days of the Cold War, Israel was firmly in the pro-Western camp. Israel is a friend of Australia and Australia is a friend of Israel. Israel has been a liberal democracy in a region where despotism, authoritarianism and Islamic fundamentalism are all too common. It has been surrounded by countries committed to its destruction. From Metula in the north, where it is attacked by Hezbollah, to Sderot in the south, where it is attacked by Hamas, Israel has been surrounded by those hell-bent on its destruction. We in the federal Labor government are firmly committed to Israel's security.

Our support for the state of Israel goes back to the creation of Israel in 1948, when the then Australian Minister for External Affairs, Dr HV Evatt, played such an important role in the negotiations leading to Israel's creation and presided over the historic May 1949 vote admitting Israel as the 59th member of the United Nations. Australia was the first country to vote in favour of General Assembly resolution 181 in 1947 to establish the Jewish and Arab states. Our relationship is underpinned by the 90,000 members of the Jewish community in Australia. Indeed, post World War II we admitted 35,000 Jewish refugees fleeing from the remnants of the Holocaust and the tragic experiences they had in Europe. The Jewish community has made a significant contribution to Australia in many fields. Trade between Israel and Australia amounted to $740 million in 2009-10.

We in the federal Labor government are strongly committed to the security of Israel. We want a negotiated two-state solution that allows a secure and independent Israel to exist side by side with a secure and independent future Palestinian state. Violence has no place in a peaceful Middle East in the future. Australia continues to support negotiations to be undertaken in this regard. Violence and actions which
undermine trust and treat people as inhuman simply because they come from a different race or a different religion have no place amongst people of goodwill.

One of the largest impediments to peace in the Middle East has been the ongoing refusal of Hamas to recognise the right of the state of Israel to exist and its relentless bombing of Israelis in southern Israel. Another has been the dysfunctionality of the Palestinian leadership. After Israel pulled out of the Gaza Strip we saw a civil war break out between Hamas and Fatah, which meant that people were killed and there was no voice and no effective partner for peace for Israel for so many years. We on this side of the House have called for cessation of settlement construction by Israel on the West Bank. Personally, I welcome the comments of President Obama in his broad terms and as a constructive pathway for peaceful negotiations.

The Marrickville Council should have a good look at itself. Pathways and parks and rates and rubbish should be its focus, not foreign policy. The truth is that this federal Labor government is committed to the Palestinian people. We have provided $160 million since 2007 to support the Palestinian people. And during his visit to Ramallah in March, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Kevin Rudd, outlined a significant increase in Australia's assistance to the Palestinian people—a five-year development partnership with regular budget support and a further A$18 million to the UN Relief and Works Agency, which we announced in December 2010.

We do not support boycotts that impede legitimate trade between states, including between Israel and Australia. The Marrickville Council should never have passed that resolution in the first place. The idea of banning academic, government, sporting and cultural exchanges with Israel is simply a nonsense and political stupidity by the Marrickville Council. We welcomed the outcome of the 19 April vote by the Marrickville Council to reject support for international boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Israel. We hope that in future they concentrate on what is their principal role in local government. I simply repudiate those opposite who want to make political capital out of this issue and say that they should stand with us in rejecting the stupidity of the Marrickville Council's initial decision. (Time expired)

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (21:01): I rise to support the motion moved by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, and I do so as somebody who is a very strong supporter of the state of Israel, its right to exist and the fact that it is a shining beacon of democracy within the Middle East. Sadly, we see very few functioning democracies within that region. That is why it is very important for this House to acknowledge the importance to Australia of the bilateral relationship we have with Israel.

It is particularly important that we acknowledge it on the occasion of its 60th anniversary. As members of this House would well know, for those 60 years they have had a very difficult existence as their neighbours and many of the other countries within their region deny them the right to exist. Sadly, that denial of their rights, the denigration of the state of Israel, is often shared by those on the left—on the extreme left, in this case—of Australian politics. We have seen it in the support that the Greens councillors who occupy positions on Marrickville Council have given for a boycott of Israel.

It reflects something rather strange about sections of the more extreme left in Australia that they refuse to repudiate and attack the
behaviour of opponents of Israel, who often behave in extraordinarily bad ways. In looking at the state of Israel, instead of—to use a biblical reference—looking at the log within their enemy's eyes they try to pick on the splinter within Israel's eye. Israel is clearly not a perfect state, but I believe it is a state that behaves in a way that I think Australians have much sympathy for.

I have had the opportunity to visit Israel. For a country that has really been in a state of war for the whole 60 years of its existence, what really struck me was the very vigorous internal debate within Israel about the way that they behave as a state, about the way that they behave with their neighbours, about the way that they respond to military provocation, about the way that they respond to attacks on their people and about the way that they respond to attacks on their territory. An extraordinarily vigorous debate occurs in Israel about what they believe is moral and right and about the way that they approach these issues.

The most extraordinary policy issues that are taken by the state of Israel are issues that actually involve life or death for Israeli citizens are contestable within the Israeli legal system and you have had members of the Israeli judiciary pass judgment on the behaviour of the Israeli military in times of war. That accompanied what was a very vigorous debate within Israel and amongst Israeli citizens—always checking themselves about whether they are behaving in a way that was appropriate for a democracy and for the country that I think all Israeli citizens hope for.

From comments that have been made in this House, and certainly from comments that have been made from this side of the House, we find very strong support for the state of Israel. I know that that support is certainly mirrored by most on the other side of the House—although not all. I think that all members of this House need to get together and say very strongly that Australia enjoys a strong bilateral relationship with Israel, that Australia acknowledges 60 very impressive years of the state of Israel. We need to acknowledge not only that they have survived in what is a very difficult and turbulent region but also that they have had an economic miracle within the state—lessons which I think Australia can learn from as well.

They liberalised very decisively within the 1980s and enjoyed rates of economic growth that I think are the envy of most countries, and certainly the envy of their neighbours. It makes me wonder whether, if their neighbours were to join with Israel in creating a peaceful solution to what of course is a very difficult political problem, everyone in the region could start to enjoy some of the dynamism that you see when you visit Israel. It is great that we can acknowledge the 60th anniversary of the state of Israel and the very strong relationship we have. (Time expired)

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (21:06): Great events are shaping the Middle East and these events may see impediments to genuine peace negotiations like the regime in Syria being removed. It is a shame, therefore, with such important events happening, that the member for Curtin has moved a motion which does not rise above petty point-scoring and seeks to portray one of the great political parties that has always supported the state of Israel and an equitable solution, including a two-state solution which we voted for in 1948, as 'antagonistic' to Israel. It is surprising to me that the member would turn such an occasion into a politicised issue, especially since we were together—many members of the Labor Party and many members of the opposition—in Israel on a bipartisan delegation last
November; indeed, we are having a reunion this week.

The members for Blair and Calwell, to their credit—and I single out the member for Calwell—explicitly support government policy which recognises a two-state solution. The Labor Party has a very honourable history of support for the state of Israel. After all, Dr Evatt was part of the UN Special Committee on Palestine that recommended partition in 1947. And, in January 1949, it was the Labor Prime Minister Ben Chifley who announced that Australia would be amongst the first countries to recognise the new state of Israel, describing it as 'a force of special value in the world community.'

It is strange to me that the Marrickville Council and the Moreland City Council have behaved as they have. They are completely beyond their powers. They kicked an own goal, which led to the defeat of Fiona Byrne with residents obviously repudiating her stand. Labor is fundamentally opposed to the extreme foreign policy views of some within the Greens party, such as Marrickville Mayor Fiona Byrne and her watermelon colleague, the senator-elect Lee Rhiannon, who is coming to this place with her fearsome views. I would remind the member for Curtin that it was the New South Wales Liberal Party who refused, unlike their counterparts in Victoria, to allocate preferences in the seat of Marrickville, nearly ensuring that Fiona Byrne—the watermelon Greens candidate, the anti-Israel boycott divestment candidate—nearly won the seat. Unlike Victoria, this was an act of parochialism of the New South Wales Liberal Party which failed to take a principled stand against the Greens candidate in Marrickville.

I think the Deputy Leader of the Opposition may have kicked another own goal by trying to portray Philip Ruddock as foolish or, worse, a left-wing extremist, because it was he who, as Attorney-General, refused to ban Hizb ut-Tahrir. He, like I and other serious people on the intelligence committee, will take action if we have a recommendation from the security agencies that Hizb ut-Tahrir be banned—have no fear. Let us remember that the Prime Minister of Australia, Julia Gillard, said in an interview on Four Corners:

I am a strong supporter of Israel. Obviously also a strong supporter of a peace process there and a two state solution and I have that dialogue with a friends from Israel when I get the opportunity to. But I am a strong supporter of Israel and proud to be one.

Everyone here on the government side has strongly supported the government policy which supports the two-state solution—a policy that Australia has had, proudly, since 1948. We have no association with the Greens political party and some of their extreme foreign policy. I want to make it clear that there are members like me who will very strongly oppose Greens party policy, whether it is the 30 per cent death tax that they have that none of us on this side of parliament support, or crazy policies on foreign policy.

I note that the Elena Ceaucescu of the Greens, Lee Rhiannon, is about to arrive in this parliament. She will find a firm opponent in me and many people on this side of parliament, as she will on the opposition benches. There are people like me in the Labor Party, in seats in the House of Representatives—and this will probably be ignored as all important points that I find are made in backbench speeches are—who will be thinking very carefully at the next election about where we give our preferences. The Greens political party will not be getting my support—
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott): Order! The time allocated for this debate has expired. The member will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Early Onset Dementia

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (21:11): I move:

That this House:

(1) recognises the devastating impact of early onset dementia on the lives of sufferers and their families;

(2) notes that:

(a) individuals who suffer from early onset dementia often face unique challenges including obtaining an accurate and early diagnosis and finding appropriate accommodation and care facilities; and

(b) early onset dementia sufferers are generally still physically active, engaged in paid employment and many still have significant family responsibilities at the time of their diagnosis;

(3) acknowledges that these characteristics often mean that sufferers of early onset dementia require support services tailored to their unique circumstances including:

(a) accommodation with appropriate support and activities specifically for their age;

(b) support for family members to understand and cope with the impact of the disease especially for young dependent children; and

(c) support for the individual and their families in managing their reduced capacity to work and inability to fulfil family responsibilities, such as parenting, as a result of the disease; and

(4) calls on all levels of government to work together to appropriately support those suffering from early onset dementia and their families.

Dementia is often viewed by our society as an older person’s disease and, while dementing illnesses such as Alzheimer’s do generally affect older people, there are also many younger individuals under the age of 65 years being diagnosed with dementia. Access Economics has estimated that in Australia around 10,000 individuals have been diagnosed with early onset dementia.

As I have outlined in my motion, the widely accepted correlation between dementia and the ageing process often means that individuals who suffer from early onset dementia face unique challenges and struggles throughout their illness. For this reason, I believe it is important that the House recognises the truly devastating impact of early onset dementia on the lives of younger suffers and their families. For example, research shows that people with early onset dementia often experience significant difficulties in obtaining an early and accurate diagnosis. The younger population is more at risk of experiencing atypical dementias, which can mean that behavioural and personality changes are the obvious presenting symptoms rather than memory loss. Additionally, pronounced depression associated with the development of early onset dementia can mask the real illness because the two conditions share some symptoms such as a lack of energy and focus. The fact that younger sufferers often look fit and healthy also compounds the difficulties in obtaining an early and accurate diagnosis. This can be a long and frustrating process for sufferers and their families.

The motion notes that one of the significant challenges unique to early onset dementia sufferers and their families is finding appropriate accommodation and care facilities. Most services and facilities for people with dementia are designed for and targeted to older people and yet younger sufferers are generally still quite physically active and have significantly more energy, despite their dementia. As a result, younger sufferers who end up in aged-care facilities because their condition is no longer
manageable in their family home often report feeling uncomfortable and out of place. What they really want is contact with other younger sufferers and activities tailored to their specific physical needs and personal interests. Many younger sufferers still want to be occupied in a meaningful way and have identified social activities, opportunities for volunteer work and supported employment, transportation and support for their families and young children as being most important to them.

The motion acknowledges that support is needed for family members to understand and accept the changing roles within the family structure as a result of this condition. There are some particular emotional challenges for younger sufferers diagnosed with early onset dementia. This debilitating condition can occur at a time when the person still holds multiple roles such as spouse, parent to young children or adult child to ageing parents. The impact of this shift in family structure on the individual sufferer is significant. In particular, suddenly becoming a dependent when you were relied on to take sole responsibility for things like paying the bills, driving them around and even feeding them can have a big impact. It is also very significant for their families.

As previously mentioned, those diagnosed with early onset dementia often have dependent children. While it is always upsetting at any age to watch the condition of a loved one suffering from a dementia illness deteriorate, children can find this even more difficult as they struggle to comprehend what is happening to their parent. Children of parents diagnosed with early onset dementia often feel confused, frightened at the gradual loss of their parent's memory and by the prospect that they too may suffer from this disease and anxious as a result of the added strain placed on their parents' relationship. Children may also feel isolated as their well parent's time is increasingly taken up with caring responsibilities.

I rise to speak on this motion tonight because of one particular family I met in my electorate. I would like to mention Jenie Aikman and her husband Kym, who was diagnosed with early onset dementia approximately three years ago at the age of just 41. Kym can no longer live in the family home. Jenie said to me:

The services and facilities are all targeted at older people with dementia. I had to be a full time mum and a full time carer but I wasn't even entitled to the same assistance that carers are when the sufferer is 65 years and over. Sadly, this means that you are forced to put your loved-one in an aged care facility sooner …

This is an issue to do with early onset dementia that we must pay attention to. I commend the motion to the House.

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

Mr IRONS (Swan) (21:17): I second the motion. Today I rise to support the motion put forward by the member for Kingston that this House recognises the devastating impact of early onset dementia on the lives of the sufferers and their families. The member for Kingston and I both served on the health and ageing committee in the last parliament and I know that she has a genuine concern for many health related issues and I congratulate her for bringing this motion forward.

In part 2(a) of the motion put by the member for Kingston she notes that individuals who suffer from early onset dementia often face unique challenges, including the challenges of obtaining an accurate and early diagnoses and finding appropriate accommodation. I would like to inform the house that a test to diagnose early onset dementia has been developed by University of New South Wales researchers.
The test will relieve patients and their families of the trauma and guesswork of misdiagnosis and make sure they get access to the right resources.

Frontotemporal dementia, FTD, is the second most common form of dementia in younger people and yet it is commonly misdiagnosed. It may also be much more common in those who are over 65 than is currently believed. Sydney is estimated to have at least 1,000 people with FTD and many of whom do not know that they have the condition. Professor John Hodges, who is based at the Prince of Wales Medical Research Institute has said:

These patients have typically had the condition for three to five years and they have seen a number of specialists before they come to us. This type of dementia can affect people in two ways—either through changes in personality and social behaviour or through loss of vocabulary. Behavioural changes include apathy, which is sometimes diagnosed as depression, loss of empathy and disinhibition. Those with loss of vocabulary and memory for words might be labelled as having Alzheimer's disease. It is essential that people are diagnosed correctly for a number of reasons. While there is no cure for FTD, there are drugs which can alleviate some of the behaviours, such as disinhibition and overeating.

There are also a number of gene mutations that can result in FTD that have been discovered in the last few years. Professor Hodges and his team want to screen for gene abnormalities if there is a strong family history of dementia. He said:

We can also help support the families who care for people with FTD. This disorder is particularly traumatic for families because they are left caring for someone who is robbed of their original personality. In many cases, the patients can't recognise emotions in others. There is very little awareness about FTD and it's very difficult to diagnose without sophisticated brain imaging. We hope this test will be used by professionals working in memory clinics, neurologists, geriatricians and psychiatrists.

In September last year the ABC reported new research that suggests that up to a fifth of all cases of early-onset dementia could be alcohol related, nearly twice the figure suggested by earlier estimates. Drug and alcohol experts say that the figures are a worry and may reflect an increase in binge drinking among young people. They say that too many people underestimate the long-term health effects of alcohol abuse.

Recently in WA it was reported in the West Australian that public health leaders have rejected calls for the alcohol industry to be part of a new alliance formed to tackle binge drinking among young people, saying it would be unable to be objective. But the WA Alcohol and Youth Action Coalition is an alliance of 63 community and health organisations convened by Fiona Stanley and Professor Mike Daube. This coalition realises that binge drinking is one of the most damaging practices in our society to people of all ages but particularly the young.

Dr Adrienne Withall from the Dementia Collaborative Research Centre from the University of New South Wales says that studies done across hospitals in NSW of people with young onset dementia suggest about 20 per cent of cases are alcohol related. Dr Withall says that it is clear that there is a link between sustained drinking and increased incidence of early onset dementia. However, she says that the link between binge drinking and dementia is less obvious. She said:

We're talking really about sustained drinking. I think given the increasing prevalence for people to binge drink, we just don't know enough about what it's going to do in the future. But when it comes to sustained drinking and the kind of daily drinking, we're talking about for men around about 35 standard drinks a week and for women...
about 28 standard drinks a week over a period of about five years.

Australian National Council on Drugs chairman Dr John Herron says he agrees that more research is needed, but says binge drinking is the most likely cause. He said:

Alcohol’s basically a poison. It affects the liver and it also affects the brain, but it diffuses the brain. When you get strokes or blood vessel clotting occurring in the brain, that part of the brain is affected. Another part of the brain can take over the function of that other [part]—this is called neuroplasticity—but with alcohol it affects all brain cells.

Dr Herron says research has shown that while alcohol affects some parts of the brain more frequently than others it does affect the whole of the brain.

Mrs D’ATH (Petrie) (21:22): I rise to speak in support of this motion on early-onset dementia and in doing so congratulate the member for Kingston for bringing such an important issue to the House. I also acknowledge the speeches of the member for Swan and the member for McPherson, who will be speaking shortly on this motion. I also acknowledge and thank the member for Newcastle for her ongoing work as chairperson of Parliamentary Friends of Dementia.

For many people dementia is a very difficult issue to talk about. This is particularly so when you are talking about the younger onset of dementia. Younger onset of dementia is the term used to describe dementia with onset of symptoms in people under the age of 65. The Alzheimer’s Australia 2009-10 annual report notes that the most recent Access Economics report estimates the number of people with younger onset of dementia at 15,000.

Everybody at some point worries about how they will age. As you get older forgetfulness becomes something you fear. People worry that it is the first signs of dementia. Imagine facing these fears at 60 or 50 years of age. Now imagine being 43 or even being diagnosed at 31. Unfortunately these are not hypothetical numbers; they are the ages of real people facing a debilitating illness and a shortening of their lives. As with any illness, it is not just the individual with the illness who suffers. The early onset of dementia has a real and demonstrable impact on the lives of their immediate family.

I acknowledge the work of Parliamentary Friends of Dementia and Alzheimer's Australia, who together put on a national summit on younger onset dementia back in February 2009. They brought together 100 participants here in Parliament House, including young people with dementia, carers and experts from across Australia. They produced a booklet called In our own words: younger onset dementia: a collection of very personal stories. But the one story I heard most recently—later that year, in 2009—that has stuck with me ever since is the story of Rebecca Doig. Rebecca was 31, a wife and five months pregnant with her first child when she was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s. You can only imagine the fear of her husband, knowing that his wife will never really get to know their daughter.

I particularly wanted to speak on this motion—on the issue of the difficulty of finding accommodation and the pressures on families—from my own personal experience. I have spoken in this House before about my mother passing away. What I have not said is how or why. My mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s two months before I had my first child. She was 56. She passed away at 63. I know the pressures on families when there is still a mortgage to pay, when there are still family members who need to work and earn an income themselves—how difficult it is for families to make that eventual decision to put that person into full-time care and then to go...
into a nursing home, to see the age of people in nursing homes and to try to put a younger person into a nursing home. When you consider that there are people in their 30s, their 40s and their 50s with dementia, their family members having to make that tough decision to put them into care, we need to do more in this area. I congratulate Youngcare for the work they are doing, but we need so many more facilities out there that take in young people, not just with dementia but with severe disabilities and needing full-time nursing care. We need to provide support for families. We need to provide support for children whose parents are going through dementia.

I remember going along to the launch of this booklet in Parliament House in 2009 and talking to a woman who looked like she was in her 60s. I was thinking she was going to tell me her partner was suffering from Alzheimer's when in fact it was her son. Imagine being a parent and having to deal with the fact that your son is going through dementia and how you support them, their partners and their children--your grandchildren. These are the struggles that people face every day. There are, unfortunately, growing numbers of people with young dementia. We need to do a lot more in this area. I congratulate all those involved in the research. There is a lot of great research in this area, but we can do more. (Time expired)

Mrs ANDREWS (McPherson) (21:27): I rise today in support of the motion on early-onset dementia. Dementia, by definition, is caused by various diseases and medical conditions that result in damaged brain cells or connections between brain cells. For a medical diagnosis, symptoms must include decline in memory and decline in at least one of the following cognitive abilities: ability to generate coherent speech or understand spoken or written language, ability to recognise or identify objects, ability to execute motor activities and ability to think abstractly, make sound judgments and plan and carry out complex tasks.

Dementia is a particularly sad and debilitating disease that takes hold of the one thing we often take for granted: our mental wellbeing. By progressively eroding the memories, intellect and social aspects of a person, dementia ultimately leads to a slow but eventual decline in physical functionality. When we think about dementia we typically consider the diagnosis and effects of the disease on the elderly. However, the tragic reality is that dementia can and does affect younger members of our community as well.

Early-onset dementia describes dementia in any person under the age of 65 years. It is estimated that around 250,000 Australians currently live with dementia and that by 2030 that number will increase to 590,000. There are also around 10,000 people with early-onset dementia, and this is projected to rise to 14,220 by the year 2020. Despite this figure, Australians still associate dementia with the elderly and are therefore unaware that early-onset dementia exists. The fact is that 25 per cent of people over 80 years of age have dementia, while less than one per cent of people under 65 years have this illness. It is crucial that early onset dementia is diagnosed as soon as possible to ensure that appropriate information, support and medication can be provided to treat this disease. The earlier a diagnosis can be made, the sooner and more adequately the issues of behavioural change, sexuality and employment issues can be addressed. While I will not speak on all of these issues today, I would like to focus on one of the main and unique issues which sufferers of early onset dementia face—that is, their ability to work. Because of both the mental and physical symptoms of this ailment, these impairments...
detrimentally affect a person's ability to carry out their job. This will often lead to an inability to continue or find employment, which in turn causes financial issues that must be faced.

Debate interrupted.

ADJOURNMENT

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott): Order! I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

Refugees

Ms GAMBARO (Brisbane) (21:30): It is with much concern that I rise tonight to speak on an issue that all members in this place will find disturbing. Today a press release was issued by the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship on settlement services in the Newcastle region. Accompanying the press release was a list of recommendations made by Ernst and Young, and the full report by Ernst and Young is on the DIAC website and makes for some very disturbing reading.

The independent review and its report, Provision of humanitarian support services in the Hunter region, was announced by the minister only two days after receiving widespread complaints from the member for Newcastle. In question time today the minister told the House that it did not make for pretty reading. He was right about that: it is not pretty; it is pretty appalling. The IHSS is designed to resettle humanitarian refugees into Australian society. These people have suffered from unthinkable acts perpetrated against them in their own country. They have arrived here in an orderly manner under our humanitarian entrants program only to be subjected to further degradation and poor treatment. Having accepted these vulnerable individuals, our government has an obligation to help them settle into society.

Ernst and Young have recommended 12 action items to correct as a result of their investigation. I note that the minister said today that the more severe allegations have been referred to the New South Wales police force. This government should be ashamed. The report shows families are being ripped-off by service providers and these providers should have been subject to more rigorous review. In addition to being ripped-off, these people have had to live in squalid and unsafe conditions. The list of terrible conditions is long: significant overcrowding, unsafe living conditions, no hot water, holes in the roof, no windows in a child's bedroom, and large families are staying in places designed for short-term accommodation of six to 10 weeks and they have been there for more than nine months.

The department was made aware of the problems and, despite the service provider being asked to correct the problems, nothing was done. Clearly no oversight on the provision of services has been taking place. These terrible scenarios have breached the IHSS agreements and are yet another indication of how this government is failing these families. The report shows houses that were so bad that they were considered uninhabitable. Some of the families in this type of accommodation not only had to live in unsafe and inadequate accommodation but also had to pay above the market rate for that meagre housing. The report outlines instances where they were required to pay almost 50 per cent of their welfare payments in rent alone.

The department has had rigorous obligations to approve and review accommodation for refugees; however, Ernst and Young could not find any documentation of approvals or inspections taking place. The audit found many areas that were a cause of deep concern. The potential for negative impacts on the immediate welfare of
individuals and their long-term settlement is great, the report said. A month ago I called for spot checks to be conducted and for a widening of the audit to include all settlement services currently in place. Ernst and Young have agreed with me and have suggested that this problem could be widespread across the country, and they have certainly made this a key recommendation in the report.

We have been pursuing this particular issue at estimates over a period of time and we have asked the government to detail what measures of accountability and service delivery have been occurring. We read in the report that information for the monitoring of settlement services was sourced through feedback surveys of humanitarian entrants. This feedback was obtained through interviews and questionnaires of people with very poor English skills and little understanding of what they were being asked. Ernst and Young have also asked the government to ensure that key performance indicators are built into the settlement services contract, and the report also said that the application of the governance and accountability arrangements does not appear to be effective.

This government not only has lost control of its borders but also has lost control of the care and welfare of our humanitarian program.

Canberra Electorate

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (21:35): I rise tonight to speak about the investments the Gillard government has made, and is continuing to make, in my electorate of Canberra and in the ACT more generally. Since being elected in August last year, I have seen the benefits of a significant amount of investment in the electorate and across Canberra which is ensuring that Canberrans, like all other Australians, have the infrastructure, skills and resources needed to grab every opportunity to grow and prosper in the future.

Being such a strong supporter of education, I have been honoured to attend many Building the Education Revolution ceremonies and to see the modern state-of-the-art facilities built by the schools in my electorate. Some of the facilities funded through the BER program include: $3.2 million for a new library and renovated classrooms at Canberra Grammar School; $2.3 million at Taylor Primary School for better classrooms, a refitted canteen, library and refurbishment of the front foyer; $3.2 million at Monash Primary School for a state-of-the-art multi-purpose hall; $3.2 million at Holy Family Parish School for classrooms for music and Indonesian studies, a new ICT lab and a better library; $2.2 million for new classrooms at Caroline Chisholm Primary School; $2.65 million for a new multi-purpose building at Theodore Primary School; and $3.3 million for a multi-purpose hall at Garran Primary School, which also houses part of the government’s successful Active After-school Communities program—to name just a few. Without exception, I have been greeted by teachers, staff, parents, grandparents and, most importantly, students who have been delighted with the investment made by the Gillard government in their learning infrastructure for the 21st century.

The government has also invested $5.7 million for a trades training centre at St Mary MacKillop College in Tuggeranong, which is acting as the lead school in conjunction with St Clare’s College, St Francis Xavier College and Merici College. The centre will provide a certificate III in hospitality. This practical program will help local students and boost local productivity. It will mean that we will not have to import skills, particularly trades, because we will be able to grow our own,
which is particularly important for a place like Canberra. I have said time and again in this chamber that Canberra suffers a skills shortage in every area but community pharmacy. The trade training centres and our major budget investment in apprenticeships will help overcome that shortage.

The government has also invested in health care in Canberra. Canberra has one of the lowest rates of bulk-billing GPs in the country, so I am glad the Gillard government has committed $15 million for a GP superclinic, for which consultations are well underway. In the current budget, the Gillard government also committed $2.3 million to improve critical outreach and health training.

The Gillard government is also investing in road infrastructure, including more than $277,000 in funding for black spot eradication in Tuggeranong and Symonston and $18 million for the duplication of the Monaro Highway. In all, through this budget, the Gillard government will invest $82.2 million for road infrastructure in the ACT region.

The Gillard government is also contributing to some of the great institutions in this city. When Canberra was established as a national capital nearly 100 years ago it was planned to perform five key roles. It was to be the seat of government; the location of the national parliament and executive; the centre of national administration, which took nearly 70 years to achieve; the symbol of Australian national life and a location for memorials and ceremonial events; and the location for national institutions in research, education, arts, music and sports. I am delighted that the Gillard government has increased the High Court's funding by $6.1 million, invested $33.9 million over four years in the Australian War Memorial, invested $1.7 million to start planning for a permanent exhibition in honour of the centenary of Anzac and invested $20 million in the National Arboretum, $42 million for Constitution Drive and $6 million for Canberra's centenary.

The Gillard government is also looking after some of Canberra's most vulnerable people. Despite what many may think, we do have pockets of disadvantage in this city. The Gillard government has invested $5.6 billion in social housing initiatives across Australia, and millions of dollars here in Canberra. It has invested in units for older people wanting to downsize, freeing up larger properties to house more families more quickly. It is a great initiative. I have been the member for Canberra for only eight months, and already I have seen significant investment in my electorate and the ACT.

(Time expired)

Canning Electorate: National Broadband Network

Mr RANDALL (Canning) (21:40): The Canning electorate is stuck in NBN limbo. In fact, this limbo was referred to in an article, by Geoff Thompson of the ABC, entitled 'Thousands to be stuck in NBN limbo'. Stuck in this limbo is exactly where many of my constituents are. While the government presses ahead with its white elephant, the NBN, Telstra is increasingly adjusting its policy to encompass temporary telecommunications measures while people wait for the NBN.

Telstra's universal service obligation, or USO, states it will provide all Australians with reasonable access on an equitable basis to a standard telephone service—a minimal service. This means that Telstra, at its discretion, can provide a mobile phone service instead of a fixed line service. This is the same for internet services.

Many of my constituents have said that, unfortunately, the mobile service Telstra is offering is substandard. In fact, Telstra has
downgraded the Australian Broadband Guarantee, which was designed to make broadband services available to rural consumers at speeds comparable with those in metro areas. It will eventually be replaced by the NBN and an interim satellite solution. The interim satellite solution is regarded by wireless broadband providers as technically inferior to current wireless services, which are already labelled as unreliable. The other issue is that when they are forced onto wireless, consumers are being forced to pay more.

People in the suburbs of Piara Waters, Harrisdale, Forrestdale, Waroona and Darling Downs have been complaining they cannot get basic telephone and ADSL services. Parusu Ramakrishnan, of Harrisdale, and Daryll Niemack and Karen Tonge, of Piara Waters, have all complained about Telstra's interim wireless phone and internet services. After I contacted Telstra CEO, David Thodey, on their behalf they luckily got some sort of fixed line service, but have now been told there are no more ADSL ports available at the Forrestdale exchange, where they would need to connect to. This is very interesting, because this is a product of Sol Trujillo's reign at Telstra and the fact that he fell out with both sides of government—as I have mentioned before. This side of government decided it would not play ball with Telstra and put in its own NBN service. As a result, people in my electorate are being greatly hurt by this.

I have many examples. In the new estates, particularly around Piara Waters and Harrisdale, Telstra obviously is not going to put in optic fibre—at the minimum it is going to put in copper wire. The interim mobile phones certainly do not provide ADSL, and we are told the NBN will not come for up to eight years. How does a new estate like that get service? People want to operate their businesses from home, people want to communicate and kids want to get online for their school studies. This is out of order and a dereliction of duty by the government and Telstra in relation to my constituents.

In a bizarre situation, Jeremy Coleman from Tilling Timbers, a business at the Forrestdale Business Park, has had to set up an elaborate and very expensive $36,000 communications substitute, after being promised by Telstra for 18 months that communications would be installed. We have this huge industrial estate where the substructure is in the ground, but there is nothing in it. There is no wire or cable and, as a result, they have to have a microwave link to the R&I building in Perth, some 30 km away, to get telephone and ADSL at a cost of $36,000. Tonight, in the House, the Carey Baptist College told me they are doing the same. Even though they have some service they now have to set up a microwave link for their school. That is not good enough. Many people in the Canning electorate are being held up and have been told that they could be for up to eight years.

After talking to Mr Thodey—thank goodness, I did not have to deal with the state office of Telstra—he said that as an interim measure they would put in a copper wire network. It is only interim. It is not good enough in the modern age, and the government has a lot to answer for in relation to this very expensive national broadband network that it is inflicting on the Australian public. (Time expired)

Page Electorate

Ms Saffin (Page) (21:45): I want to talk about things that have been going on in my electorate of Page, particularly over the last month and the last week. There has been lots of activities and wonderful community events that I have been able to participate in.
On Saturday evening I attended the North Coast TAFE awards of excellence. The awards were for students from Ballina, Casino, Lismore and Wollongbar campuses, which are four campuses in my electorate. They were well attended and it was a packed hall at Trinity Sports Centre Auditorium. Just over one per cent of the students were there for the awards night and it is a reflection of the good work, training and education that they are getting. Along with state and other members of parliament in my electorate, I was able to directly participate and hand out some of the awards. It was very pleasing. Students of all ages were there with their families, who were very proud of them, and rightly so. Lots of local businesses, who are sponsors of the awards, were also there.

After that, I attended Beef Week and the crowning of the queen. That was at the Casino RSM Club. Beef Week is a big deal in our area of Casino and it means a lot to the local community. It also means a lot in terms of the economy and the amount of money that comes into the electorate from Beef Week. It is getting bigger and bigger after starting some decades ago. Everybody who works on it is a volunteer. There is a Beef Week committee. They get money sometimes and hire people, but all of the people who are on the committee and do a lot of work are all voluntary. It is a wonderful volunteer effort that everybody in the community can equally share in.

The crowned queen was 18-year-old Margaret Young, who is from a property in Dyraaba, and works for Clayton James solicitors in Casino. It was wonderful to hear her talking and see her confidence and poise. She was so natural it was like she was having a chat, and that is not easy when you are 18 and have to get up and speak in a large public forum for the first time. I could tell by the way she acquitted herself on Saturday night that she is going to be a wonderful ambassador as the Beef Week Queen for Casino and the Richmond Valley area.

I also visited Grafton Base Hospital and was able to see stage 1 redevelopment completed, which incorporated a number of things. The two key areas of redevelopment were the new operating theatres and the new emergency department. It was from money I managed to secure in 2007, and it has been an ongoing project in which everybody has been involved in. We have been able to get really first-class facilities. It was great to tour the hospital with Dr Allan Tyson, who is head of the medical staff council and is an anaesthetist, and has been a real champion of health in the area.

We are also able to have orthopaedic surgery and we have been blessed in attracting an orthopaedic surgeon, Dr Sam Martin, to Grafton Base Hospital. There is more work coming on the redevelopment with stage 2, which will involve another $10 million I also managed to get for a new imaging department and between four and six orthopaedic beds as well as a whole range of other developments.

Speaking of health, there are eight paediatricians from my area, four from Lismore and four from the Tweed, have advised parents of new babies to avoid taking them to crowded indoor spaces, etcetera, and it is about the dangers associated with whooping cough. There has been an epidemic running in New South Wales and our area has less people who get immunised. It is a real issue and, sadly, some young babies have died from whooping cough. The doctors are giving advice on how to best protect the children and adults from whooping cough.

Grey Electorate: Remote Area Energy Scheme

Mr RAMSEY (Grey) (21:50): On 18 February the South Australian government
removed more than $1 million from the Remote Area Energy Scheme. This is a subsidy paid to towns and communities that generate power off the grid. Generally, it is a diesel generation arrangement. There are 13 communities affected, the largest of which is Coober Pedy, as well as Andamooka, Yunta, Nundroo, Marla, Oodnadatta, Marree, Kingoonya, Glendambo, Parachilna, Blinman, Manna Hill and Cockburn.

The result of this withdrawal of subsidy is these towns and the businesses in these towns, the bigger users of electricity, will see a greater than 100 per cent increase in the tariff that they will pay. It is not as if they start from a low base. Already electricity in these communities is about 50 per cent higher than that paid by the rest of the people on the grid. Typically, they pay around 29c or 30c a kilowatt-hour. They will be paying 60c a kilowatt-hour. For some businesses it will mean extra bills in excess of $100,000 a year. If I take the case of Coober Pedy, not only is electricity difficult there, it is a pretty dry spot as well so water is also difficult. What they have to do is desalinate the saline groundwater supply. That will cost the council an extra $185,000 a year under the new electricity rates, which will be passed on to the water consumers who already pay $4.93 for a kilolitre. They will be paying $5.70 for a kilolitre. I know we are all complaining about water and electricity prices all around Australia but it is $5.70 a kilolitre. What the state government has done here is increase the cost of living for everybody who lives in these communities because these business owners will have to pass on the cost to their consumers.

The great insult we have in South Australia with this dereliction of duty by the government is that every other state in the Commonwealth actually recognises this as an issue and has state-wide electricity pricing policies. But the Minister for Energy, Michael O'Brien, says, 'These people choose to live there; they can pay the bill.' I might point out to Minister O'Brien that subsidies work both ways in our economy. For the people of Coober Pedy, Oodnadatta and Andamooka it is a little hard to access the public transport subsidies that are directed into the city, or the subsidies which go into the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, the Adelaide Festival of Arts or the V8 Supercars races that take to our streets each year, or the new tram lines that are being built in the city, or indeed the $500 million plus to be spent on the Adelaide Oval upgrade. I am not particularly picking on any one of those investments by the state government, but the point is that taxpayers' dollars from all over the state go into those projects and they choose not to spend any of the dollars in these remote communities.

The government is prepared to put millions of dollars into supplying electricity to remote Indigenous communities, but towns like Coober Pedy have significant populations of Indigenous people and their electricity prices are all affected by the cuts in subsidy. It flows right through the economy and affects the price of everything they buy. One of the reasons Indigenous people come to these communities is that there are jobs there. So what these policies are doing is barring them access and pushing them further and further out into the remote communities, when in fact we should be trying to draw them into the communities where they can find work.

The minister, under a great deal of pressure, has recently announced a phase-in period, but it does not cut the mustard. I attended a meeting in Coober Pedy two weeks ago with Senator Nick Xenophon and John Darley, who is an independent member of the state's upper house. We had more than 200 people attend. I believe we would have had more but we had it underground and that
is about all we could get into the dugout at that point. I can tell you the people of Coober Pedy, who are leading the charge on behalf of the other 12 communities affected, are incensed by their treatment from the state government, which has turned its back on the regional parts of South Australia.

**Rockhampton Council**

Ms LIVERMORE (Capricornia) (21:55): Last Tuesday's paper ran a story from 1964 when the mayor, Rex Pilbeam, was quoted as saying, 'Two civic projects were completed during the year — the Civic Theatre and the road to the top of Mt Archer.' Also in 1964 the council resolved to spend $5 million for the Fitzroy River barrage and treatment works. These are major civic infrastructure works championed and carried out by the Rockhampton council of the day. Later in the week our current mayor, Councillor Carter, delivered with much fanfare his major achievement: a new brochure. I was invited to its launch, but only as an obvious afterthought. I did, however, get a copy and when you open it there is nothing of what this council has built, unlike the case in 1964, rather every page has in bold type 'We need' and 'We want'. This is typical of the whining from the mayor directed at the Commonwealth government. Every week there is an hysterical headline from Councillor Carter: 'Rudd out of touch', 'Rudd slammed over oil spill', 'Residents let down', and so on.

I have been patient, hoping the mayor would work out that he needs to start achieving something of substance himself before he can be taken seriously by other levels of government, but instead the harassment has increased. It is interesting to note that Councillor Carter was, from 1991, the regional director for state development in Central Queensland. He was the bureaucrat with responsibility for developing our infrastructure needs. He has had 20 years to make things happen in Rockhampton but instead spends his time as mayor looking for others to blame.

As I said, Councillor Carter last week launched an investment brochure for Rockhampton and complained that I was not present. Well I had a lot on last week. Senator Ludwig flew into town with $2.4 million for the 2012 beef expo. On Tuesday I was in Yeppoon meeting with constituents. On Wednesday I hosted the infrastructure minister, Anthony Albanese, to ensure he understands the need for a long-term solution for Rockhampton's road and rail problem, not a quick fix. On Thursday I hosted a meeting between Central Queensland University and the regional Australia minister, Simon Crean, to gain his support for the innovative Central Queensland University and Central Queensland TAFE amalgamation. And on Friday I visited Moranbah to celebrate the opening of $3 million worth of school buildings. Meanwhile I was negotiating with the offices of various ministers on other important projects. This shows that I accept responsibility for the federal government's record of delivery in Capricornia. Ahead of next year's council election Councillor Carter needs to stop commentating on the federal government's performance and start doing something about his.

Rockhampton was recently included in the 10 regions to receive intensive assistance to break the cycle of disadvantage that many agree contributes to the city's social problems and juvenile crime. The mayor's only comment was to complain that no-one told him that Rockhampton had been identified as having these problems. Meanwhile, the local paper has done an excellent job in keeping this issue in front of the public for the last 2 years, I have made well-reported speeches about it and you only
have to talk to people in parts of our city to know how frightening some of the juvenile criminal activities have become. But again it is someone else's fault because the federal government did not tell Councillor Carter in advance about its budget plans. It is not my job to hold his hand or to put up with his campaign of whining and harassment. I understand that Councillor Carter has had problems in previous employment and has even had counselling for bullying and harassment. What he needs to understand is that, just like the feisty old ladies in Depot Hill, I will not be bullied or intimidated.

Last Friday's paper had the mayor accusing the government of neglecting the region, specifically with regard to a lack of funds for critical road and rail services. Rockhampton has a 19th century railway bridge across the Fitzroy River. The railway line runs down the main street and we have B-double trucks moving live cattle through the centre of our town to supply two of the largest meatworks in Australia. It is well past time that these issues are attended to. In the meantime, in January, Rockhampton experienced a major flood. While not as big as previous floods, it was big enough and Rockhampton was cut off from the south for a period of time. This has resulted in the mayor and, to some extent, the state government losing sight of the big picture, which is not to simply construct flood-free access but to also remove cattle trucks and trains from the centre of Rockhampton. The mayor wants a quick fix he can take to next year's election. But I will not be moved on this. I am determined to provide a plan for the city's future that will ensure we not only achieve a greater degree of flood-proofing for Rockhampton but also remove the 19th-century infrastructure and cattle trucks from our city. Let us see Councillor Carter get on with his job and see if he can be re-elected in the next four council elections as I have done in the last four federal elections.

Digital Television

Dr STONE (Murray) (22:00): On Thursday, 5 May the analog television signal was switched off in the electorate of Murray. In the weeks leading up to that event, and in an ever-increasing crescendo, my office and local television and antenna installers have been besieged by desperate pensioners who now have poor reception or no reception at all. These people, some of the most frail and vulnerable people in our community and with the least mobility and least means to pay, are the latest victims of Labor's latest shonky hare-brained scheme. These people have taken up the free set-top box installation and training package. We are seeing pensioners having their battered eight- or nine-year-old televisions being fitted with set-top boxes paid for by the government at an average cost of about $350 for the package. That might sound like a nice idea for the first 10 seconds but, after that, most intelligent people would figure that it would be much cheaper and less complicated if, instead of paying to retrofit very old sets with renewed technology, the government simply helped pensioners to buy a brand-new digital TV. They could buy them from local shops and therefore support local business communities. They could have local expert technicians, who they know and trust, install their new TVs and tweak their antennas, or even replace them if necessary, and all would be happy. Indeed, they would be praising the government instead of condemning them as they are now doing.

These pensioners would not be left with an incompatible aerial that still needs tuning—that is, if they can get the government's installers to revisit them. They would not be left with two remote controls—one for the set-top box and one for the TV.
They need to synchronise these two remotes. Some of these people are in their late-eighties and early-nineties and they are desperate and concerned about how to do all of this every time they want to change their TV's function or channel. They do not always have their 13-year-old great grandchildren there to help.

These pensioners would not need to let strangers into their homes who are mostly not up to the job. These installers appear to be in the same league as the shonky installers of pink batts, or at least trained in the same school. They refuse to return promptly to fix up malfunctions, and when they simply cannot make the thing work, they confidently announce that the problem is with the pensioner's TV set and they should just go out and buy a new one as soon as possible. Of course, the installer still gets paid, on average, a $350 service and equipment fee regardless of whether the job takes 15 minutes or three hours and several returns.

Instead of everyone talking about who won the footy in my local area, our local source of funny stories is: 'Did you hear the latest set-top box installer episode?' We had the one about the set-top box man who arrived in a cloud of dust in a kombi van with 'Nimbin' painted on the side of it and a mattress in the back. When he got up on the roof to tweak the antenna, he asked the lady to show him which direction the Bendigo TV signal would come from. Then there was the one about a local supplier of set-top boxes—an expert installer who will do the job. He guarantees a good job for $75. He was originally complaining about the set-top box installation scheme because no local technicians or experts won any tenders. He is now saying it is the biggest gravy train he has seen. He has been called out—and, unfortunately, he does have to charge—to fix up all the malfunctioning sets when the governments installers will not return to deal with them or have simply disappeared from the area altogether. These local technicians can supply a new digital television from their local shops, keeping the local town going, for around $200.

So here we have a scheme which is well-meaning—just as the pink batts scheme was well-meaning—but it is from a government that just did not think it through. It comes from a government that had a cash for clunkers scheme for about five minutes and a scheme for checking grocery prices for about three minutes—and what about Fuel Watch! This is a government that does not understand the details of managing a program. It was happy to throw $300 million at this scheme without first trying it on a small group of elderly or disabled people to see if it actually works in practice. They did not even test and check it out to see whether they were going to get brownie points by investing, in the first instance, $300 million—but watch this space; this figure is no doubt going to triple and quadruple. In fact, they could have been winners if they had simply said, 'We're changing to digital television and we can provide cheap and adequate television sets for pensioners for $200 or $300.' This would have been a great saving, and everyone would be happy. We would not have vulnerable people getting nervous and concerned about having people in their homes—worried about whether their TV set really does need replacing or whether the technician simply does not know what to do. (Time expired)

**Catholic Schools Week**

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (22:05): I have spoken many times in this place about how education is the great enabler. Today I rise to mention some recent developments that have occurred in Greenway in the area of education—namely, the great success that was Catholic Schools Week, the involvement
of local primary schools in my Anzac Day writing competition and the continued success of the Building the Education Revolution program.

From 1 to 7 May I had the absolute pleasure of visiting six Catholic schools in Greenway to help celebrate Catholic Schools Week. During that week I had the pleasure of visiting St John's Primary School in Riverstone, Terra Sancta College in Schofields, St Andrew's Primary School in Girraween, Holy Cross Primary School in Glenwood, our Lady of Lourdes Primary in Seven Hills and Mary Immaculate Primary in Quakers Hill. During these visits I witnessed firsthand the great community spirit that exists among the Catholic schools in my electorate. I sincerely thank the principals, parents and students for having me along and involving me in their liturgies and other activities.

Catholic Schools Week celebrates the fantastic job that Catholic schools do in our community. The theme for Catholic Schools Week 2011 was: 'A learning adventure, a journey of faith'. The purpose of Catholic Schools Week is to raise awareness and celebrate the strength and distinctiveness of Catholic schools. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Executive Director of Catholic schools in the Parramatta diocese, Mr Greg Whitby, who has been reappointed for another five-year term. Mr Whitby leads a system of some 78 schools in west and north-west Sydney and his continued commitment to education in my community is greatly appreciated. He is a man of incredible intellect. He is someone who embraces technology and is genuine in everything he does. Irrespective of his position within the Catholic Education Office, his research and working knowledge of education and schooling generally is very important to ensuring that this government can continue to deliver the best for all schools.

I also want to mention the Anzac Day writing competition that was conducted in Greenway and send a special thanks to all the schools that participated. This competition gave primary school students in Greenway the opportunity to discuss the meaning of Anzac Day. There was an overwhelming response from the many schools and it revealed what great minds our young people have. All students wrote thoughtful and very poignant responses that were often of a quality beyond their years. I would like to congratulate all the winners of my Anzac Day writing competition and especially mention the outstanding entries that I received from Vineyard Public School, Kellyville Ridge Public School, Holy Cross Primary School and St Anthony's Primary School. I would also like to give special thanks to the representatives of the local RSL clubs, including Seven Hills, Toongabbie, Blacktown and Riverstone, for being judges of the awards.

The final development that has been occurring recently in Greenway in relation to education is, of course, the continued success of the Building the Education Revolution. Over the past few weeks I have had the privilege of attending the openings of a number of BER developments—namely, at Caddies Creek Public School in Glenwood and Kings Langley Public School. Both principals of these schools, Mr Phil Nash of Caddies of Creek and Mr Phil Walker of Kings Langley, told me how much the BER meant to them and to their communities. Both principals related to me that without the federal government's investment in their schools it would have been impossible to deliver the outstanding infrastructure they now have. It is always a pleasure to attend these openings and spend time with the staff, students and parents, who are all so
appreciative of their new facilities. These are indeed facilities that would not have been possible without this government's investment.

I have often referred to west and north-west Sydney as Australia's nursery. In the Blacktown local government area, which is shared between my electorate of Greenway and the electorate of Chifley, over half the population—that is, some 117,000 people—are under the age of 30. More revealing is the fact that the most dominant age group in Blacktown is the five-to-nine-year-old group.

I am privileged to represent an area of such diversity and such outstanding educational institutions—an area where there is commitment by parents, teachers and the community generally. The future of our country, I am convinced, is right where we are, and I am committed to this government continuing its investment in education in west and north-west Sydney. This is evident in this government's commitment to delivering its community response, the Building the Education Revolution, and its ongoing commitment to the greatest technological advances in all our schools.

I say very sincerely that one of the most enjoyable of my civic duties is visiting schools. It always reminds me of what is important. I thank all the teachers, parents and staff who have hosted me over the past few months since I have been the member for Greenway. I thank them, of course, for their hospitality and reaffirm my commitment to ensuring that every school in Greenway is, and continues to be, a great school.

Hasluck Leadership Awards

Mr Wyatt (Hasluck) (22:10): I rise today to talk about the Hasluck Leadership Awards. This program was started by previous Liberal member for Hasluck, Stuart Henry, and has resulted in seven young leaders from across Hasluck travelling to Canberra to experience life in the capital.

As soon as I was elected I pledged to reinstate this program, which seeks to develop, recognise and celebrate the leadership of our young people. Every high school in Hasluck was invited to nominate a year 11 student to enter the competition. The two winners will travel to Canberra and stay for a week in August to meet with senior decision-makers and leaders, both political and non-political.

Students were invited to answer the question: how will I benefit from the trip to Canberra? The seven finalists were then interrogated by an independent panel which required off-the-cuff, two-minute answers to some topical and difficult questions on leadership. I wanted to identify the leadership potential of our young people and provide some of them with the opportunity to apply this talent in the real world and to act as role models for their peers. The seven finalists all carried themselves exceptionally well and were a credit to their families and schools.

I would like to acknowledge Michelle Gaudin from Darling Range Sports College, Mariah Williams from Governor Stirling Senior High School, Angela Gazey from Kalamunda Senior High School, Heather Barnwall from La Salle College, Shaiden McNamara from Lumen Christi College, Joshua Bremell from Mazenod College and Joanne Pryce from St Brigid's College. Each one of these young people were outstanding in their own individual right and are winners already, even without this recognition.

However, there were only two winners on the night as determined by the independent panel of judges consisting of Paul Rosair, the Director General of the Department of Regional Development and Lands; Tracey Hodgkins from Australian Experiential
Learning Centre; First Class Constable Kay Turner from the Gosnells PCYC; Councillor Allan Morton from the Shire of Kalamunda, and Mark Pescud, a teacher at Ashburton Primary School. I would like to thank each and every one of the judging panel who had to make some tough decisions due to the calibre of the students in front of them. Each young person had their own individual skills and any one of them could have been recognised as the recipient of the major prize.

The judges found that Joshua Bretnall from Mazenod College and Joanne Pryce from St Brigid’s College were the two standout students during the judging process. Both will be joining my and staff me in Canberra during August.

None of this would be possible without our major sponsors, which I would like to publicly acknowledge: Qantas, Brikmakers, the Swan Chamber of Commerce, WesTrac, David Goode from Westate Finance, the Damien Cole Group and Tony Trlin & Co. Builders. Without them this opportunity for the young people of Hasluck would not have been possible.

What also made the evening special was the attendance of Senator Judith Adams and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition Julie Bishop MP. Julie was extremely giving of her time and spoke to each student and their families at length about challenges in leadership, and of the students’ respective achievements. Senator Judith Adams also provided an insight into leadership, talking to families about her long and distinguished career in the Senate. She has been a supporter of the Hasluck Leadership Awards since Stuart Henry commenced the program.

Additionally, what made the evening so positive was the attitude of the students who did not win the final prizes. They were upbeat and optimistic and it seemed keen to get on with their studies and start their lives as year 12 students next year. I was astounded at their approach to life, their maturity and intelligence. They all have powerful aspirations in the fields of defence and law, for example, and are ready to contribute to society. As a result, I was inspired to launch the Hasluck Young Leaders Program on the same evening. This is open to all the award nominees plus head boys and girls from all high schools across Hasluck. It is an opportunity for students to participate in policy debates, excursions to locations such as state parliament and meet a number of different leaders within the community. This is designed to ensure that our young leaders across the electorate have every opportunity. In our society, we are too quick to point the finger at young people as being troublesome, disrespectful and even dangerous to others. I would like to challenge that notion, and do so with this program.

In my dealings with hundreds of young people across the electorate, I continue to be overwhelmingly impressed with the nature and commitment of many of these young people. These young people should be recognised by their peers as examples of what can be achieved through dedication and effort, and I am proud that they were part of the Hasluck Leadership Awards and will be part of the Hasluck Young Leaders Program in the future.

