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SITTING DAYS—2012

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FORTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—SEVENTH PERIOD

Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce, Companion of the Order of Australia

House of Representatives Office holders

Speaker—Hon. Peter Neil Slipper MP
Deputy Speaker—Ms Anna Elizabeth Burke MP
Second Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Craig Scott MP

Members of the Speaker’s Panel—Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry Adams MP,
Mrs Yvette Maree D’Ath MP, Mr Steven Georganas MP, Ms Sharon Joy Grierson MP,
Dr Andrew Keith Leigh MP, Ms Kirsten Fiona Livermore MP,
Mr Geoffrey Raymond Lyons MP, Mr Robert George Mitchell MP, Mr John Paul Murphy MP,
Mr Robert James Murray Oakeshott MP, Ms Deborah Mary O’Neill MP,
Ms Amanda Louise Rishworth MP, Mr Michael Stuart Symon MP,
Mr Kelvin John Thomson MP, Ms Maria Vamvakinou MP,
Mr Anthony Harold Curties Windsor 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 Ed Husic 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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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—C Mills
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CHAMBER
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) took the chair at 10:00, made an acknowledgement of country and read prayers.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Private Members' Motions

Reference to Federation Chamber

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (10:01): In accordance with standing order 41(g), and the recommendations of the Selection Committee, I present copies of the terms of motions for which notice has been given by the members for Bendigo, Gippsland, Fowler, Fraser, La Trobe and Shortland. These items will be considered in the Federation Chamber later today.

PETITIONS

Mr MURPHY (Reid) (10:01): I begin the week by wishing a very happy birthday to the former member for Throsby, the great Jennie George—happy birthday, Jen. On behalf of the Standing Committee on Petitions, and in accordance with standing order 207, I present the following petitions:

Falun Gong

To the Honourable Members of the House of Representatives in the Parliament assembled:

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 4,224 citizens

Marriage

PETITION TO RETAIN THE DEFINITION OF MARRIAGE BETWEEN A MAN AND A 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 Marriage Act 2004 states "marriage means the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntary entered into for life" which is the foundation upon which families are built and on which our Australian society stands.

To amend the definition of marriage to include same sex homosexual or lesbian "marriage" would be to change the very structure of our Australian society, especially the education system to the detriment of all, particularly children.

We, the undersigned citizens therefore request that any Marriage Equality Amendment Bill be opposed. And, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

from 176 citizens

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:

- Weekend and shift workers are disadvantaged whenever Christmas Day, Boxing Day or New Year's Day falls on a weekend and the public holiday substitutes (is moved) to the following Monday or Tuesday.
• When substitution occurs workers rostered to work on the actual special day falling on the weekend don't receive a public holiday whilst workers rostered to work on the substitute day do.

• This is unfair to weekend and shift workers.

• Some States have legislated for Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day to be public holidays when they fall on a weekend plus provide an additional public holiday on the following Monday, or Tuesday.

• Weekend and shift workers are also disadvantaged because Good Friday, Easter Saturday (in most states) and Easter Monday are public holidays but Easter Sunday (except in NSW) is not. (The NSW Parliament unanimously legislated for Easter Sunday to be a public holiday.)

• This is unfair to weekend and shift workers.

• Parliament should legislate a uniform standard across Australia.

We therefore ask the House to:

Amend the National Employment Standards in the Fair Work Act to include:

1. An additional public holiday (not a substitute day) on the following Monday and/or Tuesday whenever Christmas Day, Boxing Day or New Year's Day fall on a weekend.

2. Easter Sunday as a public holiday.

from 428 citizens and 95 citizens

Health Insurance

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

This petition of ............ draws to the attention of the House:

To financial penalties [GAP] carried by citizens who alleviate the burden on the Public Health system and use Private Health insurance by opting to be a private patient in a Public or Private facility. There's insufficient reimbursement under the co-payment system between Medicare and Health insurers in regard to Medical practitioner fees and services. Citizens having paid for Private Health Insurance should be covered by "insurance" as insurance is understood to mean by the general population. Medicare and Private Health Insurance system does not provide sufficient cover in protecting private patients from financial hardship due to the built in factor of unknown costs [Gaps].

I therefore ask the House to: address and correct through the parliamentary process the failure between Medicare and Private Health Insurers in providing insurance that can offer 100% health insurance protection for private health insurance user in regard to all medical bills and charges from approved government practitioners and health service providers. I ask the Government to find a process that can offer financial protection for citizens in regard to the co-payment or GAP and make it a condition of approval to operate as a Private Health Insurer under the Private Health Insurance Act of 2007 that insurance companies provide policies that offer citizens 100% cover with no GAPS for all medical services.

from 1 citizens

Nationally Owned Bank

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

This petition of Australians for a New People's Bank draws to the attention of the House: the need to establish a new people's bank to counteract the predatory behaviour of the privately owned banks. The Federal bank's ownership is to be incorporated into the Australian Constitution to prevent the government of the day from selling the new people's bank without first asking the people in a referendum whether they want to sell their bank.

We therefore ask the House to: pass legislation in the House of Representatives to establish a new people's bank. Pass legislation to hold a referendum to give Australians the opportunity to incorporate the ownership of the new Federal bank in the Australian Constitution.

from 2,645 citizens

Asylum Seekers

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

This petition of certain students of Santa Maria College.
Draws to the attention of the House the current asylum seeker legislation and debate, pertaining to those seeking asylum in Australia by arriving on boats from Indonesia. Current asylum seeker policy of both the government and opposition fail to ensure for the just, fair and humane treatment of these people.

We therefore ask the House to ensure that any amendments to existing legislation and any future legislation upholds the standards set by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which Australia is a signatory. In particular, the standards of:

Article 3: Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 5: No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

Article 14: Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution: Article 25: Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and, the necessary social services, from 134 citizens

Petitions received.

PETITIONS

Responses

Mr MURPHY (Reid) (10:02): Ministerial responses to petitions previously presented to the House have been received as follows:

Human Rights: West Papua

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 25 June 2012 concerning the Standing Committee on Petitions' consideration of two petitions regarding Indonesia's Papuan provinces:

The Australian Government strongly supports Indonesia's territorial integrity and recognises its sovereignty over the provinces of Papua and West Papua, which resulted from the 1969 United Nations' sponsored Act of Free Choice. The Act of Free Choice was supervised by the United Nations and conducted in the context of broad international support for finalising the decolonisation process of Indonesia. At that time, Australia voted with 83 other nations at the UN General Assembly to accept the outcome of the Act of Free Choice. There were zero votes against and 30 abstentions. The Australian Government has no intention of raising this issue in the context of the United Nations.

The Australian Government supports training for Indonesian security forces and military that emphasises human rights awareness, accountability and respect for the rule of law — including in Papua and West Papua. We do not train the Indonesian police or military to counter separatist groups or organisations. The focus of Australian engagement with these forces is combating terrorism. Against the tragic history of terrorist activity in our region, including the loss of 88 Australian lives in the first Bali bombing, such engagement is crucial in protecting the safety of both Indonesians and Australians. The results of these efforts are clear: Indonesia has been both effective and determined in its response to terrorism, arresting around 700 people on terrorism-related charges over the last decade and convicting close to 500. The Australian Government is committed to working with Indonesia to boost its capacity to contribute to regional security and will continue our collaborative and multilateral engagement with its security forces and military in preventing the broader regional threat of terrorism.

The Australian Government supports a vigorous and free press as a key feature of modern Indonesian democracy and will continue to highlight the importance of vibrancy and diversity within its media. We regularly underline the value to Indonesia of being seen to be open to international media. Australia raises with the Indonesian Government the importance of allowing credible observers access to the Papuan provinces, including by foreign journalists, Australian Government officials, and non-governmental organisations. On 23 May 2012, the Australian Government participated in the UN Universal Periodic Review of Indonesia, which included providing key recommendations to help bolster Indonesia's human rights record throughout the country. Australia's recommendations to Indonesia included
improving the access of local and international media organisations throughout the country, and its engagement with key international organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Thank you for bringing the petitions to my attention.

from the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator B Carr

Taxation

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 13 February 2012 concerning a petition from people of the North Western Region of Victoria, regarding the cost of living for pensioners. I sincerely apologise for the delay in responding to you.

The goods and services tax (GST) applies broadly to goods and services, with a limited number of exemptions in areas such as basic food, education and medical services. The GST replaced a number of Commonwealth and State taxes and is set at a single uniform rate of 10 per cent. Having a single rate that applies to most goods and services minimises complexity and reduces compliance costs.

Revenue from the GST goes to the States and Territories giving them a secure source of funding to assist in providing essential services, such as health and education. I note that under the Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations any change to the rate or base of the GST requires the support of the Australian Government and the unanimous agreement of the State and Territory Governments.

In response to the petition of the people of the North Western Region of Victoria, I note that supplies of water, sewerage and drainage are GST-free. Australian Government taxes, including council rates, are exempt from GST, as are other fees and charges paid to an Australian Government agency for a permission, exemption, authority or license, including car registration.

The GST applies to some goods and services that are considered essential such as electricity and private car and house insurance. However, the Government's policy is not to tax or exempt items on the basis of whether they are essential. The GST operates most efficiently when applied to as broad a range of goods and services as possible.

Extending GST-free treatment to products purchased by pensioners would require a different tax treatment for identical products, depending on who purchased them. Varying the tax treatment in this way is inconsistent with the nature of the transactions-based GST system. Consequently, the Government does not consider it appropriate to waive GST for pensioners.

In 2009, the Government improved the adequacy of the pension through one-off increases and changes to the indexation arrangements as part of the Secure and Sustainable Pension Reform. The maximum pension payment to single pensioners, including supplements and indexation, has increased from $601.08 per fortnight on 1 July 2009 to $755.50 a fortnight from 20 March 2012. Across the same period the maximum pension payment to couple pensioners, including supplements and indexation, has increased from $983.08 (combined) to $1,139.00 (combined).

The Government recognises that pensioners can sometimes find it difficult to keep up with increases in the cost of living, including increases in essential services such as utilities. As part of pension reform in 2009, the Government has improved indexation arrangements to ensure they better respond to cost of living increases faced by pensioners. The maximum base pension rates are now indexed to the greater of the increase in the Consumer Price Index and the increase in the new Pensioner and Beneficiary Living Cost Index (PBLCI). The PBLCI measures the specific cost of the things pensioners typically buy. Pensions are then compared to the male total average weekly earnings (MTAWE) benchmark and are increased if necessary to bring them in line with MTAWE.

I trust this information will be of assistance to you.

from the Treasurer, Mr Swan

Migration

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 19 March 2012 concerning the petition lodged with the Standing
Committee on Petitions by friends of Mrs ………… I apologise for the delay in responding.
I understand from the petition that Mrs …………. wishes to migrate to Australia to be closer to her brother and the friends she has made during her visits.
The Australian Government acknowledges that there is value in family members migrating to Australia, as recognised in the recent Federal Budget announcement with an increase in the migration program places for the 2012-13 financial year.
As there are a limited number of places available however, the Government must balance the demand for Family stream visas. As such, priority is given to partners, dependent children and carers of Australian citizens, permanent residents and eligible New Zealand citizens. Proportionately fewer places are made available to non-dependent family members such as parents, adult siblings, adult children and other relatives.
The Remaining Relative visa is for applicants (and their spouses or de facto partners) who have no near relatives usually resident outside of Australia. A near relative is a parent, sibling, non-dependent child or their step equivalent. This is an objective legal requirement which cannot be waived, and there is no discretion to consider the nature and quality of such relationships.
I appreciate the disappointment of Mrs ………….. and her friends that she does not meet the requirements for the Remaining Relative visa because of her adult children living outside of Australia. Nevertheless, I can confirm that there are no plans to broaden the eligibility criteria for this visa to allow a greater flexibility in such circumstances.
All people wishing to migrate or remain permanently in Australia must first apply through my Department and meet the legal criteria for grant of a particular visa. Australian migration law only permits me to intervene in limited circumstances where a decision has been made by the Department to refuse a visa application, and that decision has been reviewed by the Migration Review Tribunal. As Mrs ………….. has not had an application reviewed by this tribunal, I am unable to intervene in her case.

Thank you for bringing this matter to my attention.

from the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Mr Bowen

Heritage Listing: Dampier Archipelago

Dear Mr Murphy
I refer to your letter of 21 May 2012 concerning The Standing Committee on Petitions regarding the addition of Dampier Archipelago as a World Heritage listing.
On 2 March 2011, Senator Sterle advised the Senate, on my behalf, that the Australian Heritage Council would be instructed to assess whether the Dampier Archipelago has heritage value of Outstanding Universal Value and any threats to that site. On 4 April 2012, the Australian Heritage Council submitted their final report, which is available to the public on the Council's website: http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/ahc/index.html.
I have requested the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities to provide me with advice on the report's findings. I will take the appropriate action after considering that advice.
Thank you for writing on this matter.

from the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Mr T Burke

Foreign Investment in Agriculture

Dear Mr Murphy
Thank you for your letters of 21 May 2012 about two petitions for restrictions on the purchase of Australian land by foreign investors.
As the Treasurer, the Hon. Wayne Swan MP, is responsible for foreign investment policy, I have forwarded copies of your letters to the Treasurer for his consideration.
Thank you again for your letters.

from the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Senator Ludwig
Foreign Investment in Agriculture

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 21 May 2012, reference number 650/1056 concerning foreign investment.

The Government, like previous governments, is committed to a case-by-case approach to considering foreign investment proposals. This approach maximises investment flows while protecting Australia's national interest. In the agricultural sector, it helps ensure that investments do not adversely affect the sustainability of Australia's national agricultural resources, including their economic, social and environmental contribution to Australia. The Government does not support an approach that would impose blanket bans or restrictions or involve government compulsorily acquiring commercial interests in food companies.

Foreign investment has helped build Australia's economy and will continue to enhance the wellbeing of Australians by supporting economic growth and prosperity. The Foreign Acquisitions and Takeovers Act 1975 provides the legislative framework for the Government to review significant foreign investment proposals on a case-by-case basis. It enables the Treasurer to block proposals that he finds contrary to the national interest or impose conditions on an investor to address national interest concerns. All foreign governments and their related entities must notify the Foreign Investment Review Board and receive approval for direct investments, new businesses and land acquisitions, irrespective of the value of the investment.

However, the Government recognises community concerns about the sale of rural land and agricultural businesses to foreign investors and is taking steps to ensure that its policy in this area is well understood and is also strengthening the transparency of foreign ownership of rural land and agricultural food production.

The Government is committed to facilitating foreign investment in the agricultural sector, consistent with protecting Australia's national interest. The Government's 18 January 2012 Policy Statement on Foreign Investment in Agriculture also provides detailed guidance on specific factors typically considered in relation to proposed acquisitions in the agricultural sector. These include the impact of the proposal on the quality and availability of Australia's agricultural resources, including water; land access and use; agricultural production and productivity; Australia's capacity to remain a reliable supplier of agricultural production, both to the Australian community and to our trading partners; biodiversity; and employment and prosperity in Australia's local and regional communities.

The September 2011 release of the Agricultural Land and Water Ownership Survey by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) confirmed that Australia's agricultural industry is mostly Australian owned. It found that 99 per cent of agricultural businesses in Australia and around 89 per cent of Australian agricultural land are entirely Australian owned and a further 6 per cent of Australian agricultural land is majority owned by Australians. In addition, more than 90 per cent of water entitlements for agricultural purposes in Australia are entirely Australian owned. These results are broadly comparable with levels of foreign ownership of agricultural businesses and land reported in the agricultural census of 1983-84.

The Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences report Foreign investment and Australian agriculture, released in January 2012, found that Australia has a high level of food security and produces more than twice the amount of food it consumes. It concluded that foreign investment in the agricultural sector enhances Australia's food security by increasing efficiency and productive capacity and contributing to incomes, infrastructure and employment, often in regional areas. Its assessment was that foreign investment is vital in supporting growth and jobs for Australian farmers and regional communities and that lower levels of foreign investment could carry significant risks for Australia's agricultural communities.

To build on this work, in January 2012, the Government announced an expansion of ABS statistical data collection activities including the expansion of the Agricultural Census to provide ongoing information on ownership of Australian
agricultural businesses, land and water. On 15 June 2012, the Government also established a working group to consult on the development of a Commonwealth foreign ownership register for agricultural land. A national foreign ownership register for agricultural land would provide the community with a more comprehensive picture of the specific size and locations of foreign agricultural landholdings over and above what is currently available. The Government will pursue a register where it will clearly improve transparency of foreign ownership in agriculture without imposing unnecessary burdens on investors or duplicating work already undertaken by State and Territory governments.

Australia is in the fortunate position of producing significantly more food than we consume. In 2010-11 Australia exported $27.1 billion worth of food products, compared with imports in the same year of $10.6 billion. In recent years we have been able to export more than half of our food production, depending on crop sizes, while still ensuring that over 90 per cent of our fresh produce is domestically grown and supplied. This provides significant capacity to meet our future food needs, and to be a significant and reliable supplier to the world food market.

However we cannot be complacent, particularly given challenges such as climate change, resource constraints and an increasing population. The Government has committed to developing Australia's first national food plan to help achieve its vision of a sustainable, globally competitive, resilient food supply that supports access to nutritious and affordable food. Further information on the development of a national food plan is available on the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry’s website at: www.daff.gov.au/nfp.

Thank you again for your letter and I hope this information will be of assistance to you. Yours from the Assistant Treasurer and Minister Assisting for Deregulation, Mr Bradbury

Foreign Investment in Agriculture

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 21 May 2012, reference number 652/1058 concerning foreign investment.

The Government, like previous governments, is committed to a case-by-case approach to considering foreign investment proposals. This approach maximises investment flows while protecting Australia's national interest. In the agricultural sector, it helps ensure that investments do not adversely affect the sustainability of Australia's national agricultural resources, including their economic, social and environmental contribution to Australia. The Government does not support an approach that would impose blanket bans or restrictions or involve government compulsorily acquiring commercial interests in food companies.

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However we cannot be complacent, particularly given challenges such as climate change, resource constraints and an increasing population. The Government has committed to developing Australia's first national food plan to help achieve its vision of a sustainable, globally competitive, resilient food supply that supports access to nutritious and affordable food. Further information on the development of a national food plan is available on the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry's website at: www.daff.gov.au/nfp.

Thank you again for your letter and I hope this information will be of assistance to you. Yours from the Assistant Treasurer and Minister Assisting for Deregulation, Mr Bradbury

Petition: Latrobe Regional Hospital

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 24 May 2012 seeking my response to a petition currently under consideration by the Standing Committee on Petitions, regarding federal funding for the redevelopment of Latrobe Regional Hospital under the Health and Hospitals Fund (HHF) 201 I Regional Priority Round.
All applications for funding under the HHF were assessed on their individual merit by the independent Advisory Board against the HHF Evaluation Criteria and Regional Priority Round Additional Guidance. The Board then provided its advice to me, as the Minister for Health, on whether each application met the criteria.

The HHF Advisory Board assessed this application as having met the Evaluation Criteria and Additional Guidance. However there was a strong interest in the Round, with applications totalling almost $3.4 billion, far exceeding the $475 million available and the Government was unable to fund all eligible projects. Latrobe Regional Hospital was one of these un-funded projects.

All applicants were advised in writing of the outcome of their application following the 2012-13 Federal Budget announcements on 8 May 2012. The Australian Government is committed to its broad health infrastructure investment program, which is equipping the nation’s health and hospital system for the future.

I note the community support for this project and appreciate the work required to prepare this application.

from the **Minister for Health, Ms Plibersek**

Financial Services

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 21 May 2012, reference number 660/1066, alerting me to the petition regarding financial sector companies sending jobs and customer information off-shore. I apologise for the delay in responding.

I expect businesses in the financial sector to look after their employees like all other Australian businesses. Businesses must endeavour to utilise the talent and hardworking spirit of Australian workers, and manage costs by investing in the training and productivity of their employees.

The finance and insurance services sector remains strong in Australia and continues to employ more Australians. It is encouraging to see that employment in the financial and insurance services sector increased by around 42,700 jobs (up 11 per cent) in the last two years. This compares with an additional 270,300 jobs for the rest of the economy (up 2.4 per cent).

Regarding the protection of customers’ information, the Privacy Act 1988 regulates the sending of personal information overseas. Banks and financial institutions are permitted to transfer personal information to an overseas recipient under certain conditions. These conditions include the individual consenting to the transfer, or the transfer being necessary for the performance of a contract between the individual and the organisation.

You may be aware that the Government is undertaking comprehensive reforms to Australia’s privacy laws. The reforms will ensure that individuals must be made aware of how and why personal information is, or will be, collected and how the entity will deal with that personal information. Among other things, agencies and organisations will be required to notify individuals whether their personal information is likely to be disclosed to overseas recipients.

Thank you for bringing this petition to my attention. I trust this information will be of assistance to you.

from the **Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation, Mr Shorten**

**Centrelink**

Dear Murphy

Thank you for your correspondence of 24 May 2012 about a petition recently submitted for the consideration of the Standing Committee on Petitions. The Petition requested an examination of the transition process to access concessional medicines under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), when a dependent child turns 16 years of age.

The Department of Human Services (the department) writes to customers who are receiving Parenting Payment Single in the period leading up to the youngest child’s 16th birthday. The letter advises that entitlement to the payment will cease and that the associated concession card will be cancelled.
The customer is invited to contact the department should they still require social security support. Depending on the date the customer contacts, transferring from one payment type to another can be backdated to ensure continuity of entitlements of their concession card and/or income support. Commonly, a customer on Parenting Payment Single will transfer to Newstart Allowance. When a person has primary caring responsibility for a dependent child they will also have access to a Pensioner Concession Card.

In the case of the customer being granted Newstart Allowance, a new concession card will be produced and mailed to the customer. Production and delivery of personalised concession cards can take up to 14 days. Where a customer has advised they urgently need access to concessional entitlements, the department can provide an interim voucher to the customer which can be used to confirm their eligibility for the concession.

There is a further safeguard to ensure that customers have access to the PBS while waiting for their card to arrive in the mail. A customer who pays the non-concessional rate for prescription medicines can take their receipts to any Service Centre offering Medicare services and claim a refund upon presentation of their Medicare card.

A check is made against the department’s records, which are updated nightly on working days, to determine whether the customer is entitled to concessional rates when they make a claim for PBS.

The department considers that the current arrangements are satisfactory and that the processes in place to ensure a customer’s continued access to their entitlements under these circumstances are adequate. If any customer needs further assistance, the department will discuss the options of other entitlements for which they may be eligible.

from the Minister for Human Services, Senator K Carr

Marriage

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 21 May 2012 regarding a petition opposing same-sex marriage submitted to the Standing Committee on Petitions from the Christian and Muslim communities.

The Government notes the strong opinions on this subject. As you are aware, three bills have been introduced into Parliament and have been referred to committees for inquiry. The future consideration and progress of the Bills will be a matter for the Parliament.

from the Attorney-General, Ms Roxon

Petition: Robina Mail Delivery Centre

Dear Mr Murphy

Petition — Australia Post Delivery Centre, Robina

Thank you for your letter dated 23 May 2012, concerning a petition submitted for the Committee’s consideration regarding opposition to the closure of the Australia Post Delivery Centre at Robina, 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 its operational network. As a Government Business Enterprise, Australia Post does not receive any funding from taxpayers and, as far as practicable, it is required to perform its functions in a manner consistent with sound commercial practice.

Australia Post has advised that it continually reviews its facilities by examining costs, revenue and performance, including the capacity to meet its customers’ needs. In monitoring changes in the mail network, and noting that the Bundall Delivery Facility has the capacity to accommodate the operations and staff at the Robina Delivery, it has been decided that these services would be consolidated from June 2012.

While this consolidation of mail operations will have no impact on the mail delivery currently provided to the Robina community, Australia Post recognises the impact the change will have for PO Box holders at the Robina Delivery Centre. I understand that Australia Post
communicated well in advice of the planned June relocation and provided alternative options for PO Box customers, including free mail redirection for 12 months.

The PO Boxes are being relocated to the Town Centre complex, which offers a 24 hour PO Box Lobby. The Lobby is well-lit, weather-proof and provides secure minister@dbcde.gov.au post office with a full range of retail services with ease of access to undercover parking and public transport.

Australia Post has advised that Robina continues to be well-serviced with a number of postal retail outlets within close proximity, including the Q Super Post Office, Robina Post Office, Mudgeeraba Licensed Post Office (LPO) and more recently, Varsity Lakes LPO. Australia Post believes that these postal outlets are meeting the needs of the community.

Australia Post remains in contact with the Member for McPherson, Mrs Karen Andrews MP. Australia Post advised Mrs Andrews on 5 June 2012 that the PO Boxes would be relocated in late June and that the Town Centre complex had been identified to become a new Superstore. Renovations to the retail outlet began on Thursday, 31 May 2012, with the transformation to the Superstore completed at the end of June 2012. I am advised that the post office remained open for business throughout the renovation period.

I trust this information will be of assistance.

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

Tomaree Peninsula: Hydrotherapy Facility

Dear Mr. Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 28 May 2012 regarding a petition requesting a hydrotherapy facility in the Tomaree Peninsula, New South Wales (Ref: 670/1078).

The Australian Government is committed to improving the delivery of health care in rural and remote communities by providing better access to infrastructure funding.

There are a number of programs within my Department which may be of interest to the petitioners.

The National Rural and Remote Health Infrastructure Program (NRRHIP) is a competitive grants program which aims to improve access to health services by funding projects in rural and remote communities where a lack of infrastructure is a barrier to the establishment of new health services, or the enhancement of existing health services.

The Program provides up to a maximum of $500,000 (GST exclusive) to eligible applicants seeking to provide services in the Australian Standard Geographical Classification — Remoteness Areas 2 to 5 with a population of up to 20,000.

Round six of the NRRHIP closed on 15 December 2011. The assessment process has been finalised and information on successful applicants is available at www.health.gov.au/nrrhip. Further information on the NRRHIP, including future funding rounds, is also available on this website.

A $5 billion Health and Hospitals Fund (HHF) was established on 1 January 2009 under the Nation-building Funds Act 2008 and forms part of the Government's broader nation-building infrastructure program. This investment delivers major improvements in health infrastructure through renewal and refurbishment of acute and primary care facilities, medical technology equipment and major medical research facilities and projects.

The Government provided funding for 85 health infrastructure projects valued at $3.2 billion in the first two funding rounds of the HHF. These projects span three critical areas: the fight against cancer; translational research and research workforce infrastructure; and the improvement and modernisation of the hospital system.

The Government subsequently committed to a third HHF round focussed on regional health infrastructure, and funding of $1.33 billion (GST exclusive) for 63 projects was confirmed as part of the 2011-12 Federal Budget. The aim of this round was to assist regional communities by providing upgrades to regional health infrastructure, expansions to regional hospitals.
and support for clinical training capacity in regional hospitals. The Government also announced further funding of $475 million (GST exclusive) for another IHF regional priority round to open in 2011. Applications for the 2011 regional priority round closed on 19 October 2011 with funding of $475 million (GST exclusive) for 76 projects announced in May 2012.

Further HHF funding round arrangements have yet to be determined. Further information about future rounds will be available at www.health.gov.au/hhf.

In addition, the Day Therapy Centre (DTC) program provides for therapy services to both frail older people living in the community, and to low level care residents of Commonwealth funded residential aged care facilities.

DTC clients receive a wide range of therapy services such as physiotherapy, hydrotherapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy and podiatry, which all aim to optimise their independence to allow them to remain in the community, or in low level residential care, for as long as possible.

There are over 140 centres across Australia, and program funding for 2011-12 is $37,626,782 (GST exclusive). On 24 February 2012, I announced a three year funding extension of existing providers until 30 June 2015. The extension will provide over $117 million (GST exclusive) in funding over three years.

The Australian Government recognises the need for fundamental reform of the aged care system in order to ensure that it continues to provide high quality care and can respond to future challenges. Information on the comprehensive reform package can be found on the ‘Living Longer. Living Better.’ website at www.agedcareaustralia.gov.au.

As part of the Living Longer. Living Better. aged care reform, the Commonwealth Home and Community Care program, the National Respite for Carers Program, Day Therapy Centres and the Assistance with Care and Housing for the Aged Program will be consolidated under a new Home Support program from 1 July 2015. The Home Support program will have a focus on prevention and re-ablement as the first level of care in an end-to-end aged care system. The Government will expand this program to meet increasing demand for support at home.

Currently there is no funding available for the establishment of new Day Therapy Centres.


Once again, thank you for writing.

from the Minister for Health, Ms Plibersek

International Development Assistance

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 28 May 2012 (ref: 671/1079) regarding the Standing Committee on Petitions' consideration of a petition to increase foreign aid funding for water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH).

While the world has already met the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target of halving the number of people without access to safe drinking water, the Australian Government recognises that this work is far from finished. Many people are still without access to safe drinking water and 2.5 billion people still lack access to improved sanitation.

The Government has responded to the need for greater investment in support of the MDG sanitation target. A key objective of Australia’s aid program is to improve public health by increasing access to WASH. In support of this objective, Australian Government funding for WASH is expected to be $1 billion over the next four years.

This commitment recognises that investing in WASH is a proven way to reduce the disease burden on the poor, particularly for children. This investment is expected to provide access to safe water to 5.8 million people and access to basic sanitation to 4.6 million people across Asia, Africa and the Pacific.

The Government is currently spending about thirty per cent of WASH aid expenditure on sanitation activities which represents a doubling in the proportion of spending on sanitation activities over the last three years.
Thank you for bringing this petition to the attention of the Australian Government.

from the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator B Carr

Voting Age

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 28 May 2012 (your reference 672/1081) regarding a petition submitted to the Committee seeking to lower the voting age from 18 years of age to 16. I note the petition proposes that voting for eligible 16 and 17 year olds be optional before it becomes compulsory at 18.

The Government is committed to improving Australia's electoral system and to examining options for modernisation and reform.

As you may be aware, the rules governing enrolment and voting at federal elections are set out in the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 (Electoral Act), which is administered by the Australian Electoral Commission. Any changes to the rules set out in the Electoral Act are matters for Parliament to consider and agree to.

The Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (JSCEM) considers a range of electoral and administrative matters, including the issue you have written about. Further information about the JSCEM, its activities and processes can be found at:


In its inquiry into the conduct of the 2007 federal election the JSCEM discussed, among other things, the appropriate minimum age for provisional enrolment. The JSCEM recommended lowering the minimum age for voluntary provisional enrolment from 17 to 16 years old, but did not recommend lowering the voting age.

The petitioners may be interested to know that optional enrolment and voting for 16 year olds was mentioned in the report on the 2008 Australia 2020 Youth Summit, which discussed the future of Australian governance (including renewed democracy). Lowering the voting age was also considered in paragraphs 4.42 to 4.45 of the Australian Government's Electoral Reform Green Paper — Strengthening Australia’s Democracy, released in 2009. This Green Paper, the second of two on electoral reform, invited comment on a wide range of possible changes to Australia's electoral architecture and processes. This Green Paper is available from the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet website at:


In early June 2010, the Government introduced legislation into the Parliament to lower the minimum age for provisional enrolment from 17 to 16 years old. The necessary legislative changes were passed by Parliament later that month, and made into law by the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Modernisation and Other Measures) Act 2010.

Significant changes to the electoral system are not usually introduced to the Parliament without first being considered by the JSCEM. This is an open process and the JSCEM welcomes submissions from any interested Australians. The Government considers and responds to the JSCEM's recommendations once the inquiry is complete. Accordingly, persons who may wish to pursue legislative change, such as lowering the voting age to 16 years, should lodge a submission with the next appropriate inquiry of the JSCEM.

I trust this information is of assistance to the Committee and its petitioners.

from the Minister for Public Service and Integrity, Mr Gray

Health Services

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 21 June 2012 inviting my response to a submission to the Standing Committee on Petitions in which action is sought to address shortages of general practitioners (GPs) in Proserpine and the Whitsundays.

Addressing the current shortage of doctors is an important priority for the Australian Government. The Government is taking action through its National Health and Hospitals Network to tackle Australia's health workforce shortages by:
doubling the number of places available for medical graduates to train to become a GP from 600, when the Government took office, to 1,200 a year by 2014;

more than doubling the current number of posts available for medical graduates to undertake specialist training in private, community and rural settings from 360 to 900 by 2014 previous investments; and

more than doubling the number of places available for junior doctors to experience a career in general practice through the Prevocational General Practice Placements Program, before they become a fully-fledged doctor, to 975 places a year by 2013.

These major investments will help reduce pressure on hospitals by improving access and availability of GP and specialist services. There is, and will continue to be, a particular emphasis on ensuring that the needs of regional and rural Australia are met through these initiatives.

Furthermore, a key activity for the new Townsville-Mackay Medicare Local is to design and implement a region-wide health care gap analysis as a basis for more effective planning and service delivery. This includes a priority focus on after-hours GP services and undertaking up-to-date population level planning.

from the **Minister for Health, Ms Plibersek**

**Social Security Act**

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 25 June 2012 about two petitions recently submitted for consideration on assessments made under the Social Security Act 1991 relating to the income test for Account Based Pensions, and superannuation income for people aged 55 or above.

The Department of Human Services delivers payments and services on behalf of a range of government departments and agencies. The policy and legislation relating to the above income assessments falls within the portfolio responsibilities of the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Jenny Macklin MP. Therefore, I have passed your correspondence to Minister Macklin for consideration.

Once again, thank you for writing.

from the **Minister for Human Services, Senator K Carr**

**PETITIONS**

**Statements**

**Mr MURPHY (Reid) (10:04):** As you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, over the winter recess there has been continual petitioning activity, with petitioners forwarding their petitions to the committee for consideration in the first sitting week—
and I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for your contribution on our committee. Similarly, ministerial responses have arrived and, following the committee's formal receipt of them when it met last week, I have today presented them to this House. This is a feature of the committee's work. Whilst its formal activities revolve very much around the activities of the House, it has its own ongoing processes that are followed in the same way as processes are followed in all parliamentary committees.

The Petitions Committee primarily facilitates tabling activity in the House, but it also maintains its committee decision-making and stewardship role. For example, ministerial responses to petitions are addressed to the committee, and as such they are handled as private committee documents until they are reported to the House. The committee therefore acts as a conduit for both the tabling of petitions and responses to them. It also acts as a gatekeeper. I believe that this unique combination provides the House's petitions system with a high level of certainty and responsiveness. This is because the House's committee based system stipulates an objective mechanism of assessment against the House's petitioning requirements and, importantly, the guarantee that a petition which is certified as meeting those requirements can be tabled at the next available announcement opportunity. This assurance is strengthened by the ready access petitioners have to committee resources to ensure that their draft petition complies with the House's requirements before they gather signatures.

The petitions process is dynamic. A petition addressed to this House and meeting committee requirements can be tabled in the House irrespective of when it is received. For example, unlike the inquiries process of the House standing committees, the petitions process does not conclude on the tabling of a report or lapse on dissolution of parliament. Petitions may not be able to be assessed, presented or referred to a minister during a parliamentary recess, but a petition will be received and held for assessment when sittings recommence—the petition itself remains live.

As today's announcement attests, the ebb and flow of petitions and ministerial responses to petitions is outside the committee's control. The committee scrutinises petitions within the compliance framework set by the House. However, it has two important discretionary powers. Firstly, it may choose to refer a petition to a minister for comment; and, secondly, it may conduct public hearings on presented petitions. The committee usually refers petitions to the relevant minister where the subject matter has not previously been recently referred, although every petition's referral outcome is individually decided by the committee. Similarly, the committee can—but is not required—to speak with petitioners at public hearings. It does take the opportunity to conduct public hearings from time to time.

Rather than take a blanket approach to holding public hearings on a large number of petitions received, the committee has found value in selecting petitions which have displayed strong local interest—or other notable characteristics—and to discuss these petitions in greater detail. The committee cannot follow up or make recommendations to government on individual petitions, but the hearing process enables a public dialogue, with the potential for further action to take place, beyond the committee's role, merely because the matter has received further parliamentary airing.

The committee looks forward to discussions with a number of petitioners at public hearings to be held in Perth after this sitting fortnight. I am sure it will be a...
worthwhile exercise and I will report back to the House on the outcome.

COMMITTEES
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Joint Committee
Report
Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Werriwa) (10:09): On behalf of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, it gives me great pleasure to present the committee's report on Australia's human rights dialogues with China and Vietnam.

Many submissions and witnesses to this inquiry expressed concern about the perceived lack of progress achieved by Australia's human rights dialogues so far, but overall the consensus in the community seems to be that it is constructive to be talking to other countries about Australia's perspective on human rights. This support notwithstanding, there were many suggestions made on how the dialogues could be improved, including taking steps to measure the effectiveness of the dialogues, actively engaging NGOs in the dialogue process, strengthening the participation of parliamentarians, and more detailed reporting of the dialogues.

In order to address the concerns about evaluating the effectiveness of the dialogues, the committee recommends that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade convene a panel of experts to consult widely in order to produce a report outlining a set of principles and aims for Australia's dialogues, as well as a set of benchmarks so that progress towards these aims can be effectively measured. That was a matter very much raised by a number of members of the committee—the inadequacy, or nonexistence in many cases, of benchmarks.

To increase the role of NGOs in the dialogues process, the committee makes two recommendations. Firstly, we recommend the construction of a human rights web portal to act as a central access point for all Australian government human rights information and activity. This web portal will also enable NGOs and other concerned groups and individuals to engage in an ongoing online interactive dialogue, and will allow them to receive more regular feedback on what happens in the dialogues. That is part of the problem we face: whilst there was widespread interest in this process by the diasporas of Vietnam in particular and, to a lesser extent, China, and from other communities that thought there should be dialogues with their own homelands, the wider response to the inquiry by the Australian public was not overwhelming. It is important that there is more information out there for people.

Secondly, as an additional way to engage NGOs in the dialogue process, the committee calls for biennial meetings between the participating agencies and interested NGOs, ethnic community groups and individuals devoted to discussion of the dialogues. We recommend that these meetings be held alternately in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne so as to make it easier for community groups with limited resources to participate. That is obviously very important. The committee has raised with the minister the lack of resources of members to participate in these dialogues, let alone the general public's lack of finance to play a role.

The committee also calls for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to provide prompt reports after each round of dialogue, and furthermore for the department to work to facilitate the participation of parliamentarians in the dialogues themselves. These two recommendations are crucial for strengthening parliamentary oversight of the dialogues.
In addition to the human rights web portal's obvious additional benefits of increasing the transparency and reporting on the dialogues, the committee also makes another recommendation to enhance the reporting of the dialogues. The committee recommends that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade expand the reporting of the dialogues currently contained in its annual report to include at least a list of participants, the issues raised by each dialogue partner and a list of the key outcomes of the dialogues.

The community groups also suggested that Australia adopt bilateral dialogues with a number of other countries where there were concerns, including Malaysia, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Burma, Cambodia, Iran and Sri Lanka. The committee formed the view that it is an appropriate time to consider re-establishing its human rights dialogue with Iran as well as making representations to the Sri Lankan government to open a formal human rights dialogue. I note that the committee received many submissions and heard from many witnesses on that issue over the past year. In addition to establishing these dialogues, we think it is important to continually monitor and evaluate the human rights situations of the countries in Australia's region, including an assessment of whether Australia should adopt a human rights dialogue with these countries.

I would like to sincerely thank everyone who participated in this inquiry. One of the most pleasing aspects of this inquiry was the high level of participation by NGOs, ethnic community groups and concerned individuals. These groups and individuals have generously donated their time, effort and limited resources to make thoughtful submissions and to appear at public hearings to voice their support for, and concerns about, Australia's human rights dialogues. I would also like to commend the secretariat for their work. This report was much agreed upon, virtually without any division. That reflects on the work done by the committee secretariat. I commend this report to the House.

In accordance with standing order 39(f) the report was made a parliamentary paper.

Mr RUDDOCK (Berowra) (10:14): I endorse the comments of the chair of the subcommittee and support the report that is before us. My approach will be somewhat different, but let me first thank the secretariat for their help and assistance in relation to this matter. We were asked to report on the effectiveness of Australia's human rights dialogues, particularly those with China and Vietnam. We did not get many submissions but, with respect to those that we did receive, you would have to ask yourself the question, 'Are the dialogues of any value at all?' The Australian Council for International Development said they were at risk of becoming ritualistic and an end in themselves. The International Commission of Jurists said they could be seen to legitimise or make respectable a particular government. The Australia Tibet Council voiced its concern over the 'Australian government's reliance on the annual human rights dialogue as the centrepiece of its efforts to improve China's human rights performance had not seen a tangible outcome'. The Vietnam Committee on Human Rights noted that, 'after almost a decade of implementation, the lack of human rights progress in Vietnam' raises serious questions about their relevance and impact. You have to ask yourself the question: were they really seen to be of any value when you have questions of that sort being asked?

The committee noted that it did not receive enough evidence to undertake an assessment as to whether there are
measurable outcomes as a result of the human rights dialogue process and how effective it has been to date. I looked very carefully at the human rights dialogues and the discussion that occurred and was reported on, although I might say somewhat meagrely. One of the reasons the committee has recommended that it be enhanced is that there is not a great deal of information available about these matters. The NGOs that deal with them have had limited information. Even the reporting to the parliament has been somewhat meagre. I might say that when members of parliament are advised as to when these dialogues might be occurring, we are lucky to get several weeks' notice, even though there is a desire for members of parliament to participate in the process.

Where is this leading me? We have recommended that the dialogues continue. There is not much good sense in Australia berating governments abroad on human rights issues if it denies us an opportunity to talk about a range of other issues that are important bilaterally—and that is what tends to happen. I think there is some value in the way in which the dialogues enable us to progress human rights issues in a way of advocating for change and they certainly enables us to raise matters that we think are important bilaterally. It also helps to increase our knowledge about human rights issues when these matters are progressed and it helps in relation to broader debate.

I am one who has a very strong view that the parliamentary engagement in relation to the human rights dialogues has been something that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has been happy to see sidelined. But I think if we are going to have a useful advance, an engagement which brings members of parliament into the process would encourage change also in the countries we are talking to as to who they include in the processes. I happen to think that if members of parliament or members of the congresses—or whatever they call them in Vietnam and China—were to be engaged, you might find that they start to think about these issues domestically in a much more positive way.

How are we going to get this parliamentary involvement? At the moment what the government says is, 'If members of parliament want to be involved, let them find some philanthropic organisation that might agree to send them.' Or they say, 'You can use your parliamentary allowances, which we are just about to take away, and you can assume that that is the priority concern you have and therefore the one you should progress when you are spending them.' I think the rubber is hitting the road. The allowances that members have had to undertake some private travel are being stripped away. If members of parliament are going to be engaged in this process, the government have to take seriously the recommendations in this report about the way in which members can be involved. I would encourage them to take that up very seriously, because it could make a realistic difference as to the way in which these works are undertaken. (Time expired)

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

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Werriwa) (10:19): I move:

That the House take note of the report.

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

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Werriwa) (10:19): I move:

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

Question agreed to.

Regional Australia Committee Report

Mr WINDSOR (New England) (10:20): On behalf of the Standing Committee of Regional Australia, I present the committee's report, incorporating additional comments, entitled, Report into certain matters relating to the proposed Murray-Darling Basin Plan, together with the minutes, proceedings and evidence received by the committee.

I rise today to present the Standing Committee of Regional Australia's second report on its inquiry into certain matters relating to the proposed Murray-Darling Basin Plan. This report was presented out of session of 6 July 2012. The committee undertook this inquiry at the request of the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, the Hon. Tony Burke. The minister specifically asked the committee to direct its focus onto three areas: (1) the progress to date in water recovery towards bridging the gap by 2019; (2) the role that environmental works and measures can play in offsetting the sustainable diversion limit reductions; and (3) the groundwater sustainable diversion limits.

Being very aware that consultation on the draft plan was in its final stages, the committee agreed to undertake a narrow and focused inquiry, intending to highlight areas that needed to be addressed prior to the basin plan being introduced to the parliament. The report makes four recommendations in key areas that the committee believes must be addressed prior to the plan being introduced to the parliament. The committee found that there are some areas where the government can still improve the information being given to basin stakeholders. The first two recommendations of the report address issues where the committee believes that more information is required before the basin plan being introduced to the parliament.

Firstly, the committee has recommended that the Commonwealth government develop and release a water recovery strategy addressing how the remaining 1,270 gigalitres of water is due to be recovered. Stakeholders are concerned that the government is acting without an appropriate forward strategy for achieving this. Secondly, in its original report on this matter the committee recommended that when water is not needed for environmental assets the Commonwealth environmental water holder be able to trade it into the productive market. The committee has again recommended that this proposal be finalised so that the parliament can consider it along with the plan.

Another key area of debate is whether sustainable diversion limits may be offset by environmental works and measures. The committee has recommended that a mechanism be developed to adjust these sustainable diversion limits automatically in response to the efficiencies gained by environmental works and measures, rather than through parliament having to approve the sustainable diversion limit changes. This will allow flexibility and responsiveness to be built into the plan, rather than it being tied to the parliamentary calendar. I am pleased to note that the sustainable diversion limit adjustment mechanism is included in the latest draft plan, which was issued on 6 August 2012.
Finally, the committee has recommended that the government look more seriously at river and irrigation management and monitoring. The committee heard evidence in this and its previous inquiry that better river and irrigation management and monitoring can achieve water savings and prevent evaporative losses, yet governments at all levels have been slow to act. This is one of the key areas that must be addressed as part of this reform. Without acting to better manage the rivers only half of the reform process will have been completed.

Whilst it has not made recommendations on the groundwater issues that were part of the inquiry, the committee notes its ongoing concern about the impact that coal seam gas mining may have on groundwater resources.

The report is a unanimous one, with some additional comments from the member for Murray clarifying her position on some matters. I commend the report to the House and thank those committee members, not only for this inquiry, which was a short, sharp inquiry, but for the quite exhausting inquiry we did earlier this year and last year.

The committee has worked extraordinarily well together, in my view. If that demeanour can be carried through the parliament, where people across the political spectrum actually come together with a common aim and a common objective, we can see some achievement come out of this parliament. I thank the secretariat for their very diligent and hard work and all those people who have taken the time to be part of this process.

In accordance with standing order 39(f), the report was made a parliamentary paper.

Mr GIBBONS (Bendigo) (10:25): I endorse the words of the member for New England. I think that a lot of the credit for our having a unanimous report goes to his stewardship and negotiating ability. We should be forever indebted to him. As he said, this inquiry was conducted over a period of five weeks to enable the committee to report in a timely manner so that recommendations could be incorporated into the ministerial council's consideration of its draft plan.

Submissions were sought directly from basin state governments, peak interest groups and the general public: 40 submissions were received, with 17 organisations and three state governments represented at public hearings. As with the committee's first inquiry into this matter, the community submitted a range of water-saving proposals ranging from six gigalitres through to the use of the desalination plant in Adelaide to achieve 1,100 gigalitres by better watering of the Lindsay-Walpolla Islands in Victoria. The report found that there are some areas where the department is being not quite effective in getting its message out. I understand that is being addressed.

I again thank the chair—the committee was very capably led by the member for New England—and also the secretariat, under Glenn Worthington and ably assisted by Siobhan Leyne, Casey, Katrina and Emily. The first inquiry—not so much the second inquiry—was conducted sometimes, not often, under the most gruelling and trying circumstances, such as the heat, the dust and the flies that come from travelling in northern New South Wales and southern Queensland in high summer. It was a very enjoyable trip; a lot of good comradeship was shown during it.

I think we have come up with a report that very accurately reflects what people in the basin on both sides of the argument, if you like to use that word, are thinking. I still
think very strongly that we are capable of getting a win-win situation. We took evidence that proves that. I know the minister is striving to do that. I just sound a note of caution: if we do not get this right this time there will probably never be another opportunity to get the reforms needed to ensure a sustainable Murray-Darling Basin for all the communities involved, whether they be environmentalists, irrigators, farming communities or small businesses.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): Order! The time allotted for statements on this report has expired. Does the member for New England wish to move a motion in connection with the report to enable it to be debated on a future occasion?

Mr WINDSOR (New England) (10:28):
I move:
That the House take note of the report.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: In accordance with standing order 39, the debate is adjourned. The resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for a later hour this day.

Report and Reference to Federation Chamber

Mr WINDSOR (New England) (10:28):
I move:
That the order of the day be referred to the Federation Chamber for debate.

Question agreed to.

Health and Ageing Committee Report

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (10:28):
On behalf of the Standing Committee on Health and Ageing, I present the committee's discussion paper on late effects of polio and post-polio syndrome, together with the minutes of proceedings. This is our report on a roundtable we held earlier this year.

Polio is a crippling and potentially fatal infectious disease. Between the 1930s and 1960s many thousands of Australians contracted polio. Some experienced mild flu-like symptoms, perhaps not even realising that they had contracted polio, but others were permanently paralysed. The good news is that the development of effective vaccines in the 1950s and 1960s coupled with a global effort has all but eradicated polio. Australia was officially declared polio free by the World Health Organization in 2000.

The bad news is that polio has left a legacy. Even though people seemed to recover from the initial infection, years later many polio survivors started developing new symptoms. The most common complaints include fatigue, muscle weakness and pain. These are collectively known as late effects of polio or LEOP for short. LEOP can be a very severe condition. Its impact on sufferers and their families is very significant. It is unclear how many Australians are affected by LEOP and how many more are at risk of developing the condition. It is likely that there are thousands of Australians affected or at risk. Even so, the late effects of polio appear to have gone largely unrecognised in Australia.

To learn more about this issue and raise awareness of this issue, the health and ageing committee decided to hold a roundtable discussion. This took place in Melbourne in March this year. I also note the presence of the Deputy Speaker, who was at the roundtable. It was attended by polio advocates, doctors and people involved in research. There were also some patients who came along to share their firsthand experiences of living with the late effects of polio. They told us about all the physical, social, emotional and financial impacts of late effects of polio, of which there are many.
People with LEOP have restricted mobility and they get tired easily, which makes it hard for them to attend social functions and get involved in their communities. It is also expensive to have the late effects of polio. You need to pay for medication, doctor's appointments, special equipment and modifications to your car and home. After hearing all this, we were not surprised to hear that people with the late effects of polio are often socially isolated and financially disadvantaged. It was interesting to hear that it can be hard to even get the right diagnosis to begin with, which is a big factor in treating the illness. There are a lot of reasons for this, but one of them is that there is no particular test for the late effects of polio. So, unless your doctor knows about it, you might not even get diagnosed. In fact, the committee heard that it takes, on average, six years for a patient to receive the correct diagnosis for the late effects of polio. In the meantime, you might be misdiagnosed and given treatment that makes it worse.

Once people have been correctly diagnosed, it is really important that people have access to proper support services. However, Polio Services Victoria is Australia's only publicly funded specialist service. But it is not all bad news. The committee found that several current government policies are likely to help people with the late effects of polio. The GP superclinics and Medicare Locals that the government is rolling out will fill some of the current gaps in services and improve delivery of multidisciplinary care. Having a personally controlled electronic health record will mean that people with LEOP will not need to drag their medical records from doctor to doctor.

The committee made some recommendations which are contained in this report, including information about how important it is. We were surprised to hear that no-one really knows how many people have LEOP, so we have recommended that the Australian Bureau of Statistics or the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare establish mechanisms to collect that information and report on this data. We also have two recommendations about awareness. The first is that information on LEOP should be included in relevant undergraduate health degrees such as medicine. The second is for Medicare Locals to help increase the awareness of LEOP among health professionals already in practice and among the wider community. We now eagerly await the response of the health minister to these recommendations, and I sincerely thank everyone involved in the inquiry. I commend this paper to the House.

In accordance with standing order 39(f) the report was made a parliamentary paper.

Mr IRONS (Swan) (10:33): I rise to speak on the discussion paper on the late effects of polio and post-polio syndrome and also to support the comments the chair just made in the chamber. It is also good to see that we have a quorum of the committee sitting here in the chamber, including you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Poliomyelitis, commonly referred to as polio, is a viral infection that was widespread in the Western world until the early 1960s. Polio is a crippling and potentially fatal disease. Between the 1930s and 1960s there were more than 40,000 cases recorded as Australia experienced a number of epidemics. International efforts led to the rollout of vaccine programs, beginning in the late 1950s, and have prevented new infections in Australia whilst resulting in a 99 per cent decrease in the number of polio cases worldwide between 1998 and 2010. Australia was officially declared polio free by the World Health Organization in 2000.
Despite the eradication of polio in Australia, over the last 20 years much attention has been drawn to the development of new, previously unrecognised symptoms which occur in people who were thought to have reached a stable level of recovery after the acute disease. Many polio survivors who have emerging symptoms still report difficulty in obtaining correct diagnosis and treatment. These symptoms include muscle weakness and pain, fatigue, respiratory compromise and an inability to stay alert. These characterise the late effects of polio or post-polio syndrome.

The Standing Committee on Health and Ageing, of which I am the deputy chair, has been looking into the late effects of polio and post-polio syndrome—and this is the paper that came from the roundtable that was held in Melbourne. Although it is unclear how many polio survivors are in Australia, post-polio syndrome is a potentially debilitating condition. The time lag from the initial infection to the second phase varies but is usually around 30 years and the onset is usually slow and steady. Although there is no accurate data on the prevalence of post-polio syndrome in Australia, it is estimated that thousands of individuals are either affected or at risk of developing the condition. Many of those affected are over 50 years of age, which reflects the fact that polio was an uncommon infection in Australia by the early 1960s. However, there are cases amongst those who migrated to Australia from countries who did not eradicate polio as successfully or where it is still an epidemic. This younger group of survivors affected by post-polio syndrome means that the condition needs to be addressed now and for many years to come in Australia.

Despite the seriousness of the symptoms, awareness about post-polio syndrome amongst health professionals and the wider community in Australia is very low. The health and ageing committee decided to hear about post-polio syndrome and its impact on polio survivors, their families and carers. On 30 March 2012, the committee held a roundtable discussion in Melbourne. Participants at the roundtable included representatives of Polio Australia and associated state based polio networks, which between them provide support and advocacy for Australia's polio survivors.

The roundtable also included representation from health professionals involved in the treatment and clinical management of post-polio syndrome as well as representatives of the health and ageing department. The discussions held with these groups formed the basis of the committee’s discussion paper. The aim of the roundtable was to provide a better understanding of the challenges facing those affected and to raise the profile of the condition through discussion in a public forum. Roundtable participants demonstrated strong knowledge of the area and there was strong consensus amongst participants on the main issues.

The committee concluded there are some key issues that warrant specific recommendations. The committee was particularly concerned about the lack of information on the prevalence of the late effects of post-polio syndrome and the size of the population at risk. The committee understands that basic research is needed to improve diagnostic capability, which will enable accurate determination of prevalence. However, there is still a need to establish a mechanism to gauge the possible extent of post-polio syndrome in Australia.

The committee recommends the Australian Bureau of Statistics compile data to estimate the number of polio survivors living in Australia and determine within that population the proportion currently
experiencing the condition. A key benefit will be to raise awareness of the prevalence of post-polio syndrome to ensure GPs and other health professionals are aware of the condition and are better able to diagnose it and recommend appropriate treatment to patients. The committee also recommends that Medicare Locals actively engage with Polio Australia and state based post-polio associations, with state and territory departments of health and with general practitioners to provide activities which will raise awareness of the late effects of post-polio syndrome.

I commend the report to the House and thank the secretariat for all their work. I also thank the other committee members and all the post-polio syndrome sufferers who have since this discussion paper was released applauded the work of the committee.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Lyons): The time allotted for statements on this report has expired. Does the honourable member for Hindmarsh wish to move a motion in connection with the report to enable it to be debated on a later occasion?

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (10:39): I move:

That the House take note of the report.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: In accordance with standing order 39, 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 Federation Chamber

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (10:39): I move:

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

Question agreed to.
Australia and the European parliament. The report outlines the discussions held at this meeting, and hopefully we will soon be able to return the excellent hospitality that this delegation was offered while in Israel. One of the most memorable moments for me was going to the Tyne Cot cemetery and a service where Brendan Nelson spoke in front of the cross of sacrifice. It was probably one of the coldest mornings I have ever experienced in my life, but to do that on Anzac Day was certainly a very moving experience.

It was also great to see Australians all around the world doing great things. We went to the Nuclear Energy Agency and met with Mr Ron Cameron and his colleague Dr Ted Lazo. It was great to see Australians, especially after the Fukushima disaster, doing great things in monitoring nuclear controls.

To go to Israel as a Catholic and also as someone from a significant population that are concerned about what is going on in Palestine was an incredible opportunity. We went to the Aida UNRWA refugee camp—an incredible area of just 0.71 square kilometres which houses 4,700 refugees. It is obviously incredibly overcrowded. To stand on the roof of one of the schools and look down at the walls separating this community and separating houses from their farms was quite a moving experience. To go to a classroom with the boys was also an incredible opportunity. I particularly thank David Hutton, the deputy director from the West Bank UNRWA, and all the staff at the Aida camp for the time they spent with us.

Particularly as a Catholic, to go to the Church of the Nativity and to meet with Dr Victor Batarseh, the Mayor of Bethlehem, and the church leaders was quite an experience. We also met with the Palestinian Monetary Authority and Dr Ghassan Khatib, the director of the Palestinian Government Media Centre, to hear about the history, the future, the hopes, the dreams and the challenges facing that community, which was quite an experience. We were honoured to be able to represent the Australian parliament on this important delegation and I commend the report to the House.

Ms O’NEILL (Robertson) (10:44): by leave—I rise to speak also on the report of the parliamentary delegation to the European parliament and institutions and the bilateral visit to Israel which took place from 20 April to 4 May 2012. In this place, where sometimes conversations are very harsh and bipartisan cooperation is not always at the forefront, it is important to note that relationships do develop which enhance the work we do here in the parliament when we spend significant periods with our clients across the sometimes enormous party-political divide.

I pay particular tribute to the contribution to our national interests which arose from this delegation's visit to the EU—to Paris—Palestine and to Israel. We were very ably led by the honourable Senator John Hogg with the assistance which the deputy leader of the delegation, the Hon. Ian Macdonald, very freely offered. From this chamber, Russell Broadbent and Graham Perrett attended with me, and, from the Senate, Senator Bridget McKenzie attended. The team did Australia proud—we were team Australia while we were away. The first place in which we gathered to undertake our work as a parliamentary delegation was Brussels, where the current ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg, the European Union and NATO, Brendan Nelson, is doing an absolutely outstanding job of making sure that Australia's interests are represented at the very highest levels.

The point of these delegations as parliament-to-parliament conversations was
always very much emphasised by Senator Hogg, who understands that the permanence of such relationships can sometimes transcend our relationships in this place. Building on the great work that has been done by those before us and continuing to represent Australia overseas is a vital part of the work that we do as a delegation. During our visit to the European parliament we had extremely high level talks with Mr Martin Shulz, the President of the European parliament, and Mr Klaus Welle, the Secretary General of the European parliament.

Such talks are vital for us at this point in time. Since 2008 the Australia-EU relationship has been guided by a partnership framework, but there have been changes to the Lisbon treaty which have created a new institutional structure within the EU. This has very much impacted on Australia's relationship with the EU and on how we intend to interact with the EU in future. In October 2010, Prime Minister Gillard proposed that Australia and the EU negotiate a treaty level framework, and this is now the underpinning of all the great work that we can do with the EU. I am pleased to say that I believe that we were able to advance our agenda in our time visiting the European parliament.

We followed our visit to the parliament very quickly with one of the most moving experiences of my life thus far—being at the dawn service in Polygon Wood on Flanders Fields. The music that was offered by three amazing servicewomen—one from the Air Force, one from the Army and one from the Navy—enhanced tremendously the dawn service's recognition of Australia's service men and women and the great loss of life so many years ago on the fields of Flanders in the cause of freedom. I feel extremely privileged to have been there and very pleased that the Australian government was represented at that occasion, because there are so many Australians who go there to acknowledge the sacrifices of our service men and women.

Our work in Paris has been spoken about by my colleague Graham Perrett, the member for Moreton. He also spoke about the second part of our trip, when we were in Palestine and Israel. I too was very touched by my visit to the Aida refugee camp in Palestine, but I take the time remaining to me to put on the record how moved we were by our experience of visiting Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum. It is a truly remarkable place which aptly records the horror of the Holocaust with an indication to us never to forget and always to look to the future for better ways of solving the conflicts which necessarily emerge from time to time between us as human beings and as nations and as people who have different ideologies. It is a reminder of the need to negotiate a safe space for all people to participate.

I take this opportunity to give my thanks to the Australian ambassadors and embassy staff serving in Belgium, in France, in Israel and in Palestine. We are ably served by these missions. They do us great credit.

**Parliamentary Delegation to the United Kingdom, Spain, Germany and the United States**

Dr JENSEN (Tangney) (10:50): I present the report of the Australian Parliamentary Delegation to the UK, Spain, Germany and the United States, 14 April to 3 May 2012. I seek leave to make a statement.

Leave granted.

Dr JENSEN: This was a very busy delegation visit. It entailed 14 flights in 17 days and all the travel that that means. Frankly, too much time was spent in aeroplanes; however, it was very useful. I was the only member of the House of
Representatives on this delegation visit. The other five, led by Senator Bishop, were obviously of the other house.

The trip started in the UK. We went to the naval base in Plymouth and spoke with Babcock marine about submarine sustainment: the methodologies that they use to maintain the British nuclear submarine fleet and the fact that they as sustainers are these days integrally involved in the design aspects of submarines to ensure that the relevant design technologies are used and that maintenance is thus made a lot easier.

Following that, we went to Spain. The first place we went to was Ferrol. I was surprised—you hear about sunny Spain but it was pouring rain the whole time we were there. We went to Navantia and saw the two LHDs being made. We then went to Madrid. We spoke to the Ministry of Defence. We also went to Navantia head office and then to Airbus Military to speak both about the refuelling tankers that we are introducing to the Royal Australian Air Force and also about their bid for the light tactical transport. We then went to Cartagena, which is in the south, and it was very sunny and pleasant there. We spoke to Navantia again about submarines. What is very clear is that there is no conventional submarine in existence that will actually do what we require in an unmodified form. The simple fact is that the European submarines, which we would be potentially looking at, are all too small.

Following that, we went to Kiel in Germany and spoke to HDW about submarines again. Once again it was made clear that the submarines are small. We then went to the USA. We started off at Washington DC. We had 10 meetings, including with Frank Kendall, the acting undersecretary of defence for acquisition; the export conference roundtable; the Government Accountability Office; Dr Mike Gilmore, Director, Operational Test and Evaluation; two House of Representatives members; and the JSF Program Office. There were 10 meetings in all; I have not outlined all of them. In the meetings with both Undersecretary Frank Kendall and the JSF Program Office, they highlighted and pushed very strongly—unfortunately it is not reflected in the report—their concern about losing foreign customers to the joint strike fighter, given that the program is loaded up in the early years with foreign customers. Obviously if they fall over it has very significant implications for the program generally. This is something that I think the Australian government needs to be very cognisant of.

Following that we went to Boston. We went to Raytheon. We had a look at integrated air defence systems, particularly Patriot and NASAMS. We then went to Fort Worth for a day of classified briefings on the Joint Strike Fighter Program and also saw the facility where they built thousands of B24 Liberator bombers in World War II. We then went to San Diego and spoke with General Atomics about Predator and Reaper unmanned aerial vehicles. After that we went to Palmdale and spoke to Northrop Grumman about the joint strike fighter and also the broad area maritime surveillance capability, better known as Global Hawk. I will leave it there. It was a very useful delegation.

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

**National Disability Insurance Scheme Committee**

Mr **CHRISTENSEN** (Dawson) (10:55): I move:

That this House:

(1) recognises that the:

(a)proposal of a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is a once-in-a-generation landmark reform that has the potential to deliver
better quality of life outcomes for Australians with disabilities;

(b) schedule for implementation of the NDIS, as proposed by the Productivity Commission, will take seven years, spanning the life of three Parliaments; and

(c) NDIS is a reform that involves the cooperation and support of state and territory governments, the disability support services sector, people with a disability and their families and carers;

(2) notes the bipartisan and cross-party support for the implementation of the NDIS;

(3) declares its support for policy stability on the NDIS over the life of those three Parliaments and until the scheme’s full implementation; and

(4) resolves to immediately establish a Joint Select Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme which will:

(a) oversee the implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme;

(b) be subject to terms of reference to be agreed upon by the Prime Minister and Opposition Leader and ratified by this House;

(c) be comprised of 4 Government members and/or Senators, 4 Opposition members and/or Senators, 1 Greens member and/or Senator and 1 non-aligned member and/or Senator;

(d) be jointly chaired by 1 Government member and 1 Opposition member; and

(e) remain in existence until the full implementation of the NDIS is achieved; and

(5) transmit a message to establish a Joint Select Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme to the Senate for concurrence.

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

Mr Craig Kelly: I second the motion.

Mr CHRISTENSEN: My mother would turn blue when she had her fits. I grew up in a family where disabilities were a lived experience every single day. My father lost a leg to cancer when he was 19, before I was even a twinkle in his eye, and my mother was an epileptic who also had cerebral palsy.

While, as a child of parents with disabilities, you got to understand the difficulties that people with disabilities have to put up with on a daily basis, nothing was more shocking than watching your mother turn blue when she was having an epileptic fit. She would alarm us by crossing or folding her arms and asking for my father's help before she went into one of her epileptic fits.

My dad was out making a living, driving taxis so that we could have food on the table, so he could not be there all the time and certainly was not there a lot of time when she had her fits and was calling for help. Even then, as an eight-year-old kid, I knew that when Mum did that you had to put her on the floor in case she fell off the chair she was sitting on or fell over. Then her eyes would roll back into her head and sometimes she would stop breathing and her face would turn blue. I would literally smack her on the face, because as an eight-year-old it was the only thing I could think of to snap her out of it. I never knew whether that would be the last memory of my mother, and to think of that as an eight-year-old kid—all because the support services for people in her situation were nonexistent.

So I know too well why a national disability insurance scheme is needed in this country. Certainly I am very proud that the government and the Liberal-National coalition strongly support the National Disability Insurance Scheme. But forgive me for this one negative shot: I also know why I bristle every time I hear disabilities and indeed the NDIS proposal being politicised. When I hear the Prime Minister say that the NDIS is a 'great Labor reform' as if the Liberal-National coalition is somehow against it, to me that is politicising disabilities. As someone who had to revive his epileptic mother from unconsciousness several times, it is quite frankly disgusting.
National Disability Services, the peak body for non-government disability services, give an apt description of the National Disability Insurance Scheme. They say it will be an entitlement based funding mechanism which will provide flexible, person centred supports so that people can participate in ordinary daily life. It will provide people with a disability, their families and their carers with the ongoing care, support, therapy and equipment they need.

Most importantly it will be individualised and person-centred, with support based on the personal choices of either the person with a disability or their family or their carers. This is the fundamentally great thing about the NDIS—empowerment. It lets individuals and families decide what services will best fit them rather than have some bureaucrat in a state capital work it out on a desktop model. It opens up competition and opportunity in the disability services sector, which is good for both the person with disabilities, as they will have affordable choices for service provision, and for the disability service providers as they will have greater certainty in terms of long-term service demand.

In my electorate of Dawson we have many quality organisations working in the field of disability support—organisations such as Cootharinga, Engedi, Mackay Lifestyle Choices, MADEC, CQ Community and In-Home Care, Bowen Flexi Care, the Burdekin Flexible Support Services, the Burdekin Community Association, Life Stream Mackay, Blue Care and the Endeavour Foundation. These local organisations provide quality care services and make life easier for their clients—people with disabilities and the families and carers of those with disabilities. They are great local service providers in my electorate, but I know they could provide so much more for their clients if there was a better, more streamlined funding system that their clients had access to. But the benefits of the NDIS go beyond just people with disabilities and disability service providers; it benefits the entire nation.

The Leader of the Opposition has said that one of the great things about the National Disability Insurance Scheme is that it will 'give people with disabilities and their carers more opportunity to be productive and more opportunity to participate in our economy'. He went on to say words that aptly express my feelings about the NDIS:

That's why it's not just a cost. Over time, it is an investment in a better society and in a stronger economy.

The NDIS is not about handouts, it is not about charity, it is an investment in our future. National Disability Services say:

Timely interventions, appropriate aids and equipment, training and development would become investment in individual capacity rather than welfare. The scheme would therefore lead to more positive results for people with a disability, their families and carers as well as being fiscally responsible.

It is for these reasons that the Liberal-National coalition believes that the National Disability Insurance Scheme is an idea whose time has come. Earlier this year, the Leader of the Opposition, on behalf of the entire Liberal-National coalition, released a statement which deserves putting on the parliamentary record. He said:

Right now, the treatment given to people with disabilities depends upon how the disability was incurred and which state it happened in. Most rely on state government-funded disability services where demand always outstrips supply.

It’s wrong that people’s treatment should depend upon the litigation lottery or more upon what the system can afford than upon people’s needs. The national disability scheme should be a new project that unites Australians.
It has to be done responsibly but it does have to be done.

The Coalition will do what we reasonably can to make the NDIS happen and would accept a government invitation to be jointly responsible for this vital national project.

On 13 April this year, the Leader of the Opposition sent a letter to the Prime Minister putting forward the concept of creating a parliamentary NDIS committee that would ensure policy stability for the proposal until its full implementation. There was no written response but merely a brush-off that was put in the media. On 27 April, the Leader of the Opposition repeated the offer to the Prime Minister but this offer was formally rejected.

As we know, the implementation of the NDIS, as proposed by the Productivity Commission, will take seven years, spanning the life of three parliaments and quite possibly different governments. That offer by the Leader of the Opposition was, sadly, rejected.

A new offer now lies on the table for the government and for this parliament in the form of my motion. Upon passage of this motion in this place and passage of a concurrent motion in the other place, this parliament would resolve to immediately establish a Joint Select Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme, which would oversee the implementation of that scheme. It would be subject to terms of reference to be agreed upon by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition and ratified by this House. It would be jointly chaired by a government member and an opposition member and, most importantly, it would remain in existence until the full implementation of the NDIS is achieved. The joint committee I propose today is the only vehicle for true bipartisanship for the NDIS.

The National Disability Services chief executive, Ken Baker, has issued a statement this morning in light of this motion being brought before the parliament today. I want to read a section of this statement. Dr Baker says:

If you compare the progress towards building the NDIS to a race in the Paralympics we are 20 metres in to a 400 metre race. You don't get a gold medal for leading at the 20 metre mark, you have to keep your head down and keep working. When it comes to the NDIS we need all parliaments to keep working at building the scheme.

I don't think anyone in the disability community thinks that we have won the NDIS. We know that neither political party has outlined how they will fund the full scheme. We also know that the discussions around funding will involve the Federal, States and Territories parliaments.

Parties at both levels of government should recognize that this is a long-term reform which requires support from both sides of politics. To deliver the NDIS in full, political opponents across successive parliaments both federally and in the states are going to be required to work together for the greater good.

The truth remains that before the NDIS is locked in we will need both political parties to outline how they intend to fully fund the scheme. We will also need both political parties to commit to true political collaboration on the design and roll out of the NDIS.

Dr Baker is right: we are at the 20 metre mark of a 400 metre race in the Paralympics and, after the next election or the one after that, it very well could be a relay where the baton needs to be passed to a different player.

National Disability Services campaign posters for the NDIS run the line: 'It's time to make every Australian count.' Indeed, that has been the campaign slogan for the NDIS movement. Right now, it is time to make this parliament count when it comes to the NDIS. Let's put aside petty politics, join together on the NDIS and make this work for the betterment of our nation.
Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (11:06): There are many unsung heroes who live with disability, care for those with a disability or provide services for those with a disability in my electorate of Blair—including organisations such as IRASI, CODI, ALARA and Focal Extended to name just a few. It is a pity that the member for Dawson did not mention the fact that the Campbell Newman government is taking away funding from these organisations and also stripping away and sacking public servants in my electorate who provide services for people with disabilities. That was not mentioned in the smooth soliloquy of the member for Dawson. When it comes to the LNP and the coalition, look at what they did, not what they say now.

During the 11 years of the Howard coalition government, funding for disability services in those circumstances grew by 1.8 per cent, less than the rate of inflation. Where were the coalition members on this issue during the years of the Howard coalition government? Where were they? The reality is that they would not commit to a national disability insurance scheme then and they will not commit to one now. The member for Dawson can come in here with his motion, but we have heard the shadow Treasurer describe the billion dollars that we put on the table in this budget for a National Disability Insurance Scheme as a cruel hoax and we have heard the Leader of the Opposition say that it is an aspiration.

Before the last Queensland election—Queensland, where the member for Dawson comes from—we heard Campbell Newman and we heard Tracy Davies, the then Queensland shadow disability services minister, commit themselves hand-on-heart. We saw LNP websites talking all about this. But what did they do? When they came into government they could not come up with even $20 million for a launch site; there was just a 1½ page letter, not a detailed proposal like the other states and territories. That $20 million over four years is equivalent to $62.50 for every person with a disability in Queensland. They could not even come up with that money for a launch site. In their submission they did not even mention Gympie, but in the press conference Campbell Newman mentioned Gympie. My area of Ipswich in the South-East Queensland area deserves a national disability launch site.

We will have 20,000 Australians in the next couple of years covered by the National Disability Insurance Scheme. We have seen coalition governments in Victoria and New South Wales, Labor governments in the ACT, Tasmania and South Australia come to the party on this; but where are the Queensland LNP members who are putting pressure on Campbell Newman? Where are the LNP members on the backbench opposite putting pressure on the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Treasurer? The coalition have had more positions on this issue than you could find in the Kama Sutra. They have had positions everywhere, but they cannot put a dollar on the table.

This is a great initiative devised and implemented by a Labor government. Those opposite talk the talk but they have never walked the walk on this issue. There has not been a word from the member for Dawson in relation to Campbell Newman and the cutbacks for disability in Queensland—not a word! Organisations in my electorate such as IRASI, which provide disability services, have had their funding slashed by the Campbell Newman government. So do not come into this place with this sort of motion and tell us that you are in favour of a national disability insurance scheme when your comrades and colleagues back in Queensland are gutting disability services.
and you are saying nothing about it. That is the reality.

We have seen 80,000 Queenslanders miss out. The policy of the coalition in this place is to delay. This motion is a recipe for delay. We already have treasurers and disability ministers in coalition and Labor states on the COAG select committee. I do not know what the member for Dawson thinks. Governments pass bills, including budget bills, and they implement policies—committees do not. This motion, from paragraph 4 onwards, is a recipe for delay. It is a political strategy. Do not come into this place and say it is not a political strategy from the LNP: that is exactly what it is.

Queensland pays $5,830 per capita in disability services; Victoria, $8,378 per capita. Both sides of politics are at fault in that. The member for Dawson should get onto his LNP mates Campbell Newman and Tracy Davies and get them to increase the funding for disability services in Queensland. That is what he should be doing; he should be increasing the funding. He should not come in here and tell us that we should somehow be following their dictates. They have form in relation to this.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme is an idea whose time has come, because it will give people with a disability greater control in their decision making. It will help people develop their skills, talent and ability. It will give people with disability the opportunity to fulfil their potential. We could see added to our GDP about $32.5 billion by 2050, if we could get everyone to realise their potential, get the jobs they want, build their pride and self-esteem and get involved with the workplace. That is what it means: greater financial security, greater opportunity and greater economic development. But, sadly, those opposite want to delay the National Disability Insurance Scheme by a year. That is their policy. We have brought forward the Productivity Commission recommendations by a year by putting a billion dollars on the table in this budget.

We have shown that we are serious about disability reform. We have not turned our backs on people with a disability, as the LNP government in Queensland has done and the Howard government did for nearly 12 years when it came to that sort of funding. We have not ignored the thousands of people who are crying out for it: people like Peter and Linda Tully in my area. Peter Tully said that when he saw what Campbell Newman was doing to Queensland he wanted to scream. Senator Jan McLucas held a forum at Ipswich Special School just a couple of weeks ago. Fran Vicary, a great advocate for disability reform in Queensland, was there. We have dozens and dozens of people there. Did anyone there say that the cutbacks that Campbell Newman is making and the coalition's policy in relation to this are right? No. There were disability advocates from all over Ipswich. Everyone was critical of the coalition and of the LNP government in Queensland on this issue, because they have had no consistency on this issue. They will not back us on this issue even now. This motion is just a typical example of delay. Inaction, inertia, idleness: that is all the coalition have had on disability reform for such a long period of time. They have turned their back on Queenslanders as well.

The coalition say they want it, but they do not show it. If they wanted it, where would the money come from? What would they do? Instead, Campbell Newman comes up with the idea that we should have some sort of Medicare levy. But he is a friend of the LNP member for Dawson, who voted against the flood recovery money—as did all the LNP members from Queensland—that we raised to rebuild Queensland after the cyclones and the floods in South-East Queensland.
Campbell Newman wants us to raise taxes for a national disability insurance scheme with a levy, but this bloke, the member for Dawson, who would not support a flood levy to rebuild Queensland, is silent on this issue as well. All the LNP members from Queensland are silent on the issue of the cutbacks to disability services in Queensland. They have gone to dust; they have gone into hiding.

I guarantee anyone that comes in here will not praise Campbell Newman and what the LNP have done in Queensland. I guarantee no-one will get up and say how wonderful they are. I guarantee that is the case. That is the reality of what they have done. They have been brutal, heartless and callous in what they have done in relation to disability funding. That is the reality of the LNP hierarchy and government in Queensland. It is a breach of faith.

They come in here and talk to us about having one policy before an election and having one policy after an election. They with hand on heart said that they would support a national disability insurance scheme and they have broken that promise. They have breached that faith. Go back to Campbell Newman, Member for Dawson, and tell him what to do. Tell him that Queenslanders want it done to make sure that we do it. These are wrong priorities. Ed Miliband, the opposition leader in the UK, gave one of the best speeches I have heard in a long time in his budget reply when he said this of the UK Conservative government:

… wrong choices, wrong priorities, wrong values, out of touch, same old Tories.

This is the same thing—wrong choices, wrong priorities, wrong values, out of touch, same old coalition. That is their record. That is what they have done in the past. They will not come to the party on a national disability insurance scheme. Once again, by this very motion, they have shown that they want to delay a policy that will make a difference in the lives not just of Queensland but of 400,000 Australians, their carers and their families.

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (11:16): I rise to support this motion moved by my good friend the member for Dawson. I congratulate him for it, for I know it is an issue dear to his heart. However, before I start, I must comment that it is most disappointing to hear that contribution from the member for Blair. We want this issue to be bipartisan, with every member of this House working towards delivering a national disability insurance scheme. That contribution shows exactly why we should support this motion.

I will go through this motion. It recognises that the proposal for the NDIS is a once-in-a-lifetime landmark reform that has the potential to deliver better quality-of-life outcomes for Australians with disabilities. It also recognises that the scheduled implementation for the NDIS as proposed by the Productivity Commission will take seven years to deliver, spanning the lives of three parliaments. It recognises that the NDIS is a reform that will involve the cooperation of the state and territory governments and the disability support sector and people with disabilities and their families. It notes—unlike what we heard in the member for Blair's recent comments—that this has bipartisan and cross-party support for its implementation delivery. It also declares in support for the policy that the stability of the NDIS is most important. Over the lives of these three parliaments and the full scheme's implementation over these seven years we need stability. We need to have bipartisanship going through those next three parliaments for the next seven years.
Therefore, this motion resolves to immediately establish a joint select committee on a national disability insurance scheme which will: (a) oversee the implementation of the NDIS; (b) be subject to the terms of reference to be agreed upon by the Prime Minister and the opposition leader and ratified by the entire House; (c) be comprised of four government members and/or senators, four opposition members and/or senators, one Greens member and/or senator and one non-aligned member and/or senator; (d) be jointly chaired by one government member and one opposition member; and—this is the most important point—(e) remain in existence until the full implementation of the NDIS is achieved.

This is a motion well worth supporting. This motion is a test. It is a test to see whether this government is truly concerned about a better deal for the disabled or whether it is just coming in here to play politics with the most vulnerable members of our society. Most importantly, it is the Productivity Commission's own timetable that said the implementation of the NDIS will occur over the life of three parliaments. So, if we as members of this current parliament are truly concerned with the welfare and opportunities of our disabled, it is our duty to support this this motion. The importance of this motion is that, should there be a change of government at the next election, the progress of the NDIS can continue smoothly.

This motion also commits the current opposition, should we form the next government after the next election, to the notion that the delivery of the NDIS will remain a bipartisan issue. Further, should the current opposition form government after the next election, this motion commits that government to maintaining a bipartisan committee, consisting of four coalition members, four Labor members, one Greens member and one non-aligned member. This motion will ensure that all parties are honest about the delivery of the NDIS for those with significant disabilities.

I hate to say this but the Productivity Commission called for $3.9 billion to be allocated to the trials over the forward estimates and yet, while the government talks this up, they have only delivered $1 billion. From day one, this parliament is short-changing our disabled by 75 per cent.

There are three major issues that this bipartisan committee on a national disability insurance scheme needs to consider—firstly, what services need to be provided and to whom they will be provided; secondly, how those services will be delivered because, although getting the framework right is very important, it is only one thing and we need to be very careful that the NDIS is not captured by bureaucracies and that the funding we are putting forward goes to providing resources to those who most need them; and, thirdly and most importantly, how we fund the NDIS. We can have all the goodwill in the world, we can tour the countryside talking up the NDIS and taking the applause of disabled groups, we can design the most efficient and effective scheme to provide those services, but, unless we determine how the NDIS can be paid for on a sustainable basis and clearly state how that extra $7 billion will be funded, the NDIS will remain nothing but a mirage and a cruel hoax upon the disabled.

That is why it is important that government members support this motion: so we show the disabled and send them the message that this is truly bipartisan.

The method of funding the NDIS must be sustainable. It cannot be funded on deficit spending. Without criticising this government, we have had the four largest budget deficits in our nation's history. We had a $20 billion surplus, net zero debt and
$60 billion in Future Fund. By the end of the last financial year, we had borrowed $120 million every day and now our level of national debt is north of $140 billion. Because of the debt we have accumulated, next year, before we find one cent for the disabled, we in this parliament have to come up with close to $7 billion in interest payments, which will mainly go to foreigners. That is the equivalent of $300 for every man, woman and child, or $1,200 for a family of four. Those are the interest payments that we have to come up with. We have to come up with that $7 billion year after year for ever, until we start paying back the $140 million we borrowed.

That is the reason why we cannot fund the NDIS out of further deficit spending. The truth is there are only two ways that we can fund the NDIS. We must cut the waste. We must eliminate many of the indulgent, feelgood schemes, and we must do it by making sure our economy is running on all cylinders and by lifting our productivity. We cannot do that by introducing new taxes that raise the cost of doing business in Australia and make Australian industry uncompetitive.

This motion calls for a bipartisan committee and I would like to put my name forward as a member of the committee, for, as they say, I have skin in the game: I know how desperately we need an NDIS, because it affects me directly. My son Trent was born 16 years ago with Down syndrome and autism. He has no speech. My wife and I will need to care for him for our entire lives. This has made me appreciate how each individual has their real value and how the dignity of every individual must be respected, but most importantly it has awakened me to the fact that as a nation we need to do so much more for our children with disabilities and for their carers. It has made me personally aware of the unsung group of carers across Australia, who we may well call our neglected people.

I personally understand that for parents caring for a physically or intellectually disabled child it becomes a lifetime's task. I understand that for most carers there are no days off, there is no sick pay, there is no holiday pay and there is no superannuation. When carers grow old, they do so with the worry about what will happen to their children when they are too old or frail to nurse them. Many parents I know with kids with severe disabilities are on medication for depression. Divorce rates are high and studies show that single mums who have kids with severe disabilities have the same stress levels as soldiers in combat.

We are a wealthy and compassionate country. The time has come for us to find a way—a bipartisan way, without any of the old excuses—to provide a generous and practical response to the needs of people with severe disabilities and their carers. I call on members of the government, many of whom I know genuinely want to see the NDIS delivered over the term of these three parliaments, over these seven years, to show goodwill and to support this motion. Let us refocus on getting this done rather than scoring political points off each other. Also, showing support for this motion would be a great boost to our disabled people. It would show we really want to get this done. I hope as members of the government you will support this motion.

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (11:26): I am very disappointed, but perhaps it is not surprising that we see the Liberal Party and the Nationals here today trying to delay one of the greatest programs that will do more than any other program has ever done for the disability sector—the National Disability Insurance Scheme. After all, they spent 12 long years in government doing absolutely nothing. In fact, they made cuts to the sector without a single program. Now Labor is getting on with that job. We are getting on
with the very important job of giving people with disabilities the services that they need. Those opposite are continuing in the same ilk that they have continued with every other policy in this House—and that is, to oppose, to say no and to be destructive. Here we have a plan that will do magnificent things for people with disabilities. We know that these programs are needed, and again the opposition are trying their delaying tactics, saying one thing when they are out there in front of the cameras and doing something completely different when they are here in this parliament.

Mr Christensen: Mr Deputy Speaker, a point of order on relevance. There is nothing in the motion about delaying the NDIS, so I ask the member to refer to the motion in front of us.

Mr GEORGANAS: When you ask for an inquiry or a committee, to me that is delaying. That is stopping the process, doing something else instead of getting on with our program. Labor is now getting on with the job of giving people with disabilities the services that they need, not just saying no like the opposition has been doing.

Support for disability is a human right. It is not a privilege. It is not something bestowed on the whimsy or whim of governments or political parties. It is an entitlement for all Australians. But, as I said, Australians with disabilities were bitterly disappointed by the Howard government for 12 long years—again and again. While the Liberal Party was in government, funding for disabilities actually went backwards. That is the way it is and I will say it again: whilst the Liberal Party was in government, funding for disabilities actually went backwards. They took support away from people already struggling to get a fair go. As I said, this is not a privilege. This support is for the most vulnerable people in our communities.

Madam Deputy Speaker D’Ath, I cannot count the number of times people have come into my office—and, I take it, to your office and the offices of other members of parliament—seeking assistance to get something as basic as a wheelchair. We know that too often it is difficult for people with disabilities to get access to essential services; we see it every day. That is why we on this side of the chamber are getting on with the job and working towards a future where all Australian children and adults with disabilities lead lives of dignity and opportunity. We are delivering the first stage of the National Disability Insurance Scheme, and if those opposite do not want to help they should get right out of the way. The time for playing politics with the lives of Australians living with disabilities is over. We have seen those opposite play politics with lots of other issues that other governments of all persuasions would not play political games with. Now we have those opposite playing politics with the National Disability Insurance Scheme, which is extremely important and should have been put in place many years ago. Those opposite are now trying their delaying tactics.

It is now one year since the government released the Productivity Commission’s report into disability care and support. The Productivity Commission recommended that the NDIS be established to end the cruel lottery of disability care. Right now in Australia the type and level of support you get depends on how you got your disability—and that is wrong. Your access to services should not depend on whether you were born with a disability or acquired it. Each of us here is only—touch wood and God forbid—one accident or injury away from needing the NDIS. Whether it be through a work accident, a car accident or a sporting accident, disability can strike...
absolutely anyone. We on this side of the room know that.

It does not matter whether you live in the regions—in the country or in rural areas—or whether you are a city dweller like those in my electorate or whether you live in the outer areas, and it does not matter what your background is. We know that all of us are only one accident or injury away from needing the NDIS. For too long, where you live and not what you need has been the determining factor in what help you get. Whether we are talking about assistance with education, health care or disability support I believe deeply in the NDIS, as do all of us on this side. We believe that your postcode should not determine your chance of success in life. So, while the opposition dithers and delays, we are getting on with all sorts of reforms. Through the NDIS, we will give all Australians a fair go in education, health care and disability support. That is what our country is all about.

The Australian government is moving fast to make things happen. Just one year after the Productivity Commission’s report was released, we are launching the NDIS. This is a life-changing reform for thousands of Australians with disabilities, their families and their carers. When the NDIS starts, people with disability will get much more choice of the quality and standard of care that they receive. Premier Jay Weatherill in South Australia has been huge supporter of the NDIS. Unlike many of the Liberal state premiers, he knows that, to people in his state, the NDIS is a hugely important reform. I was very pleased to see him jump on board as the first premier to support the NDIS—unlike others in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria, where they dillydallied again with this very important reform. When the chance for an NDIS trial in South Australia appeared, Premier Weatherill grabbed it with both hands and, in addition, put in $20 million—which is a lot of money for a small state—on the table. So I thank Premier Weatherill for his leadership and his insight when his counterpart Liberal premiers in other states have fought the NDIS all the way. He knows that the NDIS is real and urgent and that we should deal with it urgently. He is a former disability minister, and he was absolutely committed to the disability sector and did a very good job when he was minister for disabilities in South Australia.

In my electorate of Hindmarsh, disability services are a huge issue. That is partly because of the demographic: one in four people in Hindmarsh are over the age of 65, and that means its residents have among the oldest average age of any seat in the country; I always like to say that it is one of the wisest seats in the country, because with age comes wisdom. Recently many of you would have seen the article in the Australian—I think it was published a couple weeks ago. The article pinpointed the areas of Australia with the highest concentration of people with disabilities. Two suburbs in my electorate made it onto the list. One was Morphettville, where 16 per cent of all residents have a disability, and the other one was North Plympton, where 15 per cent of people have a disability. The NDIS trial in South Australia will help approximately 4,600 people, starting next year, to access better services and improve their lives. In mid-2013 the trial will be launched for children aged between birth and five years, and from 2014 the age limit will extend to 14 years. These real reforms are taking place next year and beyond, and we cannot afford to risk delays through the motion that the member opposite has put.

Just a few weeks ago I was at Kilparrin Special School in my electorate. It is a school for children with vision impairment and severe disabilities. We met some of
those children, who will be among the first in
the country to get the individual support that
they require so desperately through the
National Disability Insurance Scheme. *(Time
expired)*

Mr COULTON (Parkes—The Nationals
Chief Whip) (11:36): I rise to support the
motion moved by the member for Dawson. I
say at the outset that I am a little
disappointed in my colleagues on the other
side of the chamber. They seem to have
misread the intention of this motion. The
member for Dawson and the member for
Hughes, who respectively moved and
seconded this motion, have done so not only
for the best of reasons but as people who
have a deep understanding of this particular
issue. The member for Blair's contribution
was one of the most appalling contributions I
have heard in this place. I agree with much
of what the member for Hindmarsh said, but
I found the political angle he came from very
disappointing.

As a point of clarification, some of the
premiers did not rush to agree to the trial of
the National Disability Insurance Scheme
because there was no guarantee that the trial
would flow through to being implemented.
Further, the trial was to be funded by the
state premiers. They had every reason to
show some concern with what was being
proposed.

The NDIS is not something that is filling
up a news cycle. This is a scheme that is
going to take three political terms to
implement. When you speak to the people
from Disability Services Australia they say
that they know there is no quick fix. There is
no need for political speeches at this stage
because this is a big, long-term reform that
will require a lot of effort.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme
is significant, necessary reform. It has the
potential to transform people's lives and we,
the parliament, have the opportunity to be
part of this. Meeting the needs of Australians
with disability should be core government
business. Only bipartisanship will ensure the
NDIS proceeds smoothly. As I said, this has
to survive three parliamentary cycles, at
least, to reach full implementation. As a
society we should be able to properly support
people with a disability and their carers.

Many people with disabilities face
significant challenges in fully participating in
work, family and community and they are
some of the most vulnerable in our society.
There should be adequate support both for
people with disability and for their carers. In
a rural electorate such as mine, whether
people are born with a disability or whether
they acquire a disability, they face a much
more dramatic situation. That is not only
because of travel distances but also because
it is more difficult to find others with similar
care needs who could share a group house.
Quite often people with a disability who live
in rural areas find that they are the only ones
in their community with a particular
disability and that there is no provision of
services.

Unfortunately, the current support for
Australians with a disability is a frayed
patchwork characterised by piecemeal
programs, inconsistent eligibility criteria and
a lack of coordination. That is why the NDIS
is imperative. I support the introduction of
the National Disability Insurance Scheme
100 per cent. It is important for all
Australians. The National Disability
Insurance Scheme will provide insurance
cover for all Australians in the event of
significant disability and will revolutionise
the way people with a disability, their
families and their carers are supported in this
country. The proposed NDIS aims to give
everyone with a serious disability
comparable treatment and assistance to that
currently available for people injured at work
or on the roads. There is the old saying: if someone has a serious accident on the weekend, you should really try to get them into a car and hit a tree, because a whole range of financial help is available to people who have a car accident. The multipronged approach to the way we handle people with disabilities needs to be addressed.

An NDIS is expensive but the cost is merely a function of the unmet needs of people with a disability. The Productivity Commission quantified these unmet needs at around $6½ billion per annum. That is what would be required to eliminate the waiting lists— (Time expired)

Ms HALL (Shortland—Government Whip) (11:42): I suspect that nobody in this parliament has had as much work experience as I have had working with people with disability. Before entering into politics, for many, many years, I worked with people with disabilities. I know they do not want another committee set up. They do not want to have the process slowed down even further. They want some action; they want some results.

The NDIS is a groundbreaking scheme that has been welcomed by people with disabilities, parents, carers, advocacy groups and the community as a whole. It is a tragedy that the needs of people with disability have been ignored for so long and that it has taken the Rudd and Gillard governments to finally recognise that people with disabilities have a right to be treated with dignity and provided with opportunity rather than be denied not only opportunity but, in many cases, basic human rights. That is about to change with the implementation of the NDIS—something that needs to happen now, something that does not need to be delayed, as this motion seeks to do. This government is determined to deliver to people with disabilities.

The Productivity Commission recommended that the NDIS be established and that key components of the scheme be an entitlement to services and a choice about who should deliver those services and the types of services required. That replaces an ad hoc system that is based on chance. If you are lucky enough to get a quality service, you can rejoice. If you are not, you get nothing. This is not good enough and it cannot be allowed to continue. The implementation of the NDIS cannot be delayed. The member for Dawson should be ashamed of himself for trying to slow down the progress of the NDIS. It is imperative that the NDIS proceed as soon as possible. The NDIS trials are important and must proceed. People with disability cannot and should not wait any longer.

When the Liberal Party were in power, people with disabilities waited for 12 long years. Under Labor governments in the past, there was no action, but the Rudd and Gillard governments have recognised that people with disabilities have rights and they cannot be ignored. I see this as a question of commitment.

I believe the motion seeks to delay the NDIS and the shadow Treasurer at the National Press Club was not even prepared to commit to paper the implementation.

I am particularly excited about the pilots that are to be undertaken. One of the pilots is in the Hunter where I worked for many, many years in the area of disability, and I know the challenges that are faced by people with disabilities. This is fantastic news for those people, their families, their carers—for people like Tracey and Crystal who volunteer in my office. I spoke about them the other night. The NDIS will provide people with disabilities, their families and carers in the Hunter with the support and care they need, which is something they have
had to struggle for in the past. I am really excited and pleased about the pilot taking place in the Hunter. I know that in the Hunter we will do a really good job.

The NDIS in the Hunter will cover about 10,000 people with significant and permanent disabilities every year. The lives of 10,000 people will be changed. Under the NDIS these people will for the first time be assessed to receive individualised care and support packages and have the power to make decisions about their care and support. They will be assisted by local coordinators to help manage and deliver their support and they will be able to access a system that will be easy to navigate and deliver them to mainstream services.

This is ground-breaking legislation. We cannot allow it to be delayed and politicised by a joint select committee. People with disabilities deserve to be treated the same way as everybody else. The NDIS is a step in the right direction. (Time expired)

WYATT ROY (Longman) (11:47): What a stark contrast we have seen in the chamber today. Improving disability policy was one of my primary motivations for going into politics. After growing up alongside a close mate of mine who suffers from spinal muscular atrophy, I have witnessed firsthand the many obstacles and obstructions of an overly bureaucratic disability system that all too often fails to recognise need.

As Australians we like to believe that we are easy-going, accepting and all-inclusive. But in reality, many in our midst who suffer from congenital or acquired conditions are not fully included in our society. They are offered only minimal assistance and our system all too often simply does not make allowance for those who require additional or specific help. Friends and families are the safety net for people with disabilities. They are the carers, the sponsors and the security. But in a country such as ours, which sets itself up as a world leader in many areas, it is our responsibility also to lead others in areas of social conscience. This is what the National Disability Insurance Scheme is all about. It is about ensuring that every Australian has the best possible opportunities for the future, regardless of the obstacles they face. It is about ensuring that everyone with a disability will have the support they need.

It would seem that members on both sides of this place agree that the National Disability Insurance Scheme is not only an important concept but also an essential tool for our future of our nation. With cross-party support on this issue, I have been absolutely astounded and deeply disappointed to watch as the NDIS has been made into a political football. Let me put my view bluntly. Over the past month the Prime Minister and Labor have prioritised party politics over real action on disability reform. It could not be made more evident than by the contribution of the member for Blair earlier today.

It has been disappointing to see that in an effort to pass the buck, the Prime Minister has cast aside the Productivity Commission’s blueprint for the NDIS in favour of a political blame game. The Productivity Commission’s final report was very clear about how a National Disability Insurance Scheme should be implemented and where the funding should come from. But, regardless of this, we are now seeing a situation where the Prime Minister is trying to strong-arm state governments into holding up her federal government's responsibilities. In the recent negotiations with state governments, the Prime Minister failed to concede the important contribution that the states have made this far in the provision of disability services. Instead of recognising this contribution and building on it—as the Productivity Commission advises—the
Prime Minister is trying to force state governments into sponsoring the Labor government's funding shortfall.

The Productivity Commission's final report strongly indicated that the Australian government should be the sole contributor to a national disability insurance scheme. Yet the Prime Minister has indicated that she would put only $1 billion toward it. That is a massive $2.9 billion short of what the Productivity Commission recommended. This is a shortfall in Commonwealth funds, not state government funds. When Labor and the Greens found $10 billion of taxpayers' money to hedge in a clean energy finance corporation, I question how this Labor government could not find the extra $2.9 billion that the Productivity Commission recommended the Commonwealth fund.

In Queensland in the last financial year the federal government's contribution to disability services was about $255 million. Compare that with $920 million contributed by the Queensland government. In my electorate alone there are many examples of where the Prime Minister and the Labor government have wasted taxpayers' money. We need only to look as far as school halls and pink batts to know that those opposite have not valued taxpayers' money. I do not want to see this incredibly important policy miss out simply because those opposite could not rein in their addiction to wasteful spending on failed programs.

As I stand in the parliament today, the federal Labor government has not committed to the Productivity Commission's target date of a full NDIS by 2018-19. Nor has it committed funds, provided plans or given information about what will happen when the haphazard trial finishes and the real NDIS is supposed to be implemented. What is important here is that the National Disability Insurance Scheme comes to fruition within the timeframe outlined in the Productivity Commission's report. What this motion suggests—and I support—is that a joint select committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme is established to oversee the implementation of the full rollout. The timeframe for the NDIS rollout spans the lifecycle of several parliaments. The National Disability Insurance Scheme is more important than a quick political win. It has the ability to change the future for thousands of Australians and change our direction as a nation. Nothing could be more important in this place.

Mr MURPHY (Reid) (11:52): Labor believes all Australians deserve care and support if they acquire or are born with disability. We believe that no one should be left behind. We believe that accident or disability should not take away the chance for a decent life. That is why Labor supports the National Disability Insurance Scheme. The NDIS is good news for people with disability in our community, their families and carers. It will give them the support and care they need, when they need it, to help them lead good lives. I am proud to be part of a Labor government that is initiating this historic reform.

Under the NDIS these people, for the first time, will be assessed to receive individualised care and support packages. They will have the power to make decisions about their care and support, including choosing their service provider. They will be helped by local coordinators to manage and deliver their support. And they will have access to a system that they can easily understand and that will connect them to other services. This will give people with disability more opportunities to get involved in work, school and community life.

The government is providing $1 billion over four years to start rolling out the first
stage of the NDIS. State governments are also contributing a modest amount to the costs of the launch, to make sure this reform becomes a reality. The coalition ignored people with disability and their carers for 12 years and stood by while demand for disability services grew and disability pensioners struggled with the cost of living. Unfortunately, people with disabilities are not high on the Liberal-National agenda. Some of their state counterparts had to be shamed into participating in the launches.

The former coalition government ignored the inadequacy of the Disability Support Pension and sat on its hands while demand for disability services increased. Under the former coalition government, federal contributions to disability funding grew at a mere 1.8 per cent a year, less than the rate of inflation—in other words, funding went backwards in real terms.

In the policy they took to the last election, the federal opposition proposed to assist just 6,000 children with disabilities and their families. But there are 164,000 students with special needs in Australian schools. The opposition leader had nothing to say to the other 158,000 students with disabilities.

Under the previous coalition government, people with disability had to wait up to a year to get help to prepare for work through Disability Employment Services. And, if they did, their access to their pension was reviewed. This discouraged people with disability from benefiting from work and did nothing to support people with disability to find work. The numbers of people on the Disability Support Pension kept going up after the coalition’s Welfare to Work changes, which also failed to support the many disability pensioners keen to contribute more actively to their community.

The first stage of the NDIS will benefit more than 20,000 people with disability, as well as their families and carers. We will now work closely with the state and territory governments on the detailed planning to implement the scheme. This will include active engagement with local communities. The scheme will involve major changes in the way that we work with people with disability, their families, carers and service providers, and we want to make sure that we get this right so that we build a system that is sustainable over time.

We are building the NDIS in selected locations first, to ensure that the implementation of the scheme is informed by feedback from people with disability, their families and carers, service providers and community organisations. The lessons learned in launching the first stage will tell us when and how to proceed to a full scheme that is comprehensive, robust and responsive to the needs of people with disability. I commend the NDIS to the House.

Mr McCORMACK (Riverina) (11:56): I commend the member for Dawson for calling for the establishment of a Joint Select Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme. As a member of parliament who grew up in a household with disability pensioners as parents, the member for Dawson has formed a strong social justice conscience. He understands as well as anyone in this place how important it is to get the National Disability Insurance Scheme model right. He knows full well what this would mean for ensuring the NDIS proceeds with bipartisan support. There have been times recently when the NDIS has threatened to disintegrate into a political football—we have seen that this morning. This must not be allowed to happen. Certainly, this motion should and must receive the full support of the lower house and be taken up by way of a concurrence motion in the Senate. It is too crucial not to be given wholehearted backing.
The NDIS is a good proposal. It is a national scheme designed to provide insurance cover for all Australians in the event of significant disability. It comes at a cost but, as the first federal parliamentarian in New South Wales to sign up to the NDIS 'Every Australian Counts' campaign, I see this as an investment in our future. If we choose to do nothing, or delay indefinitely doing something—anything—we will lose a marvellous opportunity that will cost the nation more in the long run.

I know an NDIS has the support of so many people in the Riverina. Wagga Wagga based Kurrajong Waratah, a marvellous organisation which has provided care, support, training and opportunities for people with an intellectual disability or development delay and their families and carers for more than half a century, is right behind an NDIS. Councillor Anne Napoli of Griffith City Council enthusiastically supports an NDIS. Her artistically talented son Patrick, aged 36, has cerebral palsy. Chris and Carol Harmer of Wagga Wagga are a fantastic couple. They have three children, two of whom were born with an extremely rare condition called Phelan-McDermid syndrome. Their daughter Emily, 19, has never uttered a word and their 15-year-old son Tom is also affected, only more moderately. I spoke to Chris this morning, and he spoke of his high hopes for an NDIS. Narelle Hughes of Kooringal and her daughter Sally Dorling, 24, are similarly supportive. Narelle has spent her life looking after Sally. A mother's love knows no bounds, but even unconditional love sometimes needs help. Narelle said:

The NDIS provides a whole-life plan and there are people out there in desperate situations and they need this help as soon as possible.

Another NDIS advocate from the Riverina is Temora's Patricia Thomas, whose son Richard, 47, is disabled. Patricia has formed a Special Persons and Carers Group and is President of this tireless band of workers.

The NDIS has the backing of both sides of politics. The government has, however, sought most recently to politicise the issue. This is unfortunate. The Liberal-National coalition supports the implementation of the NDIS, despite the government's claims to the contrary. Politicising this issue is an affront to many Australians who know how tough it is for families which have a disabled member. The opposition leader wrote to the Prime Minister twice seeking the establishment of a joint select committee on the NDIS.

Debate interrupted.

Reference to Federation Chamber

Mr CHRISTENSEN (Dawson) (12:00): I move:

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

Question agreed to.

BILLS

Migration Legislation Amendment (Regional Processing and Other Measures) Bill 2012

Returned from Senate

Message received from the Senate returning the bill without amendment or request.

Crimes Legislation Amendment (Slavery, Slavery-like Conditions and People Trafficking) Bill 2012

Reference to Federation Chamber

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter—Chief Government Whip) (12:00): by leave—I move:

That the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Slavery, Slavery-like Conditions and People Trafficking) Bill 2012 be referred to the Federation Chamber for further consideration.
Question agreed to.

Marriage Amendment Bill 2012
Report from Federation Chamber
Bill returned from the Federation Chamber for further consideration.

Customs Amendment (Smuggled Tobacco) Bill 2012
Report from Committee

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (12:01): by leave—On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, I rise to present this statement and discharge the committee's obligation to report on the Customs Amendment (Smuggled Tobacco) Bill 2012. On 28 June, the House Selection Committee, in their wisdom, referred this bill to our committee. The Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee was referred the very same bill by the Senate for inquiry. The Senate committee tabled its report on 14 August 2012. This committee commends the Senate committee's inquiry into the bill and its report. This committee agrees with the Senate committee's observation that smuggled tobacco undermines the government's ongoing efforts to reduce the harm from smoking in Australia. The Senate committee noted that submissions to its inquiry from both the tobacco industry and anti-smoking organisations were supportive of the bill and recommended that the bill be passed.

Given that the Senate committee has inquired into the bill in consultation with the public and interested stakeholders, this committee does not wish to duplicate this work and considers that there is little value to add by conducting another inquiry into the same bill. As expressed previously, the committee considers it an inefficient use of committee and Department of the House of Representatives resources to conduct concurrent inquiries into identical bills.

COMMITTEES
Public Works Committee
Report

Ms SAFFIN (Page) (12:03): On behalf of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, I present the committee's fourth report of 2012 and referrals made in 2012 relating to the proposed integrated fit-out of new leased premises for the Australian Taxation Office at the site known as 913 Whitehorse Road, Box Hill, Victoria; the development and construction of housing for Defence members and their families at Lindfield, New South Wales; and the development and construction of housing for Defence members and their families at Weston Creek, ACT.

In accordance with standing order 39(f) the report was made a parliamentary paper.

Ms SAFFIN: by leave—This report deals with three inquiries with a total estimated cost of $277 million. In each case, the committee recommends that the House of Representatives agree to the works proceeding.

The first inquiry examined the Australian Taxation Office's proposal for the integrated fit-out of new leased premises at the site known as 913 Whitehorse Road, Box Hill, Victoria. The key objective of the project is to provide an office fit-out that meets at least a 4.5-star rating in the National Australian Built Environmental Ratings Scheme, or NABERS, and other Commonwealth lease requirements for the 1,292 ATO staff located in Box Hill. The office accommodation will be located in a proposed building that has been designed to meet a five-star NABERS energy rating and a five-star Green Building Council of Australia rating.

The ATO has liaised with the developers of this proposed building to incorporate the agency's requirements into the building's...
design. The building will provide 19,100 square metres of office accommodation and high-quality facilities for the ATO. It is close to the existing ATO Box Hill building, which cannot be upgraded to meet the agency's needs. This proposal allows the ATO to update its office accommodation while retaining a presence in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. They were two of the questions that the committee inquired into when it had the public inquiry there. The committee is satisfied that the ATO office has fully considered all feasible options for the ongoing provision of office accommodation in Box Hill and that the selected option is a practical, long-term solution that represents value for money for the Commonwealth.

I move to speak to the second inquiry of this report. Defence Housing Australia seeks approval for the proposed development and construction of housing for Defence members and their families at Lindfield, New South Wales.

The key objective of the project is to assist in reducing the proportion of Defence families residing in private rental accommodation in Sydney to below the target of 15 per cent. The current proportion of families in private rental accommodation in Sydney is 35.9 per cent.

Defence Housing Australia plans to develop road and civil infrastructure on a site of approximately 13.8 hectares, adjacent to the Lane Cove National Park. Defence Housing Australia then intends to construct 345 dwellings for an integrated residential community for Defence and other families, with 173 houses for Defence use.

One of the key issues for this project was the single access road to the development site. The committee was concerned that this road could become obstructed during a bushfire, preventing evacuation from the site. It is an area surrounded by a national park but in suburban Sydney. However, the committee was assured by Defence Housing Australia that they are developing and building on the Lindfield site within the relevant regulations. Evidence was also given to the committee that the site has been approved by the Rural Fire Service.

The third inquiry in this report examined another Defence Housing Australia project, the proposed development and construction of housing for Defence members and their families at Weston Creek, here in the ACT. The member for Mallee was acting chair for this inquiry and I thank him for doing that.

The key objective of the project is to maintain the proportion of Defence families residing in private rental accommodation in the ACT under the target of 15 per cent. The current proportion of families in private rental accommodation in the ACT is 13 per cent.

Defence Housing Australia plans to develop road and civil infrastructure for 73 single dwelling lots and three multi-unit sites on a site of approximately 8.3 hectares. Defence Housing Australia then intends to construct 50 dwellings for Defence use.

One of the key issues for this project was community consultation. The committee received correspondence from several stakeholders who raised concerns with Defence Housing Australia's consultation on this project.

The committee has subsequently recommended that Defence Housing Australia 'engage in widespread, active and ongoing consultation with all relevant stakeholders that are likely to be directly or indirectly impacted by any proposed development, irrespective of the stage of the town planning process'.

The committee suggests that Defence Housing Australia closely monitor feedback
in current and future consultation processes and respond immediately to any concerns raised by local stakeholders. We all know that you cannot always satisfy everything that is raised by community members, but there has to be an immediate and engaged response to them.

The committee notes that, in other projects, Defence Housing Australia has demonstrated effective stakeholder consultation and encourages it to use the lessons learnt from this project to develop clear and comprehensive consultation strategies for all future projects.

In closing, I want to thank the members of the committee for their very active participation and also my deputy, the honourable member for Mallee. I also thank the secretariat that services the Public Works Committee, and there are two of them sitting here: Anthony Overs and Fiona Gardner. But I thank the whole secretariat for their very good work and the service they provide to the committee in turning these reports around in a timely fashion, because we have a very busy program and it can be difficult to get through all the work. I commend the report to the House.

BILLS

Maritime Powers Bill 2012
Maritime Powers (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2012
Second Reading
Cognate debate.
Debate resumed on the motion:
That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (12:12): We are debating the Maritime Powers Bill 2012 about consolidating maritime powers at a time when the front-line men and women of Australian Customs and Border Protection Command and their naval colleagues are operating at absolute breaking point. Both the personnel and the boats in which they operate, because of the government's failure to secure our borders, are operating beyond reasonable demands. I would hope that the House would bear in mind our responsibilities to these men and women in particular and make sure that this bill does not create any further hardships for them. I want to go to an issue that may be within this bill later on in my speech.

What we do know is that we had a system of robust border protection instituted well over a decade ago by the previous government. That system has been completely degraded since the government changed in 2007 and the consequences for the men and women who protect our borders have been enormous. They have been forced to operate at a completely unsustainable operational tempo. If you go and speak to those officers, their frustration about the circumstances in which they have been placed by this government is obvious for everyone to see.

We are debating this bill at a time when the climate for people smugglers has been far too friendly. Clearly this is an issue that the parliament has been debating. We debated it last week and the government took a step in the right direction by finally relenting in its opposition to offshore processing on Manus and Nauru. But our great concern in the opposition—and we would like to see these measures work but we are concerned that they will not—is that the measure that was taken last week just does not go far enough. It only adopts one plank of the three planks of the opposition's policy, which we believe very firmly needs to be implemented if we are going to bring the curtain down on a very shameful period in Australia's border protection policy. Over 22½ thousand people have arrived illegally with all the enormous
consequences for us as a nation that flow on from that fact.

Events occurred last week—that is, the use of two merchant vessels to pick up asylum seekers who had made a distress call—and the issues that arose as a result of these events need to be aired in this debate. The distress call was taken by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority, and merchant vessels went to the aid of those people. In the case of the MV *Parsifal*, what happened then is deeply disturbing. This merchant ship rescued a boatload of asylum seekers; apparently they were 44 nautical miles from Indonesia. The minister then informed the public on Sky News that after this boat went to the aid of these people—as is required under the *International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea*, and to the credit of the crew of the boat—the captain of the vessel, which was on its way to Singapore, fulfilled his obligations. At the request of the Australian authorities he picked up the people who had called for distress, and under any circumstances he was perfectly entitled—and should have been able—to continue to his destination once he had fulfilled his obligations to rescue people and take the people he picked up to the nearest place of safety, which is generally understood to be the nearest port. The captain, as was his right, determined that he was going to continue on his voyage to Singapore. The minister informed us on Sky News that the boatload of asylum seekers then threatened violence and became very aggressive and insisted that the boat turn around and deliver them to Christmas Island. The captain decided that the risk to his crew was too great and acquiesced to the request of those asylum seekers to come to Australia.

This is completely and utterly unacceptable. You wonder why the government was prepared to acquiesce. A merchant vessel went and fulfilled its duty to pick people up when they were in apparent distress and the people, who you would think would be grateful for being rescued by a merchant vessel, then turned on the captain and the officers of the merchant vessel and insisted they come to Australia. This situation is completely and utterly out of control. It is exactly the definition of piracy—using violence to take a ship off the course on which it is supposed to be going. It is not acceptable that potential acts of piracy go unpunished by the Australian government, and it is not acceptable that merchant vessels that go to the aid of people in distress have to fear for their own safety from the people they have picked up and who then find themselves in this apparently life-threatening situation.

The problem is that the Labor government never thinks through the consequences of its actions. This boat was well within the Indonesian search-and-rescue zone and very close to Indonesia itself, yet the government was prepared to acquiesce to the asylum seekers' desire to come to Australia. You wonder how far this policy would go. What are the territorial limits of the Australian government's acceptance of people's desire to come to Australia? What if they had been north of Indonesia? Would they have been allowed to say 'we are going to come to Australia', and the Australian government is going to do nothing about it? What if it was a vessel that had left Sri Lanka and was off the coast of India and was picked up by a passing merchant vessel and they insisted that they come to Australia? Would they be allowed to come to Australia in such circumstances? Clearly the government does not think through the sorts of decisions that it makes.

Mr Jenkins: Read the first part of your speech and compare it to *Tampa*.
Mr KEENAN: There are interjections from the Minister for Scullin, and I am very happy to compare it to that situation.

Mr Jenkins interjecting—

Mr Randall: He should know better; he should know better than that.

Mr KEENAN: Yes, he should know better, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am very happy to make the comparison to the incident that the government compares this to, which of course happened when the *Tampa* situation occurred. The current situation is a very relevant precedent for this parliament to look at, because what has happened here follows a reverse-*Tampa* principle. We cannot accept a situation where—

Mr Jenkins interjecting—

Mr Randall interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs D'Ath): Order! Can the member for Scullin and the member for Canning allow the member to be heard in silence? I am asking both members to allow the member for Stirling the right to be heard.

Mr KEENAN: Thank you for your protection, Madam Deputy Speaker. I think that those interjections are just a great example of the sort of hypocrisy we see from the Labor Party on this issue. They have to think through the consequences of what happened last week. A merchant vessel goes the aid of people in distress. The merchant vessel determines that it is going to continue a journey to Singapore. Yet, because of the threats and intimidation that the minister announced on Sky News last week, the vessel was diverted from its course. What are the consequences? Clearly it is going to be a consideration for merchant vessels when they are asked to go to pick up people who have made a distress call and said that their safety is in peril. If merchant vessels are going to be diverted from their course and then pick people up and be hijacked in this way, my concern is that when vessels receive a distress signal they are going to think twice about their response. It also could lead to a situation where merchant vessels avoid this area between Indonesia and Australia. There were two incidents last week where merchant vessels were diverted to pick up people who were apparently in distress, and what happened last week could lead to a situation where merchant vessels start to avoid the area between Indonesia and Australia. Clearly that is not a good outcome for Australia and is not a good outcome for people who might find themselves in distress when taking the same journey.

I will go through what the obligations of a merchant vessel are in such circumstances, because I think it is important that the parliament understand them. The report of the government's own expert panel, which was released last Monday, dealt with this. The panel noted that the safety of life at sea convention says:

On receiving information that persons are in distress at sea, the master of a ship, which is in a position to provide assistance, must proceed with all speed to their assistance.

This obligation applies regardless of the nationality or status of such persons or the circumstances in which they are found.

Where assistance has been provided to persons in distress in a state’s [search-and-rescue zone]—

All of these rescues have, of course, occurred within the Indonesian search-and-rescue zone—

that state has primary responsibility to ensure that coordination and cooperation occurs between governments, so that survivors are disembarked from the assisting ship and delivered to a place of safety.

As a matter of practice ‘a place of safety’ could be the nearest convenient port. This will not necessarily be a port in the territory of the state in
whose [search-and-rescue zone] an incident occurs, nor in the territory of the state of the vessel rendering assistance.

The captain of the MV Parsifal responded to the broadcast issued by the Australian authorities and he appropriately followed all of his obligations under the Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea. He is allowed to continue on his journey once he has fulfilled those obligations. The captain determined that the nearest convenient port was Singapore, yet, as I outlined, he was not allowed to continue on that journey, under threats of violence and intimidation from the people he had rescued.

This incident does need to be investigated by the Australian government. Sadly, when the minister announced this on Sky News, apparently the government had taken no steps to investigate these circumstances. They had just acquiesced to the fact that this ship had been diverted from its course because of these threats of intimidation. They need to do much better than that. I understand that, belatedly, they are investigating the circumstances that this vessel found itself in.

The government also need to work out what their policy is. What are the territorial limits of this policy? Is it possible for anyone who has been rescued by a merchant vessel to insist that they come to Australia regardless of where they are rescued? The government really do need to show some resolve in dealing with people smugglers and they need to put an end to a situation where other people are dictating our border protection and immigration policies.

I want to turn to some of the specific aspects of the Maritime Powers Bill, which establishes authorisations under which a maritime officer may exercise enforcement powers in relation to vessels, installations, aircraft, protected land areas and isolated persons on certain grounds. It also provides for the enforcement powers available to maritime officers, including boarding, obtaining information, searching, detaining, seizing and retaining things, and moving and detaining persons, and it creates offences for failure to comply. The bill seeks to consolidate the powers and functions that currently exist within the existing legal framework, chiefly under the Customs Act 1901, the Migration Act 1958, the Fisheries Management Act 1991 and the Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984.

The unique aspects of the maritime environment merit a tailored approach to maritime powers, helping to ensure flexibility in their exercise and to assist maritime officers to deal with quickly changing circumstances and difficult and dangerous situations. It would appear that the powers contained within the bill are primarily based on powers currently available to operational agencies. However, as with most pieces of legislation originating from this government, it does not hurt for this parliament to be additionally prudent and thorough to ensure we are not passing legislation that has been hurriedly put together and has errors or unintended consequences.

With that in mind, the bill has been referred to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee, which I understand is due to bring down its report today. The opposition will be keen to scrutinise what it has to say, particularly in relation to an issue I would like to raise in a minute. The Australian Crime Commission made a submission to that committee, and I think it is worth while to look at what they say:

Australia's long and vulnerable coastline provides opportunity for illicit goods to be trafficked into and out of the country via small vessels and light aircraft. As such, the aviation and maritime sectors are highly desirable environments for
serious and organised criminal infiltration and exploitation.

Despite clear evidence that our maritime and aviation sectors are being exploited by organised crime, this Labor government continues to slash and burn the budget of Customs and Border Protection. It has savaged the budget of the Australian Crime Commission and it has attacked the budget of the Australian Federal Police.

Recently, in their submission to the parliamentary inquiry into the gathering and use of criminal intelligence, the Crime Commission highlighted the damage Labor’s budget cuts have done to their ability to fight crime. Since Labor took office they have slashed $22.2 million in funding and have cut 144 staff from the Australian Crime Commission, clearly hindering their ability to do their job effectively. This point was highlighted by the agency in their submission to the inquiry:
The ACC has, for a number of successive years, been subject to very significant cost reduction strategies, particularly in the context of the agency’s supplier budget. These reductions adversely affect the ACC’s ability to respond to serious and organised crime.

These kinds of cuts also have a very negative effect on the ability of our premier law enforcement agencies to do the job that we expect of them. In particular, the ACC needs to look at organised crime. When you attack their budget and personnel, you are clearly providing opportunities for organised crime to flourish. When the minister talks about his determination to do something about crime in Australia, unfortunately his words are completely and utterly empty, because since this government has come into office it has given every encouragement to criminals to pursue their evil deeds. Sadly, the cuts that I outlined to the ACC have been particularly bad, but they are not the only crime-fighting agency that has been affected by savage Labor cuts. The ACC made this point to the inquiry:

Organised crime groups primarily exploit vulnerabilities in the maritime sector for the purposes of organised theft, the avoidance of duty on illicit goods, and as the primary gateway into Australia for illicit drug importation.

The ACC have highlighted the damaging effect of Labor’s cuts; they have also highlighted the sorts of vulnerabilities that criminals, particularly organised criminals, seek to exploit.

The agency that we expect will deal with criminal infiltration on our borders is Customs and Border Protection and, sadly, it is an agency that again has been savaged by the Labor Party since they came to office. Initially the Labor Party ripped $51.8 million out of its budget to inspect cargo when it comes into Australia. When the government changed in 2007, 60 per cent of air consignments coming into the country were inspected. The number of consignments is now 75 per cent down, in terms of inspection, on what it was in those times. Sea cargo inspections are down 25 per cent because of these savage cuts. This is occurring at a time when the volume of cargo coming into Australia is increasing. What we also know from inquiries that this parliament has conducted is that airports and ports are very vulnerable to criminal exploitation. There is lots of evidence that organised criminals are exploiting the difficulties that Customs and Border Protection are having because of the Labor Party’s savage cuts. We will reverse those cuts. We do not think it is a good idea when organised criminals are clearly infiltrating our ports and our airports—and when parliamentary committees and law enforcement agencies have acknowledged that—and in fact it is a stupid thing to cut funding to the agency that is responsible for policing our ports and airports. We will
reverse those cuts when we come into office, if we get the chance to govern again.

Earlier in my speech I highlighted that I wanted to raise a particular issue on which we have concerns with this bill and I hope it is one that the Senate committee has had a long look at in its report. It has come to our attention that there is a potential issue in the bill that may cause problems with the interception of illegal boat arrivals, including those not in our waters. This may have implications for maritime authorities fulfilling their obligations under the international Law of the Sea. The bill's explanatory memorandum gives details of this obligation, and I believe it is worth quoting in full.

Australia has implied non-refoulement obligations under Articles 6 and 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and under the Second Optional Protocol to the Covenant.

This comprises the obligation not to remove a person to a country where there is a real risk that the person would face the death penalty, arbitrary deprivation of life, torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Such a risk must be a necessary and foreseeable consequence of the person's removal.

Proposed section 72 of the Bill may engage Australia's non-refoulement obligations. Section 72(4) of the Bill provides that a maritime officer may detain a person and take the person, or cause the person to be taken to a place in or outside the migration zone, including a place outside Australia.

The EM then goes on to say:

In circumstances where the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and or the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant apply, obligations of non-refoulement may be engaged and a person may be eligible to apply for a protection visa under section 36(2)(aa) of the Migration Act 1958 (Cth).

In such circumstances, in order to ensure that a maritime officer who has detained a person aboard a vessel acts in accordance with Australia's non-refoulement obligations, procedures relating to the consideration of refoulement risks would need to be in place.

We in the opposition are concerned that this section of the bill could potentially place a considerable burden on our maritime officers who are already finding the circumstances in which they operate incredibly challenging, and I hope that it has been thoroughly investigated by the Senate committee before it hands down its report. We will look very closely at what they have to say about it. Given what I have outlined earlier in my speech about events last week in relation to merchant vessels picking up people who have made distress calls, it is vitally important that this section is clarified to ensure our border protection officers are able to do their tasks effectively and without concern that they are being legally hampered by sections of this bill.

We in the opposition will always side with our maritime officers and the very difficult job they are tasked to do in protecting our borders. They are operating at a tempo that has never occurred in our country's history. They are operating on vessels that are not keeping up with the pace they are required to operate at. We have had reports of vessels going out to sea when they should not—they are required to do that through the sheer volume of illegal arrivals unleashed by Labor's border protection failures. The officers on these boats perform arduous tasks at sea and they are being asked to perform duties that are generally outside their normal remit and are being pushed to breaking point by these failed policies. We strongly support the work that they do and we believe this parliament should do everything we can to help them. We certainly should not be doing anything extra to hinder them. I am
concerned that there may be parts of this bill that do do that.

The government needs to take a strong stance backing up our maritime officers, particularly if they are going to face circumstances where they are threatened at sea or intimidated at sea. Clearly as we take on people smugglers—and they are vicious criminals who care nothing about the human cargo they transport—it is completely naive for us to think that they are simply going to give up and go home without testing the resolve of the Australian government. We need to ensure that there is a legal framework that protects our officers who will be called upon to deal with those consequences, because they do deal with very difficult situations. The opposition will always back up their right to do their work in the most effective and safest way that they can. Pending the report of the Senate committee, the opposition is not going to oppose passage of this bill through the parliament, but we will be very interested in what the Senate committee reports.

We will certainly ensure that there is nothing within this bill that is going to hinder the work of the very brave men and women who are protecting our borders. Although we will not oppose this bill, we will not agree to its passage through the parliament until those issues have been fully investigated by the committee.

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (12:37): In contrast to the previous speaker, I am going to speak on the bills. I assume that as he did not have much to say about the Maritime Powers Bill 2012 or the Maritime Powers (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2012, apart from a bit on section 72, he essentially supports the rest of the legislation. Given the propensity of the opposition to find criticism anywhere they can, I assume that if they had problems with the bills they would have said so. I am going to spend a little bit of time actually talking about the legislation itself, because it is very important legislation.

The Maritime Powers Bill 2012 consolidates and harmonises the Commonwealth's existing maritime enforcement regime, which is presently spread across numerous pieces of legislation. In fact, it is spread across 35 pieces of legislation. So when the member for Stirling talks about providing certainty for our officers in the carrying out of their duty, amalgamating all those different places they have to go—35 different places—into one piece of legislation is incredibly important. The bill provides a single framework for use by our on-water enforcement agencies, such as Customs and the Navy, and will be used to enforce a diverse range of Australia's maritime laws, including in relation to fishing, customs, migration, environment and quarantine, as well as international agreements and decisions in particular circumstances. It will provide clarity for on-water enforcement agencies in relation to the powers that they are acting under and the procedures that they are to follow. The Maritime Powers (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2012 is really a technical bill. It just repeals the duplicate provisions in other acts.

This is an important piece of legislation that consolidates and harmonises the existing maritime enforcement regime. It provides a single framework, as I said, and will apply to a range of Australia's maritime laws, including illegal fishing, customs and migration.