Mr HAYES (Fowler—Government Whip) (22:15): I rise tonight to speak about an uplifting event I attended in my electorate of Fowler last Friday. As members will be aware, last week was Families Week. Right across the country, community groups gathered to celebrate families in all their manifestations, including nuclear families and families in the broader community with different religions and from different cultures but with common interests.
In my electorate, I attended an event coordinated by Mission Australia and at the invitation of Lucy Reggio, who is also the President of Special Needs Ability Program Providers. Lucy does an outstanding job in the local community. Her organisation works tirelessly to provide social and recreational activities for adults and children with disabilities. I know personally of a number of children and families whose lives have been greatly enriched by the work of Lucy and her group.

In disability services, we can sometimes focus very much on the negative. That is not to diminish the great challenges that people in our community with disabilities face. But Lucy's organisation focuses on the positive and provides a social group where people can come together, meet and participate in recreational activities in a safe environment. A number of other local community groups also attended that day: the Cubbyhouse, who enhance the social skills of children, including those with an autism spectrum disorder; the South West Youth Peer Education, who support local teenagers; and Inspire Church, a local, very active church in our community in the south-west of Sydney. That is just to name a few of the participants. It was also great to see the event supported by the local police and fire brigade. Food as well as entertainment was provided for everybody.

The theme of the event was 'Sticking Together in Good Tough Times'. I know members would agree this is particularly relevant considering the number of natural disasters our nation and our neighbours have suffered in recent times. I think it is fair to say that at times like these Australians tend to come together as a family. We empathise with each other, we support each other and we do what we can to help those who are most in need. Family in the community is particularly important when the nuclear family is not available and sometimes not even close by.

My electorate of Fowler is the most multicultural electorate in the country. For many that cultural diversity brings huge advantages. But for many residents, particularly those who have only recently arrived in this country, their extended families are overseas, and getting together can be an expensive exercise that is out of reach. It is important that that community groups fill this gap, providing essential support and services to many.

Groups in our community who support those with a disability and their families are to be commended. I am very passionate about doing all I can, while I am an elected member, to understand the needs of those groups, particularly issues of disability in our community, and where I can to support them. It goes to the heart of our Labor values, and I am very proud to work for the Labor government, who has done much to provide services to those living with disabilities.

This Friday, 27 May, I will be holding a Disabilities Forum in my electorate, where a large number of community groups and residents will come together. It is my hope that by hearing directly from those involved, I can gain a better understanding of the difficulties of those who are faced with disabilities and their families. Through that, I hope to find the best way that we as a government can provide support for them.

At the end of the event, it is my intention to provide Senator Jan McLucas, the Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers, with a report with the recommendations of all those who are present next week. I would like to thank in advance those who have helped me put together this event and have supported the idea, such as Lucy Reggio, and Grace Fava, from Autism Advisory and Support Services.
This is sure to be an informative and important event, and for those who live in south-west Sydney it is essential that we learn to come to terms with living with disabilities, ensure their inclusion in our society and make sure that we support those families who are affected—(Time expired)

Northern New South Wales Fishing Industry

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper) (22:20): Today I would like to take the opportunity to table in this parliament a petition in regard to the Gillard government's proposal to create a new Commonwealth marine reserve on the New South Wales North Coast. The petition says the following:

This petition of concerned residents draws to the attention of the House of Representatives their concerns over Government plans to prevent commercial and recreational fishing in waters off the New South Wales North Coast. We also draw to the attention of the House of Representatives the devastating impact a reduction in fishing will have on tourism and local economies. We therefore ask the House of Representatives to ensure that no Government unnecessarily locks up waters without the support of comprehensive scientific evidence and that marine reserves should strike a balance between good environmental outcomes and community needs.

More than 10,000 have signed this petition, which highlights the serious concerns of coastal communities across the Cowper electorate with regard to federal Labor's proposal.

In March last year, the former federal minister for the environment, the Member for Kingsford Smith, released a draft plan to create a Commonwealth marine reserve called Clarence. Clarence covered an area from Brooms Head to Hat Head and up to 80 kilometres offshore. By either sheer coincidence or political convenience, this coastal strip covered almost my entire electorate. Rightly so, coastal communities right across the New South Wales North Coast were alarmed at the minister's announcement. The release of the draft plan was not accompanied by any detailed scientific analysis. Recreational fishers could see large areas potentially locked up from fishing. Commercial fishers could see their industry being decimated. Local businesses could see their livelihoods disappear overnight as tourists choose to holiday somewhere else, where fishing is permitted.

If anyone has any doubts about the importance of fishing to our tourism industry, consider this: around 55 per cent of the people who signed the petition were from outside the electorate. That is despite the fact that the petition was only distributed within Cowper. This confirms how important fishing is to our local tourism industry.

The recreational and commercial fishers' concerns about federal Labor's intentions are easily justified. They have already suffered as a result of New South Wales Labor's deal with the Greens, which saw large areas of state marine parks made no-go zones. To them, this draft declaration of a Commonwealth marine reserve was federal Labor just pursuing the same ideological agenda as their state colleagues. Their concerns are further magnified by the new Gillard minority government, which is having to deal with the Greens and now relies on the member for Melbourne and Senator Brown in order to retain power.

The Labor-Greens alliance is potentially fatal for our coastal communities. Whether it was small coastal villages such as Hat Head, Stuarts Point, Wooli or Brooms Head or larger communities such as South West Rocks, Nambucca Heads or Coffs Harbour, the result would be the same. Millions of dollars would be lost and local jobs would go. The Coffs Harbour Fishermen's Cooperative generates approximately $15...
million annually. It is already struggling under increased restrictions in the state Solitary Islands Marine Park. A Commonwealth marine reserve could be the final straw.

The management of Commonwealth waters needs to be done in a way which balances the needs of environmental sustainability with the needs of economic sustainability. No-one wants to see fish stocks wiped out; that is not in anyone's interest, least of all the fishers'. Commercial fishers know their livelihood depends on sustainable fishing practices. The spokesman for the Professional Fishermen's Association, John Harris, highlighted to me recently the absurdity of shutting down Australian commercial fishers, who are committed to sustainability. In the end, this would lead to imports of seafood from other countries where many of the fishing practices are unsustainable and indeed questionable.

Since the release of the draft marine plan, the department has been conducting a consultation process. Despite being the federal representative, I was not invited to attend these consultations. But those who have attended question the whole process and consider it a sham. The bureaucrats have failed to produce detailed scientific evidence in support of the proposed plans, and they insist that fishers and small businesses justify their opposition to the proposal. The feedback I have received from stakeholders is that the departmental representatives have been arrogant and almost dismissive of anybody who seeks to question what is being proposed.

Earlier I noted the fact that many people in my electorate were concerned that this was an ideologically driven process when it was being managed by the member for Kingsford Smith. However, since the release of the draft plan there have been two major developments. We have seen the New South Wales coalition government overturn Labor's fishing lockout at Fish Rock and Green Island, near South West Rocks, and commence genuine consultation with stakeholders. At the federal level, we have a new minister in charge. It is vitally important that we take a balanced view towards coastal marine reserves. This petition shows the depth of community feeling. I table the petition in the House.

**The SPEAKER:** The acceptance of the petition will be subject to the approval of the Standing Committee on Petitions.

**Chisholm Electorate: Huntingdale Train Station**

Ms BURKE (Chisholm) (22:25): Tragically, I rise tonight to again talk about an ongoing concern in my electorate: the services and amenities around Huntingdale train station. Huntingdale station is located in my electorate and is used by many, many locals at the Clayton and Oakleigh end, but, more importantly, it is used by the hordes of students and staff attending Monash University. It is the end of the line. You get off at Huntingdale and then try and cram onto a bus to get to Monash. The situation has become so diabolical that many constituents, students, the Monash Student Association, the National Tertiary Education Union and even the Vice-Chancellor of Monash University have been in contact with me to plead for better services. The inadequacy of the bus services means that many people are waiting long hours in queues just to board a bus to proceed on the short journey to Clayton station.

I am on the record in this House as arguing long and hard that we need the train line to continue to Monash station and out to Rowville, as was the original plan. I will keep arguing for that till I am blue in the face. I will probably never see it, but I am...
going to keep arguing for it because it is the logical thing to do. Students are forced to add extra time to their travel, as are the many Monash University staff who also use the services. They are also competing with the people trying to get on the train at Huntingdale to proceed into town because it is a zone 1 station and it is heavily utilised. Monash University has actually gone to its own expense of creating additional bus services at the train station at peak hours to try to move the traffic flow.

In addition to this, the car park at the station has become a diabolical mess. Half of the parking bays are no longer marked. So many people are trying to park that poor commuters are arriving at their cars at the end of a long day to find they have been parked in. In one case, a person had to wait two hours for another commuter to arrive and move their car so they could proceed on their journey home. It has also become a dumping ground for the unwanted masses of rubbish in the area. Monash City Council is spending an exorbitant amount of money retrieving everybody's used mattresses. This situation cannot go on.

The previous Victorian state government promised to upgrade Huntingdale station and had committed $8 million towards this project. If we could at least get the station, the interchange and the buses going, we could relieve some of the situation. Tragically, the Liberal government that has come to power has not matched this pledge and has not seen fit to do anything about Huntingdale station, even though one of its commitments going into the election was that it would fix up the transport services and the train stations. Nothing is happening. Instead, $2 million in funding has been pledged to a train crossing in Brighton, where a sum total of 15 cars travel every day, to put a tunnel under an intersection that is not needed. Indeed, by order of priority it is the 222nd train intersection that the RACV has recognised in Melbourne as needing an upgrade—so that the people in Brighton travelling along Beach Road can get into New Street five minutes earlier.

Meanwhile, the students and my constituents in Huntingdale are facing massive waits. It is forcing more and more people to use their cars. We are trying to take cars off the road. The university has put in place measures to relieve this, but to no avail. We need an integrated plan. We need more buses at the train station. We need the site cleaned up. We need to ensure that the concerns of the Monash Student Association, the staff, the vice-chancellor, the local residents and traders in the area, who are all suffering greatly because of this issue, are addressed quickly and for the poor people of Huntingdale not to be ignored.

Mr Neumann to move:

That this House:
(1) recognises that:
(a) there are about three million Australians who still smoke; and
(b) tobacco is a lethal product, killing around 15,000 Australians every year; and
(2) calls on all Members and political parties to immediately stop accepting political donations from tobacco companies.

Mr Melham to move:

That this House:
(1) notes the release on 28 March 2011 of an Amnesty International report entitled Death Sentences and Executions 2010 and that:
(a) over the last 10 years, 31 countries have abolished the death sentence in practice or in law; and
(b) in December 2010:
(i) the United Nations General Assembly adopted its third resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty; and
(ii) 23 countries had carried out executions in 2010 compared to 19 countries in 2009; and
(2) recommits to its bi-partisan condemnation of the death penalty across the world.

Mr Burke to move:
That this House:
(1) notes that:
(a) Thursday 26 May marks World Multiple Sclerosis Day; and
(b) around the world, World Multiple Sclerosis Day in 2011 is being given the theme of employment to acknowledge that staying at work is a key concern for people diagnosed with multiple sclerosis;
(2) recognises that:
(a) multiple sclerosis is most frequently diagnosed in people aged between 20 and 40 years, at a stage in life when these people are building their careers and their families;
(b) the Australian Multiple Sclerosis Longitudinal Study reported that 80 per cent of people with multiple sclerosis lose their employment within 10 years of diagnosis;
(c) like many chronic diseases, multiple sclerosis is costly, and enabling people with multiple sclerosis to stay in work not only builds their confidence and self-esteem but helps to meet the costs that come with managing a lifelong disease; and
(d) with the ageing of the population, people with chronic diseases such as multiple sclerosis will increasingly feature in Australian workplaces, requiring enhanced management and support of these employees; and
(3) commits itself to:
(a) ensuring that the labour market and welfare system continue to provide assistance to people with multiple sclerosis in supporting them to both obtain and retain employment; and
(b) encouraging employers to incorporate greater flexibility in workplaces to enable people with multiple sclerosis and their carers to fulfil their productive capacity.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper) took the chair at 10:30.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Environmental Conservation

Mr VASTA (Bonner) (10:31): It is with pleasure that I rise today to acknowledge and thank the many volunteers in my electorate of Bonner who are taking direct action to improve our community by protecting and enhancing our natural areas. I salute Carindale PCYC and the Bulimba Creek Catchment Coordinating Committee, B4C, who this month have united for a very worthy project—to build a community garden and to plant trees to offset development work being undertaken nearby.

The Carindale PCYC has taken advantage of the run-down parkland behind the PCYC building and a community garden space is being created. On 14 May a working bee was held to begin the first stage of planting 800 trees that will create a buffer of native vegetation, encouraging a wildlife corridor and habitat. This project is an opportunity to beautify the local area and will ultimately be an incredible place for the community to gather and enjoy.

Earlier in July the Bulimba Creek Catchment Coordinating Committee also organised a community planting day at Maisie Dixon Park at Eight Mile Plains. Since 2010, B4C has been working closely with the Department of Transport and Main Roads which covers Queensland's urban utilities to develop a program of environmental offsets and local parkland close to the areas that have been affected by their work. Maisie Dixon Park is one of those projects. B4C are working with the local Brisbane habitat group, Wishart Outlook Bushland Care, to choose suitable areas to remove the weeds, spread the mulch and replant native species. B4C has been recognised for the success of various projects through the national river prize in 2005, three healthy waterways community group awards and the Queensland urban land care award in 2009.

These initiatives are very much in line with one aspect of the coalition's direct action plan for the environment and climate change—the commitment to green corridors and urban forests and the planting of an additional 20 million trees by 2020. So often projects like these provide an opportunity for the community to come together and work towards a common goal and, in doing so, foster that sense of community spirit. In my experience, this is certainly the case with these two projects and I would like to commend the Carindale PCYC on their great work. (Time expired)

Queensland Government

Mr CHRISTENSEN (Dawson) (10:33): I firmly believe it is the role of all elected representatives at all levels of government to stand up for those they claim to represent. In the past week, we have seen the Premier of Western Australia, Mr Colin Barnett, do exactly that—stand up for his state and the people who make it great. By raising mining royalties the Premier is securing the funds required to invest in his state from the funds produced by his state. Combined with this is the fact that WA's Royalties for Regions program is the country's best method of royalties for distribution. It came about as a result of the WA Nationals standing up for rural and regional areas in WA. The fact that Premier Barnett's action affects
the federal government's proposed mining tax is of no consequence to the people of WA, who are no doubt proud of their Premier for standing up for their rights.

In Queensland, the other resource-rich state, the situation is not the same. There is no 'royalties for regions program'. There is, however, an unofficial 'royalties for the south-east corner program', where the government sucks up the wealth from the north, bleeding dry the communities that are working hard and paying the social price for creating that wealth, and then wrings out billions of dollars from these regions and pumps them into wasteful, frivolous projects in the south-east corner. This week, state parliament meets in Mackay, my home town, the prime example of a community feeling the strain of the mining boom accompanied by government neglect. So I would like to challenge the Queensland Treasurer, Andrew Fraser, to take a stand like WA has taken. I challenge Mr Fraser to consult with the mining industry and then sensibly increase mining royalties and quarantine those funds for the purpose of reinvesting in the regions that are impacted by mining. In doing so, he will be standing up to the federal government's mining tax which will bleed billions of dollars from the Mackay region and funnel it into places like Sydney and Melbourne.

Today, the state government announced $40 million for a bridge over Fursden Creek in Mackay. This is to fix a stuff-up they created when they built a bridge to direct traffic over a river and straight into a flood zone. This belated investment is a mere drop in the ocean when you consider that almost $1.1 billion went into the state coffers last financial year through royalties and the coal exported through the ports of Hay Point, Dalrymple Bay and Abbot Point, all of which are in the Mackay region—and that was in the middle of the global financial crisis. The year before that we contributed more than $2.2 billion in royalties, and this year there will be another billion-dollar bonanza in royalties from our region for the state. So now is the time for the Treasurer of Queensland to stand up to the federal government and their proposed mining tax. Now is the time to raise royalties and introduce a 'royalties for the region' style program in our state. Now is the time for Mr Fraser to stand up for the Queenslanders that he is supposed to represent.

University of the Third Age
St Brigit's, Gisborne

Mr MITCHELL (McEwen) (10:36): I am delighted to speak this morning about some great events that I have recently attended. Last week, I had the pleasure of being the guest speaker at the Sunbury University of the Third Age. It was great to be with such an engaged group of locals who were interested in discussing both national and local issues. Many of the questions related to the issues of the day including some of the misinformation deliberately peddled by the opposition. It was a terrific opportunity to address the distortion of truth and take time to actually discuss concerns and inform people of what I would like to achieve for our future. We discussed issues of local concern such as the railway line electrification, the future of the VU site for education and how it could be used to skill-up locals and offer better choices of education. As well, we discussed the redistribution of federal electorates. U3A, as we know, is a place where our seniors can come together and it enables members to share many educational, creative and leisure activities. The seniors of our community have a wealth of knowledge and skills which should be passed on to the next generation. This opportunity to chat with them is one that I was very pleased to take. The U3A network in Victoria is an incorporated association with some 97 universities of the third age and over 24,600 individual
members. I look forward to returning to the Sunbury U3A in the near future to speak with them again.

I was also delighted to attend St Brigid's in Gisborne for a Q&A discussion with grade 5 and 6 students on the importance of rights, responsibilities and decision making. The students are currently undertaking a school project on the three levels of government and it was great to be there in an interactive forum where the students were able to question me on federal rights and responsibilities, how laws are made and the responsibilities of the federal government. The students put forward all arguments for and against in coming to make decisions. One example was a possibility of McDonald's being built in our community. Some students opposed it saying they believed the community could lose its country feel and some of the students' parents who run local shops and cafes would suffer as a result of McDonald's opening, while others said they saw it as a great opportunity for young people with the creation of more jobs locally, particularly part-time jobs for local students.

These discussions and the putting forward of the local situation illustrated to the students that rights, responsibilities and decision making are not just something that we as politicians encounter but something that we all come across in everyday life. Some decisions may be bigger than others and some responsibilities greater, but how we come to decisions must always be based on a thorough understanding of the issues at hand and robust debate and then the balance is right. I congratulate all the students, who undoubtedly will become future community leaders, and the knowledge, passions and questions—(Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper): I will now call the honourable member for Page to balance up the speakers on both sides of the chamber. I thank the honourable members for Bonner and Macarthur for their cooperation.

Page Electorate: Building the Education Revolution

Ms SAFFIN (Page) (10:39): I also thank the honourable members for their cooperation. I want to talk about what has been going on in my electorate of Page over the last month but particularly the last week. The last week feels a bit like a month because there has been so much activity and so many good things happening. I have had the pleasure to open 5 BER projects—all good projects and all welcomed by the local teachers and parents and the local communities. There was Stratheden, which is a small country school in my electorate in between Casino and Kyogle. I also had with me the Mayor of Richmond Valley Council, Col Sullivan, who was a student a long time ago at Stratheden school. There was also Southern Cross in Ballina, a K to 12 school, which is a larger school and a school that also undertakes distance education. It does that extremely well, incorporating languages into the school. The third one was St Mary's Primary School in Grafton. All of them have got new libraries and new halls and, because they were able to work with the local builders and local companies, they managed to get a good deal. They got additional covered walkways and things like that.

I have 96 schools in my electorate, so I have been a bit involved with them and have tried to make sure that we get the best we possibly can out of that stimulus money. All of these schools are using local architects, local builders, local electricians and local plumbers. Then there was St James Primary School in Yamba. I was there the other day, and they did extremely well—they have a multipurpose hall and they have a lovely walkway. The choir performed for me in the hall. On Friday I was at Rappville Public School. It is a great country school; it has 23 students and its numbers are holding. It is on the Summerland Way between

MAIN COMMITTEE
Casino and Grafton. It was really pleasing to see the library that they have and a range of other things. They managed to get another shed and a water tank and all the things that they need for good amenities in the area.

Many other things have happened which I will not have time to cover, but there was a wonderful $700,000 Healthy Clarence Communities grant which came through Minister Nicola Roxon, who initiated the National Healthy Communities Program. The Clarence Valley Council put up a submission and was successful, and I was able to announce that on Friday. I also visited Grafton Base Hospital and saw the upgrade there.

**Macarthur Electorate: The Lair**

Mr MATHESON (Macarthur) (10:43): I would like to publicly commend a new program which I believe will provide great opportunities for young people living in my electorate. Wests Tigers rugby league club has developed a learning centre in Leumeah which they call The Lair, aimed at inspiring local children to work hard to reach their goals. The concept of the Lair was inspired by the NRL all-stars game which is played each year on the Gold Coast to promote the Close the Gap campaign. The Campbelltown area, which is one of Wests Tigers traditional heartland suburbs, has a high Aboriginal population, and the Australian Human Rights Commission Close the Gap campaign has inspired the club to help the community. The idea of the centre is to bring students out of the traditional school environment into a place where they can relax and prosper to their full potential.

I attended the opening of the centre last week, and it was great to see the Wests Tigers embracing our local community and our Aboriginal children. Aboriginal elder Steve Williams, fondly known to Campbelltown locals as Uncle Steve, conducted a smoking ceremony outside the new centre. Students with Indigenous backgrounds identified by their high schools will be eligible to attend the centre. The students might be those who are struggling at school and need extra help or those who are prospering and need a little extra help to reach their full potential. Students will visit the centre after school for help with any of their educational needs. They can also undergo sessions which may include goal setting, time management in exams and essay structuring.

At the opening I met students from Airds High School, who were very excited about the centre and the opportunities it offered. It is great to see local kids get involved in sport, but it is even better to know that they will be encouraged by their sporting heroes to focus on their education and enjoy their learning experiences at the centre. Head coach Tim Sheens, captain Robbie Farah and former Wests Tigers legend John Skandalis helped open the new learning centre last week. Many Wests Tigers players have come from challenging backgrounds—they have had to battle adversity to get to where they are today. These players will be a massive influence for the students who attend the centre by mentoring them and keeping them on track with their goals. Throughout this process Wests Tigers have been in constant consultation with Campbelltown City Council and the New South Wales Department of Education and Training to develop a program to match the needs of the community.

Wests Tigers also hope to implement the school to work transition program that has been implemented at other NRL clubs. This program will help students stay on track for their final years of school and provide them with pathways into work and further education placements. The Lair has been set up in a room owned by Western Suburbs League Club, Campbelltown, with many generous sponsors and supporters. John F. Kennedy once said, 'Leadership and
learning are indispensable to each other,' and I believe this centre will be an example of that. Wests Tigers CEO Steve Humphreys and his team are to be congratulated for having the vision, the drive and the commitment to develop this learning centre. This is what leadership is all about, and I am sure many young people in the Macarthur region are going to benefit from this initiative.

I am proud to say that the federal coalition has always taken a keen interest in the development of Australia's young people. This centre, along with our federal strategies, will become an important tool in the development of our young men and women in the Macarthur region. I am sure all the sponsors and the Wests Campbelltown league club are keen to see the results not only in the local community but on the paddock in Wests Tigers jerseys one day.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper): I call the Hon. Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, the honourable member for McMahon, and I thank him for gracing the Main Committee with his presence.

McMahon Electorate: Learning Links

Mr BOWEN (McMahon—Minister for Immigration and Citizenship) (10:46): Not at all; it is my privilege to be able to be here. I wanted today to take a small amount of the parliament's time to talk about a charity in my electorate and to update the House on the work that it does and on the fundraising work that is being carried on in relation to this charity. This charity is Learning Links, which helps children who have learning disabilities or challenges and who might have difficulties in getting the extra training and tuition they need. Learning Links have been operating in my electorate for some 12 or 13 years, and when I was Mayor of Fairfield City Council in 1998 and 1999 I opened their Fairfield office. Their services include early intervention, a mobile toy library, speech therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, family counselling, case management, group programs for children and parents, and specialised literacy and numeracy support, including Reading for Life and Counting for Life, which are volunteer reading and numeracy programs for primary school children.

Four years ago we started an initiative in my electorate which is the Learning Links annual fundraising ball, which we call the Enchanted Evening. This ball has raised a considerable amount of money for Learning Links over previous years. We hold this event at Club Marconi, Bossley Park, each year and it has raised $200,000 over the last four years for Learning Links. I wanted to take this opportunity to thank a number of organisations and groups which have supported our annual ball consistently over the last four years: the Investment and Financial Services Association, and in particular their two chief executives over that time, Richard Gilbert and John Brogden; William Roberts Lawyers; the Fairfield RSL and the Smithfield RSL; the Electrical Trades Union; Giotto Gelato, which supplies the dessert every year for free; Club Marconi, which hosts the event very generously each year; and Wow Factor Events and Daniela Fedele, the principal of that organisation, who assists us in putting the event together each year.

As I said, over the last four years we have raised $200,000 together for Learning Links. That $200,000 has meant that Learning Links will soon move into state-of-the-art, specifically designed premises. The existing premises, which, as I mentioned, I opened 12 or 13 years ago when I was Mayor of Fairfield City Council, were not specifically designed. They were very cramped and not good for getting the best out of the children, who are suffering learning difficulties. These new facilities at Mount Pritchard are very good facilities indeed and they
are only able to be opened because of the support that those charities, groups and companies that I talked about before have given the Learning Links ball over the last four years, contributing to the $200,000 that we have raised.

I would like to thank each of the guest speakers we have had over the last four years: Peter Garrett, Wayne Swan, Kevin Rudd and this year Her Excellency the Governor-General, Quentin Bryce. I am not sure who the guest speaker will be next year, having had the Governor-General, but I am sure next year we will have as good event as any. (Time expired)

**Gold Coast Suns**

*Mrs ANDREWS (McPherson) (10:49):* I stand here today as a proud and passionate supporter of the Gold Coast Suns. Next Saturday, 28 May 2011, the Australian Football League's newest team will play its first game at the purpose built stadium at Carrara on the Gold Coast, and I along with thousands of others will be there to cheer them on. It is just three years since the AFL formally invited representatives from the Gold Coast community and businesses to form a board with a view to demonstrating that a Gold Coast based AFL team had a good prospect of long-term success. In March 2009 it was officially announced that the Gold Coast Suns had been granted a provisional licence to compete in 2011.

This year the Gold Coast Suns made their debut and already have had two wins—firstly, against Port Adelaide, historically on Port Adelaide's home ground and, secondly, defeating the Brisbane Lions at the Gabba. For a team that was not expected to have great success in their first year, to win two games so early in the season gives us an indication of their potential. The success of the Gold Coast Suns is due not only to its players but also to its coach, Guy McKenna, CEO Travis Auld and the board, comprising chairman John Witheriff and board members Dr Alan Mackenzie, Bob Gordon, Malcolm Blight, Bob East, Paul Scurrah and Janelle Manders and of course the growing base of members and supporters.

The Gold Coast Suns will not only have a major impact on football and sport in general on the Gold Coast; they will also be a major contributor to the Gold Coast economy. It is estimated that having an AFL team based on the Gold Coast will boost tourist numbers by over 120,000 annually and result in more than $30 million being injected into the local economy. This will be a very much-needed tonic for our tourism industry, including our accommodation providers, tourist operators, restaurants, cafes, taxi and limousine operators, as well as local retail outlets.

We hope that when AFL fans come to the Gold Coast to watch the games they will witness firsthand what we have to offer and return for a longer stay, perhaps with friends and family. We hope that when the corporate AFL sponsors and fans see what the Gold Coast has to offer they will consider the Gold Coast as a venue for business and corporate events. Having our own AFL team is a wonderful opportunity for the Gold Coast and we plan to maximise the benefits to our community and to promote them and the Gold Coast.

We should all be proud of the Suns and what they offer to our great city. They are a young team, full of promise and potential. They are relentless and they are determined. To paraphrase part of their song: they will fight till they hold up the cup; they are the mighty Gold Coast Suns. I, along with my fellow Gold Coasters, wish them every success.
Greenway Electorate: Climate Change

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (10:52): I rise to mention two local examples in my electorate of Greenway that demonstrate the real concern among our young people who want this parliament to take action on climate change. I received a letter signed by a class of year 5 students from Vardy's Road Public School in Kings Langley. These students wrote to me as their local member because they were alarmed about the impact of climate change and they wanted to know what I was doing about it. On 3 May I met with the students and their teacher, Mrs Lyn Oppliger. They explained to me how they understood the Earth was changing, how pollution was adversely contributing to that change and how there is a small window of opportunity that exists to take action.

I was very affected by some of their comments that reflected both their innocence and their frustration. As one child said to me, 'I'm just a kid. I can't vote and I can't make decisions.' As I spent time with these children, as they took my hand, as we chatted and they led me around their school's vegetable garden and compost heap, it reinforced my responsibility to do everything in my power to ensure they inherit a planet that is liveable and an economy that is sustainable. I want to thank Mrs Oppliger and the principal of Vardy's Road Public School, Mrs Amanda Connelly, and above all the students who hosted me—Sophie, James, Jason, Cameron, Thomas, Lena, Tarina, Jackson, Breannon, Jack, Kiannah, Mona, Jessica L., Kaustubh, Heath, Bradley, Caitlin, Jordan, Tyler, Jessica K., Sarah and Andrew. To them I say a special thank you for sending me a photo of your class, which I will keep in my office to remind me about what is important and your message that your future is in my hands.

I also held a student leadership roundtable in Blacktown during April's youth week celebrations. This roundtable was attended by 18 student representatives from Greenway, drawn from nine local high schools. I want to thank all the participants for an enlightening afternoon of open opinions and constructive discussions and a listening exercise for me. Again, these are young people who cannot yet vote but who feel deeply frustrated that the future could be determined by some people who refuse to believe the science of climate change and the contribution of humans towards it. As they discussed a wide range of issues from binge drinking to discrimination it became clear that climate change was the standout issue of importance to them and that we must take action now to tackle climate change to position Australia for the future.

It is these young people who provide us with the most appropriate case studies about why we cannot shy away from our climate change responsibility. I could look these young people in the eye—the future of this country—and tell them that I am a member of a government that cares about the future, that I believe climate change is real and that I am committed to doing something about it. I thank them all for their time, their contribution and their patience in educating me about what is important to them. Above all, I reaffirm my commitment to these young people to not let them down.

Hasluck Electorate: Coffee Shop Inreach Program

Mr WYATT (Hasluck) (10:55): I rise today to talk about the successful Coffee Shop Inreach Program that Team Hasluck rolled out across the Christmas break and which is continuing throughout my first term. The goal is simple: to reach out to as many people as possible who cannot make it to my office. Hasluck has a disproportionately high number of seniors, retirees and people with a disability. Couple this with young mums who are at home
and would have to catch two buses to reach my electoral office and you have a silent majority of people whose voices are not heard. When I won the seat, I pledged to listen and be accessible to as many people as possible. This is absolutely essential if I am to truly represent all of the people of this diverse electorate.

I launched the Coffee Shop Inreach Program at Baileys Coffee and Cream in Gosnells and the coffee shop inside Midland Gate Shopping Centre before Christmas. Since then I have been able to meet and speak with older Australians, young mothers and concerned residents about a range of issues. Topics range from fixing local roads, law and order and protecting our borders—issues which are common—through to religious persecution of Christians overseas and the need to fund aged care more appropriately. Some people want to express their views about government, others to compliment it. I have also learned much about the views of the people of Hasluck through this process and what is really needed from government. Access to a fair share of funding and the provision of parks and recreation areas, public transport, services for disabled people and their carers and aged-care services are required. People at the coffee shop certainly are not backward in expressing their views and concerns, and I welcome this. It is what I am there for. All of the opinions and thoughts are valid but often are not heard. Yes, online communication is a powerful tool and one that I am using to reach the younger generation of people in Hasluck. This works for many people but not for all.

I would like to thank the proprietors of the Colony Coffee House of Midland, the R & J Cafe in Southern River, the Friendship Cafe in Midland, the Nearest Cafe in Thornlie and Bailey’s Coffee and Cream in Gosnells for allowing me to host these events at their cafes. They too are concerned with local issues and by allowing me to use their facilities are providing a community service to their local area. The year 2010 was an amazing year in politics, but one thing has resonated long after the election race was won and lost: the electorate of Australia want more accountability from their members. They want to see and hear from their elected representatives more than ever. That is what I have always done in my professional life and I intend to continue dedicating my energies to doing this throughout my term as the member for Hasluck. It enables me to reach those who find my office unreachable.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (10:58): I would like to thank all those committed staff members of the Mersey Community Hospital and members in the state government, particularly in the state health department and the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, for the terrific work that they have managed to bring about at the Mersey Community Hospital. It was, of course, the centre of some political storm and controversy 3½ years ago. The Mersey Community Hospital is doing a great job and continuing to provide really good services to the region. In particular, I would like to emphasise that over the past two years the Mersey has grown its endoscopy service and indeed has become the regional hub for endoscopy procedures in the north-west. Since 2008, for example, the North West Area Health Service has increased the number of endoscopies per year by 114 per cent, which is a massive and impressive increase.

The Mersey Community Hospital theatre throughput has increased dramatically, by 48 per cent. For example, in 2007 the Mersey was doing around 250 theatre procedures a year and in February this year the Mersey performed 475 procedures, which is almost double—a
staggering increase. The Mersey has taken great steps towards becoming a centre of excellence for short-stay surgery in Tasmania.

New services that have come to the Mersey include a urology service. Patients used to go to Launceston for their consultation and surgery. Now the Mersey has a dedicated regional urology service, providing much improved access for the north-west community.

In recent times the Mersey has also become the dedicated hub for public cataract surgery in the north-west. It has also massively increased its outpatient activities, including, as I mentioned, endoscopy, dental, vascular and plastics. It has also increased its cardiac services.

The Mersey also has a new high-dependency unit, which has been built through the auspices of the Tasmanian government working in partnership with the Commonwealth government. In addition, it is improving and redeveloping its emergency department to the tune of a $5.3 million redevelopment. It has a refurbished women's and children's ward. And just recently I had the privilege of opening the University of Tasmania centre of excellence, for the development of a rural health education hub at the Mersey.

I congratulate everyone involved on providing these excellent services. I know we will continue our support to make this happen into the future. (Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper): In accordance with standing order 193, the time for members' constituency statements has concluded.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

50th Anniversary of Amnesty International

Debate resumed on the motion by Mr Oakeshott:

That this House:

(1) notes that 28 May 2011 marks the fiftieth anniversary of Amnesty International, a global movement of over three million supporters dedicated to defending and protecting human rights;

(2) recognises the important role Amnesty International continues to play in promoting and protecting human rights and shining a light on human rights abuses around the world;

(3) acknowledges the many achievements of Amnesty International, including its:

(a) integral role in the development, promotion and ultimate adoption of the United Nations Convention Against Torture in 1975, it being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1977 and the Sydney Peace Prize in 2006; and

(b) successful campaigning for the release of thousands of political prisoners around the world; and

(4) notes that from 1961 till the end of 2010 the organisation:

(a) conducted at least 3,341 missions to research human rights abuses around the world;

(b) produced and published an estimated 17,093 reports and public documents including the annual human rights report which is now produced in 25 languages; and

(c) issued over 31,000 urgent actions for individuals at risk.

Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (11:01): I note, as a co-chair of the reformed parliamentary Amnesty group, that there is some very good work of a bipartisan nature done amongst my colleagues, work that is targeted towards the too many parliamentarians or election candidates around the world who have found themselves being persecuted, for a number of reasons. I hope that work continues and I hope the parliamentary group continues to be active.
Happy birthday, Amnesty International, and thank you for the good work that you continue to do. In my view, the organisation is at the front end of protecting, defending and advocating for the individual, despite collective will being quite often against the individual. It is, I think, a flaw in mankind that we tend towards inhumanity and unkindness towards each other. Organisations such as Amnesty International remind us of the higher values rather than the lower ones and focus us on humanity and kindness rather than on the inhumane and unkind.

These principles behind Amnesty International—I might put alongside that human rights and the United Nations generally—too often in Australian political culture get an unfair serve and are seen as the soft or weak options. These unfair serves only strengthen the resolve of many. The courage of those who support and advocate for higher values and higher principles is highlighted by the fact that they do so when many are accusing them of being weak or soft. So this is an important organisation, not only domestically but internationally. May their work continue.

Only last night I was watching Dateline covering an issue of the moment—Australia’s potential agreement with Malaysia about asylum seekers. It was a very good program and it is Amnesty Australasia that is leading the charge for public policy in this country to deeply consider the realities of detention in Malaysia. I would hope that a good government, regardless of political persuasion, would consider those facts and take the views of Amnesty International on board.

 Likewise, an issue of the moment is the call for action on war crimes within Sri Lanka over the past decade. This is an uncomfortable issue for governments to deal with but one that is important, again, if we are pursuing higher ideals. In an ideal world, organisations like Amnesty International would be unnecessary. In practice, their work is critical to making sure governments of all persuasions in all countries work in the best interests of their communities rather than their own best interests and chase those higher ideals rather than the low ones. Happy birthday and thank you to Amnesty International. (Time expired)

Mrs MOYLAN (Pearce) (11:06): It is a great honour to second the member for Lyne’s motion noting the forthcoming 50th anniversary of Amnesty International. I thank him for bringing this to the notice of the House. The date of 28 May 2011 marks 50 years of a movement that has championed the cause of human rights globally. The pursuit of basic freedom and protection of individuals across the divides of race, sexuality, citizenship, gender, nationality, ethnicity and ability has been unrelenting and the successes have been innumerable.

Since 1961, Amnesty International has conducted 3,341 missions to research human rights abuses around the world, including recently the treatment of asylum seekers in Malaysia. The member for Lyne mentioned Graham Thom’s performance on Dateline and, listening to the briefing provided by Graham Thom to this parliament on that mission, one can only marvel at the enormous courage of those individuals who place themselves in difficult and sometimes dangerous situations to open the eyes of the world to the many inhumanities being perpetrated on the innocent. Graham Thom is one of those very courageous people.

Amnesty International has published over 17,000 reports and public documents, including the annual human rights report, which is now produced in 25 languages. On 10 December 1961, the first Amnesty candle was lit in the church of St Martin-in-the-Fields, London. This iconic event occurred following the first meeting of Amnesty International, at which delegates...
made a decision to establish a permanent international movement in defence of freedom of opinion and religion. That movement was inspired by British lawyer Peter Benenson, who witnessed the growing global trend of imprisonment, torture or execution of people because of their political views or religious orientation. Many of us witness things that disgust and alarm us, but Peter Benenson had the courage to act on what he was seeing. Indeed he gave his life to 'the vision of collective action that defines Amnesty International's work today'. Peter Benenson said at the time:

If these feelings of disgust all over the world could be united into common action, something effective could be done

Something effective has been done and today we are celebrating 50 years of that action to free people from violation, from having their freedoms denied. In 1973, members and senators in this parliament caught that vision and established a parliamentary amnesty group. Today, I pay tribute to the men and women of this parliament who kept that flame burning brightly for their dedicated work in ensuring that people's rights and freedoms, wherever in the world they are violated, continue to be a focus of their work. Today we acknowledge the many successful and notable campaigns Amnesty has conducted and pay tribute to all the people of the world who involve themselves day to day in the work of this great and noble organisation. I feel privileged to join with my colleagues to keep the flame of such a great organisation burning in the corridors of this parliament.

Amnesty's 50th anniversary provides a splendid opportunity to recommit ourselves to act as Peter Benenson did when he read about the prison sentences imposed on Portuguese students all those years ago. The Amnesty symbol of a candle wrapped in barbed wire is inspired by the ancient Chinese proverb 'It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.' May we again dedicate ourselves, as the member for Lyne said, to greater humanity and greater kindness in the carrying out of our duties within this parliament.

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Werriwa) (11:11): I genuinely congratulate the member for Lyne on raising this matter. For a person who from an early age was interested in other countries and events in the foreign policy area, it was a very welcome possibility, when I arrived in the federal parliament in 1990, to join the group that was just alluded to by the previous speaker. The group was already formed here, and my understanding is that it was the first in the world. I congratulate the people who established it—people like Rob Lundie, in the Parliamentary Library, who persisted over many years selling badges here once a year and basically carrying the organisation. That is another welcome event. We in this parliament do not often get involved with groups that have both parliamentary and staff members, so that is great.

I believe that the strength of Amnesty International is the perception among those who are honest and sincere that it is neutral. It is constantly belittled, attacked and vilified by regimes around the world. It is seen sometimes as an instrument of the West. It is seen as an organisation that might be undermining supposedly idiosyncratic attitudes to rights in, say, the Middle East and other nations—that somehow rights are not universal and Amnesty International is a tool of Western attitudes. It has a track record that stretches back to supporting Jews and Baptists in the Soviet Union during oppression there, taking up the cause of people who start to struggle for democracy. Today, it is a defender of Arabs against Israeli colonial measures and suppression; it is a campaigner for the rights of Arabs in the Middle
East against oppressive regimes that sometimes utilise the issue of Palestine to preserve themselves.

Most people would very much regret and repudiate those regimes—Sri Lanka is a current example—that basically try to argue that there is not genuineness on the part of Amnesty International. Amnesty has the track record. It is respected for that. It is interesting to note that since its formation in 1961 it has changed its emphasis from its original one of taking up the precarious situation of those individual prisoners to looking at questions of torture, the families involved and the question of the fairness of the trials themselves. Amnesty has very much changed its level of activity over that period, but throughout it has been a very credible international source. Its receipt of the 1977 Nobel Peace Prize was certainly recognition of that.

As a former member of the parliamentary group, I perhaps have regrets that in some fashion the degree of support for the external organisation has tended to deteriorate since I arrived here. I believe that too pronounced an emphasis on the asylum refugee issue unfortunately has tended to undermine the effectiveness of the organisation in a parliamentary sense. It is far easier to have a non-partisan, inclusive organisation when you are not getting into areas that cause differences within the membership. Certainly their work on that front is merited, but I think people's ability to work together across party lines has somewhat lessened over recent years. Amnesty, as indicated by the previous speaker, traces its genesis back to Portugal under the Salazar regime, the new order there. Allegedly it was created when some people were jailed for toasting liberty there. When I read the history of the organisation—there is some doubt about that history that Benenson gave—it certainly is a reminder of what happened through the Cold War. And it is still the case sometimes now. We see an example in East Timor, with the Islamic world supporting Indonesia throughout its occupation because it was an Islamic country. Back in that period, some people were inclined to forget what was happening in Portugal because it was seen as an ally of the United States. This is one of the strengths of Amnesty, its ability to avoid international divisions between various blocs and to come through saying that there are certain inalienable rights, that there are certain things we must stand for in regards to humanity. That is something which has allowed all of us, regardless of what we think on many other issues, to come together. I join with other speakers in recognising this 50th anniversary.

Mr RUDDOCK (Berowra) (11:16): I take this opportunity to thank the member for Lyne for enabling us to record the importance of this international organisation, Amnesty International. I have been proudly a member over something like 36 years. I was certainly engaged when the parliamentary group was formed, as was alluded to by the member for Pearce. I joined the organisation, strangely, because of the encouragement of people who, unexpectedly, would be my friends—the late Bill Wentworth, the late Dick Klugman, Tony Lamb, David Hamer, Alan Missen, Michael Hodgman. This was an organisation that could adopt the cause of fighting Right and Left dictatorships around the world and did so without fear or favour. Its core principles were of such fundamental importance. Who could disagree?—opposition to the death penalty, focusing on the use of torture, prisoners of conscience. Amnesty was a courageous organisation. I can remember Michael Hodgman railing against the advice they gave us that they would not adopt Nelson Mandela as a prisoner of conscience. Why? Because he would not eschew the use of violence in pursuit of
his political objectives. They held so strongly to those sorts of judgments that they would take courageous decisions.

I was very proud of the parliamentary group formed by the efforts of Lenore Ryan from Victoria. She was brought here by Tony Lamb. I held early office, as did David Hamer, but one of our most courageous members was the late Alan Missen, who even went to the former Soviet Union and brought out some of the important records of people like Solzhenitsyn and the like to understand what was happening in that regime. We would take up the causes regularly and vociferously by visiting missions and talking to them about human rights issues. We had the opportunity, with the Bush visit to Australia—not George Jr, George Sr—to raise the issue of capital punishment in United States of America. As you can gather from my comments, I am very proud of this organisation. I have proudly worn its badge over a long period of time. Not everybody has been comfortable with that and the member for Werriwa spoke about that in part. I think Amnesty, when it gets caught up by some groups who say, 'It is such an important organisation—if they adopt our cause as well,' weakens its principal mission. Not every asylum seeker is a prisoner of conscience—some may be—but by running issues that others ought to be running I think Amnesty is diminished. I spent a lot of time travelling at various times. I was in Trafalgar Square and I saw some rallies being organised by Amnesty—and what were they on? Domestic violence. Domestic violence is abhorrent and people ought to run it as an issue, but it is not one of Amnesty's core issues, in my view; yet it is now one of those issues it takes up which detracts from its principal purpose.

If you get the impression that I agreed very much with the member for Werriwa, you are right. I am opposed to capital punishment. I abhor the use of torture. I believe we should work conscientiously in relation to prisoners of conscience. If we keep that focus, this organisation, which I have been part of for so long, will contribute positively not just for another 50 years but for tens of decades into the future, while ever there is a need, regrettably, to be working on those causes.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper): Order! The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of debate will be made an order of day for the next sitting.

National Consumer Credit Action Plan

Debate resumed on the motion by Ms Vamvakinou:

That this House:

(1) acknowledges the Federal Government's National Consumer Credit Action Plan, particularly phase one of the plan which came into effect on 1 January 2011 and provides for licensing of all credit providers, new responsible lending requirements and access to external dispute resolution for all consumers of consumer credit;

(2) notes that phase two of the National Consumer Credit Action Plan will be considered by the Government in 2011, which will include consideration of new rules to apply to small amount short term loans (often known as payday loans);

(3) calls on all Members of this House to consider and consult with relevant community organisations on the impact of small amount short term loans on vulnerable constituents, particularly the impact of very expensive interest, fees and charges which can be detrimental to household budgets and reduce the ability for people to manage their day-to-day finances; and
(4) calls on the Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation to improve the operation of the consumer credit market in Australia by ensuring that small amount short term loans are not damaging to families and households, by replacing the myriad of existing state-based interest rate limits with a single, national limit on the fees and interest that can be charged by short term lenders.

Ms VAMVAKINOU (Calwell) (11:21): Today I rise to speak on this motion because I feel it is very important that we as a parliament ensure that there are more efficient and responsive regulatory mechanisms in place to address the shortfalls and loopholes which have allowed the practice of what is commonly and quite rightly known as 'dodgy lending' to flourish in the broader Australian community.

I go to the heart of what this motion speaks to, and that is the issue of payday loans. These short-term high interest loans are designed to view people and families in desperate need of money or credit as a lucrative market upon which to feed and make profit. This is a $1 billion industry that has long served to commodify and target people on low incomes and their families by marketing their so-called assistance as emergency short-term loans, often taking merciless advantage of people's desperation.

These loan sharks, as they are often referred to, are known for charging exuberant interest rates and preying on vulnerable people who have no other means of accessing loan funding. It is important that regulatory oversight mechanisms are in place to significantly boost consumer protection, which can be achieved only through a single standard national regulation of consumer credit. It is not enough to talk about consumers without actually outlining who these consumers are. Consumers are actually people and they are those who are essentially very vulnerable—those who are experiencing entrenched disadvantage, those who are unemployed, single mothers and single fathers, vulnerable young adults, students, elderly pensioners and disabled people, all of whom can be found in communities across Australia and, in particular, can be found in great numbers in my electorate of Calwell.

That is why this motion acknowledges and, indeed, congratulates the federal government's National Consumer Credit Action Plan, because people in desperate circumstances need protection from unscrupulous lending. It was a Labor government which enacted the uniform consumer credit code into Commonwealth legislation and established a national licensing regime for providers of consumer credit and credit related brokering services. It was a Labor government that regulated margin lending and enhanced the enforcement powers required to make sure that licensees stick to responsible lending practices. I am also encouraged that it is this Labor government that will seek to implement phase 2 of the National Consumer Credit Action Plan that will include a focus on payday lending. The source of the problem is that the market base for these short-term loans is often people with poor credit due largely to their poor financial literacy. The federal government have supported programs which serve to enhance the financial capacity of the most vulnerable Australians because financial literacy is key to assisting people in such circumstances. One such program is the Saver Plus program developed by the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the ANZ Bank. I am pleased to say that this program operates out of my electorate of Calwell. Since 2007, 235 families have been in contact seeking assistance from this program. The success of this program lies in its ability to directly reach and engage with the community at a grassroots level. I have had an opportunity to speak to the people in my electorate who run this program and they often tell me that their workload has grown significantly and continues to grow. On the one hand that is a problem

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because it indicates that more and more people are getting into trouble; on the other it gives them an opportunity to reach and assist a group of people.

Nationwide, 7,000 families across 60 sites have benefited from this capacity-building program. This program recognises that it is not about waiting for families to reach crisis point before intervening to appropriate money from them; it is actually about ensuring that families are resilient enough to build and achieve their financial goals, and avoid falling into a cycle of disadvantage. Those who have greater financial literacy and money-saving methods are more likely to avoid having poor credit and, as such, are less likely to be affected by financial exclusion. Importantly, capacity-building programs such as the Saver Plus program increase the knowledge capacity of participants, who acquire the knowledge to identify hidden fees and exorbitant charges relating to a range of financial products, thereby exposing the traps and pitfalls of ultrahigh interest loans.

The government's agenda is to close the loopholes that provide what is known as wiggle room for lenders that all too often cause borrowers to default and be left in a cycle of increasing debt. Our welfare agencies often report severe financial difficulties. There has been an increase in demand from families and individuals in my electorate requiring help to manage their finances. My electorate is a vulnerable electorate, with places such as Broadmeadows experiencing higher than average rates of financial exclusion due to a variety of social and economic factors. The government's policy is designed to mitigate these challenging factors that have a direct impact on the wellbeing of families and the community at large.

The implementation of these reforms is not an isolated initiative put forward by the government. The government's multifaceted approach and commitment to tackling the root cause of financial hardship is clearly visible. In Broadmeadows, I recently had the opportunity, along with the Assistant Treasurer, the member for Maribyrnong, to launch the MoneySmart website developed by the Australian Securities and Investments Commission. This is all part of the federal government's National Financial Literacy Strategy. It is about ensuring that when people want to access credit and finance they do so with the knowledge required to make informed and efficient decisions. Along with the MoneySmart website, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer, the member for Lindsay, and I launched the 'Your shopping rights' fact sheet, which is about helping people make more informed savings and financial decisions without running the risk of falling victim to the sales pitch and the spin which often lead them to accumulating more debt than they can afford. The federal government are showing leadership on this issue through a comprehensive approach to providing a national policy direction for helping the most vulnerable in our community in a clear, consistent and coordinated fashion—one that reaches communities across Australia. The launch in Broadmeadows was a case in point because it is one of the most diverse electorates in the country. The fact sheet is designed to reach all communities in all their diversity because it is produced in a number of languages. It overcomes the language barrier for a lot of people, which is often the reason that they get into financial difficulty.

I want to quote a case study from the Saver Plus policy briefing by the Brotherhood of St Laurence. It is not a complicated example; rather its simplicity reflects the fact that it serves to address the impediments which ordinary people in my electorate face on a daily basis. It says: ‘Sheryl is a single mother of two living in the northern suburbs of Melbourne and
working part-time in a nursing home. Sheryl has said that Saver Plus gave her the opportunity to upgrade her family's old computer and to learn saving skills that she had lacked in the past. Sheryl developed a money plan and saved $50 each fortnight to go towards a new computer for her children. When Sheryl completed the program she used the funds to buy her children a new computer. "The most helpful thing I learnt from the program", says Sheryl, "was how to take care of my own financial situation and cut down on where I was wasting money. My children have picked up on my saving habits and instead of spending their weekly allowance immediately are saving it to buy those items they want instead of me buying it for them. It is teaching them the real value of money.""

This is a case in point, but it is reflective of an improvement in financial literacy coupled with the correct knowledge base of consumer rights and shows that that is what empowers families who are doing it tough. It is about intergenerational learning rather than an intergenerational cycle of disadvantage.

I want to finish by drawing the attention of the House to a Consumer Action Law Centre report titled Payday loans: helping hand or quicksand? The report, which was produced in 2010, makes a very important point. The report invites the reader to think about a statement which it quotes from a Cash Converters financial report of June 2006. The Cash Converters report gloats:

'Repeat customers' is code for celebrating the fact that the vast bulk of their customer base is made up of people and families consumed in a cycle of debt—a deliberate, calculated and crude strategy for attracting debt and default. It is with this thought in mind that I welcome the government's commitment to protecting families and to improving the operation of the consumer credit market in Australia. I also commend the work of the community organisations determined to work with the government to tackle this blight on our society that is guided by misconduct, exploitation and greed.

Mr VAN MANEN (Forde) (11:31): I thank the member for Calwell for her motion. As for what the member for Calwell has shared, in my electorate of Forde we have many people who suffer from the same financial difficulties. There are many reasons for that. The importance of this National Consumer Credit Action Plan is that it starts to put some guidelines and protections around those who are vulnerable in our community. I think there is also great value in having a single unified system across the country so that as people become more mobile in their lives and move interstate they understand what the laws and systems are.

One thing we need to be mindful of with these facilities is that for some of these people it is their only access to finance, and therein lies a great trade-off. For people who have poor credit histories or who are unable to access finance through the normal banking channels, how do they access finance to help meet those gaps in their daily needs? I acknowledge that some of the interest rates and fees are excessive, particularly on the interest rate side. But, given that a lot of these loans are quite small and there is a requirement for the providers to charge a fee to cover some of their costs, the total cost may appear quite high but these providers at some point need to cover their costs for providing the service. So we need to be careful, with these issues, that we do not preclude people who are in difficult and vulnerable positions from
accessing amounts of finance to allow them to continue to meet their living expenses and cash flow requirements.

The member for Calwell touched on the Saver Plus program, and I know from experience of talking to representatives from the Benevolent Society in my electorate that it is a great success. I commend the government and ask the government to continue to support the program. In my role, I will certainly continue to support and advocate for that program because it provides a great benefit to families in my community. I will move on to one of the reasons why these people are looking for this sort of finance—that is, access to finance through the major banks or building societies. In that regard, we as a coalition have proposed a root-and-branch reform of the financial system, starting with a nine-point banking plan. It is designed to provide a competitive and sustainable banking system. If we can bring the poor and the marginalised in our society into the mainstream banking system, it will take away the avenues of business for these short-term payday lenders.