I will respond in part to some of the things that the member for Stirling said, in particular his use of the word 'illegal' when referring to boat arrivals. There will be many people in the community and, I note, some journalists in the last few days who have...
been pulling up members of the opposition for using the word illegal when talking about boat arrivals. The member for Stirling said there had been some 20,000 illegal arrivals. They are of course not illegal; both sides use the word irregular from time to time, but the arrivals are not illegal. The main concern I have with the word illegal being used is that it gives an impression of some sort of incredibly bad behaviour by a person who seeks to come here by boat. I would like to put on the record that there are many people in our community, and I am one of them, who understand the position they face—having crossed the border into Pakistan along with 1.8 million refugees and thinking they would be there with their family for decades—when offered an opportunity to get on a boat. I might, like many people in this House, I think, find myself saying yes to that opportunity.

These people are not doing something that is wrong. They have fled persecution. They are doing the best they can for their family and are trying to find a path to safety in whatever way they can. The issue for me is not whether they are doing the right thing or not. Thank heavens, most of us have never been in those circumstances, and we have to respect people for doing what they can for their families. The issue for me is that when 20,000 people try to get to Australia by boat a large number of them drown—an estimated one in 20 will drown on the way. Whether people are drowning while trying to get to Australia or, as they do on their way to Europe, suffocating in the bottom of containers or crossing snowy mountains through Asia—whatever the reason for their deaths on the way—we as a nation have an obligation to try to find a way to stop those deaths. So my concern with the boat arrivals is not with the behaviour of the people concerned. As I said, I might just be one of them myself if I were in those circumstances, and I am sure that some of the members opposite would be as well. I know people in Australia who have come by boat and who have made the most fabulous citizens and who have worked incredibly hard. Again, we need to be very careful about placing value judgments on the behaviour of people who are doing the best they can under appalling circumstances. It is good to see the opposition accept a level of compromise in the last week when it supported the amendments that went through the House. We on this side offered to reopen Nauru and Manus Island quite some time ago, but it is good to see the opposition willing to compromise, at least a little bit, in its recent support of that proposal.

I also want to talk about the comments the member for Stirling made about the behaviour, as he put it, of asylum seekers on the ocean. The report of the expert panel made it really clear that circumstances have changed substantially since towbacks were last used. I think the member for Stirling came into the parliament at the same time as I did, in 2004, so he was not a member of parliament during the mass arrivals at the turn of the decade, but he has certainly been in parliament long enough to hear much of the debate. The circumstances have changed in the last decade since the limited number of turnbacks happened over a decade ago. I think there were only about seven: the first couple worked and then the people on the boats worked out very quickly that they could scuttle the boat. Even a decade ago, the use of that policy lasted a few days at best before people started to risk their lives and those of our Navy personnel in desperate attempts to get to Australia. The legal context also has changed. The attitudes of many regional governments have evolved, raising the potential cost in terms of bilateral cooperation generally and coordination on people-smuggling activities in particular.
The pre-emptive tactics of people smugglers have adapted quite substantially.

Irregular vessels—not 'illegal' vessels—carrying asylum seekers can often be quickly disabled or rendered unsafe to foil any attempted turnbacks and to create a safety-of-life-at-sea situation. This introduces potential dangers for asylum seekers—and we have seen some of the dreadful outcomes—and for Australian personnel, and the effect in the turnbacks is significantly diminished.

The expert panel was also of the strong view that there are a range of conditions that need to be fulfilled for the safe and lawful turnback of boats carrying asylum seekers, and they were quite clear on this. They do not believe that those conditions currently exist at all. They made it perfectly clear that towbacks could not be attempted without the agreement of Indonesia, and that agreement does not exist. The report finds that the conditions required for effective, lawful and safe turnbacks of irregular vessels heading for Australia with asylum seekers on board are not currently met in regard to Indonesia.

A number of people have made comments on this. The Indonesian foreign minister said on 15 March 2012:

From that kind of mindset, and naturally, it would be impossible and not advisable even to simply shift the nature of the challenge from one end of the continuum to the other.

He also said:

... simply pushing boats back to where they came from would be a backward step.

And:

The general concept of pushing boats back and forth would be an aberration to the general consensus that has been established since 2003.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees said in February 2012:

We have clearly opposed pushbacks in the Italian case in the Mediterranean in the recent past before the Libyan crisis, and we think that that is clearly a violation in relation to the '51 Convention.

Remember too that, whether or not one believes that one can do it in relation to the country one is pushing the boats back to, we had the situation even a decade ago with the turning back of half a dozen boats where the people involved in smuggling had already worked out that scuttling a boat and putting the lives of asylum seekers and Australia’s Navy at risk was the way to go. We knew we would no doubt see more of that. The member for Stirling has already talked about attempts in recent weeks to scuttle boats—or, at least, suspected attempts to scuttle boats. That is clearly now part of the arsenal of people smugglers.

This issue unfortunately still remains mired in a lot of political rhetoric. We have heard a little bit of it again today. That is a great shame. It really is a great shame. I think people will look back at the decade since the *Tampa* and the level of rhetoric around some very desperate people with some shame. I hope the time when we look back on this decade with shame comes very quickly. It is certainly time for the rhetoric to stop.

We have an incredibly important refugee program. We currently take around 14,000 people. We are one of the few countries in the world that take people from camps. Only the United States and Canada currently take more than we do from third countries. After us, most of the other nine or so countries that do take people from camps from third countries take anywhere between a few hundred and about 1,200. So the big chance for resettlement from a third country if you are in a camp is in the US, Canada and Australia.

Every time a person arrives by boat, a person who might get to Australia through another path does not. I know there are
some, I guess because a person on a boat
asks us for help in a different way, who
prioritise that request for help over other
forms of request for help. I do not. I believe
the bottom line is that the role for Australia
is to take as many refugees as we can, as
effectively as we can and I believe the way
for us to do that is to do it through the
UNHCR process, through regional
processing frameworks and from third
countries. I suspect that those on the other
side also agree with that.

I suspect that we also have common
ground in that we, over time, would like to
see the number of asylum seekers that we
accept increased. There may be a debate
about what the time frame might be. We on
this side are accepting the recommendations
of the expert panel that we go to 20,000
straight away and 27,000 within five years.
But, again, whether we have agreement on
when, I have no doubt that there are many on
the other side of this House who believe that
a refugee program is incredibly important
and that we as a fairly wealthy and generous
nation relative to so many of our neighbours
could play a much, much stronger role in
working with the UNHCR to take a greater
number from third countries. So we do
actually have quite a considerable area of
common ground.

This is an intractable problem. The world
refugee problem has no answer; it certainly
does not have an answer that Australia can
come up with today. If we took 49.5 million
asylum seekers today, there would still be a
hell of a lot waiting for safety. So it is not a
problem we can solve. We can only play our
part. I would urge the member for Stirling in
future and the speakers
—

Ms OWENS: Oh, I have been told! If I
am judging you incorrectly, I apologise. But
I would urge people on both sides of this
House to enter into a very constructive
debate about what is an intractable problem,
to cease even by inference making any
allegations of improper behaviour against
people who are doing the best they can to
find safety for their families and to look at
Australia's role in a larger context and find a
way through for us to play the role that we
can in providing a safe haven for people
from third countries, working with our
neighbours to improve the safety of those
that are in transit countries. Again, I know
we agree on this. I would hope that our
rhetoric can settle somewhat and we can
have a much more constructive debate.

I will just return very quickly to the bill,
which I did speak on initially, so I have
actually done better than the previous
speaker. Thirty-five pieces of legislation
covering the activities of our law
enforcement officers on the sea is a little bit
silly, to say the least. This bill has been a
long time coming. There has been extensive
consultation. I commend it to the House.

Mr MORRISON (Cook) (12:52): I rise
to speak on the Maritime Powers Bill and
Maritime Powers (Consequential
Amendments) Bill. The purpose of these
bills is to set out a common framework to
consolidate the powers of our
Commonwealth maritime enforcement
agencies and their staff. There are a number
of key agencies who work in this space and
their operational parameters have historically
been set out across a range of different bills
that govern and determine their specific
powers and responsibilities. These different
powers are contained in over 35 separate
Commonwealth acts, including four key
pieces of legislation: the Migration Act, the
Customs Act, the Fisheries Management Act
and the Torres Strait Fisheries Act.
The government has said the purpose of these bills before the House today is to attempt to consolidate those powers and draw them all together into one document, one single maritime enforcement law. Yet the rhetoric in these bills about best supporting our front-line officers is, I believe, fundamentally undermined by Labor's actions in recent times, and over the last four years in particular, which speak far louder than the words that are written in these bills. In particular I will note and return to the government's failure just in the course of the past week in how they dealt with the MV Parsifal, which my colleague made reference to. Also, we have a situation where the government is effectively not protecting our borders or enforcing our legal rights on our borders. Instead, it has been operating a water taxi service for some time.

The coalition has demonstrated its conviction and belief in secure border protection policies that this government can only hint at. This is a government that lacks the will to deal with this issue, despite the bills before us today and even despite the bills before us last week. The simple fact is they were dragged kicking and screaming to the measures they agreed to last week. If they do not believe in these matters, and over a decade they said they did not, then I do not think Australians can have a high level of trust in their ability to act on these matters in the future.

In principle, I have serious concerns about unnecessarily rewriting legislation that appears on the face of it to be working. I am also very aware of the dangers of inadvertently creating fresh loopholes that would potentially prevent or inhibit our agencies in their ability to protect Australia's border security. I understand that as part of the process of drafting this legislation Customs, the Department of Defence and the Australian Crime Commission have each been consulted. I understand also that the Acting Chief of Navy, Rear Admiral Jones, said on behalf of the Department of Defence and noted in his submission to the committee:

The Department strongly supports the above Bills which will simplify on water maritime enforcement operations and streamline training and doctrine development within Defence (Navy). In our view there will also be less likelihood of a misapplication of power with more coherent and comprehensive legislation. In addition, any future amendments will be far less complex as there will be only one Department responsible for the legislation.

The Australian Fisheries Management Authority stated:

We are satisfied that the proposed changes are not going to cause operational disruption nor curtail the Authority's powers or ability to perform, in cooperation with other agencies … I note, however, that within my own shadow portfolio the department of immigration has not yet made a submission to this process. I am puzzled as to why, given their responsibilities under the Migration Act and the significant implications of this bill for matters that relate to them. I would hope that we get some comment or some input from them on these issues.

The Australian Crime Commission said in their submission that they will 'continue to have access to maritime powers as outlined in the powers bill' and that there was no change to the Australian Crime Commission's access to these powers. The Australian Customs and Border Protection Service stated:

As Australia's primary civil maritime law enforcement agency, Customs and Border Protection has been heavily involved in the development of both these Bills. I hope they are right. It is for the government to guarantee that they are right and that these bills will not create unintended consequences.
that restrict the options available to our sovereign government to protect our borders—in particular to deter illegal entry—or otherwise impede the ability of our agencies to do their job, whether it be managing and responding to the threat of people smuggling or illegal movements of people or goods across our borders.

I make specific reference to the phrase 'illegal entry', because there still seems to be some confusion about what this means. I will refer to the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime and the Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air. Article 3 states the following:

(a) "Smuggling of migrants" shall mean the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry—the UN's word—of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident;

(b) "Illegal entry" shall mean crossing borders without complying with the necessary requirements for legal entry into the receiving State …

Article 31 of the Refugee convention also makes specific reference to 'illegal entry', the UN's term to describe the nature of a person's arrival in a country, regardless of whether they at some time might make an asylum claim or indeed prove to be a refugee.

It is not illegal to make a claim for asylum. The coalition has never said that. That is not in dispute. It never has been. But, if you cross our borders without complying with the necessary requirements for legal entry into the receiving state, that is an illegal entry and we will refer to it as such. We will not be intimidated by those who would seek to have us do otherwise. Your claim does not change the nature of your arrival. People arrive in this country legally and illegally. In the former case we have a greater capacity to control and decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come. This remains our policy. This is coalition policy—always has been. We believe in it and we can be trusted to act on it, unlike those who sit opposite.

The bill sets out a system of authorisations under which a maritime officer can exercise enforcement powers in relation to vessels, aircraft, installations, protected land areas and persons. The government has said these bills are not proposing new powers. Rather, the powers contained in the bills are based predominantly on powers that are currently available to and exercised by the agencies that operate in these areas. The bill does not seem on the face of it to propose changes to operational roles or responsibilities, nor does it appear to be reprioritising or reallocating funding.

Where existing powers overlap, these bills are said to remove duplication. However, we are talking about consolidating a very diverse range of laws, and further scrutiny is essential to ensure there are no unintended consequences arising from this attempt at simplification.

The legislation has been referred to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs and is also before the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee, who are due to hand down their report later this month. The coalition are not opposing these bills at present; however, we await the Senate committee report with great interest in the clarification and further details that this, hopefully, will provide.

Of particular concern to me is the language surrounding the burden of responsibility for maritime officials working in situations where Australia's non-refoulement obligations may come into play,
which was referred to by my colleague. Of particular concern to me is that these obligations are outlined in the Maritime Powers Bill explanatory memorandum. It states in relation to proposed section 72(4):

… that a maritime officer may detain a person and take the person, or cause the person to be taken to a place in or outside the migration zone, including a place outside Australia.

The explanatory memorandum goes on to say that in relation to circumstances where these obligations may be triggered:

… in order to ensure that a maritime officer who has detained a person aboard a vessel acts in accordance with Australia's non-refoulement obligations, procedures relating to the consideration of refoulement risks would need to be in place.

It is important we have a clear understanding of what these obligations presently are and that in this bill we are not seeking to add to these obligations, particularly on the high seas or in our contiguous zone.

The Guidelines on the Treatment of Persons Rescued at Sea, published by the International Maritime Organization, which also bears the logo of the UNHCR, following amendments to the SOLAS and SAR conventions, are explicit in stating:

- Any operations and procedures such as screening and status assessment of rescued persons that go beyond rendering assistance to persons in distress should not—

be allowed to hinder the provision of such assistance or unduly delay disembarkation …

of survivors from the assisting ships. The government needs to ensure this bill does not create more difficulties or seek to add or further condition the action of maritime officers as they try to do their jobs, including the interception of illegal boats both inside and out of Australia’s territorial waters.

In addition, the Houston report found that turning boats back—because this is what it predominantly relates to—‘can be operationally achieved and can constitute an effective disincentive’. I note that page 126 of that report states:

The following principles for implementing turnbacks are based on international and domestic legal considerations, as well as diplomatic and operational considerations:

- The State to which the vessel is to be returned would need to consent to such a return.

One thing those opposite fail to acknowledge is that the report notes that this consent may be provided by acquiescence. ‘Acquiescence’ is a very specific term which those opposite would be familiar with, and the drafters of the Houston report were very careful to make sure they put that term in there. This is exactly as occurred when the policies of turning back boats were implemented on the last occasion by the Howard government. It also does not make reference to the situation where an Indonesian flagged vessel re-enters or enters Indonesian waters under its own steam carrying passengers returning to Indonesia or situations of search and rescue where a boat is in distress.

The second condition was:

- Turning around a vessel outside Australia’s territorial sea or contiguous zone … or ‘steaming’ a vessel intercepted and turned around in Australia’s territorial sea or contiguous zone back through international waters could only be done under international law with the approval of the State in which the vessel is registered (the ‘flag State’).

These provisions, I note, are set out in article 8, paragraph 2 of the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air. This does not address the situation of a flagless vessel, though—which is how the majority of cases first present at sea—and provide legal basis for interception. Paragraph 7 of that same protocol states:
A State Party that has reasonable grounds to suspect that a vessel is engaged in the smuggling of migrants by sea and is without nationality or may be assimilated to a vessel without nationality may board and search the vessel. If evidence confirming the suspicion is found, that State Party shall take appropriate measures in accordance with relevant domestic and international law.

Thirdly, the Houston report states:

- A decision to turn around a vessel would need to be made in accordance with Australian domestic law and international law, including non-refoulement obligations, and consider any legal responsibility Australia or operational personnel would have for the consequences to the individuals on board any vessel that was to be turned around.

There is certainly no clear legal obligation arising from Australia's signatory status to the refugee convention under article 33 which would prevent them doing this in extraterritorial waters. The US Supreme Court held in Sale v Haitian Centers Council that the US Coast Guard's high seas interception and return of Haitian asylum seekers did not contravene article 33. This argument is strengthened by the position that non-refoulement has increasingly become an established principle of customary international law. In addition, Indonesia are a signatory to numerous other conventions that also deal with non-refoulement, including the convention against torture. They are also signatories to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The fourth criterion set out by the Houston panel is:

- Turning around a vessel would need to be conducted consistently with Australia’s obligations under the SOLAS Convention, particularly in relation to those on board the vessel, mindful also of the safety of those Australian officials or Defence Force personnel involved in any such operation.

The Guidelines on the Treatment of Persons Rescued at Sea, which I referred to earlier, state that the government responsible for the search-and-rescue region in which survivors were recovered is responsible for providing a place of safety or ensuring that such a place of safety is provided.

The safety of Defence Force personnel is managed by the chain of command, which has always been the coalition's policy. On this last point, we have the situation now where vessels in distress are being rescued by what has become a water taxi service which has every legal right to return people to the closest place of practicable safety, but it is not doing so under this government. So we have had this situation where the distress calls are now forcing a water taxi service to take asylum seekers who are forcing their claims on the Australian continent by going down that path. As my colleague mentioned prior to me, we have also had the situation now, with the Parsifal, where they are using intimidation through threats to their own safety and, potentially, later, to the crew themselves to force the hand of these vessels.

We have a clear difference in attitude here between the government and the coalition. The government has been dragged kicking and screaming to deal with these issues of enforcing our rights and our sovereignty at sea on our borders. The coalition has always believed in it. We believe we need strong laws and we also believe we need a government that is prepared to use those strong laws and use every option available to it to protect our borders. This government does not have that track record and it does not have the trust of the Australian people.

Mr JENKINS (Scullin) (13:07): Regrettably I find, as I get towards the end of my parliamentary career, that I am getting a bit skinned and I am easily provoked into debates. But on this occasion it is not the member for Cook who has provoked me. Whilst I disagree with much of what he said...
today in his 15-minute contribution, and although there were some slight digressions into emotive language—and they were slight—it is not he who has provoked me on this occasion.

The member for Stirling, in talking about the *Parsifal*, infuriated me, because the attitude of those opposite is in contrast to the attitude of the coalition when they were in government and were dealing with the sister ship of the *Parsifal*, the *Tampa*. Consistency about the application of international maritime law is much of what the member for Stirling talked about before, finally getting around to the legislation after 21 minutes. The honourable member for Cook, in talking about refoulement, was of course talking about the same sections of the principal bill, the Maritime Powers Bill 2012, that we are debating today. I do not mind if we are going to have debates around those issues. In fact, I am very pleased that in this case these pieces of legislation were, I think, brought in before the requirement for compatibility statements about human rights issues came in and that the parliament is discussing them. It might be that we have different conclusions about that issue, but it is appropriate that the parliament look at it.

Let’s go back to the start of the slippery slope on these issues. It started 11 years ago, in August 2001, when a vessel sinking in waters that I think were under Indonesian search-and-rescue responsibility put out a distress call, and a merchant ship, the MV *Tampa*, went to its aid. Having taken aboard the 400-plus asylum seekers that were on board the distressed ship, the captain of the MV *Tampa* then decided that the most appropriate place for him to take them was the closest land point, that being Christmas Island—a decision that, clearly, he could legitimately make under his understanding of the application of international maritime law. And what happened? He was refused permission to land.

Then, with a policy written on the back of a postage stamp, Nauru was finally found as a solution. We have heard over the last couple of weeks about the brilliance of the then ministers in charge—the brilliance of them discovering Nauru as the solution to a problem that they believed they had. Yet, if you go through writings about these decisions since that time, you see people like the then foreign minister, Alexander Downer, admitting that there was no great science to the fact that they picked Nauru; it just happened to come into their heads. They decided it was an island that they could take them to—out of sight, out of mind. Yet, on this legislation, in contrast to the way in which the coalition clearly admit they made these decisions without consultation, without talking about the people that they had to put them in place, at least the member for Cook had the decency to put on the record the comments of several government agencies, from Navy through to Customs, who were all part of the way in which we put in place these pieces of legislation—agreeing that their comments had been considered and that they accepted the consolidation in this law of all the regulations and law that preceded it.

But, regrettably, the member for Cook on the substantive issues goes on to say: ‘We can't be sure. Somehow the government has fiddled with it,’ or something like that. Well, I am sorry; executive government is about that. It is the ministers down there in the south wing actually working with their departments. Fortunately, on the public record, it would appear that all the agencies involved in this maritime powers legislation, coming from all the different silos of government, came together. There is no evidence that this has been only one agency imposing on others. This is a whole-of-
government approach. This is something that should be celebrated.

As a parliamentarian, I am happy for the Senate committee to have a look at it. I am happy for them to look at the things that have been raised by the two opposition frontbenchers in this debate. But do not use the fact that they are proposing that we look at these things as a criticism that the system has failed. That is the proper way that the parliament should look at proposals put by executive government. I am confident that they will stack up. Even if they do not stand up, if they are properly reacted to, that is appropriate, and it is not something such that we should come in here, mealy mouthed, deciding that we are going to score points on every issue.

If, indeed, people last week on the vessel Parsifal acted illegally in threatening the master of the vessel, then let this parliament allow the appropriate investigations to go on and the appropriate action to take place. But that does not change the fact that government, from time to time, has to make decisions about destinations in these circumstances, because—I keep going back to this—that is exactly what an Australian government did in the case of the Tampa. It just happens that the coalition, now in opposition, forget that.

The fact is that this legislation is an attempt to give certainty to all those agencies that will have to make pretty hard decisions, in real time, out in dangerous situations. It is appropriate that we look at these pieces of legislation in that manner.

When last week's debate is raised, I want those that sit opposite to think about their contributions to that debate. Their contributions fell for the mistake of a party that goes out of government at a point in time and then thinks that the world does not change from that point in time—that their policies at that point in time are then always contemporary. There is a failure to look at the situation in a contemporary manner and then to develop, modify or tweak policies so that they suit the situation five years on, in 2012.

But there was one significant contribution—it was to do with issues that are raised in these pieces of legislation on maritime powers—from a member opposite: the member for Kooyong. The member for Kooyong actually mentioned regional cooperation. That was pretty good. What was the Houston committee on about? The context—the whole package—includes regional cooperation in the processing of asylum seekers. I disagree with the member for Kooyong in his analysis that this government has not pursued regional cooperation with appropriate vigour. I think he is wrong on that point. But he was the only one that reminded the House, as I have on other occasions, that regional cooperation under the Bali process commenced with the coalition government. It was one of their better moves. But it does not suit their political narrative, because suddenly regional cooperation with countries like Indonesia, Malaysia or any of the 40-plus countries that are in the Bali process somehow would not be hairy chested enough. It would not show them as being tough. It would show them as being sensible. It would show them as understanding that this is an issue that will not go away—that this is an issue where our response has to range from dealing with the misery of those who have died at sea through to dealing with those who have proceeded in a measured way through the assessment of their claims for refuge as international asylum seekers. That is the breadth of the issues that confront us.

As I said, I was happy that the member for Cook was measured. I disagree with the emphasis that he places on the word 'illegal'.

He made a response to issues raised by the member for Parramatta in this debate. I believe that it was appropriate that the member for Parramatta raised those issues. But let’s look at the Houston report. Again—it is applicable to these pieces of legislation—they talked about IMAs, illegal maritime arrivals. We have to have a language when we are dealing with these things; it would be better if we kept it simple and understandable. So we have IMAs and we have SIEVs, suspected illegal entry vessels—I think I have that right—and that has become part of our nomenclature. Those terms can be interpreted by those that feel that they are at the compassionate, progressive end of the spectrum in the debate as being nasty, pejorative terms. Hardliners say, ‘That is really what they are,’ and make an interpretation that it is all about the ‘I’ for ‘illegal’.

But, significantly, the member for Cook agreed that the people on those vessels, even if the vessels are called SIEVs and the people are called IMAs, have every right under the international agreements that this government has entered into—I understand that the whole of the parliament agrees that we are participants in those agreements and agrees that we should participate in them to the fullest—to seek asylum. Why is it that once the people get to that point we cannot simply talk about them as ‘asylum seekers’, which, at that point in time, they are? There is not emotion in that; it is a simple statement of fact. At that time, as the member for Cook acknowledged, they have a legal right to seek asylum. It may be that down the track, when it has been decided that they are not refugees, they return to being ‘illegal’, but that is a different matter. In the debate, where there is emotion, we place great value—great weight—on these terms. And that does not help the debate in this place.

I know that I should not be so thin skinned. I know that I should not be provoked, but, if we are going to have these debates, we should talk about the couple of decades of these issues. Let us celebrate that a government is trying to bring all the agencies together so that they understand what each is doing and what is expected of them and that we are all working in the national interest. It disappoints me that from time to time the debates in this place are not conducted in the national interest.

Mr HAWKE (Mitchell) (13:22): It is a privilege to follow the member for Cook and the member for Stirling on the Maritime Powers Bill 2012 and Maritime Powers (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2012. It has been interesting listening to the debate from members opposite on these bills, on maritime powers in the context of the MV Parsifal and on what has been happening in recent weeks on the government’s border protection measures.

It almost feels as though the member for Parramatta and the member for Scullin really do have an issue to take up—an issue with their own government. The people they really hold concern for are the people running the country, and the proposals they disagree with are their own government’s proposals. If ever you wanted an example of the contortions of this government in relation to border protection and maritime powers, this issue really has revealed it here today, in this chamber.

The debate has seen the member for Parramatta lament what has happened with MV Parsifal, not the fact that some illegal activity may have occurred but that we as an opposition are pointing out that the government has met this serious situation with absolute weakness. Yes, as the member for Scullin said, I am a hardliner on border protection. I make no apologies for it. I make
no apologies for it, because it saves lives, it saves money and it produces a better result for Australians—for Australian taxpayers and for people seeking asylum in Australia today. It is better to be tough on border protection, and I am a strong advocate for it.

I have stood in this place before and said, 'It's okay to be soft and humanitarian on border protection,' as well—as the Greens have. I do not agree with the member for Melbourne, but he is principled. What I do accuse the government of is straddling both sides of the fence and achieving absolutely nothing. In fact, the member for Scullin said that you have to look at things the way they are, not the way you want them to be. You have to accept that time has moved on.

We have accepted that time has moved on. We have noted that it is not the same as 2007, when you had a highly successful, strong government with the strength of conviction and will to run a border protection system and which had clear definitions of maritime powers. What we have had since 2007 is the unravelling of border protection measure after border protection measure. It is a change in the circumstance brought about by this government, bit by bit, until we got to the point this year where we had to—and were forced to as a parliament—return to the system that produced the best results. It was not with an acknowledgement from the government of, 'Gee, we got that wrong all along; oh, my gosh, that was a terrible thing.' It was to somehow stand here, as the member for Parramatta did, and say, 'Look, I don't like the word "illegal".'

Contrast here that very emotive speech, and that the word 'illegal' is somehow unpalatable for this parliament, with the factual presentation of the member for Cook. He quoted sections of the refugee conventions referring to illegal entries, specifying what an illegal entry represents. Let us name it for what it is. If people come here illegally they should be named as coming here illegally. The government worries about the semantics and the language: 'Oh, gee, don't say that; that's a bit nasty. Oh, my gosh, you're too tough.' These are the contortions that we see inside this government that produces bad policy. Bad policy costs people's lives. Bad policy costs money. Bad policy has serious consequences.

The member for Scullin said, 'Why are we raising issues with these bills before us today?' Well, I am suspicious of the government's motives in presenting the Maritime Powers Bill 2012. I am concerned about the detail. The detail matters. The government has failed in getting the details right in so many pieces of legislation before this chamber in recent times. Each member is right to get up here and raise concerns. What concerns have we raised? The member for Cook and the member for Stirling have eloquently expressed our concerns with refoulement. We have referred the bill to the relevant Senate committee to consider it. We are suspicious about why we have a bill consolidating maritime powers appearing at the same time that we have a demonstration of weakness in relation to the MV Parsifal.

We know that the merchant ship MV Parsifal rescued a boatload of asylum seekers and was then subjected to threats of violence and intimidation from the asylum seekers it had rescued. We know that the captain had become concerned for the safety of his crew. Even though he had determined under the relevant provisions of rescues at sea that Singapore was the relevant port to take the ship to, because of the concerns—because of the dramas created by those he had rescued—he had to return to Australia.

I found the member for Stirling's points in relation to this very important. Where does
this end? Why is the government consolidating maritime powers and consequential amendments on this when we have no comprehensive way of addressing what occurred? When are boats considered to be doing the right thing or the wrong thing? When are the people on board those boats, the asylum seekers—threatening the safety of crew—considered to be doing the right thing or the wrong thing?

The member for Parramatta seemed to think, 'Don't you dare raise what people do on these boats; they have a right to do it.' I do not believe that principle can be extended to what is going on in our seas and in our border protection system. People do have a responsibility to behave humanely, especially when the ship's captain is rescuing them from distress, as he is obliged to, and I do not believe it is then right for anybody to turn around and engage in illegal behaviour. For the member for Parramatta to suggest, 'Well, they're desperate; if I were in that situation I could see myself acting in a way that would be different from the way we act here,' I do not think is a powerful or persuasive argument. In fact, I find it to be an argument for a stronger system and stronger legislation.

The opposition has a concern that this bill is being raised to make it look like the government are doing something. They see bills that they pass through this parliament as action. The Leader of the House is fond of saying that they have passed this many bills or that many bills—as if more laws are better, or the more numerous the laws the better our society is governed. But the quality of the bill, the quality of what is in it, is absolutely paramount. It is not simply the case that the more bills you pass the better it is.

Consolidating the framework for the exercise of the Commonwealth's maritime enforcement powers could be seen as a good objective. The consolidation of bills and frameworks is something that generally I support.

However, there has to be an examination of what the government is proposing here and whether anybody's obligations under the bills will change. The Customs Act 1901, the Migration Act 1958, the Fisheries Management Act 1991 and the Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984 all need to be examined in the context of what is going on. We do not want the government to make a mistake or have unintended consequences from a consolidation bill at a time when this is such a grave concern.

I have risen in this place before to express my very serious concerns with the government's management of our borders. The Maritime Powers Bill gives us another opportunity to highlight what is going on in the government's failure to protect our borders. The member for Cook made another valid point: the Department of Immigration and Citizenship has not yet made a submission to the relevant House committee or Senate committee to which the bill was referred. The Australian Crime Commission's submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee inquiry into this bill made a point of noting how difficult it is to manage Australia's long and vulnerable coastlines. I would simply add that, as a member for a Sydney electorate which has recently been subjected to an increased range of shooting crimes and gun crimes, I accept the member for Stirling's points that cuts to border protection and cuts to Customs screening of vessels have led to bad outcomes, especially for the people of Sydney who are the victims of more illegal gun crime.

It is counterintuitive for the government to be talking about maritime powers when they
have been making cuts to Customs and border protection screening on our nation's borders to the tune of $58.1 million, when greater volumes of cargo are hitting our borders every single day. When the Howard government left office, 60 per cent of air cargo consignments were being inspected, which Labor has cut by about three-quarters, meaning that there is a greater chance of illicit goods being shipped into Australia. I think this has had a real impact in the Sydney basin. Sea cargo inspections have been reduced by 25 per cent at a time when the Australian Crime Commission, in its submission, openly acknowledged that organised criminal gangs are taking advantage of the lax conditions at wharfs and exploiting weaknesses in the system.

I do not intend to go much further into this bill, other than to say that the member for Parramatta and the member for Scullin really have issues with their own government and their own government's policy. It is to that government they should turn with their concerns. If they have concerns about the word 'illegal' they should really look at the sections of the refugee conventions that the member for Cook raised to understand that people are entering Australia illegally, that the people smugglers are running an illegal operation, that removing documents or paying money to people smugglers is acting illegally and that people threatening the captain of a ship in order to turn around and move to another port are acting illegally. I make no apology for being tough on such people who are acting illegally. Of course people have the right to seek asylum in Australia and of course there are circumstances where that might happen, but we must devise a system which is strong on border protection so that people do not make a risky journey and so that we do not have the incidents at sea like the MV Parsifal. For government members to stand here in this House today and lament the situation on behalf of people who may well be acting inappropriately or illegally on these boats I think is unacceptable.

Ms King (Ballarat—Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Transport and Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing) (13:33): I thank honourable members for their contribution to the debate. The Maritime Powers Bill 2012 and the Maritime Powers (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2012 provide a simpler approach to maritime enforcement through streamlining the operational framework of our on-water enforcement agencies.

The maritime domain poses particular challenges to the effective enforcement of laws. Enforcement operations in maritime areas frequently occur in remote locations, isolated from the support normally available to land based operations and constrained by the practicalities of sea based work. Under the current legislative framework, operational agencies use powers contained in at least 35 separate Commonwealth acts. This structure is inefficient and can lead to operational difficulties for the primary on-water enforcement agencies.

The Maritime Powers Bill provides a smarter and simpler approach to maritime enforcement through a single maritime enforcement law. This single role consolidates and harmonises the Commonwealth's existing maritime enforcement regime. The powers contained in this bill are modelled on powers currently available to operational agencies. The bill establishes a system of authorisations under which a maritime officer may exercise enforcement powers in the maritime domain. In addition to providing the necessary operational flexibility, this system of authorisations includes a range of safeguards to make sure maritime enforcement powers
are authorised and exercised appropriately and for a proper purpose. The key safeguard is the requirement for the exercise of powers to be authorised on specific grounds by a senior maritime officer or a member of the Australian Federal Police. This provides clarity around who must make decisions to take enforcement action and ensures appropriate oversight in the exercise of powers. The types of authorisations available under the bill will cover a wide range of enforcement situations which arise in the maritime environment including fishing, Customs and migration matters. Enforcement powers under the bill will be exercised by officers of the Australian Defence Force, the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service, the Australian Federal Police and other persons appointed to conduct enforcement and monitoring activities in the maritime environment. The Maritime Powers (Consequential Amendments) Bill repeals maritime enforcement powers in a number of other acts where they overlap the powers in the Maritime Powers Bill.

I want to turn to some of the specific comments raised in the debate. The member for Stirling’s statements about cuts to Customs are, frankly, pretty rich coming from a party that needs to make $70 billion worth of cuts and plans to sack 12,000 public servants if it wins the next election. The shadow Treasurer said earlier this year, ‘For a start, 12,000 public servants in Canberra will be made redundant over a two-year period immediately upon us being elected.’ The shadow minister has also refused to rule out cuts to Customs. When he was quizzed about this—

Mr Robert: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order: relevance. The parliamentary secretary is wrapping up a bill on maritime issues. How that strays into comments made by a shadow minister prior to the last election is simply beyond the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott): I thank the member for Fadden. The parliamentary secretary has the call and she will be, as she would understand, relevant to the bill that she is summing up.

Ms KING: As the member for Stirling raised the issues of cuts to Customs, I am being relevant to the bill and to the debate. When quizzed, the shadow minister said it was impossible for him to give any guarantee around that, so to attack the government on cuts in this debate is fairly rich. In fact, we have spent more than $1 billion a year on Customs and Border Protection, and it is getting results. Last year we seized more heroin, cocaine and amphetamines than ever before. Earlier this month we seized half a billion dollars worth of illegal drugs—the largest seizure of ice in Australian history and the third-largest heroin seizure. That is more than we often seize in an entire year. The amount of drugs and illicit materials we seize in air cargo has more than doubled since we came to office, and that is because we are investing in intelligence. It is important. Ask any expert in the field and they will tell you that intelligence is the key to catching crooks and seizing drugs and guns. We are investing in intelligence, and we ask the opposition to do the same.

Some of the members who have spoken, particularly the member for Cook, have raised concerns about the operation of various powers under the bill. I remind those members that this bill does not enlarge or reduce any such powers. The bill, importantly, harmonises existing provisions across a range of laws to provide a smarter and simpler approach to maritime enforcement. The explanatory memorandum raises matters regarding the implementation of Australia's obligations with respect to
nonrefoulement and under a range of international legal instruments. The issues exist in relation to current legislative powers and will continue to exist in relation to the legislation as harmonised in this bill.

The member for Cook also queried whether the government has fully engaged with the relevant stakeholders. I assure the member that, over the several years during which the harmonisation process has been carefully undertaken, all relevant departments have been fully engaged. The members opposite also seem keen to use this bill to debate the question of asylum seekers and the recent expert panel report. I remind members that this bill is not directed to those matters. This bill is an important regulatory step to simplify and harmonise on-water enforcement operations.

In conclusion, the Australian government is committed to ensuring that Australia's laws are effectively monitored and enforced in the maritime domain. The unique aspects of the maritime environment merit a tailored approach to maritime powers. These bills ensure flexibility in the exercise of these powers, allowing maritime officers to deal with quickly changing circumstances in often difficult and dangerous situations. These bills will streamline and modernise Australia's legal framework for maritime enforcement and thereby support the hardworking Australians who work on our behalf to uphold Australia's maritime laws. These reforms are just one aspect of the government's work to provide Australia with a modern legal framework.

I table a revised explanatory memorandum and commend these bills to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill a second time.

Third Reading

Ms KING (Ballarat—Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Transport and Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing) (13:41): by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

Maritime Powers (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2012

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Ms KING (Ballarat—Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Transport and Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing) (13:42): by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

BUSINESS

Rearrangement

Mrs ELLIOT (Richmond—Parliamentary Secretary for Trade) (13:43):

I move:

That orders of the day Nos 4 and 5, government business, be postponed until a later hour this day.

Question agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Winnaleah Irrigation Scheme Augmentation

Mr LYONS (Bass) (13:43): I recently had the pleasure of representing the federal government at the opening of the $10 million Winnaleah Irrigation Scheme Augmentation,
the fourth in a suite of projects completed under the Australian government's $140 million commitment to support the development of modern and efficient irrigation schemes in Tasmania after 11 years of neglect by the Liberal government. The augmentation of the scheme not only will help secure a long-term sustainable future for Tasmanian irrigation communities but will lend greater certainty to investment and productivity in local communities. It will supply an increased volume of reliable irrigation water, which in turn will provide the opportunity for greater production and more jobs in the region.

The Australian government provided funding of more than $4 million for this project, which demonstrates the government's commitment to investing in efficient and ecologically sustainable irrigation in Tasmania and helping Tasmanian irrigators produce some of the best food in the world. Projects like this one are assisting Tasmania to ensure that water resources within its irrigation sector are used in a sustainable and efficient manner whilst facilitating water reform actions under the National Water Initiative. I would like to again congratulate everyone who was involved in this project, from start to finish. I look forward to seeing it boost the productive capacity of irrigators in this region.

Fisheries

Ms GAMBARO (Brisbane) (13:45): I rise to highlight the plight of the Australian seafood industry, which is set to become the latest victim of this inept Labor government and its desperation to remain in power through yet another dodgy deal with the extreme Greens. Yesterday I attended a rally in the Brisbane seaside suburb of Shorncliffe attended by more than 150 people concerned about Labor's lockout of 1.5 million square kilometres of fishing zones. We do not need to lock up our oceans to protect them, and Minister Burke would have known that if this proposal had been based on real science as opposed to political science.

This proposed lockout has been undertaken with stealth and unholy haste. The government have not undertaken a proper study or analysis of the economic impacts of the lockout on the fishing industry supply chain, and as a result they seemingly do not know that a $4.35 billion impact and a loss of 36,000 jobs will result. What is more alarming is that they just do not care. Minister Burke continues to falsely claim that the lockout will only impact on one to two per cent of the industry—but this is what you would expect from a minister who not only does not do his homework but does not want to do his homework either.

No form of fishing as currently managed in the Coral Sea has been demonstrated to be a threat to biodiversity. Not only is the management of Australia's fishing zones of world-leading standard but also it continues to improve. We can thank the coalition and the Australian seafood industry for that.

Organ Donation

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (13:47): I am incredibly proud of corporate Canberra for its recent efforts in promoting organ donor awareness. A firm in my electorate, KazarSlaven, take their social conscience seriously. Led by Henry Kazar and Michael Slaven, they have become a friend of DonateLife and take every opportunity to promote a cause that is close to my heart. Lyndell Kazar manages their community activism and organised a regional team to participate in this year's City to Surf in Sydney.

These are people who have nothing to do with organ donation—they are neither recipients nor donors. Like me, they are
touched by the many stories of people dying on waiting lists. The team was 50 strong and came from corporate Canberra and Goulburn. Their camaraderie was strong—they wore shirts with the DonateLife logo on them—and their bond was cemented on the bus trip to Sydney. They had a team dinner where one of Canberra’s organ donor advocates encouraged them not to sample the tastes of the big smoke but to get to bed early. The message was heeded.

This is the third year our regional team has participated and many personal bests were achieved; in particular, Dan del Rio completed the course in 65 minutes. Times were not the purpose, however. It was about people on the route having a conversation about organ and tissue donation. Many of the 80,000 participants noticed this team and commented on their commitment to organ donation. I thank these foot soldiers and urge others to get involved in ensuring that all Australians have had the conversation with their loved ones.

Mulholland, Gunner Jack

Mrs GRIGGS (Solomon) (13:48): It is with regret that I rise today to advise the House of passing of Gunner Jack Mulholland, who sadly passed away over the weekend aged 92. Jack was one of the last surviving Darwin defenders. Jack manned an anti-aircraft gun during the bombing of Darwin on 19 February 1942. I am pleased that the parliament at my request through a private member’s motion acknowledged the bombing of Darwin as a day of significance. I am pleased that Jack was able to participate in the commemorations earlier this year of the 70th anniversary of the bombing of Darwin.

It is astounding that it is 70 years on and only now Australians are learning about the bombing of Darwin. I am amazed at how many people are not aware of what occurred back in 1942—it certainly was never taught in schools. It is only through people like Jack that the story of the bombing of Darwin was shared. In fact, it was while Jack was sharing one of his stories that I first met him, at the Darwin Military Museum—a place very dear to him, and something else Jack fought for. From all accounts Jack was one of the key people to ensure that the Darwin Military Museum remained at its current location despite the Northern Territory government wanting to relocate the museum in town. Rest in peace, Jack—you will never be forgotten. Thank you on behalf of a grateful nation for your efforts in protecting Australia.

Robertson Electorate: Excellence in Business Awards

Ms O’NEILL (Robertson) (13:50): I rise to acknowledge and celebrate the Central Coast Business Excellence Awards 2012, which were held in my electorate, on the Central Coast of New South Wales, last Saturday night. I want to acknowledge Coast Star Motors and Central Coast Business Review as significant sponsors for this event and a number of other significant partners in our community—New South Wales Trade and Investment, Wyong Shire Council, Bendigo Bank, Print National, Display Power, SV Partners, Apex Insurance Brokers, TAFE, University of Newcastle, Complete Staff Solutions, Gosford City Council and Graphic by Design.

The talent in business acumen on the Central Coast needs to be acknowledged, and I want particularly to name some of the winners: Treehouse Creative; Baltimore Aircoil Australia; Close Financial Group; Naomi Taylor from the Mingara-Indigo Bar; Wyong Regional Chamber of Commerce; Independent Portable Buildings, who were the winners of the overall business prize; E-bis Print and Webstuff.biz; Jason van
Genderen and Treehouse Creative, who won another award; ING Direct; Bub's Customs, Trehy Ingold Neate; Independent Portable Buildings; and Lake Haven Shopping Centre. In the categories of sustainability I particularly want to acknowledge Baltimore Aircfoil Australia, whose business is growing on the back of the carbon price, which is bringing about massive change in refrigeration. *(Time expired)*

**Aged Care Reform**

Mr CHESTER *(Gippsland)* (13:51): I rise to highlight huge concerns in the aged-care sector about this government's so-called reform package. I have had the opportunity to meet with aged-care providers in my electorate, and to say they are alarmed about the future viability of their critically important services is an understatement. Aged and Community Care Victoria released a statement in June this year titled 'Gillard government slashes aged care funding', which states:

… CEO Kate Hough said the industry was shocked to learn that the high-profile budget announcement of a $50 million redirection for the next financial year resulted in a real reduction in funding of over $500 million.

Modelling by providers has consistently shown that subsidy income will be substantially reduced—a cut of between five and 10 per cent for every provider.

The statement quotes Ms Hough as saying:

As a result of this new model, residents with exactly the same care needs in the same facility could be entitled to different levels of funding.

The board of the Sale Elderly Citizens Village has written to me to express similar concerns. They said:

Someone needs to speak up for the Aged and the Facilities that provide these people with the love, care and attention they both need and deserve.

This impacts on us not only by the new charges for electricity, gas, rising insurance costs, the new EBA which is being negotiated at present, carbon tax etc but there will be such a differential between Residents that are in our facility now versus the ones that will come in after the July 1st.

I urge the minister and the Prime Minister to stop hiding behind the spin and actually start delivering better services for older Australians.

**International Development Assistance**

Ms HALL *(Shortland—Government Whip)* (13:53): I received a letter from Pastor Louise Shanks from the Lakes Baptist Church at Gorokan. They are involved in a program with TEAR Australia, where TEAR stands for transformation, empowerment, advocacy and relief. It is about contributing to aid and development. A weekend conference was recently held for 70-plus children. Pastor Shanks said she went there to educate the children but found she was educated and challenged by them.

I will share some of the messages sent to me by children who attended. One message, from Mckayla, said, 'Please can you help the poor children and families in the world.' Another one, from Stephanie, said: 'Stop and think of the poor. Please think of the very desperate in need. Enough is enough. Rag-pickers and the poor—they need your help. Yes, you can help.' There are many such inspiring letters from these young people, who have a very strong social conscience.

Ella, who is aged nine, wrote, 'Dear politician, please remember to help the poor people in need.' I call on all members of this parliament to support those young people at the Gorokan church and to join together and support the poor of the world.

**Brisbane Ekka**

Mrs PRENTICE *(Ryan)* (13:52): For 10 days every August, the country meets the city at the Brisbane Ekka. Each year, Scouts Queensland, based in Auchenflower in my electorate of Ryan, participate in the Ekka's fruit display competition. The fruit display is
one of the most popular events at the Ekka with entrants from right across the state. I recently met with Scouts Queensland, and they explained the process of putting together a winning fruit display. The display takes about four months to put together—from design concept to the final day of the Ekka. Each piece of fruit is painstakingly checked for blemishes and bruises. Last year's display used just over 1½ tonnes of fruit. Once the fruit arrives at the RNA Showgrounds, a group of 10 people spend almost two days placing the fruit on the display. At the end of the Ekka, the fruit that is not sold is donated to Foodbank Queensland for distribution through their network of charities. Judging of the fruit display took place last Thursday week, and I am pleased to announce that Scouts Queensland took out second place in this year's competition. I congratulate the scouts on their hard work and wish them well in future competitions.

I take this opportunity to congratulate Brendan Christou and all the councillors at the RNA for an outstanding show this year. In particular, I did enjoy the woodchopping event with Mr Phil Kesby and Ms Tory Shenstone as MCs, and the junior fashion competition, in which Kenmore State High School had several entrants and winners. All in all, it was a great show for all of Brisbane.

Petition: Public Holidays

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (13:56): I present to the House a petition on public holidays which has been approved by the Standing Committee on Petitions.

The petition read as follows—

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:

- Weekend and shift workers are disadvantaged whenever Christmas Day, Boxing Day or New Year's Day falls on a weekend and the public holiday substitutes (is moved) to the following Monday or Tuesday.
- When substitution occurs workers rostered to work on the actual special day falling on the weekend don't receive a public holiday whilst workers rostered to work on the substitute day do.
- This is unfair to weekend and shift workers.
- Some States have legislated for Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day to be public holidays when they fall on a weekend plus provide an additional public holiday on the following Monday, or Tuesday.
- Weekend and shift workers are also disadvantaged because Good Friday, Easter Saturday (in most states) and Easter Monday are public holidays but Easter Sunday (except in NSW) is not. (The NSW Parliament unanimously legislated for Easter Sunday to be a public holiday.)
- This is unfair to weekend and shift workers.
- Parliament should legislate a uniform standard across Australia.

We therefore ask the House to:

Amend the National Employment Standards in the Fair Work Act to include:

1. An additional public holiday (not a substitute day) on the following Monday or Tuesday whenever Christmas Day, Boxing Day or New Year's Day falls on a weekend.
2. Easter Sunday as a public holiday.

from 39 citizens

Petition received.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON: The petition is signed by 39 petitioners. The principal petitioner is Michael Donovan from the Victorian branch of the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association. It asks the House to amend the National Employment Standards in the Fair Work Act to include an additional public holiday, not a substitute day, on the following Monday or Tuesday whenever Christmas Day, Boxing Day or New Year's Day fall on a weekend.
and to include Easter Sunday as a public holiday.

The petitioners have drawn the attention of the House to the fact that weekend workers and shiftworkers are disadvantaged whenever Christmas Day, Boxing Day or New Year's Day falls on a weekend and the public holiday substitute is moved to the following Monday or Tuesday. When that substitution occurs, workers rostered to work on the actual day falling on the weekend do not receive a public holiday whilst workers rostered to work on the substitute day do. This is unfair to weekend workers and shiftworkers. Some states have legislated for Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day to be public holidays when they fall on a weekend as well as for an additional public holiday on the following Monday or Tuesday. Similarly there are difficulties relating to Easter Sunday, and the petitioner asks parliament to legislate a uniform standard across Australia.

Vietnam Veterans Day

Mr EWEN JONES (Herbert) (13:57): It was with great pride that I attended the Vietnam Veterans service on Sunday at Anzac Park in Townsville. The ranks may be thinning and they may be getting a little bit tired, but when the RSM called them to order and to line up in fours, they did so with glee. Some were not able to stand for the entire service.

It was a great service and a great time to pause and reflect on what has gone before. These men, who fought for us in Vietnam, probably all went through Townsville on their way to war. We should reflect on the way they were treated when they left—and when they came back. They still bear scars from that. But they should know that the reason we treat current ADF members and their families so well is our memory of the way we treated them—the shabby treatment they received.

I recently went to see the 2RAR—the parade to send them overseas. The then Chief of Army stood and spoke for 15 minutes. Nearly 12 minutes of that was addressed to the families of those who were to be deployed—telling them about the services that would be available and how they are included in the effort. In some way the Vietnam veterans have paved the way for that to happen and hopefully, in some part and in some measure, that makes up for the shabby treatment they received. For those guys who still bear the scars, we say, 'Lest we forget.'

Youth Services

Mr LYONS (Bass) (13:59): I recently attended Beacon events at schools in my electorate of Bass. Beacon is a not-for-profit organisation aimed at providing brighter and positive futures for our youth. The schools involved in these events in the great electorate of Bass were Brooks High School, the city campus of Kings Meadows High School, Queechy High School and Winnaleah District High School. These young adults make a commitment to further education, training or employment. I commend this program and look forward to this generation making a positive difference for themselves and their communities.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): Order! In accordance with standing order 43, the time for members' statements has concluded.

STATEMENTS ON INDULGENCE

Vietnam Veterans Day

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:00): Last Saturday, 18 August, was Vietnam Veterans Day, and this year, 50 years since Australia's war in Vietnam began, Vietnam Veterans Day is a
particularly important day. Eighteen Australians died at Long Tan, but they did not die in defeat. Long Tan stands tall in our memory, and we do not forget. Its anniversary stands for every Australian who served and suffered in Vietnam. We remember them all every 18 August. In 1969, on the third anniversary of that dreadful day, their mates remembered them: many Australians will be familiar with the moving image of bare-chested diggers erecting a cross at the battle site. After the war, the Long Tan cross was removed from the site by the Vietnamese authorities, but they kept it safe. In 1989, in a remarkable gesture of remembrance and reconciliation, the Long Dat District People's Committee erected a replica cross on the original site. This year, we are very grateful to the government of Vietnam for lending the original Long Tan cross to the Australian War Memorial. It is on display there today and, of course, it is a symbol of supreme sacrifice.

It is 50 years this year since the fateful decision to send Australian advisers to Vietnam, and it is 25 years since hundreds of thousands of Australians cheered and applauded tens of thousands of Vietnam veterans in the 1987 welcome home parade. It was one of the Hawke government's finest days.

I am proud of everything our nation has done in the 25 year since to honour our Vietnam veterans—proud of the haunting and magnificent Australian Vietnam National Memorial on Anzac Parade right here in Canberra; of the work we have done to enable our veterans to visit the battlefields and places of Vietnam where they fought for us; of the Australian contribution to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington DC which I opened last year. I am proud of everything the Vietnam generation of veterans is doing now to care for the ageing veterans who served before them, and I am so proud of what the Vietnam generation is doing for the young veterans who are coming home now. They are literally caring for their fathers and caring for their sons. Today we remember them all and thank them for it all. Lest we forget.

Honourable members: Lest we forget.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (14:03): I rise to support the words of the Prime Minister. Yes, it is 50 years now since the beginning of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War, and Saturday was the 46th anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan, the largest single engagement involving Australians, a remarkable engagement where 100 members of the Australian Army defeated at least 2,000 Vietcong and North Vietnamese regular army personnel. It was a great victory. It was obviously a tragic day, though, and it is right that we remember the service and sacrifice of all who fought in that conflict. We remember those killed and wounded in action. We also remember all of those who have suffered since as a result of their service.

It is good that the Vietnamese government has made available the original Long Tan cross. Obviously, I would urge as many Australians as possible to visit the War Memorial to view the cross as an act of homage to those who fought under our flag in that conflict.

Reference to Federation Chamber

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (14:04): by leave—I move:

That further statements by indulgence in relation to Vietnam Veterans' Day be permitted in the Federation Chamber.

Question agreed to.
MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:05): I inform the House that the Minister for Housing, Minister for Homelessness and Minister for Small Business will be absent from question time this week for personal reasons. The Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs will answer questions in relation to housing and homelessness and on behalf of the Minister for Human Services. The Assistant Treasurer will answer questions in relation to small business.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Budget

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney) (14:05): My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister guarantee a surplus of at least $1.5 billion this financial year and higher over the forward estimates, as promised in the budget just a few weeks ago?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:05): The government will bring the budget to surplus this financial year, as promised. We will update all of the budget figures in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, as is appropriate.

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney) (14:05): Madam Deputy Speaker, I ask a supplementary question. Will the Prime Minister now rule out the introduction of new taxes or levies or the increase of existing taxes and levies to pay for big new promises in education, NDIS, submarines and border protection?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:06): I am more than a little amazed to get this question of all questions from the shadow Treasurer, who has admitted—even though he denies it now—that the opposition have a $70 billion costing problem, and their only way of fixing that is to slash health, slash education, slash support to families, because that is what Liberals do.

Unlike those opposite, who always have their eyes on slashing health—the Leader of the Opposition has form—and on slashing education—he has talked today about cutting funding to public schools—instead of taking that approach, we will continue to take the responsible approach which people have seen from us to date. As we have worked our way carefully through the government's budget, we have shown the ability to invest in the new instruments of fairness that Australians want, while bringing the budget to surplus. To give just one example, we found room in the federal government's budget for a billion dollars for the National Disability Insurance Scheme launch site. I take it from the shadow Treasurer's question that the opposition is now out and proud and opposed to the NDIS. Finally, they have come out and done that. We make the hard decisions to get these things done. You sit there with figures that will not add up and secret plans to cut health and education and support for families.

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney) (14:08): Madam Deputy Speaker, I ask a further supplementary question. Will the Prime Minister now rule out the introduction of new taxes or levies or the increase of existing taxes and levies to pay for big new promises in education, NDIS, submarines and border protection?

Honourable members interjecting—

Mr Hockey: So you are going to increase taxes—yes or no?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): Order! When the House is silent the member for Cook promised better behaviour today.

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:08): Once again, I am amazed to hear
the shadow Treasurer shouting about carbon taxes, given that he is a very big supporter of putting a price on carbon, on the record—until he decided that for the purposes of appearance he had better pretend to be supporting the Leader of the Opposition. On the way in which we will fund the government's promises, let us be clear. We have a tax-to-GDP ratio which is less than the one we inherited from the other side—that is, we are a lower taxing government than the government that the shadow Treasurer was a member of, and we will continue to be a lower taxing government. As the shadow Treasurer would be well aware, I have already dealt with these questions about taxes and levies in relation to the National Disability Insurance Scheme. That is on the public record and no amount of—

Mr Pyne: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order as to direct relevance. The Prime Minister was asked whether she would guarantee ruling out any new taxes or charges to pay for her spending.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. The Prime Minister has the call.

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms GILLARD: Money for people with disabilities and for schools described as a spending spree—how offensive! The person who was advocating a tax increase for the National Disability Insurance Scheme was Liberal Premier Campbell Newman and, as is a matter of public record, I disagreed with him. As is also a matter of public record, company tax will always be higher under those opposite than under us because of their tax on companies to pay for their paid parental leave scheme. Less tax, less company tax, a prudent budget, a surplus and a better deal for people with disabilities and better Australian schools—(Time expired)

Mr Pyne: And a unicorn!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Sturt is warned!

Education

Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (14:11): Madam Deputy Speaker, I ask briefly for your indulgence. In 1968, Peter Norman made a bold stand for racial equality, which will be honoured in a motion in the House tonight. His sister Elaine, her husband, Michael, and his 91-year-old mother, Thelma, are with us in the gallery today and I want to acknowledge them being here with us.

My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister inform the House of the government's plans to improve all our nation's schools?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:11): I thank the member for Fraser for his question. Today I had the opportunity to speak to the Association of Independent Schools and I very much welcomed it. I also had the opportunity to attend in front of Parliament House to meet with public school advocates, principals from public schools and the Australian Education Union. So I have had a morning where I have had an opportunity to speak to great principals from independent schools and from public schools. I have spoken to them about the determination I share with them to improve every school in this country because we want to see a better education for every child in this country.

The government's reform agenda for Australian schools is about every child in every school. We have an opportunity now, after the work of the independent review panel on funding, to look at the question of funding for the first time in 40 years, but, as I made very clear when I spoke today to
independent school principals and to public school principals, we intend to drive a school improvement agenda because we want every child in every school to have a better education and a better opportunity in life and that is what our economy will require for the future. It is what fairness demands of us.

I was very disturbed, in fact I would say angered, by the approach that the Leader of the Opposition has taken to this very important question. He, too, went to address the Independent Schools National Education Forum, and what he told them is that public schools have too much money. Just in case anybody missed the sound bite, he repeated it twice. The Leader of the Opposition thinks public schools have too much money. And, in case anybody thinks it is one of his periodic stumbles, these were prepared and scripted remarks—that public schools have too much money.

The opposition are very fond of throwing around allegations about hit lists. Today it has been revealed that every public school in this country is on an opposition hit list and is slated for a reduction in funding. Every public school in this country is on their hit list and is due for a funding reduction. We should not be surprised when the member for Sturt says he will take one in seven teachers out of classrooms and is quite happy to see increases in class sizes.

That is the difference between both sides of politics. We will give every child and every school a better future. On the other side there is the politics of division, and cutbacks for Australian public schools, bigger class sizes and fewer teachers, and no-one over there cares.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke):** The member for Goldstein!

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**Carbon Pricing**

**Mr ABBOTT** (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (14:14): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer her to the letter I have here from Australian Country Choice. It indicates that the company is now paying a carbon charge of an extra 38 per cent for peak electricity and an extra 86 per cent for off-peak electricity. That is an extra $10,400 a week because of the introduction of the carbon tax. Why aren't businesses like this one being compensated for the Prime Minister's broken promise that, 'There will be no carbon tax under the government I lead'?

**Ms GILLARD** (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:15): In answer to the Leader of the Opposition's question, he has had a bit of a morning this morning. He has not only gone out and threatened to cut every public school in this country; he has finally come clean on electricity prices. He has said today that it is true that the carbon tax is not the only factor in the dramatic rise in power prices. It was a complete backflip compared with his statement in the run-up to parliament that everything else except carbon pricing was apparently a furphy. So the Leader of the Opposition has finally smacked into the reality that state Liberals do not agree with him, experts do not agree with him, the regulators do not agree with him and members of his own team do not agree with him. He has finally come clean that, yes, the dramatic increases in power prices are not about carbon pricing but are about other actions. So, for the small business—

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke):** The Prime Minister will resume her seat. The member for Mackellar on a point of order.

**Mrs Bronwyn Bishop:** In her wildest dreams that is not directly relevant to the
question as asked. The question was directly on the carbon tax—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Mackellar will resume her seat.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Mackellar is warned! Abuse of points of order has gone too far and will not be tolerated. The Prime Minister is answering the question. There were a range of issues canvassed in the question. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD: And of course the level of abuse is always correlated with their lack of ideas.

Honourable members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Prime Minister will be relevant to the question.

Ms GILLARD: Now the Leader of the Opposition has admitted that it is the actions of state governments and others—it is factors beyond carbon pricing—that have led to dramatic increases in power prices. To his question and to the business he talks about: presumably he will get that business on the phone and say that he, the Leader of the Opposition, now understands that that business—

Mr Robb interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Goldstein is warned!

Ms GILLARD: That business would have seen a 50 per cent increase in their power prices, and it is nothing to do with carbon pricing. Presumably he has explained that to them, now that the penny has dropped.

Presumably he would also explain to them that the impact on electricity prices is exactly as the government predicted it. That means that small businesses are in a position to pass those costs through, because they are dealing with consumers who have had the benefit of tax cuts, family payment increases and pension increases.

If the Leader of the Opposition were genuinely concerned about the circumstances of this business, instead of continuing his reckless fear campaign he would be working with the government, now that he has admitted he was wrong in the run-up to parliament and that there are other factors causing the rapid escalation in electricity prices, and would be instructing his state Liberal colleagues to do the same so that they come to December COAG ready to act on electricity prices. That is what he would do if he were interested in anything else except the reckless fear campaign.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Is the Leader of the Opposition seeking to table a document?

Mr Abbott: An 86 per cent increase in power prices entirely as a result of the carbon—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. The Leader of the Opposition needs to follow the rules given by the chair—and the Manager of Opposition Business has indicated that there is no leave to be granted.

Education

Mr CHEESEMAN (Corangamite) (14:19): My question is to the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth. It follows on from the question posed to the Prime Minister earlier. What approach will the government take and what principles will guide the government's plans to improve Australian schools?

Mr GARRETT (Kingsford Smith—Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth) (14:19): I thank the member for Corangamite for his question. Central to this government's values and
principles about education is recognising that all Australian students need to get support in the schools they are in, regardless of where they live and regardless of how much money their parents earn. A student can only live a fulfilling life if their education is good, and the country can only have a sustainable productive economy if our education is good for our students.

This is smack bang in the middle of what we as a government believe in. Because of the pace of reform you can see that commitment. We have seen more reform in education nationally than we have ever seen in our lifetime, whether it is the national curriculum, national professional standards for teachers, the MySchool website or the investment in modernised facilities in every single school. This is all about investing in the future, and it is absolutely central to this Labor government's vision for Australia.

The next step for us is to continue that journey. The findings of the Gonski panel that have been talked about are challenging for us because they show that between 2000 and 2009 our best students fell behind those in neighbouring countries. They also find that there is a persistent gap, sometimes called the equity gap, between our top and bottom student achievers. We are leaving too many young Australians behind.

We are committed to delivering a national plan for school improvement that will benefit each and every school. It will focus on teacher quality, on funding and on the needs of students in those schools. We do that on the basis of a record level of investment and the big reforms underway already.

I am asked about the principles of education funding. They are our principles. But when I look to the other side of the House all I can see is the persistent, hard-wired negativity of the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow minister—$2.8 billion worth of cuts on board. But not only that; there is no willingness at all to engage in this reform. The shadow minister dismissed the Gonski review within half an hour of its release, and then, when it comes to Gonski, I could not help but notice that there are other members on the opposition side who do not seem to have been listening to the Leader of the Opposition, and particularly his speech today.

Here we have the member for Bowman—and here is a photograph: ‘Andrew Laming gives a Gonski’. At least someone on that side of the House recognises the deficiencies in the approach of the Leader of the Opposition and the delinquency of the member for Sturt in the cavalier, negative approach that they have taken to school funding.

We understand that we need reform and investment. We are committed to national school improvement, and we will get on with this job now and in the future.

Mr CHEESEMAN (Corangamite) (14:23): I have a supplementary question. The minister has talked about improving schools across the country. What will this mean for schools and students in my electorate?

Mr GARRETT (Kingsford Smith—Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth) (14:23): I thank the member for the supplementary question. The minister has talked about improving schools across the country. What will this mean for schools and students in my electorate?

Mr GARRETT (Kingsford Smith—Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth) (14:23): I thank the member for the supplementary question. By the way, I seek leave to table this photo of Mr Laming giving a Gonski.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The minister does not need to seek leave. He can just table the document.

Mr GARRETT: In respect of the question that the member has asked me, he—like other members in this House—knows what investment this Labor government has provided to his electorate. He has got $103 million of projects that have benefited about
72 of his schools. He has got 9,000 families benefiting from the schoolkids bonus. He has in his electorate schools like Rokewood Primary School, Colac Secondary College, Trinity college and St Brendan's Primary School—all part of the national partnerships. These are the very national partnerships that the Leader of the Opposition, who was speaking after the Prime Minister this morning, actually thinks have received too much money. We should pause and think about that for a moment.

We understand the link between students' fulfilment of their capacity, and economic prosperity and education. We understand that targeted investment in the things that work and, in the case of the member for Corangamite, in teacher quality in his schools, in better resources for students and in making sure that schools have a national improvement plan that is integrated into what they are doing—all of these things—will make a difference. We know that is the case, but in order to do them you have to have a conviction about education. That conviction exists on this side of the parliament. It is right at the heart of the Labor government's agenda for improving Australia's future. *(Time expired)*

**DISTINGUISHED VISITORS**

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) (14:24): Before I call the member for Hughes, I inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon the Acting Minister for Manpower and Senior Minister of State, Ministry of National Development, from the Parliament of Singapore, Brigadier-General Tan Chuan-Jin. On behalf of the House I extend to him a very warm welcome.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**

**Carbon Pricing**

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (14:25): My question is to the Prime Minister. I remind the Prime Minister that Ingleburn High School in Western Sydney has been hit with a carbon tax hike of $450 for just one month, with a teacher warning: 'So much for the carbon tax not having an impact! The money will have to come from funds otherwise allocated to students.' Will the Prime Minister apologise to parents of Ingleburn High students for promising them, 'There will be no carbon tax under the government I lead'?

Mr Hockey interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The member for North Sydney is warned.

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:25): I am very glad that the member raises the question of how best to support schools. We are a government that have doubled the amount of funding going into school education. And, as the member should know, because of the way that money is indexed—

Mr Pyne: Madam Deputy Speaker, I raise a point of order. The Prime Minister cannot simply rephrase the question and answer a question she would have liked to have been asked, like Joh Bjelke-Petersen. She was asked about the carbon tax and not about the funding of schools.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. The Prime Minister has just commenced her answer. I will listen to her answer.

Ms GILLARD: As I was just about to say to the member who asked the question, we have doubled the funding for school education. That funding is indexed. The way
in which the index works is that it takes into account increases, like the 10 per cent increase for electricity prices, which are flowing through into schools. That is taken into account in the index. I wonder if the member has ever got the New South Wales state government on the phone and asked them about the impact of the 70 per cent increase in electricity prices that will have hit the school in his electorate? I wonder if he has ever done that—

Mr Hockey interjecting—

Mr Dutton interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for North Sydney and the member for Dickson will leave the chamber under the provisions of section 94(a). They have both previously been warned. It is a double hit. It is not my fault if you cannot hear me because you are making so much noise.

The member for North Sydney and the member for Dickson then left the chamber.

Ms GILLARD: I wonder whether the member who asked the question was embarrassed to stand alongside the Leader of the Opposition at the last election and promise to cut quality teaching money, promise to cut computers in schools and promise to cut trade-training centres. And I wonder now whether the member is embarrassed to sit behind the Leader of the Opposition, who today has said to that public school that he is coming for it. Like Jack the Ripper, he is going to be there wielding his knife to cut money out of that public school. That is what he has promised today.

Mr Pyne: Madam Deputy Speaker, I raise a point of order. In past times, I have been asked to withdraw a reference to the Prime Minister as Lady Macbeth, and I would ask her to withdraw the reference to the Leader of the Opposition that she just made, which is offensive.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I could not actually hear the reference the Prime Minister made, as I was trying to get order back in the chamber. But, to assist the House, I will ask the Prime Minister to withdraw.

Ms GILLARD: I withdraw, Deputy Speaker.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Prime Minister has the call and will be heard in silence. There are no further points of order on this question.

Ms GILLARD: I wonder how the member who asked the question feels about sitting behind this Leader of the Opposition, who is coming to that school to cut its funding. He has promised that today. Whatever label one wants to put on it, what that means is that that school would have less money for the education of children. The Leader of the Opposition in his own words today, in a carefully scripted remark, has said that he is coming for public schools to cut back their funding. Every public school in this country, every parent who sends a child to a public school, and every community member who cares about the quality of public education needs to know from today that the Leader of the Opposition is coming for them. He is coming with cutbacks, and he is coming to destroy the opportunity for those schoolchildren—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Prime Minister will return to the question before her.

Ms GILLARD: for a decent education and a decent life.

Mr Chester: And you wonder why no-one believes you.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Gippsland is warned.
Mr CRAIG THOMSON (Dobell) (14:30): My question is to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. In 2007 I secured $20 million funding for five years for the important work of rejuvenating Tuggerah Lakes. Wyong Shire Council, under the leadership of Mayor Bob Graham, matched that funding and have been delivering the necessary work for the lakes. The five years is up soon. Will the government commit to continue funding the vital work needed to save Tuggerah Lakes?

Mr BURKE (Watson—Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities) (14:30): I thank the member for Dobell for the question. Tuggerah Lakes has been an iconic project for many years across the Central Coast and an area iconic not only for people on the Central Coast. You would not find too many people who have grown up in Sydney who have not had many of their holidays up there, gone prawning in areas of Tuggerah Lakes and seen the magnificent seabirds there, in particular the pelicans but also a series of endangered species.

The $20 million commitment that the member for Dobell refers to was put into two stages. The first was about $7½ million, and then there was a second stage. The first has been fully expended. It feeds from two rivers—the Wyong and the Ourimbah. The work is actually being done, led by the council there, by a whole lot of volunteers, in part—hundreds of volunteers—working in revegetating the area.

You have real problems in Tuggerah Lakes with run-off and nutrients coming through the catchments down into Tuggerah. The work of volunteers being led by the council—he mentions Bob Graham—has been work that has made a real difference in the water quality and the native vegetation of the area. I understand there are two milestone payments still to be made. All the advice that I have received is that they remain on track to be made. I think the next one is due in September.

The member also asks about future funding for Tuggerah Lakes. It is something that he has raised in question time today, previously in the parliament and directly with me. Funding for Tuggerah Lakes has been coming out of Caring for our Country. Members may be aware that Caring for our Country has finished its first five years, and the review is taking place to determine the future of Caring for our Country and the exact way that that will be configured. Submissions for that funding review closed three or four days ago, so it will not be long before the government is in a position to make announcements about the exact nature of Caring for our Country, as to which programs it gets broken up into in the future.

I have to say, looking at the progress over the last five years, Tuggerah Lakes has been one of the great success stories of the project. It has been a great example of community engagement and a great example of substantial environmental improvement in something that is iconic to the people of Central Coast and beyond.

Economy

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (14:33): My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer update the House on the current strength of our economy and why it is important to keep investing in skills and infrastructure to keep the economy strong?

Mr SWAN (Lilley—Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer) (14:33): I thank the member for Blair for that very important question, because our economy does walk tall in the world. It is 10 per cent bigger than it was prior to the global financial crisis, and
it is stronger than every other major
developed economy. We have seen the
creation of something like 800,000 jobs in
the period this government has been in
office—a remarkable outcome, given what is
going on elsewhere in the world. But also we
have seen really strong private business
investment. Private business investment has
grown by 20 per cent to be at its highest
percentage of GDP in something like 40
years.

Of course there is a really strong pipeline
of investment in resources as well. That
advanced pipeline of resources investment
has grown by nearly $90 billion in the past
year alone. This private investment, along
with all of the public investment that the
government has been making in infrastructure but also in skills and education
more broadly, is what strengthens our
economy. It gives us the resilience we need
to meet the challenges of the future. That
fundamental investment drives the strength
of our economy as we go forward, because
these investments have been put in place.

Of course we do need to reverse the
decade-long decline in productivity which
we inherited from the other side of politics.
That is why we are investing in these areas
which they refused to invest in. As the
Reserve Bank said, their failure to invest in
these areas led to something like 10 interest
rate rises in a row. We are committed to
investing in infrastructure because we
understand that if you invest in the future
you strengthen future prosperity. We want to
build our economy up, and those Liberals on
the other side simply want to tear it down.
We have a $3 billion skills package. We
have a huge increase in the number of people
in tertiary education. And we have doubled
our investment in infrastructure—road, rail
and port. This is all driving growth and
productivity. So we have a plan for the future to support
jobs, whereas those on the opposite side of
this House do not have a plan to do that. They have a plan to do the reverse. The
shadow finance minister let the cat out of the
bag up at Hayman Island the weekend before
last. He said the opposition were not going to
make the mistake that John Hewson had
made, where he put out all the fine detail of
slashing and burning in health and education.
They were not going to put that out as they
went to the next election. They were going to
do a Campbell Newman and hide it from the
Australian people—the impact on jobs, the
impact on education. There is a hidden
agenda from those opposite to slash, cut and
burn health and education and to cut away
the productive base of the Australian
economy. We will support working families.
They have nothing but contempt for them.

(Time expired)

Carbon Pricing

Mr TONY SMITH (Casey) (14:36): My
question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the
Prime Minister to the statement of Pat
Italiano, owner of Essendon Fruit Supply, in
the electorate of Maribyrnong, who said,
with regard to the carbon tax:

We are trying to absorb the costs as much as we
can but it's a real slap in the face and it's making
things much harder for us.

Can the Prime Minister
explain to Mr
Italiano and every other small business
owner across Australia why they will not
receive a cent of compensation for the
world's biggest carbon tax?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister)
(14:36): To the member for Casey: it may be
that the example he quotes was an example
used in one of today's newspapers. I have
seen some of those reports, and in some of
those reports we have prices referred to, like
tomatoes going up from $5 a kilo a couple of
weeks ago to $8.99 a kilo now. I would say
to this House and I would say to people reading those newspapers: if there is anyone in this country who is representing that that increase is anything to do with carbon pricing, then people should ring the ACCC and get that addressed because that is clearly wrong and meant to deceive and mislead.

For the real circumstances of small business, small businesses do not pay the carbon price. That is paid by the big polluters, who generate the most carbon pollution.

Ms Marino interjecting—

Ms GILLARD: We have always said that some of those costs would be—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The member for Forrest is warned.

Ms GILLARD: passed through to small businesses, particularly in the form of an increase in electricity, and we have talked very clearly with the Australian community about us predicting a 10 per cent increase in household electricity bills, for example—an increase of $3.30 a week on average—and that is why we have provided assistance of $10.10 a week on average. To the small business involved, I would therefore say that that small business is dealing with consumers who have received tax cuts, family payment increases and pension increases because our anticipation was that small businesses would pass these modest price impacts on. When we are talking about modest price impacts, let's remember that the Treasury modelling, which has proved accurate on things like electricity prices, says that the impact overall will be 0.7 per cent of CPI—that is less than a cent in a dollar.

To the member, who may have a genuine concern about price impacts for this small business: I presume he is talking to them about the price impacts flowing from electricity increases that have absolutely nothing to do with carbon pricing. Now that the Leader of the Opposition has admitted that there are dramatic power price increases, nothing to do with carbon price increases, the member should feel empowered to have a frank conversation about the facts. You no longer have to go around pretending, in order to be loyal to the Leader of the Opposition, that this is all about carbon pricing. Today he has given the game away and he has pointed to the other sources of big power bills, and I trust the member who asked the question will do precisely that for the small business involved.

Infrastructure

Ms LIVERMORE (Capricornia) (14:40): My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport. Will the minister update the House on the government's record investments in nation-building infrastructure? How are these helping to rebuild the Bruce Highway, and are there any recent observations that confirm the benefit of these investments?

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (14:40): I thank the member for Capricornia for her question. Of course, this federal Labor government has continued to roll out its record Nation Building Program, doubling the roads budget, increasing the rail budget tenfold and committing more to urban public transport than all governments combined since Federation. In addition to that, we are committed to spreading the benefits of the mining boom. That is why we have established the $6 billion Regional Infrastructure Fund.

I am asked about the Bruce Highway, which has benefited from both our Nation Building Program and the Regional Infrastructure Fund.

Mr Truss interjecting—

Mr ALBANESE: Recently, as the Leader of the Nationals interjected, he
embarked on the equivalent of National Lampoon's Vacation. He went up the North Coast, up the Bruce Highway. As he went up the Bruce Highway, all loaded up in the car were the member for Gippsland and other people over there, who were not sure what seat they were from. Some of that mob over there were loaded into the car, some on the roof, some strapped in, going to look at the work that is taking place on the Bruce Highway.

As the Leader of the National Party left his seat going up north, he would have hit the Cooroy to Curra section—the section which he had previously said had the worst road in Australia. He had said that and he should have known. At the time he said that, he was not only the local member; he was the transport minister, and he had done nothing about it. But at the end of last year he would have seen the work underway that will be completed and opened. When he hit the member for Capricornia's seat he would have seen the work that is taking place on the Yeppen Lagoon Bridge and the Yeppen roundabout—$40 million coming from the Regional Infrastructure Fund that he would abolish.

If they had got their timing right, they could have been with me and the member for Herbert when we opened the $110 million Douglas Arterial. He could have asked the member for Herbert what he thought, because the member for Herbert said:

I'll give Labor a pat on the back and say they have spent more in their four or five years on the Bruce Highway than we did before.

That is what the member for Herbert had to say.

Throughout his journey he could have seen the work that is underway, including under the $210 million from the Regional Infrastructure Fund. We have spent $2.8 billion over six years; he spent $1.3 billion over 12 long years. So it is no wonder that, as they got to Cairns—as they got to Walley World—their final destination, he got asked, 'What are you committing?' The LNP members spent a whole week strapped in this car and on the roof. When they got to the end, they proposed not one cent of additional funding—not one single cent of additional funding from those opposite.

Ms LIVERMORE (Capricornia) (14:43): Madam Deputy Speaker, I ask a supplementary question. Minister, you have talked about building infrastructure in my home state of Queensland. Why is it important for us to have bipartisan support for this infrastructure, and is the minister aware of any risks to this support?

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (14:44): I can assist the member for Capricornia with her very good question because we have committed some $8.7 billion for Queensland as part of the Nation Building Program. In addition to that, we have made commitments from the Regional Infrastructure Fund—$430 million in Queensland alone so far—which those opposite have promised to get rid of in order to give Gina and Clive a tax cut.

That is their position. So I was particularly disturbed this morning with the member for Dawson, who had this to say about the Peak Downs Highway in his electorate—

Mr Christensen interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The member for Dawson is warned.

Mr ALBANESE: and the $120 million commitment. He said, 'It's something I want to look at, you know, down the track if the Liberal-National coalition get into government.' So there it is. They want to cut school funding for those wealthy public schools around the country! The Leader of
the Opposition has made that clear. And they want to cut funding through the Regional Infrastructure Fund.

Indeed, that stands in stark contrast with the Leader of the National Party, who has said at other times that mining companies are not putting enough back into the local communities. The Gateway WA project, the Gladstone port access road, the Blacksoil Interchange, and the Townsville Ring Road are all under threat if you get rid of the Regional Infrastructure Fund, because you have got to say where the money is coming from.

Mr Pyne: That's a bit of an own goal.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Sturt has just committed an own goal and he will remove himself from the chamber under standing order 94(a). Persistent interjection will not be tolerated. The member for Sturt then left the chamber.

Carbon Pricing
Dr STONE (Murray) (14:46): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to Geoffrey Thompson Holdings, an apple and pear grower and cool-store operator in my electorate, whose latest electricity bills show a new item, carbon charges—I stress 'carbon charges'—of $23,000 for the month of July alone. This new carbon tax cannot be passed on and there is no compensation. How does this government expect a 60-year-old business to survive and the 400 regional jobs to be preserved?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:46): To the member who raises the question I say that, as the member would be aware, we have always said that in carbon pricing the price would be paid by the big polluters, there would be a flow-through impact on electricity pricing—

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms GILLARD: The member yelling out is agreeing with me, I see. We have been very clear about what that impact would be and the modelling has been proved to be right. Small businesses are not required directly to pay the carbon price and are not required to fill in any additional forms. Unlike the paperwork burden that came their way with the Howard government's GST, they do not pay the carbon price, and they do not fill in additional forms. They will see some flow-through impacts for things like electricity prices, which is why we have put consumers in a position to pass that on. Consumers are there with their tax cuts, their family payment increases and their pension increases.

I would say to the member who asked the question: what has she said to this business about the large electricity prices—

Mr Randall: 'Vote Liberal.'

Ms GILLARD: She may well have said that, but I hope she has also said that the Leader of the Opposition today has now acknowledged that the biggest impact on electricity prices is not carbon pricing. Having finally moved from a position that everyone knew to be ridiculous—

Mr Abbott interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The Leader of the Opposition is aware that he is not allowed to use that word.

Ms GILLARD: when he tried to pretend that all electricity price increases were somehow the fault of carbon pricing, he was repudiated by state Liberals, repudiated by this front bench, repudiated by the regulators. So today he has actually acknowledged that there are other sources of power price increases. What does the member, on behalf of the Leader of the
Opposition, say to the small business involved about that?

I would be in a position to say that we will drive change at the Council of Australian Governments meeting at the end of this year. Is the member in a position to say that this Leader of the Opposition will get Ted Baillieu on the phone, Barry O'Farrell on the phone and Campbell Newman on the phone and say, 'It's about time that the Liberals worked with us to address these electricity price increases at the end of this year'?

Dr Stone: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I specifically, in the question, asked the Prime Minister to address what this company is going to be able to do—what she is going to tell them when the 400 jobs are lost.

Ms GILLARD: I am not going to join the member in this fear campaigning. If she is genuinely interested in this business she would be looking at costs from all sources, including the bigger electricity costs flowing from sources other than carbon pricing. If she is not doing that, she is not serious about this business or the 400 jobs she is talking about, and I think her constituents would be very interested to know that she is not serious about 400 jobs in her electorate.

Dr Stone: I seek to present the bills, which identify the carbon charges for the month of July alone.

Ms GILLARD: I am not going to join the member in this fear campaigning. If she is genuinely interested in this business she would be looking at costs from all sources, including the bigger electricity costs flowing from sources other than carbon pricing. If she is not doing that, she is not serious about this business or the 400 jobs she is talking about, and I think her constituents would be very interested to know that she is not serious about 400 jobs in her electorate.

Mr BRIGGS interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The member for Mayo is warned.

Mr COMBET (Charlton—Minister for Industry and Innovation and Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency) (14:51): I thank the member for Deakin for his question, because underlying inflation is actually at a 13-year low, and the carbon price will have quite a small impact on inflation. We have stated many times in this place that the Treasury modelling found that the impact on the CPI would only be 0.7 per cent in financial year 2012–13. That is less than one cent in the dollar and certainly much less than the CPI impact of the introduction of the GST, which was 2.5 per cent. It is nothing like the hysterical claims made by the Leader of the Opposition of unimaginable price increases—far from it.

The carbon price has now been in place for approximately seven weeks, and during this time TD Securities' inflation gauge has shown that the overall inflation impact during the first month of the carbon price was just 0.2 per cent in July—one fifth of one cent.

There is certainly no unimaginable price increase in that, as claimed by the Leader of the Opposition, and nothing to support the ridiculous three-page beat-up today in the Daily Telegraph.

But we have also seen in the past week an analysis of inflation expectations on financial markets from financial markets. This confirms the Treasury modelling. Investors, of course, when considering these issues, back their predictions up with their money. They are saying that the impact of carbon pricing...
pricing on inflation will be in the order of 0.6 to 0.7 per cent. That is bang on the Treasury modelling. In the face of all of these facts, in the face of all of this evidence that is mounting, what do the coalition resort to as part of their mendacious, ridiculous, hysterical fear campaign? They resort to exhorting people to price gouge.

Here is a classic example. A refrigerant company, Equipserve, has been pinged by the ACCC after it replicated a statement, in effect, made by the shadow industry minister, the member for Indi. She wrongly attributed increases in refrigerant gas prices to the carbon price—the entirety of the increase to the carbon price. They are the very same statements that were found to be in breach of the consumer laws and that led to the giving of an enforceable undertaking by that company to the ACCC.

This is the conduct the opposition engage in. They go around misrepresenting, making ridiculous, deceitful claims, encouraging businesses to price gouge. The meat industry has had to disown the silly leaflet that the opposition have put out. Their whole campaign is a fraud and their claim to repeal it is also a fraud. (Time expired)

Carbon Pricing

Mr CHRISTENSEN (Dawson) (14:54): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer her to the statement by the Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency in a carbon tax debate last week: 'Farmers will not pay a cent.' How does she reconcile his statement with this letter from a tomato farmer in Bowen? It shows that Visy will increase the annual bill for cardboard boxes used on his family-run tomato farm by more than $12,000 due to the carbon tax.

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:55): To the member who asked the question: No. 1, of course we would be checking the assertions in the question—when they come from the opposition we need to; No. 2, I have described on more than one occasion in question time today the circumstances of small business; and, No. 3, the continuation of this fear campaign today, in the face of the facts, I think is because the Leader of the Opposition this morning and his opposition team are now desperate to distract from his pledge this morning to cut the funding to every public school in the nation—because he does not want to have public debate focused on his cuts to public schools. Here we go with the fear campaign and the ridiculous points of order.
you to page 519 of *House of Representatives Practice* and I would refer you to standing order No. 91. It says: 'Where a member is persistently and wilfully refusing to conform to the standing order', as is the Prime Minister. Her behaviour is disorderly. I would ask you to say that this is disorderly, her refusal to comply.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for Mackellar will resume her seat. The Prime Minister has the call.

**Ms GILLARD:** I am making the very simple point that we continue to see the fear campaign despite the facts. And the fact they want to distract from today is their plan to cut public schools.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for Dawson is seeking to table a document?

**Mr Christensen:** Yes, I seek leave to table a letter, which also states: 'Never have we seen such a dud government before.'

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for Dawson will leave the chamber, under standing order 94(a). Abuse of points of order is now out of control. The behaviour of the opposition and the complete disregard of the standing orders by the majority of the opposition are also on display.

The member for Dawson then left the chamber.

**Marine Sanctuaries**

**Mrs D’ATH** (Petrie) (14:58): My question is to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. Will the minister update the House on the government’s plan to create national parks in Commonwealth waters, and what information is the community being given during the current consultation phase?

**Mr BURKE** (Watson—Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities) (14:59): I want to thank the member for Petrie for the question. The member for Petrie has been talking to me for some time about the importance of making sure that we got the balance right in the marine national parks proposals, to make sure that we took account of the recreational fishers—who are very strong in her electorate—without in any way compromising the strong environmental outcomes that we could achieve.

We ended up with a proposal, particularly down that east coast pathway, that met those requirements precisely. It is one where we were able to become as a nation the world leader in ocean protection. It was a situation where, as a nation, whenever we were given a choice to deliver the same environmental outcome but to minimise the impact on recreational fishers, we took that option. Wherever we could get the same environmental outcome but minimise the impact on commercial fishers, we took that option. That is why the Coral Sea, for example, which I have previously described as the jewel in the crown of the whole proposal, is one area where the highest level of protection is in the areas furthest out. But in the areas that are closer—between the Great Barrier Reef and the beginning of where the Coral Sea is—you have one area of particularly high value for commercial fishers, which is reserved, and trawlers are allowed in. An area in the north of that entire central band is open to recreational fishing, and the southern part is also open to longliners to make sure that we deliver the environmental outcome in a way that minimises the challenges that might be otherwise there for the rec or commercial sectors.

That is why I was surprised to see that part of the material being distributed during the current consultation phase involved a leaflet—I am not sure what sort of image this was trying to invoke—with a symbol of fish
and chips wrapped in the Australian flag with the entire Coral Sea reserve described not as it is in the draft maps but as a no-go zone. This leaflet can only be described as nothing other than a lie.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The minister cannot use that word.

Mr BURKE: About a leaflet?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The standing orders, for everybody's benefit, state that the only word that is truly unparliamentary is 'lied'. You can use another word but not that one. The minister must withdraw.

Mr BURKE: That is fine.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The minister must withdraw.

Mr BURKE: I withdraw.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr BURKE: I just did withdraw. The map that is on the leaflet is entirely incorrect. It is trying to do one thing—that is, mislead the people of Queensland—and nothing more. It is authorised by Queensland LNP Senator Sue Boyce. It was put out as fake information to deceive Queenslanders, and the Leader of the Opposition should himself disown it.

Carbon Pricing

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (15:02): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to this electricity bill from Michael Fahey in my electorate that clearly states that the carbon tax has increased his cheapest rate of electricity by 30 per cent. As Mr Fahey has an electricity bill that has now climbed to over $3,000 a year, will the Prime Minister apologise to Mr Fahey, his family and the millions of Australian households who will be now worse off because of this toxic carbon tax?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (15:02): Once again, we see the fear campaign continue. The member who asked that question may want to explain to that business that the 50 and 60 per cent increases that people have seen in electricity prices in Queensland are nothing to do with the carbon price. The Leader of the Opposition today has acknowledged that there are dramatic increases in electricity that are nothing to do with the carbon price. The member might not like the fact, and the Leader of the Opposition might have been dragged kicking and screaming to the facts, but they are facts.

Mrs Prentice: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. This is a household. It is not a business.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The member for Ryan will resume her seat. There is no additional debate. A clarification was given.

Mrs Griggs interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Solomon is not assisting.

Ms GILLARD: I misunderstood. I thought the member was referring to a business. What I have just said is correct for businesses: the big increases they have seen in power prices in Queensland come from other areas, not the carbon price. The Leader of the Opposition has acknowledged today that there are other sources of dramatic increases in power bills.

What we have always said for Australian families is that they would see a 10 per cent increase in their electricity bill, and that has been acknowledged by the regulators as right. They will see a 10 per cent increase in their electricity bill, a 10 per cent increase in what they pay. Because they will see that 10 per cent increase, which on average for families is $3.30 a week, we have provided, on average, assistance of $10.10 a week in the form of tax cuts, in the form of pension increases and in the form of family payment

CHAMBER
increases. These are the facts and no amount of fear campaigning changes those facts. No amount of fear campaigning today will distract from the Leader of the Opposition's plan to cut funding to every public school in the member for Ryan's electorate.

**Regional Development Australia Fund**

**Mr CHAMPION** (Wakefield) (15:04): My question is to Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development, Local Government and the Arts. How is the government supporting communities across Australia through the regional development—

**Mr Abbott interjecting—**

**Mr Albanese**: Madam Deputy Speaker, I raise a point of order. I hesitate to interrupt my friend the member for Wakefield, but the Leader of the Opposition should withdraw the interjections he persistently makes across the chamber along the lines on which you have insisted they be withdrawn.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)**: The Leader of the Opposition will withdraw without qualification.

**Mr Abbott**: I withdraw.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER**: I thank the Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr Abbott**: It is still an untrue statement.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER**: The Leader of the Opposition will remove himself from the chamber under standing order 94(a). The Leader of the Opposition has now been advised by the chair on more than one occasion. I asked you, as you approached the dispatch box, to do it without qualification. You could not help yourself. The Leader of the Opposition will leave the chamber under 94(a).

**The Leader of the Opposition then left the chamber.**

**Mr CHAMPION**: My question is to the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development, Local Government and the Arts. How is the government supporting communities across the country through the Regional Development Australia Fund, including in the mid-north region in my electorate? What are the government's future plans for the Regional Development Australia Fund?

**Mr CREAN** (Hotham—Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government and Minister for the Arts) (15:06): I thank the member for Wakefield for his question and his commitment to regional development generally but particularly in his electorate. The Regional Development Australia Fund that he refers to is an important commitment on the part of this government, a billion-dollar fund over its term to assist regions to make economic and social infrastructure adjustments.

In the member's seat recently, in round 2 we were able to ensure the funding of the Wakefield-Auburn pipeline. This is a water infrastructure initiative, and it is essential to ensuring the development of housing as well as farmland expansion in that area. Without this investment, the housing and the farmland development would not have taken place. The farmland development is very important to support the continued growth of the poultry industry in his electorate, so you can see that this has both social and economic impact.

Our approach, of course, is, 'Stronger regions equal a stronger nation,' and that is why we are committed to strengthening regions in our country, across the country. This was one of seven programs funded in South Australia in the second round and 46 over the country. A new culture has developed. We have gotten away from the
rorts that personified regional development under the previous government, to a culture of genuine partnership. In fact, the $200 million that we funded in this second round leveraged $800 million, so the multiplier is four to one. We have got a lot in this round who did not get up in the first round but persisted in making their projects stack up, and they got supported. They also paid attention not just to where this proposal would be located but to the wider regional significance.

I am also asked about the future of this fund. The future of this fund under us is now secure, because we have secured passage of the minerals resource rent tax, a means by which we want to spread the benefits of the mining boom to the rest of regional Australia to ensure that they get their fair share. Under us, there will be three more rounds. But, as to the future, these rounds would not go ahead if those opposite were in government, because they are committed to abolishing the tax and therefore the means by which they fund this proposal. The challenge on the other side is to either be honest with the Australian electorate and say that you are going to keep the tax or to tell us where you are going to get the money from to fund a program that is benefiting regions. (Time expired)

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

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Dr SOUTHCOTT (Boothby) (15:09): Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): Does the honourable member claim to have been misrepresented?

Dr SOUTHCOTT: Yes.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Please proceed.

Dr SOUTHCOTT: On three occasions, the Leader of the House has made an assertion that last week, in tabling the electricity bills from the Belair Hotel, I tabled something other than that which I said I would. I was very clear. I sought leave to table the electricity accounts of January 2012 and July 2012 of the Belair Hotel, and that is exactly what I tabled. Hansard will confirm that and the Table Office will confirm that. The assertion by the Leader of the House is quite simply false.

Mr Albanese interjecting—

Dr SOUTHCOTT: I am just responding—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: No. The member for Boothby cannot respond to interjections. The Leader of the House is not assisting the chair.

Mr Albanese: I am trying to help, Madam Deputy Speaker, as always!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: You are not.

DOCUMENTS

Presentation

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (15:11): A document is presented as listed in the schedule circulated to honourable members. Details of the document will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings. I move:

That the House take note of the following document:

National Health and Medical Research Council—Review of the implementation of the strategic plan for 2010-12.

Debate adjourned.
COMMITTEES
National Capital and External Territories Committee
Membership
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) (15:11): I have received advice from the Chief Government Whip that he has nominated Mrs Griggs to be a member of the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories in place of Mr Secker.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (15:12): by leave—I move:
That Mr Secker be discharged from the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories and that, in his place, Mrs Griggs be appointed a member of the committee.

Question agreed to.

BILLS
Higher Education Support Amendment (Student Contribution Amounts and Other Measures) Bill 2012
Returned from Senate
Message received from the Senate returning the bill without amendment or request.

COMMITTEES
Privileges and Members' Interests Committee
Report
Mrs D’ATH (Petrie) (15:12): I present the report of the Privileges and Members' Interests Committee concerning the possible unauthorised disclosure of the internal proceedings of the committee.

In accordance with standing order 39(f) the report was made a parliamentary paper.

Mrs D’ATH: by leave—On 24 May 2012 I raised in the House a matter of privilege concerning the apparent unauthorised disclosure of the internal proceedings of the committee's private meeting held on the previous night. The disclosure was in articles by Ms Michelle Grattan in the online version of the Age and in the print edition of the Age of 24 May 2012.

In my statement I expressed disappointment about the disclosure, particularly in light of the discussion the committee had about the importance of confidentiality in the committee's consideration of the sensitive issues it was inquiring into.

I indicated that the committee would pursue the matter internally and report back to the House as necessary. I am now reporting back on behalf of the committee.

The committee has examined this matter in a way consistent with the approach it has advocated for all committees that experience unauthorised disclosures.

The committee has been unable to obtain evidence that might reveal the source or sources of the disclosure.

Each member of the committee and each secretariat staff member has signed a statutory declaration to the effect that they did not disclose the internal proceedings of the meeting of 23 May 2012 to any person who was not authorised to be made aware of those proceedings.

In addition the committee asked the journalist involved, Ms Michelle Grattan, to appear and give evidence in relation to any information she could provide about the source of the disclosure. In her evidence to the committee, Ms Grattan confirmed she was the author of the two articles in question. She also declined to discuss any matters to do with her sources.
In relation to the impact of the disclosure, the committee considers that the particular circumstances make this matter very serious. The meeting from which the disclosure appears to have taken place was the first meeting of the committee after the referral of an inquiry by the House into a matter of great sensitivity. The committee also explicitly discussed at that meeting the importance of confidentiality in relation to its proceedings during the course of the inquiry. The disclosure, therefore, has been damaging to the committee.

The committee makes no formal findings on this matter as it has not been able to identify the source of the disclosure.

However, the committee has a number of observations, and makes two recommendations to the House.

On a number of occasions the committee has expressed its frustration about inquiries it has conducted into unauthorised disclosures of committee information. These of course have been inquiries into disclosures from other committees, not an inquiry into a disclosure from the Committee of Privileges and Members' Interests itself, but the issues are the same.

In earlier reports the committee has acknowledged the difficulty that can be faced in seeking to ascertain the sources of disclosures. Those guilty are unlikely to identify themselves and media representatives can be expected to claim that their professional code of ethics prevents them from revealing the identity of such sources.

The person or persons who disclose information from committee proceedings are the most culpable in these matters. However, the committee reiterates the view it has expressed before that it is also important that, where it is necessary to do so, there is a willingness to proceed against those who knowingly publish material.

The committee recommends, as it has in earlier reports, that the House adopt a resolution relating to unauthorised disclosure. In addition to the terms of previously recommended resolutions, the committee has added specific provisions relating to the publication of unauthorised material and the implications for journalists and the media. The adoption of the resolution will make it clear to journalists and the media which publish unauthorised information that publication is, of itself, potentially a contempt which can be punished by the House with appropriate sanctions.

In addition to the resolution, the committee also recommends that changes be made to the process for the approval of parliamentary press gallery passes to require the pass holder to be aware of the prohibition of unauthorised disclosure of committee proceedings and also that, as part of the approval and renewal processes, the pass holder is informed that a breach can result in sanctions. The committee also notes that there is a role for the press gallery committee, which sponsors the passes of members of the gallery, to advise new members of the gallery about their responsibilities.

Having concluded my remarks on the committee's report, I wish to make some very brief remarks about two matters concerning the Register of Members' Interests that were raised with the committee by the Manager of Opposition Business and the Leader of the House. They concerned the statements of interests of the member for Dobell and the member for Hughes. The committee has considered the matters raised and has obtained information from the members concerned.
The committee has concluded that there are no grounds for it to take further actions.

I conclude by thanking the secretariat for their assistance in preparing the report and their ongoing work with the committee, and I also thank the members and the Deputy Chair of the Privileges and Members' Interests Committee.

**Mr SECKER** (Barker—Opposition Whip) (15:18): by leave—I support the words of the Chair of the Privileges and Members' Interests Committee; she has summarised the report quite extensively and I have very little to add. I will raise the issue of appendix B to the report. Paragraph (1) says:

A committee concerning which a complaint of unauthorised disclosure or publication has been made must consider whether the matter has caused substantial interference with its work …

I think the words 'substantial interference' are always going to lead to a problem of definition—is something substantial or not? I suspect this issue might not fall on that, but, again, that is open to argument. I believe we also have a problem in appendix C, subparagraph (1)(e)(i), which states:

In considering complaints in this area and notwithstanding the provisions of standing order 51, the Speaker should not allow precedence to a motion on such a matter unless, in the light of the information presented to the Speaker, he or she is of the opinion:

(i) that there is sufficient evidence that will enable the Committee of Privileges and Members' Interests to ascertain the source or sources of the disclosure(s);

We have found through this process that that is almost impossible, and that may need looking at by the Procedure Committee in the future. In almost every case that will erase the possibility of precedents being given to the motion.

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**BILLS**

**Illegal Logging Prohibition Bill 2011**

**Consideration in Detail**

Debate resumed.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) (15:20):** The question is that opposition amendment (1) moved by the member for Calare be agreed to.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM** (Braddon—Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) (15:20): In conclusion of my remarks on the amendment of the member for Calare to the Illegal Logging Prohibition Bill, I indicate that the government does not accept his amendment for the reasons I have given.

**Mr JOHN COBB** (Calare) (15:20): I rise to speak again following the government's comment on the coalition's amendment to the Illegal Logging Prohibition Bill 2011. We are committed to addressing the trade in illegally sourced timber and timber products. In fact that was coalition policy at the 2010 election. Everything I have heard indicates that we all agree that the need for action is driven by a number of issues, including environmental concerns over indiscriminate or poorly controlled logging activities. In addition, under the current legislative regime the Australian forest sector, which is globally recognised for its forest management regulation and practices, suffers a competitive disadvantage through compliance costs borne locally that are not observed by illegal loggers.

The intent of this bill is well placed, but not surprisingly the government has again bungled the delivery of a policy on which both sides of politics agree. Specifically the government has bungled on the consultation process. A flawed consultation process has led to concerns amongst significant trading partners, no less than four of whom have
voiced concerns. The Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Indonesia, our most important near neighbour, in a submission to the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade inquiry into this bill stated:

The negative impact on trade should also not be underestimated bearing in mind that timber products commonly have long and complex chains of supply with mixed sources from different locations and different kinds of timber.

The government of Indonesia submission goes on:

It is for this reason that the GOI has recommended the deferral of the legislation until 2015 to provide time to ensure the legislation will not have unintended consequences that will unnecessarily harm the mutual trade between our two nations. Furthermore, the three years of adjournment will provide time for proper consultation between both countries including detail clarification as well as period of adjustment for the Indonesian producers/exporters to comply with the regulation.

This brings to mind issues Indonesia have had experience of—such as the lack of consultation we saw with the live cattle trade ban, when not only was there insufficient consultation; I believe there was none at all. They had to read in the newspaper about Australia's decision to suspend exports to its biggest trading partner in the area. This again shows complete arrogance on the part of this government—they snubbed our nearest trading partners in the same way, as I said, that they did with the live export ban. It is not reasonable for the government to bring these measures into law without giving our trading partners, our domestic timber industry and timber importers the time they were promised to design and implement appropriate systems.

In moving this amendment, while at the same time wanting to ensure that Australia only imports timber from proper sources, I want to repeat what Indonesia—our nearest, our biggest and, without doubt, our most important neighbour—said:

It is for this reason that the GOI (Government of Indonesia) has recommended the deferral of the legislation until 2015 to provide time to ensure the legislation will not have unintended consequences that will unnecessarily harm the mutual trade between our two nations. (Time expired)

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon—Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) (15:25): We have just heard the coalition, in a very hollow gesture, claim that they do not outright oppose the bill—but they will vote against it in its current form. That means three more years of forests being decimated by illegal logging and three more years of support for the criminal activities of illegal loggers and those associated with this terrible destruction. The coalition have not made one constructive suggestion about how to improve the bill. They merely say, 'Let's delay its implementation for almost three years.' What type of abrogation of our responsibility as parliamentarians would that be? We would have legislation on the statutes as impotent as the coalition's attempt to salvage some credibility out of this debate.

This is, as I mentioned before, a shallow gesture and a reflection on those who put it forward. I want to remind the House and all those listening to this that in 2010 the federal coalition made this pledge to the Australian people:

The Coalition will legislate to make it an offence to import any timber product which has not been verified as being legally harvested.

They went on:

We will require Australian timber importers and domestic processing mills to undertake a process of due diligence to verify the legal origins of the timber product and to disclose species, country of harvest and any certification … A transition
period of two years will be provided to allow industry to adapt to these new measures.

The legislation before us delivers the coalition's commitment as well as the Labor Party's election commitment. Today the coalition is proposing to give the green light to sophisticated criminal networks to continue a trade which costs $60 billion per annum. Their amendment effectively makes Australia a haven for the proceeds of crime.

Mr John Cobb interjecting—

Mr SIDEBOTTOM: I would like to remind the member opposite, whilst he is sitting there quietly, that—using estimates published by the World Bank—a further 236,520 square kilometres of forest will be harvested illegally with the approval of the Australian parliament if we agree to your amendment. Looking at the data in the explanatory memorandum for this bill, of which you are well aware—I assume you have read it—it is clear that the coalition's amendments would give the green light to a further $180 billion worth of illicit trade by sophisticated criminal networks over the next three years. Of that, $1.2 billion would be delivered in Australia. Those opposite are effectively saying that Europe and the United States can do the heavy lifting on this issue, while Australia will be a dumping ground for illegally logged timber and timber products.

As I said before, you do not propose to oppose the bill, yet you do not make suggestions on how to improve the bill. You just say, 'Delay its implementation'—for whatever reason—and, in doing so, you admit that the government has in fact got it right. Your amendment is a shallow gesture and a reflection on those who put it forward. We will not support your amendment.

Mr FLETCHER (Bradfield) (15:29): In this consideration-in-detail stage, I would like to respond to what the Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has just said—that the coalition had displayed an abrogation of responsibility. Let's focus on exactly what is in the legislation before the House this afternoon and, therefore, why we say our amendment is necessary. The government have put forward legislation which under proposed section 8 establishes a criminal offence, with a penalty of five years imprisonment, for a person where:

(a) the person imports a thing; and
(b) the thing is, is made from, or includes, illegally logged timber; and
(c) the thing is not prescribed by the regulations for the purposes of this paragraph.

The government have introduced legislation which will pass into law if they have their way, yet when this bill comes into force there will be no way for a law-abiding citizen to know what they need to do to avoid breaching section 8. There is no detail as to what the due diligence defence actually requires. In fact, law-abiding citizens will not even be able to find out which kinds of timber attract the operation of section 8, which will impose on those citizens, if they make an innocent mistake, a penalty of up to five years in prison potentially.

Let's be completely clear about what this legislation does. Let's not hear any more of this talk of high and noble aims. Let's focus on a detailed analysis of what this provision specifically does under the bill that the government are seeking to ram through the House this afternoon. If an importer brings into Australia a chair, for example, made almost entirely of plastic or metal but which happens to include some wood and, if it turns out that that wood has been illegally logged under the law of another country, then under the operation of proposed section 8 that importer will be liable to receive a knock on the door from a government inspector and will be liable to be imprisoned for up to five...
years. Those are the plain words of section 8, on the face of it.

The government come in here and talk about abrogation of responsibility when they have put forward this legislation without bothering to have ready the regulations which specify what a law-abiding citizen must do in order to comply with this law; without bothering to specify in the regulations the nature of the due diligence that a citizen must carry out to ensure that he or she is not breaching the law; and without even bothering to specify in a list the kinds of timbers that are defined as illegally logged. In these circumstances, it is extraordinary that the parliamentary secretary would use the term 'abrogation of responsibility', because it is the most remarkable abrogation of responsibility that this government would propose to introduce legislation imposing such penalties while making it effectively impossible for a citizen to find out what he or she has to do to comply with the law.

It is all very well for the parliamentary secretary to talk about the international criminal trade in illegal logging; there is no dispute from this side of the House that illegal logging is a problem that needs to be addressed. We merely ask this of the government: get your house in order, make it clear in the law of the land what is required of a citizen to comply with the law and get the regulations in place and operational. That is why we have moved this amendment. It is not because we have an objection in principle to the notion of greater action being taken against illegal logging—indeed, as the parliamentary secretary has rightly pointed out, that is our policy. It is because introducing legislation which would go onto the books, be part of the law of the land, and which would impose these very serious penalties without it being possible for a citizen to find out what he or she needs to do to comply with the law when the bill gets royal assent is an abrogation of responsibility.

What we are in fact seeking to do here is assist the government in coming up with an additional amount of time in which it can do the job it ought to have done before bringing in this legislation—that is, getting the regulations in place following proper consultation with the importing sector and the timber sector so that citizens know what they need to do to comply with the law. That is not by any means an unreasonable proposition from the opposition. On the contrary, we are seeking to be helpful, to assist the government to do what it should have done of its own volition.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon—Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) (15:34): The only thing the member for Bradfield is being helpful with is allowing illegal logging to continue to decimate forests for three more years. That is all you are doing. You also misunderstand—I would not like to suggest you misrepresent—the bill, because it is not negligent, as you claim.

One penalty relates to knowing or reckless engagement in the proceeds of crime; the other relates to the regulations which stipulate due diligence requirements. There is no misalignment. The high-level prohibition that applies under clauses 8 and 15 should not be confused with the prohibition that applies to the regulated timber stream which is to be implemented two years after the legislation commences. The high-level prohibition places a ban on importing timber products containing illegally logged timber and processing domestic raw logs that have been illegally logged. The prohibition under clauses 8 and 15 places a minimum burden on importers and domestic processors, as they will not be
required to undertake a prescribed process under the bill. Businesses may seek to implement informal measures to ensure they are not a party to supplying illegally logged timber into the Australian markets. Two years after the commencement of the legislation, importers of regulated timber products—which the government is in the process of determining—and processors of domestic raw logs will be required to carry out due diligence to minimise the risk of importing illegally logged timber.

Mr TEHAN (Wannon) (15:36): I rise to support remarks I made in this chamber last week as well as to comment on remarks made by the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness at the end of the debate last week, where he was critical of comments that had been made about the relationship with Indonesia. In particular, he referred to a quote in the Australian Financial Review and accused us on this side of misrepresenting and misleading.

Let us place the Financial Review article to one side because what we did not hear from the trade minister and what I would like to hear him comment on—maybe the parliamentary secretary could comment—is the evidence given by Indonesia when the trade subcommittee examined this bill. I quote:

The implementation of the Bill is also likely to undermine the development of trade between Indonesia and Australia based on our respective mutual interests. In this respect, reference is made to the recent efforts of the Government of Indonesia to accommodate and resolve the problem faced by Australia during the self-imposed ban on beef exports to Indonesia.

That is what needs to be addressed by the other side. I would ask the parliamentary secretary to give us his view on what Indonesia is saying in this quote and, if the trade minister is happy to grace us with his presence again, I would like to hear his view of what this means, remembering that Indonesia is our most important market for beef and for wheat. Yet here they are saying in their submission that:

The implementation of the Bill is also likely to undermine the development of trade between Indonesia and Australia based on our respective mutual interests.

I would ask the government to give heed to that quote, to think about it, because we have already seen, through the absolute debacle which occurred with live exports to Indonesia, what harm that did to our trading relationship with Indonesia. Yet here again we see the government, through its ineptitude, through its incompetence, ready to do exactly the same thing again.

The consultation around this bill has been nothing short of a disgrace. They have not taken into account the interests of our near neighbours—how sensitive they are about these measures, how sensitive they are about other countries telling them what they should do, how they should govern their own internal affairs. It is time the government woke up and thought about doing things a better way. If they do not, they are going to cause grave damage to this relationship at a time when there are particular sensitivities.

We have already seen that there is a key to helping to resolve the asylum seeker issue here in this country—by making sure we have strong cooperation with Indonesia and Malaysia in particular. Yet the way the government has mishandled this bill will mean that those countries will look at us and say, 'Why should we cooperate with this country when they are bringing into this place unilateral measures like this?' where we are telling them how to suck eggs.

I call on the government to think again, to step back from this, to go back to those countries and say, 'Surely there is a better way to do this. Surely we can cooperate with
you, rather than us telling you how you should do it,' imposing our views on them, telling them, 'You should do it our way.' How would we like it in reverse? This is the danger of this bill because the precedent we are setting will open it up for other countries to say to us in exactly the same way, 'This is how we want you doing things.' The government should think again.

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (15:41): I appreciate the opportunity to speak again in relation to the Illegal Logging Prohibition Bill 2011 and the amendment put forward by the coalition. This bill prohibits the importation and sale of all timber products containing illegally logged timber; prohibits the processing of illegally harvested domestically grown raw logs; requires importers of regulated timber products and processors of raw logs to comply with due diligence requirements; requires the accurate description of legally logged timber products for sale in Australia; establishes enforcement powers and offences; and, imposes penalties and provides for a review of the first five years of the operation of the act. Despite the protestations of those opposite, I believe the coalition has acted in good faith in relation to this legislation and has sought to raise some very legitimate concerns—

Mr Bruce Scott: Order! The member for Gippsland should be speaking to the amendment, not to the bill.

Mr CHESTER: In raising the amendment to the bill, I believe the coalition have acted in good faith. We have sought to give the government the opportunity to get this right. That has been our concerned from the outset in the debate as it has occurred in this place. The Leader of the Opposition wrote to the Prime Minister earlier this year suggesting conditions under which the coalition could support the bill and that is the nature of the amendment before the House—

we propose a better way forward to accommodate satisfactory consultation. We have been concerned about the sensitivities at the international level, which the member for Wannon quite rightly reflected on in his contribution.

There are also concerns expressed by the domestic industry in terms of the consultation period and the need for extra time to get this right. That goes to the very heart of the amendment put forward by the coalition. We are seeking more time and more detail from this government in relation to the regulations. I believe the amendment is a sensible approach to delay the onset of the legislation and for the regulations to be made available by a settled future date. That would give us the opportunity to consult with the industry and with our international trading partners to ensure that we continue to support a viable timber industry in this country.

The position taken by the coalition is consistent with our approach to the last election where we supported prevention of illegal logging and we continue to work with the government in good faith in that regard. The coalition went into the last election period with an undertaking to legislate to make it an offence to import any timber product which has not been verified as being legally harvested. The member for Braddon and the parliamentary secretary took the opportunity to come to my electorate to meet with Australian Sustainable Timbers quite recently. I enjoyed that experience and I think the member for Braddon and the parliamentary secretary appreciated the opportunity to talk with the industry directly on this issue.

It must be said that in discussions with Australian Sustainable Hardwoods they indicated that the Victorian Association of Forest Industries supports in principle the
approach being taken by the government in relation to illegal logging, but have reservations about the regulations. That is to the heart of the amendment put forward by the coalition. We want to see the details. We want the industry to have the opportunity to be fully consulted in relation to the details of this legislation and we are particularly keen to ensure that the sensitivities at an international level are taken into account.

I do appreciate the member for Braddon taking the time to consult with the mill owners at Heyfield. He had a great appreciation for the work they are doing at the Heyfield mill to certify their operations and have them fully audited. It was a very useful visit from many perspectives. The industry did appreciate his willingness to discuss in a very full and frank manner what the future challenges will be for the industry. But I cannot support the bill without the amendment being passed, because I believe a common-sense approach is being taken by the coalition, and in good faith, with the domestic timber industry and also in relation to our international trading partners.

I thank the member for Wannon for his contribution. I think he raised some legitimate concerns regarding the sensitivities that exist when you are talking about putting requirements in place for foreign nations in relation to trade. I think it would be wrong of those opposite to simply dismiss the coalition's concerns as being political in nature, because they are not. They are being raised on behalf of industry and on behalf of our spokespeople, who are concerned about the international trading relationships that Australia has enjoyed in the past and will seek to enjoy in the future.

I appreciate the opportunity to discuss this complex area of legislation. I will be supporting the coalition's amendment and I urge those opposite to support the coalition in its efforts to ensure there is full consultation and detailed regulations—(Time expired)

Mr McCORMACK (Riverina) (15:46): It is most important to get information on the record on the amendment to the Illegal Logging Prohibition Bill. It is a pleasure to follow the members for Gippsland and Wannon. The member for Wannon made some very valid remarks about the risks inherent in this, following the trade subcommittee's recent report, from which I quote:

The implementation of the Bill is also likely to undermine the development of trade between Indonesia and Australia based on our respective mutual interests. In this respect, reference is made to the recent efforts of the Government of Indonesia to accommodate and resolve the problem faced by Australia during the self-imposed ban on beef exports to Indonesia.

As the member for Wannon indicated, the trade Australia does with Indonesia in wheat and beef cannot be jeopardised: it cannot be jeopardised by this particular legislation and it cannot be jeopardised as it concerns the national interests of Australia and Indonesia.

As we all know Indonesia is a very valuable trading partner of Australia.

This amendment calls for the regulations and amendments to coincide. Passing this bill without knowing what the detail is could jeopardise our trade relations a whole lot. We have seen this before with this Labor government when they have tried to force through other pieces of legislation, and they have been able to do that in this hung parliament. The haste with which e-health electronic health records was done springs to mind. I also caution the parliament about putting in a water policy in a hasty way that is going to impinge upon so many irrigators within my electorate.

But this particular legislation can lead to the jailing of people. We cannot have
innocent people, perhaps, going to jail for the want of better legislation and more time to consider in proper detail what this legislation entails. We need a common-sense approach. The coalition certainly have approached this in good faith. We need to ensure that all the detail is considered properly and accurately. The coalition are committed to addressing the trade of illegally sourced timber and timber products. That was certainly coalition policy at the 2010 election.

The need for the legislation is driven, as we all know, by several issues, including environmental concerns regarding indiscriminate or poorly controlled logging activities, and there is certainly a lot of logging activity in the Riverina electorate. I am sure that when the Parliamentary Secretary Sidebottom, who is sitting at the table at present, visits the Riverina—and he has shown a desire to do so, as he did with the member for Gippsland just recently—I am sure he will be able to take on board those logging activities and how valuable they are to the Riverina electorate and to the economic future of Australia, because there is so much logging activity taking place in Australia and so much of it takes place in the Riverina. In addition, under the current legislative regime the Australian forest sector, which is globally recognised for its forest management regulation and practices, suffers competitive disadvantages through compliance costs, which are borne locally but are not observed by illegal loggers.

The coalition acknowledge the government's acceptance of the majority of the recommendations made to the exposure draft. The need for further consultation is clearly indicated by a number of media articles and by some of those things that have been said by coalition members today, who are concerned about the details and effects of this bill. The coalition support measures to prevent illegal logging. This position was clearly articulated in our 2010 forestry policy. The coalition will legislate to make it an offence to import any timber product that has not been verified as being legally harvested. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry estimates that each year around $400 million, or 10 per cent, of imported forest products were derived from sources that had some risk of being illegally logged. That cannot continue.

A transition period of two years will be provided to allow industry to adapt to two new measures that will safeguard against illegal logging. The coalition will ensure that all stakeholders impacted are consulted closely in the drafting of any legislation, regulations and other related measures, which will benefit this entire bill and these amendments.

Mr RAMSEY (Grey) (15:52): Thank you for the opportunity to speak on the Illegal Logging Prohibition Bill. My father, who unfortunately passed on three years ago now, used to have a saying: 'Less haste, more speed.' And I think this is the case with what we are trying to help the government with here: rush less, and let us for once get something right.

There are many people out there in the general public in Australia who say: 'Why don't the two sides of parliament work together?'. Well, we are trying to work with the government. In fact, we have an almost identical goal—we both wish to get rid of illegal logging. But what we are doing here is trying to save the government from itself. We are trying to save the government from rushing in and, given the record of this government, which I raised in the second reading debate, we are trying to save it from yet another costly and embarrassing stuff-up on Australia's behalf. We will be judged as being overbearing and overconfident, the colonial masters of the Pacific, and then...
eventually hauled back to the plate and back to a previous position—as we have just seen on asylum seekers—where we will have to admit that we were wrong.

Of course we, on this side, want to see the end of illegal logging, because there are losers all round—the soil loses, the country loses and the people of the country lose. There are very few winners in illegal logging except, of course, those who steal the resource. But we need to get the regulation right. In fact, the intent of the bill is that it requires the accurate description of legally logged timber products for sale in Australia.

What we are trying to do with the amendments moved by the member for Calare is to ensure that the trading partners have time to implement systems that allow traceability and achieve compliance with the regulations and legislation and that, very importantly, Australian importers have the time to design and implement processes for traceability and demonstration of due diligence.’ This is because the problem we have with the legislation as it stands is that the onus is on the importer and on the seller of the timber in Australia to prove that the timber was not illegally logged. It is very difficult if you happen to be sitting in your suburban store in Byrneside, or Melbourne or wherever, to look at an article and say: 'Well, I definitely know that the sides were made from legal timber and the back was made from legal timber, but I am not so sure about the inlay in the top.'

Those traders are going to have to rely on the compliance mechanisms of the country from where the timber is sourced. At this stage, they cannot rely on that regulation. Those countries are trying, as we speak, to develop that regulation. We know that these are countries that are not as developed as Australia and that, from time to time, cash might pass under the table to achieve such certification, but this is a chance for these countries who wish to continue this trade with Australia to do the compliance right. Of course, if it is done wrongly and we see major prosecutions in Australia, then we run the risk of the trade stopping altogether. And if the trade stops altogether, we will not see a decrease in forestry in these countries. As we know with any economically traded, agricultural produce, as the price falls, production rises, because people try to cover their losses by harvesting more, planting more and, in the case of illegal forestry, logging more trees, which will find their way to the market. Perhaps this is not in Australia but to somewhere else in the world. The net effect is, in fact, counterproductive.

We do not come into this chamber in a belligerent manner. We are not shouting at the government. We are saying: ‘Just hold up a bit. Let’s see if for once we can get something right.’ Then we can go back to the people of Australia and say, ‘Yes, we have had an intelligent conversation, and we have come to an intelligent compromise.’ That is what the member for Calare is asking for. That is why I am supporting his amendments. And that is why the government ought to perhaps listen to us on this one.

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (15:56): I rise to support the coalition’s proposed amendment to this Illegal Logging Prohibition Bill. Just as the member for Grey quoted the wise words of his father, I remember well a former senator of this place, Sir John Carrick, who regularly used to use the phrase, 'Slowly, slowly, catchy monkey' which became well known in those days.

Illegal logging poses a significant challenge to the goal of sustainable management of the world’s forests. Every member of this House wants to ensure that
we do what we can to protect the environment. We must recognise, however, that there are substantial trade-offs involved between, on the one hand, the protection of global forestry and, on the other, the employment prospects and quality of life concerns in developing countries. It is important for this House to constantly keep in mind decisions made today and their ramifications for the future global environment and future generations. But we must also not ignore the fact that there are hundreds of millions of impoverished people in poor countries around the world, many millions of whom undertake illegal logging in places like Indonesia just so they can survive. This is not a desirable situation, but it is a situation that we must all accept and take into account.

The coalition is moving this amendment to defer the commencement date of the legislation so that the regulations imposed on the importation of timber products can be appropriately put into practice by local industry. Indeed, the first recommendation of the report by the Trade Subcommittee of the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade urged the government to continue to consult with the governments of Canada, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea and other important stakeholders prior to the development of subordinate legislation under the bill.

This Gillard Labor government is notorious for its ability to alienate foreign countries and it is doing so again. If we do not pass the coalition's amendment today, this bill could harm our bilateral trade relationships not only with Indonesia but also with Canada, Papua New Guinea and Malaysia, among many others. In their submissions to the inquiry by the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade into this legislation, these countries were very clear. The Indonesian government's submission expressly said:

The implementation of the Bill is...likely to undermine the development of trade between Indonesia and Australia based on our respective mutual interests.

Indonesia noted the importance of forestry and the forest sector, and noted that the industry employs close to 'four million Indonesians often in rural areas where other forms of employment do not exist'.

Clearly, Indonesia is willing to fight on this issue because it affects so many of its citizens. If Australia believed that another country were planning to impose deleterious unilateral trade restrictions on our exports, we would, no doubt, fight just as strongly.

Malaysia told the committee that while they understood:

...that the objective of the Bill is laudable, Malaysia would like to see that the implementation of the Bill will not in any way hamper the good bilateral trade relationship particularly in timber products.

The Canadian government's submission warned that any third party certification scheme and the reliance on strict chain-of-custody certification could lead to a 'barrier to trade' for exporters of timber products. These are some of our most important trading partners. Indonesia is certainly Australia's largest neighbour and the single most important export market for our wheat and beef industries. We do not want to harm this important bilateral trade relationship any more than has been achieved by the Gillard Labor government. The worry I have is that this unilateral effort and blanket policy will damage our bilateral relationships.

As the member for Curtin said previously, New Zealand, in their submission, noted the implementation of the bill had the potential to have a significant negative impact on New Zealand's forestry industry. As Judith Sloan
commented in an article in the *Australian* on 15 May 2012, the point of trade policy insofar as it actually relates to trade should be used to promote international trade and should not be used to pursue other objectives, such as environmental aims.

The coalition went to the 2010 election with a clear policy of real action for the prevention of illegal logging because we understand that illegal logging is a significant challenge to the global environment. We believe in deferring the time frame in which illegal logging measures will be fully rolled out, to allow industry to adapt to any new measures. The coalition believe that all impacted stakeholders should be consulted closely in the drafting of any legislation and regulations, which to date is still a major concern. I urge the government to address our concerns and support the coalition's amendment to defer the timing of this legislation.

**Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (16:02):** I am very concerned that the coalition would oppose the Illegal Logging Prohibition Bill 2011. I was a part of the trade committee that went through the bills. I saw the last election promises by the coalition to ban illegal logging, to support bills in the parliament to stop illegal logging, to support the Australian manufacturing industry. They have now opposed that. They are now opposing these bills on some really false position. I am really concerned that the rest of the world—the USA and the Europeans—is moving against illegal logging but not the coalition.

Who has got to the coalition? The illegal loggers, I think. People who are making money out of bringing illegal logs, illegal wood and illegal furniture into Australia have got to them. Who is paying the bills? Who is making the donations to Liberal members and National Party members for elections? We ought to start looking at this.

This is a turnaround from a promise at the last election. The promise was, 'We will oppose illegal timber and products coming into Australia.' Well, you have turned that around. You have turned that around with some spurious arguments like, 'We're worried about the trade with our neighbours,' when you know that the rest of the world is also moving against illegal logging.

I heard the member for Grey say, 'Oh, well, we know that a bit of cash passes under the table to get the accreditation.' Do we accept that? Of course we do not accept that. That is not world best practice. That is not what we should accept. We know that Indonesia is moving toward accreditation systems, and we encourage them and we are helping them. But if we do not put up proper laws in this country we will be going backwards. We should be supporting these bills and getting them through the parliament. I am very disappointed that this attitude has been taken.

The trade committee did look hard at this matter. It worked through the issues. We had a roundtable with diplomatic and trade people from neighbouring countries, and we worked through issues that they had raised. That is the way it should have been. But this is our bill to protect Australia and to set a standard for our country for forestry workers, for the manufacturing sector of Australia. That is what these bills are about: setting the standard. Australia has a right to do that and it should be supported by the political parties, not with some spurious argument that is coming from the other side, just so they have an extension or some sort of differentiation.