Some of the things that we are looking at in this nine-point plan are: that we call on the ACCC to investigate anti-competitive practices such as price signalling; that we want an investigation by APRA into unnecessary bank risks; talking to banks about reporting on bank interest margins; government support for small lenders; improved liquidity for mortgage backed securities; a complete review of the financial system; and further simplification of financial services reform to reduce costs and complexity. If we can reduce these costs and complexities for the mainstream banking system and building societies, maybe that will provide them with the option and the avenue to help the lower end of the community to obtain finance without having to deal with these so-called payday lenders. This is an argument that we as a coalition have been pursuing for some period of time. We call on the government to continue to look at that in greater detail so that these new options and avenues are available for the less fortunate in our society.

One of the concerns with this National Consumer Credit Action Plan is that the regulation that is proposed around this payday lending be kept simple and straightforward so as not to make it more expensive for these providers to provide their product. We do not want to see them put their costs up and we do not want to see them increase interest rates to continue to provide the services; otherwise, we would be defeating the purpose of these facilities.

As I touched on earlier, it is through a full root-and-branch review of our financial system that we are going to be able to deal with some of these issues in a more sustainable and long-term manner. It is through positive market based solutions together with considered regulation and the government removing itself from the market and returning to a more sound economic platform that we will create an economy where everybody can grow and prosper. We would be able to help people who are currently struggling through unemployment or lack of income who do not have the hours of work necessary to make ends meet. We must help them to truly be able to earn the income to manage their own financial affairs so that they do not have to deal with these short-term payday lenders. This issue will then start to go away as their product will no longer be required.

It is not through rushed or ill-considered legislation, which this current government has a habit of making, that we are going to solve these issues. We ask the government to listen, learn from the mistakes it has made with short-term, populist pieces of legislation, take advice
Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (11:39): This government has done more in this area of law than perhaps any other government in the past 30 years. This government has done a superb job of reforming our financial markets and our financial services sector; importantly, linking both of those to consumer protection measures as well. This government is determined to give consumers better protection in credit markets, and that is exactly what we have done.

The National Consumer Credit Action Plan, phase 1 came into effect on 1 January and provides for licensing of all credit providers. It sets out new responsible lending requirements and it gives access to external dispute resolutions to all consumers of consumer credit. I think that ought to be the basis, the starting point, for any debate in this particular area because I am very much concerned about the confusion in this debate between a properly regulated operator in a market—people operating within the law and providing a legal product—and those who are basically loan sharks. There is a huge difference, a big gap, there and we ought not to get confused about which of those two types individuals or organisations are.

The changes that we are putting forward undoubtedly are good for consumers, but there is more to be done, particularly in the area of high-cost, short-term loans commonly known as payday loans. Again, I clearly make the distinction that there are those who operate efficiently and legally, are properly regulated and provide what is a desperately needed service. The high-cost, short-term loans are typically small loans of between $200 and $500 for individual people. They are designed to be paid back in a very short period, usually of two to four weeks. They attract a fee—sometimes a high fee—and an interest charge as well. Some of these interest rates can be annualised to equal more than 400 per cent, but annualising does not paint an accurate or even responsible picture of the actual cost compared with any other type of traditional loan—a home loan, a car loan or even a credit card—and what that means in real terms for a consumer.

I draw the attention of the House to the fact that somebody with a credit card debt of $5,000 who only pays off the minimum amount as required by their bank, regardless of the interest rate, will not pay it off for 50 years. Work out the annualised rate over 50 years and how much a person with a credit card would pay compared to someone, regardless of the annualised rate, who borrows $200 and pays it back in two weeks. There is an enormous difference in the impact that has on somebody's life. It is easy enough to get confused and populist in this debate about annualised figures of 400, 500 and 600 per cent but it tells us very little of the need or the type of credit that it actually represents.

It is important to recognise that properly regulated legal loans can be effective in helping individuals. Just like any other form of credit, if it is done properly it can be of great benefit. Nobody who has created wealth in this nation would ever say they did it on their own without a creditor behind them in the first place to give them the capacity to grow their business or to get on the table to start with.

The Consumer Action Law Centre, based in Melbourne, in its very good report Payday loans: helping hand or quicksand?, sets out a number of things. It says:

Many people using these loans are vulnerable.
That is true. Studies have shown that consumers generally have high-cost short-term loans in order to meet basic needs—for example, 21 per cent of them use them to pay bills, for car registration or repairs, for living expenses, including food, or even to pay their rent. But that is exactly the point. That is exactly where a payday loan can actually be of great advantage, because if there is no other means of credit to actually pay those essential bills, what happens? Does the power go off? Do people get tossed out of their home? So there is a place; there is a market. It is recognised by government. We have done more than any other government to properly regulate that area. What I am looking for is efficiency: let us get it properly organised, let us make sure we make a distinction between the loan sharks, the underhanded black market credit—which is actually very damaging to individuals—and those who properly access a market which is obviously recognised by its need in that particular report.

As I said earlier, there is a great distinction to be made by those who understand credit and the financial markets between what is a regulated operator operating within the law—banks and those types of loans—and those who operate outside the law. And they need to recognise that the people who access this type of credit actually have no other source. They cannot get a credit card and are probably better off not getting a credit card because the cycle of debt may be a lifetime cycle. There are a number of very good quality reports out right from decent operators in the market that demonstrate that these people are not turnstile customers. (Time expired)

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (11:44): I rise to support the sentiment of the motion of the member for Calwell on the National Consumer Credit Action Plan. I commend the members for Calwell, Forde and Oxley for their contributions. It is true that this area of financial service is one that is not short of horror stories. There are a number of consumers that report very damaging impacts from participating in payday loan facilities and I concur with the general view that it is certainly an area of finance that does need a close examination and an understandable framework put in place that is nationally consistent. I think that objective is virtuous and I support that direction.

It is also worth adding to the comments of earlier speakers that this is a very legitimate area of financial service. It is a product that is well suited to particular people's circumstances. The idea that a short-term cash flow crisis emerges in a household is certainly something I am familiar with, although I have not had to resort to a payday lender. But sometimes an appliance unexpectedly turns up its toes or, in cases that have been reported more publicly, cars break down and need urgent repairs to make sure income continues to come into households. Even in the small business community, there might be a particular need for some equipment to generate income in the longer term. There are often very good and reasoned people participating in this financial service because it responds to their circumstances. It is also true, though, that this financial service can be unhelpful in many ways and, in a compounding sense, increasingly unhelpful for vulnerable families who end up pursuing payday financing as a way of addressing other debt-servicing requirements or who take out a payday loan to meet the financial responsibilities of another payday loan. That cascading process can lead to long-term financial harm and hardship.

I support the sentiment of the motion. We are very interested to see what the government actually produces. I am mindful that the government is already behind its own schedule in the state of New South Wales. There will be a need to put life back into its state based payday-
lending regime, because the anticipated start-up date of the national scheme will not be met and there will be a need for a continuation of the patchwork arrangement that is currently in place. I will not be critical of the government for that, only because I am hopeful that that means it is doing its homework. I am optimistic that the justification for that is that the government is proceeding with some care given the way in which this legitimate financial service is characterised in some quarters as evil in every respect. I have put forward an argument that I do not think that is reasonable, but I have identified where there is considerable virtue in trying to put some reasonable parameters around the way in which this financial service in this industry operates. I hope the New South Wales government does not need to extend its arrangement too much longer. I am pleased that the government is engaging in meaningful consultation. I see that it is speaking with some international providers to get their insights. Cash Store Australia is probably the only listed payday lender around. I have spoken with Cash Store Australia and understand their commitment and willingness to engage constructively.

As the member for Oxley pointed out, it is not just the headline interest rate that is of concern—we have seen reports of that being anywhere from 300 per cent to over 1,000 per cent for loans of this kind—but there are also additional costs and charges. I am aware of some cases where you had to pay $25 to be told that you will be charged $25 for any correspondence that you receive from your payday lender. These bundled-up costs need to be clearly conveyed to consumers. With transparency and a clear understanding given to people considering this line of finance I think you will see a strengthening of the credibility of payday lending. The removal of surprises that are often financially punishing and the provision of a clear sense of what people are entering into will ensure that this legitimate financial service is not characterised in the way some would have it seen—that is, an area only inhabited by loan sharks. Some of the high fees and charges also suggest that competition is not quite what it could be, but I again agree that there is a need for a national framework to make sure that the industry is properly managed. There is a risk of heavy-handed regulation that might add to costs, but I am hopeful that the delayed start-up—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Sidebottom): Order! Thank you very much for your contribution and I thank all other speakers for their contribution. The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Tax Summit

Debate resumed on motion by Mr Hockey:

That this House:

(1) notes the Government's decision to delay the Tax Summit from June to October 2011; 
(2) considers that any genuine Tax Summit will properly review and report on Labor's proposals to introduce a national mining tax and a carbon tax; and
(3) decides that no legislation to impose a national mining tax or a carbon tax be considered by the House until after the October Tax Summit has reported.

Mr TONY SMITH (Casey) (11:50): Mr Deputy Speaker Sidebottom, I know you will agree with this important motion. As someone who represents his electorate as best he can in this House, you will note the government's appalling conduct with respect to the promised tax
summit. This motion highlights the fact that this is an ever-disappearing promise of the government's, like so many of their promises in other policy areas. The motion notes the delay in the tax summit from June until October; it notes, as well, that Labor has major tax proposals in the form of the mining tax and the carbon tax—massive proposals that will damage the Australian economy. Of course prior to this summit they have ploughed on with them. Finally, the motion also seeks that the House decide not to impose legislation on these two matters until after the summit, which the government has said is all-important, at least considers those two measures which we consider to be damaging to the economy.

The tax summit was promised by the Treasurer and the Prime Minister. It was not promised out of some deep principle; it was promised under sufferance. It was promised during the negotiations with the Independents and with the Independent member for Lyne in particular. It was conceived in desperation. What we have seen since the day the government succumbed to that pressure is a watering down of the summit. It is a summit which has become a forum, and it is a forum which is on its way to becoming a seminar by the time it finally takes place in October, now, not in June—not next month, which was originally pledged. The reason for this delay is that the Treasurer and the Prime Minister did not want to agree to hold a taxation summit. This is something they wish would go away. This is like a promised visit to a difficult relative. It was agreed under sufferance. It has been delayed in time and the visit has been reduced in duration. But, because it cannot be completely avoided, the visit will take place. But nothing will be achieved by it. The great aim now of the Treasurer and the Prime Minister is simply to get through this summit, which has become a forum and which is becoming a 48-hour seminar—and that is before the member for Lyne gives his introduction—and not to get anything from it.

Allocating 48 hours in October says so much about this government. They were prepared to agree to a summit, which has become a forum and is becoming a seminar, because they were prepared to agree to the wishes of the Independents. The truth is, this government has not been interested in tax reform; it has been interested in tax increases. We had the Henry review. This was a window into so much about this government's conduct. The government, then in opposition, ran to the 2007 election without a tax plan. We all remember this side of the House releasing a tax plan in the election campaign. It was met with a full week's silence before it was agreed to almost in totality, with just a difference in the top rate. Then those income tax cuts were legislated by this government, which of course now claims them as its own. But there was no great desire for tax reform until we had another summit, the very first summit here in this House, where acres of butchers paper were scrawled upon. The idea of another tax review was thrown up and the government embraced this. My friend the member for Dunkley will remember—it was only a few short years ago but in fiscal years it is an eternity ago—that this was when the government was looking at surpluses of $20 billion plus coming down the line.

So they embarked on the Henry review, a 19-month process. I think it cost $10 million and they got 1,500 submissions. The Treasurer received the report and then he sat on it for about five months. When he released it, he cherry-picked one or two recommendations and distorted them. What we have had from this government is the announcement of a mining tax that will do huge damage to the mining sector and the Australian economy. The figures for that are included in the budget. We have had the announcement of a carbon tax which the Prime
Minister, six days before the election and one day before the election, said would never be implemented under a government she led. The Treasurer said it was hysterical for anyone to say that the government would introduce a carbon tax. Both of these taxes have been announced and the government is proceeding with them in the budget, ahead of the so-called tax summit, which has become a forum and is becoming a seminar in October. This highlights the hypocrisy of those opposite.

Many years ago there was a tax summit. The Hawke and Keating government had a tax summit in 1985. It went for a whole week. Whether you liked the Hawke government or the Keating government—and I am the first to admit that some of the things that came out of that tax summit were very positive—they outlined principles for tax reform well in advance. They did not say: 'Let's have a review of the tax system. We don't have any idea what it should do. Ken Henry, please do it and come back with the report.' They had principles for tax reform and they conducted a real tax summit for an entire week. This is going to be 48 hours where the government will just seek to get through every excruciating minute. For Wayne Swan, this will be the equivalent of sitting through a sibling's speech night. For every excruciating minute he will sit there through the tax summit, looking at the clocks in Parliament House, counting down those 48 hours just like at NASA they count down the hours and the minutes before the take-off of a space shuttle. As soon as it starts, he will be counting down every single minute—48 hours in October without any discussion of the carbon tax or the mining tax.

This motion notes the government's hypocrisy and delay and it says that, should they want to push ahead with their carbon tax and their mining tax, as they do, the House should not consider legislation, if the tax summit is so important. But of course we know their summit, forum, seminar or meeting is not important. As soon as it begins, the Treasurer will be counting down the minutes. When it comes to tax reform, the government likes to talk the talk, but when they had the Henry review with its 1,500 submissions and 19 months what did they do with it? They hid the report for five months before dropping it out a few days before the budget and picking up and distorting just a couple of those recommendations.

The Australian public is waking up to this government. It is not interested in tax reform; it is interested in tax increases. It is interested in a carbon tax it promised it would never deliver, a carbon tax that the Prime Minister said six days before the election and one day before the election would not be introduced under the government she led. The public is seeing exactly what this government is about on tax reform. It is like any other promise—it is extinguishable. This promise has been diluted; it is disappearing before our eyes. By the time we get to October, there will be lots of talk but no action from this government. Whenever it is given the chance, it promises one thing and delivers another.

**Dr LEIGH** (Fraser) (12:00): Labor are the chief architects of economic reform and growth in Australia. It was a Labor government which shaped the modern Australian economy, when Prime Minister Curtin took control of Australia's monetary and fiscal policy. As John Edwards explains in his terrific biography, *Curtin's Gift*, Curtin was not only the man who saved Australia in World War II; he was also one of Australia's great economic reformers. John Curtin regulated private banks, imposed uniform income taxation and transformed the financial relationship between the Commonwealth and states, expanding Commonwealth activity for the benefit of all Australians. The Curtin Labor government oversaw the
beginnings of our mass immigration program, supported university education and made substantial social security changes, putting in place the economic bedrock that would then form the basis of a prosperous postwar state. These reforms form part of the pillars of the modern Australian economy. Curtin's greatest achievement, John Edwards argues, was not saving us in World War II but setting us up for economic prosperity today.

Curtin's economic traditions have been continued by modern Labor governments. It was the Whitlam government that cut tariffs in 1973 and the Hawke and Keating governments that put in place economic reform and a productivity agenda that underpinned the economic growth Australia enjoyed in the 1990s. The current Labor government put in place reforms that navigated us through the global financial downturn. While those opposite would have been happy to see 200,000 Australian workers lose their jobs and thousands of businesses go to the wall, it was a Labor government that said no, Keynesian economics works at a time like this—we put in place a quick, timely, targeted temporary fiscal stimulus that ensured that Australia did not experience the economic downturn that much of the rest of the world experienced.

The Gillard government is now delivering much-needed economic reform. We are putting in place reforms to price carbon so that we can tackle dangerous climate change, recognising that the earlier we act on pricing carbon, the lower the cost will be to the Australian economy. Like most things, leaving it too late raises the cost—and that is what those opposite would have us do. We are putting in place reforms through carbon pricing that are mainstream economics. In fact, I often challenge those opposite to name one or two economists who back their proposals. I am yet to find a member of the opposition who is able to name a couple of economists who back direct action on carbon pricing. I am happy to put that challenge to the member for Higgins today. If the member for Higgins would like to name a couple of economists who back the opposition's plan, that would be delightful. But, as with climate change science, in which we see the vast bulk of scientific opinion strongly backing the notion that climate change is happening and that humans are causing it, those recalcitrants in the coalition party room are willing to stand up against science, and again they will stand up against economics when it comes to getting the policy right.

Meanwhile, we in the Labor Party are helping Australians get a fair return on their mineral resources while investing in our community. We are putting out detailed plans for minerals resource rent taxation which recognise that the minerals in the ground are the birthright of all Australians, which recognise that fair minerals taxation is appropriate and is sensible reform to put in place at this time in the economic cycle.

We are here today in a curious position. We are debating a private member's motion by an absent private member. The member for North Sydney is happy to move things, happy to foreshadow them in speeches and put them on the Notice Paper, but he appears to have gone AWOL today. The member for Casey is generously standing in as the shadow Treasurer today. I guess that is because the shadow Treasurer himself has great aspirations to take on the leadership baton. He is too busy trying to get the numbers to knock off the Leader of the Opposition to actually appear here in the chamber and talk about ideas. When we debated the amendments to the executive remuneration exactly the same thing happened. The shadow Treasurer had foreshadowed that these amendments were very important to him. He was very happy to talk about such things on the ABC program Q&A but, when it actually came to
going into the chamber and doing the hard work of advocating for reform, he left it to the member for Casey.

That is indicative of much of what is currently going on with economic policymaking in the opposition. When the shadow Treasurer was presenting to the National Press Club, he was forced to put out three steps but with no detail whatsoever. He leaves the accounting to the member for Goldstein, who has presided over the $11 billion black hole in the coalition's budget costing. The coalition are still unwilling to face up to the fact that they have been unable to make the books balance, that they are unable to say which spending measures they would oppose in order to make the books balance. The Leader of the Opposition showed this very clearly when he had the opportunity to deliver a budget reply and instead delivered a speech that better suited a shock jock audience than a mature debating chamber.

Meanwhile the government will get us back into the black by 2012-13. Having seen Australia through one of the greatest economic downturns in world economic history, the government is now presiding over the fastest fiscal consolidation in 40 years. Contrary to the spin by those opposite, Labor treasurers have consistently been more frugal than their Liberal counterparts. George Megalogenis pointed out in a recent opinion piece:

If Labor were spending at the same rate as the Coalition was then—
by which he means at the end of the coalition's term of government in 2007—
the budget would be heading for a deficit of more than $20 billion in 2012-13, rather than for a surplus of $3.5bn.

Despite bellowing about high-taxing and high-spending governments, the opposition knows that the Howard government were bigger spenders of taxpayers' money and that the Gillard government is the more responsible and prudent economic manager.

That is as true for economic management as it is for climate change. The Labor Party in government listened to the advice of expert economists. We put in place climate change plans that represent the consensus views of the world's best economists and are not dissimilar from those that the UK Conservative Party backs through their emissions trading scheme. The UK Conservative Party, the political heirs of Margaret Thatcher, are supporting market based mechanisms, recognising that they are the most cost-effective way of tackling dangerous climate change. Meanwhile, the Gillard government is reinvesting in regions through a $6 billion regional investment fund, boosting superannuation for eight million Australians and simplifying personal tax for six million Australians.

Those opposite might as well be part of a drama penned by Cecily von Ziegesar. The member for North Sydney currently presides over the metro steps, but will a bold move last week by the member for Wentworth steal the keys to the shadow treasury locker? Or is the member for Wentworth manoeuvring to preside over the class again? Perhaps the member for North Sydney will side with the member for Wentworth on this occasion because he feels the current ringleader hung him out to dry. Are we going to see shouting matches with blackberries at 10 paces? Are we going to work out which entourage the members of the opposition party room will follow when they go to the midwinter ball? Who needs policy when you have gossip and intrigue? Of course, if it goes wrong, you can always call in the parents, which are of course John Howard and probably the member for Mackellar. Aren't all problems ultimately solved by pulling the warring parties in for a quiet chat with the headmistress?
Some of us live across the bridge—in the world of hard work and real policies, not constant negativity and three-word slogans. That is the currency by which we aim to make the country even better.

So as those opposite go back to deciding who the current queen of the metro steps is, Labor continues to drive economic growth, to grow jobs, to cut taxes, to get a fairer return on our mineral wealth and to tackle the biggest policy challenge—dangerous climate change.

Ms O'DWYER (Higgins) (12:10): It is an amazing contribution that was just made by the member for Fraser. It did not seem to focus too much on the actual motion. I think in fact it could be retitled ‘In defence of economists’. We know he feels very strongly about that. In his little history lesson there I note that he did not talk about Chifley and the banks. He was keen to steer away from talking about Labor and its record but rather was focused on the Liberal Party. But I am here to talk about the motion before this parliament. In his first budget speech four years ago, Wayne Swan warned of the dangers of inflation. He said Labor was committed to improving—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Sidebottom): Would you please use the proper term.

Ms O'DWYER: The Treasurer warned of the dangers of inflation. He said Labor was committed to improving productivity and reforming the taxation system. In May 2008 the Treasurer stood at the dispatch box and said:

Tonight I confirm the most comprehensive review of Australia’s tax system since World War 2.

But the 2008 budget did not deliver this promised tax reform. Nor did the 2009 budget, nor did the 2010 budget and nor has this budget. Incidentally, this last budget was the first budget for eight years that has not provided tax cuts for everyday Australians. It is not an accident that this is also the first budget where they have not been able to simply adopt, even only in part, the tax reform schedule put in place by the former Treasurer, the Hon. Peter Costello AC.

Treasurer Swan announced the Henry tax review—another big first, according to the Treasurer, another historic review. Much was made of the fact that it would deliver significant reforms, making tax fairer and simpler. On 23 December 2009 the Secretary of the Treasury, Ken Henry, delivered the results of the Henry tax review. Some 1,500 submissions had been made, 30 speeches were delivered proclaiming just how big this tax review was and forums were held in every capital city across the country. While Wayne Swan kept the Henry tax review secret for over five months, he said that once it was announced he would act. But 17 months and three new taxes later, we are still waiting for the government to act. We are told it is going to be another five months until we see the tax summit. What the government has done so far in this short period, though, is to cherry-pick a few of the recommendations—that is, new taxes—and leave aside the actual reform. It is always easier to be a taxing government than a reforming one. It is here that we see the consistency of the Labor Party. They are consistent on this. They will always take the easy option. They will always tax more but always leave the hard stuff for someone else to do. They leave reform for a coalition government to do. So it is good to see that they are true to form, which brings me to the tax summit.

Before and after the election, the Prime Minister made a lot of promises to the Australian people and to the Independents. She said that there would be no carbon tax, but there was also
another promise she made—a commitment to have a full and frank exchange on tax reform. In her letter of 7 September 2010 to the member for Lyne, the Prime Minister promised that a tax summit would be held by June 2011. Specifically, she committed to ‘convene a public forum of experts on taxation and its economic and social effects to discuss the Henry review, with that meeting to be held before 30 June 2011’ and to ‘facilitate a debate on tax reform in the Australian parliament following the forum’. This is what the Australian people expected would happen and it is certainly what the Independent members of parliament expected to happen when they signed up to this current government. The member for Lyne said in a speech on 7 September 2010:

By June 2011, we’ve got a commitment to have the Henry Tax review thrown into the public domain with full recommendations from government and a fair-dinkum open debate—

in this country. That is a good and big outcome from this process …

The Prime Minister and also the Treasurer come to the table with their credibility in tatters. While Australia may have hoped for a fair dinkum and open debate about tax, it has been very difficult for the Prime Minister to appear fair dinkum while demoting this summit to a forum, then to a seminar and then finally to what no doubt will be a meeting when it at last occurs in October this year. There has been a very deliberate delay: the summit was originally to take place in June and July, but the date has, as I said, slipped to October. The Treasurer said he was going to provide some details as to who will be invited to this forum in the coming months, and he said that he would release a discussion paper in the middle of the year to help foster debate, but we are still waiting to find out who is going to be invited to come along.

What can we expect from the summit when it does finally happen? Since 2007, Wayne Swan has announced 13 new taxes, and before the government released the Henry tax review there were 125 taxes. Since the government’s response to the Henry tax review, we have seen a mining tax, a carbon tax and a flood tax which together have put the number of taxes up to 128. Is this how the government reviews tax reform? If it is, then—goodness gracious!—what can we expect from this tax summit? Will it give small business the opportunity to make genuine contributions to the reform of our taxation system or will small business be told about further new taxes?

Just as we heard no mention of the carbon tax in the Treasurer’s budget speech, the tax summit—despite the government’s claim that it will be a comprehensive review—will not even cover the carbon and mining taxes. It is understandable that Labor would like to pretend that the carbon tax does not exist—the government set a goal to collect no more than 23.5 per cent of GDP in tax revenue—but if a carbon tax of $26 per tonne were included in the current budget, and we know that the Greens would like the tax to be upwards of $100 a tonne, the government’s target would, of course, be exceeded. Instead it was completely ignored.

In the budget we know that the figure for revenue and spending from the carbon tax is at least $11.5 billion per year, yet this has also been completely ignored. So not only does Labor refuse to countenance the effects of its carbon tax on families and businesses struggling already with the cost-of-living pressures that they have to live with day to day; it refuses to accept that the carbon tax is a violation of its very own measure of fiscal discipline. The Treasurer cannot have it both ways; he cannot claim that there is a lack of revenue when over the next two years the government is set to receive a record-breaking $75 billion in extra
revenue. The Treasurer cannot claim that the carbon tax is an important economic reform and at the same time ignore it completely in the budget because it makes the government look bad.

There are only a couple of real reformers here. It is the coalition that are the real reformers on tax. That is why we went through the pain of introducing a GST—a reform that the Labor opposition opposed tooth and nail. We ended up replacing the wholesale sales tax and nine different state taxes, and we did it over time after we had explained to the Australian people why it was necessary to take these actions. Not only that; we were prepared to get a mandate for it. We took our reforms to an election. We made sure that the Australian people understood the need for a GST and the impact it would have on their lives day to day before we brought it in. Not so this arrogant Labor government.

Already, as I have said before, the Australian people are suffering cost-of-living pressures. Since 2007, energy costs have risen by upwards of 51 per cent, education costs have risen by upwards of 24 per cent and there have been seven interest rate rises in a row. This is having a huge impact on Australian families. When you add in the carbon tax and the RBA's forecast further interest-rate rises, life will be made increasingly difficult for Australians who are working, paying their mortgage and trying to raise a family. Julia Gillard and Wayne Swan—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Would you please use titles. I expect that of you.

Ms O'DWYER: Sorry. The Prime Minister and the Treasurer do not really want a tax debate; they do not really want to justify themselves to the Australian people. We are not going to see a full and frank, root and branch review of the tax system over the next couple of months. We are certainly not going to see that at the forum—or meeting or whatever it is finally going to be called—in October this year. What we will see is spin; we will see a fig leaf to cover the fact that this government is going to increase the taxes of the Australian people. There is really only one way to have a real forum on tax reform and that is to have an election, to allow the Australian people to decide whether they want new taxes, as this government has promised it will deliver. I think the answer is: they do not.

Mr CRAIG THOMSON (Dobell) (12:20): It is always good to follow a contribution made by the spiritual daughter of the former Treasurer. Part of the difficulty the member for Higgins had in referring to the Prime Minister and the Treasurer by their titles was that her contribution today on the motion of the member for North Sydney on a tax forum was remarkably similar to an article recently written by the former Treasurer. In fact, we could have saved time and not had the member for Higgins make this contribution; rather, she could have just referred us to the article because, clearly, that is where her inspiration has come from to the extent that they had very similar—almost word for word—opening paragraphs.

It is interesting that she harks back to the so-called golden days of the former Treasurer. One has to look at the former Treasurer's record on taxation, because that is what we are talking about here—taxation. We had the highest-taxing government under the former Treasurer not one year, not two years, not three years but four years in a row. Four times, they were the highest-taxing government in Australia's history. The current member for Higgins was the adviser to the Treasurer, so she does know about big-taxing issues. She is an expert on big-taxing governments because that is what she did in her former life. It is little wonder that she comes here today saying 'This is what we should be doing.' She has a history of being

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a big-taxing person, just like the former government was a big-taxing government, the biggest-taxing government we have seen in Australia's history four times in a row.

For the member for Higgins to come along here today and parrot the words of her spiritual leader denies the facts and the record of what actually occurred. She even talked about interest rates, which are over two per cent lower than when we came to government. So the criticism of us on interest rates does not stack up to reality. Yes, rising interest rates do hurt families. Families knew that more than ever under the former government when they saw 10 interest rate increases in a row.

This government has dealt with fiscal policy in a way which is consistent with monetary policy. We are tightening both fiscal and monetary constraints as Australia comes out of the global financial crisis and moves forward to the mining boom mark 2. It is very important that we do this and it is very important that we are consistent on this.

It is hardly surprising that the member for Higgins shows no concern about the global financial crisis. There was no reference to it whatsoever in her speech and no reference to savings measures that could have been made, because when the former Treasurer was in government we had a willy-nilly blowing of the mining boom mark 1. They spent whatever they could, wherever they could, as long as they spent the money and blew the money.

The former Treasurer, the former member for Higgins, said that he dreaded going to the former Prime Minister with options as to what to do and what to spend because the former Prime Minister would say, 'We'll do all of it!' They showed absolutely no restraint when they were in government, and the way in which they funded spending was to tax the Australian taxpayer. They increased taxes. They made sure their government was the highest-taxing government in the history of this country four years in a row. So it is of little surprise that the member for Higgins comes here with that in her backpack as the way she would deal with these issues. A tax forum is a serious issue and it is one that this government is taking seriously. With the crossbenchers, we have agreed to a forum on 4 and 5 October. It is no secret that this summit is going to be very important. It is going to look at issues of personal tax, transfer payments, business tax, state tax, environmental and social tax, and tax system governance. One thing is for sure: we are going to turn up and be there. We are going to make sure we take it seriously, unlike those on the other side who put up motions in this place and then simply do not turn up and cannot be bothered to make a contribution. It is a disgrace. It is holding this place in contempt that someone could move a motion on tax, say it is an important issue and it is a shame that we have moved it back three months and yet does not even turn up to talk to their motion.

That is how seriously the member for North Sydney takes this issue of tax reform. He is only out for a cheap quick headline. He has no basis for looking at the solid record that this government has in tax reform. He has no interest in looking at tax reform at all. What appears to be his concern at the moment is his personal relationship with the Leader of the Opposition. We understand from the weekend papers that it is at such a shaky stage at this time that he thinks he has been hung out to dry. It is little wonder he will not come here. He is worried about being hung out to dry if he actually says anything on tax. He has been classically caught. He has put up a motion saying, 'We need to look at tax; it is a really important issue,' but then he is a little scared if he has to come and actually speak on the issue because of what his leader might say. Is he going to hang him out to dry on this one again? He cannot actually
propose anything. It is a bit like his position on the Henry review—deafening silence. Do they support the Henry review?

Mr Neumann: They don't.

Mr CRAIG THOMSON: That is the answer we get from the opposition—silence, dead air. They do not know what they want to do in terms of tax reform at all. They are an absolute shambles on their economic position. There is this internal debate that is going on as to whether they should actually have a policy on any issue or whether they should continue with the current strategy of trying to duck and hide and not say anything about any particular issue. So it is little wonder that the member for North Sydney chose, in his usual courageous manner, not to turn up and contribute today. He probably can be excused, given the recent emails and phone calls that he has been getting from the Leader of the Opposition.

This government is prepared to commit to the tax forum to make sure that we do look at those issues. We are also making sure that the mining sector pays an appropriate amount of tax. This should not be delayed until a tax summit. This needs to be dealt with now. Australians right around the country understand there is a mining boom, but they want to make sure that they get their fair share of the economic prosperity that is flowing to a few. Part of the way in which we do this is by making sure that the mining tax is put into place as quickly as we can so that we can all share in its benefits.

You need only to look at an area like my own, the seat of Dobell on the Central Coast, where people are doing it tough. They have been doing it tough for a long time. We are right next to a mining area in the Hunter, yet my area does not receive the benefits that flow from the boom that is occurring there.

It is important that we do not delay. It is important that we put in place the mining tax. What we are getting from the member for North Sydney and the opposition is a delaying tactic. It is another plank in their continued attack on the government. Their attack is about saying: 'Let's do nothing; let's take a position where we say nothing. Let's try to stop anything positive that the government is trying to do to improve the lives of ordinary Australians'—ordinary Australians such as those who live in my electorate.

I do not have terribly much time left, but I do want to make some comment on the carbon tax, which really is an industry pollution reduction scheme. That is a better way perhaps of looking at it. I had the pleasure of having the Leader of the Opposition visit my electorate last week. I put an open invitation to him: 'You have come to an electorate that has been affected by climate change. Come with me to Norah Head and see the houses that are falling off the cliff, the beaches that are washing away and the houses losing their backyards at the north entrance and the flooding of the Tuggerah Lakes.' What did he do instead? He chose to do a stunt with Weet-bix. The big issue facing Australia is Weet-bix.

Mr Christensen: There's no carbon tax on Weet-Bix—there will be—

Mr CRAIG THOMSON: Exactly! Come on in. He was asked: what is the carbon tax impact on a Weet-Bix, and what is his answer? 'I don't know.' This is a stunt of a motion. It is one that should be rejected. (Time expired)

Mr CHRISTENSEN (Dawson) (12:30): In supporting this motion, I remind the House of the purpose of a tax summit: to answer questions and consider the impact of various taxation policies. This Labor-Green government's plan to introduce a carbon tax will deliver for
Australia the biggest tax regime without a mandate that this country has ever seen. It goes against the Prime Minister’s election commitment and the Treasurer’s election commitment and the commitments of at least 144 of the 150 members of the House of Representatives. To have this tax summit after the introduction of legislation for the carbon tax or the mining tax or without them in the mix, is to make a mockery of the tax summit and to admit that both these taxes will not stand up to the scrutiny of a tax summit. Far too many questions remain unanswered for such monstrous taxes to be imposed on the people of Australia through further means of stealth and deception. Australian voters were not afforded the opportunity to ask questions before the last election as the Prime Minister’s promise that there would be no carbon tax under a government that she led took any debate off the table. Having the tax summit after these taxes are introduced or without them being considered is another means of taking the debate off the table and it is proof that when these taxes are scrutinised, we will not like what we see.

This Labor-Greens government is eager to label any scrutiny or discussion of carbon tax impacts as scaremongering. But in fact these discussions that we are having right now are at the conservative end of the scale and no-one fully understands the profound impact this tax will have on real people, real families and real communities. When we talk about 6½c a litre additional tax on fuel and $300 a year additional on electricity bills, we are talking about Treasury’s own figures based on a carbon tax of $26 per tonne. If this is scaremongering, then what will Labor call it when the figures are adjusted for the minimum $40 a tonne that is being advocated by Senator Bob Brown? What will it be if the figures are adjusted to reflect the $100 a tonne figure put forward by Senator Sarah Hanson-Young? These are the people that this government is in alliance with. This Labor-Greens government does not want their carbon tax monstrosity reviewed by the people through a tax summit. They do not even want us to discuss the basic impact of the low end of the scale. They do not even want the public to mention it.

That is understandable, because the public hates it. The public knows that this carbon tax is a bad tax. They know that it will hurt industries. They know it will hurt business. They know that it will hurt families and they know that it will cost jobs. The majority of the general public out there, the real people, real families, real communities, know that this carbon tax will not do anything to clean up the environment, but they know that it will clean out their wallets. The people of my electorate in Dawson probably have the most to lose out of these taxes. The mining tax and the carbon tax appear to them to be a direct attack on their jobs and their cost of living. It is almost as if there is a visceral hatred of productive regions like those in the electorate of Dawson from the other side. As if the mining tax was not bad enough, independent economists now say that this carbon tax of $26 a tonne will mean that 16 coalmines will be closed with 23,000 mining jobs lost. How many of those will be jobs of miners in my electorate of Dawson?

We have heard that the government will have households compensated under this carbon tax, but I tell you what: you cannot compensate someone losing their job. In regional centres that are creating the wealth, like Central Queensland, the Mackay region and the Bowen Basin, the cost of living is already higher than for the rest of the country. The boom centres pay more in freight, they pay more in rent and they pay more in groceries, but not everyone is on better wages associated with the boom. Introducing a carbon tax will increase costs on
every single thing we need. People on average incomes will not be compensated because they will be paying more—most likely a lot more. How much more will they pay? How will the carbon tax affect mining families? How will it affect non-mining families in mining towns? These are questions that we do not have answers for. The tax summit will supply some of those answers and get to the truth of the matter but, to paraphrase Jack Nicholson, it seems they cannot handle the truth. But I have a message to the government from the people: we can handle the truth; we just cannot handle two great big taxes that will be no gain and all pain.

Mr HUSIC (Chifley) (12:35): What a terrifically breezy gig shadow Treasurer is these days. The shadow Treasurer, the man relied upon by the Leader of the Opposition for advice on fiscal policy to help shape an alternative view about the budget, was unable to deliver anything in relation to savings. The shadow Treasurer went to the National Press Club and was unable to identify any savings to put forward as an alternative to the government's budget. He is a person who floats policy and is then subsequently undermined by the Leader of the Opposition. From what we are given to understand, great division exists in relation to aspects of economic policy within the coalition. Finally, the shadow Treasurer puts forward a resolution and does not even have the decency to turn up to the chamber to speak on it. This constitutes what is entailed within the shadow Treasurer position in the coalition these days. Here we have being debated a motion put forward by the shadow Treasurer, who is not present, which simply amounts to another tactic designed to play politics and wreck important reforms instead of coming up with positive ideas. On this account at least the member for North Sydney is consistent.

The government have agreed with the crossbenchers to hold the tax forum on 4 and 5 October at Parliament House, covering a broad suite of topics including sessions to discuss personal tax, transfer payments, business tax, state taxes, environmental and social taxes, and tax system governance. We will also release a discussion paper in the middle of the year to help foster the debate. We have made it clear there are parts of the tax review we will not be implementing. For instance, we will not increase the GST. But we still expect and welcome a broad and constructive debate on future priorities and challenges. We have a big economic reform agenda, and we look forward to discussing those steps at the forum. It will not surprise anyone to see the coalition playing politics already instead of coming up with positive ideas of their own.

The government have already outlined a substantial agenda that will put a price on carbon for the big polluters to change their behaviour, instead of drawing billions of the government budget as in the direct action plan being advocated by the coalition. We will also reform business taxes, boost superannuation, invest in infrastructure and provide tax breaks for small business. The government have a timetable for these reforms which includes extensive consultation through business roundtables, expert panels and other meetings. The forum itself will lay out the steps we need to take over the next decade.

As this motion would suggest, the opposition have no interest in economic reform whatsoever. They ignored the tax review, the Garnaut review, the Treasury incoming government brief and their own Shergold report on carbon pricing. They ignored overwhelming advice that a carbon price is the most cost-effective way to reduce carbon emissions, as reaffirmed recently by Professor Garnaut. They ignored the tax review advice
that resource rent taxes are more efficient than royalties, that tax should be simplified for small businesses and individuals, and that superannuation should be boosted and made fairer.

We know that the opposition care just as little about the tax forum because, despite this motion, their position is already settled. They oppose better resource taxation, company tax cuts, small business tax breaks, new infrastructure funding, a boost to superannuation, fairer superannuation incentives, larger superannuation contribution caps, personal tax simplification and a tax discount on interest income.

The government on the other hand have a proud record of reform on tax, delivering $47 billion in tax cuts and, for a person on $50,000 in the Chifley electorate, we have cut their tax by $1,750 per year. The government have committed to keep tax as a share of GDP at or below the level we inherited, which was on average 23.5 per cent. This year we are at 21.8 per cent. Contrast that with the previous government, which was the highest taxing government of all time, peaking at 24.1 per cent of GDP—21.8 per cent today; 24.1 per cent under them.

When the government released the report of the tax review and announced a substantial package of tax reforms in May last year, we made it clear that these were our first steps in a long process. Since then, we have announced a further 12 measures that deliver on reform directions outlined and identified by the tax review, including removing unintended tax incentives for people who drive more than they need in order to obtain a larger tax concession; improving small-business tax rules by replacing the entrepreneurs tax offset with a small-business tax package; and improving certainty for investors by allowing infrastructure projects of national significance to carry forward losses with an uplift factor to maintain value. These measures build on the government’s long-term plan to strengthen the economy and I welcome them. (Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Georganas): The time allotted for this debate is expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Cardiovascular Disease

Debate resumed on motion by Ms Hall:

That this House:

(1) notes that cardiovascular disease:

(a) is a heart, stroke and blood vessel disease;
(b) kills one Australian nearly every 11 minutes;
(c) affects more than 3.4 million Australians;
(d) prevents 1.4 million people from living a full life because of disability caused by the disease;
(e) affects one in five Australians, and two out of three families; and
(f) claimed the lives of almost 48 000 Australians (34 per cent of all deaths) in 2008—deaths that are largely preventable;

(2) notes that cardiovascular risk factors include:

(a) tobacco smoking;
(b) insufficient physical activity;
(c) poor nutrition;
(d) alcohol consumption;

MAIN COMMITTEE
(e) high blood pressure;
(f) high blood cholesterol;
(g) being overweight;
(h) having diabetes; and
(i) kidney (renal) failure;
(3) notes the importance of knowing the warning signs of heart attack:
   (a) discomfort or pain in the centre of the chest;
   (b) discomfort in the arms, neck, shoulders, jaw and back; and
   (c) shortness of breath, nausea, cold sweat, dizziness or light headedness;
(4) notes that recognition of heart attack and early response increases cardiovascular awareness, saving lives and preventing related disability; and
(5) acknowledges that promotion of healthy eating and increased exercise will lead to healthier lifestyles and a reduction in cardiovascular disease.

Ms HALL (Shortland—Government Whip) (12:40): This is a vitally important motion for all Australians. It raises awareness of the incidence of heart disease within our society and, at the same time, puts heart disease exactly where it should be on the map as the highest killer of Australians. Heart attack claims one Australian life every 47 minutes, and each year almost 4,000 people die of heart attack in New South Wales alone. More than half of heart-attack deaths occur before a person reaches a hospital. In an area I represent in this parliament, the Hunter-New England area, 350 people die of heart attack each year. This shows just how important it is that, as a nation, we address and recognise the importance of having a healthy cardiovascular system.

The motion before the House notes that cardiovascular disease is not only heart attack but also stroke and blood vessel disease. These diseases are intertwined and have very similar causes. They kill an enormous number of Australians and affect more than 3.4 million Australians each year. These diseases impact on people's ability to live whole and full lives, to be able to participate in employment and to enjoy sport and exercise at the level other Australians can. I know that members in this House have similar experiences to the experience I had last week, where I was talking to a constituent about their son who has a severe heart condition and is prevented from working. It has impacted on every aspect of his life, and at the same time it has caused depression, which is one of the side effects of cardiovascular disease.

It is important to note that there are things people can do and there are causes of heart disease. At the top of the list of causes is tobacco smoking. We need to exercise more. We need to eat properly. Alcohol consumption is another contributor to heart disease. So is high blood pressure. It is important that people monitor their blood pressure at all times. Something as simple as having a regular blood test to check the level of cholesterol that people have in their blood can be one of the most significant steps a person can take to lower their risk of cardiovascular disease. Diabetes and renal failure also contribute to heart disease. Many of these factors can be changed, and by changing these factors people immediately reduce their risk of heart disease. Another aspect of cardiovascular disease—and I am talking about heart attacks here—is that it is really important to recognise the fact that you are having a heart attack. There is the 'golden hour' where, if within that hour people recognise that they are
having a heart attack and get treatment, their clinical outcome is much better. People have been surveyed in the area that I live in and 39 per cent of the people who were surveyed said that, if they thought they were having a heart attack, they would wait a while and see what happened. Another 68 per cent were unaware of what heart attack symptoms were, 49 per cent would not know what to do if they were having a heart attack and 24 per cent would make sure that they were having a heart attack before they called the ambulance. There is one thing that you do if you think you may be having a heart attack: call 000. Seek help immediately because, as I mentioned, that golden hour really contributes to your outcome. So what are the warning signs of a heart attack? I think it is really important to say here that no two heart attacks are the same. People can have chest pain or pain in their arms, their shoulders, their neck, their jaw or their back. They can feel short of breath, they can feel nauseous, they can have a cold sweat or they can be dizzy or lightheaded. These are all signs of a heart attack. So there is no one fit for all.

I was at the launch of Go Red for Women on 6 May in the Hunter, and I will talk a little bit more about that in a moment. A speaker at the launch was a woman who had suffered a heart attack and her symptom was heartburn. She had had heartburn for a few days before. She said, 'I was just throwing down the antacid and it kept coming back.' She had her grandchildren when she had her heart attack. She was very fortunate that her young grandchild called the ambulance and she got to hospital. She thought that she was healthy. She was a very active woman in her late 50s or 60s. She worked and assisted with the care of her grandchildren. She exercised and she did not smoke. But the one thing that she did not check on was her cholesterol level. It is so important that people embrace the message put out by the Heart Foundation.

As I mentioned earlier, on 6 May I launched the Heart Foundation's Go Red for Women campaign in the Hunter. It is a campaign designed to raise awareness of heart disease in women. The facts relating to women and heart disease are really frightening and I do not think that they are recognised. The first thing is: what is the biggest killer of women in Australia? The No. 1 killer is heart disease. It kills four times as many women as breast cancer does. Most people do not know that. I think it is a really frightening fact. People tend to think that heart disease is something that just affects older men. Wrong. Almost as many women die from heart disease as men. So it is very important that women take responsibility for their health. Do not ignore those little signs. Act to turn it around. The message of the Go Red for Women campaign this year encourages women to take action. Part of taking action and something that women can do is joining the Healthy Heart Challenge. I have signed up for the Healthy Heart Challenge and it starts on 1 June. It was trialled in Queensland last year and I was an outsider who signed up. Following the guidelines of the challenge, I managed to lose 10 kilos over a period of time. There are tips on improving nutrition, because nutrition is very important, and tips on being active. The approach that I am taking this year is to try to increase my physical activity. I have put down a few goals. The first thing I am going to do is start a walking group. The first one of our walks will be leaving the start of the Fernleigh Track in Belmont on 4 June this year. The following week I am looking to have one down at Buff Point, in the southern part of my electorate. So at 8.30 in the morning on 4 June I hope that I have a number of people join me for that walk.
Given the importance of heart disease and the importance of the Heart Foundation, I would like members who are speaking in this debate today to join with me to become friends of the Heart Foundation and fight cardiovascular disease. I would like to start a group here in parliament. It is very, very important that we get out there and get the message to all Australians. We need to take it back to our electorates. We can change things simply by taking action.

Mr WYATT (Hasluck) (12:51): I rise today to support the motion put forward by my colleague the member for Shortland on the seriousness of cardiovascular disease and its implications for the health of Australians. Cardiovascular disease is a heart and blood vessel disease that kills one Australian every 11 minutes. Sadly, I have had a long and personal association with sufferers of cardiovascular disease. In my time as director of Aboriginal health in New South Wales and Western Australia, I had the opportunity to visit and spend time with cardiovascular disease patients in programs on both sides of the country.

Cardiovascular disease covers all diseases and conditions of the heart and blood vessels. There are many forms and causes of diseases in this diverse group. The main underlying problem is atherosclerosis. In this condition, abnormal build-ups of fat, cholesterol and other substances occur in the inner lining of arteries. It is most serious when it affects the blood supply to the heart, causing angina or heart attack, or to the brain, which can lead to a stroke. It is a slow and complex process, often starting in childhood, and it progresses with age.

The major preventable risk factors for cardiovascular disease are tobacco smoking, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, insufficient physical activity, overweight and obesity, poor nutrition, diabetes and risky alcohol consumption. It is estimated that 92 per cent of Australian adults have at least one risk factor and almost 40 per cent have three or more risk factors. I would hazard a guess that many of us in this House belong to that 40 per cent.

Cardiovascular disease affects more than 3.4 million Australians and prevents 1.4 million from living a full life because of the disability caused by it. In 2008, for example, it claimed the lives of almost 50,000 Australians. Cardiovascular disease is the most expensive disease group in terms of direct healthcare expenditure, at $5.9 billion. Advances in cardiovascular disease research, detection, prevention and care management plans have seen a reduction in the loss of life. I have lost family members to this disease and know firsthand the pain and suffering that those left behind must go through every day of their waking lives as they miss a member of the family. The tragedy is that the majority of these deaths were preventable.

I commend successive governments for their work in helping to change the culture of smoking in Australia. It is having an effect. When you travel overseas, one of the first things you notice is how many people are smoking and where they are allowed to smoke. Returning to Australia, it is nice to be able to breathe fresh air, most of the time, without someone blowing smoke in your face. This antismoking effort has long been bipartisan in Australia, and long may it continue. But there needs to be more effort to re-engage those people in Australia who are under the impression that, if we do not smoke, then our risk of cardiovascular disease is very low. Unfortunately this is not the case. Many of us now live very sedentary lifestyles. We get in the car, go to work, come home and sit down to work or watch television. This is understandable, especially as people are working more hours now than ever before.
A result of this increased work-life imbalance is poor nutrition. After a long day it is often too easy to get a takeaway meal or cook something very basic at home. This is why places like McDonald's and Hungry Jack's become very popular, because of the convenience aspect. This can lead to high blood pressure, being overweight, diabetes and increasing cholesterol levels.

Kidney failure as a result of the above is a devastating long-term health consequence which kills thousands of Australians every year. I know people that receive regular dialysis and it is very challenging for them personally and for the families who have to care for that person. There are many initiatives to try and warn the public of the dangers of cardiovascular disease, but often we are too busy to hear them. However, I commend these efforts.

I would like, not dissimilarly to my colleague, to put on the record the warning signs of a heart attack, so that people reading this might call for an ambulance if they notice the symptoms themselves or in someone else. Discomfort or pain in the centre of the chest is a key signal of an impending heart attack. Along with this is discomfort in the arms or neck, shoulders, jaw or the back. Other signs include shortness of breath, dizziness, nausea, cold sweats or light-headedness. I too would like to call on more Australians to take a senior first aid course so they can help save the life of someone having a heart attack. Just last week, I saw a person being resuscitated on the side of the road not far from my electoral office. The people kept the man alive until an ambulance could fight its way through peak hour traffic. Those few moments are crucial. Without CPR, many people that are here today would have passed away before help could arrive.

But we know of course that prevention is better than a cure. I support local initiatives such as the 'walk to work and 'walk to school' days when they arise, and when taking public transport I try and get off a stop early so that I am forced to walk to my destination. Just 30 minutes a day of regular walking or exercise makes a dramatic difference to a person's cardiovascular health. None of these things are easy. Most of us are so busy we hardly take time to relax, let alone exercise. But it is also important that more effort needs to be made to ensure we live productive and healthier lives. I would like this House to note that the recognition of a heart attack and an early response increases cardiovascular awareness which, in turn, saves lives and prevents a related disability. I would also like this House to acknowledge that the promotion of healthy eating and increased exercise will lead to healthier lifestyles and a reduction in cardiovascular disease.

Like the member for Shortland, I have been part of many programs in this country that have shaped some thinking around compliance with medications. But in addition to the compliance with medications and the management plans that are put in place, there is the whole notion that exercise is absolutely critical, along with the reduction of the factors that cause cardiovascular disease.

In New South Wales I had the opportunity of working with a group of people who developed a program called the Mini Olympics. What was incredible was that people with chronic diseases, in particular cardiovascular diseases, used to come to these Mini Olympics. They did it for two reasons. One was that they shared information about what their health problem was and what they could do about it and they could take tips from each other in order to improve both their physical health condition and also their mental condition. Taking a
positive attitude alleviates the depression that people often feel when they get a debilitating illness or a disease that in a sense creates a disability for them.

I was asked to join in and I lined up behind a lady who had had a significant heart attack requiring open heart surgery. They had lines marked so that when you were playing in the Mini Olympics you stood according to your degree of incapability or the stress it would put on you. I took my turn and stood on the front line and she said, ‘Hey, you, back here. You have not had a heart attack. You have not had an operation so you have to stand on the back line in order to play.’

The thing I liked was the competitiveness between the towns in the south-eastern region of New South Wales where they do this. The other element was the way in which they would talk quite openly about the cardiovascular diseases, the doctors and the specialists they had. And they helped each other. They talked about nutrition, the exercises they did and the things that they did when they were alone at home. So it did not become a barrier. What I liked was the positivity. I too join with the member for Shortland in any work that we do around increasing the knowledge of cardiovascular disease and the way we can prevent it.

But more important is bring quality to the lives of families, particularly those who have lost someone as well. Too often I have seen individuals impacted by the loss of a life due to a heart attack. But the more telling one is those who have strokes. I have seen some very capable and gifted people lose their capability to communicate and to do the things they had been doing prior to the stroke. The frustration that one must feel within that body would be quite noticeable, and I hope that I never reach that stage. I must admit that my other half has bought me one of those elliptical walking machines in order for me to lose weight. It is so easy for us as members of this House to accumulate weight because of all the functions we attend, the commitments that we have and the sedentary life that we lead in this chamber.

Mr MURPHY (Reid) (13:01): I am very pleased to speak on the member for Shortland’s motion about cardiovascular disease, and I applaud her for it. As the member has pointed out, cardiovascular disease is a heart, stroke and blood vessel disease. Alarmingly, cardiovascular disease kills one Australian every 11 minutes, and affects more than 3.4 million Australians or two out of three families. In 2008 the disease was responsible for 34 per cent of all deaths in Australia. Sadly, many of these deaths are preventable through the right diet, lifestyle choices and medical treatment. As the member for Shortland and the member for Hasluck have pointed out, the risk factors include smoking, high blood cholesterol, obesity, alcohol consumption, high blood pressure, renal failure and diabetes.