I am telling you that I will make sure that forest workers will understand in this country—and the large bulk of those that work in making furniture in Australia will also be well aware—that the coalition is not
interested in having proper protection of their jobs and having proper processes which meet world standards, which is where we are going. As I said, we know that the rest of the world is moving down these lines. We need to seek an accreditation process so that when someone buys wood to sell in Australia it has an accreditation process on it. There are many different accreditation schemes, but one has to come up to the standards we are going to set for Australia. I cannot see what can be wrong with that. I cannot see why the opposition would be opposing this, unless there is some other reason. Maybe the member for Mayo will tell us that reason in an honest flurry from that side. I believe we should be supporting this bill and it should pass the House and the Senate.

Mr Briggs (Mayo) (16:07): I rise to speak on the amendment as well. Firstly, I will correct one thing the honourable parliamentary secretary said in his summation last Thursday, which was that I had said in my second reading speech that these bills should be tremendously amended but we would support their passage if our amendment was successful. I do not support the passage of this bill. I made that very clear in my contribution. I think this bill is a bad idea. I accept our party room’s decision to allow this bill to pass after fighting for this amendment, but I think this is a bad way for us to proceed.

That is because the member for Lyons just gave away what this bill is actually all about. This bill is not about environmental policy, as they will have you believe, as the parliamentary secretary will stand and try and have you believe; this bill is about protectionism. The member for Lyons just said exactly that, very clearly, in his contribution. This bill is about protecting what he says are important manufacturing industry jobs. I understand he believes that; I understand and accept that that is his view. He says, 'Who are the people who are telling us to have this position of supporting this amendment and opposing this bill?' Well, I have not spoken to anyone in this industry. I can make that very clear on the record. But I know that the member for Lyons has, because he was quoting pretty much from the CFMEU press release. That is who is telling this bloke what to say. That is who tells all of those people over there what to say. The donations from the CFMEU to that side of parliament would make you blush, Mr Deputy Speaker. And they have the gall to suggest that we are being paid by someone to oppose this bill. Give me strength, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The member for Lyons is more honest than that. Others are not so much, but the member for Lyons is honest enough to admit that his contribution is paid for and endorsed by the CFMEU. That is who he is arguing for, and that is what this bill is all about. It is protectionism parading as environmental policy, which will do damage to trading arrangements in our area.

In my contribution last week, as I spoke to the amendment that we moved to this bad bill, I made the comment that the parliamentary secretary at the table for the Pacific Islands, or whatever else they call him these days, has actually done some reasonable work in this area. I know that is not very popular amongst some of my colleagues and I have been chastised heavily, but I know getting that endorsement will assist him in his climb up the greasy pole, but he has done some important work with what are important regional neighbours. We want those neighbours to develop. We on this side certainly want Indonesia, Papua New Guinea,—I am not sure all those on the other side do—Malaysia and other countries who have got developing economies to do better. If they do better, they will have better certification processes to ensure that this
practice, which we all agree must come to an end, will come to an end in a better fashion. Domestic Australian law will not do that. Using trade policy through domestic law will not prevent illegal logging occurring, as the parliamentary secretary for forests has been suggesting in response to the member for Bradfield's very pertinent points. He actually quoted from the bill, Parliamentary Secretary, and you did not answer his question—instead you came up with some flurry like, 'If the coalition's amendment is successful we'll have three more years of illegal logging.'

I pose this question to you, Parliamentary Secretary—rise to your feet and answer it—if this bill is successful, if it passes the House and the Senate, will illegal logging stop? Of course it will not, but protection will come back. That is what the Labor Party is all about. They have chucked away the Hawke and Keating reforms, they have gone to the member for Lyons, they are quoting from the CFMEU—this is what it is all about. This is protectionism parading as environmental policy and I am ashamed of the member for Lyons because he has argued against this for years, against those Greens in Tasmania for years, for using trade policy and domestic law to pursue their environmental desires. And now the member for Lyons is wholly and solely with the Greens on this abomination of a bill. He should, I think, be ashamed of the position he is now taking because it will not assist his workers and it will not assist Australian consumers. It will cost them more, and it will not stop illegal logging. I want to hear the parliamentary secretary guarantee in this chamber, on his feet, that when this bill passes the practice of illegal logging in Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and wherever else around the globe will cease. He cannot and he will not.

Mr HAWKE (Mitchell) (16:14): I rise to address this consideration in detail. I would not be so kind as the member for Mayo in relation to the member for Lyons because part of the problem with this bill and this legislation is that the government of course is being driven by the Australian Greens. The member for Melbourne in his contribution to this debate said that he would like to see the definition of 'illegal timber' in the legislation expanded. He would like to see the due diligence requirements increased. Really what that reveals is that the executive arm of this government, the member for Melbourne and the Greens in the Australian Senate, are driving this agenda. And it is a Greens agenda, not a protection of jobs agenda.

It just so happens that last night, Member for Lyons, I saw a program on television about the Tasmanian tiger trail. They are trying to promote tourism there around the Tasmanian devil. It said quite reflectively, quite somberly, that they had lamented locally the loss of so many timber workers in Tasmania. Why have they lost so many timber workers in Tasmania? It is because of the policies of the Australian Greens.

So here we have a government that is driven by the Greens on one hand, saying: 'Let's expand the definition of "illegal timber". Let's stop logging altogether in the countries in our region because we are concerned about climate change,' and all of the things that the Greens are concerned about, and at the same time we have got the member for Lyons coming in here and saying, 'We've got to protect those few remaining timber workers that we've got in Tasmania.' That is the madness of a government that goes too far.

The member for Mayo's points and questions are well made, in one sense. Does the parliamentary secretary think that passing this bill will stop illegal logging? Well, yes. The government here thinks that passing a bill called the Illegal Logging Prohibition
Bill will stop illegal logging. That is the problem with this government: that is all they think they have to do. Never mind the 'how'; it is always the 'what'. Do the opposition agree with illegal logging? Of course we do not. Do we oppose this bill? No. Do we oppose the intention of this bill? No, we do not, Member for Lyons. What we are concerned about is what is in the regulations, what the definition of 'illegal timber' is, and how a citizen or business complies with it. You cannot separate the 'what' of what you want to achieve from the 'how'. But this government has not grasped the 'how'. It never does grasp the 'how'—'We'll worry about the detail later. How will we stop illegal logging? Somehow'. It is not good enough to pass the bill in this form. That is why the opposition has proposed amendments—to allow time for proper consultation.

When you read the Orwellian explanatory memorandum of this bill—which goes through the great detail of consultation with peak industry bodies and other groups that have been consulted, and how great the consultation is—you find that it is completely at odds with what you find in the attitudes to this legislation of people out there in the sector. When you go to our trading partners, whether you go to Papua New Guinea, Malaysia or Indonesia, you find that they have expressed concerns. Hardwood bodies in America or in other countries have said, 'Look, you can achieve what you are trying to achieve. Work with us.'

Even in the explanatory memorandum it says—the Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs, who is at the table, would agree—that Australia 'may leverage greater regional government action on combating illegal logging and associated trade through regional capacity building and bilateral and multilateral efforts'. Hear, hear! Where are the bilateral and multilateral efforts here? Nobody in this place has come forward into this parliament and suggested a huge issue with domestic illegal logging of timber. Nobody has come in here and suggested that.

This bill does not achieve the outcome that the government has so loudly vaunted. The member for Lyons has got up and said, 'We need to protect workers’ jobs,' at the same time as he is in coalition with the Australian Greens, who want to broaden the definition of illegal timber, and make it harder to import timber of any nature into this country because they are fundamentally opposed to logging—full stop. Every tree has to be saved, according to the Australian Greens. How does the member for Lyons come in here and say, 'Let's use the laws of this country to protect the timber jobs that are left in Tasmania. At the same time, I'm in a government that has this Greens dominated policy, which is stripping back workers and jobs in my own state.' He needs to answer that question.

But the parliamentary secretary needs to answer the question about how the government intends to stop illegal logging, just by passing a bill entitled Illegal Logging Prohibition Bill. He needs to say what the regulations will be and how this compliance will lead to a reduction in logging, and he needs to get across the detail. Every minister in this government is not across the detail, and this is another blinding example of government failure to produce the appropriate laws and regulations to back up what they are trying to achieve.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon—Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) (16:16): I thank all members for their contributions. In short, for all the verbosity from the other side, and the feigned interest in doing what is right by our
international obligations and whatever else, all those opposite are doing is delaying this legislation in order to allow further illegal logging throughout the world.

We join with others in seeking to introduce legislation to prohibit illegal logging and the importation of products that are illegally logged. If the member for Mayo thinks that that is a joke and if he thinks, in a perverse way, that the importation of illegally sourced timber products does not affect industry, jobs and businesses in Australia then I feel very sorry for him. I think that somehow or other his ideology has driven him to the perverse argument which he put before this House a moment ago.

We have had inquiry after inquiry and consultation after consultation, regionally and with our neighbours and trading partners. Indeed, time and time again we have had meeting after meeting with our trading partners over this legislation. The legislation seeks to do two things: to introduce a higher-bar entry to illegally sourced timber products into Australia, and, in the meantime, to work again with stakeholders and our partners to flesh out the regulations, which you are so pleased to say that you want to happen within three years. A three-year delay before regulations are introduced! We made a commitment in the last election and before to introduce such legislation as we have before us now, and I ask you to honour your commitment to that legislation, as we will. And you cannot honour your commitment if you support your own amendment.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott): The question is that opposition amendment (1) as moved by the member for Calare be agreed to.

The House divided. [16:23]

(The Deputy Speaker—Ms AE Burke)
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The question now is that this bill, as amended, be agreed to.

The House divided. [16:30]

(AThe Deputy Speaker—Ms AE Burke)

Ayes....................70
Noes.....................67
Majority...............3

AYES

Adams, DGH
Bandt, AP
Bowen, CE
Brodie-Muller, G
Butler, MC
Champion, ND
Clare, JD
Combet, GI
Danby, M

Albanese, AN
Bird, SL
Braddon, DJ
Burke, AS
Byrne, AM
Cheeseman, DL
Collins, JM
Crean, SF
D’Ath, YM

AYES

Alexander, JG
Andrews, KL
Bishop, BK
Briggs, JE
Buchholz, S
Christensen, GR
Cobb, JK
Dutton, PC
Fletcher, PW
Frydenberg, JA
Gash, J
Haase, BW
Hawke, AG
Hunt, GA
Jensen, DG
Keenan, M
Ley, SP
Marino, NB
Matheson, RG
Mirabella, S
Moylan, JE
O’Dowd, KD
Pyne, CM
Randall, DJ

NOES

Abbott, AJ
Baldwin, RC
Crook, AJ
Laming, A
O’Dwyer, KM

Gillard, JE
Kelly, MJ
Georganas, S
Husic, EN
O’Connor, BPJ

CHAMBER
PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Mr Abbott (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (16:34): I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Mr Abbott: Most grievously.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition has the call.

Mr Abbott: Repeatedly today in question time the Prime Minister claimed that I intended to cut funding to public schools. I said no such thing; I intend no such thing; I would do no such thing. There is only one hit list. It is the Prime Minister's hit list under which one in three schools right around Australia will have their funding cut as the Gonski review stands, even if fully funded.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. He has indicated where he has been misrepresented.

BILLS

Public Service Amendment Bill 2012
Second Reading
Debate resumed on the motion:
That this bill be now read a second time.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop (Mackellar) (16:35): The Public Service Amendment Bill 2012 is a bill which is largely technical in nature but, in the words of the minister responsible, it seeks to simplify the values of the public service from 15 down to five. They will be the terms: service, ethical, respectful, accountable and impartial. As he said, they are more succinct, memorable, easy to understand and will help the service to create an ethical high-performance culture. The one provision in this bill which I do not believe can in any way meet that high
aim is the proposed amendment which would allow the Prime Minister of the day, on behalf of the Commonwealth, on terms and conditions as determined by the Prime Minister, to appoint a secretary of a department, who has resigned or whose period of office has come to an end, to any appointment that the Prime Minister may wish—and that could be an indefinite appointment.

We in the coalition have proposed to amend the bill to delete those provisions. I flag that I will be moving those amendments in consideration in detail. I note that the government will be moving amendments in consideration in detail dealing with the original concept of a 'temporary employee' and with another provision, which the minister will no doubt himself explain. In discussions about the bill between me and the minister and his department, we have concluded that the government will accept my amendments and the opposition will agree to the government's amendments.

Before I go on to explain precisely some of the provisions of the bill that we are accepting, it is important to outline why we feel so strongly about amending the bill so that the only people who will be able to be appointed by the Prime Minister as secretaries will remain as they are in the current act, the Public Service Act 1999, which provides that, if a government department is abolished, the secretary can be appointed elsewhere and that, should a secretary have his or her term terminated by the Prime Minister, after appropriate investigation and reporting that person can be appointed elsewhere.

We are concerned on two counts about the proposed extension of the ability to appoint secretaries. One of those is that we have the precedent in New South Wales of the so-called swingers list—a whole bunch of public servants, including secretaries, who no longer have a job and simply remain on the payroll. I think it reached something like 340 at one stage, and it is only now that Premier O'Farrell is in power that he is moving to reduce the list of people who are being paid for doing nothing. This provision would have allowed such a list to develop federally. Although people will say that that is nobody's intent, it is still something that we believe is highly undesirable, and accordingly we will be moving amendments to remove that provision.

The second concern we have relates to the minister's words that I mentioned earlier:

The proposed values—that the APS is committed to service, is ethical, respectful, accountable and impartial—are more succinct and memorable, easy to understand, and will help the service to create an ethical, high-performance culture.

It is always essential that the public service can be relied upon for fair and impartial advice that ministers can act upon. Having been a minister in the previous government, I can tell you it is very valuable to have. Introducing this provision would mean that a particular secretary, by being obsequious to a Prime Minister of the day, could seek to resign and be appointed to a position indefinitely which would be to their personal benefit. This is also against the intent of the act as a whole. The difficulty has shown itself. We have had one example of it. Because there is no provision in the Public Service Act to appoint a secretary who has resigned or whose term has come to an end, the mechanism that has been used on this occasion has been section 67 of the Constitution. The Constitution allows for the appointment by the Governor-General of persons to positions as advisers, and this has been utilised by the Prime Minister in the case of the former head of the Treasury. What has happened in that circumstance has
made it very public. The terms and conditions upon which Mr Henry has been appointed are as follows:

ii. the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet be the approving authority for the Special Adviser to the Prime Minister for leave, including long service leave;

iii. for any period that the Special Adviser performs the duties of that office on a full-time basis (40 hours per week), the remuneration and other terms and conditions of employment for the Special Adviser be the same as those that apply to the person who holds the position of Secretary of the Department of the Treasury at the relevant time;

iv. the Prime Minister may agree that the duties of the Special Adviser are to be performed on a part-time basis; and

v. for any period that the Special Adviser performs the duties on a part-time basis, the remuneration referred to in clause (c)(iii) above be payable, and other entitlements accrue, on a pro-rata basis.

The problem is that this appointment as a special adviser was made under the hand of Her Excellency on 21 April 2011 but it was some five months later before it was eventually decided that there was work for him to do, on the Asian white paper. In the meantime, as of 15 March 2012, the head of Treasury would had an income of $615,000 a year, rising to $653,000 on 1 July 2012 and to $805,000 on 1 July 2014.

On 14 February, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet told Senate estimates that Dr Henry was working 2½ days a week. I have received a letter from the Secretary to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, from Mr Dreyfus, dated 14 August 2012, in answer to questions that I asked in consideration of detail of the appropriations bill.

It says that, as at 27 July 2012, Dr Henry had worked 69 days in total since 5 January at an average of 2½ days a week and that no decisions have yet been taken regarding any future projects in Mr Henry's capacity as Special Adviser to the Prime Minister. That means that, as at 1 July 2012, his remuneration will be $326,500; as at 1 January 2013, $345,500; and, if the appointment continues—and there is no end to this appointment—by 1 July he will be receiving, presuming he remains on 2½ days a week, $402,500.

In addition to that, Mr Henry is permitted to take on other work in the private sector, and he has taken on a position as a director of the National Australia Bank. That would seem to many of us to be a position of conflict of interest but it has been disclosed, as his appointment requires, and he continues in that role as well. We believe that the provision put into the act could have facilitated many more appointments like this. Many of them would have gone largely unknown, because section 67 would not have had to be used.

There are some good things in the legislation which are worthy of response and support. The commissioner will be now known as the Australian Public Service Commissioner, and greater powers do come to him. He is given the power to delegate authority to people who will be able to carry out investigations for him where the workload, were it to be done properly, would simply be too large. Code of conduct amendments will apply in connection with an employee's employment. Section 13(11) of the act is amended to require employees to behave in a way that upholds the integrity and the good reputation of their agency, as well as the APS—which is the current requirement—and to comply with the proposed employment principles as well as the APS values.

A section includes provisions to require agency heads to establish procedures for an
Australian Public Service employee to make a whistleblower report and for agency heads to deal with such reports, and provides a regulation making power to prescribe basic procedural requirements that must be complied with by the Public Service Commissioner or a delegate in dealing with whistleblower reports. This amendment will provide that regulations may prescribe circumstances in which agency heads, or the commissioner, may decline to conduct, or may decide to discontinue, an inquiry.

Another part deals with temporary employment. In the original legislation there were only to be two categories of employees—ongoing and temporary. The government has found, on advice, that this was a difficult provision to sustain and it is proposing amendments which will take us back basically to the previous position. Confidentiality of information was also of concern to the government and there are related amendments. It is now provided that persons who are conducting inquiries will also have the cover of being protected.

There is an amendment to the legislative instruments section that provides direction-making powers for the Public Service Commissioner to allow the commissioner the discretion to issue directions on employment matters relating to all Australian Public Service employees, including SES employees, on matters such as engagement, promotion, redeployment, mobility, training schemes and termination. There are some miscellaneous amendments which relate to the Australian Secret Intelligence Service, and they are supported by the opposition. The current provision is a prohibition on reduction rather than active power, and this has caused some confusion. with respect to the delegation of power.

I go back to the original point that I wanted to make, that much of this bill is endeavouring to be aspirational in terms of upholding integrity and not bringing the public service or an agency into disrepute. The current legislation does not allow a prime minister of the day to appoint a former secretary who has resigned, or whose appointment has come to an end, to any position he or she may choose for an indefinite period of time. There are two reasons for this, as I have already said—first, that it could encourage the creation of a list of so-called swingers, or the unattached list as it was known in New South Wales, and, secondly, because it could undermine those high aspirational ideals whereby a secretary of the day could wish to be subservient to a government of the day with the aim of securing employment.

I place on record—particularly because of some debate that has taken place in this chamber recently concerning the determination that the Independents chose to listen to in order that they would support the government and not vote against the appropriation bills and would give an undertaking that they would not vote on a motion of no confidence—that we sought to have our costings done by an independent source because we believed that Treasury had become politicised. That was in order until such time as the hung parliament was evident and the Independents required a briefing from Treasury—from Mr Henry himself—to tell them about the costings of the coalition's policies.

In our costings, we had identified savings of $2.5 billion against the conservative bias allowance, which is the allowance in the budget papers for corrections with regard to new policy—a buffer, you might call it. In that case, the $2.5 billion was disallowed, for want of a better term, by Mr Henry. He said that the allowance was a buffer and therefore could not be the source of any actual budgetary savings. But, in the 2009-10
budget, Mr Henry himself claimed $4.6 billion in savings over the forward estimates from that conservative bias allowance.

We had claimed that $3.3 billion could be saved from across the Health and Hospitals Fund, the Education Investment Fund and the Building Australia Fund. Mr Henry disallowed that. He said that, to claim the savings, we would have had to have identified, prior to the election, which programs were to be cut. He then said there was a secret list of programs—we had asked for that list and he said that it was secret and that he would not release it prior to the election, despite having been asked for it.

Then we came to the NBN, where we claimed $2.4 billion of savings. We said there would be a saving on borrowings because we would not be borrowing the same amount and that there would therefore be savings in interest. We calculated that saving using an interest rate of 5.5 per cent. Mr Henry said no, that he had decided that the going rate for the future would be 4.9 per cent and that he would therefore disallow our claimed amount as a saving. The only problem is that, at the time—in September, when I checked and first talked about these things—the rate was in fact 5.23 per cent.

Next we came to the question of returning people to work and the resultant saving on welfare payments. We said we would save $600 million, but Mr Henry said no to that on the basis that it was a second-round figure. But Mr Henry himself had used a second-round saving of $600 million for the government's purposes with regard to the mining tax.

Then we came to the question of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, the PBS, where possible savings of up to 40 per cent had been identified by the government prior to the election. But the government had chosen to use savings of only 23 per cent. So we said there was an additional 17 per cent, valued at $1.15 billion. But Mr Henry said no, our savings could not be allowed, and that therefore there was a further hole in our budget. It is interesting to note that, since Mr Henry disallowed that saving, the government itself has actually booked the $1.15 billion for its own savings.

Those amounts added up to $9.95 billion—and the figure for what Mr Henry said was a black hole in our accounts was $11 billion. Mr Windsor could not wait to get on television and say that, because there was a big hole in our budget and we could not do our accounting properly, he would have to vote for the government. From all of this, I think one can see that the impartiality of the Treasury and of other agencies and departments is essential if we are to have trust in the sorts of figures being produced. The bottom line is that, if we did not move our amendments, we might again see instances of people seeking to serve the interests of the government of the day rather than the public interest. We do not think that would represent good policy, particularly when the whole of the bill is designed to be aspirational in nature.

I am pleased to say that, when we come to the consideration in detail, at which time we will be moving our amendments and the government will be moving their amendments, we have agreed that each of us will accept the other's amendments to allow the bill to go forward and keep its aspirational nature intact. We trust that will help to make reality those memorable words the minister used:

The proposed values—that the APS is committed to service, is ethical, respectful, accountable and impartial—are more succinct and memorable, easy to understand, and will help the service to create an ethical, high-performance culture.

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby)
(16:57): I am pleased to be speaking on the
Public Service Amendment Bill 2012 as it gives me the opportunity to talk about the excellent work that that fine body of men and women who populate the Australian Public Service do on behalf of the Australian people and the government of Australia, day in and day out. Around 120,000 of them turn up to work to make our airports safe, to patrol our coasts, to ensure that pensioners and family benefit recipients have their payments made and their inquiries answered, to ensure that tax returns are done on time and that people pay as much tax as they should and no more than they ought, and to ensure that members of the Australian Defence Force are properly supported in far-flung places of the globe as indeed they should be. I should also mention that excellent work of the men and women who assist in providing services to this House.

The bill implements some of the changes recommended in the report, *Ahead of the game: blueprint for reform of Australian government administration*. The report arose out of the Moran review of the Australian Public Service, a review I had a little bit to do with in a former life. On 8 May 2010, the then Prime Minister announced that the government had accepted all the recommendations of the report. This bill takes forward some of those recommendations for a modern, contemporary employment framework which will help give the APS greater agility and help make it more responsive to the community and to government. Implementation of these reforms will result in greater efficiency and a more effective use of Commonwealth resources. It will facilitate and accelerate the cultural shift of the APS towards operating, as the minister said in his second reading speech, 'more effectively as one Australian Public Service'.

The amendments in the bill are an important part of modernising the Australian Public Service to ensure it has the capacity to cope with the challenges of the future. In every single one of the challenges we face as a nation, the Australian Public Service is at the front line in delivering both the policy advice and the services that will assist us as a nation in confronting those challenges. The amendments will reposition the Public Service Commissioner and the APSC to deliver on the broad reform goals of the public service workplace. The bill will empower secretaries and the leadership group to deliver on the policy goals of the government through greater independence in operation and greater accountability in performance.

There are three significant sets of amendments in the bill. Part 1 of schedule 1 to the bill provides new descriptions of the roles and responsibilities of secretaries, particularly in relation to their stewardship of the Australian Public Service. The revised descriptions make clear the service and performance expected of secretaries, and strengthen secretaries' accountability to their ministers in the performance of their role and in discharging their responsibilities. The new, proposed section 61A of the act requires an annual review of the performance of a secretary to be carried out in accordance with a framework established by the secretary of the Prime Minister's department and the Public Service Commissioner. This will provide greater accountability, transparency and oversight of the performance of secretaries.

The second set of measures will reposition the Public Service Commissioner and the APSC to deliver on broad reform goals and increase their responsibility for Australian government policies on APS agreement making and on pay and conditions. The commissioner will have three broad functions. The first is to strengthen the professionalism of the APS and facilitate
contentious, sorry, continuous improvement—probably contentious improvements as well—in workforce management in the APS. The second is to uphold high standards of integrity and conduct in the APS. The third is to monitor, review and report on APS capabilities within and between agencies to promote high standards of accountability, effectiveness and performance. The bill specifically recognises the commissioner's role as the central authority for APS workforce development and reform.

The third set of measures represent a revision of the APS values. The blueprint recognised the power of values as a foundation for reform and thus took the opportunity to revise the APS values as a means of assisting cultural change, which would in turn help to achieve the desired APS performance. The values and the employment principles are statements about the essential character and philosophy of the APS. They define what the APS is and how it should operate. These amendments seek to implement the blueprint's recommendations to revise the APS values and to establish APS leadership groups. The APS values are to be revised in order to replace the current set of 15 with a shorter set of five, and to introduce a set of employment principles. They are: committed to service, ethical, respectful, accountable and impartial—hard to cavil at any of these being employment principles.

The proposed APS values and employment principles together capture the essence of the existing 15 values, blending contemporary ethics with enduring principles of public administration that go to the heart of the Westminster model. No important concepts have been lost. Agency heads and APS employees will be required to uphold the values and the employment principles. Agency heads and SES employees will also be required to promote them, reflecting the key responsibility that they have as leaders within their agencies to set the tone for the right culture.

It is important that we continually review the legislation that enshrines employment arrangements and the performance of work within the Australian Public Service. It is one of our most important and enduring institutions. From time to time, the capacity of the public service is stretched to breaking point. One of the important functioning principles that we as a government have adopted is ensuring that we run a tight budget and that we return the budget to surplus as promised, and I know that this has placed a degree of strain on public service agencies. But I know with equal force that the men and women of the public service are committed to delivering services on behalf of the Australian government to the people of Australia.

Of course, a tight fiscal environment is not the only threat facing the men and women of the Australian Public Service. We know that there are alternative proposals as to how the APS should be regulated and funded. For example, we know that, if the opposition come to government at the next election, they will make huge cuts to the Australian Public Service in order to fund the $70 billion black hole in their policy costings. This was confirmed as recently as today by the Leader of the Opposition. They have a mammoth target. Make no mistake: to be able to bring in anything like the $70 billion of savings that will be necessary for them to meet their commitments, they will have to take to the Australian Public Service with scissors to a degree that has never been seen before.

We have had a taste of what coalition policies mean for the public service around the country. We have seen what their state
colleagues are doing in Queensland, for example, where a recently elected Premier, without forewarning, is taking to that public service. Against the promises and assurances made that front-line services would not be under attack, we are seeing exactly that in Queensland today in the health system, in the education system, in the public transport system—in fact, there is no sector in the Queensland public service that will escape the scourge of public sector job cuts.

In New South Wales, my own state, we are seeing the shape of that looming up as well as the O'Farrell government starts to take a cleaver to front-line services. The people of New South Wales are starting to see front-line services at risk because of the ideological desire to slash public sector and front-line jobs.

It is disturbing that the coalition seems, in some of the statements that have been made by some of the opposition spokespeople, to be embracing the policies of the UK Prime Minister David Cameron's guru Phillip Blond, who seems to be in vogue at the moment. Mr Blond has been advising the coalition about the notion of the so-called 'big society'. There is every sign that the coalition is adopting this conservative government approach to our public services in Australia. We have already heard the family spokesperson saying that a coalition government would cut federal oversight of aged care, child care, employment and family services. We have seen the devastating impact on recipients of aged-care services unless you have a strong cop on the beat, ensuring that those most vulnerable people in our community, people who are reliant on federally funded aged-care services, childcare services, health care and the like are not kept on their game by strong federal oversight.

People in this country will have a lot to fear if there is an adoption of the Blond approach to public sector administration. It is a failed approach. Since it was adopted in the UK, 7,000 charities have been forced to close the door. This is the agenda which seeks to enliven civil society. Have no doubt about it: the 'big society' agenda is nothing more than a big smoke screen for slashing government services and the people who provide those services.

I would like to make a few observations in response to what was said by the member for Mackellar just recently. One of the measures in this bill which I think has merit is the one which enables the Prime Minister to re-employ former secretaries of APS departments to bring them back into service and to ensure that they may commit their knowledge and expertise in the service of the Australian people and the Australian government. We saw an example of that most recently when Ken Henry, a man who has served all sides of politics in this country with great distinction and a man who sometimes has been defamed in this place for the advice he has given to government, has been re-engaged by the Prime Minister to assist in bringing together the Australia in the Asian century white paper to bring dozens of years in economic and social policy advice to bear on that important issue. When that report is finally released I know it will be a great contribution to public policy debate in this country.

I listened carefully to the member for Mackellar's objection to putting in place within the Public Service Act just that sort of arrangement—as I listen carefully to all the comments the member for Mackellar makes in this space. It does not sit easily with her track record that the objections were that somehow you would have a lack of security in the top echelons of the Australian Public Service. The words used were ‘a swingers
list. I have to say that the word 'swinger' and the Australian Public Service are not generally used in the same sentence around this place. That sits very uneasily with their track record in government.

Let us contrast what happened when Labor was elected to government in 2007. You never saw a night of the long knives, but when the coalition government was elected in 1996 you did see a night of the long knives. In the first 12 months, APS departmental secretaries in their dozens were axed from their jobs, as were almost 16,000 public servants.

The coalition's objections are hollow. The bill is a good one and should be adopted in its totality. I commend the legislation to the House.

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (17:12): It is nice to have the opportunity to speak tonight on the Public Service Amendment Bill 2012, given the very wide-ranging debate which has been allowed to occur after the comments by the member for Throsby. When I was looking around for some media commentary or discussion on this bill, there really was not much there. This bill has not inspired too many people in the general public. When we look back we see that the second reading speech by the minister was made on 1 March 2012. I am not sure it has inspired the government either, given the length of time it has taken to bring the debate back to the House—some 5½ months have transpired. The panel which created this report headed the Ahead of the game: blueprint for the reform of the Australian government administration was originally commissioned, as I understand, in September 2009. A panel comprised almost entirely of senior public servants were asked to have a look at the public service. The report was commissioned and the report was released on 2 March 2010—again, a little while ago now.

On 8 May 2010, 25 months ago, then Prime Minister Rudd said he had accepted all of the recommendations of the panel and their report. But, of course, shortly thereafter, unfortunately for the then Prime Minister, he was no longer the Prime Minister. But in any case there has been quite a delay, so their priorities have obviously been elsewhere.

I think it is agreed that we all need to be very carefully about the need to strengthen leadership in the Australian Public Service, because, ultimately, the Australian Public Service serves the people and the government of the day, whose policies need to be enacted. It goes to the public service to initiate and bring those policies to this place in the form of bills, and then ultimately to implement those policies on the ground.

I am not quite sure I agree with the member for Throsby's comments that the public service is on the forefront of every big thing that has happened in the country. I am not so sure I would say that was the case. Really, the public service exists to bring the policies the government puts before the election—or in the case of this government, after the election as well—to the point of initiation and implementation.

It is important that we be very clear that the public service should not in any case be political or self-serving. It behoves the government to ensure that their actions do not politicise the public service in any way. A public service that is seen to be politically partisan in its activities undermines confidence in the public service. That is obviously not the case with the public service. We have confidence in so much of what the public service does. But government and the public service should be very careful in the way the public service is seen to be performing its duties.

The shadow minister, the member for Mackellar, has conducted negotiations with
the government minister. This has seen an agreement that there will be coalition amendments that will be accepted by the government and government amendments that will be accepted by the coalition. That is very good news.

In this country, sadly, there is a history of certain appointments having been made by governments. I look back not very far to the Labor government of New South Wales and the creation of a burgeoning unallocated list, which constituted $16 million in salaries each year for SES or very senior public servants who were employed but were not actually required to do any work. So it is probably par for the course that the original concept of this bill, before the amendments had been agreed on, would have seen this government given the opportunity to create such a list.

When we speak of such a list, and the idea of being given a pay grade but no actual responsibilities, it is exactly the sort of thing that can create a perception of loyalties to those who created the list or brought people onto it. I think that is very clearly a bad idea for a public service, because it will in some ways create the view that there is a level of loyalty owed to those who make the appointments.

As the member for Mackellar said after the last election, one thing that had interesting implications was when Dr Henry provided a certain level of advice to the Independents, which undermined and cast doubt upon some of the election figures of the coalition, yet, not long after that, allowed those figures when the government needed the figures to match up for them. Then, he resigned as Treasury Secretary and received an appointment from the Prime Minister, again for quite a deal of money, as I recall—on a pro rata basis for part-time I think it was some $307,000 a year. If you create a system whereby people can be appointed again on an unallocated list—can be appointed to do a particular task—and the Prime Minister gets the opportunity to make those appointments, it can be highly desirable for a person to seek one of those appointments. When you have an important public service position involving an important role in the post-election administration dealing with the Independents and you then go to a government appointed position at the end of the earlier appointment, there is the possibility that some people might perceive that as being something of a conflict of interest. That is very bad for the public service.

It is such a good thing that the Special Minister of State has listened to the shadow minister, the member for Mackellar, and has seen the light in this regard. It was a great example of what actually happened, with regard to Dr Henry. We now see, and maybe the government can also see, that there is a level of risk that it might undermine the position of the public service, or senior members of the public service.

As I said earlier, it is obviously clear to the public service that it must remain impartial, but it is also right for the government of either persuasion not to put people in a position which would cause the public to have less confidence in the impartiality of the public service. It is certainly good that those amendments have been agreed to and that we will see them come up during the consideration-in-detail stage of this bill.

I appreciate the opportunity to make some comments on this matter tonight, and I appreciate the government embracing the amendments that the member for Mackellar has put forward. I think that we will have a much improved bill as a result.
Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (17:23): It gives me great pleasure to speak tonight about this important bill, the Public Service Amendment Bill 2012, which is designed to improve the way the Australian Public Service responds to the challenges of the future. This bill and the proposed amendments to it are very significant in terms of modernising the Australian Public Service. As the member for Canberra, I proudly represent thousands and thousands of public servants. I am always enormously pleased when the Labor government delivers improvements to the public service; in this case, measures that ensure the public service has the capability to better manage information. I am a fierce advocate for our public service and for the people who work extremely hard to implement government policy and keep our country ticking.

The technical amendments contained in this legislation ensure that both the Public Service Commissioner and the Australian Public Service Commission are able to deliver on wide-ranging reforms that will benefit public service workplaces. Specifically, this legislation will empower secretaries and others in leadership groups to provide a much greater range of independence and accountability in the delivery of policies. The amendments proposed to this bill will clarify the roles and responsibilities of secretaries. These measures will spell out the services and the performance that is expected of secretaries and will, additionally, strengthen secretaries’ accountability to ministers.

There are specific amendments to the employment arrangements for secretaries in this bill. Very importantly, these amendments revise the APS values. They also introduce a set of employment principles that will assist in unifying the APS around an ethical, high-performance culture. The amendments will also modernise the functions of the Public Service Commissioner and recognise the commissioner's role as the central authority for APS workforce development and reform.

This legislation continues the Gillard government's agenda of improving and enhancing the Australian Public Service. The Gillard Labor government have ensured that we have a strong public service. We will continue to build a strong public service. I will continue to advocate for a strong and stable public service. We will always make sure the public service is able to tackle current challenges while keeping growth under tight control.

As every member here knows, I am a passionate and strong advocate for Canberra, for the Australian Public Service and also for the ADF. The reason the public service needs to be defended is the threats and attacks to its integrity and performance by those opposite. The opposition have made an art form out of attacking the Australian Public Service and the integrity of the people who work there. Neither the Australian public nor the Australian Public Service can afford what those opposite could potentially subject the public sector to, particularly in terms of their boom-bust mentality. The budget surplus that the government is committed to will create a buffer against any further global economic turmoil and, however difficult this budget will be, it will not lead to the feast and famine experience that I witnessed firsthand in the 1990s when the Howard government randomly slashed almost 30,000 jobs across the public service and across the nation, and then had to expand public service numbers because of the damage done by those cuts.

The coalition thinks that Canberra-bashing and demeaning the public service is a good thing. I am constantly in committees where I hear of numbers floating around—for
example, there is a commitment from those opposite to cut 12,000 jobs, but then it gradually increases. I hear that DMO is going to be added to the list, then I hear that another government agency is going to be added to the list, and then another—it just keeps going up and up. We are probably up to about 20,000 on the public record but, from conversations I have had with those opposite, I think it is back up to about 30,000, which is what we experienced in 1996 nationally. What that meant for Canberra was that we lost between 15,000 and 20,000 public service jobs. That is about two or three suburbs in my electorate. What that meant for Canberra was that house prices plummeted, people left town, and the only real growth industry was removalists. It also meant that we had a few seasons of negative growth when the rest of Australia was growing.

As well as the huge knock-on effect here, with house prices plummeting and the local shops closing down, it also had a significant knock-on effect in the region. One only need speak to my colleague, the member for Eden-Monaro, to understand that. What we saw was a ripple effect right throughout the capital region—because Canberra is a regional hub. It depends on the service, but in some instances we provide up to 50 per cent of services to the region. I think in cancer treatment, we provide up to 50 per cent of treatment for the region; in health, it is between 30 and 50 per cent; in education, between 30 and 50 per cent. We provide a range of services to the region and we also employ a lot of people in the region. When you are looking at the loss of 15,000 to 20,000 jobs, as we experienced in 1996—and I was one of those jobs—then the impact is significant not only for Canberra but also for the region. At the coast we saw that about two-thirds of the houses were on the market—because of the huge regional knock-on effect: on jobs, on house values and on economic growth.

When I go out and do my mobile offices and my community forums, one of the things that my constituents are really concerned about is an Abbott led government, because they know about coalition governments from past, bitter experience. In 1996 farewells were held en masse—every Friday you would go to farewell for 10 or 12 people who had lost their jobs. My constituents know and understand what a coalition government can mean for Canberra because they had first hand experience of it in 1996. That is when we were plunged into an era in which there were a number of quarters of negative growth, and it took us about five years to get out of it. But we have huge infrastructure programs here now. There are BER programs, there are roads being built and there are cranes on the horizon, whereas I cannot remember having seeing a crane on the horizon in Canberra in the late 1990s and early 2000s. It is wonderful to see so much growth and investment in this city thanks to Labor. There is investment in roads—in the Monaro Highway and in the Majura Parkway—and there is investment in a number of government buildings and in BER programs. There is significant investment in Canberra because Labor is committed to Canberra.

This legislation builds on the capacity of the public service to modernise and meet future challenges. It does not look at the public service as just an expense to which an axe needs to be taken. We rely on a strong and vibrant public sector, and we value it. I remind those listening this evening of the jobs that the men and women of the Australian Public Service do. They perform enormously important functions and do so very quietly. They are the silent heroes; that is what I think I called them in my first speech to the parliament. They are the
invisible heroes—they go about their business quietly and serve the nation. They try to make a difference and improve lives quietly at the local level, at the national level and at the international level. Public servants provide our health and aged-care services, deliver to the sick and frail, manage our food production from the farm to the table, educate our children, build our universities and our higher education sector, and ensure that our workplaces are safe and fair—and the list goes on and on.

I have highlighted the huge contrast between those opposite and Labor on the public service. We will always support the incredible dedication and hard work of Australian public servants by improving the way they operate, and this bill goes a long way towards doing so. We have introduced legislation today which will improve and enhance the operations of the Australian Public Service. We are committed to the public service and public servants. We alone recognise and support the thousands of public servants who serve their country every day in so many invisible and quiet ways. This bill will improve the operations of the public service and provide it with better capacity to manage future challenges. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr WYATT (Hasluck) (17:33): I rise to speak on the Public Service Amendment Bill. In preparing to do this I read the report Ahead of the game: blueprint for the reform of Australian government administration to see what propositions were being included; I also read the explanatory memorandum to the public service bill. I agree that many changes were proposed to the legislation by the report which will modernise the public sector and create a sense of change and reform—and this will be to the betterment of the country. The Public Service Amendment Bill makes a number of amendments to the code of conduct for public servants and to the changing values and employment principles for APS employees, both of which are specified in the Public Service Act 1999.

The Public Service Amendment Bill has been introduced in response to the report Ahead of the game: blueprint for the reform of Australian government administration, which was released in March 2010. The bill aims 'to strengthen the management and leadership of the public service and embed new practices and behaviours in its culture'. I think that all of us in this chamber would agree that doing so is an absolutely necessary undertaking, because the public service provides advice and direction to ministers, and this shapes the policies and key strategic services and programs as well as the interrelatedness that exists within a federation. To that extent, the public service fills its role tremendously.

The report Ahead of the game: blueprint for the reform of Australian government administration proposes reform to the Australian public sector in four key areas. The first is:

… forge a stronger relationship with citizens through better delivery of services and greater involvement of citizens in their government …

If the legislation enhances this, then our implementation of the legislation has significant merit. The second is:

… strengthen the capacity of the public service to provide strategic, big-picture policy and delivery advice addressing the most difficult policy challenges of the day …

The third is:

… invest in the capability of the public service workforce through improved recruitment and training processes, greater mobility and alignment of working conditions across agencies, and a new, more consistent approach to employee performance …

I would assume that all the members of the Senior Executive Service would be subject,
as much as were other public servants, to such requirements so that, if they were working on contract, they would then on merit apply for the position again and that, if they won the position, they would be appointed in accordance with normal prevailing practice. We have seen some variation to this practice, and this is of concern. When you give unfettered power to an individual or a small group of individuals, some practices come into play that are not consistent with merit selection processes in the public sector.

The report also states:

- introduce a stronger focus on efficiency and quality to ensure agencies are agile, capable and effective, backed up by measures to help them plan and improve their performance.

The blueprint recommends nine key interdependent reforms which seek to deliver better service for citizens; create more open government; enhance policy capacity; reinvigorate strategic leadership; introduce a new public service commission to drive change and provide strategic planning; clarify and align employment conditions; strengthen workforce planning and development; ensure agency agility, capability and effectiveness; and improve agency efficiency. I would have thought that our current public sector does a lot of that now. Under the tweaking, the one that excites me most is its responsiveness in the way in which it will engage with citizens, the private sector and relevant sectors for which it develops programs, policies and strategies that will make a difference to the lives of all Australians.

Let me assure you that many constituents in all electorates will welcome these changes if they happen uniformly. But, equally, let me assure you that they will be very cynical and will continue with their anger and frustration. It is an opportunity to create ongoing employment for senior public servants outside their contract, guaranteeing them a continuance in employment with no significant change in salary. The recent Ken Henry appointment reflects this to some extent. That is where I have constituents raise with me the golden opportunities that are given to individuals within senior executive positions and the salaries that continue beyond the expired contract into new roles, where appointments are often seen as political. Every Australian would love the opportunity to go into a new role without having to go through a merit selection process, because people see themselves as having skills commensurate to the types of tasks required for the jobs in the public sector.

Every Australian worker knows that, on the expiration of a contract, they are without a job until they find another through a process of competing, on merit, for a new position within an organisation. They would love the opportunity to be directly appointed to a high-salaried position without going through that process. The blueprint sets an ambitious and interlinked reform agenda that seeks to improve services, programs and policies for Australian citizens. Above all, it recognises that, to be strong, the APS must make the most of the talents, energy and integrity of its people. I would have thought the appointment processes would require integrity whereby, once you finish a contract, you compete for a position on merit and undertake that role. I have been in the position where, as a public servant, you look to the whole fabric of integrity within the bureaucracies you work in. The proposed reforms therefore seek to boost and support the APS workforce and leadership and to embed new practices and behaviour into the APS culture. I do not have a problem with that. I think it has significant merit.

Of concern, however, this bill will give the Prime Minister greater power to extend
the employment of departmental secretaries, allowing the Prime Minister to create new positions for secretaries who have resigned or whose contracts have ended. Wouldn't it be great if we could offer the same opportunity to every Australian in the workplace, so they did not have to compete and could be given high-salaried positions on a basis equal to that proposed? The Prime Minister recently did this when Mr Ken Henry resigned from his position as Secretary of Treasury in April 2011, being appointed as a 'special adviser' under section 67 of the Constitution.

The unattached list is common practice in the public sector at both national and state and territory levels, and there are people who have spent considerable time on unattached lists receiving salaries provided by the taxpayers and the battling families of Australia. I would hope it is not a practice that will see the transition of retired members or secretaries into special appointments without a merit selection process. I acknowledge that we have to seek skills and expertise when we assign a task that requires thinking outside the square. But there are other ways in which we have done it successfully in the past.

Former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, in his 2020 forums, sought the views of ordinary Australians and people with jobs and specialised knowledge in particular areas to be part of the forward thinking that he had in mind when he established the Rudd government's credentials in the period in which he led government. I did not see him appoint particular advisers to continually give him advice. Should this legislation be passed, the Prime Minister will have the power to create similar roles for any secretary who resigns or whose contract has expired. I wonder if that would apply to somebody who reapplied for their position but did not win it on merit and were given the opportunity of being slotted into a plum role.

The coalition does not oppose the body of the bill. At present the Prime Minister only has the power to appoint departmental secretaries to another role if their department has been abolished or if she has terminated them from their position, both being rare occurrences in the current public sector. The changes to section 60 will allow the Prime Minister to appoint departing departmental secretaries to new roles should they resign or when their terms of service expire and are not renewed. This has the potential to be the beginning of a practice similar to the New South Wales unattached list, which applies at the chief and SES levels.

Another interesting thing I read was that there would be minimal financial implications, although the report itself states: In a number of areas, reform would require an up-front investment. For example, a new funding model would be required to support the APSC’s additional responsibilities, including the coordination of workforce planning and agency capability reviews. Similarly the citizen-centred reforms, such as developing and establishing an APS-wide citizen survey, would require some resourcing early on.

Over the long term, however, it is anticipated that the reforms (when implemented as a package), would deliver efficiencies and a return on investment. By building capacity and improving effectiveness, several reforms will drive effectiveness and efficiency gains across the APS such as reducing the burden of internal red tape. All the way through, the report is embedded with some tremendous thinking around the changes that are required, but it does not diminish the importance of public servants. What diminishes the importance of the process is the way in which this legislation will allow the Prime Minister—it does not matter whether it is a coalition or Labor government—to make appointments outside
of the normal, expected behaviour that has predominantly governed the way in which appointments are made in the public sector.

I support the coalition's proposition to amend the legislation by removing changes to section 60 of the Public Service Act, which will allow the Prime Minister to extend the terms of departmental secretaries who have resigned or whose contracts have ended. I support the sentiments expressed by the member for Canberra that public servants do play a key and vital role, that their pathways and their career progression are certainly based on merit standards. It is based on a set of criteria and they know with certainty that they have the opportunity to apply and be part of their or another agency. I think there are many meritorious elements of Ahead of the game, but I certainly could not support a proposition that gave unfettered power to a prime minister to appoint whoever.

Sometimes within the public sector you do not have the particular type of knowledge or skill that is required in the shaping of a strategic direction or the detailed advice in respect of legislation. This could apply to specialised areas of advancing scientific fields, such as gene technology. In those instances there is not a problem in bringing in the right people to provide the level of advice. We have used committees effectively for that range of expert advice without having to appoint a retired or senior public servant—secretaries in particular—at the whim of a prime minister. It is better that we have integrity within the public sector and that we never diminish it.

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (17:47): I rise to speak in support of the government's Public Service Amendment Bill. The bill is significant in that it is part of the government's ongoing program of measures to strengthen the integrity and professionalism of the Australian Public Service—a cause to which this government and preceding Labor governments have made major contributions over the past four decades. The bill represents part of the government's response to the report, Ahead of the game: Blueprint for the reform of Australian government administration, prepared by the advisory group on Reform of Australian Government Administration. In particular, the bill captures the blueprint's recommendation that APS values be revised and restated as a 'smaller set of core values that are meaningful, memorable, and effective in driving change'. This recommendation was based on extensive consultation by the advisory group among APS staff and the wider community. It is this focus on 'core values' which I wish to concentrate on in my remarks today.

On 8 May 2010, then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd announced that the government had accepted all of the recommendations in the blueprint report, and said in particular:

We are committed to building an Australian Public Service with a culture of independence, excellence and innovation—in policy advice and service delivery.

From my personal experience as a UN official, in which capacity I was closely involved with the creation of the UN Ethics Office, and from my current role as Chair of the Joint Standing Committee on the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity, I am well aware of the need for strong organisational efforts to give meaning to ethics codes and standards. Anyone who has worked in any organisation will know from experience, or from common sense, that merely publishing a code of conduct will not, of itself, entrench ethical practice. As management guru Chester Barnard observed as long ago as 1928, competent and committed leadership in managing the values of the organisation is an
essential function of the executive in any enterprise.

Former Australian Public Service Commissioner Andrew Podger made much the same point in his State of the Service report for 2004, when he observed that the APS values needed to be strengthened by institutionalising them in the day-to-day practices and procedures of departments. This is necessarily a task for the leadership which the bill addresses directly.

According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the OECD, the core values of a public service are the basis for judgement about what is proper and improper in serving the public interest:

Values, stated in public documents (such as legislation), shape citizens' expectations about the mission and activities of public sector organisations. There is also a growing recognition that public servants are not solely motivated by financial rewards for performance, and that public service values play a role in promoting the performance and integrity of government.

It is appropriate, therefore, that part 1 of schedule 1 to this bill provides new and enhanced roles and responsibilities for APS departmental secretaries, particularly in relation to their stewardship of the Australian Public Service's professional values. The bill strengthens secretaries' accountability to ministers in performing their roles and discharging their responsibilities. The bill's changes enhance both the independence of the processes for appointment and termination of departmental secretaries and the continuity of departmental leadership by countering perceptions that secretaries' terms in office may be tied to the electoral cycle.

It is perhaps not surprising that the many complex challenges facing the Australian Public Service today attract less public attention than those other major issues which engage most Australians. What is happening in the One Day International? Who is winning in the NRL or the AFL? Will Black Caviar run away from the field again? Or who is on next week's Q&A? This is perhaps inevitable, but it may just reflect the fact that, as a community, we tend to take 'good governance' for granted. And as a community, Australians should be entitled to take good governance for granted. But good governance does not just happen, and it is not just the responsibility of governments: it takes vision, effort, commitment, resources and a supportive community. Whether the task is delivering better education and health care, or better access to justice, or better use of public funds, or better resistance to corruption, better defence, better policy advice to government, or any of a thousand other 'goods', the capacity and willingness of the public service to deliver its part of the 'good governance' package remains crucial to public trust in government.

The bill therefore reflects many of the changes in Australian public administration which have occurred over recent decades. The shift away from central control to a more flexible operating environment, while retaining a principles based approach to decision making and a strong focus on core values, is the key to understanding the bill's objectives.

In responding to the blueprint report's recommendation that the 15 APS values from the 1999 act be revised to a 'smaller set of core values that are meaningful, memorable and effective in driving change', the bill addresses longstanding concerns about the Howard government's amendments to the Public Service Act 1999, which were intended to legislate the APS Values and Code of Conduct, primarily so they could be used for disciplinary purposes. Many critics at the time observed that the proposed formulation of the APS values was vague, ill-defined and conceptually incoherent.
In commenting on the proposed changes, the Joint Committee of Public Accounts commented:

…the expectations imposed on employees by the APS Values must be clear. In view of the potential seriousness of allegations of failure to uphold the Values, which could result in termination of employment in the APS, it is vital that they be easily interpreted.

Five years later, Commissioner Podger reported that much still needed to be done to embed ethics and values in practice. The State of the Service report for 2010-11 reiterates that message. Values and ethical practices cannot simply be stipulated. They must be built into the way an APS organisation manages and selects staff. They must be the basis of all internal and external communications and dealings—especially with ministers. They must be modelled at the top and at all senior levels and they must be the subject of careful monitoring and continuing professional development education.

The restatement of APS values in the bill is a critical part of meeting the blueprint report’s recommendations. The core values themselves have been reduced from 15 to five in number: impartial, committed to service, accountable, respectful, and ethical—forming the acronym ICARE. Interpretation of the new values in the specific contexts of individual APS workplaces is to be a primary function of the Public Service Commissioner, working with departmental secretaries. All APS employees are to be bound by the code and are required to uphold the APS values. Agency heads and members of the SES are also bound by the code, and will have an additional responsibility to promote adherence to the APS values.

Integrity and ethics in the Australian Public Service have been longstanding concerns of Australian Labor governments, from 1976, when the Whitlam government established the Coombs Royal Commission on Australian Government Administration, to today. This government's particular contribution to the task have been significant. On coming into office in 2007, we enacted the 2007 Standards of Ministerial Ethics, which, among other things, endorses the professional independence and integrity of the Australian Public Service as a public, non-partisan resource. We initiated a parliamentary process to develop the forthcoming parliamentary members' code, which will complement the Standards of Ministerial Ethics. We initiated a parliamentary process for a comprehensive review of whistleblower protection measures in Australia and overseas. And, on the basis of the committee's report, we are developing draft legislation, which I sincerely hope will come before the House in the near future. As part of the government's commitment to accountability and integrity, we established the new statutory office of Information Commissioner and appointed a former Commonwealth Ombudsman, Professor John McMillan, as commissioner, to ensure transparency in APS and government decision making.

This government commissioned the review and report by the advisory group on Reform of Australian Government Administration. The report Ahead of the game: blueprint for the reform of Australian government administration made wide-ranging recommendations concerning the future management and structure of the Australian Public Service, all of which were accepted by the government. The bill now before the House is evidence of the government's commitment to ensuring that the blueprint's recommended changes are made, both in legislation and in the daily practice of the Australian Public Service at all levels.
The Australian Public Service is a unique enterprise and a uniquely valuable one in a democratic society. We have seen for some time, public services everywhere being subjected to higher levels of scrutiny and criticism, and greater expectations of efficiency, service and responsiveness to governments and the public at large. We have known for some time that merely legislating for ethics does not work. Equally important is a commitment to recognising the crucial role played by departmental secretaries, and the public service leadership generally, in ensuring a culture of integrity and public trust in our public institutions.

Tone at the top— for many years the mantra of the audit profession—applies equally in this context. Setting this tone is one of the key responsibilities of the leadership in any organisation which seeks to function with integrity. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr BUCHHOLZ (Wright) (17:57): I rise to speak on the Public Service Amendment Bill 2012. This bill seeks to make a number of amendments to the Public Service Act 1999 to ensure that the Australian Public Service is able to continue serving the Australian government, the parliament, and the Australian public to a higher standard of ethics, efficiency and effectiveness.

It is no secret that the policy of the Liberal Party when in government is to reduce the number of public servants. This is a line that is consistent with other states at the moment. But, when I have the opportunity to speak with public servants in Canberra, through relationships I made before coming to this place and still have contact with, there is an element of frustration from these people at the growing amount of compliance and burdens that surround their day-to-day activities. I have no doubt that public servants work extremely hard and that they go home physically exhausted from trying to maintain and upkeep the compliance provisions that are thrust upon them. I also get the opportunity to witness the frustration that surrounds the Customs staff—our frontline staff—as resources are taken from them. I returned recently from the Somali coastline on HMAS Anzac, where I spent time with Australian Defence Force personnel who are eminently frustrated with Labor's cutbacks in defence to the tune of roughly $2 billion and the impact those will have on their lives.

When we in the coalition talk about reducing public servants, we are not talking about reductions at the frontline: it is the back-end office—back-end staff—that we will be focusing our energies on. How can the government, when it comes to public service amendments or reform, ask Australian businesses and mums and dads to tighten their belts with continually increasing new taxes—I think there have been 30—when we have seen the public service grow by roughly 22,000 personnel?

When I talk to businesses in my electorate of Wright and ask them for feedback on how their day is made easier by the number of public servants that are there, I am often met with a very similar result, or a comment of: 'My day has not got easier; in fact, it has got harder. I am burdened with compliance.' The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry-Westpac survey for the 17th consecutive quarter has indicated that the single biggest inhibitor of business growth is government taxes and compliance.

On 8 May 2010, the then Prime Minister announced that the government had accepted all the recommendations made in the earlier March release report, Ahead of the game: blueprint for the reform of Australian government administration. This report outlined a comprehensive reform agenda to position the Australian Public Service to better serve the Australian government and
the Australian community. It is an agenda that requires modernisation of the Public Service Act, bringing it into line with contemporary needs. The amendment of the bill will strengthen the management and the leadership of the Public Service and help to embed new practices and behaviours into its culture.

When we talk about new practices and new behaviours, the Public Service is quite an oddity. As a businessman, which I was before coming here, when you go through a line item you do not start with a bucket of money whereby you have the mindset, 'If we do not appropriate this line item, we will lose it.' Business does not do that. That money drops to the bottom of your balance sheet and it becomes net profit. So when we look for areas of waste or areas in which we can be more efficient or diligent there are a number of commercial practices that can be used. I understand that in the cold, hard light of reality administrators should not or cannot on occasion treat their position as commercial, but it is interesting to do an analysis on the difference in mindsets. This bill recognises that the delivery of high-quality services and policy advice requires effective and committed leadership, supported by a Public Service that is efficient, driven by its desire to serve the community and contemporary in its outlook.

Presently, the Prime Minister has the role to appoint departmental secretaries to another role if their department has been abolished or their position is terminated. Both of those situations seem rare. Of concern, however, is that this bill will give the Prime Minister greater powers to extend the employment of departmental secretaries, allowing the Prime Minister to create new positions for secretaries who have resigned or whose contracts have ended. The Prime Minister recently did this with Mr Ken Henry when he resigned from his position as Secretary of Treasury in April 2011, then to be appointed as a 'special adviser' under section 67 of the Constitution. Should this legislation be passed, the Prime Minister will have the power to create similar roles for any secretary who resigns or whose contract has expired. This is a measure that would add to the number of public servants and, as such, is in conflict with our policy, which I mentioned earlier, to reduce Public Service numbers.

Overall, the coalition does not oppose this bill. However, the coalition proposes to amend the legislation by removing changes to section 60 of the Public Service Act that will allow the Prime Minister to extend the terms of departmental secretaries who have resigned or whose contracts have ended. At present the Prime Minister has only the power to appoint departmental secretaries to another role if their department has been abolished or if she has terminated their position—both being rare occurrences. The changes to section 60 will allow the Prime Minister, at will, to appoint departmental secretaries to new roles should they resign or when their terms of service expire and/or are not renewed. This has the potential to be the beginning of a practice similar to the New South Wales unattached list, which applies to chiefs and SES levels.

Before coming to this place—I am only a new member—I had no idea there was such a thing as an unattached list. I have learned, and will share with the Australian people, that an unattached list is quite a common occurrence in government where, when the tasks or duties of high-ranking officials on normally superior wage bands are complete, rather than their taking a back seat, as in the commercial world, or looking for another job, these guys are kept on an 'unattached list'. I cannot point to anywhere in the commercial world, the corporate world or
mum-and-dad businesses where that practice exists. It bewilders me.

Whilst this legislation is at the moment limited to secretaries, it sets a precedent and is contrary to our policy to reduce rather than increase the public payroll. In New South Wales Premier O'Farrell is moving to end the unattached list, with a reported initial saving of $16 million a year by removing 250 persons from the list. If we have state governments moving to reduce these lists and the current legislation moving to introduce the list, I can only stand here and say that I am proud to be a part of the Liberal Party camp. If the Prime Minister has the authority to extend the employment of departmental secretaries indefinitely, there is potential for even greater politicisation of these roles to occur.

In Queensland we are making reductions to the public service; we are trying to reunite the state with economic credibility and accountability. Whilst the loss of our credit rating in Queensland is not completely attributable to the public service, ultimately our credit rating is diminished by the fact that we are spending more than we are earning. We are spending more than we are earning, so, as a result, tough decisions have to be made.

I feel for the public servants who will ultimately lose their jobs in New South Wales, in Queensland and, in the future, here in Canberra. However, I remind the Australian Labor Party when making these appointments in the future that history has a tendency of repeating itself. We are a government that ultimately pays back enormous debts and we are a government that ultimately tries to reduce overheads. Bear that in mind when in government and trying to make prudent fiscal decisions.

For all the good things that this bill might bring to the Australian Public Service, it is Labor's way to surround themselves with those who may toe the political line. Convenient appointments of ex-department secretaries into other roles under the discretion of the Prime Minister is not something that needs to be endorsed by legislation. As of 13 March 2012 the former head of Treasury will make $615,000 a year, rising to $653,000 and then, by 2014, to $805,000 a year. Not a bad gig if you can get it! On 13 February 2012, Ms Renee Leon from the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet told Senate estimates that Dr Henry was working 2½ days a week. Assuming it is still the case that Dr Henry is engaged in the Prime Minister's office for 2½ days a week, he could be picking up around $402,000 a year by 2014—not a bad salary for someone who is part time. I suspect that Dr Henry is not actually claiming that as he is now a director or involved with the National Australia Bank in some capacity.

I first learnt about Dr Henry's involvement with the Australian Labor Party when I had the opportunity to read The Australian Moment, a book recently put out by George Megalogeni. Up until that point I had no idea that Dr Henry had actually spent some time in the offices of previous prime ministers, including Bob Hawke. He also did some work with Paul Keating on the floating of the Australian dollar. I cannot take anything away from the guy's capacity, but it does bring into question the capacity of politicians' salaries, which are on the public record, when we start looking at salary bands of around $805,000. Ours tend to fall into insignificance, yet we take the political heat of defending those in the electorates.

The coalition will seek to amend the legislation by proposing the removal of section 60 of this bill. The public sector should at least be seen to be non-political or impartial. These amendments seek to protect those public servants who go about
conducting their duties without any bias. We support merit selection. We support a transparent application process. I think with the political tack that Dr Henry has shown in the past in serving prime ministers of this nation one can only assume that he has left himself exposed in accepting a position with, by all accounts, a limited, non-transparent application process for the position that he currently holds in the Prime Minister's office. Those comments are on the public record. I believe that the position was not advertised. There were no selection criteria to apply. It was just a very cosy, friendly little thing: 'You're with us now.' As a result, the government has led with a glass jaw on this. I would not support further practices along those lines being continued.

Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (18:11): I am fortunate enough to be a member for a seat based in the ACT, and that means that I have the privilege of representing, meeting and working with a large number of public servants. Public servants form a significant part of my constituency and I am proud of the work they do and the contribution they make to a better Australia. Labor is committed to the highest standards of integrity and conduct in the Australian Public Service. We on this side of the House understand the importance of a strong, effective, efficient Public Service. There is a similar tradition on the other side of the House, a tradition that goes back to Robert Menzies, a tradition carried through with the member for Wentworth, a tradition that recognises that it is through having strong and dedicated public servants that we are able to implement policies that we believe will create a better country.

But I am concerned when I see in this place the growing incursion of American-style attacks on public servants—the notion that government is not the solution; government is the problem. Nowhere is that epitomised more than in the coalition's pledge to cut 12,000 Public Service jobs as the first way of filling their massive funding gap. It is through that almost Pavlovian response that whenever coalition members are asked how they will manage to meet their budget shortfall, what cuts they will make, they go immediately to firing public servants. The member for Wright said that he feels for the Canberrans who would lose their jobs were an Abbott government to be elected. I am sure my constituents are grateful for his concerns, but I suspect they would rather just keep their jobs.

We see these sorts of antics when the member for North Sydney is giving particular examples of the Public Service departments that he would axe. The member for North Sydney is an honourable man, but when it comes to speaking about Public Service departments he has something of the Rick Perrys about him. Members of the House will remember Governor Perry as the man who dropped out of the Republican race when he could not manage to remember the third government department he was going to cut. The member for North Sydney has said that he will cut at least three government departments. The only difference between him and Governor Perry is he can remember them.