According to the National Health and Medical Research Council, cardiovascular disease was significantly higher in females, at 55 per cent compared with males at 45 per cent. Cardiovascular disease is also identified as one of the leading causes of disability with about 1.4 million Australians estimated to have a disability associated with cardiovascular conditions. In 2008, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reported that cardiovascular disease is the most expensive disease group in terms of direct healthcare expenditure—$5.9 billion. Because of the known cost to the community and the potential for prevention, much funding has gone into research on cardiovascular diseases. In fact, between 2000 and 2007, NHMRC invested over $439.5 million in research. Knowing the signs of heart attack can also help response time and could save lives and prevent related disability, as pointed out by both the member for Shortland and the member for Hasluck. It bears
mentioning the signs again—discomfort or pain in the chest, arms, neck, shoulders, jaw or back, shortness of breath, nausea, cold sweats, dizziness or light-headedness. Cardiovascular disease is a very serious health problem in Australia. However, continued efforts to raise awareness and encourage positive change will make a big difference, as the members have previously pointed out.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare published some positive results in 2004—a fall in the death rate from heart, stroke and vascular disease coincided with a 21 per cent and a 16 per cent fall in smoking rates for males and females respectively over the decade. It also coincided with a 50 per cent fall in the prevalence of high blood pressure since the 1980s and a 25 per cent fall in the incidence of coronary events in the last decade. It also highlighted that over the same period there was a rapid increase in community use of prescription drugs to lower blood pressure and blood cholesterol, and antiplatelet drugs.

Despite the declining rates of certain health problems, there are many others on the rise that contribute to cardiovascular disease, notably obesity, which you, Mr Deputy Speaker Georganas, know all about with your great work in the last parliament on the inquiry dealing with obesity. On 13 May this year the Minister for Health launched a Swap It, Don’t Stop It campaign, which urges Australians to make simple lifestyle changes to become healthier by swapping large meals for smaller meals, frequent treats for occasional treats, fried food for fresh food and stationary activities for more active pursuits. The Swap It campaign follows on from the Measure Up campaign and is directed particularly at 20- to 25-year-olds with children. It is increasingly important that adults take the lead in healthier lifestyle choices and provide the right example for their children. On 16 March this year I was delighted to join parents, staff and students at the National Ride2School Day at St Mark's Primary School in Drummoyne in my electoral of Reid. In a sea of scooters, bikes and skateboards, the students were thoroughly thrilled to have made it to school on their own wheels. The strong support for the federal government's initiative was clearly evident and would not be possible without the encouragement and interests of teachers and parents. I congratulate the St Mark's Primary School community for showing their support for Ride2School Day and I extend my congratulations to many other schools in my electorate of Reid that also participated in that event. More recently our government has also encouraged students to walk to school. I know many students in my electorate and elsewhere have participated in this program also and I again applaud all participants for taking the time to encourage healthier lifestyles and lifestyle choices.

Australia is very lucky to enjoy a temperate climate that facilitates many outdoor activities and an abundance of fresh fruit and vegetables, meat and dairy products. I applaud the initiative of the member for Shortland today in promoting a healthy lifestyle and I commend her in her efforts to establish a parliamentary group of friends of the Heart Foundation. (Time expired)

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (13:06): I am sure all my colleagues on this side of the House support the general intention of this motion on cardiovascular disease. The coalition will always support sensible proposals, and this is no exception. I was particularly encouraged to speak on this motion today given the Heart Foundation's launch of this year's Go Red for Women campaign, which unites women in the fight against heart disease, the biggest killer of
Australian women. Surprisingly, a woman is four times more likely to die of heart disease than of breast cancer.

While there is little doubt that we have largely eliminated many fatal diseases that still afflict less developed and less affluent countries, we still have significant health problems. These are often of our own making through overconsumption and inactivity. Cardiovascular disease is high on the list of such diseases, affecting 3.4 million people and resulting in the death of one person every 11 minutes. This, despite heart diseases being in many cases simply a by-product of personal lifestyle choices.

Surgical treatment of advanced cardiovascular disease is expensive and frequently does not result in a good outcome. In sharp contrast, early diagnosis and preventive treatment normally provides a much better outcome at a significantly lower financial cost. Clearly then our responsibility in this place is to ensure that all Australians are aware of these stark facts and are encouraged to seek medical advice in any case of doubt. Symptoms of cardiovascular disease may be present quite early, particularly if predisposing factors such as smoking, being overweight or high blood pressure are present.

In light of the benefits of an early diagnosis, research is currently being conducted at the University of Queensland in my electorate of Ryan into detecting heart disease through a simple saliva test. This is the first research of its kind conducted in Australia, and the team at the University of Queensland has made significant inroads. Currently heart disease is diagnosed through a biomolecule taken from blood. However, Dr Charmindie Punyadeera and her team have made a huge breakthrough by identifying the same biomolecule in saliva. This means that patients can receive a highly accurate non-invasive diagnosis in less than 15 minutes, making early detection and treatment of cardiovascular disease much more successful. Such research could lead to cardiac patients being able to monitor and treat their disease effectively from the comfort of their own home, ensuring considerably less stress and saving government and individuals alike on health costs. The benefits of this research alone demonstrate the need for continued funding of medical research.

No-one would seriously recommend a strategy of running their car until it breaks down before getting it serviced, so why would one follow such a policy with their own health? As with servicing a car, a regular check-up visit to one's doctor is really the only sensible course.

In conclusion, may I reiterate my support for moves to make a preventive approach the default in dealing with cardiovascular disease and similar diseases affected by lifestyle which afflict Australians. Success in this endeavour will bring a health and lifestyle bonus to a significant number of Australians while reducing needless demands on the public purse, and is therefore very worthwhile. As the member for Moreton will attest, the Brisbane City Council runs the very successful Active School Travel Program in which they have a regular Walking Wheeling Wednesday for all schoolchildren throughout the Brisbane City Council area.

I commend the suggestion of the member for Shortland that we in this place should become more active. I note that one of the six key goals for women—and the challenge for the Go Red for Women campaign is that we adopt one of these six key goals—is to be active every day, so perhaps in this place more of us should take the stairs instead of catching the elevator.
I look forward to congestion on the stairways in Parliament House as we all get healthy in the future.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Georganas): Order! The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

**International Women's Day**

Debate resumed on motion by Ms Brodtmann:

That this House acknowledges the:

(1) one hundredth anniversary of International Women's Day on 8 March 2011 and celebrates the achievements of women throughout the world; and

(2) need to continue to fight against the barrier that stops women achieving equal rights and equal opportunities throughout the world.

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (13:11): The eighth of March 2011 marked the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day. This day is a celebration of the great achievements of women throughout the world and throughout our history, from women’s suffrage to reproductive rights. It is because of the work of giants past that I am able to stand in this chamber and speak today. In this place, I carry the dreams, the work and the sacrifice of others and I want to thank them. A century ago, it would have been novel and perhaps inconceivable that women would stand in this great chamber, and it is thanks to many famous and not so famous women that I can.

It is also thanks to my working-class matriarchy that I can—thanks to my grandmother Enid Anderson and my great-grandmother Ada Huggins. In the language of the day, both were ‘in service’. My great-grandmother supported 13 children on her own in a house with dirt floors. I thank my grandmother, who worked three jobs and lived in fear that the state would take her children because she was poor. I thank my mother, Faye Anderson, who worked hard to ensure that all three of her daughters would go to university. It is because of the hardheaded determination of these women and others like them that I have been able to run a successful business, sit on boards and be elected to parliament.

While we have much to celebrate, we are not done and more must be done. We must continue to fight for equal pay and equal burden sharing in the home. We must also continue to fight to improve the representation of women on boards. Research shows that improving diversity on boards, including increasing the number of women, has a positive impact on the performance of an organisation. I have witnessed this firsthand through the boards I have been a member of, both commercial and not-for-profit. While women make up 45 per cent of our workforce they hold only 10.9 per cent of positions on ASX 200 boards, according to the Women On Boards website, and 87 ASX companies still do not have a woman on their board.

We as a society—and I say ‘a society’ because a solution lies not just with government—must do more to encourage and create opportunities to sit on boards. I would like to commend the government on its joint initiative with the Australian Institute of Company Directors to offer 70 scholarships to give Australian women the skills they need to become directors or chairs. More than 1,900 women from across the country applied for the program, so clearly women are ready, willing and able to serve.
I also want to ensure that women have the financial literacy to plan for their retirement. My mum is on the pension, and as the member for Canberra I speak each week to women, many of them retired, who are doing it tough living on the pension, living in social housing. I am worried that too many women have not planned for their future beyond work. I am worried that too many women do not have a plan for retirement. For my own part, I am organising seminars to help women understand how much superannuation they have so they can work out how much they need for their retirement and how much they need to put away each week. That way, they will be empowered to work out how long they can take off with their babies, how long they can work part-time if they so choose, and when they can retire. Understanding the detail of what they need for their retirement will allow them to better plan for their futures. I am fortunate enough to say that these are the concerns of a woman in a developed country. I have just returned from a week in Afghanistan with the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Defence Subcommittee, where we had the opportunity to visit defence bases in Tarin Kowt and Kandahar. We also had a number of calls in Kabul and met with members of the lower house. One of them was a woman and she was very committed to improving women's rights there. So it was a great opportunity to actually meet with her. The situation for women in Afghanistan is suboptimal in most parts of the country, particularly in the provinces. In Oruzgan, female literacy is just 0.8 per cent and infant mortality is 37 per cent. Many girls are married at age 13 and many women have between 10 and 15 children.

We have come a long way in the last 100 years, but our achievements have barely touched many women in developing countries. We still need to fight to ensure equal rights and equal opportunities are shared by our sisters throughout the world.

Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (13:15): Injustice has a finite life span. The pendulum will always swing to the right. Born out of inequality and oppression, International Women's Day recognises the economic, political and social achievements of women. On 8 March this year, International Women's Day celebrated its 100th anniversary. It is also a day celebrated worldwide that honours those who lived with this inequality and oppression and who fought to end it. Those first campaigners marched for women's rights to work, to vote, to be trained, to hold public office and to end discrimination. In March 1911, more than one million women and men attended rallies to campaign for women's rights.

Last night I was blessed to see the ABC Compass program on Patricia Brennan. As a former missionary doctor cum feminist theologian, Patricia is best known for her very public role in the fight for the ordination of women in Australia, a country which now has 400 Anglican women priests, 200 deacons and two women bishops. What is less known about Patricia is that she was also a specialist in forensic medicine and that most of her work in recent years dealt with sexual violence against women and children. The program is a moving biopic of an extraordinary woman of our time. I love how she was described: a woman of wild intelligence and uncommon valour, a seeker after truth and justice, lavish with kindness, quick to laugh and a lover of life.

Only a week ago at St James Church, Pakenham, we celebrated 13 years of service by the Reverend Hilary Roath. The Reverend Hilary Roath was one of those 400 Anglican women priests. I was asked almost 14 years ago by Neil Speedie what I thought about a female priest. I said, 'That is no problem for me. All of my life I have been surrounded by women working in the ministry and taking leadership roles in our community.' Hilary began her service at St...
James when the issue of ordination of women and the appointment to churches was still controversial. Hilary was a daughter, a mother, a grandmother, a great-grandmother, a pastor, a confessor, a confidante, a priest, a community activist and a friend. She lived her life in the exhilaration of birth, the celebration of marriage and the sorrow of death every week of her congregation's life. She was a teacher, a storyteller and a defender of the faith. She helped turn the annual Christmas Carols by Candlelight from a small singsong to a grand celebration of the birth of the living God, with thousands of people attending the celebration each year. Hilary laughed with the joyous, cried with the broken-hearted and walked with those with a wounded spirit. Hilary grew and changed from a woman who happened to be a priest to a priest who happened to be a woman. She stands upright today as a great achiever: a woman in a man's world, much loved and appreciated, carried by her personal courage and her grace. Hilary retired on 15 May, and many tears were shed. I was honoured to speak at the service and I spoke about a large candle, of the type you see in churches. They are very thick and, when you first light them, they are easily snuffed out, but as they burn over the years and the wick and the flame go deeper into the candle they become nearly impossible to snuff out because the candle goes down so low that, even if you do blow it out, the heat in the wick and the power of the hot wax usually flame the wick again, and then you have to try to put it out again. It cannot be put out.

In my address I said that Hilary was like that candle in the church. With all the trials and tribulations of a woman in that service at that time, over these 13 years, she was the candle that could not be blown out. Whilst the member for Canberra talked about the history and importance of women through the generations, we should never forget the women who are around us today, equally serving and equally contributing, like Patricia Brennan, who has, sadly, passed away. What a great legacy she leaves and what a great legacy one of her own, Hilary Roath, leaves in our local community.

Ms BURKE (Chisholm) (13:21): I also rise to speak on the motion on International Women's Day and I congratulate all those who have spoken, especially the member for McMillan as the token bloke in this debate because, for women to progress in this world, it is not a female issue; it is a gender-equality issue and all people need to embrace the change. One of the deterrents to full equality, for women and men to participate equally in our developed world, is that the unfortunate burden of housework still falls disproportionately to women. I have spoken at many functions for International Women's Day, and at a couple of women's luncheons recently, and my message is that, until the blokes do their fair share around the house, we are never going to progress on this issue. That might be a flippant comment but it is actually one of the defining factors in how we determine the roles of men and women in our society.

On 8 March 2001, Australia joined with the rest of the world to celebrate 100 years of progress towards gender equality. International Women's Day gives women global recognition for their achievements. One of the things we forget is that this is regardless of nationality, ethnicity and linguistic, cultural and political background. It is an internationally recognised day. It is one of the few that most countries around the world actually observe.

In 1911, when the first International Women's Day was recognised, more than one million women and men attended International Women's Day rallies, campaigning for the right of women to work, vote, be trained and hold public office and to end discrimination. Tragically,
as we celebrate 100 years down the track, we are still fighting for the same things. Much progress has been made, but it is not universal and it is not in every country across the globe. Whilst this is an occasion to look back on past struggles and accomplishments, it is, more importantly, an occasion to look forward to the yet to be realised potential and opportunities that await further generations of women, and also to the opportunities that gender equality presents for men.

In Australia, we have had some significant milestones. Our progress includes the first women's vote, in South Australia in 1895: it was the first place in the world where women were given the right to vote at a state level. In 1902, Australia was one of the first to give women the right both to vote and to stand for public office at the federal level. Sadly, though, the numbers are not great in that instance. Women make up over 51 per cent of the populace in Australia but, since Federation, there has been a grand total of 1,578 members of both the Senate and the House of Representatives in Australia, of whom only 143 have been women. These are statistics from the last parliament and I apologise because I have not updated them. Over our years of federation and consistent democracy in Australia, only 9.1 per cent of the total participants in the federal parliament have been female.

We need to be doing more on this, but we also need to be doing more at a local level. I attended many women's luncheons and someone said to me, 'What have you done in your own electorate to progress women's equality?' I was stumped by that and I thought, 'What have I done at a personal level in my electorate, more than just being a figurehead and representative of someone who can achieve this?' I have been in parliament for 13 years and I have an 11-year-old and a nine-year-old, so I have juggled quite a lot of what many women grapple with in being in the workforce. I owe a lot of that to my partner. As I say, let us not take away from the equality and the mix of that. In my electorate I have seen and supported some great things. At a sporting level, which is analogous of other things, the Box Hill soccer club—a great soccer club—for many years only had a seniors women's team. Recently, a senior men's team asked to join because the women's team was doing so well and they wanted to learn from their example. The rugby union club—in Melbourne that is a bit odd—was the first to have a female team. It was the first to get a rugby women's team up and running and those women have been participating actively in rugby union. So, if we can engender women to participate in all things, particularly in sports where you do not usually see them, that is a way of showing that we need to do more. We need particularly to do more in developed countries; we need to be leading by example; we need to ensure that in Third World countries their issues are not about getting into parliament but about health care, education and domestic violence. Tragically, domestic violence is still on the rise in Australia. More needs to be done, but we have a lot to be proud of.

Mrs ANDREWS (McPherson) (13:26): I rise to speak on the member for Canberra's motion on International Women's Day. International Women's Day has been celebrated for 100 years. It is a day to reflect on the economic, political and social achievements of women. As we reflect on the last 100 years, many things have changed. Women in Australia have more choices at all stages of their lives. They can go to school and study subjects of their choice. They can go to university to continue their studies if they wish. They can enrol in the course of their choice, subject to academic entry requirements. They have the choice of working after they have married and returning to work after they have had children.
Legislation has been passed that provides for equal opportunity, but have attitudes really changed over the years? Is there now true gender equality?

There are a number of observations that I can make in relation to my electorate of McPherson. From a political perspective, there are four state seats that are either wholly or partly within the boundary of McPherson. Three of those four seats are held by women. There are six council divisions, again either wholly or partially within McPherson, and three of those six divisions are held by women. So, arguably for McPherson voters, the gender of elected representatives is not an issue. I make the point that I believe that those who make it to this place have a special duty to remember and acknowledge the contribution to society that women make and to encourage other women to consider a role in politics.

When I look at surf lifesaving I see an increasing number of girls and women becoming actively involved and being acknowledged formally for their skill and competence at the annual award presentation ceremonies, and many of those award ceremonies are currently being conducted throughout the Gold Coast. When I look at small business I see an increasing number of women starting and operating a small business, particularly a micro business, many of which are operated from home. When I look at community organisations I see an increasing number of women taking on executive committee roles, as well as providing operational support, as they have done in some cases for many, many years. I believe that women are perfectly placed to represent communities. They appreciate and listen using broad inputs; they understand the difference between outputs and outcomes.

I am a mechanical engineer, an industrial advocate, a small business operator and a politician. I am the mother of three beautiful daughters, Emma, Jane and Kate, who I miss every day that I am here. I understand the conflicts that working mothers face every single day. For those women who choose to stay at home and tend to the children, I understand your choices and celebrate your right to choose that course. Women who stay at home work hard and deserve recognition for placing families first, often to the detriment of their careers.

I turn now to the issue of the recent decision in the equal remuneration case 2011, handed down by Fair Work Australia last week. The case revolved around non-government social and community services—SACS—workers employed in mainly not-for-profit organisations. It is a sector with which I am familiar. This decision is not about male and female gender based pay. At its core is an argument about one predominantly female private sector employment grouping against another that involves state and local government employees. It is a comparison of two predominantly female groupings. I am troubled by a decision that focuses on arguments based on the pay rates between the private and government sectors in the name of comparable worth.

David Gregory, Director of Workplace Policy with the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said of the decision:

… the Tribunal's willingness to compare public sector wage levels with private sector awards is a dangerous path given the very different circumstances between the business of governments and the business of private community employers, many of whom are small not-for-profit businesses.

Mr Gregory went on to say that ACCI will continue its intervention in this case 'to ensure that the gender pay jurisdiction remains tightly limited to actual and genuine claims about gender rather than other wage setting factors'.
I make it clear that I support equal pay for work of equal value, but I do not support a claim for a wage increase for predominantly female sectors based on a comparison of the public and private sector wage rates.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Georganas): Order! The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Sitting suspended from 13:31 to 16:01

BILLs

Customs Tariff Amendment (2012 Harmonized System Changes) Bill 2011

Second Reading

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

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (16:01): I rise to speak on the Customs Tariff Amendment (2012 Harmonized System Changes) Bill 2011. The bill amends the Customs Tariff Act 1995 as a result of the fourth review by the World Customs Organisation of the Harmonised Commodity Description and Coding System by effecting changes required by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, relating to food security; the Rotterdam Convention, relating to hazardous chemicals and pesticides; and the Montreal protocol, relating to halogenated hydrocarbons.

As noted in the bill's explanatory memorandum, the harmonised system is a system of goods classification based on six-digit codes. The six-digit classification uniquely identifies all traded goods and commodities and is uniform across all countries that have adopted the harmonised system. The harmonised system multipurpose goods classification is used as the foundation for customs tariffs and for the collection of international trade statistics. It comprises about 5,000 commodity groups, each identified by a six-digit code arranged in a legal and logical structure, with well-defined rules to achieve uniform classification.

Australia is a signatory to the harmonised system. Since 1988, the harmonised system has formed the basis of Australia's commodity classifications for traded goods, both imports and exports. The World Customs Organisation, the administering body, reassesses the harmonised system every five years to reflect changes in industry practice, technological advances and variations in international trade patterns. The World Customs Organisation completed the fourth review of the harmonised system in June 2010. The harmonised system requires Australia, along with other countries who are signatories, to apply these changes from 1 January next year.

The bill's EM also notes that this bill will make 800 technical amendments to existing classifications in the Customs Tariff Act and states:
The amendments concentrate particularly on environmental and social issues that are of global concern, including the use of the Harmonized System for identifying goods of specific importance to the food security programme of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

Other amendments from the fourth review of the harmonised system have resulted from changes in international trade patterns. The explanatory memorandum further states:
These include deleting more than 40 subheadings due to the low volume of trade in specific products, separately identifying certain commodities in either existing or new headings, and reflecting advances in technology where possible. Finally, a number of amendments aim to clarify texts to ensure uniform application of the Harmonized System Nomenclature.

The coalition supports the passage of this bill, which gives effect to the harmonised system changes while maintaining existing levels of tariff protection and margins of tariff preference. The coalition supports efforts at progressing international trade which we believe will deliver the greatest benefit to the global economy and to Australia. We therefore commend the bill to the House.

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (16:04): I rise to speak on the Customs Tariff Amendment (2012 Harmonized System Changes) Bill 2011. This bill is well supported and well understood across both houses. While it does a lot of different technical things, it does one very important thing—that is, to make sure that Australia meets its World Customs Organisation, or WCO, commitments. Australia does that as part of a global network of customs organisations that have made a commitment to ensuring that there is a tracking system and a six-digit-number system for goods that are imported and exported. There are over 200 countries participating in the system and Australia is one of the signatories. We are currently in the fourth review of that system.

This bill before the House has approximately 800 amendments, which is an awful lot, covering a range of different subheadings. Those amendments are mainly to the Customs Tariff Act 1995. As I said, these changes result from a World Customs Organisation review—a review of the harmonised commodity system, also known as the harmonised system. This system is unique and it uniquely identifies everything that is traded, everything that moves in and out of member countries—of which there are over 200—right across the world. Its uniqueness is that it is uniform and that it is agreed to by all the countries that use the system. Since 1988, this system has formed the basis of Australia's commodity classification for traded goods.

But like all things, even those that work well, the system needs review from time to time as things change, as goods come on and off markets or as we find that there are new classifications needed for particular chemicals, products or dangerous goods. Some of these latter items need to be closely monitored and identified as they travel from one country to the next for a whole range of very good reasons, not the least being environmental and social impacts. The driving forces behind this fourth review, in fact, are those two key areas of environmental impact and social impact across the globe. It was agreed that these issues were of global concern and that this harmonised system for identifying goods of specific importance was needed.

It would not surprise members in this House to understand that some of these goods relate specifically to food security, something about which I have spoken many times before—food security and food programs, particularly their relationship to the agricultural organisations of the United Nations. As you can probably understand from that, it is quite a complex system of tracking goods—particular agricultural commodities and products—across a lot of countries. There are literally tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of movements. To maintain the proper integrity of the system, it is vital for any country that it not only
understands what goods travel in and outside of its jurisdictional borders, but that it can properly track, monitor and respond to anything that occurs with such goods.

There is a particular emphasis in this review on certain fish and certain fish products. These, in recent years, have become particularly important as there is more trade, particularly among ASEAN countries, of particular fish products. The tracking of these products may be for health reasons or security reasons, but it may also be tracking of rare or protected species. It is a really important part of this system to properly inform governments of the movement of specific types of products. It can be very helpful in formulating policies and ensuring appropriate customs and border protection with respect to these products.

The new amendments will also create some new subheadings, specifically for chemicals—recognising new chemicals or altered chemicals and making sure there is proper tracking of those as well. That will include particular pesticides and—something which I think is really important and which has come back onto the agenda after some many years—ozone-depleting products. Members and senators, I am sure, can recall the very successful campaigns to rid the world of ozone-depleting chemicals and gases. The success of those campaigns was very important, but we need to continue to monitor and track any new chemicals, new products or new gases that are coming onto the markets through these unique identifiers. This will facilitate the monitoring and control of international trade in these products under the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade and the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. It is quite comprehensive; hence there are these 800 amendments contained within it. There is obviously a lot of change.

The bill also amends schedules 5, 6, 7 and 8 of the Customs Tariff Act 1995. This will give effect to the application of duty on imported products, particularly from the United States of America, Thailand, Chile, New Zealand and ASEAN nations which are under Australia’s bilateral free trade agreements. Something the bill does not do is change existing levels of industry protection and margins of tariff protection on imported goods, including goods imported under the free trade agreements. That is an important part of this bill. It isolates all of those products to the harmonisation system and does not impact or impinge in any way on the very complex system of World Trade Organisation regulations and agreements to which Australia is a signatory. This bill will ensure that we maintain the existing levels, so no-one ought to have any fear or concern that any of its 800 amendments will have some sort of material impact on the customs and other protection measures currently in place. Another bill which is coming to the House shortly will deal more specifically with antidumping measures, and there is certainly much more that can be said and needs to be done in those areas.

This bill ensures that Australia does meet its obligations under the harmonised system in a manner consistent with that of our major trading partners. It helps to monitor and control trade in chemicals, including ozone-depleting chemicals, and will provide certainty to our importers and exporters. It is fair to say that Australia has a pretty strong track record in its capacity to deal with its trading partners, whether that be through bilateral free trade, through free trade generally speaking or through the World Trade Organisation. Australia does have a strong reputation not only for meeting its obligations and understanding what those obligations are but also for being a fair actor.
Something not acknowledged enough in these debates is the way in which Australia conducts itself in the global trade market. That is not to say that it is an equal and fair playing field and that all countries play by the same rules, because the reality is that they do not. While it is a complex and sophisticated set of arrangements around trade, Australia ought to understand better that it is a fast-moving environment, an environment where trading partners and trading organisations can react much more quickly and robustly than our own regulatory systems or the agreements that we set up sometimes do. It is something that ought always to be in the back of our minds when we talk about trade monitoring and controls and when we look at the systems that are in place.

The bill before us today is certainly well supported by everyone in this House. It is a bill for which the Hon. Brendan O'Connor, in his role as Minister for Home Affairs and responsible for a range of other portfolios, ought to be commended. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (16:14): I rise to speak on the Customs Tariff Amendment (2012 Harmonized System Changes) Bill 2011 and to support the comments of the member for Stirling. This bill has no financial impacts on the economy, except perhaps creating a lot of reading for the thousands of customs agents around the nation. The bill makes no changes to any existing level of tariff or any existing tariff preferences. This bill merely contains some 800 amendments to the existing classification numbering system in the Customs Tariff Act 1995, which resulted from the fourth review of the International Convention on the Harmonised Commodity Description and Coding System, commonly referred to as the harmonised code. These amendments are fully supported by the coalition.

The Harmonised Commodity Description and Coding System is an international standard system of names and numbers for classifying traded products that are exported and imported throughout the world. Australia is a signatory to this harmonised system. This standardised system of classifying products has been developed over a period of 100 years and is currently maintained by the World Customs Organisation, based in Belgium. The harmonised system has the aim of facilitating international trade and is used by more than 200 countries and economies throughout the world. Today, over 98 per cent of all merchandise and international trade is classified using this method.

The harmonised coding system provides a vital tool in facilitating international trade as, firstly, it provides an organised basis for each nation to set their customs tariff schedules whereby the rates of duty payable are transparent and easily understood by both importers and exporters; secondly, it provides a method for the collection of international trade statistics for administrative and statistical purposes; and, thirdly, it provides a background to enhance effective trade negotiations between all countries. The harmonised system is therefore the universal economic language and a code for goods. It is an indispensable tool in international trade.

The harmonised system uniquely identifies all traded goods and commodities with a six-digit code. These six-digit codes are uniform across all countries that have adopted the system. However, countries may also use additional digits to create eight-digit codes for their own domestic purposes. The Customs Tariff Act provides an eight-digit classification made up of a six-digit international classification supplemented by two digits for our own domestic tariff purposes.
I will give a few examples of how the harmonised code system works to uniquely identify all traded goods and commodities. The entire classification system is organised into 21 sections and 96 chapters. The first two numbers of each six-digit code identify the commodity's chapter. The 96 chapters begin at 01, which includes all live animals, and then proceed to categories with increasing complexity. As an example, let us say you are interested in importing or exporting pink batts for, who knows, as far-fetched as it may seem, some government one day may have lost its way to such an extent that it dreams up some harebrained scheme that spends billions of dollars to give away free pink batts to all and sundry. Sometimes, fact is stranger than fiction. In any such tax-free funded giveaway, the local industry would be unlikely to supply all of the demand required. This would result in thousands upon thousands of containers of pink batts being imported into the country from all corners of the globe. Therefore, knowing what the six-digit harmonised code for pink batts is becomes important.

Pink batts are made of fibreglass, so the place to start to look to find their six-digit harmonised code is in section 14, which include articles of stone, plaster, cement, asbestos, mica and similar materials, ceramic products, glass and glassware. Within section 14 there is chapter 70, entitled 'Glass and glassware', which includes commodities such as float glass sheets, toughened safety glass, mirrors and drinking glasses. Therefore, the first two numbers of the six-digit harmonised code for pink batts is 70, taken from chapter 70. Drilling down further, subchapter 70.19 includes products made of glass fibres including glass wool and articles thereof. Drilling down even further, you will find the six-digit harmonised code for pink batts is 70.19.39. Once you have the harmonised code, you can look at the Australian customs tariff rates to find that the duty payable on pink batts is five per cent.

As another example, again far-fetched, let us imagine for the sake of an argument that during a brainstorming session the same government came up with the idea of giving away free television set-top boxes. Again, fact is sometimes stranger than fiction. Therefore, knowing what the six-digit harmonised code is for set-top boxes should be important, although the government might decide just to pick a number for the price at random—say, $400 each. So the place to start to look to find the six-digit harmonised code for set-top boxes is in section 16 of the code, which includes machinery and mechanical appliances, electrical equipment, sound recorders and reproducers, televisions and parts and accessories, and articles such of. Then within section 16 is chapter 85, which includes TV image and sound recorders and parts and accessories of such articles. Then, drilling down further, you will find the six-digit code for set-top boxes is 85.29.90. With this number, you will be able to look up the Australian Customs tariff schedule to find that the rate of duty payable on set-top boxes is five per cent.

Of course, the government could bypass this step and just pick up the phone and call Harvey Norman and ask Gerry what his advertised price is to supply and install set-top boxes, which I understand is less than $150. Then they could ask Gerry what special deal he could do on a million units. This step would save the government the burden of finding out what the harmonised code for set-top boxes is. If the government had employed the negotiating skills of the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship following his recent five for-one-deal with the Malaysians, who knows what deal he could have got out of Gerry?

All products, even dangerous pollutants, have six-digit harmonised codes. We have all heard the minister for global warming—I am sorry; the Minister for Climate Change and
Energy Efficiency—talk about carbon pollution. But when the minister talks about carbon pollution what he is actually referring to is that dangerous pollutant called carbon dioxide. I am not sure why he is so confused and gets the two muddled up. It may come as a surprise to many that this dangerous pollutant is actually a commodity that is traded internationally and has its own unique six-digit harmonised code. Firstly, carbon dioxide falls within section VI for the harmonised codes, titled 'Products of chemical or allied industries'. Then, within section VI, there is chapter 28, titled 'Inorganic and Organic chemicals and their compounds'. This section includes chlorine, hydrogen, nitrogen, oxygen, sodium, calcium, iodine and even distilled drinking water. Therefore, as carbon dioxide is located within chapter 28, the first two numbers of its six-digit code are 28. Drilling down further you will find that the six-digit code for carbon dioxide is 28.11.21. Therefore, when someone imports or exports carbon dioxide for the purpose of injecting this dangerous pollutant into soft drinks, beer or champagne or even to use it to increase the growth of plants they will need to know the six-digit harmonised code is 28.11.21. That will enable them to find out the rate of duty payable. Surprisingly, the tariff rate on this dangerous pollutant is zero. While the government is trying to tax it, you can actually import carbon dioxide into Australia for free.

While carbon dioxide has the harmonised code of 28.11.21, carbon is classified under a completely different code. Carbon, which includes carbon black and other forms of carbon, has the harmonised code of 28.03.00. Therefore, if the House is going to support this bill, I call on the minister to get it right, to respect the international harmonised system of which Australia is a signatory and, when he talks about pollution, to stop getting these harmonised codes mixed up.

Getting back to the reasons for this bill before the House, the World Customs Organisation reviews the harmonised code every five years to consider amendments to the code to reflect changes in industry practices, technological developments and international trade patterns. The codes have been revised through the years. Some codes have been deleted completely, others have been placed elsewhere in the classification, some codes have been combined and others have been split into two or more.

The latest and fourth review of the harmonised system occurred in June 2010, with some 800 amendments. Just one example of these 800 new changes is the creation of two new subheadings to separately identify live ostriches and emus. Before, ostriches and emus were classified under the same heading—something that every schoolchild knows is not correct. Other amendments from the fourth review of the harmonised system include deleting more than 40 subheadings due to the low volume of trade in the specified products. No doubt, when the time comes for the fifth review, the category of pink batts could be high on the list for those to be considered for deletion. Given that over the next decade there will still be thousands and thousands of containers in storage throughout Australia, it seems that there will be very little need for international trade in this product in the future.

Other changes include new subheadings for specific chemicals controlled under the Rotterdam convention, which is designed to promote shared responsibility and cooperation among parties in the international trade of certain hazardous industrial chemicals and pesticides. The aim of the convention is to protect human health and the environment from potential harm and to contribute to the environmentally sound use of hazardous products. The Rotterdam convention is very important. As with the weakening of our economy with the
carbon tax, this will only reduce our ability to deal with real pollutants and real poisons like mercury and other heavy metals and organic carcinogens.

In conclusion, as Australia is a signatory to the harmonised system convention, we are obligated, along with all other signatories worldwide, to implement these changes to the harmonised codes from 1 January 2012. Hence the need for the bill, which has the full support of the coalition.

Mr TEHAN (Wannon) (16:26): I would like to thank my predecessor, the member for Hughes, for a highly entertaining and thoughtful speech on the Customs Tariff Amendment (2012 Harmonised System Changes) Bill. He used some prime examples which I think were very illustrative of the importance of the bill but also was able to highlight, somewhat tongue in cheek, how ill-conceived and ill-thought-out government programs can actually distort trade. It is indeed a very sad situation for the pink batt industry here in Australia, where domestic competition has been flooded by overseas imports of pink batts. That has had a detrimental impact on the local industry, including in my home town of Hamilton. I think the member for Hughes has given a lot of thought to this bill. His illustrations of the importance of a harmonised code and those examples, in particular, of pink batts, have been able to highlight that it is better that government refrains from entering the marketplace, apart from where there is no true competition, an issue that I know my dear friend is also very keen on. In that situation we do not mind the government looking to ensure that we have proper practices, but in other examples, as highlighted, we do not need government in our lives.

The harmonised system which is overseen by Customs is incredibly important for our international trade. For Australia, a country of 20 million people with rich resources, international trade is vitally important, so it is essential that there be well-ordered rules around that. This bill continues in that regard, making sure that every time we harmonise our tariffs, international trade can flow as smoothly as possible. That is why, on both sides of the parliament, there is support for these harmonised system changes. In relation to the six-digit codes, we have seen consolidation regarding some items which are now not traded as they were historically, whereas we have seen newer products expanding. There is then a need for those to be added in more detail to the harmonised coding system. We on this side support that purpose, as does the other side, because ultimately it will help and encourage a trading nation such as Australia.

With respect to international trade, obviously there is the World Trade Organisation multilateral agreement and there are all the rules whereby goods are traded. There are also our bilateral free trade agreements with the US, Thailand, Chile, ASEAN and New Zealand. The bill obviously will make trade within the World Trade Organisation and within our bilateral free trade agreements flow a lot more efficiently for our businesses and, once again, this is to be commended.

One thing, though, on which I do not think there is agreement by either side is what the government and, in particular, the trade minister are doing to ensure that we continue to see movement on the international trade agenda, or the bilateral trade agenda, for countries looking to further liberalise their tariffs and import duties. Sadly, today in parliament we learnt that Australia's Minister for Trade is heading overseas to the US for a WTO meeting and then will go on to Europe for the OECD meeting. He has headed over on this two-week
trip. He had an op-ed piece in the *Australian* today which did not even mention the word 'trade,' what the purpose of his trip is and what he is trying to achieve; it was wholly focused on the budget.

I would just like to say to the trade minister that people are doing good work in harmonising tariff codes, and maybe he could concentrate on doing some work on Australia's trade agenda. All he seems to be focused on is the Treasurer's job. I know that the Treasurer is doing an appalling job but, sadly for the Minister for Trade, he also is not doing much of a job. We have seen no new initiatives in the trade area. We have seen no new calls for bilateral free trade agreements with countries. We have seen no movement whatsoever on the Doha Round. It is very sad that the leadership that Australia used to show in this area, which was very much at the forefront of pushing for further trade liberalisation, further reductions in tariff duties and customs duties, has ceased to be the case. We now get a trade minister who heads overseas for a two-week trip—it is not a trip for two days—and, even before he goes, does not enlighten the Australian people on the purpose of his visit and what he is trying to achieve.

The sad thing is that I do not think he knows what he is trying to achieve. As I said, he seems more focused on the Treasurer's job than on doing his own. I call on him to show some leadership, because my understanding is that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and those hardworking officials within the trade sections of the department are incredibly confused by his leadership or lack thereof. They do not know what our agenda is and whether, as it sometimes is purported, we are focusing more on the multilateral arrangements and therefore we are getting a conclusion to Doha or whether, once the Prime Minister goes to Japan and China, all of a sudden we will swing back and focus on trying to conclude bilateral free trade agreements with China and Japan, which were started under the Howard government. It would be very good if he could actually sit down and concentrate on his own job rather than on the Treasurer's job and start to show some focus on where Australia needs to go with regard to its trade policy, because it is vitally important for this trading nation that we continue to push for trade liberalisation both multilaterally and bilaterally. Officials are doing their job; we see that through this bill. We have had another round of harmonised changes to customs tariffs, which is to be welcomed. It has consolidated some and expanded others, and it means that our business community, who want to trade, will be able to do so in a more effective and efficient way. What we desperately now need to see, though, is our Minister for Trade following the lead of the officials and actually sitting down and working out what he wants for Australia's trade policy and then implementing that.

We on this side support this bill. I just hope that we can see from our trade minister an application similar to the application that has gone into the tariff harmonisations.

Ms HALL (Shortland—Government Whip) (16:36): That is one of the most interesting contributions to a debate I have heard in a very long time. It came from an opposition member whose shadow Treasurer could not even find the time to get up here this morning to move a motion that stood in his name because he was too busy doing the numbers to take over the leadership of the opposition and too busy protecting his own job.

The member for Wannon said he does not know what the Minister for Trade is doing overseas. I was mystified, too, because he said the minister was, 'sadly,' going to a WTO meeting. Is that nothing to do with trade? I am really surprised, because I was under the belief
that the WTO was an organisation that looked at trade and was very much involved in trade, and I would be very sad if Australia's trade minister did not present himself at a WTO meeting. I would be very worried if our trade minister was here in Australia trying to do the numbers just like the Shadow Treasurer is trying to do the numbers to protect himself and shore up his position. It is really a matter that is of great concern to me.

Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, if I could slip over to the legislation: forgive me for saying this, but it actually is not about pink batts. The detail of the legislation has nothing to do with pink batts. Rather, it is about providing certainty for Australia's importers and exporters and ensuring that Australia classifies its goods and commodities in accordance with a harmonised system and in a manner that is consistent with major trading partners. This is about ensuring Australia's trade position, and I am appalled at the contributions I have heard from the opposition in this debate. The Customs Tariff Amendment (2012 Harmonized System Changes) Bill 2011 contains amendments to the Customs Tariff Act. The amendments will implement the changes that have been agreed to because Australia is a signatory to the International Convention on the Harmonised Commodity Description and Coding System. Reviews of that system take place every five years, and we are implementing changes that have come through the fourth review.

The fourth review was completed in June 2010. Out of that review, some very practical financial and legal changes were recommended, some fairly minor in nature but very important to preserve the existing level of our industry protection and the margins of tariff preference. This is very important for Australia's trading future. It is very important to us from a customs tariff and trading perspective. The changes focus on environmental and social issues that are of global concern. I did not hear anything mentioned in contributions from the opposition about any global concern. I did hear a fleeting reference to the legislation and to putting in place the changes resulting from the review, but there was very little comment on the legislation.

Given the importance of this legislation and that some of the changes relate to ensuring the food security program of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, I can only say that I am extremely disappointed that those on the opposition side just want to play politics, to come here to talk about anything except this exceptionally important piece of legislation that ensures Australia's trading position. This bill will provide certainty for Australian importers and exporters and ensure that Australia classifies its goods and commodities in accordance with the harmonised system and in a manner that is consistent with major trading partners. I will conclude by assuring members of the opposition that the Minister for Trade is out there looking after Australia's trading interests and that is why he is attending the WTO meeting.

Mr HAYES (Fowler—Government Whip) (16:42): I am here to support the Customs Tariff Amendment (2012 Harmonised System Changes) Bill 2011, like, I assume, every other member here. No doubt my colleagues opposite also support it, but they might have had a bit of a spin on it; I do not know. They did? How did I pick that? I support this legislation. The purpose of this bill is to implement changes resulting from the World Customs Organisation's fourth review of the International Convention on the Harmonised Commodity Description and Coding System. Madam Deputy Speaker, you might think that this piece of legislation is not on the cutting edge of parliamentary reform, but we need to go into just a little bit of detail to
understand why this is significant, why we stay on top of our game, why we have these reviews and why that is important for a country such as ours, which is an import and export based nation.

Australia is proud to be a signatory to the harmonised system convention along with the other 200 members of mainstream economies. Essentially the system is a list of numbered descriptions of goods which plays an integral part in our customs system. As one would expect, constant ongoing review is needed to ensure that this list is kept up to date. These amendments reflect those changes. I can speak of my own electorate and the types of industries that exist there. One of the biggest sectors would be importing and exporting. People need to have these commodity descriptions and coding systems, particularly in relation to food and other substances. And we need to have these reviews to ensure that our systems and processes are kept up to date. Australia is a signatory to the harmonised system convention and is required to implement the changes within it on 1 January 2012—that is obligatory. There are some important changes that have occurred since the last review. I am pleased to see that the particular focus of this latest review has been on the environmental and social factors. Practically speaking, this means identifying goods that are central to world humanitarian programs, such as food of specific importance to the food security program of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations. In addition, the harmonised system will create new subheadings for specific chemicals and ozone-depleting substances controlled under the Rotterdam Convention and the Montreal Protocol.

These are things that can make a very significant change, and we have seen that in the past, particularly where controlling ozone-depleting substances in our environment is concerned. Not only have we moved to control those areas; we have done a fair bit so far towards repairing the damage that has already occurred to the ozone layer. So, while it may look insignificant, that is another area where we can apply ourselves to making sure that there is consistency among the mainstream economies in these harmonisations; we actually can deliver first-rate results.

I understand that these changes may not be seen as being at the cutting edge of regulation or as things to be highlighted in international agreements, but they are important. Changes like these, developed through research and international cooperation, help secure and protect us from the dangers that can flow from the importing and exporting of goods. It is also important to note that the bill will preserve the existing levels of trade protection and the margins of tariff protection that apply to imported goods, including goods imported to Australia under our free trade agreements.

These reviews take place every five years, and our importers and exporters know that, by doing these reviews, the government knows the framework within which they are operating. That being said, the government has been mindful of ensuring that industry gets as much time as possible to prepare for these changes and is in a position to implement them in their businesses. That is why industry—the stakeholders—have been widely consulted and kept up to date with the relevant information and will be through to the conclusion of the review itself. No doubt we will see a number of awareness seminars take place through the department in due course, and these will be significant in helping our industries and those importers and exporters understand their obligations, how the system will work and how they
can work within the system to ensure that their businesses are run as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Australia is a trading community and is often at the forefront of advocating the implementation of positive change in this area. This nation is somewhat geographically challenged relative to the main economies of the globe—we are a long way from everywhere else—so it is essential that this government implement best practice, and that must be consistent with the practices of all our major trading partners. That is precisely what this bill seeks to do—to keep us up to date and consistent with our trading partners and to provide a framework which our importing and exporting industries can understand and operate within. I commend this bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.

**Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2011**

**Second Reading**

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (16:49): I rise to speak on the Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2011. This bill contains amendments that go some way towards assisting the fight against serious and organised crime and ensuring the integrity of our law enforcement processes. The coalition supports this bill and measures to combat serious corruption in our federal law enforcement agencies, although we do so noting that Australia and our agencies remain steadfastly, in almost all circumstances, corruption free and that Australia ranks very low on any international scale of countries suffering from corruption. The culture of our government is certainly one that discourages this sort of behaviour, as opposed to many other countries in the world where, very sadly, corruption is endemic to the way that government operates.

I will turn, firstly, to the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity, which investigates law enforcement related corruption issues and focuses on systemic and serious corruption. As it stands, ACLEI's role is to detect, investigate and prevent corruption specifically in the Australian Crime Commission and in the Australian Federal Police. As mentioned in the report of the parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity on its inquiry into the operation of the Law Enforcement Integrity Commissioner Act 2006, ACLEI is currently restricted to dealing with corruption issues relating to an agency's law enforcement function. The committee reported that law enforcement is particularly vulnerable to corruption because information about detection and investigation methods makes it an attractive target for infiltration by organised crime and that law enforcement powers or functions present opportunities to support or protect criminal activity.

During the committee's inquiry, we heard from the Integrity Commissioner, Mr Philip Moss, who in speaking about the agencies with the highest corruption risk profile, said:

The agencies with a law enforcement function that come to mind as the obvious ones would be, in no particular order, the Australian Taxation Office, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship and the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service. Of those three, my own focus would tend towards the last, Customs and Border Protection, for a number of reasons.
ACLEI presented evidence to the committee that Customs presents the greatest inherent corruption risk of those agencies listed which are not already subject to ACLEI's jurisdiction. Mr Michael Carmody, the CEO of Customs, noted to the committee the value of external oversight and acknowledged of corruption risks of his agency. He said:

Notwithstanding the actions we have taken to ensure that we have an appropriate internal affairs unit and the action is taken in conjunction with the Australian Federal police … I always find advantage in something independent of the organisation being there to reinforce and assist.

He went on to say:

… Given the seriousness of the duties that we perform and given, at the top end of the scale, the risk that there could be criminal elements who would like to compromise officers, we would benefit from having a level of external involvement.

The Integrity Commissioner pointed out that Customs is indeed a law enforcement agency and outlined the inherent corruption risks. He specifically said:

… It is a decentralised agency, with officers having a high degree of discretion and autonomy in those decentralised locations. Customs protects the border in many ways and, of course, the increase in corruption risk goes right up in that context. Customs and Border Protection would be attractive to organised crime—and, in saying, 'organised crime', I also say to you 'transnational organised crime'—who have an interest in breaching the border …

The other phenomenon that is occurring in this area is that Customs is pushing protection of the borders offshore into countries where corruption is sometimes part of an accepted business practice.

As a result of the various submissions and evidence, the committee made the recommendation that Customs be brought under ACLEI's jurisdiction, by regulation, on a whole-of-agency basis. Whilst it is important to ensure that any possible corruption within Customs is addressed with the utmost seriousness and stamped out before it takes a firm footing, it is also important on our side of the House to acknowledge the good work that the customs agency does in very difficult circumstances. Since August 2008, Customs has been forced to deploy vast resources in our northern waters in order to cope with the flood of illegal boat arrivals we have seen since the rolling back of the coalition's strong and successful border protection regime. Due to Labor's mismanagement of our borders, there have been 227 illegal boat arrivals, carrying over 11,000 people. This year alone, we have seen 24 boat arrivals, carrying over 1,400 people to our shores. Customs does an extraordinary job not only in its border protection efforts but also with its mainstream customs duties at Australian ports and airports. The men and women at Customs are truly at the front line in protecting Australia's borders and deserve to be properly resourced for the task that they are expected to do. However, the Labor government have done exactly the opposite. They have slashed funding to Customs at a time when they need it most. Among the vast array of cuts to Australia's national security agencies was a $9.3 million cut to the budget of the Australian Customs and Border Protection command. Labor have also axed a further 90 staff from Customs on top of the 250 cut in the previous year's budget. To improve the government's bottom line, they have slashed $34 million from Customs in their passenger facilitation function at Australian and international airports. These funding cuts will put immense pressure on our front-line border protection agencies, particularly Customs, who are already struggling to do more with fewer resources under this incompetent government.
Going back to the 2009-10 budget, Labor cut funding to Customs for cargo screening by a staggering $58.1 million. The Gillard Labor government has not reinstated these slashed funds despite the disastrous consequences for our screening regime. This cut to screening by the Labor government reduced the number of potential sea cargo inspections by 25 per cent. Labor's cut also resulted in a staggering 75 per cent reduction of air cargo inspections. In the recent Customs annual report, it was revealed that only 4.3 per cent of sea cargo is X-rayed and only 0.6 per cent of sea cargo is physically examined. This means that 95.7 per cent of all sea cargo consignments coming into the country are not X-rayed. Unfortunately, under a Labor government, those cuts to Customs cargo-screening measures will mean that more drugs will flow through onto our streets and these cuts will enhance the ability of organised criminal syndicates to thrive.

With the security at our ports and airports at an all-time low under federal Labor, now is not the time for these further cuts announced in the recent budget that are therefore creating greater opportunities for organised crime and criminal gangs. I would also note that the coalition has committed to restoring that funding to Customs and therefore restoring the ability of Customs to do its job at our borders.

It has been estimated that organised crime costs the Australian community between $10 billion and $15 billion per year. Organised criminal syndicates have become more businesslike in their approach to laundering money and acquiring assets. The Australian Federal Police website notes that the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 provides a scheme to trace, restrain and confiscate the proceeds of crime against Commonwealth law. One of the important aspects of the act is that it provides a mechanism to allow confiscated funds to be given back to the Australian community in an endeavour to prevent and reduce the harmful effects of crime in Australia.

The bill's explanatory memorandum notes in relation to the proceeds of crime amendment that in August of 2009 the Parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian Crime Commission recommended that the Australian government examine an integrated model of asset recovery in which investigation and prosecution would be undertaken within one agency. Part 1 schedule 2 will amend the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 to assist the operation of the new Australian Federal Police Criminal Assets Confiscation Taskforce by allowing the commissioner of the AFP to apply the powers and functions pertaining to confiscation litigation under the Proceeds of Crime Act, currently exercised by the DPP alone, and enabling the commissioners of the AFP and the DPP to transfer matters already commenced between themselves.

Other matters that this bill relates to include amending the Family Law Act 1975 to reflect the commissioner's new powers and to enable state and territory proceeds of crime orders and forfeiture applications to be taken into account in property settlements and spouse maintenance proceedings, in the same manner as Commonwealth proceeds of crime audit and forfeiture applications. The other notable amendments in this bill are the two key amendments to the Proceeds of Crime Act in part 2 of schedule 2 to enhance the effectiveness of criminal asset confiscation, investigations and litigation. These amendments will amend the definition of 'property tracking document' to ensure that a magistrate can issue a production order for documents pertinent to identifying, locating and quantifying property which forms part of the wealth of a person, and improve interaction between the collection of tax related liabilities.
and proceeds of crime proceedings. In conclusion, serious and organised crime not only results in substantial economic cost to the Australian community but also operates at great social cost. Organised crime can threaten the integrity of political and other public institutional systems through the infiltration of these systems and the subsequent corruption of public officials. Consequently, this undermines public confidence in those institutions and impedes the delivery of good government services, law enforcement and justice.

As I noted at the outset, the Australian government and Australian government agencies are remarkably corruption free and we certainly do not notice any increase in that. But that does not mean that we should not always be vigilant to the possibility of minor incidents of corruption occurring. Therefore, the coalition does support the passage of this bill through the House.

Mr HAYES (Fowler—Government Whip) (17:00): I also rise to support this bill. Like the member for Stirling, I was a member of the parliamentary joint committee which sought and made recommendations to bring the issue of the Customs services within the purview of the examination by the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity. The reason that occurred in the first instance was not that there was any view of corruption existing in that area of government endeavour; it was a matter of making sure that we have all the necessary checks and balances very much in place.

One of the things that we have been doing, and unashamedly have been doing for some time, is giving greater powers to our law enforcement agencies. You will recall, Mr Deputy Speaker, debates in years past. We have given coercive powers to the Australian Crime Commission, for instance, who can work in partnership with the Australian Federal Police and other agencies. They are extraordinary powers, and extraordinary powers must have suitable checks and balances to make sure powers are not being abused. Similarly, Customs have a very significant role in protecting our borders and keeping the community safe—a role, one would argue, just as important as most of our other law enforcement agencies. Therefore, it is making sure that we have in place a suite of checks and balances that can be used as far as possible to ensure that our services that we give these powers to operate appropriately and properly within the terms of the remit they have from this parliament.

There is no apology given for that. To that extent this is just another step in that direction. This may not be the only step that is ever taken in that respect because, as we move to protect our citizens by increasing the powers of other agencies, those agencies as well may be considered in terms of law enforcement integrity. This is significant. It is also significant that this was supported from the outset on a bipartisan basis. There is certainly no minority report from when it was dealt with by the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Law Enforcement. I am indebted to the minister for responding promptly to that and ensuring that it comes back and finds its way into the Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2011 as it has here today.