He wants to get rid of much of the department of health, which he believes is overstuffed—odd, really, given that it employs about the same number of public servants that it employed when the Leader of the Opposition was the minister for health. He wants to get rid of much of the department of climate change, and the department of defence materiel is also in line for the cut.

We on this side of the House have a different view of the Public Service. Our view is that there is a valuable contribution
made by public servants. Obviously those closest to my heart are those in my own electorate, but nationwide there are public servants day in, day out making a contribution to building a better country. In May this year I moved a private member's motion calling for a strong Public Service. The motion moved:

That this House:

(1) recognises the important role played by the Australian Public Service in upholding and promoting our democracy and its key role in ensuring stable government;

(2) commends the Australian Public Service on continuing to be one of the most efficient and effective public services in the world; and

(3) condemns plans by the Opposition to make 12,000 public servants redundant.

In terms of the importance of a strong Public Service, I draw the House's attention to the Centre for Policy Development's report *The state of the Australian Public Service: an alternative report*. Authored by James Whelan and commissioned by Miriam Lyons, CPD's executive director, the report goes through a range of aspects of Public Service reform, including pulling out some quotes from parliamentarians about the importance of the Public Service. The report, for example, notes the member for Wentworth judiciously observing:

I think the critical thing to ensure is that Government delivers its services efficiently at every level but you've just got to be smart about it.

That is what we have in this country: one of the most efficient and effective public services in the world. We saw that when the global downturn hit. The rapid fiscal stimulus that saw Australian household payments out before Christmas 2008 was only made possible thanks to dedicated, hardworking public servants. We were able to put in place rapid fiscal stimulus, and we were able to do it in a way that was directed to households thanks to the efficient work of public servants.

When dealing with natural disasters, public servants are there making sure people receive their government payments, sometimes within days of a disaster hitting. There are public servants going into workplaces to make sure that conditions are safe. There are public servants keeping infectious diseases out of the country. There are public servants finding the best ways of protecting our natural environment. There is more to the Australian Public Service than the work they do in policy development, implementation and service delivery. There are a range of jobs performed by local public servants, and those public servants are often contributing to their community outside their hours. I see their passion for community translating into a greater local benefit in the ACT with our higher than average levels of volunteering and participation in sport and recreation.

In other states of Australia we see exactly that dedication as well. When the Queensland floods hit, for example, Centrelink worker Gillian Harman spent a month volunteering in flood-hit Queensland, in Dalby. After she finished volunteering, Centrelink worker Ms Harman returned home on Sunday night and the next day went straight back to work in her Centrelink office in Guyra, northern New South Wales. As the then minister for human services, the member for Sydney, informed the House, Ms Harman was tragically killed that Monday going home from the office.

I remember once hearing Vice President Al Gore make the point that on September 11 at the Twin Towers it was the government workers who were the only ones running up the stairs. When natural disasters hit, we are proud to have strong public servants doing the job that they do so ably.
What concerns me is the coalition's strong commitment to making Public Service cuts. Their policy at the last election, 12,000 public service cuts, appears to be just the tip of the iceberg. Asked on 7.30 on 8 May whether or not the coalition would get rid of 20,000 Public Service jobs, the member for North Sydney refused to rule it out. Of course the coalition has form on this. They went to the 1996 election saying their plan was to reduce departmental running costs by two per cent. I actually have a copy of this policy document in my office. You can even see on the back, 'Written and authorised by Andrew Robb,' now the member for Goldstein.

Did the coalition do just that? Sadly, no. They went much further. They had said they would achieve their targets by not replacing a proportion of those who left over the first term of the coalition government through a process of natural attrition with no forced redundancies. They said there would only be up to 2,500 positions. That is what this policy statement with 'Andrew Robb' on the back of it says. But when they came to office we saw, in 1996-97, 10,070 public servants retrenched; in 1997-98, 10,238; in 1998-99, 9,061 public servants. So upon winning office the Howard government got rid of about 30,000 public sector jobs—about 10 times more than they said they would. The CDP report notes:

The Coalition’s desire to reduce the size and cost of the Australian Public Service taps into ‘small government’ movements that have been prevalent here and in other western countries since at least the 1970s. The values, visions and policies of these movements are currently expressed by the Tea Party in the United States and ‘Big Society’ in the United Kingdom.

I note that the Minister for the Public Service and Integrity has said that he will support the amendment proposed by the member for Mackellar. But I do want to correct something that has been said by a number of opposition speakers: that these changes have something to do with Ken Henry. That in fact is not the case. The intention to broaden section 60 of the Public Service Act had been part of proposed amendments since 2006, initiated under the former government. I can understand why those opposite are keen to bring Dr Henry into this debate. Their attacks on Dr Henry are in some sense symbolic of how far they have moved from good economic policy.

Let's remember the career of Dr Henry, a man appointed as the Secretary of the Treasury by Peter Costello, a man who has faithfully served governments of both sides, somebody who advised the Hawke and Keating governments and, through his experience in the downturn of the early nineties, a man who was able to move rapidly when the global financial crisis threatened. He is also a man who assisted the Howard government in implementing the goods and services tax. He is somebody who operates very much in the bipartisan traditions that Australians hold dear.

But we have seen some frankly scurrilous attacks in this House on Ken Henry's reputation, I think probably stemming from the coalition feeling sore about the $11 billion black hole that Treasury identified in their 2010 election costings. These are costings that the opposition decided they would have done by a team of accountants, who were later found guilty of professional misconduct for claiming they had carried out an audit where in fact they had done no such thing. It was possibly better than using a catering firm to do your costings, as the member for Cook has advocated, but not much better. Those costings were later found to be out by a cool $11 billion. The response of those opposite is akin to the response of a rich kid whose maths teacher has told him he has got an answer wrong and goes straight to
the principal and asks for the maths teacher to be fired. In the case of Dr Henry, they set about attacking his reputation, suggesting that the costings exercise was somehow political.

That was a low point, and a departure from what I think has been a strong tradition, on their side of the House as well as ours, that respects public servants and recognises that they impartially serve both sides of this House. I think no-one has done that better than Dr Henry. He has made his fair share of criticisms of Labor policies and coalition policies. But he has a core set of beliefs, he is driven by the value of making Australia a better place. I would call on those opposite to allow cooler heads to prevail and to focus their attentions on reforms, not on playing the man.

In the couple of minutes remaining to me, let me simply note that the bill proposes further amendments to the Public Service Amendment Bill 2012. That bill implemented legislative changes recommended by Ahead of the game: blueprint for the reform of Australian government administration. Those changes included a range of amendments aimed at good governance to sustain an Australian Public Service that is fit for purpose. The changes were: the provision of a performance framework for departmental secretaries, with the minimum length of initial appointment to be five years; and the revision of APS values, recognising the Public Service Commissioner's role and allowing the commissioner to undertake a special review in specific circumstances.

The first set of amendments in the bill concerns temporary employees and will restore the provisions currently in the Public Service Act that provide for subcategories of non-ongoing employment. The second concern is the protection of information and immunity from civil suit provisions. The amendments make it clear that information obtained by entrusted persons who are acting under the direction of the commissioner, or the authority of those assisting the commissioner, are protected from unauthorised disclosure or use. The amendments in this and the parent bill are an important part of modernising the Australian Public Service.

Every year, thousands of young and not so young people move to the ACT to take up jobs as graduates in the Australian Public Service. I am enormously pleased that, through a difficult period of efficiency dividends, Public Service departments are continuing to hire new graduates. I call on all Australian young people to consider a career as a public servant; it is a challenging one but a worthy one. Public servants in my electorate and throughout Australia are working hard to build a better country. I commend them for their work and I commend the bill to the House.

Mr FLETCHER (Bradfield) (18:26): It is a pleasure to follow the member for Fraser and I commend him on the way in which he has used this legislation to demonstrate that he is in support of public servants—and who would have expected that from a member from the Australian Capital Territory! I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on the Public Service Amendment Bill, which, as we have heard from a number of speakers, amends the Public Service Act 1999, with the intention of revising the Australian Public Service values; clarifying the roles and responsibilities of secretaries and amending their employment arrangements; revising and clarifying the roles and functions of the Public Service Commissioner; and improving the day-to-day workforce management of the Australian Public Service through a range of operational amendments.
The purpose of this exercise, we are told, was to position the Australian Public Service to continue to serve the government to a high standard and to equip it to meet current and future challenges and the expectations of the government in the Australian community. Those are all very worthwhile objectives. In the main, the coalition supports the broad direction of this bill, with one very significant exception which I will come to.

I would like, in the brief time available to me, to make essentially three points. The first is that we on the coalition side of the House, as much as those on the government side of the House, are strongly in support of the proposition that a high-performing Public Service is very much to be supported and desired. The second observation I would like to make is that some key recent trends in the Public Service tend to increase the urgency of improving the efficiency and performance of the Public Service, which, as we are told, is the objective of this bill. I want thirdly to make the point that one aspect of this bill that the coalition does not support is the provision which would make it easier to redeploy departing departmental secretaries.

Let me turn to the importance of the Public Service. Some 160,000 Australians are employed by the Australian Public Service, with the biggest number employed by the Australian Taxation Office and Centrelink, and the rest being employed in a whole range of other departments and agencies. It is certainly an uncontroversial proposition that a high-performing and well-organised Public Service is vital to the good operation of government. Under the traditional Westminster model that applies in Australia, departments manage and implement government policy across all of the range of policy areas for which government has responsibility. So the Public Service has a critical role to play in the overall system of government. As the former Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Peter Shergold, has noted, the range of things that public servants do is wide:

They deliver welfare payments and health benefits, identify labour market opportunities, issue passports, scrutinise tax returns and decide on migration visas. They administer grants and award contracts. Every day they make decisions that affect the hopes of citizens.

Therefore it is exceptionally important for the lives and wellbeing of Australians that all of these tasks are carried out as well as they might possibly be.

The blueprint for the reform of Australian government administration—the document which underpinned the legislative changes the House is now considering—made some key points about the importance of the Australian Public Service. It noted that Australia's prosperity would be influenced by the ability of the Australian Public Service to tackle future domestic and global challenges and that the Australian Public Service needs to respond to organisational challenges, including a tightening labour market and fast-paced technological change. The report noted that capacity to provide high-quality, innovative and forward-thinking advice to government would be critical for addressing future challenges. I think we can all agree with those propositions.

That brings me to the second area that I wanted to address in the time available to me, which is to look at key recent trends in the Public Service and ask ourselves whether those trends are consistent with the objectives set out in the legislation before the parliament this evening. The question, really, is whether we are seeing the efficiency and effectiveness of the Public Service improving or, under this government, being threatened. We have certainly seen a massive blow-out in the size of the Public Service. Between the last full year of the Howard
government, 2006-07, and this year, 2012-13, there will be an increase of some 20,000 staff in the APS.

I have asked a question on notice in parliament of every cabinet minister as to how many new departments, agencies, commissions, government owned corporations or such bodies have been created within their portfolios since the Rudd government was elected to office. Not all ministers have so far responded but, to date, some 34 different bodies have been identified—ranging from NBN Co., with about 1,300 staff, to the Australian Qualifications Framework Council, with three staff. Total staff across all those newly formed entities number around 4,700.

So we are seeing a growth in the Public Service. On ordinary principles of productivity and efficiency, when you see growth, at the very least you want to see a corresponding increase in output. Ideally, you want to see a greater increase in output to achieve an increase in productivity. That is, you want to see more being delivered per unit of input—in this case, per unit of labour input. I am sorry to say that it is hard to be satisfied that we are seeing that improvement in productivity.

What we have seen is an extraordinary increase in regulation and in the volume of legislation which is being generated. In the 42nd parliament, some 409 acts were given assent; and in the 43rd parliament, to date, some 273 acts have been given assent. The government would say that that is evidence that everything is going marvellously well. A competing view is that we are seeing an explosion of regulations being imposed—in many cases, ill-considered and poorly-thought-through burdens upon citizens seeking to live productive lives.

We could look, for example, at the introduction of the carbon tax, with its thousands of pages of legislation and the massive bureaucracy to administer the legislation. According to a report in the *Australian* 118 officials in the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency and the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities are part of the Senior Executive Service. Certainly it is an uncontroversial proposition that the department of climate change has proved to be a very happy source of employment for a large number of people, many of them on very large salaries indeed by community standards, bearing in mind that according to taxation statistics 90 per cent of Australians are earning less than $100,000 a year. A very large number of people in the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency are earning significantly more than that.

Another area which raises concern about the efficiency of the Public Service, the purported object of the changes in this bill, is the increasingly chaotic administrative arrangements of the Rudd government and subsequently the Gillard government. The general principle for good administration in business and in government is to have a clear organisational and reporting structure so that you can then have clear accountability and good outcomes.

Unfortunately, the Rudd government and then the Gillard government have followed arrangements which have been the absolute antithesis of these principles. Historically, it has been accepted that you would have a cabinet minister appointed, with executive and political responsibility for each department of state. The cabinet minister would be supported by a junior minister, and in some areas there would also be support from a parliamentary secretary.

This produced a clear and logical structure. Each portfolio was represented in
cabinet by one minister and each ministerial portfolio had one department. This meant, amongst other things, that junior ministers and parliamentary secretaries could operate clearly within the confines of one portfolio and there was a clear and direct relationship between the department and the portfolio minister. This basic approach was entrenched in reforms made in the late 1980s by the then Hawke government.

Unfortunately, since the commencement of the Rudd government we have seen a very significant deviation from this approach. Mr Andrew Podger, a former health department secretary and former Public Service Commissioner, has analysed these changes—both from those perspectives and in his current capacity as Professor of Public Policy at the Australian National University. He has been very critical of the approach to public sector administration under the Rudd and Gillard governments. It seems that what we have is a move from simplicity and accountability to complexity and confusion.

Certainly, the traditional rule of one portfolio and one cabinet minister has gone out the window. Following the most recent reshuffle by the current Prime Minister there are now six portfolios with more than one cabinet minister. Even more problematically, some cabinet ministers have responsibility across several departments. For example, Greg Combet is Minister for Industry and Innovation within the Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education. He is also Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency within the department of the same name. Bill Shorten is another cabinet minister who has two portfolios—one within Treasury and one within the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

This approach of multiple cabinet ministers across portfolios can tend to mean a lack of accountability and a lack of clarity as to who has ultimate responsibility. I have no doubt that these arrangements will lead to administrative confusion and inefficiency and will undermine the critical relationship between a department and its minister, which is so important if the work of government is to be done effectively and if public servants are to be able to work clearly and effectively to achieve the priorities of the government of the day.

The chaotic arrangements that have been put in place under the Rudd and Gillard governments mean that many ministers are now required to manage multiple relationships with multiple departments and, more problematically, the departments are required to manage multiple ministers. No doubt there are also practical problems arising such as different departments using different IT systems and the question of whether it is necessary to have departmental liaison officers from multiple departments in the office of one cabinet minister.

The performance of this government when it comes to getting the best out of the Public Service has been a long way short of the rhetoric that underpins the bill before us this afternoon. If you look at how effectively cabinet government worked under the Rudd government, it is pretty clear that the guiding principle was to sideline cabinet as a proper decision-making body and have most decisions made by a kitchen cabinet, comprising the then Prime Minister and three other ministers. That chaotic approach has been reflected, I would argue, throughout the entire Public Service as it seeks to respond to the priorities set for it by government. If the government is not doing a good job of setting those priorities then necessarily the Public Service is not going to be very efficient and productive.
The final point I want to make is to highlight the perspective the opposition takes on one particular element of the bill before the House, which is the proposal to amend section 60 of the Public Service Act so as to give the Prime Minister the power to extend the terms of departmental secretaries who have resigned or whose contracts have ended. This is something that the Prime Minister recently did when Mr Ken Henry resigned from his position as Secretary of Treasury in April 2011 and was then appointed as a special adviser under section 67 of the Constitution.

If the bill before the House passes in its present form, the Prime Minister will have the power to create similar roles for any secretary who resigns or whose contract has expired, but without the scrutiny that is required under section 67. The coalition's concern is that, amongst other things, this is a measure that risks materially adding to the number of public servants and we do not think it consistent with good principles of public administration. It contrasts with that law, as it presently stands, under which the Prime Minister only has the power to appoint a departmental secretary to another role if that secretary's department has been abolished or if the Prime Minister has terminated that secretary from his or her position. Both of those things are relatively rare occurrences.

The amendment which is proposed in the bill before the House would allow the Prime Minister to, effectively at will, appoint departing departmental secretaries to new roles should they resign or whenever their terms of service expire and are not renewed. In the coalition's view, this has the potential to be the beginning of a practice similar to that which has been pursued in New South Wales for many years of having an unattached list at the senior executive service level within the Public Service. I am pleased to note that, in New South Wales, Premier O'Farrell has moved to end the unattached list arrangements, reportedly to secure savings of $16 million a year, by removing some 250 people from the list. The coalition is very concerned that this amendment would lead to a similarly wasteful and profligate approach in the administration of the Commonwealth Public Service, so that is an amendment we do not support.

I close by reiterating that we on this side of the House are very strong believers in the importance of a productive and efficient Public Service. To the extent that the amendments in this bill are designed to increase the productivity and efficiency of the Public Service, they have our support. We note that there is something of a gulf between the objectives stated in this bill and the way in which the Rudd and Gillard governments have conducted themselves and managed the relationships between ministers—particularly cabinet ministers—and the Public Service, which has tended to reduce the efficiency of the Public Service. We certainly hope that the objective of increasing productivity and efficiency is one that can be achieved and that this bill will make some contribution towards that. (Time expired)

Mr Gray (Brand—Special Minister of State and Minister for the Public Service and Integrity) (18:41): I thank members for their contribution to the debate on the Public Service Amendment Bill 2012. I thank the members for Mackellar, Cowan, Hasluck, Bradfield, Wright, Throsby, Canberra, Fremantle and Fraser. I thank you all for your contributions.

Today is the third anniversary of my father's funeral. I mention that purely because it allows me to tell a story of the Australian Public Service. It allows me to tell a story of the day my father died, which
was just three years ago. The day following my father's death, my mother and I went to visit Centrelink. We went to visit Centrelink because mum had to rearrange her pension. I thought it was an interesting exercise accompanying mum and showing her all the love, care and support that she would expect her son to provide. But I was also interested in watching the performance of Centrelink on that day, when they had to deal with a grieving, frail 78-year-old who had lost her husband of 51 years.

When mum arrived with me at Centrelink she was sad and teary but she had things that she needed to do, documents to fill in. The people at Centrelink were simply fantastic. They supported mum. She needed to be supported. They provided her with the comfort that she needed and they provided her with the care and consideration that she needed. It made me proud. It made me proud as a parliamentarian, it made me proud as a son and it made me proud of the way in which that service was delivered by our Public Service.

We are in Canberra, the capital of the Australian Public Service. If that event happened at Woden it would be pretty good. If it happened at Parramatta we would be pretty pleased. If it happened in Sydney or in the Perth CBD we would be pleased. But it happened in Whyalla, 400 kilometres north of Adelaide. It showed me what care, consideration and capability our Public Service could provide when it cradled my mum at her time of need.

Centrelink is a fantastic organisation put together 15 years ago by a government not only seeking efficiencies but also seeking to ensure that it delivered services with care, consideration, compassion and precision—and, my word, does it work well.

This bill does make important amendments to the Public Service Act 1999. The government has accepted all of the recommendations made by the advisory group on reform of Australian government administration. The group's report, *Ahead of the game: a blueprint for the reform of Australian government administration*, outlined a comprehensive reform agenda to position the Australian Public Service to better serve the Australian government and the Australian community. It is a reform agenda that requires the modernisation of significant aspects of the Public Service Act, bringing it into line with contemporary and foreseeable needs.

The amendments in the bill strengthen the governance of the Public Service. The amendments in the bill strengthen the independence of the Public Service. The Australian Public Service is fundamental to the success of our country and our society. Our high-performing public sector is like a golden thread running through our history, building our nation while binding our nation together. The commitment and expertise of our Public Service directly affects the lives of all Australians.

The bill clarifies the roles and responsibilities of secretaries to better reflect established practice and it strengthens the independence of secretaries. This bill restores a gold standard. The appointment and termination of departmental secretaries will return to the integrity and consistency of our public sector that has been supported for generations. The 1922 act provided that all appointments as permanent head—that is, secretary in today's terms—were made by the Governor-General. From the late 1940s, Prime Ministers Chifley and Menzies saw the chairman of the Public Service Board advise the Prime Minister of the day on suitable candidates who could be recommended to the Governor-General for appointment. That system fostered a cadre of leaders who helped successive Australian
governments transform our Public Service and build a nation. It was these leaders whose contribution created the modern Australian Public Service that was able, in the words of former Prime Minister Robert Gordon Menzies, to 'supply honest advice and to carry out honest and fair administration for whatever government or minister it may serve'—leaders such as Sir Robert Garran, the Solicitor-General and father of our Constitution; and Sir Arthur Tang, who laid the foundations for the Department of Foreign Affairs and helped build a modern Australian defence organisation. He cultivated leaders such as the great Western Australian, Dr Herbert 'Nugget' Coombs, the former Governor of the Commonwealth Bank, who helped rebuild World War II Australia and committed our Public Service to work towards full employment.

Most nations created in the past 100 years have not been successful liberal democracies. Indeed, very few nations created since 1900 have enjoyed anything like Australia's success. I am fond of saying no other nation has enjoyed our nation's degree of success since our states came together to create the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901. A quality public sector leadership has helped us in our mission and it has ensured our success. So it is preferable to restore the situation where the Governor-General is responsible for appointing departmental secretaries, acting on the advice of the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister would receive a report from the secretary of the Prime Minister's department before making a recommendation in this regard. That report must be prepared after consulting the Public Service Commissioner and, for appointments, the relevant minister. This would strengthen the independence of secretaries. The revised formulation makes clear the roles and responsibilities of secretaries and the relationship between secretaries and ministers. Together these changes provide for continuity of leadership and strengthen the integrity and transparency of the appointment process.

This bill establishes the Secretaries Board with a clear mandate for the stewardship of the APS. Likewise, the bill revises the roles and responsibilities of the senior executive service, making clear that its role includes promoting cooperation in the delivery of outcomes across portfolio boundaries. The functions of the Australian Public Service Commissioner will be modernised to recognise the commissioner as the central authority for Australian Public Service workforce development and reform, an authority that will take a leading role in ensuring that the service has the organisational and workforce capability to meet current and future needs. Together these amendments will strengthen the management and leadership of the Australian Public Service. It is the senior leadership of the Australian Public Service that is critical to driving the changes needed to enable the service to meet its challenges both now and in the future. This will also ensure that the expectations of both the government and our citizens are met.

The bill also establishes a more succinct set of APS values, which continue to reflect enduring principles of public administration that go to the heart of the Westminster model of government. The values and employment principles together define the character of the APS and guide the way in which it conducts its activities and serves our community and the government. They continue to articulate the culture and operating ethos of the Australian Public Service and underscore its professionalism.

The bill also contains a number of other operational amendments aimed at more
effective management of the Australian Public Service. These amendments are informed by the experience of the operation of the act over the last 12 years. I note that the shadow minister, the member for Mackellar, will move an amendment to the government's bill. The government will accept this amendment in the spirit in which it is made and in the interests of achieving meaningful reform supported across this parliament. It is important that the Public Service legislation supports a service that is fit for purpose. This bill provides for a streamlined contemporary employment framework that will allow greater agility and responsiveness from the APS to our community and to the government. It will facilitate greater efficiency and more effective use of Commonwealth resources.

The bill will also accelerate the cultural shift towards operating more effectively as a unified Australian Public Service, a 166,000-strong service that is accountable to ministers, equipped to deliver the government's priorities and responsive to the complex needs of our Australian community.

One of the most fantastic and enjoyable things a minister for the Public Service can do is engage with our graduate program. I have heard speakers in this debate today refer to the importance of that graduate program. Around the world, we see governments engaged in slashing and cutting budgets, and on occasions that has meant that graduate programs have been compromised in those public services. I can state unequivocally that the value of a graduate program is not simply that it allows our Public Service to continue to recruit the very best; it also keeps our Public Service always with a youthful bent, with a capacity to look attractive to the young people it needs to recruit into its future leadership cohort. If any members are interested in our fantastic Australian Public Service graduate program, I as Minister for the Public Service and Integrity will be very happy to ensure that they are able to engage with that program and to see the quality of our graduates and the leadership that they will bring to our Public Service in the future. Ours is a Public Service that is working in the interests of all Australians, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 52 weeks of the year. As I am fond of saying: every hour of every day of every week, a public servant is looking out for us. I thank them for that. And I thank the opposition for their support of this bill. I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Consideration in Detail

Bill—by leave—taken as a whole.

Mr GRAY (Brand—Special Minister of State and Minister for the Public Service and Integrity) (18:54): I present a supplementary explanatory memorandum to the bill and seek leave of the House to move government amendments (1) to (28), as circulated, together.

Leave granted.

Mr GRAY: I move government amendments (1) to (28):

(1) Schedule 1, heading to Part 10, page 31 (line 1), omit "Temporary", substitute "Non-ongoing".

(2) Schedule 1, items 57 to 60, page 31 (lines 3 to 15), omit the items.

(3) Schedule 1, item 61, page 31 (lines 16 to 24), omit the item, substitute:

61 Subsection 22(4)

Omit "limit", substitute "prescribe".

(4) Schedule 1, item 62, page 31 (line 28), omit "temporary", substitute "non-ongoing".

(5) Schedule 1, item 63, page 32 (line 2), omit "temporary", substitute "non-ongoing".

(6) Schedule 1, item 70, page 35 (line 19), omit "his or her".
The amendments moved today will restore the provisions currently found in section 22(2) of the Public Service Act, which...
provide for subcategories of non-ongoing employment. Under the act, a non-ongoing Australian Public Service employee may be employed for a specified term, for the duration of a specified task or for duties that are irregular or intermittent. The bill will continue to provide for regulations to be made to prescribe rather than limit the circumstances under which a non-ongoing employee may be engaged and to continue to prescribe grounds applicable to the termination of employment of a non-ongoing employee.

Part 12 of schedule 1 of the bill is intended to protect information obtained by the Public Service Commissioner or the Merit Protection Commissioner or other interested persons in the course of the commissioners' review and inquiry functions. The amendments moved today will make clear that information obtained by entrusted persons who are acting under the direction or authority of, or who are assisting, either of the commissioners is protected from unauthorised disclosure or use. The bill as currently drafted is ambiguous in this respect. It is important that these provisions operate as intended to ensure that inquiries are conducted properly and with the full cooperation of witnesses. The amendments to part 13 of schedule 1 of the bill also make clear that such persons are immune from civil proceedings when acting in good faith. I commend these amendments to the House.

Question agreed to.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP (Mackellar) (18:57): by leave—I move opposition amendments (1) to (3), as circulated:

(1) Schedule 1, item 1, page 3 (line 5), omit “, 59 and 60”, substitute “and 59”.

(2) Schedule 1, item 1, page 6 (lines 13 to 27), omit section 60.

(3) Schedule 4, item 6, page 59 (lines 13 to 21), omit the item.

In my speech on the second reading, I foreshadowed that I would be moving these amendments to take out of the bill those provisions which would have made it possible for the Prime Minister of the day to appoint a secretary who had either resigned or whose term had expired to any position that Prime Minister wished and it would be unhindered. I also said I would be moving these amendments because this could create what is known in New South Wales as the 'unattached list', which has risen to contain vast numbers of public servants who remain on the payroll with no job to do, and it could undermine the aspirational aims of this bill, which are to ensure that the Public Service upholds its principles—which have now been reduced from 15 to five. The aspirations are at all times to give true and fair advice to ministers, to government, but also to serve the public well.

The minister across the table has outlined some personal experience he had where he found that the Public Service acted to give great comfort and to work for the benefit of a particular Australian, who happened to be his mother. We have heard other stories in this chamber, and there would be many people who can speak of great and important experiences they have had with individual members of the public sector. My concern all along is that we should not see the aspirational terms of the act undermined by a situation where it would be possible for a departmental head to act to ingratiate himself or herself with the Prime Minister of the day with the aim of obtaining preferential treatment upon their resignation or the expiry of their term.

During the debate we spoke about the appointment of Mr Ken Henry, the head of Treasury who had subsequently been appointed by the Prime Minister on very favourable terms to the position of adviser to her on the same salary, for just 40 hours of
work a week, that the current serving head of the Department of the Treasury receives, and if less than that is worked then he is paid on a pro rata basis.

So, I had dual concerns in moving these amendments: this is an aspirational bill and we do not want a provision in it that would undermine the aspiration of service to government and service to the people of Australia; and, secondly, we would not wish the bill to allow the sort of situation that developed in New South Wales, which so outraged so many people, to become a possibility in the federal arena. It is for those reasons that I have moved these amendments which, very simply, remove the provisions that would have facilitated that situation. I am delighted that the government has agreed to the amendments and I commend them to the House.

Mr GRAY (Brand—Special Minister of State and Minister for the Public Service and Integrity) (19:01): The proposed amendment to section 60 of the act was to allow the Prime Minister to re-engage a former secretary on terms and conditions determined by the Prime Minister. This provision was not aimed at conferring any additional entitlement on secretaries and it was expected to be used infrequently. It was intended to improve leadership capability in the Australian Public Service by making it easier to draw on the talents and experience of former secretaries.

I understand that the opposition does not support this revision and has proposed an amendment to the Public Service Amendment Bill 2012 to restore section 60 of the act. I am prepared to support the opposition's amendment.

Question agreed to.

Bill, as amended, agreed to.
is agreed to by the House the coalition will seek to make the Veterans' Pharmaceutical Reimbursement Scheme the fair system it deserves to be.

We do not move this amendment lightly. The bill before the House makes important legislative changes which we support, although we seek to make the pharmaceutical benefits scheme aspects better. We believe that this government, now, needs to consider and introduce fair, just and equitable arrangements for military superannuants. We will prevent the passage of the current bill through the House until fair indexation is introduced. We are drawing a line in the sand now. The time has come for this parliament to deliver this important reform. The government speaks about reform often but, in the government's words, every reform it does is historic, monumental or world leading. All I ask, all the coalition asks, is for a simple reform so that veterans have the same entitlement to the indexation of pensions as age pensioners in Australia do. It is a simple request—there is no hyperbole about the world's greatest reform.

The coalition has a very proud record of supporting ADF personnel, whether serving or in retirement. We believe in the unique nature of military service. In the case of veterans and ex-service personnel, we are committed to fair indexation of military superannuation pensions. We committed to it as a policy at the 2010 election. We introduced a private member's bill. As I said, the Leader of the Opposition has reiterated that there are no ifs and no buts. The government is fond of telling people that we will not roll back the carbon tax. Let me say very clearly to the nation. Do not doubt that we will do both of these things. We will legislate the fair indexation of military pensions and we will roll back the carbon tax. We will do them both.

The Leader of the Opposition has formally recommitted the coalition on a number of occasions since the 2010 election. On 20 September 2011, at the RSL national conference in Melbourne, Tony Abbott said:

It has long been to me and my colleagues in the Coalition, verging on the scandalous that defence retirees do not enjoy the same indexation arrangements as other people who have retired.

In Bendigo on 5 March, the Leader of the Opposition, together with the shadow minister for veterans' affairs, Senator Michael Ronaldson, signed the coalition's pledge to deliver fair indexation. The pledge says in no uncertain terms that the coalition is committed to our veterans and to delivering fair indexation to 57,000 military superannuants and their families. It says that the coalition will ensure that DFRB and DFRDB military superannuation pensions are indexed in the same way as the age pension and service pensions for those aged 55 and over.

The Leader of the Opposition and the shadow minister for veterans' affairs signed two large pledges. Senator Ronaldson has one of them and I have one of them. If anyone doubts our commitment to fair indexation, walk into my office and there you will see it, signed by the Leader of the Opposition—a pledge a metre high and half a metre wide, a pledge which could not be clearer. Do not believe the government's hyperbole. We will deliver this important reform.

Frankly, I would rather we delivered fair indexation to military superannuants now. I would rather the government agreed with the amendment we are moving tonight, did the right thing and indexed military superannuation the same way the age pension is indexed. My colleague Senator Ronaldson, who, as I mentioned, is the coalition spokesperson on veterans' affairs, has committed the coalition to this policy at
every veterans forum and at every opportunity. In conjunction with these commitments, the coalition has also taken concrete steps to fairly index pensions.

As I said, Senator Ronaldson introduced my fair indexation bill into the Senate on my behalf on 18 November 2010, a bill designed to provide fair, just and equitable indexation for DFRB and DFRDB military superannuants. On 24 March 2011, the Greens and Labor called for a Senate inquiry into the legislation. The coalition opposed yet another inquiry. The Greens and Labor used the inquiry to oppose fair indexation—the first time the parliament has ever opposed fair indexation. On 16 June 2011, in a shameful day for the Senate, the coalition's fair indexation legislation was defeated by Labor and the Greens.

Again, be under no illusion—the coalition is resolutely behind the policy it has stated time and time again, the policy it transparently took to the 2010 election. That is why I stand in the chamber this evening to seek to amend the Veterans' Affairs Legislation Amendment Bill 2012—so that the issue of fair indexation receives its proper hearing.

Labor's record on military superannuation reform is nothing more than a litany of hyperbole, hot air and inaction. Let us not forget that, before the 2007 election, Labor led the veteran community to believe they would fix military DFRDB and DFRB pensions.

Mr Snowdon: You were in power for 11 years and you did diddly squat!

Mr ROBERT: As I stand here, the Minister for Veterans' Affairs is in front of me at the desk. It is great to hear him and see him sitting here for the entire debate. I thank you, Minister, for coming to listen to this important debate. I know that, deep down, you want to do the right thing. The issue is that, since 2007, the government in which you, sir, are a minister has led the nation to believe that you would fix it. In fact, the member for Eden-Monaro, who is currently the Parliamentary Secretary for Defence, together with Senator Kate Lundy, who is the Minister for Sport, sent a letter to the former Minister for Finance and Deregulation, Lindsay Tanner, dated 14 September 2009. I will quote from that letter so we can all hear the words clearly. It said:

Significantly, many people genuinely believe that prior to the 2007 election, the ALP had committed to determining a "fairer" method of indexation, and a 'review' would provide the direction ...

It is entirely appropriate, fair and consistent with our election commitment that the introduction of this improved indexation arrangement should coincide with that for pensions and benefits as announced by Minister Macklin.

These are the words of the current Minister for Sport and of the Parliamentary Secretary for Defence—a close colleague of the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, who is sitting here tonight. They have both unequivocally called upon the government to honour what it led the Australian community to believe in 2007—that it would index military DFRDB and DFRB pensions.

Their words have only been met with more obfuscation. Let us not forget that Labor failed to respond to the Podger review, which was released publicly back in December 2007—it was released 4½ ago and the government has not officially responded to it.

Mr Snowdon interjecting—

Mr ROBERT: Let us not forget the Matthews review, Minister, which I hear you talk about. I believe you spoke to and, indeed, commissioned the Matthews review. It was a whitewash in name, it was a whitewash in fact, it was a whitewash in substance and it was a whitewash of the
government's own false election commitment. There have been 10 high-level inquiries into military superannuation indexation, all of which—except for yours, Minister—recommended changing the current arrangements. Yours was the only one which—surprise, surprise—said that we should keep the status quo. That is 10 to one. Where I come from, Minister, three to one and you are out.

It does not stop there. Labor's finance minister, Senator Wong, and veterans' affairs minister, the Hon. Warren Snowdon, who is at the table tonight, launched an ongoing scaremongering campaign in an effort to distract from Labor's lack of policy. Their argument is that the cost of fair indexation is too high. Minister Wong claims that the coalition's $100 million cash cost is actually $1.7 billion, and that the scheme will cost $4.5 billion to fully implement. The finance minister, like Minister Snowdon, is being deliberately misleading. The cost of the forward estimates in cash terms is between $100 million and $150 million, depending on which view you take. That is it in cash terms, and no-one argues with that.

In terms of accrual accounting, yes, the cost goes into the billions of dollars over the next 40 years. But when was the last time you heard a debate on increasing age pensions in this House that looked at the cost over 40 years? When was the last time that was done? We deal with everything in this House in cash terms. We deal with every announcement in cash terms. We deal with every single increase in pensions in cash terms. To be completely consistent, in line with everything else that the House does we should deal with this issue in cash terms. And, when we deal with this issue in cash terms, over four years, we come to between $100 million and $150 million.

This point was reinforced by the Commonwealth Actuary during the debate surrounding my Fair Indexation Bill. In advice to Finance Minister Penny Wong in January 2011, the Commonwealth Actuary, Michael Burt, said:

...great care should be exercised when using fiscal balance figures for decision-making purposes, particularly in the area of unfunded superannuation arrangements.

He blew an almighty hole in Labor's claims that the cost of fair indexation is too high. The cost to the Commonwealth of fair indexation over the next four years is approximately $100 million. The government have told me it is about $150 million. I am happy to accept either amount. And that is before any clawback, because of course it is taxable. It is not the inflated $1.7 billion that the Labor government claim by confusing the accrual side with the cash side. In the first year, it is something like $5 million or $6 million, and then it increases slowly. It would be between $100 million and $150 million to achieve that. Compare that to the $4.7 billion the government have spent because they rolled back the proven Howard government border protection policies, the Pacific solution, out of pride, which has led to the debacle we have right now. Can you imagine what that $4.7 billion could have been spent on if this government had left proven border security solutions alone? And we are talking about $100 million to $150 million.

In negotiating with the Greens, the leader of the Greens at the time, Bob Brown, asked me to come up with savings—how we would pay for this prior to the vote on our private member's bill in the Senate. In a Defence, Foreign Affairs and Trade committee hearing, I questioned the then Defence secretary, Dr Watt, and Mr Minns, Deputy Secretary, People Strategy and Policy Group, about the 12.8 per cent increase over the
forward estimates for public servants. They indicated that because of a range of things, notwithstanding the government's cut to the Defence budget, that increase would not be as high. I suggested 30 per cent less and they agreed, which came out to about $200 million to $250 million, which I took to Senator Bob Brown as the savings. The Greens actually promised in 2007 and 2010 to index DFRDB pensions; but, when given the savings so they would be true to their promise and put it in writing, they still voted against it. And—surprise, surprise—the Minister for Defence, a number of months later, announced savings of exactly the same quantum as I brought up in the foreign affairs, defence and trade committee meeting. I indicated where the savings could be, where the money could be found in the budget. The government then, a few months later, took those exact numbers and pocketed that exact amount of money. That money was identified to fund, over the forward estimates, the indexation of super, but they took the savings and dunned 57,000 veterans and their families.

The tragedy is that we have come to expect this from a government that cannot even put pink batts in roofs without blowing $2½ billion, that cannot put up school halls without private schools getting a 60 per cent advantage over public schools because of the wasted $5 billion that went to Labor state governments. There is the $36 million spent on advertising the carbon tax and, of course, there is the $4.7 billion spent rolling back the border protection solutions that worked and on which the government have now done an amazing backflip. The money was found, it was identified, but the government pocketed it and delivered nothing.

More recently, the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Mr Snowdon—who is at the table this evening—argued that a superannuant on $58,000 per year did not need fair indexation, that they were already well off. Labor's politics of envy are alive and well when it comes to military superannuants. What Minister Snowdon failed to acknowledge, however, is that the average DFRDB military pension is just $24,386—2½ times less than the figure he quoted in June. Labor is misleading the public. Furthermore, in June, veterans were sent letters offering them a few cents extra per fortnight in their pensions. Many veterans received an increase of less than $1 per fortnight. As Tony Abbott said on Brisbane radio in 2010:

You can turn this into a huge figure. In any one year, it is bearable and we should bear it.

At the last election, we identified more than $50 billion in savings to specifically meet the costs of this commitment. More specifically, I identified over $200 million in savings on Defence personnel, savings the minister re-announced two months later and that he pocketed, that was not spent on indexing pensions.

On another matter of importance regarding the bill, when this legislation passes the House, the coalition will seek to further amend the legislation to deliver fairness for disabled veterans with high pharmaceutical costs. Labor's Pharmaceutical Reimbursement Scheme is flawed and unfair. It has created two classes of disabled veterans—those with qualifying service and those without. Up to 1,500 of our most disabled veterans get no assistance from the scheme. These are our most disabled veterans who receive the special rate, or TPI, pension but who do not have qualifying service as defined by the Veterans' Entitlement Act 1986.

The coalition has a better way. At the last election we proposed a comprehensive veterans' pharmaceutical reimbursement scheme which would deliver financial relief
to more than 80,000 disabled veterans. Importantly, it did not create two classes of veterans and ensured that all of our most disabled veterans had no out-of-pocket pharmaceutical expenses. The coalition's scheme was also immediate. There were no cumbersome requirements nor was there any need for technical amendments, as this legislation proposes, to ensure the scheme functions properly. Under the coalition scheme, a veteran who qualified for the scheme would pay for only 30 scripts per year. Once they reached this veterans' pharmaceutical safety net, they would pay no more for their scripts. This meant immediate financial relief for veterans. Significantly, the coalition scheme did not require cumbersome reimbursements; Labor's scheme leaves veterans waiting for the calendar to tick over to a new year before they receive any financial relief for the cost of pharmaceuticals.

In the Senate, the coalition will move amendments to extend eligibility for the veterans' pharmaceutical reimbursement scheme to include all special rate, or TPI, ex-service pensions. Our amendments will extend the coverage of the scheme beyond just disability pensioners with qualifying service to also include all special rate pensioners. These amendments will bring fairness and justice to Labor's flawed and unfair scheme and will cost up to $234,000 per year, based on the government's advice about the average cost of the reimbursement and the approximately 1,500 special rate pensioners without qualifying service.

The government's scheme is budgeted to cost $30 million over the next four years, making this extension a very modest additional cost to provide the fairness disabled veterans deserve. This is a small price to pay to ensure our most disabled service personnel are not further disadvantaged by Labor's unfair Pharmaceutical Reimbursement Scheme. If successful in the Senate, I will be supporting the Senate's request for the House to amend the legislation in this respect. I look forward to doing so—the Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, Mr Snowdon, is at the table.

Providing fair indexation for Australia's DFRB and DFRDB military superannuants is the right and proper thing to do. My amendment to the Veterans' Affairs Legislation Amendment Bill 2012 has only been necessary due to the continual intransigence of this government.

Last week I spoke in response to the ministerial statement by the Minister for Defence. The member for Eden-Monaro and Parliamentary Secretary for Defence, the Hon. Dr Mike Kelly AM, was also at the table. I had heard he had been saying to his veterans groups that he would be seeking at a later juncture to move a private member's bill to index DFRDB pensions the same way as we are seeking to do. I said to the member for Eden-Monaro: I've heard this. I'm happy to be wrong. I'm happy to apologise if I'm wrong, and I'll provide every assistance, on indulgence, for the member for Eden-Monaro to rise from his seat, to approach the dispatch box, to point out the error of my ways and to say I'm wrong and that that was not his intent or, if it was his intent, to move a private member's bill straightaway.' The member for Eden-Monaro did nothing. He did not move. His silence was acquiescent and he walked out of the chamber. He had the opportunity to say, 'I was wrong,' and I would have apologised, but he did not because he has no intention of moving a private member's bill. He is all talk and no action on this. He was all talk and writing letters, all signatures in ink, when he wrote to the then finance minister, Minister Tanner. But when the rubber hits the road and he is called to the dispatch box to either refute—
and I would back down—or to back up his words with action, he shrunk like a wilting violet. The member for Eden-Monaro is a fine man. He is a decent Australian, but he failed that test on that day last week.

I urge all to support this amendment. I look in front of me and there is the member for Blair waiting to speak next. The member for Blair said in relation to the latest CPI increase:

It is ridiculous to expect people to accept a 0.1 per cent increase. That is unviable, given the cost of living. It is too meagre and it needs to change. The current situation is unsustainable. It's become exacerbated by a series of fairly low CPI rises ... the Government needs to look at this again.

I say to the member for Blair that I have read your comments faithfully, sir. If I have not, stand and correct me. If they are indeed your words—and I know they are—join us in indexing fair and equitable military superannuation. Match your words with action. Do that. You have the chance tonight before the vote comes tomorrow. The Greens said in their 2010 election policy:

In a long-running campaign, current and former... defence force personnel have been pushing to ensure their superannuation pensions are indexed fairly and appropriately. It is a campaign the Australian Greens support wholeheartedly.

Except when a private member's bill is in the Senate, except when savings are identified and at the time they needed to match the words that they took to an election, the Greens were found wanting. Bob Brown said in March 2011:

At the outset I should say that fair indexation is consistent with the Australian Greens policy at the last election.

He said that when he needed the votes of 40,000-odd Tasmanians but when it came time to vote in the Senate he was found wanting. One of the Independents in this House, the member for Dobell, Craig Thomson, said of supporting fair indexation:

I am the only MP of the Central Coast who is prepared to support them—there are two others who won't.

When this comes to the vote, I expect the member for Dobell to be a man of his word and to back up those statements, as I expect of the member for Blair, whom I know to be a man of his word. I know the member for Denison, Andrew Wilkie, has also publicly supported fair and equitable indexing of DFRB and DFRDB in the past. He said:

The ALP should be condemned for not doing something about it since its election in 2007.

He also said:

Defence Force retirees in particular, would be better cared for if the unsatisfactory indexing of defence pensions were overturned in favour of a system that at least keeps up with the cost of living.

The Independent member for Lyne, Rob Oakeshott MP, has moved two motions in the House of Representatives calling for fair indexation. The last motion was seconded by the member for New England, Tony Windsor. The member for Lyne said:

… there are many in the community who are aggrieved and their concerns deserve to be heard in this House. There are many who are frustrated that government, report after report, seems to get the concerns about a lack of purchasing power within the current military superannuation scheme, yet, when it comes to actually doing something about it, the arguments of cost and difficulty in making those changes seem to be directed towards those who have done military service.

He continues:

I want it be recognised that Defence service is unique within the Public Service.

... the uniqueness of Defence service lies in defending the nation, our sovereignty and our freedoms.

They are fine words from the member for Lyne. He continues:
I would hope it is generally recognised that CPI is not a good indicator for cost-of-living measures and for purchasing power.

…… …

In my view the alternatives that are worthy of consideration are in the form of the age and welfare pensions, which are indexed by the new living cost index, to reflect the failings of CPI in the pensioner and beneficiary living cost index, or the male total average weekly earnings, whichever is the greater.

The Independent member for New England, Tony Windsor, in 2010 asked the Minister for Finance and Deregulation, Minister Lindsay Tanner:

What measures will he take, and when, to address the ongoing concerns within the veteran community that (a) the indexing of military superannuation pensions against the Consumer Price Index is not an accurate measure of the cost of living, and (b) inequality exists between the indexing of military superannuation pensions and other pensions such as age and welfare; and will he consider introducing a fairer indexation method for military superannuation pensions in line with that used to calculate age and welfare pensions.

In conclusion, prior to the 2007 election the Labor Party indicated that they would index pensions. Many of their front bench wrote to Minister Tanner seeking the indexation of pensions. Many of the Independents, as I have just quoted, have publicly stated their desire to index military pensions. The cost is about $100 to $150 million in cash terms over the next four years. Savings of up to $250 million were outlined in the private senator's bill in the Senate last year. Within two months of that private senator's bill being defeated by Labor and the Greens the Minister for Defence acted on those savings and pocketed that money. It was promised, the Independents have backed it, the money was outlined, the money was found, and the money was pocketed.

There is no reason this parliament this week should not join with and support the coalition in saying that no more steps will be taken in this area and on this bill until the fair indexation of DFRB and DFRDB pensions is addressed. We call on those who have publicly called on this issue, those who have made a point of this issue and those who have stood on soapboxes on this issue to seek votes to now stand and put their vote where their mouth is and support the coalition on indexing pensions.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Is the amendment seconded?

Mr RANDALL (Canning) (19:33): I second the amendment.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (19:34): I speak in support of the Veterans’ Affairs Legislation Amendment Bill 2012. The Repatriation Commission is responsible for determining and managing claims under the Veterans' Entitlements Act, and the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission is responsible for determining and managing claims under the MRCA and the SRCA. Lest we think that these bits of legislation are irrelevant or small, they certainly do affect people across the electorates in this place. MRCA active clients in the electorate of Blair as at 30 March 2012 total 129 people. SRCA active clients in Blair as at 30 March 2012 total 252 people. These are people whose lives will benefit from this form of legislation.

There are a range of miscellaneous measures in this bill. To a certain extent the measures tidy up things that have happened, exempt for income tax purposes certain things and ensure that, for example, people on Norfolk Island are eligible for clean energy payments under the Veterans' Entitlement Acts and the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act. I will
deal briefly with each of those as we go through it.

The first element of this particular bill before the chamber deals with travel expenses for treatment. The DVA funds eligible people for travel to appointments for medical treatment. It is a sad fact that as veterans get older, and sometimes because of what they have experienced, they have more medical treatment and need more travel for those purposes than other Australians, particularly if they are living in regional and rural areas in an electorate like mine. The amendment makes clear the policy that has been happening in practice—namely, that within the act this type of travel can be approved by the DVA after the travel has been undertaken by a particular person who is eligible for reimbursement. This practice has been undertaken by the DVA for a very long time and it really now is simply authorised by the legislation in order to avoid any hint or suggestion that it is not actually covered.

The next aspect of the amendments is eligibility under the Defence Service Homes Act for an operation in the Red Sea from 13 to 19 January 1993, Operation DAMASK-VI, and recategorisation as operational service. It makes sure that those who have been engaged in this particular operation for that short period of time will, as a result, be eligible for subsidised home loans and insurance under the Defence Service Homes Act 1918.

The third aspect that I wish to deal with briefly is special assistance. The VEA and the MRCA give the commission the power to extend special assistance and benefits to people not otherwise provided for under the legislation. Currently, that is provided by means of a regulation. This amendment makes it clear that that sort of assistance is provided by way of a legislative instrument rather than regulation, and it permits more timely payment and assistance to be provided.

The fourth area the amendments deal with is debt recovery—the technical amendment making sure that debt recovery provision within the legislation applies to all possible circumstances relating to debt recovery.

The fifth area, as I said before, deals with clean energy payments payable to people residing in Australia. I am not always sure that people who live in Norfolk Island think they actually are Australians. Having visited the place myself and having enjoyed a holiday there, I can say that the Norfolk Island residents are unique people. But these amendments make sure that Norfolk Island residents are eligible for clean energy assistance payments, as any other Australians would be.

The next aspect deals with the MRCA supplement. In 2009, this federal Labor government implemented historic pension reform, the largest pension increase we have ever seen in the history of the Commonwealth of Australia. As part of that package we introduced the MRCA supplement which replaced the telephone and pharmaceutical allowances that were payable. The amendment really just fixes up a clause and makes sure that all references to the previous telephone and pharmaceutical allowances are replaced with a reference to the supplement that now exists, which is now described as the MRCA supplement.

The next area is the bereavement payment. The VEA provides a bereavement payment to the estate of a deceased veteran or member who was in receipt of a special rate or extreme disability adjustment payment and who has died in indigent circumstances—very poor circumstances. The amendment makes sure that that
bereavement payment is exempt for income tax purposes.

The next aspect of this particular amendment bill—and, as I said, it is very much a tidying-up provision—deals with the Veterans’ Pharmaceutical Reimbursement Scheme, which provides reimbursement of all out-of-pocket expenses incurred in the purchase of pharmaceuticals under that scheme. Approximately 70,000 veterans and members are eligible for annual, automatic reimbursement of those costs. Those payments will commence on 1 January 2013. The amendment simply makes crystal clear that the payments here are tax-free.

The previous speaker dealt with issues in relation to DFRDB. What he failed to say was that for nearly 12 years the coalition did nothing in relation to that issue. There was a lot of sanctimony and unction mentioned, and there were displays of passion, but really they did nothing in relation to that issue. Further, the member did not point out the fact that what they were proposing excluded about 150,000 Military Superannuation Benefits Scheme members from June 2011. He failed to mention the fact that, under his proposal, other Commonwealth public servants are excluded from receiving payments under similar types of schemes. So there was a lot of passion and unction, but the coalition simply failed to specify to the House that that proposal—which he now says they will do, which the Howard government never did and which the then minister for finance, Nick Minchin, opposed passionately and would never get through past Peter Costello or John Howard—is something that he claims they will do. But what he should really say is that in the past they have always opposed that. He also now wants to discriminate in his proposal in relation to this. I do not think it is appropriate to bring this amendment to this particular legislation. The member is trying to simply discriminate, as I have said, between different forms of military service and service on behalf of the public.

The legislation that is before the House is very clear legislation that will be to the benefit of many Australians, particularly Australians who live in my electorate, and I support the legislation.

Mr McCormack (Riverina) (19:43): I rise to speak on the Veterans’ Affairs Legislation Amendment Bill 2012. In doing so, I need to point out that serving and retired members of the Australian Defence Force should not be treated as less than worthy citizens when it comes to superannuation entitlements. This is, unfortunately, exactly how they are faring under this Labor government. Australian veterans risked their lives for our country, yet this extraordinary level of faith has not been returned in kind by this miserable, miserly government.

As a condition of employment, fair indexation for veterans must be a non-discretionary obligation in the budget. It is a topic close to my heart and I have already spoken about it in this House on a number of occasions. In fact, I asked in this chamber on 18 June this year: why is fair indexation not affordable for military superannuation pensioners? It is affordable for some 3½ million aged pensioners and other welfare beneficiaries, and for certain parliamentary and judicial superannuation pensioners. A condition of service provides for retirement pay—a superannuation pension which maintains its purchasing power. Its purchasing power is a condition of service upon which veterans plan their retirements. Service people themselves must make compulsory contributions.

The government is bound to honour all those employment conditions, and the veterans argue that the budget should
provide for fair indexation as a non-discretionary item before other discretionary items.

I have received an email from my constituent Robert Bak of Bethungra, who is the President of the Integrated Service People's Association of Australia, an organisation which does a power of good helping veterans with all manner of things. Mr Bak writes:

It is not acceptable to the ex-service community, to have both sides procrastinate over this very serious issue. It is even more important than other current issues.

He concluded by saying:

… we are not going to let this matter rest.

And nor should they, and nor should Mr Bak.

Wagga Wagga is a proud triservice Riverina city, with bases for the Australian Army, Royal Australian Air Force and Royal Australian Navy. Blamey Barracks at Kapooka are the home of the soldier, with every Australian Army recruit passing through prior to other deployments. Those presently posted to Wagga Wagga know how essential fair superannuation is to their futures. And, like Mr Bak, they also know that the coalition is fighting hard to give them what they want, to give them what they need. They also know that those on the other side of the political equation are not.

I have received much correspondence about this matter from Bert Hoebee, who was the Deputy Commandant at Blamey Barracks Kapooka in 1989 and 1990. Now retired but passionately pursuing this issue on behalf of all veterans, Mr Hoebee had this to say in his latest stinging rebuke:

I believe that our argument is unassailable as far as its fairness and logic goes.

Too right!

The coalition are committed to military superannuation reform, and on 5 March this year the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow minister for veterans' affairs, Senator Michael Ronaldson, signed the coalition's pledge to deliver fair indexation. This pledge states the coalition's clear commitment to our veterans, to those who have served, to those who are serving, and to those who will serve into the future. And we will deliver fair indexation to 57,000 military superannuants and their families. The pledge also ensures that the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Scheme and the Defence Force Retirement Benefits Scheme are indexed in the same manner as age and service pensions. This will benefit all superannuants aged 55 years and over. The coalition want to see fair indexation. We know how important, how needed and how just it is.

The Veterans' Affairs Legislation Amendment Bill 2012 includes a number of minor technical amendments to veterans' legislation. However, the main issue of concern that parliament must immediately deal with is the unfair, unjust and inequitable situation confronting military superannuants. It is unacceptable that this Labor government continues to tarry with semantics while at the same time bluntly ignoring the everyday concerns of veterans, ex-service personnel and their families. Whilst the coalition support this amendment, we believe it can be made better, and we seek to legislate fair indexation as a requirement for this bill to pass.

Furthermore, once this legislation is passed through the House of Representatives the coalition will seek to make the Veterans' Pharmaceutical Reimbursement Scheme the fair system it deserves to be. The coalition moved an amendment to defer the debate, and this was not done lightly. We believe it is vital this legislation incorporates fair indexation. This is fair, it is just and it is
equitable for military superannuants—men and women, as I say, who put their lives in harm’s way for our country.

On Saturday I attended the commemoration service for the Vietnam veterans in the Victory Memorial Gardens in Wagga Wagga. One of the questions I was asked—not once, but several times—was, ‘When is this parliament going to fairly index military pensions?’ The coalition made a commitment to fair indexation on 27 June 2010 and took this commitment to the 2010 election. Although not able to form government, we introduced legislation to the Senate on 18 November 2010 to bring about indexation for DFRB and DFRDB military superannuants.

On 24 March 2011 the Greens and Labor called for yet another inquiry into the legislation. The coalition opposed this on the grounds that there have been more than half a dozen inquiries, all of which have supported fair indexation. The Greens and Labor used the inquiry to oppose fair indexation—the first parliament which has ever opposed fair indexation. This is disgraceful, and Labor and Greens members should hang their heads in shame at the way Australian veterans—who lived the ANZAC legacy—are being treated.

Failure to justly index military superannuation pensions comes at a significant cost to veterans' purchasing power. The Minister for Veterans' Affairs has argued a superannuant on $58,000 per year did not need fair indexation—they were already well off. However, what the minister failed to acknowledge is that the average DFRDB military pension is just $24,386—almost 2½ times less than the figure he quoted in June. Veterans received letters in June this year offering an increase to their pensions. These increases were a measly few cents and, really, were a slap in the face to military superannuants, with many receiving less than a $1 increase per fortnight. Is this what they deserve after their years of service, their dedication and the sacrifice that they made, and the risks that they took?

Peter Grimmer, a retired warrant officer (aircrew), who served from 1965 until 1985, wrote to me stating he would receive an increase of 96c per fortnight, a pitiful total of $24.96 per annum. He told me the increase made him feel 'not only physically sick over this vile betrayal but very angry and very abused'. I think anyone could understand why Mr Grimmer feels this way, although this government continues to look the other way. It is time Labor faced reality and told veterans such as Mr Grimmer how less than a dollar a fortnight will help meet the ever increasing costs of living, costs which are not helped by the imposition of the carbon tax. Labor claims it will cost too much to fairly index military superannuants. To that I say: how can delivering what is rightly owed to military superannuants, people who put their lives on the line for Australia, cost too much?

The current Veterans' Pharmaceutical Reimbursement Scheme is also flawed, and it is unfair. The coalition seeks to amend legislation to deliver equality for disabled veterans with high pharmaceutical costs. Under Labor there is division between disabled veterans—those with qualifying service and those without. Up to 1,500 disabled veterans receive no assistance from the scheme as it currently stands. These are disabled veterans who receive the special rate, or totally and permanently incapacitated, but do not have qualifying service as defined by the Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986. The coalition proposed a comprehensive veterans' pharmaceutical reimbursement scheme at the 2010 election which delivered financial relief to more than 80,000 disabled veterans. It did
not create two classes of veterans and it ensured that all of Australia's most disabled veterans had no out-of-pocket pharmaceutical expenses. Furthermore, the coalition's scheme was immediate. There were no cumbersome reimbursements needed, nor any need for technical amendments to ensure the scheme functions properly, as the legislation before us today proposes.

Under the coalition's scheme, a veteran who qualified would pay for only 30 scripts per year and, once they reached this number, under the veterans' pharmaceutical safety net threshold they would pay no more. This meant financial relief for veterans.

Labor's scheme leaves veterans waiting for the calendar to tick over to a new year before they receive any financial relief for the cost of pharmaceuticals. It is important the government does the right thing by our retired military personnel. It is time to put a stop to the discrimination against them and to recognise the conditions of their employment, to which they contributed financially during their service.

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (19:53): I rise to speak on the Veterans' Affairs Legislation Amendment Bill 2012. Today's bill includes nine changes to various pieces of legislation which are technical and non-controversial in nature. The coalition will support the passage of the nine adjustments in this bill, which include clarifications under the Veterans' Entitlements Act, the Australian Participants in British Nuclear Tests (Treatment) Act, the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act and others. For example, the legislation will rationalise the maintenance income provisions of the Veterans' Entitlements Act by addressing redundant definitions and aligning definitions with those in the Social Security Act.

As the member for Fadden has already indicated, the bill presents the House with an opportunity to implement real change for veterans. As this legislation amendment bill includes important legislative changes and is intended to change conditions for veterans and ex-service people, it is more than appropriate that all avenues to improve the lives of veterans and their families be considered in this context. As such, the coalition has proposed two amendments to rectify indexation for military superannuants and to rectify provisions in the Veterans' Pharmaceutical Reimbursement Scheme.

I have said previously in this House that the only way to deliver this very important reform is to change the government. Today's amendments mean that this need not be the case in the short term. The introduction of this bill in the House is an opportunity to effect real change for our veterans; it is an opportunity to pass these very important amendments. They are important because veterans—as well as the coalition—have had enough of this tired Labor government, which refuses to support their community. It is an opportunity to commit this country to fair indexation of military superannuation pensions under the Defence Force Retirement Benefits Scheme, the DFRB Scheme, and the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Scheme, the DFRDB Scheme.

Fair indexation is one of the most important issues affecting the veteran and ex-service community. I spoke in my maiden speech about Gallipoli Barracks at Enoggera, which is in the Ryan electorate, and I acknowledged the very valued contribution made by their service men and women. In that speech, I recommitted to fair indexation of the DFRBS and the DFRDBS. It is a community to which I recommit myself again, and it is an issue for which I will continue to fight. As such, I, with my
coalition colleagues, am drawing a line in the sand when it comes to supporting veterans, and I call on the Labor Party and the Greens to finally accept that it is time for indexation. It is time that this parliament delivered for veterans.

This issue is not new, and the coalition has a proud record on which to stand when it comes to supporting veterans. The Leader of the Opposition first announced our commitment to fair indexation on 27 July 2010, more than two years ago and prior to the last election. Since then, on 18 November 2010, the coalition, in the Senate, introduced legislation so that we could finally and effectively deal with this issue. At that time, the Labor Party and the Greens did what they do best—referred the issue to an inquiry. As veterans know, this is merely this Labor-Green government's way of delaying and delaying, hoping that the issue will go away.

We opposed an inquiry because by 2010 there had already been more than six parliamentary inquiries, and I remind the members on the opposite side of the House that every single inquiry prior to 2011 held into fair indexation had supported its implementation. Instead, Labor and the Greens used that inquiry as a pretence to oppose fair indexation, the first time ever that parliament had done so. Finally, on 16 June 2011, in what can only be called a day of disgrace for the Senate, the Labor Party and the Greens combined to vote down the coalition's fair indexation legislation. On that day, the Australian Labor Party and the Greens demonstrated that they do not care about the lives of military superannuants and their families.

Since then, the coalition has maintained its strong commitment to fair indexation, and earlier this year I signed the coalition's pledge to deliver fair indexation. This pledge has also been signed by the Leader of the Opposition, the shadow minister for veterans affairs and many other members of the coalition. That pledge says:

The coalition will ensure DFRB and DFRDB military superannuation pensions are indexed in the same way as age and service pensions. All DFRB and DFRDB superannuants aged 55 and over will benefit.

Just this morning, my office received yet another letter from a constituent in Ryan, asking what my position is on this policy and asking what the coalition will do for military superannuants. In my electorate, I represent many groups, including the Returned Services League with sub-branches at Gaythorne, Kenmore-Moggill and Indooroopilly-Sherwood, as well as the Australian Army Aviation Association, the Veterans Support and Advocacy Service Australia and the VSAS Toowong branch, the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam Association, and the many members of the Australian Defence Force at Gallipoli Barracks in Enoggera. The Defence community and the veteran community want fair indexation, and they know it should happen now.

I can say with pride that, should the ALP and the Greens continue to neglect this issue by not accepting the coalition's amendments and should we the coalition be elected by the Australian people, the coalition will deliver this reform in our very first budget. This was a promise at the 2010 election. It will be a promise at the next election, and I can give an ironclad guarantee that a coalition government will deliver this important reform. At present the average DFRDB pension is a meagre $24,386. In June 2012—

Debate interrupted.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Chiapas Declaration

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (20:00): I move:
That this House:

(i) notes that:

(a) the inaugural international parliamentary conference on ‘Parliaments, minorities and Indigenous peoples: effective participation in politics’ was held in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas, Mexico from 31 October to 3 November 2010;

(b) the conference was organised jointly by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the Mexican Congress of the Union and Government of the State of Chiapas, in partnership with the United Nations Development Program, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Independent Expert on minority issues and the Minority Rights Group International;

(c) the conference heard that many situations around the world demonstrate that an adequate representation of minorities and Indigenous peoples in policy and decision-making is instrumental in breaking the cycle of discrimination and exclusion suffered by members of these groups, and their ensuing disproportionate levels of poverty and related impediments to the full enjoyment of many civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights, and yet, minorities and Indigenous peoples often remain excluded from effective participation in decision-making, including at the level of the national parliament;

(d) the conference adopted the Chiapas Declaration, which urges every parliament, within the next two years, to inter alia, hold a special debate on the situation of minorities and Indigenous peoples in their country, recognise the diversity in society, and adopt a ‘plan of action’ to make the right to equal participation and non-discrimination a reality;

(e) the Chiapas Declaration recommended that at a minimum the following elements are contained in the ‘plans of action’:

(i) ensure that the right to free, prior and informed consent is observed in every step leading to the adoption of legislative and administrative measures affecting minorities and Indigenous peoples, and hold government to account for the implementation of such measures;

(ii) require of government that all submissions to parliament of draft legislation and the national budget include an assessment of their impact on minorities and Indigenous peoples;

(iii) make regular use of plenary sessions in parliament and other parliamentary fora to discuss minority/Indigenous matters in order to raise awareness and combat prejudice in society, organise awareness-raising sessions for all parliamentarians so as to increase their knowledge of minorities and Indigenous peoples and the particular problems they face, and ensure that minority and Indigenous issues are mainstreamed into parliamentary work, especially at the committee level;

(iv) allocate sufficient resources to the task of establishing dialogue between minority/Indigenous peoples and public institutions and to parliamentary committees to allow them to carry out effective outreach activities such as public hearings with minority and Indigenous peoples; and

(v) increase parliamentarians’ familiarity with work being done within the United Nations system so as to equip them better to hold governments to account for their international commitments, including the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, urge ratification of International Labour Organisation Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, hold debates in parliament on the conclusions and recommendations made by the United Nations human rights treaty bodies and special mechanisms with regard to minority and Indigenous peoples’ rights;

(f) the Chiapas Declaration also affirmed the responsibility of political parties to promote the effective participation of minorities and Indigenous peoples, and address their concerns in their party programs; and

(g) the IPU will facilitate networking among parliaments on this issue, monitor the implementation of the Chiapas Declaration and convene a follow-up meeting within two years to discuss progress and set targets for future action;

(ii) urges the Government, parliamentarians, and political parties to familiarise themselves with the Chiapas Declaration; and
(3) calls upon the Government to facilitate a roundtable discussion with representatives of Australian Indigenous communities on issues arising from the Chiapas Declaration.

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

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

Ms PARKE: I am very pleased to speak to this motion, the genesis of which was my participation, on behalf of the Australian parliament, in the inaugural Inter-Parliamentary Union conference on Parliaments, minorities and indigenous peoples: effective participation in politics, that was held in Chiapas, Mexico, in late 2010, and involved 93 parliamentary delegates from 34 countries.

Many situations around the world demonstrate that an adequate representation of minorities and indigenous peoples in policy and decision-making is instrumental in breaking the cycle of discrimination, exclusion and poverty suffered by members of these groups. Yet minorities and indigenous peoples often remain excluded from effective participation in decision-making, including at the level of the national parliament.

The conference considered various examples of inadequate participation across different national political and electoral systems. It considered the consequences of poor participation of minorities and indigenous peoples, particularly with respect to decision-making and policy development, and it discussed and examined a range of programs designed to achieve higher levels of minority and indigenous engagement.

The IPU Chiapas conference applauded Australia's national apology to Indigenous Australians in 2008, our endorsement of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the government's implementation of the Indigenous Electoral Participation Program, which was specifically highlighted in the concluding remarks of that conference. However, the conference also recognised the vast over-representation of Aboriginal Australians in the criminal justice system and their significantly poorer health, education and employment outcomes.

There could be little doubt that the under-representation of Indigenous Australians in our ballot booths, in our parliaments and in other decision-making roles has been a significant factor in allowing the adverse situation experienced by so many to persist. It was only four years ago that a WA Indigenous elder Mr Ward died an entirely unnecessary and avoidable death while he was being transported 360 kilometres on a very hot day in the back of a prison van with no ventilation or air-conditioning. That terrible event occurred 107 years after the then Labor member for Coolgardie, Hugh Mahon, moved a motion in the first year of the federal parliament calling for a royal commission into the conditions for Aboriginal people in northern Western Australia and the administration of justice. That motion was never debated.

It was not until the 1960s that Indigenous Australians gained the right to vote and stand for election to the federal parliament. Since that time, while there have been a number of Aboriginal people elected to state and territory parliaments, there have only been three elected to this place—Senator Neville Bonner, Senator Aiden Ridgeway and Ken Wyatt, the member for Hasluck. In an interview with About the House magazine earlier this year, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Mick Gooda said that, while politicians are getting better at communicating with diverse groups, there is no substitute for direct representation. He noted:
When ATSIC was finally abolished, there wasn’t one Aboriginal person in parliament.

Pino Migliorino, Chair of the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia, said in the same article, which was entitled ‘Of the people’, that it is clear the Australian parliament is also failing when it comes to representing people from other culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. He noted that the dominance of the political landscape by the major parties means they themselves need to take direct responsibility for improving diversity in the parliament.

In that article, I noted that all members have a role to play in improving diversity in both political parties and the parliament. I said:

I don't think indigenous or minority issues should be just a matter for indigenous or minority groups.

They concern us all, they affect the quality of our democracy, the inclusiveness of our democracy...

The IPU conference adopted the Chiapas Declaration, which urged every parliament, within two years, to adopt a plan of action to provide the right to equal participation and non-discrimination a reality. One key initiative is to require that all submissions to parliament of draft legislation and the national budget include an assessment of their impact on minorities and indigenous peoples. Considering that Australia now has in place an assessment mechanism when it comes to our human rights obligations, I believe it would be possible, and not administratively burdensome, for an aspect of that process to be dedicated specifically to considering the impact on minorities and indigenous peoples.

The Chiapas Declaration also affirmed the responsibility of political parties to promote the effective participation of minorities and indigenous peoples and address their concerns in their party programs. This is a matter I intend to take up within my own party and I hope other members will consider doing the same.

Finally, I note that the Chiapas Declaration urged national parliaments to hold a special debate on the situation of minorities and indigenous citizens within two years. This motion is part of that debate and it also moves matters forward by calling upon the government to facilitate a roundtable discussion with representatives of Australian Indigenous communities on issues arising from the Chiapas Declaration. I thank those members taking part in this debate tonight, I thank the IPU for holding this important conference with the support of the United Nations and Minority Rights Group, and I thank the government of Chiapas in Mexico for being wonderful hosts. I look forward to the next IPU conference on this important matter. (Time expired)

Mr VAN MANEN (Forde) (20:05): I thank the member for Fremantle for her motion. I concur with the sentiment of the member for Fremantle that it is a very important issue that minorities and our Indigenous communities are well represented in this House and in the broader community.

As the member for Fremantle has pointed out, the Chiapas Declaration relates to a conference held in Mexico back in 2010 on Parliaments, minorities and indigenous peoples: effective participation in politics. The outcome of this conference saw the adoption of the Chiapas Declaration, which urges every parliament, within the next two years, to adopt a plan of action to provide the right to equal participation and non-discrimination a reality for minorities and indigenous people.

I would like to make the point at the outset that here in Australia I think we do a very good job of this already. It amazes me...
that a lot of these declarations talk about people's rights but never talk about people's responsibilities.

I would challenge the member for Fremantle's contribution to this debate. She draws a long bow to suggest that over-representation of our Indigenous peoples in prison, which is a terrible situation, is directly related to the level of Indigenous representation in the various parliaments around this country.

We do not need further regulation or bureaucracies. They will do little to change the situation. Change is driven by the desire of individuals through their behaviours, attitudes and beliefs. I am fortunate in being able to share some local examples where action is being taken by people in our community who represent minorities or Indigenous groups. In particular, one of our younger Indigenous people, a 16-year-old constituent living in my electorate, was the Queensland leader of the National Indigenous Youth Parliament. Letisha Jarden has written about this experience for the ABC online. In her article she says:

For a shared future of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia all aspects of life are to be considered equally. It is important that we focus on parliamentary representation as every culture has a background and beliefs that should be appreciated on a federal level.

Indigenous Australians bring unique and valuable perspective to parliament and political debates. This culture should have opportunities to work side by side with other Australian political leaders to shape our future together.

Here in Australia we have done a great job in that regard, but we can always do better. By way of example, we have Indigenous leaders such as Warren Mundine, who was the national president of the Labor Party. We have my colleague Ken Wyatt here in the parliament and we had Neville Bonner. They are terrific examples of the opportunities available for people from this country's Indigenous communities. Equally, if I look at some of the candidates for the forthcoming federal election, one of our candidates—in a seat next to mine—is from a Taiwanese background. So there are those opportunities for people who wish to become involved in the political process.

Letisha Jarden went on to explain in her article that the program is a vital initiative introduced by the Australian Electoral Commission in partnership with the YMCA. The program consists of some 50 young Indigenous people aged 16 to 25. It is the first time in Australian history that young Indigenous people like Letisha have been given the opportunity for their generation to be heard. I am very proud of Letisha's involvement in the National Youth Parliament and I believe that on-the-ground practical initiatives such as these will help encourage future participation in politics by Indigenous Australians.

I am sure that we need to allocate additional resources, but spending time doing impact assessments and making sure every piece of legislation has an impact statement or having public hearings—talkfests—I do not think achieves the outcomes we are seeking. (Time expired)

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Werriwa)

(20:11): There has been much emphasis on parliamentary representation but this Chiapas Declaration encompassed other plenary sessions to discuss the matter—situation impact studies, the need for free, prior and informed consent et cetera. I commend the nature of this resolution.

I want to refer to another UN related area on Indigenous people. I was pleased to recently attend the Nepalese Indigenous Nationalities Forum's annual event at Campsie, with about 300 in attendance. Since 2006 this organisation has been about
demonstrating the rights of Indigenous people in Nepal. It has been about making sure there is language preservation through the holding of conferences. I want to commend Ganesh Tamang and others for making sure that these issues are raised on behalf of indigenous Nepalese in Australia.

Where we do not have consent around the world we see realities such as the San people being thrown off their land in Botswana on behalf of De Beers and its diamond interests. We see the deforestation of Brazil and Peru and the throwing of people out of their villages and off their land without any consultation in regard to mining in those countries. We see the movement of large numbers of people into the Jumma people’s lands in Bangladesh. I want to stress the work of Kabita Chakma in Australia. For a group that has only about 100 or 150 people in this nation, it has very much punched above its weight in raising these issues with the federal government.

We see the situation of Uighurs and Tibetans in China, where there is not any consideration of their rights—no role in their nation’s representation, no consideration of their needs.

Whilst the previous speaker who spoke in this debate said that we do things pretty well in Australia, I am not sure it is all that brilliant, quite frankly. We have a situation where life expectancy of Indigenous males is 11.5 years lower, and females 9.7 years lower, than non-Indigenous Australians. We know the Closing the gap report showed that Indigenous Australians are four times more likely than non-Indigenous Australians to die when they are 35 to 44. The member for Fremantle referred to only one of the many deaths of Indigenous people in incarceration. It is just a bit too common seeing Taser attacks in police stations that have a disproportionate representation of Indigenous people. Reading rates for Indigenous people in years 3 to 9 are 18.6 per cent to 21.6 per cent of non-Indigenous people. Writing rates are between 16.3 and 31.4 per cent of non-Indigenous people.

The government has moved ahead in regard to the Healing Foundation and the apology to Indigenous Australians. It has talked about concepts of closing this life-expectancy gap within a generation, halving the gap in the mortality rate and halving the gap for Indigenous students in year 12, or equivalent attainment rates, by 2020. These are noble sentiments. I appreciate that the government has also devoted money to increasing the understanding of Australians and the need to recognise Indigenous people in our Constitution. But we cannot pretend that things are pretty in Australia with regard to Indigenous Australians.

I certainly commend this motion. I agree with the previous speaker insofar as whether you have seven Indigenous people in this parliament or four might not be, by itself, that crucial to Indigenous people’s rights but it is a part of a broader agenda, as this resolution indicates. This declaration was adopted by a large variety of countries at an international conference. The organisations that were involved in it included the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Mexican congress, the government of the state of Chiapas—Chiapas historically had major conflicts in the nineties regarding Indigenous rights—and the United Nations. It covers the gamut of things that can be done.

If we can make sure we do consider Indigenous rights when legislation comes before this parliament, if we can have sessions that do raise the awareness of these issues, then these are valuable things. To decry them as over-regulation or over-bureaucratisation is to run away from facing very significant problems in this country. As I said earlier, we can go around the world
and see a wide variety of nations where Indigenous people are deprived of their rights, where their languages are disappearing because of lack of government support and where their culture is disappearing. I very much believe this resolution coming out of this conference is well and truly overdue.

Ms GAMBARO (Brisbane) (20:15): I rise to speak on the motion moved by the honourable member for Fremantle. This motion acknowledges the inaugural international conference entitled 'Parliaments, minorities and indigenous peoples: effective participation in politics', held in Chiapas, Mexico in October 2010.

It also adopted the Chiapas Declaration, which urges every parliament, within the next two years, to, inter alia, hold a special debate on the situation of minorities and Indigenous peoples in their country, recognise the diversity in society, and adopt a plan of action to make the right to equal participation and nondiscrimination a reality. The motion also calls upon the government to facilitate a roundtable discussion with representatives of Australian Indigenous communities on issues arising from the Chiapas Declaration.

I respectfully acknowledge the intent of the motion and the motivation behind it by the member for Fremantle; however, when it comes to dealing with Indigenous issues and participation in this country the time for talk is surely over. I think every single member of this parliament condemns discrimination, particularly Indigenous discrimination. And whilst small elements of discrimination may still remain acceptable to some people in our community, the way to eradicate it is to send strong messages from community leaders and politicians that it is not acceptable. How we achieve Indigenous reconciliation and increased Indigenous participation is through increased action on the ground and actual results, not through talks and roundtables.

Increasingly, we are seeing more Indigenous members of parliament in many of the state parliaments of Australia and in the federal parliament. The honourable member for Hasluck became the first ever Indigenous member of the House of Representatives in 2010. When you have incredible role models such as the member for Hasluck, thousands of young Indigenous Australians become inspired to take leadership roles in our communities just as they are inspired by many of the members here from different ethnic backgrounds. We are the leaders of our community and we do inspire many from non-English-speaking backgrounds as well. One day, we will hopefully see equal participation in this nation. We recently had the National Indigenous Youth Parliament, which, from all reports, was a huge success.

We have seen some fantastic work being done by the private sector in Indigenous employment. We all know the high rate of Indigenous unemployment and the lack of employment opportunity amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The way to truly empower Indigenous people is for them to have employment with regular income. It is interesting to note that this government and Treasurer come out and bag people like Twiggy Forrest on an almost daily basis, yet the work he really does with the Australian Employment Covenant, finding 10,000 jobs for Aboriginal people, is absolutely inspiring, and he never falters from his goal. In my home state of Queensland there is a bill before the parliament to repeal the Wild Rivers laws that were introduced by the Bligh government. These laws make land within one kilometre of a prescribed watercourse pristine and unable to be used or developed. This has had a massive impact on the ability...
of Indigenous Australians in Cape York to create their own opportunities.

There are many examples of practical things that can be achieved to inspire and empower Indigenous participation and achieve the goals set by the Chiapas Declaration. As a former employer, I have had many opportunities to work with Indigenous people and have tried to mentor and support them in the workplace. But I believe more needs to be done. More employers need to work in this space and work on initiatives to ensure that Indigenous people have every opportunity for success in the workplace.

In conclusion, I support the sentiment behind the motion. I commend the member for Fremantle, as she often brings very meaningful motions to this parliament and they are well thought out. She brings her many years of past experience in the United Nations to this parliament. We should be working for real results, we should be working on the ground with real employers and we should be providing much more action to help Indigenous participation in this nation through real and practical role models and through working with the business sector.

Mr JENKINS (Scullin) (20:21): I join with other members of this debate in thanking the member for Fremantle for bringing this motion before us and I thank the member for Brisbane for her very gracious remarks about the member for Fremantle. This Chiapas Declaration arose from a meeting held in Chiapas, Mexico, in October and November 2010. The meeting was organised by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Mexican congress and the government of the state of Chiapas. This is an example of the good work that the Inter-Parliamentary Union can do. Too often the IPU is seen as a talkfest of parliaments, a reason for parliamentarians to travel the world. That has not actually been my experience of the IPU. The IPU has been focused on outcomes, focused on influencing the way that parliaments throughout the world can have an impact. Whether it be gender inequality in our membership or whether it be the way that parliaments can oversee aid work, there has definitely been a move to ensure that the member parliaments of the IPU do good work, and this is an example of it.

I have been asked over the last few weeks, since announcing my retirement, what was the most significant moment of my parliamentary career. It most definitely was the apology that took place in this chamber the day after I was elected Speaker. The leadership that was shown by this chamber on that day was very important. But I put a very important caveat on that: it was only a commencement; there is much to be done. It has to be acknowledged that this government took on board, right from its early months, that it had a responsibility to ensure that we looked at ways in which we could close the gap in outcomes, across a whole host of areas, between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

The important thing that I have looked for is that we include Indigenous people in the political processes that lead to decisions that will decrease the gap, because if we do not involve Indigenous people we will not achieve things. I remember how, throughout the inquiry into Indigenous health by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs which led to the Health is life report, I was so impressed that Indigenous people, when offered the opportunity to outline what they would do if they were the decision makers, actually knew strongly what was required. That meant to me that they should be listened to. One of our recommendations
was that we should increase community control of health services for Indigenous communities. We said in that recommendation:

The community—

the Indigenous community—

has a responsibility to determine the nature of that control. There needs to be flexibility in arrangements to ensure that each community is able to have the services which best meet their needs within a broader accreditation process.

It is a simple thing, allowing the communities to be involved. I have one great example of that currently occurring in the electorate of Scullin. Scullin is not known for a large Indigenous community, but that community is growing, because Indigenous peoples living in the outer northern suburbs of Melbourne have been allowed the opportunity to be involved in decision making for themselves. We have had the opening of Bubup Wilam for Early Learning. 'Bubup Wilam' means 'children's place' in the Wuywurrung language, so it is the children's place for early learning. The important thing here is that the Indigenous community itself has made decisions about how Bubup Wilam operates. They see that one of their purposes is to promote, encourage, support and assist local Aboriginal communities to develop independent and sustainable responses to the needs of Aboriginal children and families. That is encouraging them to be involved in the political processes.

Of course, down the track we must ensure that there is a greater representation of our Indigenous people and other minorities in this parliament, in both houses, but along the way we must encourage Indigenous people to be involved in those things that most affect them. What impresses me about the motion that has been put before us by the member for Fremantle is the final point. It urges us as parliamentarians and political parties and as the Australian government to familiarise ourselves with the Chiapas Declaration and to implement the recommended measures to the extent possible. Some of the kind of contention we have had in the last few months might be prevented if we could sit down and work ways through that Indigenous people can be involved in their own outcomes. (Time expired)

Mr WYATT (Hasluck) (20:26): I thank the member for Fremantle for her motion on the Chiapas Declaration. I acknowledge the comments of the member for Scullin. One of the things that we have to seriously think about is that statements like the Chiapas Declaration are the culmination of people coming together to look at righting wrongs and making changes that are more far-reaching than just their own circumstances. One of the challenges that we often face when we consider international conventions is our capacity to take elements of them and use them within a domestic context. If we bring about change, then change has to be influenced. When I listen to colleagues speak on this motion, the points they raise are extremely valid, but there is also a divergence of viewpoints. There is nothing wrong with that in the debates that you have around a statement that has come from a forum of like-minded people seeking to find a way forward and a resolution to the complex issues that impact in terms of socioeconomic determinants. But it is more important that we take the intent and the spirit of statements such as this one and collectively, with a tripartisan approach, look at how we use that framework to bring about the changes.

We have within Australia a bilateral commitment in respect of closing the gap. One of the critical elements that is missing but that is reflected well in this statement is the one of partnership, the way in which we allow people to sit as equals to plan their
destiny. I agree with an earlier speaker that it does not matter how many Indigenous or minority members we have in this chamber—although it is good when we have a number of such members both in the Senate and here—but rather it is the capacity to have people involved in the policymaking within the bureaucracy, to have people not at the lower echelons of government agencies but at the senior levels. When you sit as a member of the senior executive service, you impart a perspective that influences people's thinking and the way in which an agency will implement programs, policies and services. I think that is the crux of this statement from Mexico. It is about the equal positioning in those plans and in setting future directions.

All of us at different times have given a commitment with regard to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs. To some extent, it has been there but not in a way that is changing. I think the previous Prime Minister in his apology made the comment quite succinctly that if it has not worked and that if change has not occurred then we should change the way we do business. The statement said that participation as equal partners will bring about the reforms that we need. Everybody in this chamber has an electorate, and if we consider everyone's roles within their electorates then I would certainly challenge each and every one of us, including myself, to get out there and make sure we know what the issues are that Aboriginal people and communities and organisations and communities face. It is by that process that we can effect and influence change.

Whilst I acknowledge the statement, I think that sometimes we do not need a statement of that ilk in order for us to better represent those within our electorates who are disadvantaged. Certainly there is nothing preventing any member from making a difference and personally working towards the closing of the gap that prevails for Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander communities.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr KJ Thomson): Order! The time allotted for the debate has expired.

Debate adjourned.

BILLS

Marriage Amendment Bill 2012
Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (20:31): I am pleased to speak on the Marriage Amendment Bill 2012. This private member's bill seeks to amend the Marriage Act 1961. Item 1 of schedule 1 will amend the current legal definition of marriage to read that 'marriage means the union of two people, regardless of their sex, voluntarily entered into for life'. 'For life' is a big commitment for anyone to make, but this is a commitment that many same-sex couples would like the opportunity to make.

My position in support of same-sex marriage is well known, and I have spoken on it before. In 2006 I was the first member of parliament to sign Australian Marriage Equality's Charter of Equality. I did so even though staff were surprised and warned me that it was not ALP policy. I have always had the belief that I am a human being first, no matter what party I belong to or what my role is. On the human level, it was the right thing to do. We should never discriminate against people based on sexual orientation—not in marriage law, not in superannuation law, not in social security law, not in any other law. It is unacceptable to treat one group of citizens different from another. This is why I am proud to be a member of the
party that removed 85-odd pieces of discrimination against same-sex couples from Commonwealth laws when we came into government.

In Newcastle, the city I represent, around 60 per cent of people who have contacted me have supported marriage equality—a figure in line with the recent survey by the House of Representatives Social Policy and Legal Affairs Committee, in which over 177,000 Australians expressed support for marriage equality; 64 per cent of respondents. Galaxy Research polling also indicates support for marriage equality at this same level, the highest level since polling on marriage equality began in 2009. It is lovely to be with the Australian people on this issue, and I would love to think this parliament would also be with the Australian people on this issue. I do respect the right of others to hold differing viewpoints when it comes to the issue of marriage. I also respect the rights of religious bodies to be exempt from having to perform non-heterosexual marriages. This bill gives provision to that, ensuring that no minister of religion would be bound to solemnise a marriage where the two individuals were of the same sex.

Many people have made appointments to see me to talk about their views, and I respect those views. Many of those views were about religion—as I said, this bill covers off on that—but they also spoke very much about marriage being about children, including the protection and the raising of children. In 30 years in education as a teacher and a principal I saw many children abused and mistreated by their biological parents. I saw many children loved, nurtured and given great hope by people who were not their biological parents but were their guardians. So I cannot buy the idea that biological parents are obviously the best people to raise children—it just is not always the case.

On Saturday 11 August hundreds turned out at Newcastle City Hall for the Rally for Marriage Equality, marking the eighth anniversary of the Howard government's provocative ban on equal marriage rights. It is important to remember that the Marriage Act never said marriage was between a man and a woman until John Howard changed it. It was always about polygamy and not allowing multiple relationships in a marriage. It was never defined until John Howard put it in. That was a very retrograde step. A number of locals spoke at the rally, including the inspirational Michelle Lancey, who runs Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays in Newcastle—an invaluable support network in my region. Michelle spoke at the ALP National Conference. She is a mother who would like to see both of her boys be able to marry. One is homosexual and one is heterosexual, and she finds it very sad that their relationships are not of equal value.

La Trobe University's 2011 Writing themselves in report, which surveyed the experiences of over 3,000 gay youth between 14 and 21, found that 79 per cent of students attracted to the same sex had been physically assaulted or verbally abused. It is time this country matured. That is not acceptable in any country. It is time tolerance was extended to everybody. It is sad to see the suicide rates amongst gay young people as well. It is time to legislate for marriage equality. We would not be acting alone—many countries have done this. I am pleased to support the bill. (Time expired)

Mr SECKER (Barker—Opposition Whip) (20:36): I find it very interesting that the member for Newcastle, in speaking on the Marriage Amendment Bill 2012 currently before us, said it was a retrograde step for Prime Minister John Howard to define marriage as being 'between a man and a woman, to the exclusion of all others', which
of course is the definition of marriage in Britain. I was here at that time—as was the member for Newcastle, who is escaping the chamber to avoid hearing this. I do not remember the member for Newcastle coming into this chamber and speaking against that motion or voting against that motion; it did not happen.

I also remember promises being made during the last federal election campaign by both the Labor Party and the coalition to retain that definition of marriage. The Labor Party promised not to change the definition, and we in the coalition also said we would not change the definition. I know that not one member from my side went to that election suggesting that we would break that commitment or that they were against the definition of marriage being 'between a man and woman, to the exclusion of all others'. I am not aware that any Labor member went to the last election saying they would change that definition or were in favour of changing it. I may be wrong—it is possible that one or some did—but I am certainly not aware of it.

I know that those on the other side are quite happy to break promises they made during the 2010 election campaign. We had the famous example of the Prime Minister saying, 'There will be no carbon tax under the government I lead.' But I think it is sacrosanct that members keep their commitments. If people are to trust politicians, it is very important that politicians, if they make a commitment or promise before an election, keep to that promise—unlike those on the other side.

I have been asked why I will not change my mind on this, and I am quite happy to say that I actually believe in marriage being between a man and a woman. That is not to say that I am against some sort of contractual arrangement of a different type for same-sex couples, but, when it comes to the word 'marriage' and the legal definition of marriage, I am proud to say that I believe marriage should be between a man and a woman, to the exclusion of all others. I accept that other people have different views. But, if they have gone to an election saying they will not change that definition and then, when the election is over, break that promise, I think it is a problem. It fuels the belief that politicians do not keep their promises. We are thought of badly enough, thanks to some promises which have been broken.

I am indebted to Brian Camenker, who has given us some information about what happened in Massachusetts:

On November 18, 2003, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court announced its Goodridge opinion, declaring that it was unconstitutional not to allow same-sex "marriage."

I believe it was a very close decision. Mr Camenker goes on:

Six months later, despite public outrage, homosexual "weddings" began to take place. Let us have a look at what has happened since that time. Mr Camenker tells us:

By the following year it was in elementary school curricula—with hostility towards parents who disagreed.

He cites an example:

When … the parent of a kindergartener … calmly refused to leave a school meeting unless officials agreed to notify him when discussing homosexuality or transgenderism with his son, the school had him arrested and jailed overnight. We do not want to see that in Australia. Above all, we do not want to see parental rights taken away by— (Time expired)

Ms BIRD (Cunningham—Parliamentary Secretary for Higher Education and Skills) (20:41): Tonight I reaffirm my intention to support the Marriage Amendment Act 2012, introduced as a private member's bill by my colleague the member for Throsby, which aims to amend the Marriage Act 1961 to
establish marriage equality for same-sex couples. Over recent times, I have sought the views of my constituency on this issue and have received arguments both for and against the change. Indeed, over 1,500 constituents contacted me, some on multiple occasions, by various methods, including petitions, standard email campaigns and personally written emails and letters.

I came to the debate undetermined about my own views on this issue. I have a significant appreciation of the special nature of marriage for those with various religious affiliations. I have also spent much of my adult life arguing that people in committed relationships who are not married deserve to have that relationship given the same legal and social acceptance and recognition as those who are married. I also have a profoundly held belief that gay and lesbian individuals and couples should not face harassment, discrimination or denial of rights extended to other Australians. For that reason, I welcomed the significant legislative reforms put in place by the new Labor government when we came to office in 2007.

Since I was genuinely undetermined about my own views, I read with an honestly inquiring mind all the submissions made to me. I received personal representations both in my electorate and in Canberra from groups wishing to explain their views on the legislation. In large part, these interactions were well considered and respectful and I appreciate those who argued their case passionately but without attacking the other side of the argument—or indeed me—in a personal way. Sadly, this was not universally the case. But those who resorted to personal attacks simply wasted an opportunity to influence my views.

When the ALP determined that members were to be given a conscience vote on the issue, I concluded my own consideration and determined that I would be supporting the change for reasons I will shortly outline. I then wrote to all of the constituents who had contacted me to let them know of my decision. I acknowledge that there are some who were, and remain, disappointed by my decision, as there are those who welcomed it. I can only assure all that I reached the decision after extensive consideration of all the submissions made to me and I am entirely comfortable that I have determined the decision conscientiously.

The exercise of a conscience vote is particularly important, as it does not bind a member to a predetermined outcome and therefore the numbers are not the overriding consideration; rather, it is expected that the member will bring their own judgement to the matter. It is a matter of great regret and shame, I believe, that the Leader of the Opposition has not afforded his own members a similar right to exercise a free conscience vote.

The existence of the Marriage Act and the use of that status in various other acts mean that the institution of marriage is not a church-only matter; it is also a matter for consideration by the state. There is much discussion still in this debate that a new form of formal recognition, such as a civil union, would be a more appropriate response as a formal recognition of committed same-sex relationships. Initially I felt this might be an appropriate way forward. I could see the logic of the mechanistic nature of the arguments for this model. But, at the end of the day, it is my view that this is simply splitting hairs. In everyday life, people are asked, 'Are you married?' not 'Are you civilly united?' The nature of the relationships should be equal, so, to my mind, the process should be equal.

As a result of my considerations, I also believe it is critically important that this
apply to the state's operation and recognition of relationships for its purposes. I remain firmly of the view that churches and other religious institutions should be protected in their right to perform marriage ceremonies according to their own principles and values. Indeed, the ALP platform specifically states this, as does the amendment bill before us. In the final analysis for me as a parliamentarian, it is up to the state to determine whether or not to expand the definition of marriage, and it is up to the church and its clergy to solemnise marriage according to its traditions.

Mr COULTON (Parkes—The Nationals Chief Whip) (20:46): I am a little confused about what is happening with this bill, the Marriage Amendment Bill 2012. If same-sex marriage is such an issue, as it is reported to be, and so many members of the government are in support of it, why has it been introduced by a backbencher? Why wasn't it introduced through the normal cabinet process, brought before the House and a decision made? As it is now, it gets trotted out about every four weeks, like a child's pony, and paraded around the chamber. I presume the tactic there is to give people the idea that something is actually happening on this front. A lot of people are waiting to watch this chamber to see what it does with regard to the issue, one way or another.

As the previous speaker, the member for Cunningham, said, we get a lot of emails, and I have got a lot of communications about this bill. I have to say to people, 'This is a private member's bill, not a government bill,' and explain what that means. So I really do not think the government are fair dinkum about this. To be honest, I do not think it is fair to the Australian public that they are using this approach. In my electorate there are people who are strongly opposed to same-sex marriage and there are people who strongly support it. Indeed, I have been in communication with people from both sides. But this is not an issue you can decide on a clear majority. If I poll the 100,000 voters in my electorate and 50,001 are for same-sex marriage—or vice versa—it does not mean that is what we will have. You will still have the other half, all those other people, who are disappointed. The nature of this issue makes it personal.

My constituents are very clear about where I stand on this. They do not all agree with where I stand on this but they are all very clear about where I stand. It was not a platform at the last election, but if anyone had cared to ask what my thoughts were, I would have told them. My personal thoughts are that marriage is between a man and a woman. That is not to say that I do not respect people who have a different point of view and that, sometime in the future, a clear majority will not think otherwise. That is my personal view, and I do not resile from it. As for the view of my electorate, from the correspondence I am getting and from the mood in the electorate I still think that a clear majority are in favour of marriage being between a man and a woman.

Why is the government handling this issue the way it is? Why is it leaving the running of this to the member for Throsby, in conjunction with the member for Melbourne, who are running a tag team on private members' motions? There is a caucus meeting tomorrow; if the government are fair dinkum about this, they should get it on the agenda, and then let the parliament decide so we can move on.

I suspect that this tactic of having a debate every three or four weeks on same-sex marriage is a great diversion away from the other issues we have been dealing with, such as the carbon tax and asylum seekers. I think that is grossly unfair. I think the government are taking the Australian people for fools to
treat them this way. My thoughts are that we need to put this issue behind us one way or another and move on for the sake of the Australian people and for the sake of the gay and lesbian communities.

Mr NEVILLE (Hinkler—The Nationals Deputy Whip) (20:51): I rise tonight to speak against the Marriage Amendment Bill 2012. From the outset, I would like to make a few disclaimers about this bill. The first is my opposition is not driven by any homophobic leanings. The second is I respect the motion of the member for Throsby and his sincerity in this matter, as indeed I do the member for Cunningham—one of the people I most respect in this chamber. But on the bill I beg to differ.

It is simply my belief that marriage in its current form should remain. In fact, I go further than that. I do not think that it is in the capacity of the state to redefine the essence of marriage as being other than between a man and a woman. It is the framework central to a 3,500-year Judeo-Christian tradition and, until comparatively recent centuries, a commitment which took the form of a religious, ceremonial and legal union which was always between a man and a woman. Even in modern times priests and pastors continue to be the front-line celebrants of the marriage ceremony, though it is recognised in a pluralist society that other non-Christian clergy or appointed civil practitioners deliver the ceremony to those who are not part of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

For the last few centuries, civil unions were held in registry offices, court houses and magistrates’ offices and by captains of ships at sea until the advent of civil celebrants in the second half of the 20th century. I do not seek to impugn couples who wish to live together, whether that is in a heterosexual, homosexual, lesbian or platonic relationship. I do not contest their right to have ceremonies of commitment, providing they do not purport to be married. I believe couples who come together in these circumstances should not be deprived of joint ownership of property, entitlement to wills, insurance settlements and superannuation, but I do contest their right to redefine marriage.

I vehemently support the coalition in believing that the definition of marriage contained in the existing provisions of the Marriage Act 1974 appropriately affects the common understanding of marriage in the Australian community—the union of a man and a woman, to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life and, within this framework, for the raising of children. I do not believe that parliaments should attempt to change concepts that have historic, cultural and, in most instances, religious foundations.

Of course, with such a contentious topic as this, it should be not just my view that is expressed, but that of my constituents in Hinkler. In 2011, when this issue was just as topical, I took the step of gauging the level of support for same-sex marriage through a newsletter. I have always found my newsletter was a very good way to get feedback from constituents. Only 14 people were supportive of same-sex marriage, and 595 were opposed to it—that is, roughly two per cent of the respondents in Hinkler were in favour of same-sex marriage. Quite frankly, I was surprised. Even though it is a conservative electorate, I thought the result would have been closer. Along with this, I received 232 letters from my constituents in the form of an open letter to the Prime Minister protesting against any move towards same-sex marriage.

As I have said before, I, like the vast majority of my constituents, believe
marriage is and should remain the union of a man and a woman. It seems there is a great push in some sections of society for change for change's sake. But that is not good enough.

Finally, what we have heard in the speeches from the government tonight should not be the basis for a change to the Marriage Act.

Debate adjourned.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS
Carbon Pricing

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

Debate resumed on the motion:
That this House:
(1) notes:
(a) that the carbon price came into effect on 1 July 2012;
(b) the Government's repeated assertions that only Australia's '500 biggest polluters' will pay the carbon price;
(c) community concern that the social and economic impacts of the carbon price have not been fully investigated;
(d) research that indicates the carbon price will have a disproportionate impact on small businesses, regional industries, and regional communities;
(e) concern:
(i) regarding the impact of the carbon price on at least 104 councils in rural, regional and urban Australia which have received notices of potential liability from the Clean Energy Regulator; and
(ii) within regional communities that the $200 million Regional Structural Adjustment Assistance Package is inadequate to meet the needs of adversely affected communities, particularly those exposed to the Government's 'contract for closure' policies; and
(g) that the Government's $36 million advertising campaign to promote the Household Assistance Package provides no information on the policy that has led to the payments to households; and
(2) highlights that the Government should have deferred the introduction of the carbon price until after the Australian public has had its say at the next election.

WYATT ROY (Longman) (20:57): I rise tonight to again speak out in support of locals who are being hit hard by the carbon tax. Last week marked the shameful anniversary of two years since our Prime Minister misled the Australian people and declared that there would be no carbon tax under a government she led. Local small businesses in our community are now bearing the weight of this deception about a tax that is not only making life much more expensive, but squeezing small businesses who are already doing it tough.

On Friday I visited a small business in my electorate, a business that is being hit hard by the carbon tax and is receiving no assistance from the federal Labor government for the pain it is causing. I spoke with Craig, from the local Foodworks in Burpengary, who has just been notified by his electricity company that his costs have gone up dramatically due to the carbon tax. Craig receives monthly accounts for his electricity and, upon receiving his July account, realised that his business was footing a $1,300 carbon tax bill for one month alone! That amount is exactly what Craig's bill actually specifies he is paying for the carbon tax alone. What is clear is that, in contrast with what this Labor government is trying to spin, small businesses are indeed facing huge costs under the carbon tax. Craig's business will be paying more than $15,000 each year in carbon tax on his electricity alone, which does not account for his increased costs in fresh produce, freight or meat products,
despite the fact that he has had assurances from suppliers that prices will definitely be rising as a result of the carbon tax. Craig pointed out that:

The carbon tax is going to cost people their jobs and hurt them in the hip pocket. We'll absorb as much as we can but we can't possibly absorb 100 per cent of the cost of the carbon tax.

I was also speaking with another local business on Friday, Redsell Air, whose costs are also rising. The main impost for Redsell Air is refrigeration gas. The cost of the most common type of refrigeration gas has increased by over 350 per cent with the carbon tax. Tony from Redsell Air told me that he was already well aware of the ways the carbon tax will hurt his business. Tony said:

The carbon tax is already having a clear impact on costs for our business. Refrigerant gas has been hit hard with the carbon tax. Prior to 1st July, our most common type of refrigerant gas was $31.40 per kilo. After the 1st of July, it is $112.82 per kilo, directly due to the impact of the carbon tax. This is more than a 350 per cent rise in the cost for what is a key factor in our business.

Last week I also spoke extensively with my two local chambers of commerce. The President of the Bribie Island Chamber of Commerce told me that her members are very concerned about their future prospects under the carbon tax. She said:

People know they will be hit hard with the carbon tax, and many people just aren't spending money. Local businesses are the ones who ultimately lose out.

She further said:

More businesses are closing now than with the GFC. For small business the killer is that customers are not spending money because they are frightened to get their electricity bills.

Commerce Caboolture reports a similar story, saying:

There is little doubt that the recently introduced carbon tax will increase the costs of all businesses. With consumer and business confidence low, there is a great deal of uncertainty about how much of those costs can be passed on. This means that businesses that have been doing it tough already may be squeezed even further.

I note with some obvious interest tonight that the Labor party has preselected its candidate for the Federal seat of Longman at the next election. Let me take this, the first available opportunity, to sincerely congratulate my opponent. I know it is not an easy thing to be preselected by a major political party. I note that he stated in his media release:

I believe our MPs should understand the day to day cost of living pressures in our area.

Well, I would love to know how the carbon tax is going to help one person in our local community. How is any one of the 26 new or increased taxes since federal Labor came to power going to help locals in our community?

The coalition has a very clear plan for how it will help Australians. We will restore hope, reward and opportunity. We will reduce cost-of-living pressures, grow the economy, strengthen the nation and deliver the stable and accountable government Australians deserve.

**Mr KELVIN THOMSON** (Wills) (21:02): This motion continues the regrettable opposition tradition of not letting the facts get in the way of a good story when it comes to the carbon price. The motion says the carbon price will have a disproportionate impact on regional industries. The Leader of the Opposition went further, saying in June last year that there will be 45,000 jobs lost in energy-intensive industries and there will be 126,000 jobs lost, mainly in regional Australia. The claim is nonsense. Employment will continue to grow strongly under a carbon price, with 1.6 million new jobs being created by 2020. New jobs and industries in regional Australia will be
created from investment in clean technology, and I urge the state governments of Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland not to put planning roadblocks in the way of wind energy jobs in regional Australia.

In June last year the Leader of the Opposition claimed, 'A carbon tax ultimately means death to the coal industry.' In fact, Treasury modelling shows the Australian coal mining industry's output will more than double over the period from 2010 to 2050. More than $96 billion worth of investment in the coal industry is currently in the pipeline—$96 billion.

And of course the opposition—and we heard it again tonight—has been endeavouring to blame the carbon price for electricity price rises. The Leader of the Opposition said last October: 'It will lead to massive increases in power prices.' In fact, the carbon price will increase household electricity prices by $3.30 a week on average, and households will receive $10.10 a week on average under the government's Household Assistance Package.

The opposition are Johnny-come-latelys to the issue of electricity prices. In November 2010 I expressed great concern in this House that over the past 10 years electricity prices in both Melbourne and Sydney had more than doubled: Melbourne prices had risen by more than 52 per cent in real terms and so had Sydney's, at 51 per cent. It is high time pensioners and other household electricity consumers got some relief from ever-rising electricity prices. I believe that regulatory authorities should limit electricity price rises for household consumers to the percentage amount by which pensions rise. This would give pensioners and fixed income earners some badly needed respite. I urge electricity pricing regulatory authorities to consider the hardship the rises over the past decade have caused and think about pensioners who are struggling to make ends meet.

My view is that the cost of investing in new electricity infrastructure should be borne by the beneficiaries of growth: the property industry. Electricity companies should not be prevented from recovering the costs of new infrastructure from the new developments that necessitate it. Household customers should not be asked to subsidise infrastructure development over which they have no control.

I welcome recent statements by the Prime Minister on the causes of rising electricity prices and on the debate we are now having about the gold-plating of electricity networks, with pensioners and household consumers footing the bill. The more that power companies spend, the more money they receive. This gives them an incentive to gold-plate their networks. I draw the attention of the House to an example of this in my own electorate. At the Brunswick Terminal Station, CitiPower and SP AusNet, majority owned by the Singaporean government, have turned what should have been a $107 million spend in 2006 on an enhancement to Melbourne's CBD network into a $271 million spend, and still counting, this year. What is called the 'reg test' is the green light for the owners of transmission assets to build something and then lift the prices charged to consumers, via their power bills, to recover the costs. Yet the 2008 'reg test' for the Brunswick Terminal Station did not consider the possibility that the air insulated system that it had identified for the site was unlikely to receive local council planning approval. This was notwithstanding that the Brunswick site was zoned residential and even a cursory inquiry would have revealed entrenched local opposition. Four years later the plan is to spend $271 million. This is a far cry from the original $107 million earmarked for the site or the $135
million considered for the Bouverie Street alternative. The federal government should launch an investigation into how it is that a $100 million proposal can become a $271 million one.

As long as this kind of thing continues to happen, we will continue to see electricity supply companies making large, unwarranted profits at the expense of pensioners and ordinary households. This is what this motion should be about. If the opposition were fair dinkum, that is what they would be talking about tonight.

Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (21:07): I seek the indulgence of the House just for a moment before I speak to the bill. I was looking tonight at this book, Lake Eyre: A Journey Through the Heart of the Continent, and it had the name Paul Lockyer on it, with photographs and support by John Bean and Gary Ticehurst. It is 12 months since that inexplicable, tragic accident happened. I know that for us, life moves on. I did not know any of these three people, but those family members, and those who were close to them, and many in outback Australia, will be really feeling it at this time. I would just like to identify with them, 12 months on from that accident, and to say what wonderful men they were and what a wonderful contribution they made to this nation.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr Leigh): I thank the member for McMillan for his well-chosen words.

Mr BROADBENT: It is 40 days since I sent a letter out to my electorate through the local newspapers, mentioning the Greg Sheridan article in the Weekend Australian of 11-12 July. All I asked in that letter was that Minister Combet answer the queries put within that article that were negative about the carbon tax and what it will do for Australia. All I asked for was some veracity, some truth. But at this stage neither the minister, Greg Combet, nor any of his colleagues have addressed the specific issues raised by Sheridan—namely, the Productivity Commission findings that no economy in the world has produced a scheme such as Australia's tax at $23 a tonne. The US does not have a national scheme, nor Canada, nor China. South Korea is yet to develop one. New Zealand has modified its already low-price scheme. India is not considering anything until after 2020, and then only wants Western dollars.

Despite the minister's answer to the dixer in question time last Thursday, the EU, where some trading exists, has a permit price as low as $7 or $8—which would make an enormous difference to my power station or, rather, to the member for Gippsland's power station—and to my workers as well as to his workers. According to Swiss banking giant UBS Investment Research, the EU ETS cost $278 billion through 2011, and its effect on the reduction of emissions was 'almost zero impact'. Experts doubt that an international trading scheme will ever work. For example, there are doubts over the veracity of the permits emanating out of China. Lastly, there is no evidence to show that a market based system of trading actually reduces carbon emissions.

These are only the reasons that I am asking Greg Combet, the minister, to look at the Sheridan article of 40 days ago, to take it apart piece by piece, and give the Australian people the opportunity to say: 'Righto, there is a criticism—and here is the answer from the government. Here is a definitive response from the government on these issues.' My workers in the Latrobe Valley, along with the member for Gippsland's workers in the Latrobe Valley, actually deserve a response. They deserve a response to an article that clearly says, this puts Australia at a
disadvantage. And it was not just Greg Sheridan; he was quoting two other experts.

Now the member opposite may grin and have a little cheer, but he should come down and see my workers, who are really concerned about their futures and who are really concerned that they have been dudged by the party that they voted for. Do you know what sort of vote I get in their area? Twenty-five per cent. And if I have a good election campaign, I get 26 per cent. They are solid, down-to-earth, hardworking Labor voters. The member opposite can grin all he likes, because he is not grinning at me—he is grinning at those voters. And I can tell you something, if they vote the way they voted during the last election campaign, that grin will be wiped so far off his face he will not know which way to run.

Having said that, all I am asking tonight is for one minister in the government of the day to go and answer a simple article that was put in the Australian on 11 July. That was 40 days ago, and there has not been one response. And if I have to get up in this parliament tomorrow, and the day after, it will be 41 days, and 42 days, and he will not have answered the question.

I know there are really good reasons for this nation to reduce its emissions and, perhaps, take a world lead. But this government is not going about it in a way that is good for this nation. It is certainly not good for Gippsland. We are the ones who are, once again, going to take the brunt of massive changes in Australia's approach to emissions. We have already been through the privatisation of the power industry, where we lost as many as 8,000 jobs in one hit. And now here we are at the forefront of this whole issue again. I am out of time, but I look forward to the next five days, when the minister may consider a response.

Mr CHAMPION (Wakefield) (21:13): It is not for me to respond, but I would point the member for McMillan to the experience in the United States of market based mechanisms to reduce pollution. In the United States, they used a market based mechanism—a trading scheme—to eliminate acid rain. Deputy Speaker Leigh could give the member various articles about how that was done through a trading system, and that would be proof that such systems work.

Earlier, we heard the member for Longman complain about business confidence. He talked about how small businesses in his electorate were complaining about business confidence and were worried about the future. The main reason they are worried about the future is that we have an opposition that is not playing the role of the loyal opposition but rather playing the role of the tea party in Australia.

They are running around the place, increasingly shrill and unbelievable—as this motion demonstrates—in this Henny Penny fashion saying: 'The sky is going to fall. You've got to be scared. You've got to be frightened. It's just around the corner.' We got to 1 July and it was: 'It's just around the corner. Wait until the power bills come in.' After that it will be: 'Wait for this. Wait for that.'

Mr Perrett: It's a python, not a cobra.

Mr CHAMPION: It's a python, not a cobra. We have seen Whyalla survive. Whyalla is still there. We have seen the opposition leader previously describe the lifts in the cost of living as 'unimaginable', and yet the TD Securities inflation figure for July was 0.2 per cent. We have heard the Leader of the Opposition say that every Australian job would be less secure, yet unemployment remains low. Wages continue to grow. Australians in all walks of life continue to get on with their daily lives.
What we have seen over the last year is the most irresponsible scare campaign in this nation's history.

I have been out to my electorate and talked to people. I used to do the piece-of-steak test. I knew that the average piece of steak would rise by half a cent under the carbon price. I would go out there and ask people, 'How much do you think it's going up?' Because of the scare campaign of those opposite, you got anywhere from 15c to $2 a piece. People have fertile imaginations these days. Of course members opposite have played upon those imaginations and turned them into an incense burner to their own political vanity. Unfortunately, this all has to stop. At some point, reality has to set in. And of course it has set in.

What this price is all about—and it is a price, and it is a market based mechanism—is a transformation in our economy, mainly to drive efficiency. That is what this price does: it mainly drives efficiency. Sure, some costs are passed on. That is why consumers—particularly consumers on fixed incomes—are compensated. But what this price really is designed to do is drive efficiency in business.

I have seen that in my own electorate, in a big bottling plant. Obviously it was energy intensive. They were fearful of what Europe might do in terms of trade barriers. They were fearful that wineries might ship their wine over there and bottle in the United Kingdom rather than bottle here. So they halved the amount of glass in the bottles. They invested in a very efficient manufacturing plant and reduced the amount of glass they used. Because they reduced the amount of glass they used, they reduced their energy intensity. Because they reduced that, they pump out less carbon. That is what market based systems do: they promote efficiency. Members opposite know this. But they just do not want to talk about it.

Mr Hunt: I'll talk about it.

Mr CHAMPION: You did your whole thesis on it. You should know it back to front. We are waiting for you to tell us.

Mr Hunt: I know a bit about this.

Mr CHAMPION: You claim that your own scheme is a market based mechanism. I wonder how you are going to justify that.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr Leigh): Order! The member will direct his comments through the chair.

Mr CHAMPION: It is going to be the greatest public subsidy for heavy industry since Stalin was around. State based socialism is what you are proposing.

Mr Christensen: Did you get your car subsidies?

Mr CHAMPION: The member opposite should not knock Holdens. Holden is a great Australian brand. You should not knock them in this place. I will leave it to the other side to explain their policy and the merits of it.

(Time expired)

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (21:18): Let me deal with this carbon tax. It does not work, nobody else is doing it and there is a better way. Let me deal with the fact that it does not work. I will take the member for Wakefield to page 18 of the summary modelling document in Treasury's own modelling. What does that say? That between 2010 and 2020 Australia's emissions will go up from 578 million tonnes to 621 million tonnes. Hang on. We have a carbon tax. It has been brought about to reduce emissions. Yet Australia's emissions go up by 43 million tonnes or almost two tonnes per person. The raison d'etre, the purpose, the cause, the reason for being of this carbon tax is to reduce Australia's emissions—and it does not. It does not work.
It does not achieve its basics. It does not achieve the very thing for which it was created. That is why, before you even get to the issue of electricity prices, gas prices and refrigeration costs, Australians are saying very simply, 'What's the point?' I am one that does believe that we need to take action, that does want to reduce emissions. This carbon tax does not do it, because electricity is a fundamentally inelastic good—not perfectly inelastic, but it is an essential service. That means its susceptibility to price change is limited. That is why around the world an electricity tax is not what is actually happening.

This brings me to the second point: nobody else is doing it. What the government would have us believe is that everybody is rushing to the carbon tax, right around the world. Let us look at the reality. The United States has made sure that there will be no carbon tax under a government that anybody leads in that country over the next 10 years. Of that I am as certain as I could possibly be in terms of anything at the geostrategic level. Canada has just held an effective referendum with its last election, and the proponents of the carbon tax were decimated, destroyed, obliterated. That was the electoral fate of the carbon tax in Canada. In Japan it has been deferred indefinitely. In Korea it was not brought forward; it was put back. And the amount of free permits is up to 100 per cent in the vast majority of cases. So the reality is that there is the fig leaf but no actual functioning tax remotely like anything else. In India, no chance. In China they are seeing the greatest growth in coal emissions in human history.

What we are seeing is a growth in coal from 1.4 billion tonnes in 2002 to up to four billion tonnes in 2015. That is the reality. In Europe—which the government cites as if it is the great saviour of the drowning government—over their first five years they averaged a take of $500 million, for a population of 500 million, so it was $1 per person. In Australia, we will make $9 billion from the carbon tax by taking it from the people in the first year. In the first year we will have approximately 18 times the take of Europe's first five-year average, and our population is 22½ million people. So the difference is between $1 per person and $400 per person. That is why there can be no comparison between Europe and Australia.

As the Productivity Commission said, no other country has an economy-wide carbon tax or emissions trading scheme equivalent to that which is being proposed in Australia—all of which leads to the knowledge that there is a better way. And it is very simple: we just hold a reverse auction. All we do is what we do with water. We buy the lowest cost emissions reduction, the lowest cost abatement—whether it is capturing carbon in soil, capturing carbon in trees, cleaning up waste landfill gas, cleaning up waste coalmine gas, cleaning up our power stations or pursuing energy efficiency at the industrial, domestic or commercial level. That is what we do. It is not difficult. It is in fact exactly as the UN's Clean Development Mechanism operates. This carbon tax is lonely. It is a failure. It does not work, and that is why it should be utterly rejected.

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (21:24): Thank you, Deputy Speaker Leigh; your earlier motion up in the Federation Chamber was a noble point for this parliament to consider. This motion, put forward by the member for La Trobe, is not so noble.

Mr Chester: It was the member for Gippsland.

Mr PERRETT: I beg your pardon, Member for Gippsland. The member for Gippsland put up this motion. I could not sign up quickly enough to talk about the
price on carbon. Obviously, firstly, we need to turn to the motion put forward by the member for Gippsland. It talked about the impact of the carbon price. As the first thing we do, let's look at the facts. Let's have a look at the economy. I wondered whether, if we went back 10 years, the Treasurer at the time, Peter Costello, had a set of figures like this, with 4.3 per cent growth, especially compared to the rest of the world—

Mr Chester interjecting—

Mr PERRETT: Yes, a surplus. I take that interjection from the member opposite. That is certainly what we are predicting in our budget, with 14,000 jobs created in the month of July. That is despite the Premier of Queensland sacking thousands of people. The number was 5,000, then 6,000, and then 7,000, and they are on track to having sacked 20,000—some say even 30,000—people. When we look at private investment in the economy, we see the highest percentage of GDP in almost 40 years. The investment pipeline lined up to come in, especially in resources but also across Australia, is $500 billion, or half a trillion dollars. And look at the TD Securities results in terms of inflation. Surely with those figures, inflation must be out of control, or unemployment must be a problem. But, no, we have unemployment at around the five per cent mark. Since back in July when the carbon tax was introduced, we have had inflation at 0.2 per cent.

I remember a time when it was said that there would be serious price increases, or, according to the member for Warringah, 'astronomical and unimaginable price increases'. I am not using his imagination as a yardstick for what people are doing. He talked about it being a 'wrecking ball' on the economy. Surely the Treasurer 10 years ago would have been in raptures over those sorts of economic figures. We heard it was a cobra poised to strike the economy, and then it transmogrified into a carpet snake—

Ms Rishworth interjecting—

Mr PERRETT: Sorry, a python. A carpet snake is a type of python. Anyone from the bush knows that a carpet snake will not hurt you. You probably don’t want to put your finger in its mouth, but a carpet snake won't do any harm. Most carpet snakes do good things around the home. They get rid of mice and a few things like that.

Mr Chester: We should all have one!

Ms Rishworth: A lot less than the GST.

Mr PERRETT: Definitely a lot less than the GST. It will be two years tomorrow since the 2010 election, and I can assure those opposite that the people that turned out to vote for me in Moreton would have been horrified if we had not gone ahead with pricing carbon the way we had promised in 2007, the way the member for Warringah promised in 2007 and the way the member for Wentworth promised up until 2 December 2009, when the member for Warringah took control of the opposition by one vote—with one donkey vote and one missing vote. It was so close, we could have had a completely different approach to this problem. Instead we have seen political opportunism still coming out tonight, with
this motion, and with members saying the price on carbon is having a significant impact. The economic figures laugh in the face of such an accusation from the member for— *(Time expired)*

**DISTINGUISHED VISITORS**

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr Leigh) (21:29): The member for Barker draws my attention to the presence on the floor of Craig Whittaker, British MP for Calder Valley, originally from Whyalla in South Australia. I welcome him to the floor of the parliament tonight.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

**Carbon Pricing**

Report from Federation Chamber

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

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this House:

(1) notes:

(a) that the carbon price came into effect on 1 July 2012;

(b) the Government's repeated assertions that only Australia's '500 biggest polluters' will pay the carbon price;

(c) community concern that the social and economic impacts of the carbon price have not been fully investigated;

(d) research that indicates the carbon price will have a disproportionate impact on small businesses, regional industries, and regional communities;

(e) concern:

(i) regarding the impact of the carbon price on at least 104 councils in rural, regional and urban Australia which have received notices of potential liability from the Clean Energy Regulator; and

(ii) within regional communities that the $200 million Regional Structural Adjustment Assistance Package is inadequate to meet the needs of adversely affected communities, particularly those exposed to the Government's 'contract for closure' policies; and

(g) that the Government's $36 million advertising campaign to promote the Household Assistance Package provides no information on the policy that has led to the payments to households; and

(2) highlights that the Government should have deferred the introduction of the carbon price until after the Australian public has had its say at the next election.

Mr CHRISTENSEN (Dawson) (21:29): The member for Moreton said that the carbon tax was bang on the money. It certainly has been bang on the money in Dawson. In the three major sectors—agriculture, tourism and mining—it is hitting already. I talked about a Bowen tomato farmer today who has a $12,000 carbon tax bill. I did not mention that, on top of that, he has got to find an extra $9,000, on the government's figures, for his electricity bill. So there is $21,000 in the first year alone. And that is just in one sector. It is hitting all sectors, and this government will be held to account for that.

Debate adjourned.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): Order! I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

**Lonmin Platinum Mine, South Africa**

Dr JENSEN (Tangney) (21:30): I hope you will join with me today in roundly condemning the massacre which occurred at the Lonmin Platinum Mine in Marikana, South Africa over the weekend. I care—not because they are from the land of my birth, though they are, but for a more noble a reason: I can speak and they cannot.

Eighty per cent of the world's known platinum reserves are within South African
borders. The average wage of a platinum miner in South Africa is 5,000 rand, or approximately $486 a month. Had that same worker won the ovarian lottery and been born here in Australia, he could have been guaranteed several times that wage every week. There have been 44 deaths in the space of 14 days, and all for protesting—for putting in a claim for a fairer share of their treasure.

Yes, I realise that this is a complex issue with many parts. But the fact remains that it is wrong and reprehensible that 34 miners should die and 78 be wounded. Add to this total the 10 deaths earlier in the week, and the total rises to 44. That is what has occurred.

I am calling on all sides to take an interest and bring Lonmin to book on its bullying tactics. It is not acceptable that a major multinational corporation use its might to break the spine and spirit, and dash the dreams, of a people. It would appear from reports that the Lonmin Corporation is issuing an ultimatum: go back to work by Sunday or lose your job.

Here in Australia we talk about the fair go. The miners are asking for comparable treatment to their colleagues in the gold mines. In the gold mines pay is higher, accommodation is on site, and life is better. I am not saying the workers are without blame. I appreciate that the police made some attempts at non-lethal suppression, but when no-one is to blame, usually all are to blame—that is, the unions, mine management, police and government. The resultant images struck me as similar to the ones I saw on the tired old TV my grandmother used to own. How is Lonmin going to sit alongside Soweto and Sharpeville?

I never overlook the deep friendship and history of our two countries, and to the people of South Africa I say, 'When you hurt we feel your pain.' We fought together in many wars and stand together in the peace. We look not down on you today but up, to your historic achievements in the steps out of apartheid.

Australia can do more and should do more. The police forces need training; we have the skills and willingness to help. How long will the national commission of inquiry installed by President Zuma have for the investigation? Who will they be, and how much power will they have? Mark Bristow, chief executive of Randgold Resources Limited, said mixed messages from the government regarding the mining industry had compounded the frustration on the ground. 'South Africa has never got to a formula where everyone feels part of the business,' said Mr Bristow. 'It is always them and us.' He went on:

There is still a nationalization debate ... the whole South African issue is still looking at distribution and redistribution rather than looking at the hard business of building value and profitability.

We urge the South African government to do not what is easy but what is difficult, because we know they can do it, again. What is difficult now is to reaffirm a commitment to a capitalism that works for all. What people want most of all is a vision and certainty. In the absence of real leaders demagogues and dictators will fill the void.

Nearly two decades ago Nelson Mandela brought down the wall of apartheid in Johannesburg, saying, 'Free at last.' How do these actions honour Mandela's creed? There is only one way to bring real freedom, and that is through economic freedom, where the rising tide lifts all boats.

Loss and the sorrows of too many mothers has been the shame of that great and colourful nation. The events in Marikana added to that. Right and wrong are not for
blacks or for whites. Right is not about colour. It is within our power to say to the world simply, for the good and honest people of South Africa, 'Our politics is to see suffering and try to end it, to see hurt and try to heal it, and to see wrong and try to right it.' That is the type of leadership needed from the mines, unions and government. Again, we have had to say, 'Never again.'

Kingston Electorate: Telecommunications Infrastructure

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (21:35): I rise tonight to raise an issue that many constituents in my electorate have brought to my attention: their lack of voice when it comes to planning laws around where to put telecommunications towers. Residents in my electorate recognise that having access to phone coverage is very important, and towers are a necessary part of telecommunications infrastructure. Certainly, it is something that is raised with me on a regular basis. However, a lot of residents are feeling very frustrated and confused about how they can have influence and a voice on where these telecommunications towers go.

In particular, there are two towers that are causing a lot of concern in my electorate. There is one on lot 94, Country Road, adjacent to Sellicks Creek and Sellicks Beach; and there is one on the Esplanade at Aldinga. The first one, on Sellicks Beach, is causing a lot of concern because it is metres away from nearby homes in a residential zoned area. Residents are confused as to why this tower cannot be put onto the other tower that is in the vicinity in a more industrial area. It seems that this is the cheapest way that the company can put up a tower, so they have decided to put it there.