I would like to comment on the business that underpins criminal activity in the country. I have seen the costings of the Australian Crime Commission. They say the cost of criminal activity to our community, as it stands today, is somewhere between $10 billion and $15 billion from fraud, theft, blackmail and a whole host of things which ultimately have at the base a profit motive. One of the clear things that I have learnt in all my time of supporting law enforcement agencies throughout this country is that, when it comes to catching crooks, follow the money trail. Essentially that is really what schedule 2 of this piece of legislation is

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doing. The government see that the issue of serious and organised crime is based on a profit motive. What we are trying to do is provide the legal teeth to ensure that our law enforcement agencies have the ability to go after the money. One of those matters is to do with issues of confiscation of wealth through the proceeds of crime measures. This is dealt with in schedule 2 of the amendment legislation, which provides for the framework of a Criminal Assets Confiscation Taskforce, which will be led by the Australian Federal Police. This was established at the election in 2010 with an interim task force being launched in March of this year. The amendment will ensure that this has a permanent place in our agencies for the fight against organised crime.

I note that the minister has joined us. He knows only too well that the basis of criminal activity, particularly in terms of its impact on the community, is very much profit driven. This is trying to look at an ability for our agencies to identify and to then be able to prosecute in respect of the potential for asset confiscation matters. At the moment it is a matter of record that only the Commonwealth DPP has the authority to conduct that process under the Proceeds of Crime Act and schedule 2 of the amendment legislation will enable the AFP to have greater flexibility to take those matters on itself. It will also allow for transfers of matters between the AFP and the DPP. This will ensure there is greater flexibility and efficiency within the system in that respect.

A greater harmonisation will also be achieved to do with forfeiture of assets processes throughout the Commonwealth. As a consequence of this we will see the harmonisation of approach, which is so essential because there is no criminal group that is going to defer to the Constitution or to the geography of the states to discern where it will conduct its next criminal endeavour. As I have said, criminals are driven by a profit motive. If we create or allow to remain in existence legal loopholes, they will be exploited. That is what this is designed to do: to ensure that criminal activity, which covers across state borders, is minimised by having a greater harmonisation of approach and that our agencies are better equipped in terms of identifying, disrupting and prosecuting such activity.

I seldom let an opportunity go by in this place to highlight the work that our law enforcement agencies do, and this will certainly not be an opportunity lost. I find it quite amazing that people have the courage to put on a blue uniform and be prepared to go out and do what is necessary to defend and protect our community. These are a special type of people. I think that what those people need is not simply gratitude, although I think they could do with a little bit more respect occasionally, but also to be equipped with the tools necessary to go about their task of protecting our community. This piece of legislation is another step towards doing that. This piece of legislation is moving to ensure the integrity of our adjacent agencies, particularly as to Customs and Border Protection, and it is moving to give the AFP greater powers vis-a-vis the Director of Public Prosecutions to ensure it can prosecute in respect of elements of the proceeds of crime and return those moneys to the community. This will put them on the front foot to attack the business model that underpins criminal endeavour. That is what this legislation does.

There are probably going to be many, many more steps that will follow on from all of this. Like every other enterprise out there, the criminal enterprise is not static. It is forever evolving, which requires our parliament to also play its role in an ongoing way to ensure that, wherever possible, we equip our police with the appropriate tools and legislative support they
need to get on and do the job of protecting our community. I commend the amendment bill to the House.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR (Gorton—Minister for Privacy and Freedom of Information, Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Justice) (17:10): I rise to thank the honourable members for their contributions to this important debate. The members for Stirling and Fowler have focused on some of the elements of the bill before us. The Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2011 contains amendments designed to ensure the integrity of our law enforcement processes and to strengthen the efficacy of our responses to serious and organised crime. That is why it is such an important bill.

The bill contains amendments to the Law Enforcement Integrity Commissioner Act 2006 to bring the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service within the jurisdiction of the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity. I think that is a very important and vital reform. It is one that resulted from an examination by a parliamentary committee and, as the member for Stirling indicated, one that was agreed by the chief executive officer of Customs at the time as a good approach. It just shows that the chief executive officer was correct in his view that we need, from time to time, external and independent oversight of our agencies. I want to pay tribute to Michael Carmody for that enlightened view about the way in which we consider examining that from within the agency. This is a very important element of the bill.

In line with the government's Commonwealth Organised Crime Strategic Framework, the bill also contains amendments to key Commonwealth legislation to ensure the streamlined operation of the government's new Criminal Assets Confiscation Taskforce. The task force, a multi-agency initiative that represents a new, more holistic and dynamic approach to the complex area of proceeds of crime, illustrates delivery of another Gillard government election commitment. By combining the expertise of the Australian Federal Police, the Australian Taxation Office, the Australian Crime Commission and the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions we are ensuring the close cooperation of intelligence operations, forensic accounting, litigation and specialist law enforcement in detecting and confiscating the financial motivation and fuel of organised crime. As has been said before—and will be said in the future, no doubt—money is the lifeblood of organised crime. The government believes that this new, integrated approach will be very effective in combating organised crime.

To that end, the bill will facilitate the new litigation role of the Criminal Assets Confiscation Taskforce by extending the power to conduct proceedings under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 to the AFP. The bill also contains other important enhancements to the proceeds of crime regime. Amendments to the Family Law Act 1975 will allow a stay of family law proceedings relating to property and spousal maintenance when action is being taken at the same time under state or territory proceeds of crime legislation. And proposed amendments to the definition of property-tracking documents in the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 will allow a magistrate to issue a production order for all documents relevant to unexplained wealth proceedings, ensuring that these production powers are consistent with other proceeds of crime tools. Finally, the bill will increase the court's flexibility under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 in dealing with the complex interaction between tax related liabilities and proceeds of crime proceedings. These improvements to the proceeds of crime scheme are part of a consistent commitment to cracking down on organised crime, removing
its incentive as well as its capacity for reinvestment. The stronger our proceeds of crime infrastructure, the weaker the criminal architecture that props up organised crime. I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Ordered that the bill be reported to the House without amendment.

**Customs Tariff Amendment (2012 Harmonized System Changes) Bill 2011**

_Second Reading_

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR** (Gorton—Minister for Privacy and Freedom of Information, Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Justice) (17:15): The Customs Tariff Amendment (2012 Harmonized System Changes) Bill 2011 contains approximately 800 amendments to the Customs Tariff Act 1995. These amendments implement changes resulting from the World Customs Organization’s fourth review of the International Convention on the Harmonised Commodity Description and Coding System commonly referred to as the harmonised system.

As a signatory to the harmonised system, Australia is required to implement the changes resulting from the fourth review on 1 January next year. The amendments concentrate on environmental and social issues that are of global concern including the use of the harmonised system for identifying goods that are of importance to the food security program of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations.

The review also creates new subheadings for specific chemicals including pesticides and ozone-depleting substances. This will facilitate the monitoring and control of international trade in these products under various United Nations treaties including the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade, and the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. The bill will preserve existing levels of industry protection and margins of tariff preference that apply to imported goods including goods imported under free trade agreements. This bill will provide certainty for Australia’s importers and exporters and will ensure consistency with Australia’s major trading partners. I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Ordered that the bill be reported to the House without amendment.

**Child Support (Registration and Collection) Amendment Bill 2011**

_Second Reading_

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Mr ANDREWS** (Menzies) (17:18): I rise to speak on the Child Support (Registration and Collection) Amendment Bill 2011. The bill seeks to amend the Child Support (Registration and Collection) Act 1988 to achieve two objectives. Firstly, it proposes to broaden the powers
of the Child Support Registrar to delegate powers to perform his or her duties under the act to persons outside the department to enhance efficiency. Secondly, it amends the number of criminal penalty provisions to ensure that the offences contained therein can be successfully prosecuted, thus achieving the object of those offences when they were initially legislated and also protecting the integrity of the Child Support Scheme.

The Child Support Scheme has identified that having the ability to outsource debt collection activity to external service providers on occasions should increase the successful collection of outstanding child support liabilities. This is similar to arrangements employed by Centrelink that that agency currently delegates to external service providers to collect outstanding liabilities in certain instances. The proposed amendments to certain criminal provisions under the act relate to the obligations of an employer when they are required by the Child Support Agency to withhold moneys from an employee to be paid to the agency when there is an outstanding child support liability. The government argues that the current offences relating to employer withholdings are somewhat ambiguous, as the offence provisions create an obligation and provide a penalty but do not specify whether the offence is created by an act or an omission. The proposed amendments will make it clear that an offence is committed when an employer fails to deduct or remit child support payments. Importantly, the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions has been consulted in the making of the proposed amendments.

Child support is an important part of our system of supporting children following the breakdown of relationships, and we can no doubt rely even more on child support in the future. Why, might we ask? It is quite simple. The Gillard Labor government has ripped some $50 million out of family relationships services. Services in place to support parents and kids and help families stay together have been hit hard by a weak and directionless government—in this case, those $50 million coming from family relationships centres and also from the important work of marriage counselling in Australia.

Family relationships services are important. They play an important role in preventing relationship breakdowns and in keeping families together. When you take $50 million out of that system, a cut that will hit those families beginning on 1 July this year, people will suffer, families will suffer and, regrettably, kids will suffer. Helping families stay together is important. Instead, Labor spends more time and energy on what happens after the relationship has broken down. And, of course, the Greens do not seem to have any positive policies on this. It is a regret that the government has trillions of dollars to spend, yet a relatively small amount of money is not being spent on such important services so far as many families are concerned.

The coalition will not oppose this bill in the House. These seem to be technical and mechanical measures that will make the operation of the agency and the Child Support Scheme more efficient.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (17:22): I speak in support of the Child Support (Registration and Collection) Amendment Bill 2011. At common law, a parent owed no duty to provide financial support for a child that was enforceable by court action. However, statute law has long intervened to create a civil liability for financial support of children by parents that is enforceable by court action. The previous speaker was criticising us about legislation, actions and funding in respect of families. Well, long on the watch of the coalition was child support...
maintenance—what we call child support—almost a voluntary measure. It took the election of a federal Labor government, the Whitlam Labor government, in the mid-seventies to ensure that the Family Law Act 1975 established a duty to maintain a child and created the legal obligation to pay child maintenance. The Family Law Act is now constrained by section 66E of that act, which says effectively that, if a person wishes to apply for child support, they need to apply for an administrative assessment of child support under the Child Support (Assessment) Act 1989.

The 1970s and 1980s were a time of dramatic change in Australia. The economy was internationalised by the Hawke and Keating Labor governments. There were massive changes in the way people worked and in family life generally. There was a dramatic increase in divorce. Divorce increased from 10,000 in the mid-1970s to about 40,000 in the mid-1980s. About 50,000 dependent children were affected by their parents' divorce. There was a dramatic increase in the number of single parents receiving what are now called Centrelink payments. In 1974, the total number was 183,000; in 1985, it was 316,000.

These problems mainly occurred on the watch of the coalition governments, all through the Menzies, Holt and Gorton periods and mainly through the period of Fraser. It took a federal Labor government to bring in the Family Law Act, and it took a federal Labor government to bring in the Child Support (Assessment) Act and the Child Support (Registration and Collection) Act. So it was Labor governments that built the progressive reforms in family law and child support, and the coalition who have always behaved with inertia, inaction and idleness when it comes to family law reform—except when they want to pander to the men's rights groups, when they do things that they think will be electorally popular. The result of the voluntary payment of maintenance, or what we call child support these days, led to a reduction in the standard of living of children in single-parent households. It meant that taxpayers increased their payments for single-parent pensions, a very big impost on the public purse.

This government has been committed to making sure that parents fulfil what the legislation describes as their primary obligation under the Family Law Act and the Child Support (Assessment) Act, which is to pay for the maintenance of their children—that is, to pay for their basic needs, their accommodation, their clothing, their school expenses, their food and other recreational activities which incur impost. As at 31 December 2010, over 77 per cent of all children in domestic active cases received about 100 per cent of their child support. That is a significant improvement on when the Howard coalition government was on the benches. The number of children receiving 100 per cent of their child support has steadily increased every year since Labor came to power in November 2007. The federal Labor government collected $1.19 billion in the last financial year for the children of separated parents. That is money that parents pay to maintain their children in a separated situation. It is money that they, not the taxpayers, pay. So a strong, good regulatory system which compels parents to fulfil their financial obligations is good for government operation and it is good for taxpayers generally, because parents have a primary responsibility to do that.

The legislation that is before the House is really quite technical and minor in many ways, but it is in accordance with the reformist nature of this and previous federal Labor governments. The Child Support Agency was established in 1988 to administer the Australian government's Child Support Scheme, which it does by a number of pieces of legislation.
Originally of course the Child Support Agency was part of the Australian Taxation Office but, I think correctly, it was transferred to the Department of Family and Community Services, which is now known as the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. FaHCSIA currently has responsibility for the Child Support Agency.

The legislation here today deals with only a couple of changes. The first aspect is the outsourcing of the child support debt collection activities. The new arrangement will enable the registrar of the Child Support Agency to delegate powers to persons outside the Department of Human Services. The registrar could use external providers to engage in debt collection. Governments are not always the best at collecting debts, and sometimes there are private providers who have skills, talents and expertise in certain debt collection activities which could lead to more successful identification and collection of outstanding child support debt. Centrelink has undertaken to collect outstanding liabilities. The Department of Human Services is moving to an integrated model with various agencies and now has responsibility for the child support portfolio. I think that is a credible way to go. It means more efficient collection and, if it means that we can avail ourselves of greater opportunities to outsource and allow Child Support Agency staff who were hitherto engaged in those collection activities to be engaged in other aspects, that is important. I think it would also result potentially in the Child Support Agency reducing its administrative and operational costs. There also needs to be safe security clearances for these external agencies and I am pleased that that is proposed as well.

The second matter that this legislation deals with relates to amendments of criminal provisions in the Child Support (Registration and Collection) Act. In any criminal matter—and I used to practice in family law extensively but have a background, from my early time as a lawyer, practising in criminal law—there has got to be physical elements of an offence. An offence is created by an act or an omission. There is a degree of ambiguity in the legislation. I agree with the office of the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions which has advised the Child Support Agency that it would be reluctant to prosecute under section 46 of the act, which deals with an employer who fails to withhold salary or wages of a paying parent.

That creates some real problems. When an employer gets notified by the Child Support Agency that the agency needs to collect child support by withholding that support from the wages of the potential payer who has a registrable liability under the Child Support (Assessment) Act and the employer does nothing about that, there is no sanction that can be enforced against that employer and the integrity of the scheme comes into doubt. That might sound strange. Are we really punishing the employer? Governments of both persuasions have been involved in supporting this type of legislation.

In very small arrangements where there are often corporate structures involving someone who could be an employee as well as a director and a shareholder of a company, or someone who could be working for a brother, sister, mother or father, or indeed someone who could be working in a small enterprise—and there are about 2.4 million of those in the country—the employee could say to his employer, Joe Bloggs: 'Do not comply. Are you being notified by the Child Support Agency? Do not withhold my wages. Pay it to me. Nothing is going to happen to you. They will not prosecute you.' Joe Bloggs, the employer, says: 'If nothing is going to happen, I want Bill Brown, my valued employee, to be happy. He needs the money
himself.' The employer does not see that he has any responsibility, so he says: 'I am not going to pay it. I am not going to hand it over to the Child Support Agency under the registration and collection legislation.'

The consequences of no sanction to that employer means that the whole integrity of the scheme breaks down and the payee—usually a mum, but not always, who may have a couple of kids—does not get paid. The consequences of that are, firstly, we as taxpayers foot the bill for the operation of a scheme that is ineffectual and, secondly, we pay the bill because we end up having to pay more from social security payments to the mum who has got responsibility for the kids.

So the amendments really are a practical way to make the scheme operate better. Making sure that there are elements of an offence here that the Director of Public Prosecutions can identify which needs to be prosecuted if someone fails to comply with the legislation is really important. There are amendments in relation to a number of sections of the legislation and, in those circumstances, they make it clear to an employer that if they fail to comply with a proper notice—it is a legal notice I have seen plenty of times in my years practising as a lawyer and plenty of times clients have come to see me and I have always told the employer to comply with the legislation—to deduct or remit those child support payments they have committed an offence and can be prosecuted. If that is the case, and they realise there are consequences for their actions, they are more likely to comply. It will improve the prospects of a successful prosecution and it will improve the integrity of the whole scheme.

I am pleased to support this legislation. It is another demonstration of a federal Labor government that wants reform in the system that we know as the Child Support Scheme in this country. It yet again builds on the amendments that we have had a long history of committing to: of reform in family law and in child support, about which those opposite have often had a certain ambiguity and inertia.

Dr STONE (Murray) (17:34): I also rise to support the Child Support (Registration and Collection) Amendment Bill 2011. These are two common-sense sets of amendments to what is often a difficult and fraught area of social policy—namely, the collection of moneys from the separated parent who has obligations to provide financial support for their children through the Child Support Program.

The first cluster of amendments in the bill allows the Child Support Registrar to delegate some powers and functions to non-government or external service providers. Obviously, those will be carefully vetted and expert in their functioning. Most specifically this could mean, for example, that outstanding child support payments could be collected using specialists in debt collection. Given that there is a serious problem for the supported parent and children when child support payments are not made or are very late, it is hoped that there will be better and more timely rates of child support moneys collected using specialists or expertise drawn from the private sector.

There are already a number of other agencies, such as Centrelink, who use specialists when it comes to debt collection. The outsourcing of money collection to specialists in the field should also give the child support agencies more time to focus on their core business. We would hope that that core business includes how to maintain everything in the best interests of the child and, in particular, how to ensure that relationships between parents are not causing a great deal of stress—more than is necessary—to the children.
The second group of amendments in this bill relates to some criminal provisions under the Child Support (Registration and Collection) Act 1988. In some circumstances, an employer is required to withhold an amount from the paying parent's salary, or wages, on behalf of the Child Support Agency. The current wording of the act is ambiguous and leaves some questions about whether the offence is created by an act or omission. The proposed amendments will make it absolutely clear that an offence is committed by an employer if he or she fails to undertake certain actions as directed by the CSA—for example, the withholding of an employee's salary or the remission of those moneys to the Child Support Agency. Of course, those moneys are then directed to the needs of the children.

Both these clusters of amendments are aimed at ensuring children are properly supported by their separated parents. The coalition therefore supports these amendments. But we are not saying that is the end of the business when it comes to best practice in ensuring that, after separating parents go their different ways, their children's needs are best met. There are other concerns about the integrity of the Child Support Program. For example, electorate offices like mine are regularly contacted by distressed parents who claim that their ex-partners have declared no income or that they are unemployed after they have left their salaried employment or have converted their salaried employment to 'work for cash' payments or to some in-kind payment instead of a salary. This leaves the supporting partner with considerably reduced or no liabilities, according to the law. The CSA needs to be more proactive in investigating any such allegations to ensure that these practices do not occur and that the children are not the victims of a further failure by an obligated parent to support the children.

In some occupations, for example the Defence Reserves, the income earned is tax free. So, again, a supporting parent may appear to have no capacity to help pay for their children's upkeep—that is, no salary or income officially—but, in fact, they are earning. There is also often contention and arguments surrounding what is claimed to be just or affordable when one or both parents repartner and have more children in a new family. These not uncommon complications can lead to great distress that affects the original children's sense of wellbeing or even their capacity to have a properly funded education, clothing or health services provided. The CSA must have the appropriate legislative tools and information to ensure that all children's needs remain the focus of government actions.

Unfortunately, there is also a not uncommon problem where a grandparent—and it is almost always the grandmother—is supporting and maintaining children after the parents' relationship has broken down. Supporting parent benefits or Child Support Agency payments are not necessarily automatically diverted to the children being cared for or being raised in the grandparent's household. The grandparent is often reluctant to report her need for financial support to the CSA or to Centrelink because she knows that she may do so at the expense of her daughter's direct payments and this daughter may in fact threaten to relocate the children back into a very unstable or unsatisfactory environment rather than see her parenting payments diverted to the real carer, the grandmother.

These are just some of the very complex problems and difficulties associated with ensuring children are always the best served by our systems and legislation. We also have to make sure that the supporting parents are best able to make decisions and are able to afford to meet the needs of their children as they grow. It is therefore very unfortunate that funding for family relationship centres and services and marriage guidance counselling was cut in this budget by...
some $50 million. We see that as very short sighted. Quite obviously it is better to help parents sort out relationship difficulties before they lead to a separated situation, with children's needs then having to be met in two separate households. We are very concerned about that loss of some $50 million, and we ask that this government reconsider that budget action.

In relation to the bill under discussion, we support these two clusters of amendments and we ask that the government not take its eye off this issue of how to best ensure children's financial needs are met by separated parents. There is certainly a lot of unfinished business in this most complex area of social policy and legislation.

Mr HAYES (Fowler—Government Whip) (17:41): I also express my support for the Child Support (Registration and Collection) Amendment Bill 2011. This legislation effectively makes two necessary changes to the child support system. It is odd that I get to speak in support of a bill like this having only yesterday celebrated my 35th wedding anniversary and all the joys that go with that—and it is all joy. But, unfortunately, one in three marriages in this country end up in divorce. Apply that to the current generation—I have three children, and we have been through the very objective that this legislation provides for with my youngest son, Jonathan. I know a broken relationship becomes a very emotional time for everybody, with the hurt and the feeling that money is being given to an ex-partner, but as grandparents of young Kiarni we have to get my son to understand we are providing for his daughter, and the biological mother is the person who is fundamentally looking after the child. The child is still entitled to all the love and care that she would have had if they were still in a relationship, and the child is entitled to participate in all the good fortune that he has in his subsequent endeavours, whether it be business or other things.

It was an interesting experience for me as a parent to go through that with a son who obviously was quite upset and emotional at the time. One thing I can stand back and look at is what is good for my granddaughter. Fortunately, that is all past and the emotions and everything else have been equalised, and there is a good working relationship between the former partners. Both sides are cooperating with, as I say, the best interests of my granddaughter in mind. So it is with mixed feelings that I make this presentation tonight.

The Child Support (Registration and Collection) Act was passed over two decades ago, and since then we have seen a steady growth in child support obligations. This amendment bill is just another example of our addressing the need to reform. It is well documented that children from broken homes already face huge upheaval, and some of this stuff must be considered in the context of the child and the way the child thinks of it in any event. But what we have attempted to do through this amendment bill is to ensure that our responsibility is very clearly fixed on addressing the monetary issues in these situations by ensuring that the most efficient and compliant child support system is available. That is exactly what it is supposed to do—to look after the child.

Under the proposed changes the government aims to improve the consistency of the service by granting the registrar the authority to delegate certain powers to individuals outside the Department of Human Services. This is new and it is substantial. The role of the external agency will be to become, effectively, the agency for debt collection. It will deal with the parents in ensuring that payments are made for child support. The focus of the Commonwealth and the focus of the parliament in this respect, then, will be clearly on the
needs of the child. By allocating the role of debt collection agency to a third party, there is a greater opportunity to increase the identification and collection of outstanding child support debt. By conducting collection in this manner, we hope that we can benefit from external expertise and also see a significant reduction in the operation and costs in that regard. This will free up the existing Child Support Program staff to do what they are there to do—to focus on the child, to give better services to the customer and, in the main, to ensure that the child is being looked after appropriately under the system.

The structure of the system is based on the model that is currently being used by the department in Centrelink. For some time now they have outsourced their collection of outstanding liabilities. It could be seen, to some extent, as one step closer to integrating and streamlining government department agencies that have a community based support. Now, particularly where there is financial debt that one way or another has accumulated, that debt will be recovered externally and returned so it is not the child in this instance that is missing out.

The security of the parties involved will certainly not be compromised. The staff of external agencies, in terms of debt collection and what have you, will undergo the same security clearances as current employees of the Child Support Program and that, again, will also be subject to the current monitoring processes.

In addition to the external participation in the child support system, this amendment bill also addresses some criminal provisions in the process of an employer withholding payments, which currently is a little ambiguous, as I understand it. Not being a lawyer, I have not been able to appreciate the subtle differences that the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions has made, but I accept the advice that he has given—that is, 'employer withholdings' refer to the act by which an employer withholds specific amounts from a parent's wage or salary equal to the amount required by the Commonwealth support program. Under current legislation, according to the DPP, it appears that the employer can potentially be penalised for complying with the legislation. The uncertainty associated with the current wording outlined in the physical elements to the offence has now resulted in the Office of the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions being reluctant to initiate prosecution proceedings in respect of an employer who fails to withhold such payments. The proposed changes will make it abundantly clear that an employer has a legal duty to deduct or remit child support payments and to send them to the Child Support Agency. It is made clear that an offence is committed when an employer fails to take these actions and that subsequent penalties will apply when these obligations are not met. Improving the efficiency and compliance within the child support system will ensure greater welfare for children of broken homes. I acknowledge that most parents pay child support in full and that they do it on time. As at 31 December 2010 over 77 per cent of all children in domestic activity cases received their full support payments. The government is proud of this record; the figure has steadily increased since 2007. In the last financial year $1.19 billion was collected. It is, however, our duty to ensure that the children who are subject to default payments are not left behind and are not neglected.

Regrettably, a large number of families and children in my electorate of Fowler are affected by any change that we enact to legislation in this area. As a parliament we need to ensure that these changes improve the system and make it easier for all stakeholders: the
agencies involved, the parents, and most importantly the children who are affected. I have spent time with an organisation called Dads in Distress. I understand that many men are still grieving from broken relationships. When I met with them last month, I indicated that the position of government must always be with the child. We must ensure that the young person in the relationship—who had nothing to do with the break-up, who did not pick sides—is not left behind, that their financial wellbeing is looked after and that they are given the opportunity for inclusion in our modern society.

I commend this amendment bill. I strongly support the work done by Tanya Plibersek, the Minister for Human Services. She is a person who is very strongly focused in this area and she does know the value of looking after children.

Ms O’NEILL (Robertson) (17:52): I too rise to speak in support of the Child Support (Registration and Collection) Amendment Bill 2011. I firmly believe that every child deserves to be emotionally and financially supported by both their parents. The importance of a culture where both parents provide the emotional and financial support for their children can never really be underestimated. Indeed, good parenting and adequate financial support is central to ensuring that children are able to reach their full potential.

Increasingly, research identifies the positive, life-enhancing health and wellbeing impact of being brought up in a family where the parents remain together to support one another and to support their children through all the challenges that life presents. Yet, as the member for Fowler, Government Whip, has so eloquently and personally articulated, the reality is that one-third of marriages break down, as do long-term relationships, and we are confronted with the reality that family relationships and breakdown are just a part of the way we live these days. One of the most contentious issues in relation to this bill is how the law deals with families where parents separate with regard to child support. Indeed, our system of child support is one of the means through which we ensure that children whose parents have separated receive the emotional and financial support they deserve. In a recent class that I had in a course entitled 'Issues in adolescent development', I had the benefit of having mature age students and young students who had just left school in the same classroom. One of the things I try to model in terms of excellence in education is to allow students as much space as possible to choose their own issues to explore. It just so happened that in this class I had a couple of young people who wanted to explore the impact of family breakdown on them and their peers who had experienced this loss and suffering. They went to great lengths to gather up-to-date information about how that impacts generally, and they were certainly very generous in sharing their own perspectives.

The interesting thing was that there were mature age adults in that classroom who had gone through family breakups and felt that they had managed them very well who were articulating that their children had suffered a lot less than was being articulated by the young students aged 17 or 18 telling the story of the difficulty of family breakdown. The conversation that came out of it was that so much of the depth of impact of a family breakdown depends on how the parents are able to interact and how safe the children feel after that period of intense difficulty. In our own conversations in that classroom, students were very easily able to articulate that, where parents were able to negotiate a practical way to manage their lives as they moved forward to becoming a family that had separated rather than living together in one house, the outcomes were so much better.
I want to put on the record too that, in addition to this conversation between younger and older members of my class, we got to really understand in a deeper way the whole theoretical concept of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. We do need food and we do need shelter. Yes, we need love. I would love to think that every day all Australians got to the peak of that pyramid and got up to self-actualisation. But the chances of achieving your maximum potential, the chances of becoming the best Australian that you can be, are severely compromised if at night you are struggling to have a full belly, a warm bed to sleep in or the love and care of two people who have a right and responsibility to be a part of your life in a sustained and important way.

That is why this bill becomes particularly important. As stated by the Minister for Human Services, who has just joined us, while most parents do the right thing and pay their child support in full and on time, sadly, we know that not all parents meet their child support obligations. There can be a range of reasons for this being the case currently. Sadly, in the media we see the terrible outcomes of acrimonious split-ups. Just recently there was a murder-suicide and the tragedy of that weighs on the entire community. At times of great sorrow and at times of great loss, people might not be able to make the best decisions but, while as adults we might have those impulses that take us away from the interests of children, the reality is that we also have deep and lifelong-lasting responsibilities as parents to ensure that the children we bring into the world are given every opportunity. In some ways, I think that becoming a parent is the moment where you have to learn that it is not all about you anymore. In that opportunity for growth, great things are possible. When the conflict of a family breakup happens, it is even more important that that discussion surfaces about who is at the centre of our considerations and that we make sure that, of all the people who are given the first and the most significant support, the children come first.

The means by which the Child Support Scheme is able to ensure that child support is paid therefore needs to be very effective. This bill is aimed at improving the effectiveness of the child support program with a register to ensure that parents comply with their responsibilities in supporting their children financially. The first means by which the bill does this is by enabling the Child Support Register to delegate certain powers and functions to individuals outside the Department of Human Services. Primarily, this will enable the Child Support Register to delegate its debt collection activities to external service providers who are specialised in debt collection. This method of delegation is currently utilised by Centrelink and it has been found to be effective. I understand that there could be hesitation in the community about enabling the Child Support Register to delegate its debt collection activities to external providers. But this outsourcing to skilled external providers does have the potential to lead to an increase in the successful identification and collection of outstanding child support debt. This therefore has the potential to ensure that more children have financial support that they deserve. I understand the great difficulties that parents who have separated face when they manage the parenting of children. Much of this is managed through parenting plans under the Family Law Act. However, as we know, child support can be a source of acrimony between separated parents. Indeed, issues regarding child support are often a barrier to constructive relationships between separated parents. This legislation puts the child’s needs ahead of the parents and firmly recognises the benefits that children attain when they receive the financial support they need. By enabling the Child Support Register to delegate its debt collection activities to external service providers, the Child Support Program will be more effective.
efficient in managing other activities. These other activities are related to compliance and the more efficient and effective service of other child support customers.

In my previous occupation as a high school teacher, and then as an academic specialising in education, I came more and more to understand through my students the importance of a stable family life and ensuring good outcomes for children regardless of which parent they live with. It is simply critical that parents find a way to manage through this to enhance the outcomes for young people. By enabling the Child Support Program to be more efficient and effective, there is the potential that child support issues between separated parents can be better managed.

This legislation will also enable the Child Support Program to ensure the consistency of service delivery options. The delegation of collection activities will create the potential for the Child Support Program to lower its operational costs. This is important given the need to ensure that we effectively and carefully manage the resources of the Commonwealth. This bill will contribute to the development of greater efficiency in the Department of Human Services.

But there is a second part to the bill that is also important for us to explore and to put on the record today why it should proceed. This amendment bill also reforms the criminal provisions relating to the system of employers withholding a paying parent's salary or wages. The withheld salary or wages is paid to the Child Support Program to satisfy a child support liability. The criminal offences concern employers who do not abide by the system of withholding payments to the Child Support Program. The problem with the current criminal provisions is that they are ambiguous and therefore difficult to apply. Section 46 of the act as it currently stands does specifically outline the physical element of the offence. The issue is that the current provision only creates an obligation penalty. It does not specify whether the offence is created by an omission or an action. As stated by the minister, a literal reading of the current provisions suggests that an employer could be penalised for complying with this section. These issues have resulted in the office of the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions advising the Child Support Program that it would be reluctant to prosecute an employer under section 46 of the act. This is an undesirable situation because it means there are real issues in regard to how this act is enforced. That is why this legislation is important. We are talking about a real issue with a real impact that is currently not enhancing the life outcomes of young Australians who are caught in the crossfire of difficult negotiations between parents over their responsibilities.

Issues with the effective enforcement of criminal sanctions lead to difficulties in ensuring that children receive the financial support they need through this Child Support Program. The new subsection 46(4A) for makes clear that an employer will be fined 10 penalty units if they fail to make a deduction that they have been required to do under the act. The new section makes clear that an offence is committed when an employer fails to take the required action. This same problem is found in sections 47, 59 and 72W of the act, and those provisions have likewise been amended to clarify that it is an 'omission' not an 'act' that attracts a criminal liability. By providing for a criminal sanction that is unambiguous the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions will be better able to prosecute employers who do not comply with the act; furthermore, the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions will be more likely to be successful in such actions, ensuring that children do ultimately receive the financial support that they deserve.
We must also recognise that the criminal sanctions act as an important deterrent to employers with regard to noncompliance with their obligations under the employer-withholding process. If the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions experiences difficulty in enforcing the criminal provisions of the act, its ability to act as an effective deterrent is limited. Additionally, improving the ability of the Child Support Program to prosecute employers who fail to comply with requirements under the act will help the integrity of the Child Support Program. One wonders why it could be that an employer who is aware of such a situation acts in complicity with a non-paying parent. Relationships are interesting things in life—relationships between husbands and wives, men and women, mothers and fathers and employers and employees—and our loyalties are sometimes a little skewed in the wrong direction. This legislation is to make sure that children are put at the heart of any decision making and that they come before all else in order to give them the best advantage in getting on with life.

Population growth on the Central Coast has been among the many young families. We have a high percentage of families. The 2006 census gives a figure of 27,250 couple families with children under the age of 15 years who are dependent students. Additionally, there are 10,264 single-parent families with children under the age of 15 or with dependent students. It is really important to recognise that, in contemporary Australia, the composition of families varies, but we want to make sure that families that are not the typical, traditional family are not disadvantaged in any way and that their disadvantage is not made any worse by a failure to have the laws in place to support their best possibilities in life. Many Australian families, including families in my electorate, do experience parental separation.

I firmly believe that the amendments we have discussed here will advance the cause of ensuring that children are the priority in the child support system. They will provide for an effective incentive and, where necessary, a deterrent to employers to ensure that they comply with the act. I commend the amended bill to the House.

Mr CRAIG THOMSON (Dobell) (18:08): It is an unexpected pleasure, can I say, to speak to the Child Support (Registration and Collection) Amendment Bill 2011. As my colleague, good friend and fellow Central Coast MP, the member for Robertson, has pointed out, this is a very important bill for our area. We are an area that has a lot of young families, a lot of families that have moved to the Central Coast, which will clearly benefit from this legislation. For that reason, it is an important piece of legislation for those of us who are from the Central Coast.

The bill proposes, firstly, to allow the Child Support Registrar to delegate certain powers and functions to individuals outside the Department of Human Services and, secondly, the bill amends several criminal penalty provisions to ensure that offences in those provisions can be prosecuted successfully. Successful prosecutions are difficult to obtain in relation to child support. This is a very important provision to make sure that these offences are prosecuted successfully so that the right outcomes are there. I think all MPs would have people come to their office with stories about particular hardships they have had to face and where essentially the issue has been about successfully prosecuting their case. This bill squarely faces that. More important is perhaps the philosophy behind this bill which is making sure that children are front and centre in terms of the decisions that are being made. All too often when we are in these difficult situations of assessing what is to happen, and how child support is to work
and the like, these issues are not always front and centre. This is the case with this bill. While it was an unexpected pleasure to talk about this bill, it is nonetheless a contribution that I am very happy to make. I commend this bill to the House.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (18:10): The Child Support (Registration and Collection) Amendment Bill 2011 is very important legislation. I am very happy to speak on it, particularly with the Minister for Human Services here.

Ms Plibersek: I wouldn't miss it.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM: The bill has two major objectives. Firstly, the bill proposes to allow a child support registrar to delegate certain powers and functions to individuals outside the Department of Human Services and, secondly, as the minister has pointed out before, the bill amends several criminal penalty provisions to ensure that offences in these provisions can be prosecuted successfully—all very good aims.

The government believes it is vital that children of separated parents receive the emotional and financial support they need. Everybody would support that principle. While most parents do the right thing and pay their child support in full and on time, unfortunately not all parents meet their child support obligations. Through practical experience, the Child Support Program—and may I thank all those people that work in that area—very importantly has identified that having the ability to outsource debt collection activity to an external service provider on occasions should increase the successful collection of outstanding child support liabilities.

Hence the first amendment in the bill will enable a child support registrar to delegate certain powers and functions to external service providers. There is precedent, however, for this approach. For instance, such an approach is currently utilised by Centrelink for collection of outstanding liabilities. So why is the option being adopted? This approach aims to improve the collection of child support by using the expertise of skilled external providers for specific collection activities.

The outsourcing of collection activities is expected to lead to an increase in the successful identification and collection of outstanding child support debt. Indeed, this is right and proper. It is a debt. It is outstanding and there is an obligation on the debtor to pay. As a third party, it is the responsibility of our government to ensure that those responsible for child support payments honour that contract and obligation. There is another very good reason to have the option of outsourcing collection activities. This allows Child Support Program staff to concentrate on other compliance activities and better serve other child support customers.

The amendments to the delegation provisions under the Child Support (Registration and Collection) Act 1988 also have precedence. They are based on equivalent provisions under the Social Security (Administration) Act 1999 and the Paid Parental Leave Act 2010. As the Department of Human Services moves towards an integrated model between its various agencies, these amendments will enable the Child Support Program to ensure consistency of service delivery options across agencies.

The second group of amendments are for certain criminal provisions under the Child Support (Registration and Collection) Act 1988. These provisions relate to the obligations of an employer when they are required to withhold money from an employee. Employer withholding is a process whereby an employer withholds amounts from a paying parent's
wage or salary only as required by the Child Support Program to be paid to the CSA in satisfaction of a child support liability. The current offences relating to an employer withholding in the Child Support (Registration and Collection) Act 1988 are deemed to be somewhat ambiguous. Hence it is argued that a literal reading of the provisions suggest that an employer could indeed be penalised for complying with the section. This makes it difficult for the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecution to prosecute an employer who is doing the wrong thing. The proposed amendments will make it clear that an offence is committed when an employer fails to take certain action. Obviously, to clarify this legal matter the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions has been consulted in the making of the proposed amendments. In summary, these amendments will improve the prospect of a successful prosecution under the act. They make it clear that it is an offence when an employer fails to deduct or remit child support payments for the benefit of children. Improving the ability of the Child Support Program to successfully prosecute employers who fail to comply with requirements will also help protect the integrity of the Child Support Program and, at the end of the day, support the children of separated parents. Is that not, after all, the very intention of the program? I commend the legislation and the minister for promoting it.

**Ms PLIBERSEK** (Sydney—Minister for Social Inclusion and Minister for Human Services) (18:15): I want to thank all members for their contributions on this bill. It has been very reassuring and rewarding to listen to the contributions, because it has been plain from each contribution that each member considers that the best interests of the child should always be paramount when we are talking about issues relating to the Child Support Agency and the legislation which governs the actions of the Child Support Agency. Obviously, post separation after divorce is a period of enormous conflict and difficulty for families, and often there is ongoing conflict between parents. But, at every stage, as parliamentarians, as a community and as a country we should be thinking about what is best for the children in those circumstances.

I would like to make a few remarks about some of the issues that have been raised by my colleagues. The member for Menzies mentioned family relationship services. I want to reassure the member for Menzies that the government is fully committed to the Family Support Program and to funding services that help families to find alternative and meaningful ways of resolving their family law disputes. Total funding for the Family Support Program is well over $200 million per annum. That includes an annual investment of more than $90 million per annum for mediation services under the Family Support Program, which supports separating families to resolve issues around children's matters. Last year the government announced that some funding from within the Family Relationship Services Program would be redirected to provide legal assistance and advice to help separating families resolve disputes with targeted legal assistance delivered by organisations like community legal centres. That included reallocating $48.4 million from the Family Relationship Services Program over four years, with a total investment of $51.8 million, to help separating families resolve disputes with targeted legal assistance. Early indications show that this new approach to providing legal assistance for couples attending family relationship centres has been very positive. The government has consulted extensively within the family relationship services sector on these changes to their funding arrangements and, further, the government has
decided to defer the measures that apply to family relationship centres until January 2012 to assist in transitioning to the new funding arrangements.

I also want to reassure the member for Murray about the difficulties that she raised in relation to grandparents caring full time for their grandchildren. She is absolutely right: it is a terrifically difficult thing, thinking you have raised your children, to then go back to packing school lunches, signing notes, taking kids for inoculations, going to weekend sport and helping with homework—starting all over again all of those responsibilities of day-to-day parenting. It is a very challenging role and can be quite overwhelming for many grandparents, which is in part because those grandparents do not always know about the supports that are available in the community to help them with the very important role that they have taken on.

On 8 December last year I announced that grandparent advisers will be introduced in some Centrelink offices to support grandparents. I have been fortunate enough to meet with one of the grandparent advisers in the Sydney region. The new advisers will provide one-on-one support to grandparent carers by helping them apply for government support such as family assistance and income support payments. They are doing a terrific job. The feedback on the grandparent support officers has been very positive as well. The government believes it is vital that the children of separated parents receive both the emotional and the financial support that they need from both of their parents. While, as other speakers have said, most parents do the right thing and pay their child support in full and on time, unfortunately not all parents meet their obligations, as other speakers have said.

The first of these amendments will firstly enable the Child Support Registrar to delegate powers and functions to external service providers. Secondly, the bill amends several criminal penalty provisions to ensure the offences in those provisions can be prosecuted successfully and, thirdly, the Child Support Program has identified that the outsourcing of debt collection activity on occasion should increase the successful collection of outstanding child support liabilities. This approach is currently used by Centrelink for the collection of outstanding liabilities. Even though the Child Support Program envisages only limited use of the new powers, they are necessary to strengthen the Child Support Program's focus on the collection of child support payments and debt reduction. The changes to the legislation will also enable the Child Support Program to use the expertise of external providers for specific collection activities; for example, there are times when you might need a forensic accountant to help for a short period of time. Now that the parliament has passed legislation to integrate Centrelink, Medicare and the Child Support Program into a single department of human services, it is appropriate for the Child Support Program to have the same powers as Centrelink so that a debt collection agent may concurrently pursue debts relating to mutual customers of the Child Support Program and Centrelink. The amendments in this bill will allow that to happen.

The second group of amendments relates to certain obligations on an employer to deduct and remit child support payments to the Child Support Program. As both the previous speakers have mentioned, the current offences, relating to employers withholding payments, are somewhat ambiguous and a literal reading of the provisions would mean that an employer could be penalised for actually complying with the section. That makes it very difficult to prosecute employers under those provisions. The proposed amendments will make it clear that it is an offence when an employer fails to take a certain action. That will improve the prospect of successful prosecution of employers who fail to deduct or remit child support
payments for the benefit of children. Of course, the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions has been consulted in the making of the proposed amendments. I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Ordered that this bill be reported to the House without amendment.

Proceedings suspended from 18:23 to 18:30

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Griffin Design for the National Capital

Debate resumed on motion by Mr Andrews:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) 24 May 2011 marks the centenary of the launch of an international competition to design an Australian national capital; and

(b) the winning design for Canberra:

(i) by the American architect, Walter Burley Griffin, was announced in May 1912; and

(ii) was a collaboration between Griffin and his wife, Marian Mahony Griffin; and

(2) calls on the National Capital Authority to work with the Parliament to arrange an appropriate celebration of the centenary of the choice of the Griffin design for our nation’s capital.

Mr ANDREWS (Menzies) (18:30): Tomorrow marks the centenary of the launch of the competition to design the national capital city of Australia. On 24 May 1911 the Minister for Home Affairs, King O'Malley, announced an international competition for the design. In 1899 the colonial premiers had decided that the permanent capital would be in New South Wales, not less than 100 miles from Sydney, and a congress was held in Melbourne four months after Federation in 1901 on the planning of a capital. Dalgety was first chosen as the site of the future capital in 1904, but four years later the Canberra-Yass region was selected as a replacement. The selected site for the Australian Capital Territory was transferred to the Commonwealth of Australia in January 1911.

Half a world away in Chicago, two architects, whose names subsequently would come to be associated with Australia forever, had married. Walter Burley Griffin qualified as an architect in 1901, subsequently working with Frank Lloyd Wright and conducting his practice when Wright went to Japan, before starting his own practice. Marion Lucy Mahony, a graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, had also been employed in Wright’s office, and later by Hermann von Hoist when Wright eloped to Europe in 1909. They were major proponents of the 'prairie' school of architecture:

I am what may be termed a naturalist in architecture … I believe in architecture that is the logical outgrowth of the environment in which the building in mind is to be located.

It was while the Griffins were on their honeymoon that they learnt of the competition. According to a report in the New York Times of 2 June 1912, after the announcement that Griffin had won the competition and the $8,750 prize:
Mr Griffin spent two months in work upon his plans, and finally submitted thirteen drawings, five feet by thirty inches in diameter. These included a lay-out of the central district of the city, a general plan of the city and its environs, long sections through the city in two-directions, and a prospective bird's eye view of the city from Mount Ainslie.

Marion Mahony's impressive drawings and renderings of the plan no doubt helped the judges to select the Americans from the 137 entries in the competition, despite neither having ever visited Australia. Speaking after the announcement in 1912, Griffin said:

I have planned a city not like any other city in the world. I have planned it not in a way that I expected any governmental authorities in the world would accept. I have planned an ideal city—a city that meets my ideal of the city of the future.

With unknowing prescience Griffin added:

"I do not know to what extent my plan will be carried out. The Australian authorities may merely adopt my ground plan and fill in the architectural details to suit themselves. However, if my plan is carried out in all its details, I think the Australian capital will be the most beautiful city in history."

"I do not know whether I shall be called to Australia to superintend the construction of the new city. I hope so. I rather expect I shall. It would be only fair to me. There is nobody in the world who can work out my ideas like myself.

Technical problems with the transmission of sound having occurred—

Sitting suspended from 18:32 to 18:34

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms S Bird): The Main Committee will resume. The member for Menzies had the call, and his speech as he has delivered it to this point has been entered from his notes into Hansard.

Mr ANDREWS: Thank you. History records that the Griffins did come to Canberra to supervise the plan, but they had a rocky relationship with bureaucrats, eventually resulting in Walter being removed as director of construction by the Hughes government in 1921. He subsequently left Australia for India in 1935, having designed the towns of Leeton and Griffith and residential developments at Castlecrag in Sydney and at Eaglemont in Melbourne, as well as a series of notable buildings including Melbourne's Capitol Theatre and Newman College at the University of Melbourne.

The main features that were in the plan can be observed in Canberra today. But, as Professor David Dolan observes, the Griffin 'vision is grossly diluted and adulterated' and was 'ruthlessly compromised'. Indeed, the only fully completed structure that Griffin designed is the grave of the WWI general Sir William Bridges, at the Royal Military College, Duntroon.

It is appropriate that the Australian parliament recognises and celebrates the centenary of the city which was designed as its home and which in the decades since has become a thriving, modern symbol of Australia, a location for government, culture and commerce and a home for hundreds of thousands of our fellow citizens. I commend the motion to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I thank the member for Menzies for his delivery during that slightly disrupted period.

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (18:37): It gives me great pleasure as the member for Canberra to speak on this motion, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the member for Menzies for putting it forward, particularly given the influence that former Prime Minister Menzies had on this city. One of the frustrations of being a Canberran is the derision
which our city draws from many Australians. I know that the winters can be bitter, and today is probably not the finest example of our climate, but we do have great summers, great springs and great autumns and our famous blue sky through most of the seasons. I am most grateful to the member for Menzies for celebrating the city of Canberra, its place as our national capital and the role played by the Griffin-Mahony legacy.

As the member for Canberra, I have always been a bit baffled about why this city does not generate the same awe as that other national capital, Washington. After all, in the US, a career in the government in Washington is highly coveted, and a life in Washington is also highly coveted. It is a constant disappointment to all Canberrans that Australians do not connect with their national capital as Americans do with theirs, which is why this motion from a non-Canberran is so welcome.

Canberra is my home and my community and, more than that, it is the heart of this nation’s democracy and the 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. They run from every corner of this nation, and the knot that binds them is this House. For this reason, Canberra’s centenary in 2013 is not just a celebration for Canberrans but a celebration for the entire nation. It is a celebration of the history and the unity of Australia, a history and unity forged by common good, not war—and it is a history that we are still discovering. Just today the Minister for Justice unveiled a recently discovered design drawing from the capital competition, which was a wonderful and timely find. However, the centenary of Canberra is also an opportunity to reflect on how the city has grown beyond the drawings of the Griffin-Mahony design. But before I do that I want to dwell on the Griffin-Mahony vision for the city and the nation’s capital. It speaks of ideals as much about the social fabric of Australia as the built environment. In doing so I draw heavily on the work of Dr David Headon, who has studied and written extensively on Canberra and the national capital.

Walter Burley Griffin enthusiastically responded to Australia’s new and unique democracy, a democracy heavily imprinted by the Enlightenment and regarded as a progressive social experiment. Griffin was also deeply influenced by the democratic and naturalistic architecture that was flourishing in Chicago, particularly through the work of Frank Lloyd Wright and Louis Sullivan. You can see many of these influences in the designs of the early Canberra houses. Griffin felt that Australia was well placed to learn from the errors of the Old World. He wrote that he planned ‘an ideal city, a city that meets my ideal of a city of the future and a nature and liberty-loving people’. He wanted simplicity, comfort and egalitarianism in architecture and a national capital that would reflect that.

I do not think anything better exemplifies this Canberra approach to life, this nature and liberty-loving people than the rose gardens at Old Parliament House. I did a tour of these gardens many years ago and was delighted to learn that Robert Broinowski, who was secretary of the Joint House Department there, relied on rose donors to establish the gardens. Donors included the British City Council, Goodyear Tyre and Rubber Company, the North Sydney Council, the NRMA and in 1933 the touring English cricket team. But the donations were not confined to organisations and companies. Individuals also donated clippings and Old Parliament House workers donated one shilling and fourpence to buy a rose and join an illustrious group. The donors are acknowledged to this day on storyboards down there.
Canberra is no longer merely a town planner's concept, it has become a living, breathing and evolving community of more than 300,000 people. It is a city that owes its evolution to the Griffin-Mahony legacy but it has evolved from the influence of many people, from King O'Malley, from members of this parliament, from people in the legislative assembly. Most Canberrans are looking forward to celebrating our centenary and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Gillard government for providing $6 million for the program. In closing, I reflect on Griffin's words:

Australia of most democratic tendencies and bold radical government may well be expected to look upon her great future and with it her Federal Capital with characteristic big vision, for which her capital offers the best opportunity so far.

That is very much an ideal and vision to celebrate in 2013.

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (18:42): On 12 March 1913 the wife of the then Governor-General of Australia, Lady Denman, announced that the new capital would be called Canberra. With just two years to go before the 100th anniversary of the foundation of our national capital, it is right that we should now mark the significance of some of the key dates that were involved with the establishment of the capital. As the Deputy Chair of the Joint Committee on the National Capital and External Territories, I am very pleased to join and second, with the member for Menzies, the Hon. Kevin Andrews, this motion, which highlights the great importance and significance of the international competition to design the Australian capital, the winning design, the winning architects, and as part of this motion to call upon the National Capital Authority to work with the parliament to arrange an appropriate commemoration. Tomorrow, 24 May 2011, marks the 100th anniversary of the launch of the design competition that began the journey towards the establishment of our truly unique and magnificent capital city of our country.

When you look at the development of our state capitals and other major cities, there was always the potential that the national capital would in some way replicate some aspects of either Sydney or Melbourne, the dominant cities at the time. Yet the vision to have such a design competition really did ensure that a unique capital would be created. In May 1912 the winner of the competition was announced as Walter Burley Griffin, an architect who worked with his wife, Marion Mahony Griffin, to create the design and fundamentally influence the city's design and future. So when you look at the winning design, although it is not exactly the way the city subsequently developed, it is absolutely true to say that the major aspects of the city are evident in the Griffin design. As someone who has lived in this city for over six years of my life, thanks to the Army and the Federal Police before that, I can say that I do appreciate the beauty and functionality of Canberra, and this city that serves our nation well is highly appropriate. Although I am rarely in Canberra these days, apart from being here in Parliament House, when I speak of those places that visitors should come and see, I appreciate the beautiful parts of the city. I think of the lake that bears Griffin's name and I think of the layout of the streets and the monuments and the views that were evident as part of the original design. These are the aspects I recall most fondly, and they are the things that we owe to Griffin. What he planned for the capital and what was achieved are the parts of Canberra that I see as the key parts, and many people share my view. I know that many Australians that have not lived in Canberra or visited Canberra can be dismissive of the
capital. However, when they do come here, one thing they will always take home with them and appreciate is the parts of the city that Griffin was responsible for.

It is true to say that there was friction between Griffin and the government after the competition had been won. At the time that the implementation of the design was being attempted, the government was obviously focusing on the First World War. As I said before, there are aspects of the plan that were compromised. The key elements and the fundamental design that was implemented nevertheless reflects the tenets of his work. When you look at the final drawings, you see the east, the west and the central basins of the lake itself, which took until 1964 to be completed. The design of many of the roads and the layout of the city are evident. There is no doubt that this city, this capital, is fundamentally the work of its maker, its designer, and we should pay tribute to Walter Burley Griffin for what he achieved. It is somewhat tragic that it took until 1964, when Prime Minister Menzies decided to name the lake after Walter Burley Griffin, before he actually got some credit for the work that he did. Certainly he has become more appreciated with the establishment in 1988 of the Walter Burley Griffin Society.

Given the influence and the importance of the architectural competition and given the fact that we are now moving quickly towards the centenary of Canberra, it seems right and appropriate that as part of that celebration we properly reflect the contribution that Griffin made and the importance of that architectural competition. With the CAPITheticAL design competition that is being undertaken as part of the 100th birthday celebrations for Canberra, it does seem like an appropriate opportunity and location to make a contribution and to commemorate Griffin and the original competition.

**Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (18:47):** When Canberra turns on its charm and offers that perfect day—the sun shines, the water glistens and the temperature is neither too cold nor too hot—it is easy to see how this city charmed the federal parliamentarians who visited in 1906 and 1907 on their tour of potential sites for the new nation's capital. Originally Canberra was not the preferred location of either the media or the politicians. But for the perfect Canberra day on 13 August 1906 and then again on 23 August 1907, the parochial interests of a Premier and the change of heart invoked by a Victorian senator, our nation's capital could have been somewhere entirely different.

On 23 May 1912, entry No. 29 by Walter Burley Griffin, a landscape architect from Chicago, Illinois, was declared the winner of the competition to design Australia's new federal capital. Walter Burley Griffin heard about the Australian government's competition to design the national capital while on honeymoon with his wife, Marion, in 1911. Although it was Walter's name that headed the entry, theirs was very much a collaborative effort. Without Marion's elegant drawings, it is unlikely that Walter's design would have grabbed the judges and lifted it above the 136 other entries in the competition. The winning design incorporated leading international ideas of the day in the science of town planning, such as the 'city beautiful' and 'garden city' movements. Yet, for the city to flourish, Griffin believed it also needed a community with 'great democratic civic ideals'. He wanted Australia's capital to be a place where citizens enjoyed a high quality of life based on 'egalitarian legislation, genuine public spirit and organic, scientific cities'. The 13th March 2013 marks the Centenary of Canberra. The Australian government recognises the national importance of the Centenary of Canberra as the national capital. We have been working closely with the ACT government to
develop a program of events in the lead-up to and in the centenary year. The Australian and ACT governments have established an intergovernmental working group under an agreement signed in December 2008.

Along with the support of the Centenary of Canberra creative director, Robyn Archer, the working group have identified centenary national program activities, activities that have national reach and engage communities right around Australia, not just residents of the ACT. For example, the draft program includes the construction of the Canberra Centenary Walking and Cycling Trail. The trail will guide walkers and cyclists through urban and nearby rural areas, incorporating a variety of iconic and lesser known locations that tell the story of Canberra. The idea for the trail was raised from community submissions received as part of the Canberra 100 call for centenary projects. Taking in existing fire and walking trails, it will merge with new ones. It will start here at Parliament House and loop around the ACT through locations including Anzac Parade, the Australian War Memorial, Lake Burley Griffin, Mount Ainslie, Mount Taylor, Red Hill, the National Arboretum, Stromlo Forest Park and Mulligans Flat Sanctuary. A result of the partnership between the Australian government and the ACT community, the Centenary Trail will be a gift to Canberra and visitors to our city for years to come.

The Australian government's commitment to the Centenary of Canberra is evidenced by the recent announcement in its 2011-12 budget of $6 million over three years as a contribution to the centenary national program. The Australian and ACT governments are keen to collaborate with all stakeholders to ensure the success of this activity and the entire national program. The final size and shape of the program is currently being negotiated with the ACT.

Our national capital is a source of pride for all Australians. The Centenary of Canberra is a unique opportunity to celebrate this historic moment and for the Australian government to continue its conversation with the Australian people about the kind of nation we want over the next 100 years. As the federal member for Fraser and father of two young boys who proudly call Canberra home, I welcome the positive attention being paid to this city by the member for Menzies. I would also encourage the opposition to support the initiatives being put in place by the Australian government to celebrate the Centenary of Canberra, such as the Centenary Trail and new investments in the National Arboretum. I know they will join other national institutions in enriching the lives of the city and the nation.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms S Bird): The time allotted for the debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

**International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers**

Debate resumed on the motion by Ms Parke:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) by resolution 57/129 of 11 December 2002, the General Assembly designated 29 May as the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers to:

(i) pay tribute to all the men and women who have served and continue to serve in United Nations peacekeeping operations;

(ii) recognise their high level of professionalism, dedication and courage; and

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MAIN COMMITTEE
(iii) honour the memory of those who have lost their lives in the cause of peace;

(b) on 29 May 2011 Australia joins with other nations to commemorate United Nations workers who provide life-saving assistance to millions of people around the world; who work in conflict zones and areas of natural hazards; and who place their own lives at risk in the line of duty;

(c) Australia has been a strong supporter of United Nations peacekeeping operations since the first mission in 1947, and is one of the top 20 contributors to the United Nations peacekeeping budget;

(d) the United Nations' total peacekeeping budget is US$7.8 billion, or half of one per cent of global military spending, indicating that building and keeping the peace is overwhelmingly cheaper than the pursuit of war;

(e) there are over 122,000 military and civilian men and women working in 15 different United Nations missions around the world, who are not there for personal gain, rather, they are engaged in maintaining peace and security and in building the political, social and economic infrastructure required to ensure conflict zones can make the transition to peace on a sustainable and lasting basis;

(f) in the last decade, more than 1,100 United Nations peacekeepers have died while striving to help those most in need in some of the world's most hostile environments, with recent examples being in April 2011, when:

(i) 28 United Nations staff and 5 non-government organisations workers were killed in a plane crash in Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and

(ii) 7 international United Nations staff were killed in an attack on a United Nations compound in Mazar-e-Sharif in northern Afghanistan, which was the third direct attack against United Nations personnel in Afghanistan in the past 18 months; and

(g) United Nations and other humanitarian workers are increasingly being targeted for political and ideological reasons; and

(2) commends the vital work carried out by United Nations peacekeepers and other humanitarian workers and calls upon all United Nations member states to ensure the safety and security of United Nations peacekeepers and other humanitarian workers, and to appropriately punish perpetrators of violence against such workers

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (18:53): Next Sunday, 29 May, will be the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers. This day is to recognise and celebrate the work of United Nations peacekeepers across the globe. There are currently 122,000 UN peacekeepers involved in 15 separate UN peacekeeping operations. The United Nations continues to represent an evolving and necessary model of global cooperation that takes human endeavour, progress and problem solving beyond the confines of the nation state.

There are a few things about the United Nations that I hope every high school graduate in Australia would know. One would be its historical context—in other words, the fact that it was created in the aftermath of the worst conflict the human race has suffered and as a result of what that conflict implied. The second would be its purpose, which is to be something larger and wiser than a single nation state can be and, therefore, to represent a set of universal values and to bind and coordinate countries in their pursuit of those values. The third would be to recognise Australia's role as an early and active supporter of the United Nations. Australians should be proud that we, an island nation with perhaps more geographical cause to be isolationist than some countries, have been a key player for a country of our size. That is certainly true when it comes to our contribution to United Nations peacekeeping efforts. Since the end of the Second World War, somewhere between 30,000 and 40,000 Australian military personnel and police have been part of more than 50 peacekeeping missions in relation to
over 27 separate conflicts. For those members interested, I encourage you to read *Australian Peacekeeping: Sixty Years in the Field*, edited by David Horner, Peter Londey, and Jean Bou, which is a fantastic collection of essays on this subject collected from papers given at a conference in 2007 at the Australian War Memorial held to mark those 60 years.

I want to express my thanks and support for those Australians who are currently part of our contribution to seven UN peacekeeping operations, namely UNMIS in Sudan, UNAMID in Darfur, UNTSO in the Middle East, UNAMI in Iraq, UNAMA in Afghanistan, UNMIT in Timor-Leste and UNFICYP in Cyprus. I have a number of friends working in these missions from Australia and elsewhere.

The work of a United Nations peacekeeper draws on one's best qualities and one's deepest reservoirs of energy. And if you take on that calling, it puts you shoulder to shoulder with people from around the world who share a commitment to peace and a commitment to fairness and equality through the fellowship of men and women, irrespective of nation, religion, language or gender. It can break your heart—it almost certainly will break your heart—but its lasting personal legacy will be to have shown you, against the background of fear and violence and deprivation, against the background sometimes of humanity at its worst, the infinite potential goodness in people; the shining possibility of people at their best.

The value of Australia's efforts in this area, and of peacekeeping in general, has only increased in the last 20 years. I was pleased to note, courtesy of a typically intelligent and well-referenced essay entitled 'Five Steps to Becoming a More Effective UN Member' by John Langmore, a former member of this place and former President of the United Nations Association of Australia, that in the early 1990s there were more than 50 conflicts causing at least 1,000 annual battle deaths, whereas there were only 36 at the end of 2010. That is progress—and it is progress that diplomacy and peacekeeping have played a large part in achieving.

In Australia, a country that has participated in UN operations since the very beginning, we have made progress and improvements in our approach to peacekeeping. In 1993, following recognition by the Hawke-Keating government that peace operations had special requirements and were of increasing complexity, the ADF Peace Operations Training Centre was established, and it remains the headquarters for developing and managing peace operations policy and training. It was also in 1993 that the Australian War Memorial presented its first exhibition on peacekeeping—with financial input from the three services and also from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. That exhibition marked a turning point in the recognition of peacekeeping within the wider ambit of Australian Defence Force deployments. I am pleased to note that the WA Army Museum located in Fremantle, which is the most significant war museum in Australia outside of Canberra, has a fantastic new post-1945 gallery which contains a comprehensive exhibition on Australian peacekeeping.

Today, when people think about the Australian Defence Force, they often conjure up images of service men and women at work on peacekeeping missions. The armed services are promoted as a vocation that may well involve a substantial amount of work without weapons; that may involve building a bridge or a school or repairing a well or even—as I saw in a picture from last Christmas—making a visit from Father Christmas and his camouflage-wearing elves to the Dominican orphanage in Dili, Timor-Leste, courtesy of an International Stabilisation Force helicopter.
Ironically, the greater public focus on and recognition of ADF peacekeeping that occurred during the 1990s and peaked with our very substantial involvement in East Timor in 1999 actually fell away during the first decade of this century, at least partly because Australia in that time has again been involved in fighting wars. In any case, Australia's participation in both UN and non-UN peacekeeping is ongoing and of course continues to be of great value and impact, especially in those countries in our region where we take a leading role, such as Timor-Leste and the Solomon Islands.

A further welcome development on the civilian side is the establishment of the Australian Civilian Corps, a select group of civilian specialists who will deploy to countries experiencing or emerging from natural disaster or conflict in order to support stabilisation, recovery and development planning. It is intended that by 2014 there will be 500 Australians on the Civilian Corps register. This program is managed by AusAID, and I congratulate Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd on this important initiative.

That Australia continues to be one of the 20 highest contributors to UN peacekeeping is and should be a matter of pride. Our financial contributions to United Nations peacekeeping operations amount to some $160 million annually. However it needs to be said that the United Nations current annual peacekeeping budget, at US$7.8 billion, is equivalent to half of one per cent of annual global military spending. The US defence budget alone is 100 times the global peacekeeping budget, and even Australia's defence budget is nearly 3½ times as large. I look forward to the day the resources we devote to peacemaking and peacekeeping are within touching distance of the resources we pour into weapons and war. In their introduction to the book I mentioned earlier, *Australian Peacekeeping: Sixty Years in the Field*, in the context of how peacekeepers are regarded vis-a-vis personnel deployed for combat, the editors note:

Peacekeeping was less straightforward. Peacekeepers, regardless of the worth of their cause, were not fighting the nation's wars; they were trying to sort out someone else's. This comparison between fighting a war and trying to settle the aftermath of one clearly points towards a third kind of involvement, which is the active work, or peacemaking, that might be done to anticipate and prevent wars from starting in the first place. As John Langmore points out in his article:

… the first and principal requirement of UN Member States which is to attempt by all reasonable means to avoid the threat or use of force and to seek non-violent means of minimising and resolving conflict.

Of course, diplomatic efforts to prevent war have existed since diplomacy itself, yet the dedicated structures and resources that would constitute peacemaking that springs from a multilateral and humanitarian impetus, rather than from the sovereign self-interest which has been the predominant motivation for seeking peace in the past, do not exist to any great degree.

Norway is a counter example and, as John Langmore points out, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs now includes a Peace and Reconciliation Section, with an annual budget of US$100 million and a mandate to work in collaboration with the new United Nations Mediation Support Unit. As an example of the value of global community effort in resolving a conflict, Langmore notes the international efforts to resolve the conflict between the Luos and the Kikuyu after the presidential election in Kenya, in December 2007, which involved
concerted engagement by several countries and international NGOs, led by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

In relation to the Australian situation, Langmore says:

As far as I know, not a single Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade officer is working full-time on peaceful conflict resolution. The department would have to build its capacity in the field by, for example, establishing a branch of professional staff trained in mediation and the other means suggested in the UN Charter for peaceful settlement of disputes.

I agree with John Langmore that Australia is well placed and well suited to consider being even more proactive in the cause of peace and cooperation in the way he suggests—for instance, if modest resources could be found from the defence budget.

Only today the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade inquiry into the 2009-10 DFAT annual report canvassed the enormous disparity in budgetary terms between defence and diplomacy: roughly $27 billion versus $1 billion. In my view, there is no reason why we should not invest in preventative defence in the same way as we do in preventative health.

One of my favourite cartoons from the New Yorker magazine features a man talking to a highly decorated general at a reception, and he is saying to the general: 'Our real first line of defence, wouldn't you agree, is our capacity to reason.' I think that all peacekeepers would agree.

I thank my colleagues for joining me in speaking to this motion. Most importantly, I thank all the UN peacekeepers for their efforts and courage, those from Australia and from all the other contributing nations. I particularly honour those peacekeepers who have lost their lives, and I express here my sorrow and my gratitude to their families.

Mr McCormack (Riverina) (19:03): The 29th of May is the designated date to acknowledge United Nations peacekeepers. It is a time for us to show recognition for the hard work, dedication and risks that UN peacekeepers take. This is a day to honour the memory of the UN peacekeepers who have lost their lives in the cause of peace and a time to pay tribute to all the men and women who have served and who continue to serve in UN peacekeeping operations for their high level of professionalism, courage and dedication. These are people who are genuinely trying to help make the world a safer place, a better place and to ease the burden on those whose lives are worse off because of conflict.

This year also marks a milestone in the history of UN peacekeeping operations, with UN member states commemorating the 60th anniversary of the first UN peacekeeping operation, authorised by the UN Security Council. United Nations peacekeepers are guided by three basic principles: consent of the parties; impartiality; non-use of force, except in self-defence, and defence of the mandate. Peacekeeping operations are deployed on the basis of a mandate from the United Nations Security Council. Over the years, the tasks assigned to the operations have significantly expanded as the conflict patterns change and different threats arise to international peace and security. Since 1948, when the first UN peacekeeping mission was established, more than 2,900 military, police and civilian personnel have lost their lives in the service of peace as a result of acts of violence, accidents and disease. In the past decade alone more than 1,100 UN peacekeepers have died while striving to help those in some of the world's most hostile environments.
In 1988 the UN peacekeeping forces were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in honour of their contribution to reducing tensions under extremely difficult conditions where an armistice has been negotiated but a peace treaty has yet to be established. Today there are 15 UN peacekeeping operations deployed on four continents. These operations not only maintain peace and security but also facilitate the political process; protect civilians; assist in the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of former combatants; support the organisation of elections; protect and promote human rights; and assist in restoring the rule of law.

Australia has been involved with United Nations peacekeeping missions for over 50 years. In Indonesia in 1947 Australians were part of the very first group of UN military observers in the world and in fact were the first into the field. Peacekeeping is not only the work of Australian defence personnel; Australian police have also had an active role since 1964, helping to build bridges between communities all across the world. Since the first Australian peacekeepers in 1947, more than 30,000 Australians have been involved in peacekeeping and humanitarian operations.

Peacekeeping is a difficult process, and unfortunately many lives have been lost trying to make the world a safer place. Thirteen Australians have been killed whilst involved in peacekeeping operations. In April this year 28 UN staff and five non-government organisation workers were killed in a plane crash in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and seven international UN staff were killed in an attack in northern Afghanistan—an attack directly against UN personnel and other humanitarian workers. In January 2010 the UN suffered its largest ever loss of staff in the devastating Haiti earthquake, where 100 UN civilian and military peacekeepers from 30 countries were killed. These were people who thought only of bringing good to the world, and their memory will serve to fortify us in carrying on our efforts to help restore dignity to the lives of the world’s most vulnerable.

At present there are more than 122,000 military, police and civilian personnel serving in peacekeeping operations, essential security and support to millions of people, 113 of whom are Australians dispersed in 15 UN peacekeeping operations deployed on four continents. These include 14 peace operations and one special political mission in Afghanistan. Australia has been a longstanding supporter of the United Nations. Despite our relative isolation and relatively small population, Australia has contributed mightily to UN peacekeeping efforts. May it long continue.

We continue that tradition today as an active contributor of personnel and financial support to UN and other multilateral peace operations throughout the world. Since the 1970s, Australia's contribution to peacekeeping operations has increased in size and scope. In that decade, and again in the 1980s, RAAF helicopters operated in the Sinai as Egypt and Israel ended three decades of hostilities. At the end of the 1970s an Australian infantry force of 150 soldiers took part in a British Commonwealth operation as Zimbabwe won its independence. Then in the 1980s an even larger contingent, composed largely of engineers, assisted a UN operation with a similar role in Namibia.

However, by far the largest peacekeeping operation was the deployment of 5,500 Australians to East Timor. In August 1999 a UN peace operation, the United Nations Mission in East Timor, was established. But the national vote of independence caused violence and bloodshed amongst the people and in September of the same year Major General Peter Cosgrove contributed more than 5,000 Australian soldiers. Two Australian personnel died

As the member for Riverina, my residence of Wagga Wagga is also home to the Army Recruit Training Centre at Kapooka, the home of the Australian soldier. All regular recruits to the Australian Army do basic training within this important facility. Many past, present and future peacekeepers will have passed or will pass through my electorate. For the privacy of the veterans, most personal information on members of peacekeeping missions is not available to the public. However, I would like to make special mention of Signalman Neil Atkins from Wagga Wagga, who was deployed with the United Nations peacekeeping force in the Western Sahara in 1991. Many men and women from all over the world put their lives at risk working in places others cannot or will not go, committing to maintaining international peace and security, developing friendly relations amongst nations, promoting social progress, better living standards and human rights.

On 29 May we must stop, take a minute and thank the efforts of the United Nations and humanitarian workers who provide lifesaving assistance to millions of people around the world, who work in conflict zones and in areas of natural hazards and who place their own lives at risk in the line of duty.

Ms SAFFIN (Page (19:10): I would like to commend and thank the honourable member for Fremantle for giving us the opportunity to speak on such an important issue. It really is something which, as members of parliament, we have to be mindful of, particularly on 29 May.

Australia has a long tradition of peacekeeping. The honourable member for Fremantle talked about Norway, how they have a certain area within their foreign affairs dedicated to peace operations, as opposed to peacekeeping within the military and the police. I am aware of the work of that all-agency group in this very important area, which is one we could well explore. Australia contributes significantly to the peacekeeping budget with ADF personnel and AFP and we could play even more of a role.

There are a couple of peacekeeping initiatives. There is the Australian Civilian Corps, a really good initiative which has been set up—I think they have either deployed or are about to be. That corps is another good initiative which can help in general in the peace area, although not entirely. Also there is the Asia-Pacific Civil-Military Centre of Excellence, an initiative set up by this government which is run by the retired Major General Mike Smith. The centre of excellence has an important role to play in preparedness for our ADF and our AFP, and also within the region and some work they are doing in Africa. Major General Mike Smith was involved in UNTAC in Cambodia and also in East Timor. I have worked with him in the field.

That brings me to some of the experiences I had in East Timor from 1999 when INTERFET went in and then there was the peacekeeping mission. I worked with them over a period of years up to 2006, and I was there when the International Stabilisation Force came in, led predominantly through the ADF. Working in that area—I know the honourable member for Fremantle has had these experiences as well—has given me a real insight and a unique experience. One of the difficulties for peacekeepers is that generally they are invited in under a Security Council mandate but they are going into a contested environment. Even if it is the government of the day who invites them in, working in a contested environment—and that is...
not just for soldiers and police but for the civilians—presents its own set of challenges. In
peacekeeping there is a range of issues and challenges and the rule of law is a particular one,
among many, that I took quite a strong interest in, because when you are working in the field
you do a bit of everything. It is one that peacekeeping and the UN have been seized with since
about 1999, but it is one that needs a lot more work. In closing, I too pay tribute to all the men
and women in the field, and to those who have lost their lives and to their families I say thank
you for doing a hard job, one that we should applaud.

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (19:15): Australia has a long and proud history of contributing
to peacekeeping missions around the world. Our peacekeepers were in fact part of the very
first United Nations peacekeeping mission, and the first four Australian military officers who
were part of that mission were indeed the first in the field. That is one reason why it is
particularly important for us to celebrate the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers on Sunday, 29 May. I am honoured to be attending the Brisbane ceremony this
weekend at Anzac Square.

Since the very first United Nations peacekeeping mission in 1947, to Indonesia, Australia
has had active peacekeepers deployed non-stop in 64 countries around the world. We have
come a long way since those first four peacekeepers in 1947. Sixty-six thousand Australians,
members of the ADF and the AFP, have been part of 73 different peacekeeping operations,
making a real difference to the regions in which they served. When looking at the difference
they have made in Bougainville, it becomes clear that peacekeepers play a vital role in
bringing about, as their name suggests, world peace. In Bougainville, Australia was at the
forefront of the international peacekeeping effort which facilitated the security for what was
to become a successful peace process. It is important to note how Australia's independent role
in the Bougainville negotiations helped not only the success of the peacemaking but also to
build Australia's standing in the Pacific region. It also says something of the courage and
understanding of the troops from Australia, New Zealand, Vanuatu and Fiji that the
peacekeeping force, the troops and later the peace monitoring group were not harmed, even
though the combatants held their arms until the institution of a weapons disposal program.

In East Timor and the Solomon Islands, Australian troops were at the forefront of the
peacekeeping process. Managing peace, protecting civilians and building a base for lasting
peace is not an easy process, particularly when the combatants retain their arms. There is
generally a real lack of trust on all sides, and these operations demand not only a combat
capacity but also the capacity to talk, to engage groups with often diametrically opposed
views as to the future of their country and then to help build a consensus. That takes a broad
range of skills and community engagement. Australia's achievements to date are a credit to
our armed forces and to the many civilian advisers who are inevitably involved—from
AusAID to NGOs, they all deserve our gratitude.

Building peace is as important as fighting a war, if not more so, and it is important that we
acknowledge the success of brave Australians in building peace. It is important that our
peacekeepers are recognised and their values upheld now and in the future. We must ensure
that the honouring of their bravery, courage and integrity is long lived, and I commend the
Australian War Memorial for dedicating itself to building a living memory of all military
service.
As we honour our soldiers, sailors and airmen, it is timely to remind this government that we must not undervalue the War Memorial and the important role it plays. The history of peacekeeping is indeed a history of Australians striving to make the world a better place. The values of responsibility, trustworthiness and a higher regard for humanity that our peacekeepers carry should be instilled and implemented into society at home and around the world as they let us take a further step towards a peaceful world. One way that we can do this is to teach our younger generations about the sacrifices our service men and women have made, ensuring that they learn of the dedication of our military personnel and police forces to a better world through peacekeeping.

Our peacekeepers are courageous. It is important to acknowledge the 1,100 United Nations peacekeepers who have lost their lives in service over the past decade and the 13 Australians who have fallen since 1966. The nature of peacekeeping and all military service is unique, and our peacekeepers face risks and trauma that can haunt them for the rest of their lives. Indeed, as we honour the men and women who have fallen in service, we must also not forget that 31 Defence personnel have or are believed to have committed suicide since 2005. The horrors of peacekeeping are spelt out in Ian McPhedran's book *Soldiers Without Borders*, a book about the SAS but which describes the horrors confronting Australian troops in Rwanda as part of the Australian Defence Force medical support force with the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda. The horrors that our service men and women face do not leave them, and we are losing young men and women not only in service but also after they return home. While we honour peacekeepers today, we must look at what we are doing to support our personnel returning from wars and from peacekeeping. They have served and supported their country, and we must ensure that our country serves and supports them. I commend this motion to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DGH Adams): Order! The time allocated for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Science Curriculum

Debate resumed on the motion by Mr Pyne:

That this House:

(1) acknowledges the effectiveness of programs initiated by the former Coalition Government such as 'Primary Connections' and 'Science By Doing', that support professional development for teachers to effectively engage primary and secondary school students on science curriculum;

(2) recognises the need for Australian Government support of teachers, allowing them to access the support and training they need to teach the new national curriculum in science;

(3) notes the:

(a) Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development evidence which indicates that science literacy in students is declining in Australia compared with other countries; and

(b) concern of the Australian Primary Schools Principals Association, that the Australian Government has not provided a funding commitment to the Australian Academy of Science beyond this financial year to continue the 'Primary Connections' and 'Science By Doing' programs; and

(4) calls on the Australian Government to make clear its funding commitment in relation to these programs which are vital to support teachers.

MAIN COMMITTEE
Mrs MIRABELLA (Indi) (19:21): In many respects, it does not give me any particular pleasure to speak on this motion. Indeed, if we had a government that displayed any degree of competence, then we would not have a need for this motion in the first place. But we all know that that would be wishful thinking and much too much to ask or expect when it comes to the Gillard government.

Whoever is responsible for the abolition of the PrimaryConnections and Science by Doing programs should hang their head in shame, because what they have done is axe programs that have proven highly effective. What they have done is axe programs that addressed genuine problems. What they have done is axe programs that identified and corrected flaws in previous approaches to science education. What they have also done is undercut past funding and compromise extraordinary amounts of work, time and effort that have been invested by the Academy of Science, schools and teachers and a host of other science bodies and figures over recent years to roll out, promote and optimise the considerable benefits of each of the two programs. And all this at a time when most experts in the field argue that Australia desperately needs programs like these that successfully tackle issues such as improving support and training for science teachers and addressing the declining levels of scientific literacy among our students compared to other countries.

Unfortunately, I am not completely sure how or why the government came to its decision to abolish the two programs, because, in typical Labor fashion, it has subsequently tried to silence all discussion about it and simply make the issue disappear from public view. There has been no serious explanation of the reasons for the decision. Indeed, my understanding is that it has not even been rationalised behind closed doors, by either Minister Garrett or Minister Carr, to any of the key stakeholders, let alone to the public. In fact, we even had the disarming sight at estimates in February of Senator Carr, the science minister and a former schoolteacher no less, belligerently arguing that this whole matter had absolutely nothing to do with him.

I can only assume the motivation is a misjudged and mean-spirited attempt at a budget saving. But it is not exactly as though the continuation of the programs would have been either a huge or unjustified drain on the public purse. In fact, the outlay is minimal in relative terms, especially when set against its impacts and contrasted with the billions of dollars that the government have splurged on all manner of wasteful projects, which they of course continue to do. We are talking about $11.5 million over the next five years for the two programs combined, and less than $5 million over the next two years. Let us also bear in mind that these programs would have both become self-sustaining in only a short time in any case if they were allowed to continue.

But, sadly, this government is so weak and unaccountable that it has not even bothered to explain itself at all. As a result, a trail of bewilderment, anger and frustration has been left in its wake, all the way from the Academy of Science, which was the architect of the programs, to the participating teachers and students, to former Prime Minister's Prizes for Science winners, to professional science and literacy associations, to the Australian Primary Principals Association, to the Australian Council of Deans of Education, right through to the many other Australians who were benefiting both directly and indirectly from the operation of these programs. In respect of the PrimaryConnections program alone, extensive analysis and evaluation of the initiative indicates that there have been significantly improved levels of
confidence, engagement and competence amongst teachers. Similarly, there has been substantial field evidence pointing to increased interest, enthusiasm and knowledge among students, not to mention widespread uptake, with the program proving so popular that more than 55 per cent of all primary schools have ordered units. Likewise, Science by Doing, whilst at an earlier stage, not only has been allowing for more practical hands-on teaching of science to secondary students but also has been engaging those students more actively with science through an inquiry based approach.

These have all been great outcomes—indeed the kinds of outcomes for which educators, scientists and politicians have yearned for many years. But now these gains have been thrown down the drain. It is quite some irony that the Labor Party thinks it is perfectly acceptable to waste billions on overpriced school halls yet cannot even bother to find a tiny fraction of that amount to devote to successful programs for the teachers and children inside those halls. It is about as contradictory as making a lot of grand rhetorical flourishes about the importance of a new science curriculum but not even bothering to make sure that teachers are adequately trained and supported to be able to teach it. It makes about as much sense as bemoaning the poor state of Indigenous education but then discontinuing initiatives that have been widely praised for imparting noticeable improvements in the ways that many Indigenous children are learning and understanding the science lessons they are being taught. It is about as logical as touting the importance of the Inspiring Australia initiative to promote science in Australia on the one hand but then slashing support for crucial science education measures for the nation's children on the other hand.

Unfortunately such acts simply continue the tale of ongoing degradation of the importance of science by this government. To be sure, it professes an interest in science, particularly at moments when it waxes lyrical about climate change, and it does make a lot of grand claims about being determined to commit to evidence based decisions. But the reality is very different. In reality such interest is based purely on all of its usual political expediency. Regrettably, scientists, science agencies and organisations and science journalists have been shamefully mistreated by this government. Let us look at some of the examples. Whether you are, for instance, a Chief Scientist who never even gets to meet the Prime Minister, a science journalist personally denigrated under the cloak of Senate estimates, an individual scientist whose findings are censored and then rewritten just to make them politically palatable or a CSIRO scientist whose pay claims are ignored while the science minister is crowing about supposedly record funding to the organisation, the story is the same: you are valued by this government only so long as you do not get in the way by disagreeing with Labor Party lines.

This government always does merely what it thinks will garner it the most votes. It ditches the initiatives, policies and programs when it thinks that such actions will not cause significant political fallout. Presumably, it believes that a decision to cut the budget for science education will not receive much media coverage and will not have severe political repercussions. Of course it is perfectly prepared to risk damaging the quality of science teaching to our schools as a result. But, just because you do not hear loud voices of disappointment with and anger towards this government, does it mean they are not there? They add to the perception of a government that is desperate and out of touch and that has no vision for this nation. How can you have a vision when you gut something as
important as science education by $11½ million dollars? It makes a mockery of the government's so-called education revolution.

There is at least a small glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel, because it is not too late for the government to admit to its many failings in the area of science. Everyone knows it. Everyone out there has long crowed that the emperor has no clothes. The most sensible way for the government to begin would be to apologise for its error in axing these education programs, concede it is a decision it got badly wrong and reinstate the funding. Sadly, though, I will not be holding my breath, because one of the enduring features of this government is that not only does it have bad instincts and not only does it make bad decisions without consultation but, rather than repair the damage, it usually makes the situation worse by digging its heels in.

I strongly support the member for Sturt's motion and I condemn the government for its continued short-sightedness. As the shadow minister for, amongst other things, science, I am deeply disturbed by the anxiety it has caused in the broader science community and I ask the government to reconsider its position. It will not be front-page news that you have done another backflip, but you might just get some credit out there in the science community where it counts. And you might just be putting in place one of those very important educational building blocks. I commend the motion to the House.

Ms BIRD (Cunningham) (19:31): I welcome the opportunity to address the issues in the motion put before the House by the shadow minister on the broad issue of professional development support for teachers generally and, more specifically, for science teachers. I will address the broad issue first and then go to the specific issue of the continuation of the PrimaryConnections and Science by Doing programs. In doing so, I will address some of the issues raised by the member for Indi in her contribution to the debate, of which about half was related directly to the motion—the other half was the usual general diatribe against the government. We will ignore that bit and just deal with the part that was actually relevant to the motion before us.

We should firstly acknowledge that the primary responsibility for the professional development of teachers sits with their employing authorities, either state or private. However, the federal government works in partnership by providing substantial funding for teacher professional development through the National Education Agreement for government school teachers and through the Australian Government Quality Teacher Program for teachers in non-government schools.

As the challenges of improving our efficiency and competitiveness in the modern world continue to highlight the need for high standards of scientific literacy in the community, we should acknowledge that Australia's PISA 2009 results remained steady with those of the previous testing done in 2006. Australia's average score was 527, which was significantly above the OECD average of 501. These results are not bad results, but we should always be working to improve them, particularly as our regional neighbours, such as Shanghai and Hong Kong China, Singapore, Japan and Korea outperformed us in 2009.

I would also like to take the opportunity at this point to indicate how important, despite the comments of the member for Indi, the Digital Education Revolution and the rollout of the National Broadband Network are to the successful delivery of science in schools. They will
be increasingly important in engaging young people in real world studies, particularly in areas of science.

In particular, I refer members to the case study that can be found on the NBN Co. website about St Peter Chanel Catholic School in Smithton in Tasmania, perhaps known to Mr Deputy Speaker Adams. The headmaster, Clynton Scharvi, says it feels like a whole new world has opened up to the students, teachers and parents since the school was connected to the NBN. He states:

Children are engaged and enthused and the NBN is outstanding in supporting discovery or inquiry-based learning … The fact that the kids are so engaged motivates our teachers which drives the whole learning process. Going back three or four years, having a teacher set up a data projector and screen was a big deal. Now we have teachers using iPads, Google applications online and seeking out new ways to enhance online learning through the NBN. For example, we used the NBN to host an astronomy night at the school. We synchronised an iPad application with our location to produce a view of the night sky. Using telescopes we could then chart the stars we were seeing and identify them through the iPad. Parents joined in too. Students have also had the opportunity to have live link-ups with a diver on the Great Barrier Reef and students in a remote community on the Tiwi Islands … We often take for granted that you can fly to Melbourne for a weekend. But some of our kids at Circular Head don’t get the chance to leave Rocky Cape, just 40 kms away. The NBN increases the opportunities for every single child to experience and learn about people, environments and cultures from around the world. This is a simply great story from a local school, and it is clear that these new tools and connections have enormous capacity to reconnect young people to the inspiration of scientific discovery and exploration. The principal went on further to talk about the professional development that is provided to teachers to enable them to make best use of these tools.

I was reminded when repeating that story from the principal of my first term in this parliament on the education committee when we were looking at the issue of teacher training and the fact that a lot of our young new teachers did not last more than five years. Rod Sawford, a member of the House at the time, was on the committee with me and he was a very passionate advocate of science and maths, in particular, in our schools. An issue that became clear to us was the importance of providing up-to-date capacities for science to be delivered in schools. Kids were going home and they were watching the Discovery Channel on TV and they were engaging with science in really meaningful ways, yet somehow the curriculum and the school experience had become very dry and unengaging and they were losing their love of science in the school. It appears to me, from a story like this, that young people doing real-life experience with a class of kids from the Tiwi Islands, looking at a wetland area and working together on a science project, provides an outstanding opportunity for them to re-engage.

Further to those government initiatives, we have provided $550 million through the Smarter Schools—Improving Teacher Quality national partnership to implement a range of reforms to raise teacher quality and to help underpin the implementation of the national Australian curriculum, including through professional development for teachers. Additionally, in partnership with the states and territories, the government has established the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, as well as Education Services Australia. These organisations will also play a key role in supporting the augmentation of the Australian curriculum.
Part of the shadow minister's motion emphasises the importance of supporting teachers, allowing them, in his words, to 'access the support and training they need to teach the new national curriculum in science'. The government has been delivering and will continue to deliver this support. The opposition should stop deriding the Digital Education Revolution and the National Broadband Network as these initiatives will be increasingly important tools in engaging young people in the sciences and supporting teachers to provide meaningful and innovative teaching activities in the classroom.

The two specific programs identified by the shadow minister in the motion and described as axed by the member for Indi—the PrimaryConnections and the Science By Doing projects—were funded five-year projects. Both of these programs have in fact received a substantial investment by this government and, as a result, have generated valuable returns for the teaching and learning of science in Australian schools. Importantly, these returns will continue beyond the life of the projects themselves. The initiatives, as they were set up to do, have developed important and valuable resources for teachers in delivering curriculum units, and these resources will be available into the future both online and in other relevant formats when the projects are completed. In addition, hundreds of trainers in the PrimaryConnections approach have been trained. Over 8,000 professional learning workshops have been run, and these have been delivered in order to help the state and territory authorities take up the program.

The government extends its congratulations to the Australian Academy of Science for its commitment to the advancement of science education and its innovative work in developing these projects to foster quality in science teaching in Australian schools. Importantly, I acknowledge their ongoing work in that area, including that of other organisations in the science field. In particular I refer to some of the great partnerships that Questacon are developing to provide science lessons utilising the capacity of the NBN that will deliver to schools in engaging young people in experiences of the various projects and presentations at Questacon, making them available to classrooms with kids who may never get the opportunity themselves to visit Questacon.

There are lots of great initiatives out there. This government certainly values these projects and the work that they have done and remains committed to making sure, as was the intention when the projects were first established, that the resources and the skills that are being developed continue to be applied into classrooms into the future. I remain optimistic about the future of science learning in our schools, particularly supported by modern technology in its capacity to re-engage young people with a love for the sciences.

Ms MARINO (Forrest—Opposition Whip) (19:41): I support the motion of the member for Sturt on the science curriculum. When the Prime Minister addressed the US congress earlier this year she said:

… our societies share a deep commitment to the value of education. We understand education's transformative power. We know education is the future for every child who learns. We also know education is the future for our economies.

The Prime Minister also said:

We must work together to achieve an historic transition to high technology, high skill, clean energy economies.
But the Prime Minister did not tell the Americans that she was about to cut a highly successful science program which directly undermines the capacity and opportunity for Australian teachers to access the materials they need to assist them in teaching our children science.

In April, a number of previous winners of the Prime Minister's Science Prize for Excellence in Science Teaching in Primary Schools wrote to the Prime Minister asking her not to cut funding to the PrimaryConnections program. In that letter some of our best and most dedicated science teachers in this country told the Prime Minister:

The Primary Connections program is such an outstanding success with classroom teachers because it gives support at differing levels, from complete step by step instruction, to supporting teachers in developing their own teaching modules using the background information given.

The teachers also told the Prime Minister that the program was so good that young graduates were buying the PrimaryConnections materials with their own money. What a resounding endorsement. The PrimaryConnections program was in the process of becoming self-funding and sustainable through sales to schools, but the government has axed it. This is a program that deserves support because it delivers real results.

The Australian Council of Deans of Science report Who's teaching science? of 2005 was prepared by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education. It highlighted that there was a shortage of teachers with strong science skills, especially in the tough science subjects of physics and chemistry. One of the reasons for this shortage was that teachers were leaving the profession to find employment elsewhere because of the lack of support for science teachers and that was in part driving the exodus. Cutting this support even further is really a national disgrace.

Science By Doing is a national initiative which aims to actively engage junior secondary school students in learning science through an inquiry based approach. The project is managed by the Australian Academy of Science in conjunction with CSIRO, the Australian Science Teachers Association and state education departments. The purpose of Science By Doing is described by the Australian Academy of Science as to improve science learning by engaging secondary students through an inquiry based approach and supporting school based learning communities that acknowledge and build upon teacher expertise.

Support for both these programs is widespread. Quite simply, they are very good programs. Individual teachers have contacted me. They are profoundly disappointed by this decision by the government. How will teachers now keep up with the rapid pace of developments in technologies without the resources of PrimaryConnections? The Australian Science Teachers Association and the Australian Primary Principals Association have also expressed their shock that the government would contemplate dumping these programs and are opposed to the proposed cuts. If education is the future of our economy, as the Prime Minister told the American congress, it looks like that economy will not be relying on the government to support science education for our students or in supporting our science teachers. We certainly face many challenges as a nation. Providing and provoking both an interest and an education in science is integral not only to understanding nature and life but to continuous cutting-edge research and to development and technology, and essentially it is our future. I note that Cheryl Capra, a Queensland science teacher who studied astronomy and now helps train other teachers, was quoted as saying that PrimaryConnections has been a tremendous boost to
science learning throughout Australia in primary schools but its job is not finished even with the national curriculum on the doorstep. I note that Australian Academy of Science president Suzanne Cory says PrimaryConnections needs another $1.5 million over two years to make it self-sustaining and that the program will not be able to update and keep teachers abreast of rapid developments in technology, and what they really need is improved and inspirational science teaching such as that that has been available through this science program.

So I support the PrimaryConnections program. I strongly support the motion by the member for Sturt.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (19:46): Like everyone else in this place, I am very supportive of those that inspire and teach science and for those scientists who go about their profession which is absolutely essential to our world. It just reminds me of a statement some time ago that young people are inspired more by those who give to the world than by those who take from it. Science, through experiment, observation and analysis, looks at new solutions, new techniques and new opportunities to further humanity’s goals. I think it was Isidor Rabi, the Nobel prize winner for physics, who said in 1944, ‘Science is a great game where the playing field is the universe itself.’ I think that is fantastic, and the great achievement of humanity is indeed science and is the definition of its promise.

Like many in this place on both sides and particularly you, Mr Deputy Speaker Adams, from the excellent electorate of Lyons, I have had the privilege of opening a number of school science centres funded by this government, science centres that would not have been funded under the former government or any other government for that matter and certainly not by many of our state government colleagues. Reece High School, Devonport High School, Penguin High School, St Brendan Shaw and the Circular Head Christian School and the Marist Regional College are but some of them. To see their eyes light up like a test tube going into their brand-new laboratories brought back terrible memories of my science classes where everyone rushed in to turn the gas on in order to eliminate their colleagues, their enemies and even their friends.

I want to congratulate the government on its record in the funding of science and its support for science itself. There is not enough, there will not be enough, we have got to have more. I have already written to the minister complaining about a few programs that I think we could spur on a little bit more. The previous speaker was mentioning some of these programs, but the important thing we have got to remember about those programs is that they were discrete programs fully funded by the Commonwealth in conjunction with the states, and we expect the states not to handball this but to do their bit and to continue these science programs as the agreement stipulated. What is fantastic is that a lot of this material now is on the internet, is available to all schools, is available to science teachers, is available to parents and indeed is available to the community. Those programs are ready to be rolled out and updated, as was part of the program. So I congratulate the government on the funding of those science programs. I also congratulate the government on its attempts to support professional development of teachers and particularly in the development of science and of the science curriculum.

Tasmania is renowned for lots of excellent things and just one more to add to the list is that it is the home of the Primary Industry Centre for Science Education, PICSE, led by the University of Tasmania. I was really happy to see that it was Dr David Russell, who was a
colleague of mine at the Don College and who is now at the Cradle Coast campus of the University of Tasmania, who initiated this program which is now nationwide. What it does essentially is it supports science teachers to encourage their students to go and have scientific experiences within primary industries, to keep people interested in the most dynamic industries in Australia—the primary industries. This program is now nationwide and has a tremendous reach. Information has been presented to something like 44,000 students in over 2,000 year 11 and 12 science classes. It has informed year 11 and 12 students about study and career opportunities in the sciences and particularly in selected primary industries to demonstrate the relevance of science. It has supported 3,336 secondary school students and their teachers in the participation of science investigation awards, just to name some of what has now grown into a $12 million value-added program in the sciences. Congratulations to Dr David Russell and his team, which has now spread throughout Tasmania, and to PICSE, a world leader.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DGH Adams): Order! The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Uniform Road Laws and Motor Vehicle Registration Compliance Standards

Debate resumed on motion by Mr Zappia:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) Australian road laws and vehicle compliance standards vary between each of the States and Territories of Australia; and

(b) those variations are causing confusion and uncertainty to Australian motorists; and

(2) calls on the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport to urge the States and Territories to adopt, through COAG, uniform road laws and motor vehicle registration compliance standards.

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (19:51): I am told that at the first meeting of the Australian Automobile Association, held in Adelaide in 1924, a resolution was passed calling for uniform traffic laws and regulations across Australia. There is no question that since 1924 we have made considerable progress towards having uniform road laws throughout Australia, but as with so many other matters administered by each state or territory there are still many inconsistencies between the road laws across Australian jurisdictions. The importance of having uniform road laws across Australia should not be underestimated. Inconsistencies in road laws cause confusion, unintended breaches of road laws, road accidents and a loss of productivity.

Whilst I am conscious that this is a complex matter, in today's world, where people are regularly driving interstate and each year thousands of overseas visitors drive on our roads, uniform road laws have become a necessity. In the limited time available to me tonight I will provide some examples of the differences that I am referring to. I start with the issue of U-turns. In South Australia, Queensland, New South Wales, Western Australia and the Northern Territory you must not perform a U-turn at a signalised intersection unless there is a 'U-turn permitted' sign there. In Victoria, however, the reverse applies: U-turns are permitted at signalised intersections unless there is a 'no U-turn' sign. In the Northern Territory, the default speed limit outside of built-up areas is 110 kilometres per hour. In most other jurisdictions, it
is 100 kilometres an hour. In some areas in the Northern Territory, speeds of up to 130 kilometres an hour are permitted unless a trailer is being towed, in which case it is 100 kilometres an hour. I also note that in the Northern Territory a 60 kilometre an hour speed limit applies in built-up areas; in other states a 50 kilometre per hour limit applies. Another example is Tasmania's provisions for left-turning on red after stopping at traffic lights—a law that, quite frankly, I support but which does not exist throughout most jurisdictions.

One of the areas of significant difference between the jurisdictions relates to the requirements, obligations and restrictions of learners and provisional drivers. For learners and provisional drivers—or P-plates, as they are known—variations with respect to the process, the speeds permitted, the display of P-plates, the towing of trailers, demerit point losses, motor vehicle power permissibility and even restrictions on the time of day a person can drive are prevalent across jurisdictions. I know that all these differences make it particularly difficult for young people living in communities close to state and territory borders. I understand that this became a major political issue along the New South Wales-Queensland border when in 2007 the New South Wales member for Tweed introduced a bill to address a number of anomalies relating to P-plates. At that time, it was estimated that about four million Queenslanders travelled across the border and into the Tweed each year, while approximately 50,000 Queensland vehicles crossed the border daily. Of course, there are many other differences in road laws related to bicycles, gophers, scooters and even horse riding on roads.

I turn briefly to the matter of vehicle compliance standards between jurisdictions. Again, differences exist between states and territories with respect to compliance standards, and hefty penalties can be imposed if breaches occur. I note that regulations relating to windscreen tinting, whilst fairly similar across each of the jurisdictions, can still be open to differences of interpretation by authorities because the regulations are not identically defined in each state. Victoria even has specific provisions relating to bicycle carriers. Again, I commend that state for doing so. Personally, I believe bike carriers should always be removed when the bicycles are removed as they can be very dangerous.

The last example I refer to is the difference in speed limit tolerance allowed in each jurisdiction. This is a matter that causes considerable angst to drivers. In most jurisdictions an eight to 10 per cent tolerance generally applies. In Victoria, I understand the tolerance is three per cent. Whilst I am sure that some people will argue that there should be no tolerance, common sense dictates that tolerance is applied for good reason and should be uniform.

I have little doubt that each year millions of dollars in fines are paid by motorists who unknowingly and unintentionally contravene the law. Whilst ignorance of the law is never accepted as a defence by the authorities, few motorists, if any, would be conversant with every law and every regulation relating to road use in every state and territory across Australia.

Over 60 years ago, in 1947, Australian road traffic ministers formed an Australian Road Traffic Code Committee in an attempt to establish uniform road laws across Australia. Whilst a road traffic code was established and some progress was made, the code in itself did not achieve sufficient consistency in Australian road laws. In October 1999 the National Road Transport Commission, which was succeeded by the National Transport Commission, developed a set of model rules—the Australian Road Rules—which today form a basis for
state and territory road laws throughout Australia. With the establishment of the Australian Road Rules, further progress has been made towards having consistent national road rules across Australia. The National Transport Commission last year commenced a 10-year review of the Australian Road Rules. I understand the review will run for two years. The review is an important step in this process as it will enable each of the jurisdictions to assess their own application of the Australian Road Rules in addition to the national effectiveness of the Australian Road Rules.

Whilst the review is both necessary and timely, I hope it is completed as quickly as practicable and that it is not used by states and territories as an excuse to delay or defer changes that would create greater consistencies in Australia's national road laws. Whilst the Commonwealth is a signatory to the agreements underpinning the Australian Road Rules, the rules are not binding on any of the states or territories and rely entirely on the willingness of the states and territories to implement any reforms. With respect to that, I note that continuous improvements are being made to the rules and that those changes are being widely adopted by each jurisdiction.

I note with interest that transport ministers from the Commonwealth, states and territories, together with representatives from New Zealand and the Australian Local Government Association, announced in Alice Springs last Friday that the Australian Transport Council agreed to support forwarding to COAG for signature at their next meeting, scheduled for mid-2011, the intergovernmental agreements to establish the national heavy vehicle regulator. I know that this is a matter that is of keen interest to the trucking industry in this country because there would be few sectors in our community that would be conscious of the differences between the laws that apply in each state. With respect to the trucking industry, in addition to the road laws themselves there would also be laws relating to the compliance of each heavy vehicle. I also note that, when it comes to the trucking industry, they have a range of locally imposed conditions which also vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction and clearly also impact on people's ability to carry out their business and in turn on their livelihood.

The ATC also agreed to accept the recommendations of independent expert panels on the unresolved policy issues to be included in heavy vehicle laws. Ministers identified a number of key areas of further work in settling heavy vehicle regulatory requirements which will need to be worked through over the next six months as the national laws are finalised. This is an important step towards developing uniformity across jurisdictions in respect of heavy vehicle regulations.

I bring this matter to the attention of the House in the hope that the federal Minister for Infrastructure and Transport might take whatever action is available to him to encourage the states and territories to implement uniform road laws throughout Australia, which I know would be welcomed by Australian motorists across this country.

Mr ALEXANDER (Bennelong) (20:00): I rise to speak in support of uniform road laws and compliance standards. I will give some examples of the silliness that currently exists. On the Victorian border, one driver is caught in Albury every hour performing an illegal U-turn at traffic lights. The move is allowed in Victoria but not in New South Wales unless otherwise signposted. Albury police field at least two phone calls a day about road rules. Confusion also arises for those on learner plates. In New South Wales, learner drivers are unable to travel
faster than 80 kilometres per hour, whilst learner drivers in Victoria have no such speed restrictions.

In New South Wales, you can be fined almost five times as much as you would be in Victoria for certain speeding offences. Breaking the limit by 45 kilometres per hour in New South Wales incurs a fine of $2,490, whilst in Victoria it is a penalty of a mere $474. A speeding offence that attracts one demerit point in Victoria could cost you half your Victorian licence if it occurs in Sydney. New South Wales docks three points off your licence if you are caught doing between zero and 15 kilometres per hour over the limit and six points during double demerit periods. In contrast, most other states dock you only one point for the least serious speeding offence.

You can be fined in South Australia if you smoke in a vehicle that is carrying someone under the age of 16. In Melbourne or Adelaide, you can be fined for turning right from the right-hand lane, where you should perform a hook turn. This is accepted practice in Sydney. If you try to do a U-turn at traffic lights in Sydney, you will be fined. It is perfectly legal in most cases in Melbourne and Adelaide. In Melbourne and Adelaide, you can never overtake a stopped tram. Fines and demerit points apply in New South Wales if you overtake on an unbroken white line, but that law is not enforced in Victoria.

In the ACT, a learner licence is obtainable from the age of 15 years and nine months. A provisional licence is obtainable from the age of 17 years. To be qualified, you only have to have had a learner licence for six months. You need to display a P plate for three years unless you have completed the Road Ready Plus course after having had a licence for more than six months. If the Road Ready Plus course is taken, you are also granted a four demerit point allowance.

In New South Wales, a complicated three-stage graduated licensing scheme exists. Learner licences are obtainable at the age of 16 years and require 120 hours of supervised driving. A P1 licence is required for a year and there is a 90 kilometres per hour restriction. A P2 licence is required for two years, and the driver may drive at 100 kilometres per hour and is allowed seven demerit points. There are complaints that speed restrictions cause problems on country roads and highways where other drivers can go up to 110 kilometres per hour. It is the variation of speed that creates this danger.

In Queensland, there have been reforms made to make it similar to New South Wales, and there are only a few minor differences.

In South Australia, L plates are available at 16 years of age and you are required to do 75 hours with a 100 kilometres per hour restriction. P plates allow four demerit points and must be held for two years. In resolving this issue the focus should not be on the debate about which laws are better, although this would be ideal. The most important issue surely is the standardisation of all road laws throughout Australia. These laws are in place to properly administer road traffic throughout Australia efficiently and, to the best of our current knowledge, to enhance productivity and safety.

We are constantly subjected to fear campaigns about speed being the primary culprit in road fatalities and injuries. The extraordinary facts are that there are fewer fatalities now than there were in the late forties and early fifties, yet the number of private vehicles has risen dramatically and continues to do so. There are currently over 10 million registered cars in
Australia compared with 769,000 in 1950. The biggest contributor to the reduction in fatalities and injuries is the improvement in the primary and secondary safety of our cars—that is, the ability to avoid an accident due to improved braking and handling performance characteristics in cars, protection of passengers, who are in a virtual safety cage with absorbing materials and design around it, seatbelt laws and airbag technology.

Improved driver awareness campaigns have also been a big contributor in this regard. This may have led to more educated drivers, but it has also created a syndrome where pedestrians are overly protected and overly empowered, with devastating effects. There is a strong belief among motoring authorities, including Peter MacKay, Australia’s leading automotive journalist, that driver education and the ability to get a licence is too easy and that the laws to entrap, create revenues and take the driver's licence away are too great and treat the driver like a cash cow. There are any number of examples of speed camera locations and tricky variations in speed, which trap all except those with heightened levels of vigilance. Drivers are really wicked people; they speed! In short, a licence is too easy to get and too easy to lose. That is not the right formula.

It would appear that drivers are the only target for road safety, yet in metropolitan Sydney pedestrians represent one in three deaths on our roads. In Australia we have gone through generations of giving a voice to those who are in need of assistance. This syndrome has resulted in the empowerment of pedestrians and it now puts them in peril due to their own sense of rights and invincibility. The association of Australian and New Zealand road transport and traffic authorities has described pedestrians as:

… the largest single road-user group. Most individual trips, whatever the primary mode used, begin and/or finish with a walk section, so that walking is a fundamental component of all travel.

Yet where is the focus for awareness of pedestrian education and their behaviour on our roads? Where is their punishment for endangering their own safety and that of other road users?

The motion today highlights our nation's clear need for consistent and appropriate speed limits. Uniformity in our rules is very important. We require a level of standardisation of our laws to educate new drivers on how to drive not just in the location of their test but also in foreign conditions. It does not make sense that a 17-year-old, just hours after gaining a licence in Sydney, can drive to Melbourne and be asked to perform a hook turn, which is something he or she would never have heard of.

The variability of speed is a great danger. I drive on a road every day where the speed limit goes from 80 kilometres per hour to 40 kilometres per hour to 80 kilometres per hour to 60 kilometres per hour in the space of one kilometre. Whilst this has been implemented in the name of safety, the variability makes the roads increasingly dangerous as drivers become overly confused by their obligations. We have become increasingly conscious of speed as a direct correlation to danger and fatalities. That is based on common sense. However, the data tells us that the safest roads in the world remain the autobahns in Germany, the roads with no speed limits, as drivers drive to their own capacity rather than feel an obligation to sit on a signed limit. Similarly, the decrease in speed limit on open roads in the Northern Territory saw an increase in fatalities in the following year. These facts show that it is not always the logical solution that attains the desired result. Upskilling and re-educating drivers is important, but maybe we need to think outside the square in implementing uniform rules.
Perhaps we need to implement a requirement to re-sit drivers licences every 10 years. I sat my driver's licence more than 40 years ago and, despite living overseas for 14 years, I have never been asked since to show that I understand the local road rules, yet I received my licence before roundabouts were in existence. Surrounding all this, in all states and territories, there is one standout issue—that is, the importance of addressing pedestrian safety through education campaigns and uniform and appropriate laws that are enforced.

Mr MITCHELL (McEwen) (20:10): I rise to support the motion by the honourable member for Makin. Australians love their motorcars and my electorate of McEwen is no exception. We have a very high population of cars, and a very high percentage of our residents have more than two cars per household. This is due to various reasons, including our geographical diversity and the need for motor vehicles in order to work in rural areas. McEwen is also home to many who work in the automotive industry, which has proudly been manufacturing cars in the Australian community since 1925. Australian manufactured cars have been continually at the forefront in design, safety and durability as long as the industry has been in existence. Australia has produced some of the most innovative vehicles in history through manufacturers such as Bolwell, OKA, Lightburn and Purvis, as well as the mainstays of automotive manufacturers in Australia: Ford, Holden and Toyota.

The automotive manufacturing sector has far-reaching value to the Australian economy by complementing manufacturers and suppliers, who employ many thousands of Australians. The automotive industry directly employs some 60,000 people and, as I have said, many others across the nation. That is why we on this side of the House support the manufacturing and automotive industry. We know the importance of jobs in our communities, we know the importance of manufacturing in our communities and we know the value of the automotive sector to our communities.

That is why it is important that we ensure that manufacturers of motor vehicles in Australia are able to supply vehicles from the factories which are able to be sold across the nation to benefit all Australia. The importance of Australian design rules, or ADR, should never be underestimated. ADRs deal predominantly with vehicle safety, especially the role that technology can play in improving the standards of vehicles that are used on our roads today. Vehicle standards are set by the Australian government under the Motor Vehicle Standards Act 1989 and form a single body of national law. Amendments to ADRs and new ADRs are developed through extensive processes of consultation. This includes the Strategic Vehicle Safety and Environment Group, which includes the states and territories and industry and community groups and operates as an advisory forum on ADRs. That is why it is important that states and territories continue to comply with the agreed timelines for the implementation of vehicle standards, such as electronic stability control.

In the case of Ford Australia, the Victorian government's decision to move ahead of these agreed timelines has resulted in difficulties for this industry entering the Victorian market. As a result, one model of vehicle was withdrawn from sale in the Victorian market. While the former Victorian government should be commended for taking action to increase the safety of vehicles sold in Victoria, I reiterate that the states and territories should continue to comply with the agreed timelines for the implementation of vehicle standards.

A number of key states and territories have regulations in place that restrict the driving of high-powered cars by young drivers. I fully support the need to ensure that young,
inexperienced drivers are not let loose on the road in high-powered vehicles. The results of speed related accidents and inexperienced drivers are, sadly, ones that I have seen too many of over the years, some of which will be etched in my mind forever. I can still hear, smell and see the results of these accidents some 20 years later. I think about the heartache for families and the cost to our communities of the cessation of young lives or the permanent injuries inflicted upon them.

These experiences are all too common on our roads, but I will continue to support safely modified vehicles and muscle cars on our roads if they are in the hands of suitably experienced drivers. As I have said, a number of key states and territories have regulations in place that restrict the driving high-powered cars by young drivers. Each of these standards tends to be different, leading to considerable and unnecessary complexity. Furthermore, they tend to have an outright ban on turbo petrol-powered cars. In the past, turbocharging was used solely on vehicles as a way to enhance their performance and, boy, did they work well. However, in this day and age many car manufacturers are using low-powered turbo technology as the key to reducing motor vehicle CO₂ emissions. Turbodiesel motors are now increasingly the new choice for many carbon conscious families, and these engines also produce exceptional fuel economy.

From the manufacturers' point of view, it is difficult to sell family cars that cannot be driven by P-plate drivers. I know that the automotive industry is working with states and territories to address the issue of low-powered turbo cars. It is also seeking standard regulation across the states to remove the unnecessary complexity and confusion of different laws. That is why I support the member for Makin's motion. It is about supporting a viable industry and about supporting jobs—a key priority for the Gillard government.

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (20:15): In supporting this motion I commend the member for Makin for bringing the House's attention to an issue of significant importance right across our nation. The motion before the House does cover a broad range of issues and I would like to particularly focus on regional areas. Before I do, I refer briefly to the member for Bennelong's contribution, which highlighted some very important points relating to the inconsistencies between different state jurisdictions. Those rules and regulations in place in different states are presumably based on expert advice, but the simple message tonight is that they cannot all be right. What is the best practice, and whatever that best practice is is what we should be implementing right across Australia. We have such conflicting sets of road rules and vehicle standards that it has got to the stage where you need to be a Rhodes Scholar to figure out what is the most appropriate way to maintain a safe road environment. It is confusing and I certainly support a complete overhaul with a view to making our road laws much more consistent.

Naturally road issues are very close to the heart of regional MPs. I note the contribution by the member for McEwen. We tend to drive longer miles and we certainly rely on our cars to break down our isolation. Having a licence and being able to operate on a good and safe network of roads is critical for not only the economic well-being of regional communities but also the social life of our communities. There is no question that our road network is the artery of economic and social life in regional areas. It is important that our attempts to harmonise road laws and vehicle compliance standards be directed at ensuring clarity for road users themselves and providing certainty for the Australian motorist, as noted in the motion.
We also need to focus very much on the need to improve the road safety outcome with everything we do in this regard, and so reduce Australia's road death and injury toll.

Inconsistencies particularly in relation to licensing arrangements for L-platers and P-platers have been well and truly highlighted. In Victoria, a full licence cannot be achieved until a driver is 18 years of age. Then we impose passenger restrictions on young people. That seems to be at complete odds with all our other messages, particularly relating to drink-driving, where we encourage people to have a designated driver. But, as a P-plater, in Victoria you are told you are not allowed to have more than one passenger. That seems to be at odds with all the other messages we are putting to the community in terms of being responsible in the consumption of alcohol. Some of the other states permit a full licence at 17 years of age, which to me would make more sense if you are going to impose those passenger restrictions on young people at a later age.

As I said, the focus of this discussion must be on how we make our roads safer for road users. Various reports have found that improving the actual safety of the road environment is critical to reducing the road toll. While enforcement and driver behaviour are key issues and are a focus of our police officers right throughout the nation, improving the actual safety of the roads environment is paramount. From a Victorian perspective, the road toll has been reduced in the entire state but the regional road toll has remained quite resistant to efforts by governments of both political persuasions to reduce it. The Nationals have been at the forefront of working with the government of the day, with programs such as Black Spots which are aimed very directly at improving the safety of known trouble spots. Also I give credit to the former Bracks and Brumby governments in Victoria for introducing a grey spots program to target areas which have not been a source of accidents but have the potential threat of accidents.

At a federal level, the Nationals and Liberals initiated the successful Roads to Recovery Program in March 2001, which I think was a great initiative. It has been continued by the current government, and it is important to make the point that there has been a bipartisan approach to the program and it has been very successful in focusing on road safety improvements on a local level, where local councils have the opportunity to access additional resources and use those resources to maintain local road networks. Our party is also very keen to see a bridges renewal program introduced right across Australia given the huge backlog of bridges in need of repairs. I understand there are about 30,000 bridges across our nation and our local councils are struggling desperately to try and maintain that network.

I commend the member for Makin for bringing this issue to the attention of the House. I am sure the people listening at home would appreciate, when they travel between different states, that these inconsistencies are a great source of frustration and I am sure they would be heartened to think that members here in this place are doing their best to try and develop a more consistent standard which will improve road safety for all road users.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): Order! The time allotted for this debate has expired. the debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.
Debate resumed on motion by Mr Robert:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) military service is unique and comes with inherent risks not applicable to other public service jobs;

(b) Australia's service personnel, past and present, after giving so much to their nation, deserve to live out their lives in the knowledge that they have financial security; and

(c) approximately 56,000 retired military personnel who are members of the Defence Force Retirement and Deaths Benefits (DFRDB) scheme and the Defence Forces Retirement Benefits (DFRB) scheme have their military pensions indexed only to movements in the Consumer Price Index (CPI); and

(2) calls on all Members to support the:

(a) concept of the unique nature of military service; and

(b) Coalition's policy to index the military pensions to members of the DFRDB and DFRB schemes who are aged 55 and over, to the higher movements in the CPI, Male Total Average Weekly Earnings or the Pensioner Beneficiary Living Cost Index.

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (20:21): It is with great pleasure that I bring this motion before the House this evening. By way of history, the Labor government, at the 2007 election, promised to fix military superannuation. They said that they would address the inequity of the indexation arrangements. So many things were promised in 2007; so many things have simply not been delivered. The Rudd Labor government at the time led the veterans to believe that they would address this glaring inequity, which is the difference in indexation arrangements between those of an age pensioner and those of a military superannuant.

The Gillard Labor government, in the 2010 election, was conspicuous by the absence of any military superannuation policy at all. Unlike Labor, the coalition has now consulted widely. We have listened carefully to the views put forward by veterans, by those who are ex-service, by ex-service organisations and by current serving ADF personnel.

Labor has failed its veterans; the coalition provides them with hope. We actually believe in the unique nature of military service. We believe that our service personnel, past and present, after giving so much for their nation, deserve to live out their lives in the knowledge that they have financial security to the maximum degree possible. Indeed the submission made by the Alliance of Defence Service Organisations to the inquiry of the Senate Legislation Committee on Finance and Public Administration into the coalition's DFRDB bill notes:

In no other calling, occupation or profession has the State the power to accept or demand the surrender of these rights—

the universal human rights—

The Unique Nature of Military Service deserves unique solutions and also places a great burden on the Government as the "employer" to ensure that ADF members are looked after both during and after Service.

The Vietnam Veterans Federation of Australia also noted:

Members of the Australian Defence Force have suffered conditions of service far less favourable than civilians including:
liability for compulsory high risk combat operations …
• a restriction of liberty in a regimented way of life;
• compulsory long and irregular working hours;
• compulsory statutory retiring ages well below the community norms;
• compulsory high standards of physical fitness;
• frequent compulsory relocation …

If that is not unique I am not too sure what is. The submission by the RSL further states:

An examination of legislation for the Australian Defence Force shows that in almost all respects, the Parliament has been consistent since Federation in regarding the nation's armed forces as a separate and quite distinctly different part of Australian society.

The coalition is committed to the concept of the unique nature of military service. We believe it; we have seen it in action; we have experienced it; we are committed to it; and we are also committed to the process of military superannuation reform.

That is why the coalition made a commitment on 27 June 2010 to provide fair indexation for the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Scheme and the Defence Force Retirement Benefits Scheme, the DFRDB and DFRB, superannuation pensioners. The Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Amendment (Fair Indexation) Bill 2010 was subsequently introduced into the Senate by my colleague Senator Ronaldson on 18 November 2010 and backs up and reaffirms and stands as a beacon of the coalition's commitment to its word, as opposed to the shallow, hollow promise of the Rudd Labor government in 2007. The private member's bill that we submitted to the Senate affirms the coalition’s commitment to introducing a fair, equitable and fiscally responsible military superannuation system. The bill also reaffirms the coalition's recognition of the unique nature of military service. These changes have long been sought by veterans' organisations as part of a wider, fairer indexation system. The changes would bring indexation arrangements for these superannuants into line with the age pension. It is the right thing to do considering the unique nature and the risks of military service.

Widows of superannuants of this scheme will also benefit from the announced changes. The coalition are simply calling on all senators and members who have been vocal supporters of such measures for the indexation regime to support the motion and, indeed, support the coalition's bill. We ask no more than that. We know the Labor Party were not true to their word; they broke it in 2007. We know they treat veterans with great disdain. But those who have stood in this place and said publicly that they will support fairer indexation, we simply call on them to honour their word.

From 1 July 2011 the coalition's bill will ensure that DFRDB and DFRB superannuants aged 55 and over will have their superannuation pensions indexed in the same way as Australian government income support pensions. Twice yearly, pensions will be indexed to the higher of the CPI, the Male Total Average Weekly Earnings or the Pensioner and Beneficiary Living Cost Index. Currently, DFRDB and DFRB members have their superannuation indexed only in line with the CPI. This bill will provide over 56,000 retired Australian Defence Force personnel who are members of these now closed DFRDB and DFRB schemes with an indexed superannuation pension that better reflects changes in the cost of living.
The Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration's report was the ninth such report into the indexation arrangements. Of the 17 submissions recently received by the Senate committee, only two did not support the bill. The two that did not—surprise, surprise!—were Labor's Department of Finance and Deregulation and, of course, the Department of Defence. Every other veteran and ex-service organisation unanimously supported the coalition's bill. It seems like the whole nation is on board except the Australian Labor Party. All ESO submissions contended that military service is sufficiently unique that those serving should be entitled to special financial and non-financial benefits and that a fairer indexation regime would satisfy this objective. I agree. The coalition passionately agrees.

The two submissions that did not support the coalition's bill reached different conclusions on our bill. Each reached a different conclusion regarding the scope of the bill. In their respective submissions each of the departments differently and selectively quoted advice from the Australian Government Actuary with regard to how provisions in the bill will apply to DFRDB and DFRB members. For instance, the Department of Defence, in submission No. 15, said:

On 13 January 2011 the Australian Government Actuary (the Actuary) provided Defence with an analysis of the increased costs involved in changing from current indexation by the Consumer Price Index to the methodology proposed in the Bill. The analysis indicated that the Bill, as drafted and amended, does not deliver indexation for the best of the Consumer Price Index, Male Total Average Weekly Earnings and the Pensioner and Beneficiary Living Cost Index. Instead it falls short of that objective.

Yet the Department of Finance and Deregulation said:

However, as reflected in the AGA's advice to the Department of Defence it appears that the Bill would provide for better indexation arrangements than those currently applying to Age and Service Pensions. Defence says it would not help; Finance and Deregulation says it would help. I suggest their responses were rushed. Clearly they did not look at the content of the private member's bill and they came to vastly different conclusions.

The coalition believes, as we took to the election, that this would cost $98 million over the forward estimates. Even if we were to believe the government that it would cost $175 million over the forward estimates, this is easily funded by reducing the growth of Australian Public Service full-time equivalents in the Department of Defence, including DMO, by 33 per cent. If we simply reduce the growth by 33 per cent over the forward estimates it would save well over $175 million and we would be able to fund the requirement. This will still see the number of staff in the department grow in size by a staggering 8.3 per cent by financial year 2013-14 compared to a budgeted 12.6 per cent. I still find 8.3 per cent a staggering growth for APS civilian bureaucracy but cutting it from 12.6 to 8.3 easily funds the coalition requirements. The coalition believes the government has not justified the expansive growth in the civilian defence bureaucracy. The project forecast to grow by 12.6 per cent over the forward estimates simply is indefensible. This growth is taking place at the same time the government's strategic reform program is designed to reduce expenditure by approximately $2 million per annum over 10 years. Accordingly it is fitting that a savings measure to provide a more equitable indexation regime for retired defence personnel should be funded from the Department of Defence.
The private member's bill is quite simple. We stand for fairer indexation for those who have served our country as recognition of their unique service. The question is: what will Labor and the Independents do?

Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (20:21): The indexation of military pensions and superannuation is an issue that, as the member for Fraser, I am very familiar with. Over at least the last year I have been working with colleagues Senator Kate Lundy, Mike Kelly, the federal member for Eden-Monaro and Gai Brodtmann, the member for Canberra, along with the Defence Force Welfare Association, the Superannuated Commonwealth Officers Association and the Australian Council of Public Sector Retiree Organisations, in making representations regarding the indexation of military superannuation pensions as well as those for Commonwealth employees.

This is an important issue that affects the lives of many in my electorate and others who have given committed service to the Australian public and the interests of our nation. Reforms to the indexation of military superannuation pensions must be undertaken in a responsible and sustainable manner, one that requires the economic understanding and responsibility that the Labor government has shown in guiding Australia through the global financial crisis and returning the budget to surplus in 2012-13.

The Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Amendment Bill 2011 demonstrates yet again the divisive approach of the opposition and the fact that once again they cannot be entrusted with fiscal matters and matters as important as the ongoing funding of military superannuation pensions. Those who have served in the protection of our nation deserve better than fiscal incompetence and recklessness in their retirement livelihoods.

Military service is a special vocation with unique requirements. These include the compulsory and continuous liability for combat operations; being subject to both the civil legal code and a separate Defence Force disciplinary code to support command structures for effective conduct of combat operations and training; the requirement to work long and irregular hours for which no overtime is payable; separation from families, sometimes for considerable periods of time, which as I know with many Defence Force members in my electorate can be a cause of stress to both members and their families; the posting of members at regular intervals to meet Australian Defence Force manning requirements; and the requirement to maintain a high standard of both physical and mental fitness required to meet operational tasks and training for combat.

In recognition of the demands these requirements place on Defence Force personnel, military superannuation is one of the key elements in the competitive remuneration and conditions of service package provided to Australian Defence Force members. Established by the Keating government in 1991, the Military Superannuation and Benefits Scheme was introduced to address major changes the government had made to both the regulatory system and the regulations governing superannuation. The Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Scheme provides an indexed pension calculated on a combination of salary and length of service. Members who discharge after 20 years are able to take an immediate lifetime pension based on 35 per cent of the member's salary at discharge. These pensions, which can be taken as early as 38 years of age, continue to be paid even if the former member returns to the workforce. The percentage of final salary increases with each year of service.
For example, at 30 years of service the pension is 51.25 per cent of final salary and at 40 years of service it is 76.5 per cent of final salary.

As at 30 June last year, there were 3,978 pensioners in the Defence Forces Retirement Benefits scheme, and 4,246 contributors and 53,003 pensioners—15,193 of those under the age of 55—in the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits scheme. Military superannuation arrangements are based on salary and the length of a member's period of service. They are not based on, nor do they aim to reflect, a member's needs in retirement. To change military superannuation indexation arrangements would effectively mean a change to a member's preretirement conditions of service after the member has retired.

If allowed to proceed, the opposition's bill would present several issues. First, a proposed law that would appropriate revenue or moneys cannot originate as a private member's bill, and a bill for such a law cannot originate in the Senate. Second, the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Amendment (Fair Indexation) Bill as introduced by Senator Ronaldson would have a fiscal cost of $1.7 billion over four years and an underlying cash cost of $175 million over four years. It would increase the Commonwealth unfunded liabilities by $6.2 billion. Yet it would provide nothing more to recipients of the Commonwealth civilian superannuation pension. Indeed, the opposition's view of public servants was made clear by the member for Fadden, who clearly suggested that savings to pay for these pensions should be made up by Public Service cuts. The opposition's bill would also provide nothing to many recipients of military pensions.

On 9 February 2011, along with Senator Lundy and the members for Canberra and Eden-Monaro, I wrote to Senator Penny Wong asking that the Department of Finance and Deregulation estimate the costs regarding indexation changes in Commonwealth government civilian and military superannuation scheme pensions. The department's estimate stated that the cost of indexing military and civilian pensions by the age pension methodology would be $322 million for the period 2011-12 to 2014-15, with an immediate increase in unfunded superannuation liabilities of $32.9 billion. The cost of indexing military and civilian pensions by the higher of the consumer price index, the pensioner and beneficiary living cost index and the increase in male average total weekly earnings would be $614 million for the period 2011-12 to 2014-15, with an immediate increase in unfunded superannuation liabilities of $47.8 billion.

Third, and most importantly, the proposals in this bill would only benefit a minority of military superannuants. The bill does not provide any indexation change for the 3,978 benefit recipients from the Defence Forces Retirement Benefits scheme. The bill does not provide any change for any of the 7,684 pensioners under the Military Superannuation and Benefits Scheme. Nor does this bill provide for the 15,193 Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits scheme recipients under age 55. Nor does it provide for the needs of Commonwealth civilian superannuants.

The coalition's policy to index military pensions for members of the Defence Forces Retirement Benefits scheme and the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits scheme who are aged 55 and over would not provide financial security for Australian Defence Force personnel. Superannuation pensions paid by the government to its retired military personnel are indexed twice annually to reflect quarterly changes in the price of a basket of goods and
services which account for a high proportion of expenditure by the consumer price index population group.

The Gillard government honoured its 2007 election commitment to review the indexation arrangements for superannuation pensions that it pays to retired civilian employees and military personnel. The review of pension indexation arrangements in Australian government civilian and military superannuation schemes was conducted by Mr Trevor Matthews. In December 2008 the Matthews report of the Review of pension indexation arrangements in Australian government civilian and military superannuation schemes recommended that pensions continue to be indexed against CPI to protect against inflation increases. The report also identified very significant additional costs that would be incurred if indexation methodology were changed. The Australian Government Actuary has also pointed to significant additional costs if the coalition policy, the subject of this bill, were adopted. The significant costs of higher indexation would have to be found from the Consolidated Revenue Fund or from the existing defence budget. This would jeopardise the funding of other initiatives.

Over recent years, various groups have campaigned to change the indexation of Public Service and military pensions from the CPI to an analytical cost of living index. They have argued that compared to other pensions their level of indexation is not fair or equitable in terms of being able to maintain contemporary living standards, and that the CPI is ineffective as a measure of the change in the cost of living. Recommendation 4 of the Matthews review indicated that if a more suitable index became available the government should consider its use. With the adoption of the pensioner and beneficiary living cost index for age and other pensions, I am hopeful that such an index for Commonwealth superannuants, including those on defence pensions, will soon be developed.

ADFA and the Royal Military College of Australia are in the electorate of Fraser, and on 10 April I represented the Prime Minister and laid a wreath commemorating the 70th anniversary of the siege of Tobruk at the Rats of Tobruk memorial. I had the privilege of sitting next to Peter Collins, a veteran who was a signal operator at Tobruk. I am proud of the commitment and dedication of the men and women who provide military service to our nation every time I meet with them in my role as federal member.

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (20:41): The member for Fraser should learn to come into this House and be more than an apologist for a lacklustre Labor government. In fact, it could be argued that the Rudd government in 2007 was elected on the back of a promise to the members of our Defence Force. In fact, their 2007 election policy document said that they would:

… maintain a generous and military superannuation system in recognition of the importance of the ADF and the immense responsibility placed on personnel in securing and defending Australia.

So I say to the member for Fraser, there is more in caring for and having concern about the members of our Defence Force than simply laying wreaths. That is the easy way out. The tough way is developing up a policy and looking at a costing that truly reflects the unique nature of their service. I would also point out to the member for Fraser, who has talked about the cost at some length, that the wastage on the pink batts program could have well and truly funded this program—not the total cost, just the waste. The waste in the Building the Education Revolution would have funded this program twice over. But the member for
Fraser, like his Labor colleagues, has no respect for the unique nature of service contribution by the members of our military. I agree with David Jamison, the President of the DFWA, who summarised the uniqueness of service in this way:

In volunteering for military service, the individual accepts the surrender of his or her basic rights under Article 3 and places his or her life, liberty and security of person in the hands of the State. This surrender is not conditional, though in extremis, it is absolute.

These people give more than is asked of them. With our diggers, their word is their bond. They stand by their mates—and they lay down their lives for their mates—so how do you think they feel when they listen to the mealy-mouthed excuses of government members like the member for Fraser? That promise made in 2007, which the Rudd Labor government surfed into power on the back of, I suppose is no different from the promise laid down by the current Prime Minister just days before the federal election, when she said there would be no carbon tax under a government she leads.

I and the member for Fadden were the architects of our policy going into the last federal election. We checked the numbers with the actuaries in briefings. We came up with the assessment that it was going to cost $98 million over the forward estimates for four years. How do you think our service men and women feel when $10 million is given out of the budget this year for the development of union websites, but there is not a cracker for increasing the pensions of those who have served our nation, or indeed for the wives of those who have lost their lives for the nation? The reality is that you are prepared to use the military personnel for your own benefit but when it comes to standing up for them it is another matter—and remember it was the Labor government who made the promise in 2007 that they would address this issue.

Here we are, 3½ years on, tomorrow, from when the report was tabled. What has been done? Short of an excuse from the former minister for finance that nothing could be done, this government has failed to address the requirements of service men and women. The cost of living has gone up. In fact, it was the Labor government who, during 2007, identified the cost of living increases and said that they would result in downward pressure. Madam Deputy Speaker, I say this to you: there is no downward pressure when you do not increase the pensions. The reason that the move was made to go from CPI to CPI MTAWE or PBLCI was to make sure that the cost pressures that are borne by the ex-service men and women of our community are more able to be met.

I get sick and tired of hearing speeches like that from the member for Fraser, who will come in and talk about the uniqueness of service and the sacrifice of the many—there are so many on the Labor side—and how they are working through the issue. Three and a half years after the promise was made, it is time to deliver. Our policy going into the last election was to do exactly this.

**Mr Husic:** Why didn't you fix it?

**Mr BALDWIN:** We put forward the policy. It was truly costed. We were actually in surplus in 2007 and could have done it. But the reality is that you, the Labor Party, were the party that promised the defence men and women of this country and you reneged on that promise, you failed to deliver and you are nothing more than apologists. *(Time expired)*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke):** I did not reneg on anybody. I understand that you do not use the word 'you' in speaking through the chair and in saying 'you, the Labor
Party'. I understand it is a passionate debate, but this is a very small chamber and I would like to leave it with my hearing intact. The question is that the motion be agreed to. The member for Page has the call.

Ms SAFFIN (Page) (20:46): There are some things I want to say about the private member's motion of the member for Fadden on the indexation of military pensions. But in response to what the honourable member for Paterson said about what we were elected on, if my memory serves me correctly, there are a lot of things that people get elected on, and a big one was to get rid of Work Choices. I think the honourable member for Paterson has forgotten that, so I want to put that on the record. Then he went into areas of waste. We can always go into areas of waste if you want to throw the stone at each government. In this chamber we try not to interrupt each other, but I could have thrown out Seasprites and a whole range of other things to direct and target at the coalition when they were in government. Part of this motion talks about unique military service, and I think we owe it to service men and women to try to conduct this debate with a bit more civility, no matter what we think and what side of politics we are on.

The motion notes three things and then calls on members to support two things. Firstly, it notes that 'military service is unique and comes with inherent risks not applicable to other Public Service jobs'. That is true and it is something that all members in this place are very mindful of. The unique nature of military service means that it is compulsory and it is a continuous liability for combat operations. There is a requirement to work long, irregular hours, for which there is no overtime as we know it, and the requirement to work extra hours can be unpredictable and often arise at short notice. Members have to be deployed at short notice, for example, on operational tasks and in giving assistance to the civil community. I was recently at Amberley air base, where I met with some of the Air Force men and women who recently deployed to Japan at very short notice in the C-17s. That was a living example of how that can happen. Also tied to the long working hours, there is separation from families, sometimes for considerable periods of time. Families often have to move a lot; that is how the service is. That can cause stress to members and to their families. There is also a requirement to maintain a high standard of both physical and mental fitness to meet operational tasks and training for combat. This type of fitness standard is not generally a requirement in the private sector.

The issue of indexation of pensions for service men and women has been around for a long time. It is a contentious issue, as I can see from looking as far back as the Jess review in, I think, around 1972. There have been a lot of reviews about this issue. There were changes in 1977, and there has been contention around the indexation of pensions. I have particular sympathy with the servicemen and women who want the indexation changed and who want the best deal that they can get.

The coalition's policy, which is reflected in this private member's motion, does not achieve what the service men and women have been asking for. In fact, it is quite divisive, and the security that the opposition talk about is not in the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Amendment (Fair Indexation) Bill 2010 either. It would only benefit a minority of military superannuants. Of course they would be appreciative of that—I understand that—but the original draft of the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Amendment (Fair Indexation) Bill 2010 did not provide any indexation change. I note that that was recently
changed with an amendment to the bill—I saw something there—but it does not provide any change for the over 7,500 pensioners under the Military Superannuation and Benefits Scheme.

With the greatest sympathy to those who are desiring it, I cannot support the— (Time expired)

Mr IRONS (Swan) (20:51): I rise this evening not only to join with my parliamentary colleagues Senator Johnston, Senator Ronaldson, the member for Fadden and all the coalition in recognising that military service comes with dangers that other public servants never face and that this service to our country is valued by every Australian but also, more importantly, to join in the fight to see a fairer way of indexing the closed DFRDB and DFRB pension schemes.

To serve in the Australian military is to serve and protect every single Australian. The very nature of this service deserves recognition in the form of financial security that is fair and reasonable in meeting living standards now and in the future. The men and women of Australia who had to be prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice for their country should be treated fairly and equally, like age and service pension recipients are.

On Anzac Day, when our country commemorates the brave deeds of Australians and New Zealanders, servicemen in my electorate of Swan spoke to me about the unfairness of the indexation of the DFRDB and DFRB Schemes. Their expectations for fairness had been raised at the 2007 election, and this government should honour the commitment it made then. The government has broken many other commitments, but this commitment was to men and women who served our country and helped to preserve our way of life and the freedoms we enjoy. There is not too much that I agree with this member on, but I do acknowledge the member for Lyne for being a vocal supporter of changes in the way that these pension schemes are indexed and call for his support in pushing Labor to follow up on their promise, made in 2007 election.

This is a shameful episode of Labor thinking it is perfectly acceptable to give hope to people who genuinely deserve a fairer indexation of their pensions by promising in 2007 to do just that and then completely ignoring them. That is why the coalition made a commitment on 27 June 2010: we promised to provide a fair indexation for superannuation pensioners under the DFRDB and DFRB Schemes because it is the right thing to do. It is the right thing to do because the coalition believes in the unique nature of military service. Australia’s service personnel deserve to know that they have financial security.

There is a bill currently before the Senate, the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Amendment (Fair Indexation) Bill 2010, which from 1 July 2011 would see DFRDB and DFRB superannuants aged 55 and over have their superannuation pensions indexed in the same way as Australian government income support pensioners have their superannuation pensions indexed. Twice yearly, pensions will be indexed to the whichever is highest of the consumer price index—the CPI—male total average weekly earnings or the pensioner and beneficiary living cost index, the PBLCI. Currently, DFRDB and DFRB members have their superannuation indexed only in line with movements in the CPI. The bill before the Senate will provide over 56,000 retired Australian Defence Force personnel who are members of the now closed-off schemes with an indexed superannuation pension that better reflects changes in the cost of living. For those personal not yet aged 55, the benefits of the coalition’s commitment will be felt in the future, when they do turn 55. The Future Fund established by
the previous coalition government will be pivotal in meeting this commitment. The Future Fund was established by the previous coalition government to ensure that the long-term cost of Australian civilian and military superannuation liability was made affordable. This was to be done by locking away today's savings for tomorrow. I heard the member for Oxley tonight speaking on another bill criticising the coalition for doing this. He spoke about borrowing as being okay. He said we should all be out there borrowing, all businesses do it. Well, they do not all do it, and if he knew anything about businesses he would be aware that not all companies in Australia borrow. What he failed to mention was the profligate spending and utter waste of taxpayers' money by this economically incompetent government.

The coalition believes changing indexation arrangements is the first and most important step in a wider process to reform military superannuation arrangements. We need ongoing dialogue with the ex-service community to work out further areas for reform, particularly those which seek to improve the lives of those most in need of support. The coalition has consulted widely and listened carefully to the views put forward by the veterans, ex-service people, ex-service organisations and current ADF personnel. Labor would do themselves no harm by at least attempting some sort of consultation with these people. Labor had no military superannuation policy at the last election and continues to have no policy on military superannuation reform. Labor has forgotten about our service men and women. It is time for Labor to get real on this issue and with bipartisan support veterans and ex-service people across Australia can look forward to more fairly indexed payments, a fairer outcome which reflects the unique nature of military service. I encourage people who support this important coalition policy to contact the Independents and let them know this is important to them. (Time expired)

Mr HUSIC (Chifley) (20:56): Matters relating to Australian Defence Force personnel have long had bipartisan support, and the question of the nature of military service is no exception. It is because of this unique nature that ADF personnel receive the competitive remuneration and allowances not available to others in the community. ADF personnel receive housing, health, family support, service allowance, ADF specific leave and in some instances tax-free salaries and allowances for warlike and non-warlike service. Central to this motion is the call for members to support the indexation of Defence Force retirement and death benefits and Defence Force retirement benefits the same way in which age and service pensions are indexed.

Superannuation pensions which are paid by the government to retired military personnel are indexed twice annually to take into account changes in the price of a basket of goods and services and this form of indexation applied also to those who are recipients of age and service pensions until this government brought about its historic pension reform package. As a result of that reform the government now indexes these pensions twice a year using the tried and tested CPI and male total average weekly earnings, whichever is greater in the half-year. When this occurred it seemed to many that those beneficiaries in the Defence Force retirement and death benefits and defence forces retirement benefits were being left behind. The reality, though, is that those beneficiaries are now in receipt of a benefit that they are entitled to as a result of their employment conditions when they were in active service. If the government were to change military superannuation indexation arrangements, it would effectively be changing a member's pre-retirement conditions of service long after the
member has retired. I have to point out that the age and service pensions are provided to the community as a safety net and are therefore treated differently to superannuation pensions.

Each of the military superannuation schemes reflects the unique nature of military service and provides members with benefits such as lifetime indexed pensions and death and invalidity benefits. They also revert to eligible surviving spouses. Superannuation is a means by which Australians can manage their living standards in retirement. It is not designed to provide a replacement for income earned over a working life. There are some military pensioners who receive only small pensions from this scheme. However, this may be for a range of reasons, including salary level at the time their service ceased, shorter periods of engagement or election to convert part of a lump sum entitlement to pension. A retired ADF member may qualify for age or service pension subject to age, income and assets test should their superannuation pension be below minimum income levels. If this motion as passed, there would be significant additional cost to the government in administering the schemes. The significant cost of indexation would have to be paid for from consolidated revenue or by diverting funds from the existing defence budget. This would no doubt jeopardise the funding of other important defence initiatives.

After listening to some of the contributions tonight I want to make the following points.

I listened to the member for Paterson claim that this issue had been politicised, but there has been no simple answer dealing with this issue from either side of politics. Wh—

(Time expired)

GRIEVANCE DEBATE

Economy

Ms O'DWYER (Higgins) (21:00): I rise in this grievance debate tonight to speak about the continued dishonesty and deception of this Labor government. In recent times there has been a lot of attention on the Prime Minister’s explicit promise that she would not introduce a carbon tax if elected—yet, after the election, she broke faith with the Australian people and broke her promise. This promise went the way of Grocery Watch, Fuelwatch, the citizens assembly, no means testing of private health insurance rebates—and on and on it goes.

Tonight I would like to talk about the Prime Minister—or the Deputy Prime Minister, as she then was—and her promise before the 2007 election that no Australian worker would be worse off as a result of her industrial relations laws and that her reforms would not have a negative impact on productivity or on our nation’s economy. She also promised that she would have a ‘tough cop on the beat’ in the construction industry, yet we know that she has legislation pending which she will introduce to repeal the powers of the Australian Building and Construction Commission once the Greens seize control of the Senate in the second half of this year.

A critical task for this government is to increase productivity. The Treasurer's budget, which he delivered only a week ago, was anaemic. He talked about a few work trials but did not do anything long-term to plan for the future and to entrench reform that would lead to productivity enhancements. Julia Gillard made a comment in 2007 where she said: 'The best thing about Labor's industrial relations plan is that it will be good for productivity.' She said that in November 2007—and, in fact, continued to repeat it in the two years following. But, this is not the view of the head of the Productivity Commission, Gary Banks, who delivered a
speech in December last year about what we need to do as a nation to increase Australia's productivity. He said:

If we are to secure Australia's productive potential into the future, the regulation of labour markets cannot remain a no-go area for evidence based policy.

He further said:

It is vital to ensure that regulations intended to promote fairness in Australia's workplaces do not detract unduly from their productivity. Getting the balance right requires careful ex ante assessment and ex post review.

What do you think are the chances of this government making a careful examination of its industrial relations laws? Despite workplace relations being central to how we improve productivity, this government has not even considered them. Instead, it measures its success by how much is has spent. If the government is doing something about productivity then why is the RBA concerned about capacity constraints and the new inflationary pressures that threaten the economy? The RBA said in the latest statement on monetary policy:

In 2012 underlying inflation is expected to be around 3% and, on the stated assumptions, to increase to around 3¼ % by the end of 2013. This reflects a combination of factors, including a gradual further strengthening in labour costs as capacity utilisation and the labour market tighten and the waning of the disinflationary effect of the recent appreciation. It is likely that inflation rates for a range of non-tradeable items, including utilities, particularly electricity and rents, will contribute significantly to overall inflation.

So we have an underlying inflation problem that is pushing up beyond the RBA's target of two to three per cent. We have capacity constraints adding further stress to the economy. Under these conditions a flexible workplace is essential to ensuring that costs do not get out of control with business forced to pass them on to consumers. Labor unhelpfully likes to characterise two different classes of people: workers and consumers. They forget that everyone works and everyone consumes. Rising costs and rising prices affect everyone. Industrial relations reform is the key to stopping the wage price spiral from taking hold in the economy, and ultimately it is to the benefit of everyone, not just trade unions who benefit directly from monopolies on labour.

But if the Labor Party is not prepared to take my word on the fact that we have an issue in industrial relations reform then perhaps they will take the word of Heather Ridout. She has made a number of comments in relation to this just recently, saying that there needs to be a proper examination and a proper review. Heather Ridout has said that it would be unfortunate to have the 'strike first, negotiate later' decision become entrenched under Fair Work Australia and that it is quite necessary for this to be examined into the future—and examine it we must.

Trade unions are beginning to assert themselves in a way that has not have been seen for a long time. Indeed, they have already claimed a prime minister. The increase in union privilege under Labor's new industrial relations laws makes little sense when you consider the long-running decline in union membership in Australia. Trade union membership is apparently at 19 per cent of the work force, and 14 per cent in the private sector.

Paul Howes, though, the well-known Secretary of the Australian Workers Union, which has been responsible for at least one job loss, claimed that his membership had increased 30 per cent from 2007 to 2010. But when asked to justify these figures by a national newspaper in recent times he was unfortunately not able to do it. This leads us to question how accurate
these figures in fact are. It also leads us to question why it is that these claims are being made, and in fact who these unions are actually representing if they are not representing the widespread workforce that they claim to be representing. The simple answer is that these unions recognise that the only way that they can gain a foothold politically is by appearing relevant—and if they have to fudge the numbers to do that, they will. The unions rely very heavily on the Australian Labor Party to implement their policy program, and the Prime Minister has been a very willing participant in doing just that.

I want to make a couple of comments in my remaining time about the importance of having a strong cop on the beat in the construction sector. The Australian Building and Construction Commission, as many people would realise, was born out of the royal commission 10 years ago which was brought about to investigate the lawlessness, thuggery, intimidation and corruption that existed as part of the culture on construction sites. This was a culture that saw itself as above the law and flagrantly breached the law without any thought of consequence—a culture that has significantly increased the cost of building. The benefits of a strong watchdog for the construction industry as well as the wider community are clear—to get rid of, and stamp out, this lawlessness that exists within the construction industry.

I think it is best to look at the research that has been undertaken to see what impact the Australian Building and Construction Commission has had in delivering some widespread benefits in its role as a strong cop on the beat. Research undertaken by KPMG Econtech shows that the ABCC has seen a 10 per cent rise in industry productivity, an annual economic welfare gain of $5.5 billion per year, a drop in the CPI of 1.2 per cent, an increase in GDP of 1.5 per cent and a significant reduction in days lost through industrial action. Yet this Labor government plans to undo these economic and workplace improvements by shifting power away from the independent umpire back to the unions—to neuter the ABCC with their legislation. This government is not interested in maintaining law and order on worksites and improving the economic welfare of the nation. They are more interested in ensuring their political support from unions, who, it seems, can remove a Prime Minister and install another and now change the law.

It remains to be seen exactly how far this government will go with these changes. When the Greens take power in the Senate in the second half of this year we know that they would like to go a lot further. The Prime Minister should resist this call most vehemently, but if her track record is anything to go by we know she will not. (Time expired)

Climate Change

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (21:10): I have a very different grievance. I find it quite disturbing how much misinformation is flowing around Australia on fundamental questions such as climate change, delivery of the latest information technology, the cost of living and the various reasons for it, illegal immigrants, pulp mills and so on. Many of these are issues that crowd our television, our emails, our news sheets and even our phone calls.

We live in a world of spin because we are restricted to 30-second media grabs, and how we can explain anything properly in 30 seconds is beyond me—especially the complex questions like climate change. It is all right to have opinions, but we really need to have some facts when issues are being put out there. Journalists talking to journalists do not always give us the best facts in a debate. It is great to have a view, and that is what democracy is all about, but if you are destroying people who work in industries, and their families, that is not very good for
democracy. Being merely obstructionist and time-consuming does very little to improve things or encourage change in any constructive way.

The climate change argument is one of those issues that has suffered grievously from this sort of debate. I intend here to try to put together some facts for people to make up their own minds as part of this grievance. I will share some readings and thoughts that I have had on this issue. We hear the words 'carbon price', 'carbon tax' and 'carbon cycle' bandied about each day; yet how many of us really know what this is all about? Why has the word 'carbon' been plaguing our lives lately? It is because we blame carbon for climate change.

Many companies recognise that those who have high energy needs, such as smelters and energy producers, contribute to warming our planet. But there is a need to have an understanding of what carbon is and how it is so important in the cycle of life on earth. We rely on a variety of elements for life, including nitrogen, oxygen, carbon dioxide, helium, methane, hydrogen and some others that you would not have heard much about. A mixture of these makes up the air we breathe. Carbon dioxide is a minor constituent of air, but it has a major impact. It is the one that helps to keep our planet and us warm and it prevents us from freezing to death. But, of course, there is a bad side. Too much carbon dioxide will cause the earth to heat up and become too hot.

What we call the greenhouse effect has kept the earth warm for millions of years. The natural carbon cycle of the earth keeps a steady amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Some of the sun's infrared radiation is reflected back into space and some is trapped by greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide, in the earth's atmosphere. This is good, because it keeps the earth's temperature at a level we can live in and not be too cold.

Because the radiation is trapped, it is absorbed by the double bonds of the carbon dioxide molecules, which transfers the radiation into kinetic, or moving, energy as the bonds stretch and vibrate. The energy is then re-emitted as heat energy, which causes the atmosphere to warm up. If extra carbon dioxide appears, this warming will happen more and the atmosphere will heat up too much. That is what is causing us to query the growing carbon content of the air, as it is said that the world has been growing warmer since the industrial revolution because, as technology requires more energy, so more carbon has been emitted than can be taken up in any of the natural sinks.

So it is important to have some sort of control over the release of carbon dioxide, and setting a price on carbon emissions has been identified by the Stern review and later the Garnaut report, among many others, as a critical policy tool for achieving carbon reductions. Therefore, first we need to be able to measure emissions in some sort of quantitative way, and then a carbon price needs to be set. But we need to allow time for industry to implement measures to limit or offset the costs so that we can continue to compete in the world market.

One way of coping with unduly high carbon emissions is to relate them to how one reduces their impact. The reduction of the impact can be very expensive by itself, or one can try and take up the extra carbon by increasing the size of the sinks. Both our oceans and our forests are natural sinks, but they also emit carbon, so there has to be an understanding of their processes of absorption in order to work out what has to be done to lower the carbon load in the air.
One way has become clear, and that is to grow more forests, allow them to mature to a certain age and then harvest them and start again. This can be demonstrated by a good argument given in the Tasmanian Legislative Council inquiry into forestry by one of my constituents, Mr John Lord. He asks the question, ‘What really is wood?’ and goes on to explain:

Yes, it has structural qualities but really it is solid sunlight. It is cellulosic and hemicellulose cells that are held together by glues called lignins. The chemical elements in here are carbon, hydrogen and oxygen and these are all produced by photosynthesis … the elements required for plants to grow - phosphorous, potassium and nitrogen - are not in the wood here. They [are] in the bark and the leaves in the heads of trees. So when we cut down a tree, we leave the bark and heads in the bush to rot down and we simply take out the wood. My view is that managing our native forests is our most sustainable enterprise. It is the most sustainable enterprise I know of. We do not use chemicals, except for controlling noxious weeds. We do not use chemical fertilisers. We only remove the carbon and hydrogen and oxygen that is in the wood and all of these, I am advised, are replaceable by photosynthesis because we have the sunlight and water.

Using trees to take up extra carbon is not new, and there are many other ways to lock up carbon for use in another form, but it needs to work within an economic framework so that industry can be encouraged to lessen its emissions or to trade them with other industries and the overall amount of carbon in the atmosphere is not increased.

Tasmania is well placed to develop our forest industries to be carbon stores. We can lock that carbon up in wood products such as building materials and wooden furniture. It can help to provide carbon credits to high emitters, but to make this work it must be made an economic plus. We need a trading system and a carbon price. By setting a carbon price we can ensure stability for industries across Australia to set their carbon alleviation costs. But we really need to be able to deal with this in that sort of way. We need to be able to lock up our carbon and trade in it. Economists say that it is costly and that we should plan to help those heavy emitters to try to be less extravagant in their emissions, but we need some economic tools.

Socially, people are concerned about tsunamis, floods, fires and other climate problems that we have faced lately and are saying that they must be due to climate change but they are not sure what to do. I believe the government has got it right: we need to set a carbon price and work out the best way to set a form of trade to try to bring down world emissions. We must also stop the misinformation, the doomsayers and the soothsayers of the world, and try to work together to ensure that we are addressing the many and varied risks associated with any changes in climate. We have to act responsibly on behalf of our children and our children's children, and we should deal with climate change in a responsible way.

**Foreign Ownership**

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of The Nationals) (21:20): Concerns about foreign ownership of agribusiness and rural land in Australia are growing. There are good reasons to be concerned about Australian buyers being potentially priced out of the market by foreign competitors, the loss of control of our rural landscapes and potential threats to our nation's future food security. There has been significant foreign ownership of Australian land since European settlement and some say that the amount of land in foreign ownership has not changed significantly over the last century.
We do not have a lot of facts and figures about foreign ownership of land. A motion moved by the shadow minister for agriculture and passed by the House of Representatives during its last sittings should help to put some of the facts before the people to enable a proper debate on what is an appropriate level of foreign ownership of our land. Of course, as overseas buyers cannot take the land away with them, sales to and from overseas owners occur regularly. Often foreign buyers purchase land as a part of a major investment in this country, creating jobs and opportunities for Australians. Many overseas buyers have also been innovative and have helped to bring new farm practices, new techniques and new industries to Australia. Foreign investment is not evil in itself, and it has brought real benefits to this nation and helped it to grow.

On 22 September 2009, the federal Labor government substantially increased the thresholds above which Foreign Investment Review Board approval was required for an overseas sale. Now, agricultural land and agribusiness investments do not have to pass through the FIRB unless they are valued above a figure around $235 million. Under the Australia-United States Free Trade Agreement, the threshold for US investments is $1,004 million. All these amounts are indexed. It is obvious from these figures that most rural properties can be purchased without any FIRB consideration.

However, there are some classes of assets, such as media, banking and residential real estate, where foreign investment comes under special scrutiny and where foreign investment proposals must be reviewed against the national interest on a case-by-case basis. Foreign investors are prohibited from acquiring established dwellings for investment purposes, even if they are temporary residents in Australia. It is very much easier for a foreigner to buy a huge cattle station or a large agribusiness in Australia than to buy a suburban home. That is ridiculous. The Nationals believe there ought to be lower thresholds for FIRB approval on the sale of farmland to foreign investors.

Over recent times there has been particular concern about foreign purchases of Australian agribusiness. Since the election of the federal Labor government, reported foreign investment in Australian agribusiness has averaged $2.7 billion a year—a tenfold increase. On 15 November last year the Herald-Sun said that the level of Australian agribusiness sold overseas in the last two years amounted to over $9 billion. Large portions of almost all agribusiness sectors, including food processing, are now foreign owned and not one of those purchases has been refused by the FIRB. In the grain industry, Australia's biggest agribusiness, ABB, has been bought by Viterra, a Canadian company. The AWB, with its big Landmark rural products business, was sold to Agrium in Canada, who subsequently sold off the grain trading division to the US company Cargill. Cargill has links with GrainCorp, the dominate east coast grain handler and marketer. In the sugar industry, CRI is now owned by the Singaporean company Wilmar. Maryborough Sugar has a Thai investor called Mitr Phol, who has bought interests that were previously owned by New Zealanders. At the present time, a range of companies—Bunge from USA, China's COFCO and Mackay Sugar, who are being backed in their deal by the French-American company Louis Dreyfus—are circling Tully Sugar. Already, 60 per cent of Queensland's milling capacity is foreign owned and more mills are under threat.

In the dairy industry, Dairy Farmers—established in 1900 in Australia, one of our oldest companies—has been bought by Kirin in Japan, who also have National Foods. Pauls has
gone to Parmalat in Italy and Bonlac has gone to New Zealand. In the beef industry, companies like Marubeni and Nippon, and Rockdale, owned by Mitsubishi, have been significant purchasers or investors in Australia. Now JB Swift own Tasman and AMH. AACO, which owns 1.1 per cent of the Australian continent, is now 20 per cent owned by a consortium from UAE and Malaysia. Timbercorp sold 8,096 hectares and 90,000 megalitres of water entitlements to OLAM in Singapore. The Queensland government has just sold its entire timber resources to Hancock in the United States.

It is not just these sorts of companies alone. Foreign interests have just bought 45 per cent of Australia's almond industry. Fruit and vegetables are extensively dominated by foreign companies, as is most of our food-processing sector. The chemical companies and the fertiliser companies are largely foreign owned. Buyers even extend to Murray-Darling Basin water licences. Summit Global Management of the USA owns $20 million of Murray-Darling Basin water and Guinness Peat from Britain another $35 million. The reality is that these purchases are continuing at an enormous rate.

I believe that the wholesale sell-off of Australian agriculture poses a greater threat to the future of Australian agriculture and our nation's food security than even the sale of land. Decisions about what crops will be grown in Australia, what prices will be paid to Australian farmers and what factories will remain open in Australia are now overwhelmingly being taken in boardrooms in other parts of the world. When Cargill or Viterra make decisions about what grain they will buy or sell, will they give priority to the needs of Australian farmers or will they look after the needs of the people in their own country? If Australian cane farmers need help in a tough market, will the Thais or the Chinese or the Singaporeans be willing to help? When Cargill gets AWB's grain business, they also get access to Australia's best grain markets. But will they be lost then to Australia? Our quality premiums and our reputation cannot be guaranteed when they are owned by a foreign company that has no particular interest in Australia's national interest. Of course, we already know that Australia's quality wheat and our reputation will be blended off to return profits not to Australians but to their new USA owners.

Australians underrate the importance and value of our agriculture. Others know it is often the world's best and they are prepared to pay for it. I am very disappointed that the federal Labor government and the Foreign Investment Review Board have stood by while so much of Australian agriculture has fallen into foreign hands. Even where some sectors of an industry remain Australian owned, local companies find it very difficult to be competitive with giant overseas based multinational corporations. The FIRB has let Australian agriculture down. If the Ebro Foods takeover of 100 per cent of Sunrice is acceptable, that means a Spanish company will get control of 100 per cent of Australia's rice-growing industry. If this purchase of 100 per cent of an Australian industry is acceptable to the FIRB, when will they ever intervene?

While it will be very difficult to reverse these takeovers, Australia must be more vigilant in protecting the national interest and ensuring that key decisions about our land use and our food security are made in Australia by Australians. Australians must more highly value the strategic importance of ensuring that our food supplies are secure for the future. China and other countries are buying our land not just for the commercial investment but also to make sure that their food supplies are secure. Why wouldn't Australia want to make sure we control
our own destiny and keep the ownership of these key companies, as much as we possibly can, under Australian control and Australian management?

North-east Tasmania

Mr Lyons (Bass) (21:30): I rise to speak today on the north-east region of Tasmania, which is in my electorate of Bass. As some may note, I have spoken on this region before, but it is something I feel is important to again discuss. Some people would have us believe the situation in the north-east is all doom and gloom. These people need to take a look at what is really going on—there are many opportunities for job creation and for the community to work together to both share their ideas and their opportunities to utilise and maximise the region’s potential.

It is time that the other side, particularly Senator Guy Barnett and Tasmanian state member Peter Gutwein, stopped portraying images of doom and gloom gave up spreading misinformation about this region. It is no wonder that I read a headline in the Launceston Examiner today, ‘Abbott stands for nothing.’ It is disappointing that Senator Barnett, as he leaves this place, is more interested in scaremongering tactics than in reinforcing and fostering the positive and innovative ideas that the region is so full of.

Recently, I toured the north-east and met a number of innovative, passionate, hard working and community-minded people. I began my tour at the Wood Lea Nursery and was greeted by Tony Waites. Tony is a man full of new ideas about how he can sell his seedlings and plants from his nursery, including increasing sales to the mainland. The best thing is that Tony also has the drive and energy to make his vision become a reality. He didn’t put his head down when Gunn’s, FEA and Forestry Tasmania decided that they didn’t need as many seedlings anymore and 80 per cent of his sales dried up virtually overnight. He looked for other business opportunities and I wish him well in his new venture.

I then visited the Headquarters Road Dam site, where a 1,980 megalitre dam is being constructed. This dam is being built strategically within the catchment, using the region’s geographical and hydrological features to greatest advantage. The construction of the dam has employed forest contractors that were made redundant from the downturn in the region’s timber sector. Other employees have come from the south of the state but are staying locally, helping to stimulate the local economy. Tasmania has 13 per cent of Australia’s runoff; the Murray Darling in comparison has six per cent. Tasmania—especially the north-east—with four irrigation schemes currently being constructed or planned, is making the most of its potential.

The Upper Ringarooma scheme is planned to be a 10,000 megalitre dam. It will have 27 kilometres of pipeline, including four separate pipelines. One of these is a two-way pipeline so that water can be pumped into the dam to help fill it and then pumped out again when needed. So far 50 per cent of the landholdings have taken up water rights, the others already have existing water rights, and the dam has not even started construction as yet. The Winnaleah Dam site is in the final tender stage and the Great Forester-Brid River irrigation scheme is currently having storage and supply design options being determined by the Tasmanian Irrigation Development Board.

This is all very impressive, especially for farmers and graziers in the north-east region. It means a constant and reliable water supply, allowing for increase in development and new
business opportunities. These areas have good runoff and are suitable for high-flow winter storage and summer release of irrigation water without actually being subject to high impact flood events. The people of the north-east of Tasmania are developing innovative ideas to make the most of the resources they have and to further develop those resources into the future.

There is another group of passionate people in the town of Winnaleah, also in the north-east, who are working together to further develop the Winnaleah irrigation scheme. The scheme that they currently have can no longer meet demand, so they are developing a new plan to increase the size of the pipeline. There are 35 kilometres of existing pipeline, and this group is working hard to have another 10½ kilometres of 600 millimetre pipeline added. There is currently some discussion surrounding the size of the pipe to be laid, but I strongly support the Winnaleah irrigation scheme's proposal for a 600 millimetre pipeline. If the scheme is not built to the right dimensions from the first day of being commissioned, it will not operate to its full potential. This scheme has great potential for the area and it makes me wonder why members on the other side do not praise and become engaged with these efforts instead of continually writing off the region. The local farming community who manage the scheme would like to install a mini-hydro scheme as part of the current expansion. The income generated from the production of renewable hydro-electricity would allow further expansion and upgrades to the scheme into the future. However, to maximise efficiency, there needs to be a 600 millimetre supply pipe installed rather than the proposed 500 millimetre pipe.

I met with Michael Brill from Stronach Timbers in Scottsdale. Michael and his family own and operate a sawmill which produces a wide array of timber products, but have also recently begun operation of Stronach Labor Force. This was done off their own backs and currently helps between 30 and 40 people to find employment within the region, in dairy farming, vegetable suppliers, the wine industry, lavender farms, tourism and golf tours. If you have not played golf at Lost Farm and Barnbougle then you have not played golf at the best courses in Australia. There are even jobs in building and automotive—they have a wide range of employment opportunities to assist in accommodating those in employment transition in the region. Stronach Timber are also currently considering a number of new possibilities that have the potential to grow, develop and re-create jobs in the forest industry, and I would like to congratulate them on their passion and willingness to help others and wish them all the best in their new ventures.

I also stopped in at Glenn Moore's vegetable growing and packaging facility and I was amazed at the amount of produce that local producers package and prepare for sale. So many different vegetable varieties from all over the north-east are being sent to locations around the world. It was here that I also tasted the Tasmanian produced 'Rhu Bru', a delicious rhubarb drink that is made in the north-east. These are yet more examples of the level of innovation and the close relationships between community members that exist in the north-east of Tasmania. Minister Snowdon recently joined me at Scottsdale to announce an $18.7 million project to redevelop the Defence Science and Technology Organisation's nutrition research facility. This facility researches and manufactures the freeze-dried components used in the Australian Defence Force patrol ration packs and has been producing these since the early 1970s. In fact, Scottsdale is the only facility in Australia to both produce food and undertake
research into the nutritional value of ration packs and rationing systems used by the Australian Defence Force. This announcement will generate employment opportunities in regional Tasmania and is an announcement that was welcomed by the community. It again reinforces the federal government's commitment to the people of Scottsdale and the north-east and that Defence has a long-term future in the region.

At the same time, Minister Snowdon announced a new partnership between the University of Tasmania, CSIRO's Division of Food and Nutritional Sciences and the Defence Science and Technology Organisation. This new partnership will focus on establishing a joint research centre in food innovation. This would support and enhance the research activities that are already happening at the Defence Science and Technology Organisation establishment in Scottsdale. This is sure to benefit the local agricultural industries, local manufacturers of ingredients, small business development and employment in the north-east. The partnership will also allow for a broader pool of experts to work together and for the research capabilities to grow that will benefit not only the Australian Defence Force but also the needs of the wider Australian community.

As can be seen, the level of innovation and passion within the people of the north-east is impressive. It is time for the Liberals to stop scaremongering, take a look at all the good things and new ideas that are being generated in the north-east region of Tasmania and embrace and support these ideas instead of writing off the area. There are so many great ideas and hard-working people that will make these ideas become a reality. It is really positive to see and experience this in the region. I am very impressed with what I have seen and experienced and I look forward to working with the people of the region to help in ensuring that these ideas become a reality. I congratulate the hard-working and dedicated people of the north-east of Tasmania.

**General Practice**

Dr SOUTHCOTT (Boothby) (21:40): My grievance tonight is about another area of government waste. It is not the pink batts and it is not school halls; it is the GP superclinic program. It all sounded so good back in 2007 when Kevin Rudd said he was going to establish these things called GP superclinics. What he did back in 2007-08 was to announce $280 million in spending for 36 GP superclinics. More than three years later, there are only 10 that are in operation around Australia, but the government has gone further and announced another 28 GP superclinics at a further taxpayer cost of $370.2 million. So, since the government took office, they have committed more than $650 million to this program.

The concept of a GP superclinic is to combine general practitioners and allied health under one roof. This is not a new idea. As I travel around Australia, I have seen family practices and medical centres that are co-located with physios or that have diabetes educators or speech therapists in their room. In fact, as a medical student more than 20 years ago, I worked in a medical centre which brought together general practitioners and also had pharmacy, allied health and physio all under the one roof. It was not called a superclinic; it was a medical centre—and it was not funded by taxpayers either. Going around Australia, in towns and in suburbs you will find many medical centres and family practices that have combined general practitioners with other allied health—with diagnostic imaging, diagnostic services and pathology. These clinics are not called GP superclinics, yet they do the same thing, and they have been funded by individuals, by the private sector and by the practitioners themselves.
They have been built from the ground up, and they are connected with their communities. These extended practices have been part of our community for a long time.

As we know, the GP superclinic program has consistently underdelivered. Less than a year ago, there were only two GP superclinics in operation; now we have 10. So, after more than 3½ years, only 10 of the total of 64 superclinics are in operation. Only three of the original 36 clinics were fully operational in the government's first term in office. At the government's current rate, it will take another 23 years to have all 64 GP superclinics fully operational.

In estimates, the Department of Health and Ageing has consistently held to the position that the locations of the GP superclinics were a decision of government. We all know what this means. What it means is that Health Minister Nicola Roxon is sitting there with the ALP national secretary with a map, working out which Labor member has a seat that needs to be shored up. Who do they need to shore up electorally by announcing a GP superclinic in their electorate? The decisions were not made on the basis of district of workforce shortage, for which there is an extensive database in the Department of Health and Ageing. They were not made on health need; they were made on political need for these seats. What we know is that the Department of Health and Ageing had no input at all into the process of selecting the locations of the GP superclinics in either the 2007-08 announcement or the 2010-11 announcement. To put that in some perspective, the 2010 announcement was made in the May budget. The government did not consult with the department about the locations but determined the locations during the caretaker period, which was during the election campaign. The locations were selected to ensure the political health of the Labor Party rather than the health needs of the local communities. They were designed to shore up vulnerable Labor members in marginal seats.

On the needs for superclinics, there was no market failure requiring government intervention or the use of taxpayers’ hard earned money to remedy. The government funded superclinics were created in direct competition to those that have been set up and funded voluntarily by the private sector. Some pre-existing GPs have claimed that the superclinics are cannibalising their existing practices for patients. This is confirmed by the admission that the Department of Health and Ageing did not undertake an analysis of existing primary health care providers before the locations of GP superclinics were decided by the minister.

You need only look at the fact that some GP superclinics are failing to attract GPs. The Modbury superclinic, one I know well, was opened without a GP. It is a fantastic building with everything there, but the problem was that there were no doctors and no nurses. There was no GP for almost four months. They have actually had to get locums in to staff the superclinic. The director of GP superclinics within the Department of Health and Ageing, Anne Thorpe, has said that some other clinics are finding it challenging to provide the services they were set up to deliver. So we know that some of the GP superclinics are struggling. But only 10 of them are operational, so how much hope can we place on the viability of this $650 million program? More importantly, the GP superclinics are contracted to remain in operation for a minimum of 20 years, so it remains to be seen who will finance the clinic if it experiences operating losses throughout this time frame. Will the government be bailing them out?

There is also a lack of accountability on the GP superclinics. The data being presented by the government on the current use of GP superclinics is based only on self-reported figures.
from each of the clinics. The Department of Health and Ageing is undertaking no accurate
analysis of the services being provided. A figure of $650 million apparently buys no
accountability and no compulsory reporting. The GP superclinics have all the credibility and
accountability of a Soviet tractor factory plan.

The Department of Health and Ageing has also admitted that the amount of funding
determined for each clinic was also a decision of the government—again, Karl Bitar and
Nicola Roxon sitting in a room and working it out based on who needs what. There is no
record or public justification as to why the money was spent where it was—why one clinic
received $3 million but another received $15 million. Nicola Roxon decided those things
unilaterally based on nothing more than her generosity and the government's political needs
on any given day.

Under a coalition government it would have been very different. The coalition has always
strongly supported general practice as the cornerstone of primary health care, and this will
always be the case. However, we do not believe that GP superclinics were the answer. We
believe we should be supporting the general practices that are currently in existence,
encouraging them to expand and to bring in more people and to build on what is already there.
We should be providing grants to existing general practices to allow them to further develop
their own infrastructure, for training and teaching rooms, for accommodating existing doctors,
for expansion of integrated allied health services, for multidisciplinary care and for the
extension of after-hours opening times. We should be encouraging the existing practices
around the country to expand voluntarily, not placing government funded clinics just around
the corner in direct competition to them. To encourage existing practices to expand is a
considered approach, and it is one that has been arrived at after consultation. It is an approach
that is backed up by the AMA. Their president, Dr Andrew Pesce, has stated that the priority
should be to build on the GP services that are established and working, not to compete with
them and run them out of business and not to reinvent the wheel.

The $650 million program from the GP superclinics could have been better spent on
directly funding existing and established practices. According to figures provided by the
department there are more than 7,000 general practices around the country. The $650 million,
if it were divided evenly amongst those clinics, would have provided a $91,000 infrastructure
grant to each and every general practice in the country. Alternatively, that same money could
have provided $182,000 to half the clinics or $365,000 to one-quarter of the general practices.
This approach would have provided much better value for the taxpayer and much better value
for money and would have seen more results than the paltry 10 clinics around Australia that
we have now. Instead, the government has provided grants of up to $15 million each to a
select 64 clinics in a select 64 locations, through a process with no accountability, to compete
against the age-old family practices which got where they are because of a lot of hard work.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I was loathe to interrupt the honourable member; however,
under standing order 64 he ought not refer to the health minister by her name.

Vietnamese Community Australia

Mr HAYES (Fowler—Government Whip) (21:50): On 30 April I was given the
opportunity by the Vietnamese Community Australia to pay my respects to all veterans of the
Vietnam conflict and to speak to the hundreds of people who came to Canberra to
commemorate the 36th anniversary of the fall of Saigon. I thank Thanh Nguyen and the VCA
executive for that distinct honour. Human rights is an issue that I believe is very important to most of us in this place, because we value life as well as the dignity of mankind.

When I spoke in Canberra I noted the experience of two men who have had a profound effect on me—both Vietnamese soldiers, one a combat officer, the other a doctor in the medical corps. Both suffered greatly at the hands of the communist government and, like many other Vietnamese Australians, both are refugees. I refer to Mr Vo Dai Ton and Dr Tien Nguyen OAM, a former VCA president. I personally know these men and I know their stories. Along with so many other Vietnamese soldiers who fought to protect South Vietnam, they have endured the horrors and hardships of re-education camps. Their belief in freedom and democracy is unquestionable, and their bravery and courage is not only inspiring but deeply humbling. Despite what has happened to them, both men have made genuine and valued contributions to their adopted country, Australia.

So, when I recently learnt of a proposal for a commemorative joint parade next year, involving Australian veterans marching together with former Viet Cong fighters, my thoughts turned to these two men and to the many other Vietnamese refugees. Regardless of the undoubted honourable intentions, I do not consider such an event to be appropriate, given the circumstances of the war and particularly having regard to the ongoing human rights abuses in Vietnam. I have written to both the Prime Minister and the National President of the RSL expressing my concerns about such an event.

At the conclusion of the Vietnam war the communist government acted with extreme cruelty to those they suspected stood against them. The actions of the regime pushed many millions of people to flee their homeland in search of freedom and security. Tragically, thousands of people did not survive that journey. These events are not confined to the pages of history or distant in our memories; they were but 36 years ago. I remain deeply concerned about human rights in Vietnam. I find it appalling that there are more than 400 people currently imprisoned in Vietnam for exercising their fundamental human rights—people whose crimes are supporting political groups not recognised by the state, criticising government policy, calling for democracy and providing legal advice to other dissidents on trial.

On 11 May I had the pleasure of organising a conference in Parliament House for members and senators to discuss the current application of civil and political rights in Vietnam. I must say, there was a strong feeling that, despite our trade and diplomatic involvement, the situation of civil and political rights in Vietnam has not substantially improved, and some claim it has even gone backwards. Representatives of Bloc 1706 human rights activists also attended in order to brief members and senators on that day. Bloc 1706 gained its name as it was formed on 1 July 2006 in support of a democracy movement that was formed earlier that year in Vietnam. Before this movement, and since, many dissidents have been arrested and jailed. One thing that Bloc 1706 is doing, which is truly remarkable, is providing financial support for the families of jailed dissidents so they can at least survive. Recently, such assistance was given to the families of three labour rights activists who were jailed for nine years for organising a strike at a shoe factory in pursuit of fair wages and conditions.

It should be noted that many unions in Australia, including the Transport Workers Union and the Australia Workers Union, have taken a strong stand on the treatment of those three labour rights activists in Vietnam. Indeed, the ACTU executive has passed a resolution.
strongly condemning the actions of the Vietnamese government in their jailing. Through the resources of Vietnamese Sydney Radio, I have had the opportunity to speak to a number of people currently detained in Vietnam for exercising their basic human rights. I have spoken to two Catholic priests currently detained in Vietnam, Father Ly Van Nguyen and Father Loi Van Phan, and more recently I spoke to a young woman, Cong Nhan Thi Le, a Vietnamese lawyer. Her crime was to assist a couple of poor farmers who had been dispossessed of their property. I thank Boa Khanh and Joachim Nguyen for giving me the opportunity to speak personally to these people—after all, they are true patriots of Vietnam and, like us, they believe in freedom and the dignity for all Vietnamese people.

For some years now, at the Australia-Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue, Australian government officials have been expressing concern about political prisoners. I understand the diplomatic difficulty of gaining permission to visit prisoners and detainees in Vietnam who are not Australian citizens, and the recent experience of an American congressman and even more pointedly the experience of our own member for Cowan can attest to that. But if we are to genuinely press for human rights advances in Vietnam we need to press for access to those detained in circumstances we believe to be an abuse of human rights. I would like to briefly refer to the Human Rights Technical Cooperation Program, a program for enhancing advances in human rights in Vietnam. I note from the AusAID website that under this program the public security ministry is one area that is a beneficiary of this Australian aid. I seriously question taxpayers' money going to the very ministry which coordinates the arrest, jailing and mistreatment of peaceful dissidents.

Rights are not something we just talk about and then go ahead and forget. Rights are worth nothing unless they are respected. If people are jailed for simply exercising their basic human rights, then clearly those rights do not exist at all. For that reason, I wrote to the foreign minister only recently in respect of a matter concerning Mr Cu Huy Ha Vu, a Vietnamese legal scholar who was recently convicted for propaganda against the state. Mr Vu was arrested in 2009 after he attempted to initiate legal action following the approval of a controversial Chinese-built bauxite mining project in the central highlands of Vietnam. A year later Mr Vu was again arrested, this time for challenging the constitutional validity of a prohibition against class actions being taken in the courts. This is a man attempting to exercise what he understands to be his legal rights. I am particularly concerned that, following a trial that lasted only several hours, Mr Vu was sentenced to seven years imprisonment followed by a further three years probation.

Clearly more needs to be done to ensure that Australia's financial contribution to Vietnam is met with clear and substantial improvements in Vietnam's human rights record and with a view to their realising the terms of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which the Vietnamese government freely consented to sign back in 1982. We, as a country that trades with Vietnam, along with other developed countries, have a right to insist that those undertakings which were consented to in 1982 be implemented and that the doctrines that go with them be respected. While I support and encourage all efforts to build harmonious relations, I believe that given the current circumstances a commemorative parade involving Australian veterans marching alongside Vietcong fighters will send absolutely the wrong message to dictatorial regimes—namely that they can continue to deny their people basic freedoms while continuing to enjoy the support of our country.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper): Order! The time allotted for the debate has expired. The resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Main Committee adjourned at 22:00.
QUESTIONS IN WRITING

Asylum Seekers
(Question No. 95)

Mr Morrison asked the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, in writing, on 22 November 2010:

How many days above the Government's 90 day target have (a) Sri Lankan; and (b) Afghan asylum seekers been in detention as a consequence of the processing suspension announced on 9 April 2010 and what is the total sum of the additional costs incurred by the extended detention in parts (a) and (b).

Mr Bowen: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

While there are no statutory requirements to process asylum claims for irregular maritime arrivals within a prescribed timeframe, the 90 day statutory timeframe for assessment of onshore protection claims has been used as a standard operating guide for the Refugee Status Assessment (RSA) process. The 90 day target is calculated from the time the Department receives a Refugee Status Assessment request.

As at 23 November 2010, the average number of days Sri Lankan irregular maritime arrivals subject to the suspension were in detention was 188 days, 107 of which were taken up with RSA processing. This is 17 days above the 90 day processing target.

As at 23 November 2010, the average number of days Afghan irregular maritime arrivals subject to the suspension were in detention was 177 days, 54 of which were taken up with RSA processing. This is within the 90 day processing target.

The cost of detention is dependant on the specific circumstances of each detainee and as such the costs of the suspension cannot be adequately estimated.

Great Barrier Reef: Coral Bleaching
(Question No. 202)

Mr Simpkins asked the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, in writing, on 21 February 2011:

(1) In each calendar year since 1997, how many coral bleaching incidents have occurred on (a) the Great Barrier Reef; and (b) Ningaloo Reef.

(2) On what (a) date, and (b) part of the reef, did each incident occur; and what was the size of each affected area.

Mr Burke: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(1) Widespread coral bleaching incidents are typically caused by extreme sea temperatures; however localised bleaching can also be caused by exposure to freshwater (rain and flood waters) and pollutants.

(a) Great Barrier Reef

I am advised that three significant coral bleaching incidents have occurred within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park since 1997 as a result of prolonged elevated sea temperatures. Two widespread incidents occurred in the summers of 1997/8 and 2001/2 and a localised but severe incident occurred in the summer of 2005/6. Some localised patchy coral bleaching has also been reported at individual reefs across the Great Barrier Reef each summer since 1997.
2010-2011 Floods:
Bleaching has been reported on some fringing reefs in the Keppel Island Group as a result of the recent flooding.

(b) Ningaloo Reef
I am advised that the coral reef communities of Ningaloo Marine Park that are susceptible to coral bleaching occur in State waters which are managed by the Western Australian Department of Environment and Conservation. Water depths within the Commonwealth waters of the Park range from about 30m to greater than 500m.

Since 1997, there have been three bleaching episodes recorded on Ningaloo Reef. A cold water bleaching event occurred in 2006; bleaching related to anoxic water after coral spawning occurred in 2008; and the first recorded warm water bleaching event occurred in February 2011.

(2) Widespread coral bleaching incidents typically develop over the course of several months as a result of prolonged elevated sea temperatures, but can also result from other factors affecting water quality.

(a) Great Barrier Reef
I am advised that in the summers of 1997/98 (January-March) and 2001/2 (January – April) 50 per cent of the 2900 reefs within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park were affected by widespread coral bleaching incidents. In each case five per cent of reefs suffered lasting damage. In 2006 (January – February) a severe localised bleaching event focused at the southern end of the Marine Park caused 40 per cent mortality of reefs in the Keppel Bay area.

2010-2011 Floods:
The 2010-2011 Queensland summer (December to March) was the sixth wettest since records began and heavy flooding has persisted for several months throughout most of south-eastern Queensland. These floods have caused high turbidity and increases in sedimentation and chlorophyll levels in inshore areas exposed to the flood plumes. Corals stressed by decreased salinity and high turbidity can bleach, although salinity-induced bleaching is usually localised and confined to shallower areas where the largest salinity decrease occurs.

Ningaloo Reef
I am advised that the cold water bleaching occurred during winter (July) 2006. The bleaching event related to anoxic water after coral spawning occurred in late March 2008. The only warm water bleaching event began in February 2011.

(b) Great Barrier Reef
I am advised the 1997/8 incident primarily affected the inshore and mid-shelf reefs between Cooktown and Townsville and the inshore reefs between Ayr and Gladstone. In 2001/2 a larger proportion of mid-shelf reefs were affected by bleaching between Port Douglas and Rockhampton.

2010-2011 Floods:
Bleaching has been reported on some fringing reefs in the Keppel Island Group as a result of this current flooding, however, as rainfall has continued to occur in this area, it is too early to assess the full extent of the bleaching. Localised coral bleaching has also been observed on the reef flat at Heron Island although reports from the research station indicate this is a result of intense rainfall during very low tides.
Ningaloo Reef
I am advised that in July 2006 bleaching affected the entire length of Ningaloo Reef. Good coral recovery was observed at all sites with very minor mortality. The anoxic bleaching event in 2008 occurred in Bills Bay (Coral Bay) and coincided with fish kills. Between 20-40 per cent of coral in a 1.2km2 area was affected and did not recover. Bleaching in February 2011 was observed along the entire length of Ningaloo Reef. Areas in the Exmouth Gulf (100 per cent of coral affected), the Muiron Islands (50-80 per cent coral affected), and Coral Bay (40-60 per cent of coral affected) had higher percentage bleaching than other areas along the reef system. Detailed assessments will be finalised in the coming months and will provide a basis for assessing recovery.

Natural Disaster Resilience Program
(Question No. 230)

Mr Haase asked the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, in writing, on 3 March 2011
(1) Will funds be available for Carnarvon in WA under the Natural Disaster Resilience Program (NDRP); if so, what sum?
(2) What funds under the NDRP (a) are still available, and (b) remain unallocated, for WA?
(3) Given the flood levy construction program in Carnarvon remains incomplete, will funds from the NDRP be available for levy bank construction in Carnarvon; if so what sum?
(4) What maximum percentage of levy bank construction costs in Carnarvon will be met by the NDRP?

Mr Albanese: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
(1) As all states and territories administer their own NDRP project funding in accordance with their risk priorities, the Australian Government is not in a position to state what funds, if any, will be made available to Carnarvon. This is a decision for the WA Government based on their natural disaster risk priorities.
(2) In 2010-11, the Commonwealth is providing $3 million in NDRP funding for WA for its natural disaster resilience activities and identified projects. This funding is currently being allocated to successful project proposals by WA under their Implementation Plan which covers all funds for the 10/11 year and is in place until 30 June 2011. I am not in a position to say whether any funds remain available or unallocated.
(3) This is a decision for the WA Government based on their natural disaster risk priorities.
(4) The Australian Government is not in a position to state what percentage of funds, if any, will be made available from the NDRP to meet the levee bank construction costs, this is a matter for the Western Australian Government.

Ministers: Staff, Capital Works and Acquisitions
(Question No. 236)

Mr Briggs asked the Prime Minister, in writing, on 3 March 2011:
(1) How many personal staff are employed by the Minister.
(2) What is the (a) total cost, and (b) breakdown of costs, of all capital works and acquisitions in the Ministers private office since 3 December 2007.

Ms Gillard: I am advised that the answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
(1) The employment of staff under the Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984 is administered by the Department of Finance and Deregulation (Finance). On 22 February 2011, Finance tabled with the
Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee a list of Government Personal Staff Positions as at 1 February 2011.

(2) The cost of capital works and acquisitions for ministers' offices is shared by the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS), Finance and home departments in line with Appendix 2 of Supporting Ministers, Upholding the Values. The Special Minister of State will accordingly respond on behalf of all ministers in respect of costs incurred by the DPS and Finance.

I am advised that capital works and acquisitions costs incurred by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet total $270,815.

The breakdown of costs are as follows:

PMO – Canberra

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IT equipment</td>
<td>159,128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other office equipment</td>
<td>111,687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>$270,815</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ministers: Staff, Capital Works and Acquisitions**

(1) How many personal staff are employed by the Minister.

(2) What is the (a) total cost, and (b) breakdown of costs, of all capital works and acquisitions in the Minister's private office since 3 December 2007.

Mr Christensen asked the Minister for Arts and Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government, in writing, on 3 March 2011:

(1) How many personal staff are employed by the Minister.

(2) What is the (a) total cost, and (b) breakdown of costs, of all capital works and acquisitions in the Minister's private office since 3 December 2007.

Mr Crean: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(1) The employment of staff under the Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984 is administered by the Department of Finance and Deregulation. On 22 February 2011, the Department tabled with the Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee a list of Government Personal Staff Positions as at 1 February 2011.

(2) The cost of capital works and acquisitions for Ministers' offices is shared by the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS), Department of Finance and Deregulation (DoFD) and home departments in line with Appendix 2 of the Supporting Ministers, Upholding the Values. The Special Minister of State will accordingly respond on behalf of all Ministers in respect of costs incurred by the DPS and DoFD.

I am advised that the costs incurred by the Department of Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government are as follows:

- laminated maps of Australia—$100;
- refrigerator—$890;
- crockery for office kitchen—$250; and
- 1 x 4 draw B class safe—$3,511.

All costs quoted are shared between the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Department of Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government, in accordance with my dual role as Minister for the Arts and Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government.

I was appointed Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government and Minister for the Arts on 14 September 2010. As such, no data is provided for the period prior to this date.
Ministers: Staff, Capital Works and Acquisitions
(Question No. 243)

Mr Briggs asked the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, in writing, on 3 March 2011:

(1) How many personal staff are employed by the Minister.

(2) What is the (a) total cost, and (b) breakdown of costs, of all capital works and acquisitions in the Minister's private office since 3 December 2007.

Mr Bowen: The answer to the honourable member's question is:

(1) The employment of staff under the Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984 is administered by the Department of Finance and Deregulation (DoFD). On 22 February 2011, DoFD tabled with the Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee a list of Government Personal Staff Positions as at 1 February 2011.

(2) (a) and (b) The cost of capital works and acquisitions for ministers' offices is shared by the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS), Department of Finance and Deregulation (DoFD) and home departments in line with Appendix 2 of Supporting Ministers, Upholding the Values. The Special Minister of State will accordingly respond on behalf of all ministers in respect of costs incurred by the DPS and DoFD.

I am advised that, since being sworn in as Minister for Immigration and Citizenship on 14 September 2010, to 3 March 2011, the total cost of capital works and acquisitions incurred by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship for my office at Australian Parliament House is in the order of $3,950.91. A breakdown of costs is set out below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 x 4 Drawer C-Class Security Container</td>
<td>$1,984.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 x Televisions</td>
<td>$1,335.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 x Mini Fridge</td>
<td>$ 233.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 x DVD Player</td>
<td>$ 398.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>$3,950.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ministers: Staff, Capital Works and Acquisitions
(Question No. 247)

Mr Briggs asked the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, in writing, on 3 March 2011:

(1) How many personal staff are employed by the Minister?

(2) What is the (a) total cost, and (b) breakdown of costs, of all capital works and acquisitions in the Minister's private office since 3 December 2007?

Mr Burke: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(1) The employment of staff under the Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984 is administered by the Department of Finance and Deregulation. On 22 February 2011, the Department tabled with the Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee a list of Government Personal Staff Positions as at 1 February 2011.

(2) (a) and (b)

The cost of capital works and acquisitions for the Minister's office is shared by the
Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS), Department of Finance and Deregulation (DoFD) and home department, in line with Appendix 2 of Supporting Ministers, Upholding and Values. The Special Minister of State will accordingly respond on behalf of all ministers in respect of costs incurred by the DPS and DoFD.

Costs incurred by the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population, and Communities are as follows:

- One (1) Sony Television @ $583.65
- One (1) DM 300 5kg Digital Postage Meter @ $5,595.00

The Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population, and Communities was appointed on 14 September 2010. As such, no data is provided for periods prior to this date.

Ministers: Staff, Capital Works and Acquisitions (Question Nos 253 and 254)

Mr Briggs: asked the Minister for Resources and Energy, in writing, on 3 March 2011:

1. How many personal staff are employed by the Minister.

2. What is the (a) total cost, and (b) breakdown of costs, of all capital works and acquisitions in the Minister's private office since 3 December 2007.

Mr Martin Ferguson: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

1. The employment of staff under the *Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984* is administered by the Department of Finance and Deregulation. On 22 February 2011, the Department tabled with the Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee a list of Government Personal Staff Positions as at 1 February 2011.

2. The cost of capital works and acquisitions for ministers' offices is shared by the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS), Department of Finance and Deregulation (DoFD) and home departments in line with Appendix 2 of *Supporting Ministers, Upholding the Values*. The Special Minister of State will accordingly respond on behalf of all ministers in respect of costs incurred by the DPS and DoFD.

I am advised that the costs incurred by the Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2007/08</th>
<th>2008/09</th>
<th>2009/10</th>
<th>To 31/03/2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Office Equipment</td>
<td>2,897.70</td>
<td>1,777.86</td>
<td>1,135.69</td>
<td>737.18</td>
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<td>Photocopiers</td>
<td>2,305.48</td>
<td>1,591.27</td>
<td>5,834.15</td>
<td>4,190.48</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assets *</td>
<td>4,202.96</td>
<td>25,673.34</td>
<td>2,912.64</td>
<td>8,638.08</td>
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</tbody>
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* Asset figure in 2008/09 includes Departmental computer replacement

Ministers: Staff, Capital Works and Acquisitions (Question No. 270)

Mr Briggs asked the Minister for Indigenous Health, in writing, on 3 March 2011:

1. How many personal staff are employed by the Minister.

2. What is the (a) total cost, and (b) breakdown of costs, of all capital works and acquisitions in the Minister's private office since 3 December 2007.

Mr Snowdon: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

1. The employment of staff under the *Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984* is administered by the Department of Finance and Deregulation. On 22 February 2011, the Department tabled with the Senate...
Finance and Public Administration Committee a list of Government Personal Staff Positions as at 1 February 2011.

(2) The cost of capital works and acquisitions for Ministers' offices is shared by the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS), Department of Finance and Deregulation (DoFD) and home departments in line with Appendix 2 of Supporting Ministers, Upholding the Values. The Special Minister of State will accordingly respond on behalf of all ministers in respect of costs incurred by the DPS and DoFD. Department of Veteran Affairs and Department of Defence will be providing their own response to the question. I am advised that the costs incurred by the Department of Health and Ageing are as follows:

(a) Total cost—$0.00

(b) The costs include acquisitions for standalone objects and equipment hired and/or purchased for the office excluding portable communication devices, office consumables and operating costs. These costs are for items such as printers, audio visual equipment, polycoms, safes, shredders and televisions. The department's financial data does not capture data to differentiate between a specific item or office. The data includes the minister's private office at Australian Parliament House as well as any Commonwealth Parliamentary Office or Commonwealth Parliamentary Office and Electorate Office combined.

The Minister for Indigenous Health was appointed on 14 September 2010. As such, no data is provided for the period prior to this date.

Ministers: Staff, Capital Works and Acquisitions
(Question No. 273)

Mr Briggs asked the Minister for Mental Health and Ageing, in writing, on 3 March 2011:

(1) How many personal staff are employed by the Minister.

(2) What is the (a) total cost, and (b) breakdown of costs, of all capital works and acquisitions in the Minister's private office since 3 December 2007.

Mr Butler: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(1) The employment of staff under the Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984 is administered by the Department of Finance and Deregulation. On 22 February 2011, the Department tabled with the Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee a list of Government Personal Staff Positions as at 1 February 2011.

(2) The cost of capital works and acquisitions for Ministers' offices is shared by the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS), Department of Finance and Deregulation (DoFD) and home departments in line with Appendix 2 of Supporting Ministers, Upholding the Values. The Special Minister of State will accordingly respond on behalf of all ministers in respect of costs incurred by the DPS and DoFD. The costs incurred by the Department of Health and Ageing are as follows:

(a) Total cost—$1,427.33

(b) The costs include acquisitions for standalone objects and equipment hired and/or purchased for the office. This may include items such as printers, audio visual equipment, polycoms and safes. The department's financial system does not capture data to differentiate between a specific item or office. The data includes the Minister's private office at Australian Parliament House as well as any Commonwealth Parliamentary Office or Commonwealth Parliamentary Office and Electorate Office combined.

The Minister for Mental Health and Ageing was appointed on 14 September 2010. As such, no data is provided for the period prior to this date.
Ministers: Staff, Capital Works and Acquisitions
(Question No. 274)

Mr Briggs asked the Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity, in writing, on 3 March 2011:

(1) How many personal staff are employed by the Minister.

(2) What is the (a) total cost, and (b) breakdown of costs, of all capital works and acquisitions in the Minister's private office since 3 December 2007.

Mr Gray: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(1) The employment of staff under the Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984 is administered by the Department of Finance and Deregulation (Finance). On 22 February 2011, the Department tabled with the Senate Finance and Administration Committee, a list of Government Personal Staff Positions as at 1 February 2011.

(2) The cost of capital works and acquisitions for ministers' offices is shared by the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS), Finance and home departments in line with Appendix 2 of Supporting Ministers, Upholding the Values. The Special Minister of State will accordingly respond on behalf of all ministers in respect of costs incurred by DPS and Finance. Please refer to the Special Minister of State's answer to Question 275 for details of the home department incurred cost of capital works and acquisitions. Please note that all figures quoted in Question 275 are shared between the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and Finance, in accordance with the SMOS' dual role as Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity and Special Minister of State. The Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity was appointed on 14 September 2010. As such, no data is provided for the period prior to this date.

Ministers: Staff, Capital Works and Acquisitions
(Question No. 275)

Mr Briggs asked the Special Minister of State, in writing, on 3 March 2011:

(1) How many personal staff are employed by the Minister.

(2) What is the (a) total cost, and (b) breakdown of costs, of all capital works and acquisitions in the Minister's private office since 3 December 2007.

Mr Gray: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(1) The employment of staff under the Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984 is administered by the Department of Finance and Deregulation (Finance). On 22 February 2011, the Department tabled with the Senate Finance and Administration Committee, a list of Government Personal Staff Positions as at 1 February 2011.

(2) The cost of capital works and acquisitions for ministers' offices is shared by the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS), Finance and home departments in line with Appendix 2 of Supporting Ministers, Upholding the Values. Ministers will accordingly respond separately in respect of costs incurred by their home departments.

Attachment A provides details of the advice I have received regarding the costs incurred by DPS. I am advised that the total cost incurred by Finance for acquisitions for minister's private offices was $490,446.38. Please note that this figure reflects the total value of furniture and fittings purchased for the period 3 December 2007 to 3 March 2011. When goods are purchased for offices within the Ministerial Wing, they are not necessarily purchased for specific suites but are stored and distributed on a replacement basis in line with ministers of state entitlements.
I am advised that the cost incurred by the Finance home department area is:

(a) $9186.04
(b) Capital Works – $1,318.40  Acquisitions—$7867.64

Please note that all figures quoted for the Special Minister of State are shared between the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and Finance, in accordance with the SMOS’ dual role as Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity and Special Minister of State.

The Special Minister of State was appointed on 14 September 2010. As such, no data is provided for the period prior to this date.

Cost of capital works provided by Department of Parliamentary Services for Ministers’ Private Offices for the period

3 December 2007 to 3 March 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minister</th>
<th>Occupant</th>
<th>Suite</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Costing $</th>
<th>Carpet replacement dates per suite noted</th>
<th>Locks &amp; Master Cylinders Average/suite</th>
<th>Total $ per suite (rounded)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
<td>Gillard</td>
<td>MG-08</td>
<td>12-Jan-09</td>
<td>8,375.33</td>
<td>8,375.33</td>
<td>2,873.57</td>
<td>11,249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>Swan</td>
<td>MG-41</td>
<td>23-Jul-09</td>
<td>23,002.54</td>
<td>23,002.54</td>
<td>2,873.57</td>
<td>25,876</td>
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<td>Broadband, Communications and Digital Economy</td>
<td>Conroy</td>
<td>MG-70</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>2,873.57</td>
<td>2,874</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regional Aust, Development and Local Government Arts</td>
<td>Crean</td>
<td>MG-47</td>
<td>18-Aug-08</td>
<td>14,898.02</td>
<td>14,898.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>Rudd</td>
<td>M1-27</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>2,873.57</td>
<td>2,874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defence</td>
<td>Smith</td>
<td>M1-41</td>
<td>14-Jan-11</td>
<td>15,661.34</td>
<td>15,661.34</td>
<td>2,873.57</td>
<td>18,535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration and Citizenship</td>
<td>Bowen</td>
<td>M1-45</td>
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<td>nil</td>
<td>nil</td>
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<td>2,874</td>
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<tr>
<td>Infrastructure and Transport</td>
<td>Albanese</td>
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<td>nil</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>2,873.57</td>
<td>2,874</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health and Ageing</td>
<td>Roxon</td>
<td>MG-46</td>
<td>23-Jul-09</td>
<td>15,190.70</td>
<td>15,190.70</td>
<td>2,873.57</td>
<td>18,064</td>
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<tr>
<td>Families, Housing, Community Services &amp; Indigenous Affairs</td>
<td>Macklin</td>
<td>MG-51</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>2,873.57</td>
<td>2,874</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population &amp; Communities</td>
<td>Wong</td>
<td>MG-60</td>
<td>20-Jan-11</td>
<td>15,271.10</td>
<td>15,271.10</td>
<td>2,873.57</td>
<td>18,145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance and Deregulation School Education, Early Childhood and Youth</td>
<td>Garrett</td>
<td>M1-52</td>
<td>16-Nov-09</td>
<td>15,727.28</td>
<td>15,727.28</td>
<td>2,873.57</td>
<td>18,601</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attorney-General</td>
<td>McClelland</td>
<td>M1-21</td>
<td>14-Dec-09</td>
<td>15,141.92</td>
<td>15,141.92</td>
<td>2,873.57</td>
<td>18,015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry</td>
<td>Ludwig</td>
<td>MG-64</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>2,873.57</td>
<td>2,874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources and Energy Tourism</td>
<td>Ferguson</td>
<td>M1-26</td>
<td>4-Aug-08</td>
<td>14,507.78</td>
<td>14,507.78</td>
<td>2,873.57</td>
<td>17,381</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

QUESTIONS IN WRITING
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Portfolio</th>
<th>Minister</th>
<th>M1</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Average/ Suite</th>
<th>Total $ (rounded)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trade</td>
<td>Emerson</td>
<td>M1-22</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>14,507.78</td>
<td>2,874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate Change and Energy Efficiency</td>
<td>Combet</td>
<td>MG-50</td>
<td>9-Jul-09</td>
<td>14,410.22</td>
<td>2,873.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Services</td>
<td>Plibersek</td>
<td>M1-24</td>
<td>24-Dec-08</td>
<td>15,727.28</td>
<td>2,873.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Inclusion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privacy and Freedom of Information</td>
<td>O'Connor</td>
<td>M1-19</td>
<td>16-Nov-09</td>
<td>14,556.56</td>
<td>2,873.57</td>
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<tr>
<td>Home Affairs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>Ellis</td>
<td>M1-44</td>
<td>15-Jan-09</td>
<td>14,361.44</td>
<td>2,873.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Participation and Childcare</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status of Women</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Employment and Economic Development</td>
<td>Arbib</td>
<td>MG-61</td>
<td>11-Sep-09</td>
<td>15,141.92</td>
<td>2,873.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Housing and Homelessness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Business</td>
<td>Sherry</td>
<td>M1-46</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>14,507.78</td>
<td>2,874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans' Affairs</td>
<td>Snowdon</td>
<td>M1-49</td>
<td>14-Dec-09</td>
<td>14,410.22</td>
<td>2,873.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defence Science and Personnel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Health</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Treasurer</td>
<td>Shorten</td>
<td>M1-51</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>14,361.44</td>
<td>2,874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Services and Superannuation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health and Ageing</td>
<td>Butler</td>
<td>MG-48</td>
<td>8-Apr-08</td>
<td>14,507.78</td>
<td>2,874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Service and Integrity</td>
<td>Gray</td>
<td>M1-23</td>
<td>9-Dec-08</td>
<td>14,166.32</td>
<td>2,873.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Minister of State</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defence Materiel</td>
<td>Clare</td>
<td>M1-17</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>14,507.78</td>
<td>2,874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs and Workplace Relations</td>
<td>Evans</td>
<td>MG-68</td>
<td>24-Nov-09</td>
<td>14,410.22</td>
<td>2,873.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary Education and Skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Carpet is replaced throughout Parliament House on an approximately 8-year cycle—replacement based on carpet condition.

Note: PH Locks and Master Cylinders replacement project carried out in period February–June 2009. Figures have been extracted to indicate amount ($86,207) that just related to the 30 Ministers' suites = av. $2,874/suite
Building the Education Revolution Program  
(Question No. 295)

Mr Fletcher asked the Minister representing the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations, in writing, on 21 March 2011:

How many schools in NSW received Commonwealth funding under the Building the Education Revolution program, and in these schools, how many classrooms were built, and how many of these classrooms are air-conditioned.

Mr Garrett: The Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

(1) In NSW, 3,079 Government, Catholic and Independent schools received funding under the Building the Education Revolution (BER) program.

(2) The table below shows the number of Primary Schools for the 21st Century (P21) projects in NSW with a facility type of "Classrooms". Some of these projects may have involved the construction of more than one classroom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NSW—Sector</th>
<th>P21 projects Facility Type—Classrooms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>1173</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Under the National School Pride (NSP) or Science and Language Centres for 21st Century Secondary Schools (SLC) elements of the BER, "Classrooms" are not specified as a reportable facility type. Accordingly, data is not available on the number of classrooms built under these elements of the BER.

Under NSP, the projects undertaken were small scale infrastructure and/or minor refurbishment in nature and hence are unlikely to include the construction of classrooms.

Under SLC, it is possible that the construction or refurbishment of science and language learning centres could be classified as "classrooms". The number of projects provided under the SLC element in NSW is 159.

(3) Under the BER reporting guidelines, jurisdictions are not required to report on the provision of air conditioning in BER facilities.

Defence: Public Affairs Branch  
(Question No. 302)

Mr Robert asked the Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, in writing, on 23 March 2011:

In respect of Defence's Public Affairs Branch in (a) 2007-08, (b) 2008-09, (c) 2009-10, and (d) 2010-11, by classification level, how many (i) military state staff, (ii) public service staff, and (iii) professional service providers are/were employed.

Mr Snowdon: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
In respect of Defence's Public Affairs Branch in (a) to (d):

(i) FY10/11 FY09/10 FY08/09 FY07/08

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Rank/Title</th>
<th>FY10/11</th>
<th>FY09/10</th>
<th>FY08/09</th>
<th>FY07/08</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Navy</td>
<td>Lieutenant Commander</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lieutenant</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sub Lieutenant</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Petty Officer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leading Seaman</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Able Seaman</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navy Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army</td>
<td>Brigadier</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Colonel</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lieutenant Colonel</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Major</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Captain</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lieutenant</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Warrant Officer Class 2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sergeant</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corporal</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lance Corporal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private Proficient</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air Force</td>
<td>Wing Commander</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Squadron Leader</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flight Lieutenant</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flying Officer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sergeant</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corporal</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leading Aircraftman / Woman</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air Force Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Military Total: 57 50 51 57

(ii) FY10/11 FY09/10 FY08/09 FY07/08

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank/Level</th>
<th>FY10/11</th>
<th>FY09/10</th>
<th>FY08/09</th>
<th>FY07/08</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APS Level</td>
<td>2 2 3 3</td>
<td>3 2</td>
<td>3 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 3 1 1</td>
<td>4 4</td>
<td>5 5</td>
<td>6 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4-5 6 6 6</td>
<td>6 6</td>
<td>7 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 5 5 5</td>
<td>5 5</td>
<td>5 5</td>
<td>5 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 6 6 6</td>
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<td>7 7 7 7</td>
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<td>7 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11 11 11</td>
<td>11 11</td>
<td>11 11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Level</td>
<td>1 32 31 31</td>
<td>31 31</td>
<td>31 31</td>
<td>27 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 5 6 8</td>
<td>6 8</td>
<td>8 8</td>
<td>8 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>65 68 72 63</td>
<td>63 63</td>
<td>63 63</td>
<td>63 63</td>
</tr>
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</table>

(iii) FY10/11 FY09/10 FY08/09 FY07/08

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>FY10/11</th>
<th>FY09/10</th>
<th>FY08/09</th>
<th>FY07/08</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Service Providers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Defence: Public Affairs Branch
(Question No. 303)

Mr Robert asked the Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, in writing, on 23 March 2011:

In respect of Defence's Public Affairs Branch in (a) 2007-08, (b) 2008-09, (c) 2009-10, and (d) 2010-11, what is/was the personnel budget for (i) military staff, (ii) public service staff, and (iii) professional service providers.

Mr Snowdon: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
(a) to (d)
(i) to (iii)
The personnel budget for (i) military staff, (ii) public service staff, (iii) professional service providers is detailed in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial Year</th>
<th>Military Staff</th>
<th>Public Service Staff</th>
<th>Professional Service Providers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>4,511,130</td>
<td>5,754,837</td>
<td>359,809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>4,571,668</td>
<td>6,354,841</td>
<td>493,019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>4,984,512</td>
<td>6,568,059</td>
<td>482,539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>7,070,000</td>
<td>6,905,000</td>
<td>480,240</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The increase in military staff salaries reflects the inclusion of superannuation payments and some other minor allowances that were not part of the Group’s budget in previous years. The budgets have now been transferred to the parent Services.

Defence: Public Affairs Branch
(Question No. 304)

Mr Robert asked the Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, in writing, on 23 March 2011:

In respect of Defence's Public Affairs Branch in (a) 2007-08, (b) 2008-09, (c) 2009-10, and (d) 2010-11:

(1) What are/were the full-time equivalent caps for (a) military staff, (b) public service staff, and (c) professional service providers.

(2) What are/were the actual full-time equivalent caps for (a) military staff, (b) public service staff, and (c) professional service providers.

Mr Snowdon: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(1)
(a) to (c)
The full-time equivalent caps for (i) military staff, (ii) public service staff, (iii) professional service providers is detailed in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FY 07/08</th>
<th>FY 08/09</th>
<th>FY 09/10</th>
<th>FY 10/11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Service</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Service</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(2) (a) to (c)
The actual full-time equivalent caps for (i) military staff, (ii) public service staff, (iii) professional service providers is detailed in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Military</th>
<th>Public Service</th>
<th>Professional Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FY 07/08</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY 08/09</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY 09/10</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY 10/11</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Defence: Public Affairs Branch**

(Question No. 305)

Mr Robert asked the Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, in writing, on 23 March 2011:

In respect of Defence's Public Affairs Branch in (a) 2007-08, (b) 2008-09, (c) 2009-10, and (d) 2010-11, by classification level, what is/was the turnover rate for (i) military staff, (ii) public service staff, and (iii) professional service providers.

Mr Snowdon: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a) to (d)
(i) Nil.
(ii) nil.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FY07/08</th>
<th>FY08/09</th>
<th>FY09/10</th>
<th>FY10/11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APS Level</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(iii) Nil.

**Defence Materiel Organisation: Staff**

(Question No. 307)

Mr Robert asked the Minister for Defence Materiel, in writing, on 23 March 2011:

In respect of the Defence Materiel Organisation in (a) 2007-08, (b) 2008-09, (c) 2009-10, and (d) 2010-11, what is/was the personnel budget for (i) military staff, (ii) public service staff, and (iii) professional service providers.

Mr Clare: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a) to (d) (i) to (iii)
The Defence Materiel Organisation's personnel expense figures for (i) military staff, (ii) public service staff, and (iii) professional service providers are provided in the table below. It should be noted that
while actual figures have been provided in respect of 2007-08, 2008-09 and 2009-10, the 2010-11 figures are budget estimates in accordance with the 2010-11 Additional Estimates (AEs).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Military Staff</td>
<td>$145,913</td>
<td>$160,885</td>
<td>$156,047</td>
<td>$157,009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Service Staff</td>
<td>458,992</td>
<td>493,611</td>
<td>507,917</td>
<td>534,246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Service Providers</td>
<td>82,771</td>
<td>68,596</td>
<td>21,548</td>
<td>8,400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Defence Materiel Organisation: Staff**

(Question No. 308)

Mr Robert asked the Minister for Defence Materiel, in writing, on 23 March 2011:

In respect of the Defence Materiel Organisation in (a) 2007-08, (b) 2008-09, (c) 2009-10, and (d) 2010-11:

1. What are/were the full-time equivalent caps for (a) military staff, (b) public service staff, and (c) professional service providers.
2. What are/were the actual full-time equivalent caps for (a) military staff, (b) public service staff, and (c) professional service providers.

Mr Clare: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

1. The Defence Materiel Organisation Full Time Equivalent (FTE) caps for the years 2007-08, 2008-09, 2009-10 and 2010-11 are as follows:

   (a) As at 30 June 2008, the total DMO FTE cap was 7,595. These were further broken down into:
       (i) 1,763 Military;
       (ii) 5,573 Australian Public Servants; and
       (iii) 259 Professional Service Providers.

   (b) As at 30 June 2009, the total DMO FTE cap was 7,421. These were further broken down into:
       (i) 1,758 Military;
       (ii) 5,396 Australian Public Servants; and
       (iii) 267 Professional Service Providers.

   (c) As at 30 June 2010, the total DMO FTE cap was 7,731. These were further broken down into:
       (i) 1,790 Military;
       (ii) 5,852 Australian Public Servants; and
       (iii) 89 Professional Service Providers.

   (d) As at 17 March 2011, the total DMO FTE cap was 7,184. These were further broken down into:
       (i) 1,525 Military;
       (ii) 5,604 Australian Public Servants; and
       (iii) 55 Professional Service Providers.

2. The Defence Materiel Organisation Actual Full Time Achievement for the years 2007-08, 2008-09, 2009-10 and 2010-11 are as follows:

   (a) As at 30 June 2008, the total DMO Actual Full Time Achievement was 6,942. This was further broken down into:
       (i) 1,457 Military;
(ii) 5,304 Australian Public Servants; and
(iii) 181 Professional Service Providers.

(b) As at 30 June 2009, the total DMO Actual Full Time Achievement was 7,236. This was further broken down into:
   (i) 1,508 Military;
   (ii) 5,552 Australian Public Servants; and
   (iii) 176 Professional Service Providers.

(c) As at 30 June 2010, the total DMO Actual Full Time Achievement was 7,163. This was further broken down into:
   (i) 1,517 Military;
   (ii) 5,526 Australian Public Servants; and
   (iii) 120 Professional Service Providers.

(d) As at 17 March 2011, the total DMO Actual Full Time Achievement was 6,952. This was further broken down into:
   (i) 1,469 Military;
   (ii) 5,459 Australian Public Servants; and
   (iii) 25 Professional Service Providers.

**Defence Materiel Organisation: Staff**

(Question No. 309)

Mr Robert asked the Minister for Defence Materiel, in writing, on 23 March 2011:

In respect of the Defence Materiel Organisation in (a) 2007-08, (b) 2008-09, (c) 2009-10, and (d) 2010-11, how many (i) military staff, (ii) public service staff, and (iii) professional service providers, are/were categorised as working in projects; administration; corporate governance; and other roles.

Mr Clare: The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

The DMO workforce is attributed based on the primary role of employees; that is the delivery of acquisition and sustainment of capability products to Defence and their associated support; and the delivery of policy advice and management services.

A breakdown by military staff, public service staff and contractors across the years 2007-08, 2008-09, 2009-10 and 2010-11 (parts a-d) is provided in the Table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2007-08 (a)</th>
<th>2008-09 (b)</th>
<th>2009-10 (c)</th>
<th>2010-11 (Estimate)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Military</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i) Total</td>
<td>1,457</td>
<td>1,508</td>
<td>1,517</td>
<td>1,525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>APS</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(ii) Total</td>
<td>5,304</td>
<td>5,552</td>
<td>5,526</td>
<td>5,603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contractors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iii) Total</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>6,942</td>
<td>7,236</td>
<td>7,163</td>
<td>7,184</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table: Average Funded Strength (AFS)/Full Time Equivalent (FTE)