Residents felt bewildered about how to object to this. In the first part of the process, through the development assessment panel, they felt that they had no support and no-one to help them through quite a complex planning process. In that situation the development assessment panel could see their point of view, despite a long and frustrating process, and have supported them. However, the telecommunications company, Telstra, has appealed this and is now going to the ERD Court. The ERD Court, once again, will be considering this. If the court does find in their favour, it can then be appealed to the Supreme Court.

These are just a group of residents who really feel that they are in a David and Goliath battle. They feel that no matter what happens, and when planning authorities can see their point of view it just ends up in another appeal and another appeal until they are worn out and weary of it. This is of great concern. It is important to recognise that these residents do not have the resources that these large telecommunications companies have, they do not have the lawyers and they do not have people who can always back them up. It is important to note that these processes need to be simpler for local residents.

The tower at Aldinga is on the esplanade. For those people who have not been to Aldinga Beach I would suggest you travel there. It is a beautiful place and a real tourist attraction, with the Tour Down Under, a very popular international event, being staged there. These residents of Aldinga Beach have found themselves in a situation where a tower will be put up right on the esplanade. They believe it is important to have these towers and to have telecommunications but ask whether the beachfront is the appropriate place for this.

They are going through, once again, the process of trying to voice their opposition to this. They have had meetings. They are going through the process. But the process is quite bewildering for them. Hopefully the
development assessment panel will see their point of view. Up until that point they do not have that support. They do not have that help. And so they are left. But if it does come to a situation where they have a point and these companies are not meant to build, according to the planning authorities, they can continue to appeal.

That has become wearisome for a lot of the residents in my electorate. They feel that they do not have anywhere to go. In fact, one resident, Mr Warren Everett, said:

It took a significant and conscious effort by a small group of residents to fight this battle and it seems like, because of power and money, these corporations have made it very difficult. When the DAP refused the proposal, we thought great! Then a few months later we find they are appealing. It has been largely the good will of a select few that have made this fight so far, but we have not had the resources and if we had we would have appointed a QC to really help us with this. But we haven't been able to do so.

I think the residents in this situation need support and I would urge consideration. (Time expired)

Swan Electorate: Sport

Mr IRONS (Swan) (21:37): I rise to speak to the House on a campaign I am running in my electorate of Swan for the establishment of an artistic gymnastics academy in Queens Park. Australia has a proud sporting history; I shared the delight of many Australians in seeing our athletes arrive in Sydney and participate in the parade celebrating their achievements.

In Australia, forms of gymnastics have been practised since the late 19th century. In those early days it was organisations such as the YMCA in Melbourne and Sydney, church groups and Wesley College, Melbourne, that provided facilities for such activities. These institutions remained the dominant force in sport through the mid-20th century under the coaching expertise of individuals such as AA Bonnie Frank, at Wesley College, and Alf Lorbach at Melbourne YMCA.

In the 1930s individual state associations were formed in most states, with some running their own championships. The 1956 Olympic Games was the first time Australia was represented in international competition by both male and female teams. Although Australia was represented by only four gymnasts at the 1960 Rome Olympic Games—two women and two men—the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games saw full teams once again represent the nation. However, since then, with the change of qualification rules, Australia has been able only to qualify individual gymnasts to compete at the Olympic Games—until 1992, in Barcelona, Spain, when a full women's team qualified and finished seventh.

An interesting fact is that, despite the fact that women represented Australia at the 1956 Olympic Games, it was not until 1959 that women competed in the Australian Championships. At every Olympics our athletes make Australia proud and inspire our younger athletes back home to aspire to a level of great achievement. Australia also has a need to encourage young people to stay active. Getting into the habit of exercising and staying healthy from a young age can have great benefits in later life.

Since becoming the member for Swan in 2007 I have taken particular interest in sporting infrastructure in my electorate. I have been involved in the development of community sports facilities in the Queens Park and Cannington areas during that time, having secured a $7 million Liberal government commitment for the Leisureplex development in Wharf Street in 2010. This development has freed up the use of the Queens Park Recreation Centre and I have been working on a proposal with the local...
director of the Contemporary Gymnastics Academy, Michelle McDermott, to relocate her operations to the site.

On a visit to Michelle's current facilities with my wife just 10 days ago, it was fantastic to see the children working out and parents watching them perform. Seeing firsthand the work Michelle does, I can say the benefits her operation would bring to the Canning community are substantial. Classes are offered for children right through to adults, and she has seen rapid growth from 17 members in 2009 to over 175 members today, putting her at capacity. The huge growth in her membership shows how the local community value the service.

Problems with the lease at the current venue in Carlisle mean the academy needs a new location, and the Queens Park Recreation Centre would be an ideal one. It would also become part of a longer-term plan to see Queens Park become a local hub for sporting facilities in the Canning district. As part of my campaign I wrote to the residents of Queens Park to gauge community attitudes towards the proposal. I have received an overwhelming response, with over 100 residents contacting me in the campaign's first week to express strong support for the plan. I have written to the Canning CEO to alert him to my campaign and I will update him with the results of my survey, once complete.

I, along with many residents of Queens Park, hope that we can get this facility up and running to continue the great improvements in community sports infrastructure that I have helped deliver since entering this place. Michelle's academy already has young gymnasts who are competing in international competitions. Who knows, perhaps one of those 175-plus athletes could be a future Olympic champion like WA girl Lauren Mitchell who won gold in Beijing and at the 2010 World Championship, before finishing fifth at the recent London games.

Even if the academy does not produce a star of Lauren's calibre, the number of young people it is getting active and keeping healthy is justification enough. I encourage residents who still want to have their say on this proposal to contact my office and record their support. With a bit of lobbying of the council and some of the community spirit which my constituents so often show, we can get a positive result for local residents, the sporting community and the children who are currently involved in the sporting centre.

**Meals on Wheels**

Mr Lyons (Bass) (21:44): I rise in the House today to celebrate National Meals on Wheels Day, which this year falls on the 29 August. This annual celebration recognises the work of 78,700 volunteers at over 740 branches across Australia.

The very first Meals on Wheels service started in Britain during the Second World War and the organisation was established in Australia in 1952. For over 50 years Meals on Wheels has been offering a much needed service to the Australian community, providing meals to the elderly and disabled. The slogan for Meals on Wheels Australia is 'more than just a meal'. Indeed, Meals on Wheels provides much more than a nutritious meal. It provides comfort, certainty and friendship to the more vulnerable members of our community. I have heard from many of my constituents that knowing someone will be popping by for a chat, with a meal and a friendly smile makes a huge difference to their day. The service is also an integral part of allowing individuals to maintain their independence by staying in their own homes for as long as possible. Given Australia's aging population,
this will become more and more important in
the future.

National Meals on Wheels Day is about
recognising the contribution of the
organisation's staff and volunteers. Meals on
Wheels has over 78,000 volunteers who
deliver around 14.8 million meals to 53,000
recipients each year in city, regional and
rural areas alike. Volunteering for an
organisation like Meals on Wheels provides
personal satisfaction, the opportunity to learn
new skills, make friends and face challenges
while making a real contribution to your
local community. Having filled in at Meals
on Wheels on a couple of occasions, I can
say that it is very satisfying.

In my own electorate of Bass, the Meals
on Wheels Service is provided through the
local Australian Red Cross branch. They
deliver to Beaconsfield, Burnie, Campbell
Town, Evandale, Exeter, Georgetown,
Launceston, Lilydale, Karoola, Queenstown,
Rosebery, Bridport, Scottsdale and
Westbury. In the last 12 months this group
delivered over 74,000 meals. This is a very
impressive feat for a group who number
around 450. The manager of the Launceston
service, Mrs Barbara Hill, says the local
'delivered meals' organisation is very
fortunate to have dedicated and long-
standing volunteers who deliver the meals to
their clients in all weathers and always with
a smile and a cheery 'Hello, how are you?'

The longest serving volunteer of this
branch is Mrs Jacqueline Home. Jacqueline
has been delivering meals since 1960 and
still dedicates time once a month to the
service. Indeed, there are many longstanding
volunteers in the organisation. Hans and
Geraldine Van Donselaar and Donald and
Peggy Cleaver, for example, have been
volunteering and delivering meals in their
local communities for over 30 years.

Even as other volunteers become too
elderly or ill to carry on, there is always
another willing to fill in and assist. Charlie
and Joan Hosking do several delivery rounds
every month and are also about to fill in
when needed, and have been since they
started volunteering with the service in 1987.
Likewise, George and Margaret Cook have
been dedicated members since 1988 and, in
fact, are the only members doing deliveries
for church group St Mark's on the Hill.

Like many volunteers, Max Evans was
looking for something to fill his days during
retirement. With his neighbour Margaret
Horder, Max has been delivering meals since
1996. By all accounts they have been a
fantastic partnership, delivering meals five
days a week, with Max doing the driving and
Margaret making the deliveries.

I know that the 'delivered meals'
organisation in Launceston are also grateful
to have the support of Launceston Central,
Kings Meadows and Launceston West
Rotary groups, each of whom have been
doing the deliveries on the third Thursday of
every month since 1988. In the same year,
the Seventh Day Adventist Church also
started volunteering and is still delivering
meals five times each month.

I would like to take this opportunity to
thank each and every one of the local
volunteers for the time they dedicate and the
compassion and caring they show by
volunteering for this fantastic organisation. I
encourage everyone to celebrate National
Meals on Wheels Day on 29 August and
recognise the individuals who provide this
invaluable service to our vulnerable
community members.

Telstra Business Awards

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney) (21:50): I
rise to congratulate four small businesses
within my North Sydney electorate for their
achievement in being named finalists in the

CHAMBER
2012 Australian Telstra Business Awards. Telstra has been acknowledging successful business entrepreneurs and innovators across the country since 1992 in the form of these awards. When I was minister for small business I was pleased to attend those awards. For small and medium businesses they are prestigious and much coveted and they provide appropriate recognition for hard work and success. As shadow Treasurer, I value the significant role that small and medium enterprises play in building our strong economy. It is therefore particularly heartening to know that these four businesses have now been recognised.

North Sydney's development has been shaped in no small measure by a broad cross-section of interesting, vibrant and quite different residential areas, including thriving business hubs of North Sydney itself, St Leonards, Artarmon, Chatswood and of course Lane Cove. So it is gratifying to see a real cross-section of finalists from my electorate.

To be a finalist for the award is an achievement in itself, with a judging process that involves site visits, management interviews, company presentations and submission of documents to the judging panel. It was 'a great opportunity' as one recipient acknowledged to benchmark the company's business planning, customer engagement, marketing strategies and financial performance. So it pleases me to acknowledge in parliament these small business innovators.

The finalists from my electorate included enLighten Australia based in Artarmon. Driven by a belief that the developed world wastes too much energy on lighting, inventor David Whitfield formed enLighten Australia in 2008. His vision was to design and supply high-efficiency, intelligent lighting systems. His company has developed a new generation of occupancy-sensing technology. When combined with its patented LED lighting technology, the company's solution achieves electricity savings of up to 90 per cent. That has got to be a good thing.

Kilimanjaro Consulting—I well recall climbing that mountain but I never knew there was a consulting business named after it!—from North Sydney is one of Australia's largest and most experienced implementers of MYOB's enterprise-level business management, accounting and payroll software, MYOB EXO Business. Kilimanjaro brings its skills in management, accounting, software and business process improvement together to help clients choose the right solution to manage and grow their businesses.

Invisalign Australia from St Leonards operates as a distributor of orthodontic treatment products. Invisalign's system uses a series of removable aligners to straighten teeth, without metal or wires. How about that! The company serves orthodontists and dentists in Australia and North America, a great example of Australian technology taking on the world. I note that the Leader of the Opposition's father was an orthodontist—

Mr Tehan: He straightened your teeth!

Mr HOCKEY: who straightened my teeth. As the Leader of the Opposition's mother said, written on her husband's gravestone will be: 'Changed the face of the North Shore!'

The fourth company is Booktopia, a 100 per cent Australian owned online-only retail store selling books and DVDs all over the world. Based in Lane Cove, it offers over four million books from its subject-categorised database. As well as physical books, Booktopia partners with Google to offer Australian readers thousands of Google eBooks from a variety of international and local publishers.
It is exciting to realise that these four businesses were chosen partly because of their innovative use of communication technology. In selecting the finalists, Telstra made the observation that all of them 'have adopted social media, with the top platform being Facebook, followed by company blogs, LinkedIn and Twitter'. Booktopia, at the finalists' dinner on 25 July 2012, was announced as the Telstra 1300Australia People's Choice Award beneficiary. The people's choice award gives the Australian public the opportunity to vote for their favourite businesses, based on the belief that customers are great judges of service, values, innovation and strength of businesses. Congratulations must go to this fantastic, innovative and successful online bookselling business in Lane Cove in New South Wales. It utilises the internet and social media and connects with customers, providing a benchmark for other small to medium businesses to emulate. (Time expired)

Robertson Electorate: Health Services

Ms O’NEILL (Robertson) (21:55): I am always proud to stand in this place and speak about the great investment that this Labor government is delivering in the regions across the country, but nothing gives me more pleasure than the achievements that are being enabled for our local people in the electorate of Robertson. Last Friday I had the pleasure of attending a sod-turning for the southern Central Coast GP superclinic. This is something on which I campaigned strongly at the last election, because it will help ease the difficulty that we have on the coast in accessing a doctor. I am pleased to say that I have delivered on this election promise and it is full steam ahead, with construction located within the Riverside Park precinct at West Gosford.

I commend Dr Rodney Beckwith of Reliance Medical for his work in securing the tender and his commitment to delivering fantastic care services for locals. Reliance Medical is known on the coast for its record of working with local hospitals, GPs and community organisations to bring vital services to residents. I am thrilled that Dr Beckwith will be able to expand his already comprehensive service to include space for another 14 GPs and 30 additional allied health professionals. I met with many of these young health professionals as we turned the sod on Friday afternoon.

Patients at the Gosford GP superclinic will be able to access pathology, pharmacy, and X-ray on site. Gosford is a commuting community, so it is very important that locals will now be able to benefit from the clinic being open seven days a week until 10 pm, offering care from numerous health professionals who are able to work together to improve patient care.

The clinic will also have a strong emphasis on training doctors, medical students and nursing students, and it hopes to expand into training other disciplines as well. One of the great things that Dr Beckwith has been able to achieve is to cement communications and links with our local university, the University of Newcastle. A number of graduates are coming down to do their training with his current practice, which is located at West Gosford.

This GP superclinic will provide an essential element in building a stronger primary health system on the Central Coast, with an emphasis on chronic disease and preventative health care to ensure that problems can be nipped in the bud before they get more serious.

In a further boost to the region, local building and development company the Gibbens Group are driving the Riverside Park development at West Gosford. The Gibbens brothers have turned previously
usable marshland into a thriving commercial zone, already buzzing with growth opportunities. Not only will we have a GP superclinic, but we will also have much needed commercial office space, large-scale retail facilities and other specialty retail which is already in business there, including a range of fast food providers; Boydita Flowers, who are very well regarded in our local area; and a couple of cafes. It is a very popular place for people to go, and now they will be able to go and see their GP there at times that suit them. That is a big transformation in terms of health access for my community. But it does not stop with the GP superclinic in Robertson. We are also benefitting from a $28 million after-hours GP hotline which allows people across the country, no matter where they live or what time it is, to speak to a GP and get practical, immediate assistance without unnecessarily filling up hospital emergency wards.

The Central Coast is also thanking this Labor government for bringing back the Woy Woy Hospital rehab facility. While the state Liberal government promised to bring back this vital and much loved service when they were elected last year, it took a federal Labor government to actually provide the funding to ensure that this dream became a reality. It has been brought back to life now with $21 million invested by the federal Labor government, because we understand that health access is critical in our communities.

Most important for our region is the $28.6 million for a regional cancer centre at Gosford Hospital, which will mean that, for the first time, locals will not have to face the enormous challenge of having to travel to Sydney or Newcastle to access cancer treatment. This will allow patients to be close to family, friends and support networks, not stuck on the F3 or on a train or a shuttle bus to Newcastle or Sydney to get the treatment that they require.

I am very proud of this government and its commitment to make it easier for all Australians to see and contact a doctor to get the help they need. We believe in fairness, and that is what we are delivering to the people of Robertson.

Public Transport: Kings Cross

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth) (22:00): I have the privilege of representing the communities of Kings Cross, Potts Point, Elizabeth Bay and Darlinghurst in my electorate of Wentworth. The degree of drunkenness and violence in the streets of Kings Cross, particularly on Friday and Saturday nights and the following early mornings, has been a matter of growing concern and apprehension for the residents of those areas for some time. Those areas are the most densely settled residential communities in Australia. They are home to many thousands of our fellow citizens and neighbours.

It is doubly tragic that it took the death of Thomas Kelly, a young man who was killed needlessly and brutally in the streets of Kings Cross on 7 July, for the issue of drunkenness and violence in Kings Cross to become literally a front-page story. To its great credit, the Sydney Morning Herald organised a public meeting on 17 July which I attended, as did the state minister, Mr Souris, and the mayor, Clover Moore. The community of Kings Cross and Potts Point attended in their hundreds to demand action from government.

The state government has responded, commendably, with a proposal to introduce some tough new restrictions on licences in Kings Cross on 7 July, for the issue of drunkenness and violence in Kings Cross to become literally a front-page story. To its great credit, the Sydney Morning Herald organised a public meeting on 17 July which I attended, as did the state minister, Mr Souris, and the mayor, Clover Moore. The community of Kings Cross and Potts Point attended in their hundreds to demand action from government.

The state government has responded, commendably, with a proposal to introduce some tough new restrictions on licences in Kings Cross. It will mean that pubs and hotels will not be able to sell shots after midnight on weekends, will have to stop serving alcohol in the hour before they close
on weekends, and will be obliged to sell liquor in plastic glasses after midnight. There are a number of other restrictions, too.

What has not yet been provided, and what needs to be provided urgently for the protection of the community, is public transport to enable people to leave that precinct in the early hours of the morning. At the moment there are in a very small area 58 premises—some of them vast, with a capacity of well over 1,000 drinkers—that are open as late as 5 am or indeed are open 24 hours a day. Late on a Friday night or Saturday night there might be 20,000 or 30,000 people, and because the premises are open so late very often they arrive already inebriated. The proposition the AHA put at the public meeting at the town hall that their licensees' employees do not serve liquor to people who are inebriated was one of the few remarks met with a gale of laughter.

This problem of drunkenness is not unique. In Sydney at the moment we are focused on the problems in Kings Cross, and naturally that is a matter of keen concern for me as the local member of parliament. A key issue, as I noted a moment ago, is transport. If the trains stop at a quarter to two in the morning, as they do, but the drinkers are there until three and four and five o'clock in the morning and they cannot get out, then you have a lot of tired, inebriated and increasingly angry people milling around the streets, with the inevitable consequences. I do commend the Premier, Mr O'Farrell, for the changes he has announced—and I trust he will remain resolute with those changes when he meets with the AHA. Sometimes in the AHA's advocacy for their premises they would have you believe that alcohol was a soothing medicine and hotels were the equivalent of childcare centres for adolescents and young adults, so if the Premier remains resolute on these changes that would be a good thing but one matter that only the state government can deal with is the provision of public transport for as long as the premises are open. My simple contention is that if the state government wishes these licensed premises to be open until 5 am, it must provide the public transport to enable the patrons to get home.

News Limited

Mr Murphy (Reid) (22:05): Last Thursday I addressed the House to congratulate that great Australian Dick Smith for being game to stand up to the Murdoch press, and others in big business, and actually admit that perpetual growth in the use of resources and energy is not sustainable in a finite world and that we must start planning now before the limits are reached. Dick Smith correctly branded News Limited's campaign against proposed media reforms as hypocritical. He said News Limited's claim that proposed media regulations would curtail freedom of speech was 'claptrap' because News Limited regularly censored any criticism of itself. He said also that it is in News Limited's commercial interests to censor the idea that people are responsible for global warming. In Dick Smith's Magazine of Forbidden Ideas That You Won't Read About in the Mainstream Media, he says:

Ever since I started Dick Smith Foods, the Murdoch press has attacked me when I call for a fair balance of Australian ownership in our food industry ...

I've wondered why some Murdoch journalists get so angry when I explain how important it is to support Aussie-owned businesses, so the profits and jobs stay in Australia ...

Could it be that they are embarrassed by the fact that the Murdoch press, which controls about 70 per cent of our print media, is American owned and each year sends substantial profits out of Australia?

As I have been saying all along, News Corporation has one standard for itself and
another for everyone else. I have urged members to read *Dial M for Murdoch: News Corporation and the Corruption of Britain*, written by the great Tom Watson MP and Martin Hickman, to see how News Corporation's criminal activities have corrupted democracy in Britain.

As the authors have noted:

From the start of his career in 1950s Australia, Murdoch manipulated politicians and broke rules and promises to accumulate money and power. They go on to say:

As head of the company he shaped its culture. While he depicted phone hacking as an anomaly, something set apart from an otherwise virtuous organization, seasoned Murdoch-watchers identified the wrongdoing as part of a pattern—the greatest manifestation of a win-at-all-costs diktat which bent and broke all the rules at will'.

The authors further noted:

… what is most revealing is not that his newspaper company was breaking the law at will and paying off police and officials, but how it responded when it was caught. At all times until very recently—and then arguably only under the pressing need to avoid its directors being jailed—News Corp acted to cover up rather than uncover its past.'

In the last paragraph of the book, the authors state:

In the end, this story is about corruption by power. Some of Murdoch's enforcers departed from the company line (it's all about business) and pursued personal agendas and vendettas, even against minor politicians. Their arrogance was so stratospheric they discussed their crimes even though they knew they were being recorded. They thought they could destroy the evidence, threaten and cover up. They thought they were cleverer than everyone else; they thought they were untouchable. From the criminal underworld to the headquarters of London's police force, from the decks of yachts in the Mediterranean to farmhouses in the Cotswolds and the deep-carpeted rooms of Downing Street, they had spun an invisible web of connections and corruption. They had privileged access to government ministers, state secrets, tax, health and vehicle data, to the records of phone companies and banks, to the intimate personal information of members of the public. They listened to voice messages, of course, but they also bugged, bribed, spied and bullied, and imposed their will through blackmail, corruption and intimidation. The names of their agents spoke of the darkness: Silent Shadow, Shadowmenuk. Rupert Murdoch was not running a normal business, but a shadow state. Now exposed to the daylight, it has been publicly humbled, its apparatus partially dismantled and its executives in retreat, at least for the moment. It stands shaken and ostensibly apologetic but it is still there, and Rupert Murdoch is still in charge.

In Australia, we have seen some of those same double standards and some of that same hypocrisy in the attempt to censor Dick Smith. News Limited feels free to criticise everyone but will not accept criticism of itself. That is at least one reason why we need a public interest test and a fit and proper person test for media owners in order to stop the corruption of our democracy. (Time expired)

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**Child Care**

Mr TEHAN (Wannon) (22:10): I rise tonight to recognise and salute Southern Grampians Shire Council family day care educator Joyce Tonissen, who has been named a regional winner in the Family Day Care Australia Educator of the Year awards. Joyce has been providing her home based childcare and education services for over 15 years. She is a worthy winner. 'Overwhelmed and honoured' was how Joyce described her feelings when she learnt of her award. It is deserved recognition for all the time and effort she has put into educating young people over those 15 years.

But there is a sad side to this story. Joyce has already made the decision to cease provision of her service at the end of the year. Why? Joyce has said of her decision to retire:
Having to implement the new National Regulations and Frameworks has certainly brought forward my decision sooner rather than later.

The coalition shadow minister said last week at the Family Day Care Association International Conference:

Our worry in the Coalition is that many good people will be forced out of the industry as a result of the new qualifications requirements.

She went on to say:

This is one area where the NQF clearly could have done better in automatic recognition of the skills and experience of these carers.

Sadly, Joyce Tonissen has become an example of this, and it is a shame. With a bit of common sense, Joyce could continue to provide her family day care centre service.

Here is an idea for the government—and I do not think it is too late for them to implement it. Why could we not find a way to ensure that more experienced childcare workers are given appropriate recognition for their prior learning? Why don't we come to our senses? Maybe someone straight out of TAFE should not have their qualifications deemed superior to those of someone who has run a centre, as Joyce has, for 15 years. Maybe we could find a way to ensure that people who have 15 years of experience are not forced out of the industry—they can stay in it and continue to provide their services. Perhaps there could be a rule which says that, if you have 10 years experience in the sector, we will recognise that experience and we will not send you off to do a costly course just so you have a certificate which recognises your ability to teach and look after these young children. We could recognise that these people have the experience.

While the coalition recognise the positive elements of the national quality framework, the example of Joyce shows that its implementation has been grossly mishandled. We have already stated publicly that we would like the Productivity Commission to look at this whole area, and that is what we are doing. As I speak, the shadow minister is preparing the terms and conditions on which the Productivity Commission will conduct its review if the coalition form the next government. In the meantime, I make this plea to the government: look at the example of Joyce, look at the award she received—regional winner in the Family Day Care Australia Educator of the Year Awards—and look for a commonsense way for us to recognise her outstanding service, rather than have her retire.

China

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (22:15):

In the weeks before parliament resumed, Australians heard a cacophony of advocates urging the US to get used to the reality of China becoming the dominant power in the Asia-Pacific. Professor Hugh White, who is DFAT's strategist of choice in training young diplomats, launched his book The China Choice, supporting the thesis that China's rise means the demise of the US in our region and that the United States has to surrender power in the Asia-Pacific to China, hopefully through his vision, a la Talleyrand, of a 'concert of Asia'. Former Prime Minister Keating, to whom I am otherwise very devoted, unfortunately argued at the book launch:

The seemingly perpetual invocation of this human rights mantra contributes no moral value to the size and quality of Chinese achievement.

The cacophony reached a crescendo when the immediate past Australian Ambassador to China, Dr Geoff Raby, attacked the Gillard government for the announcement that US troops would be based in Darwin. In a speech for Monash University given at the
State Library of Victoria, Raby vociferously criticised both the Australian government and United States President Barack Obama's speech in this parliament last year. Raby, who currently serves on the board of mining oligarch Andrew Forrest's company, denigrated the use of ideological constructs like democracy in the consideration of foreign policy, particularly in Australian policy between the United States and China.

The former ambassador's speech came some days after the Leader of the Opposition's strong comments, upon his return from China, that he would restrict Chinese foreign investment in Australia. Raby was invited by you, Madam Deputy Speaker Burke, to comment—in a speech devoted entirely to attacking the Labor government—on the member for Warringah's strange anti-economic-rationalist comments about restricting investment from China and declined to do so. Dr Raby has every right to voice his opinion. But I do not agree with either his views or Professor White's view that Australia must choose between the United States and China as if it was stuck in some immediate kind of conflict between these two superpowers.

Associate Professor John Lee, from the Centre for International Security Studies at the University of Sydney, said on Lateline recently:

... the Chinese buy commodities from Australia not because they like our policies, but because they have to.

Our commodities tend to be around a third cheaper than other competitors—for example, Brazil—because of our location. The Chinese simply have no choice. I mean, getting access to raw materials is fundamental to the economic growth. They cannot jeopardise that for domestic reasons.

After all, economic growth reinforces the legitimacy of a state where the leadership is unelected and undemocratic. A sticking point for and a source of tension within China is its sovereign claim to more than four-fifths of the South China Sea, now described as one of Beijing's core interests. John Lee argued in the Australian that this is 'driven by a desire to eliminate the chance of foreign interdiction of commercial shipping bound for its ports'. Since 2001, there have been many incidents in the South China Sea that have led to a rise in tension between the parties involved in the dispute—that is, China and the smaller countries of South-East Asia. Recently, at the ASEAN Summit, Cambodia withdrew its support for a joint statement and, therefore, due to the lack of consensus, no resolution could be carried at the conference about a rules based system for deciding disputes between China and the smaller countries of South-East Asia.

Professor Paul Dibb's judgement is, 'China is utterly dependent on foreign markets and is in reality a highly constrained power,' and the US pivot towards Asia may mean that China's assertiveness will be minimised. The point is that conflict between the US and China is not inevitable. (Time expired)

School Funding

Mr TUDGE (Aston) (22:20): When Julia Gillard finally announces her new school funding policy in a few weeks time, it would be the first time in eight years that Labor have put forward an alternative funding plan. Their last plan, Latham's hit list in 2004, cut funding to dozens of schools and contributed to a huge election loss. Catholic and independent schools, including many in my electorate, are not holding their breaths for Gillard's new plan.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The member will refer to people by their appropriate titles.

Mr TUDGE: The Prime Minister's new plan. School funding is something that I have
followed and been involved with for many years. I was a senior adviser to education minister Brendan Nelson the last time that there was a considerable change to school funding policy, back in 2005. At that time, the Catholic school system joined the SES funding model, the model that has now been operating for independent schools since Howard introduced it in 2001. Reforming school funding may sound straightforward, but there are four certainties that the Prime Minister would do well to understand.

The first certainty is that any change in the school funding model inevitably involves winners and losers, unless there are considerably more funds injected to lift the entire base upwards. This is not an assertion but a statement of mathematical fact. The Gonski proposals seek to realign school funding but come with a $5 billion price tag, presumably to meet the requirement that no school go backwards.

It is plainly clear that the Gillard government and state governments cannot afford this. State governments have said so. But, even if they could, modeling by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development finds that 3,254 schools—about a third of all schools—would be worse off. There are four schools in my electorate that will be hit, including Our Lady of Lourdes in Bayswater, Holy Trinity in Wantirna South, St Luke's in Wantirna and St Judes in Scoresby. All are low-fee Catholic schools serving medium and sometimes lower income families. These schools will lose up to $750 per student. Many families would struggle to afford these schools if the fees had to rise to make up for the funding shortfall. I will be fighting to ensure that this does not happen and have written to the education minister to get a guarantee that no school will lose funds.

The second certainty is that the winners and losers which inevitably come from a new funding model cannot be predicted with any accuracy in advance. There may be an intent to achieve a certain outcome—say, to give more money to lower fee schools in certain areas—but designing a formula to achieve this is difficult due to the huge range and types of schools which exist across the nation. Hence, the modeling on Gonski shows that low-fee Catholic primary schools will be particularly hit. On the other hand, I have been informed that many very high fee independent schools will gain considerably, including one of the most elite private boys schools in the country, which is due to gain by a million dollars per year.

The third certainty which the government fails to understand is that the indexation method for annual increases is what really matters. The government might reform the model to give a little extra in year 1 to some schools, but if the indexation method is reduced, any gain is quickly lost. Again, this is simple mathematics.

Over the last 12 years, schools have had their funding indexed against the AGSRC index, which increases by about six per cent per annum. Gonski recommends a different indexation method which we believe will see increases of two to three per cent per annum. This has a dramatic impact over the medium term. For example, an average school receiving $5,000 per student in public funds might get an immediate $1,000 boost in year one, but if the indexation rate was reduced to two per cent, they would be worse off by year five than if they had simply received the existing indexation increases with no year one boost.

The indexation rate matters and the coalition firmly supports maintenance of the AGSRC index. For all the talk about school funding, it is not the main lever for school
improvement. Of course it is important, but to think that a revolution will occur because of a change to the funding model is plainly wrong. A rigorous curriculum and quality teaching is what counts.

I am very concerned about the future funding of non-government schools in this country primarily because the government does not appear to understand the factors I have outlined. The developments of the Gonski review do not give me confidence. The modeling shows that schools across the nation will miss out, including low-fee schools in my electorate. The government today would not guarantee that schools will not be worse off under their proposals.

The current system of school funding is not perfect, but no system is perfect. However, it is predictable, based on objective data, weighted towards schools serving poorer communities and provides an average six per cent increase in funding each year. It should be extended.

Macedonia

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (22:25): I suspect I am one of only a few members of this parliament who can take a 25-hour trip by plane to a country on the other side of the world, walk down the main street of a town in the south of that country and within an hour met six of his constituents, including two who worked on polling booths for him in the previous election. The town was Bitola in Macedonia. During the last week of the parliamentary recess I visited the republic as part of a self-funded study tour. The purpose of the trip was to inform myself of the issues and circumstances of that country which affect around 26,000 people from the Illawarra. I was accompanied by a representative of the Illawarra Macedonian Community, Mr Ljupco Stefanovski, to whom I am eternally grateful for his excellent translation skills.

I spent two days in the capital, Skopje, and had the great privilege of meeting with senior government representatives. I met the President of the Republic, His Excellency, Mr George Ivanov, and spent an hour discussing a mutual passion for history, politics and the culture of the Balkans. I met with the Vice Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Mr Zoran Stavreski, to discuss the country's economic priorities and the trading circumstances facing his country and Europe. I renewed my acquaintance with the President of the Assembly, His Excellency, Mr Trajko Veljanoski, who visited Australia as part of a parliamentary delegation earlier this year. I met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Nikola Poposki, and discussed the country's focus on education as the tool for development—it is working. Ninety-eight per cent of students are completing secondary school now and 95 per cent of those people are furthering their tertiary education in some form—crucial for a country which seeks to skip jump into development.

I renewed my acquaintance with Mr Illija Dimovski, Chairman of the Macedonian Parliamentary Group for Cooperation with Australia and New Zealand, and discussed the possibilities for scholarships and education exchanges with the University of Wollongong.

I visited the Museum of Macedonian Struggle for Statehood, Mother Teresa Memorial House and Macedonia Square, where I saw an array of impressive, new public works focused on the country's history and instilling national pride. I spent a day in Ohrid, the sister city of my Wollongong City Council, and met with Dusko Jovcevski, President of the City of Ohrid. We discussed the economic and social issues affecting the region, and the challenges facing a town which is a popular tourist destination for thousands of Europeans. We toured many
cultural and historical monuments, including the Church of St Clement, the Church of
Saint Sophia and the beautiful Lake Ohrid.

St Iliya's Day, 2 August, is a special day
in the republic, a national holiday which
commemorates the Linden Uprising of 1903,
which started in Bitola and Ohrid but quickly
spread around the region. On 3 August 1903
the Krusevo Republic was proclaimed in
Krusevo in defiance of the Turkish empire. It
lasted only 10 days as the rebels were vastly
outnumbered and overpowered by the
Turkish imperial forces, but here began the
quest for nationhood.

With parallels to our own Anzac Day, the
Macedonians celebrate this day despite the
military losses. I joined with them, attending
the ceremony that was presided over by the
President of the Republic and the
representatives of over 10 countries and laid
a wreath at the shrine to the martyrs.

I also visited Bitola and met with the
Mayor of Bitola, Mr Vladimir Taleski, where
we discussed the economic development
opportunities in the region.

There are deep links between our two
countries—a point made recently by the
Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator Bob
Carr, in a special statement on the matter.
The principal focus for the Republic of
Macedonia is simply to provide security and
prosperity for its people, the integrity of its
borders and participation in trade and
commerce with Europe. For this, entry into
NATO and the EU are critical.

There is the ongoing and ever-present
dispute with Greece over the name
'Macedonia', which needs to be resolved and
swiftly. I understand there are strongly held
views. The republic is about to celebrate its
22nd birthday. The Socialist Federal
Republic of Yugoslavia existed for 48 years.
It would be a matter of great embarrassment
if we are still referring to the republic by its
unfortunate prefix for longer than the
existence of the former communist
federation itself.

Debate interrupted.

House adjourned at 22:31

NOTICES

The following notice was given:

Mr Chester to move:
That this House:
(1) notes that National Landcare Week (3 to 9
September) will celebrate the extraordinary
contribution by volunteers to practical
environmental projects throughout Australia;
(2) highlights the outstanding contribution of
Australian farmers and other rural landholders to
enhance the environment on public and private
land; and
(3) recognises the need for ongoing public
funding to:
   (a) employ Landcare facilitators and
 coordinators who manage volunteer programs;
   (b) support Landcare groups to achieve
 strategic goals; and
   (c) assist in maximising the volunteer effort.

Mr Billson to move:
That this House notes:
(1) the work of Meniere’s Australia in developing
and improving services in Australia for people
living with the distressing consequences of
Meniere’s disease and other unseen Vestibular
Disorders;
(2) that vertigo, dizziness, balance problems,
hearing loss and tinnitus are common symptoms
of Meniere’s disease which lead to sudden
debilitating attacks, loss of employment, social
isolation and loss of confidence and personal
capabilities in everyday living activities;
(3) that the exact number of people affected by
Vestibular Disorders is not known as the
conditions are under-diagnosed and under-
reported;
(4) that the research from the United States of
America indicates that up to five per cent of the
population may be living with one or more
vestibular conditions which translates to one million Australians; and
(5) that with more support, Meniere's Australia Support Groups would be able to provide much needed counselling, practical advice, information and peer support to both individuals and their families and carers.

Mr Briggs to move:
That that is House:
(1) notes that:
(a) the Australian Greens can formally submit an unlimited number of new policy proposals to the Government for analysis and costing under the Agreement for a Better Parliament: Parliamentary Reform, signed on 7 September 2010 to establish ‘a basis for stable and effective government’; and
(b) on 20 July 2012, The Treasury made a decision on a Freedom of Information request to refuse access to 12 documents relating to Australian Greens’ policy costings because the documents ‘would allow a direct inference to be drawn about subsequent Cabinet deliberations’ and they contained ‘material prepared to inform deliberations of Government’;
(2) recognises that the Government has previously released policy costings, namely:
(a) an Executive Minute detailing costings of the Coalition’s Direct Action Plan, released in full by The Treasury on 2 September 2011;
(b) updated costings on reopening the detention facility in Nauru, released by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship on 27 January 2012; and
(c) Treasury modelling provided to unaligned Members, released by The Treasury on 24 February 2012; and
(3) calls on The Treasury and the Department of Finance and Deregulation to release all costings of policy proposals that the Australian Greens have formally submitted to the Government for analysis since the 2010 Federal Election.

RESPONSE TO REQUEST FOR DETAILED INFORMATION

Department of Parliamentary Services: Broadcasting Services

Mr Robb asked the Speaker, in writing, on 27 June 2012—

In respect of broadcasting services provided by the Department of Parliamentary Services, will the reduction in funding result in a downsizing of services or the cancellation of any service enhancement plans; if so, which services and plans will be affected.

Mr Speaker The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows—
The Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS) has no plan to downscale broadcasting services, either actual or proposed.
Monday, 20 August 2012

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Bruce Scott) took the chair at 10:30.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Yarra Ranges Relay for Life

Mr TONY SMITH (Casey) (10:30): I rise in this House to speak about the great efforts of those organising the Yarra Ranges Relay for Life. The Relay for Life will take place from Saturday, 10 November through the night until Sunday, 11 November, Remembrance Day. It will take place at the Don Road Sporting Complex in Healesville. Relay teams of between 10 and 15 can walk or run, or both, through the course of the evening to raise funds for the Cancer Council. Last year's event was very successful, and this year's event is going to be as successful if not more so, judged on the efforts of the organising committee.

The committee is made up of about 20 people. The chair is Megan Fleming. Last year's chair was Kaitlin Morrow. Just in this last week, they launched their event in Mount Evelyn by having businesses in the Mount Evelyn community 'paint the town purple' by decorating their shops and windows in displays of purple to promote the Relay for Life. I was driving through Mount Evelyn on the weekend. Some of the standout businesses with purple shopfronts included the hair salon Shear Obsession and the IGA. The launch ended on Saturday afternoon with a fundraising sausage sizzle outside the Mount Evelyn IGA. Despite what was a very cold and rainy day in Melbourne, you will be surprised to hear, Mr Deputy Speaker, that the dedicated volunteer committee raised more than $200 and, just as importantly, got the message out that the Relay for Life is on again this year. As I said, there is a dedicated committee of around 20 people organising this year's event. Last year's event was extremely successful, and I am sure that, with their dedication, this year's event will be as well.

Australian Fisheries

FV Margiris

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (10:32): I want to follow up on the speech I made on fisheries legislation relating to the inquiry I am currently undertaking on the role of science in the future of fisheries and aquaculture. This has been a broad-reaching inquiry and has incidentally been given attention by the recreational fishers because of a concern they have about a large trawler seeking permission to fish in Australian waters. The inquiry has not included the impact on recreational fishers because they are not under the control of AFMA, nor at the moment are they contributing very much to the science—something that I hope they might be able to do in the future if they can use their wide experience and local knowledge to build up more data. This would be a great help to science to know what the take is for recreational fishing in Australia.

The trawler issue has become highly divisive and really has been whipped up by some false information. Getting some proper commentary into the issue has been very hard because of the emotion that has been wrought by Green groups, which, I believe, is directed at ending commercial fishing in Australia. This is further confirmed by the fact that recreational fishing and game-fishing groups withdrew from the working group process established by the minister to try and sort out what some of the facts are in the fishing regions of Australia and...
how it might affect recreational fishers. While it is disappointing that this has happened, there was progress being made, I understand, by the parties, including quite detailed discussions about possible additional spatial control on the operations of the FV *Margiris*.

As an independent agency, AFMA will assess any application that comes before it based on the science and the management plan in place for that fishery. To date the *Margiris* has not submitted an application and is still waiting to be reflagged as an Australian vessel under the Maritime Safety Authority. Like any planning or regulatory authority, there has to be some application to work from. Until that happens, the federal government has to wait and see that assessment from the application.

In the meantime, I believe that rec fishers have given up their opportunity to have a proper say in the future of fishing in Australia relating directly to the issue about which they have concerns. All the peak bodies have met with me as chairman of the committee and they have belatedly asked to appear before the committee but, unfortunately, our program is already set and there is little extra time available.

The committee has heard from some individual groups around Australia who have already arranged to come before the committee and therefore we have had evidence from them on a number of issues, particularly on their views on decline in certain species. However, the evidence must be taken in the overall context of the inquiry, not directed to a particular issue, so I am sad that they have not continued with the federal minister as that was the best medium for them to achieve this. I think we must keep science up to date and relevant for the scrutiny and control of fishing practices in Australia.

**Northern Territory Election**

*Mrs GRIGGS* (Solomon) (10:35): With only five days until to Northern Territory election, the Henderson Labor team are becoming as desperate as the Gillard Labor government and will do anything and say anything to stay in power. Territorians are well aware that the Henderson Labor team, aka Territory Labor, are spinning out of control.

In recent days we have seen them spinning the truth again. This time it is about their record on crime. No amount of spin from the Henderson Labor team can change the fact that crime is increasing in the Northern Territory. In today's *Northern Territory News* letters to the editor section, Peter Ward of Humpty Doo makes some very valid points that I would like to share with you today. The title of his letter is 'Mistakes voters shouldn't forget.' He says:

… with election day approaching, voters should remember a few of the abysmal fiascos perpetrated by the current NT Labor Government. Removing open speed limits on our highways. The result an inconvenience to road users, with no reduction in road accidents.

- Plastic shopping ban. An inconvenience and additional costs to consumers.
- Banned drinkers register. More inconvenience to consumers with no change to alcohol related problems.
- Cash for containers scheme. Another costs to consumers.
- Out of control crime in Darwin and Alice Springs.
- Constant electricity supply interruptions and skyrocketing costs.
- A $450 million growing deficit.
The starvation of 800 cattle on Mataranka Station, with the investigation into those responsible purposely delayed by the Labor Government to avoid accountability.

I would like to add a few more mistakes to the list: firstly, that Chief Minister Paul Henderson, leader of the Henderson Labor team, stood next to Prime Minister Julia Gillard when she closed down the live cattle export industry. This has no doubt affected our relationship with Indonesia but it has certainly affected the livelihoods of many, many Territorians. Then there is the Montara oil spill, one of Australia's worst oil spills on record.

The Henderson Labor government's failure on housing speaks for itself. How can anyone forget that, under the Henderson-Rudd Labor government, $672 million was spent on the SIHIP project which delivered two houses in two years? There is no doubt that the only way to stop four more years of a hard Labor government and putting up with their lies and mismanagement is to vote for your local Country Liberals representative. It is time for a change: Territorians cannot afford another four years of Labor. *(Time expired)*

**Macarthur Electorate: Lifeline Annual Volunteer Dinner**

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (10:39): Last Saturday I had the honour of attending the Lifeline Macarthur Annual Volunteer Dinner at the Campbelltown RSL Club. It was the sixth consecutive time I have attended this important event, which acknowledges and celebrates the tremendous contribution Lifeline volunteers make to our local community.

The dinner also provided us with the opportunity to say thank you to the individuals who selflessly dedicate their time and energy to assist others. Volunteers are essential in our society and without them many local organisations, including Lifeline, would not be able to endure.

Currently there are 6.4 million Australians who give their time and energy to assist their fellow Australians in need—and 350 of them volunteer with Lifeline Macarthur.

It is a fact of life that from time to time we will experience various levels of stress and difficulty. For some people the difficulties run deep and for far too long, to the point where they are no longer able to cope on their own. At times like this it is good to know that there are people on hand at the other end of the telephone who will offer a calm and supportive voice. Lifeline Macarthur is a 24/7 telephone crisis support line and it takes as many as 430,000 calls a year dealing with suicide. This is a tremendously large number of people who are given support in difficult times, and a large number of lives that may have, indeed, been saved. As an ambassador of Lifeline I have acknowledged on a number of occasions that it is one of the most exemplary local organisations throughout our communities.

Lifeline Macarthur started in 1978 and provided assistance to the people of the Macarthur region. Since then it has continued to expand in a number of surrounding areas throughout New South Wales, including Liverpool and Fairfield in my electorate of Fowler. I would like to praise the efforts of Lifeline Macarthur CEO, Peter Mihajlovic, the chair of the board, Dennis Roams, the many staff and, most importantly, the 350 volunteers. Together with the member for Macarthur I am in the process of establishing Parliamentary Friends of Lifeline, a group which I hope other members will support.

On behalf of a very grateful community I thank Lifeline Macarthur and each and every one of the staff and volunteers who generously give of their time and energy to assist and serve others. To all the volunteers: your efforts, care and concern for our community have not only...
changed the lives of many but, for those at the absolute pit of despair and depression, have saved lives. *Time expired*

**Riverina Electorate: Altina Wildlife Park**

Mr McCormack (Riverina) (10:42): I had the rare honour yesterday of officially opening a new lion enclosure at what is a truly remarkable wildlife park in the Riverina. Altina Wildlife Park near Darlington Point, a little more than 50 kilometres west of Narrandera on the Sturt Highway, is a 207-hectare sanctuary run by Gino Altin and his wife, Gloria, with daughter, Rebecca Surian, as head animal keeper.

This outstanding safari park is set among ancient river red gums next to the mighty Murrumbidgee River. The owners have a noble mission to conserve wildlife and the environment and, in doing so, educate the public. Altina, literally, has a Noah's Ark array of all things fast and furry, including African Cape hunting dog, African spotted hyena, Asian water buffalo, banteng, giraffe, Himalayan tahr, maned wolf, North American bison, scimitar-horned oryx—the list goes on and on. There are some green alligators and long-necked geese, and even humpy backed camels. One of the attendants, Ben Maples, who is enjoying this role far more than his former job at an abattoirs, reckons that if visitors look hard enough they would even find a unicorn.

Certainly, Altina gives visitors an up-close-and-personal experience with the wildlife, some of which are endangered species, so the park's breeding program is helping in that respect. For sure the 'mane attraction'—pardon the pun—are the lions. There are two rare African white lions, a breeding pair Bella and Tim, and two magnificent tawny lions, Narla and her son Jabari. The four lions have taken 'pride of place' in their new, spacious surrounds. It is a wonderful place. The animals are lively but contented. They are well looked after in a roomy, almost free-range environment.

Altina Wildlife Park opened in mid November 2004 and last year catered for 5,000 visitors, all by appointment. The park is the realisation of a lifelong dream of Gino who has pumped $2 million into the project. Earlier this year he nearly had his hard work and investment washed away by the great March flood. Murrumbidgee River floodwaters swamped the park—a good thing the crocodiles were safely housed—and cost the operation a $140,000 repair bill.

Gino received no government assistance because he has another business in Griffith, which is a successful precasting concrete company, and has missed out on getting any grants the whole way through since his animal park began to take shape. He has done it all on his own with a little help from his friends.

In their first week the carnivores chewed through a combined 160 kilograms of meat. There are only 130 white lions in captivity worldwide and very few left in the wild. As for the future of Altina Wildlife Park, Gino has plans to add red pandas, rhinoceroses, servals, tigers and even Tasmanian devils—a very much threatened marsupial.

The Riverina has many outstanding tourist attractions, and this is amongst the best. It is an example of entrepreneurial spirit, someone having a vision and making a go of it, and strong local community support. Certainly the newly arrived lions will play their part at Altina. Given their size and majesty, I am sure they will guarantee the park is a 'roaring' success. *Time expired*
Ballarat Electorate: Ballarat Avenue of Honour

Norman, Mr Peter

Ms KING (Ballarat—Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Transport and Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing) (10:45): One of my favourite images of the Ballarat Avenue of Honour is the original footage of the opening of the Arch of Victory in 1920 by Edward, the Prince of Wales. This footage shows Ballarat in all of its complexity: hundreds of people from every walk of life cheering, commemorating and celebrating. Last year I joined the Governor-General at the official reopening of the rejuvenated and restored Arch of Victory. The government invested over half a million dollars in the restoration of the magnificent arch at the beginning of the avenue, and the arch now looks fantastic.

Unfortunately, however, as people drive along the avenue they get to a point where things are not as they should be. They find the avenue severed by the Western Highway and, slightly further north, the Ballarat-Ararat rail line. It has been that way ever since 1993. Early in July I visited the location and viewed the neglected section of the former avenue between the rail line and the highway—now poignantly known as no-man's-land.

The rail line that continues to block an uninterrupted flow of this avenue results in many ex-service personnel not being appropriately recognised. I met with the Avenue of Honour Committee president, Bruce Price, while visiting the avenue. The committee and I are pushing for the avenue to be fully restored by placing a level crossing at the rail line. I know that many family members are unable to find trees of their relatives who served in World War I. The work will require $1 million. I have since spoken with Minister Albanese about the importance of funding such a vital project and I have written to him to outline the importance to the people of my region of seeing this avenue restored to its full length. I will continue to work hard to see this outcome delivered in time for the commemoration of the Anzac centenary, marking 100 years since our involvement in the First World War.

On another matter, I want to acknowledge the private member's motion by the member for Fraser, which I understand will be debated later today in this chamber, regarding the death of Peter Norman. Peter's brother Laurie, who lives in Learmonth, is in my electorate, and he will be in Parliament House today with his mum. As we know, Peter was a tremendous athlete, winning a silver medal in the 200 metres in the 1968 Mexico City Olympics. Peter used his success in those Olympics by wearing a human rights badge while at the podium to show his support for African American athletes who stood up for equal rights and an end to discrimination. His courage to stand up for his fellow athletes so publicly is a reflection of his great Australian character. The role of Peter Norman in furthering racial equality will always be remembered, especially by those people across my own community who know his brother so well. I want to add my voice to the motion that will be debated in this chamber later this evening and also offer my apology to Peter Norman, to his brother who will be here in parliament today and to his mum for what happened subsequently.

Youth With a Mission

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (10:48): I recently had the opportunity to join my colleague the member for Herbert, Mr Ewen Jones, to support the relaunch of the YWAM medical ship Pacific Link, which is doing significant work to help our near neighbours in remote areas of Papua New Guinea. Headquartered in Townsville and under the direction of CEO Ken
Mulligan, YWAM—Youth With a Mission—is a Christian charity that offers global opportunities for volunteers to serve, build, care and connect with individuals and communities. YWAM Medical Ships is a growing organisation which aims to expand its partnership and reach within Papua New Guinea. This includes further training, development and capacity building for locals, greater and more frequent access to health care, and community development projects.

YWAM Medical Ships have been actively involved in the Western and Gulf provinces of Papua New Guinea since July 2010. By the end of 2011 YWAM had already delivered on more than 50,000 health outcomes in developing communities and worked with 356 villages which had accessed YWAM medical ships. During this time YWAM has been concentrating on: building relationships with communities, river charting, surveying, assessments, training local health workers and providing health care.

In working with locals, YWAM have repeatedly witnessed the desperation of the villagers for basic health care. Villagers report that they often feel overlooked, as little to no health patrols regularly visit their area.

Many of the villages are without healthcare workers, and those that do have a healthcare worker say they are struggling with a lack of supplies and support. In fact, many of the villages to which YWAM provides services have not had health patrols for several years and in some cases never.

Without any clear charting or mapping of the villages, YWAM has also been concentrating on river charting the regions, which is uncovering valuable information for long-term community development. YWAM is currently actively involved in some of the most remote parts of the Gulf and Western Provinces in Papua New Guinea. By using their ship, they are able to overcome issues of isolation and lack of infrastructure to provide training and health care for villagers in their home environment. At the recent relaunch of the Pacific Link in Port Moresby, we had a presentation from Dr Daryl Holmes of 1300SMILES, who not only volunteers but also provides dentists, assistants and supplies from his own practice at no charge to support YWAM and treat local villagers who have never had proper and regular access to dental treatment. It was a great opportunity to experience firsthand what it is like to live and work aboard a medical ship such as the Pacific Link and to meet the volunteers who do such a wonderful job supporting rural and remote communities of the Gulf and Western Provinces.

I commend the work of YWAM and the volunteers on the medical ship for the outstanding work they are undertaking for our near neighbours in Papua New Guinea. It is crucial that we support this work so that they can expand their outreach services to help more people in the remote areas of Papua New Guinea. It is inspiring to see a non-government organisation providing such efficient and effective services for our Pacific neighbours. I congratulate Mike Reynolds and Sir Rabbie Namaliu on their support and assistance.

**Clark, Professor Graeme**

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga—Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Minister for Disability Reform) (10:51): Today I rise to pay tribute to a constituent in my electorate of Jagajaga who has perhaps done as much in the field of medicine as any other in this country. I am speaking of Professor Graeme Clark, the inventor...
of the cochlear implant. Next month is the 30th anniversary of this truly historic medical advance. In 30 years, people with profound deafness in more than 100 countries have had the bionic ear implanted. Because of the work of Professor Clark, thousands of adults who lost hearing, or never knew it, have had their lives changed. Thousands of children faced with a great barrier now know the joy of speech and sound.

While the bionic ear was and still is a remarkable medical discovery, it was about much more than that for Professor Clark. For him, this was about family. His father, Colin—a pharmacist—suffered from profound deafness, and for a young Graeme that was his spark. As he helped out in the pharmacy, he decided he would one day do something to help people like his dad. In fact, when asked by his primary school teacher what he wanted to do when he grew up, Graeme said he wanted to fix ears.

Professor Clark would go on to be the youngest clinical professor in Australia, at the age of 34. His early work in this field was carried out against opposition and criticism from others, who thought it all impossible. There were no government funds or grants, as it was not seen to be worth it. Instead, it was organisations like Rotary, Lions and Apex that kept Professor Clark's project alive. Despite the obstacles, he and his team kept at it, and we can all be thankful that they did, and we can be immensely proud of their achievements.

Among a long list of awards and recognitions, Professor Clark is a Companion of the Order of Australia for his services to medicine and science and a former Senior Australian of the Year. But his most indelible legacy is seen in the people whose lives he has changed and the many, many more yet to benefit. Across decades, ordinary people have been given a brighter future thanks to an extraordinary discovery by this remarkable man.

Professor Clark turned 77 last week. As we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the bionic ear, we should also celebrate its pioneer. We should celebrate Professor Clark's remarkable achievements, a lifetime of accomplishment that began with a boy who just wanted to fix ears.

Swan Chamber of Commerce

Mr WYATT (Hasluck) (10:54): I rise today to talk about the new initiative underway from the Swan Chamber of Commerce in Midland in the north of my electorate of Hasluck. Already well known in Perth for its tireless advocacy on behalf of its members, the Swan Chamber of Commerce has broadened its reach by launching the Swan Junior Chamber of Commerce. The group is for professionals, businesspeople, managers, employees and university and TAFE students who are interested in seeing business grow and develop in the region, who live, work or study in the region and who are aged between 18 and 35 years. It provides young people with social and networking opportunities and the chance to be exposed to leaders in the political and private sectors. The Swan Chamber of Commerce will also provide its junior counterpart with business mentoring, leadership development, access to visiting VIPs and help find employment for its student members when they have completed their studies.

It is the mentoring side of this partnership that provides the most value to their members. Young people by their very nature tend to be risk-takers; they often see the world through a different lens than those of us who have been around for a while longer. By providing an incubator for these young people to grow their business plans, the Swan Junior Chamber of

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It is the mentoring side of this partnership that provides the most value to their members. Young people by their very nature tend to be risk-takers; they often see the world through a different lens than those of us who have been around for a while longer. By providing an incubator for these young people to grow their business plans, the Swan Junior Chamber of
Commerce can help give them the real-world experience to make their ideas become a success. This is so important as we should be constantly looking to encourage new minds and thought processes to enter the corporate sector. It helps keep its DNA fresh; it makes others adjust their thinking and keeps some of the stalwarts of an industry on their toes as well.

On Saturday night, I attended an event at the Swan Chamber of Commerce, its annual awards evening, the Hanson Swan Business Awards. The junior chamber members were in attendance and had a table that was donated by a small business. As is usual with one of these events, it was a successful evening and it was striking to see so many small business owners being recognised for their efforts. These people are doing it tough in a challenging environment. I was pleased to see them recognised for their tenacity, their innovation and their success.

As in all aspects of life, ensuring that we provide space, advice and support for those who are coming behind us is critical. This is especially so in the field of small business. Small business is the employment engine of the country. It creates millions of jobs; it supports millions of families. We as a nation must ensure that we provide fertile ground for them to grow and that the seeds can be planted and take hold. That is why I am proud to stand here today and put on the record my appreciation of the launch of the Swan Junior Chamber of Commerce in Midland. Long may it succeed. The opportunity that is afforded to young people by the Swan Chamber of Commerce will see many become leaders within the small business sector and contribute to the economy of this country. The innovation they develop and experience they gain from that process will certainly prove to be invaluable in the future.

Hindmarsh Electorate: CCTV Project

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (10:57): Today I rise to thank all the residents of Glenelg and surrounding areas who recently took the time to sign a petition organised by the Glenelg Neighbourhood Watch and Glenelg police station to support our CCTV project. I was very pleased to assist in securing $350,000 in Australian government funding for the project in 2010. It will provide new CCTV cameras and lighting to the Glenelg area. The petition has been signed by 3,059 people in my electorate and asks that 75 per cent of the money be used for CCTV cameras and the rest be used for extra lighting. The petition was tabled last week at a meeting of the City of Holdfast Bay Council and I know that the council is very carefully considering the proposal at the moment. I seek leave to table a copy of that petition as a document.

Leave granted.

Mr GEORGANAS: Thank you. As I said, I look forward to hearing what the council has to say, but in the meantime I would like to thank all those people in the community groups, which have displayed so much energy and enthusiasm for this project and have been working extremely hard to ensure that we get the best possible outcome and the best possible value for money from the grant.

Firstly, I would like to thank the Glenelg Neighbourhood Watch. One of the reasons this funding became available was that I attended a Neighbourhood Watch meeting a few years ago. There I heard that there were hot spots of unacceptable behaviour and crime taking place and that CCTV cameras would help. There had been some installed in the area that assisted, but a few more would be extremely helpful. So I took on the task with the Glenelg
Neighbourhood Watch group to go out and lobby for funding, and I was very pleased that we did receive funding.

I would also like to thank the Glenelg police, who have been very helpful in the strategic planning of where the cameras are to go and where they would have the best effect. Of course, the Glenelg Residents Association has been on board on this project from the very beginning. The president, Mr Jack Messenger, is a great community person in the area. He works tirelessly for the community through the Glenelg Residents Association. The Jetty Road Mainstreet board; the chairman, the Rev. Bruce Grindlay; the local traders; the City of Holdfast Bay; the Mayor, Ken Rollond, who was very supportive; councillors Tim Looker and Mikki Bouchee; the CEO, Justin Lynch; and the operations manager, Steve Hodge—all these people have been involved. And, of course, there is the President of the Taxi Council of South Australia, Wally Sievers. You might think, ‘What's the Taxi Council got to do with this?’ There is a taxi rank which is very close to the centre of Glenelg, where the nightlife is, and the cameras there play a very important role. Before I close, can I thank all of the people, especially the police, who have been very supportive of this project and are doing all that they can to see that we get the best outcome for the dollars that will be spent.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott): In accordance with standing order 193 the time for members' constituency statements has concluded.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Independent News Media

Debate resumed on the motion by Mr Gibbons:

That this House:

(1) acknowledges that a vibrant, independent news media is an essential component of a healthy democracy; and

(2) considers that:

(a) the democratically essential concept of an independent news media not does equate to the unrestricted right of specific media owners, or the industry in general, to manage their businesses without a social licence to operate;

(b) recent developments in Australia, and in other democratic countries, including inappropriate relations between media owners and politicians, socially unacceptable methods of news gathering, socially unacceptable standards of factuality and veracity in news reporting, a failure to distinguish between factual news reporting and editorial opinion, falling circulations, declining sales revenues and failed business models, are all evidence, prima facie, of an industry that has lost its social licence to operate;

(c) market competition can be a valuable mechanism for maintaining general, socially acceptable standards of journalism, but the concentration of news media ownership in the hands of a few represents, prima facie, a competitive market failure requiring compensatory regulation to ensure socially acceptable outcomes; and

(d) as the only representative body democratically elected by all citizens of Australia, the Parliament of Australia is the appropriate body to determine what socially acceptable standards are expected from news media in this country and to legislate appropriately to ensure adherence to them; and such legislation should include:

(i) the appointment of a politically-independent regulatory body to oversee adherence to statutorily-defined standards of news media behaviour;
(ii) commercially significant sanctions for failures to comply with relevant statutory regulations; and

(iii) adequate resourcing for such a regulatory body to enable it to enforce statutorily defined sanctions against financially and politically powerful news media owners.

Mr GIBBONS (Bendigo) (10:59): An independent news media plays an essential role in maintaining the individual freedoms we enjoy in a democratic society. But participatory democracy only works if citizens have sufficient and accurate information about an issue for them to make up their own minds about what they think about it. If something is reported unfairly or inaccurately, not only does it potentially harm those mentioned in the story, but it also misleads every reader, viewer or listener of that story. Unfortunately, the contemporary news media are failing to perform this vital role in a way that is acceptable to the community at large. In fact, there are journalists and many media practitioners that demand the right to deliberately mislead by stating untruths and to not be held to account, and it is no surprise that these very same media practitioners are the loudest and strongest critics of any form of effective media accountability.

Currently journalists and other media practitioners are only accountable to whoever employs them. Consequently, over the past couple of decades, there have been increasing indications that the media has lost the community's faith. It has lost the community's confidence that it can be trusted to run its businesses in an ethical and socially acceptable manner. It only takes a few examples of unethical or irresponsible behaviour to destroy that public confidence, to destroy the industry's so-called social licence to operate. With little distinction these days between news reporting and opinion, it is almost impossible for readers to distinguish between the information they can trust and the information about which they should be very sceptical. It is no surprise, therefore, that Australian journalists are consistently ranked among the least honest and ethical professions in the annual Roy Morgan reputation survey. Nor is it surprising that newspaper circulation has been falling for years, and those who think that this is just due to the internet are kidding themselves. The plain fact is that fewer and fewer people, especially among our younger citizens, want to buy what newspapers and other media outlets are currently selling.

In the private sector, self-regulation in the form of codes of ethics and industry appointed bodies such as the Australian Press Council have clearly not delivered standards of journalistic integrity that the public has a right to expect and, in fact, does expect. I support many of the recommendations in the Finkelstein report, which the government is currently considering. In particular, I agree with its conclusion that the current regulatory mechanisms are:

... not sufficient to achieve the degree of accountability desirable in a democracy.

Accountability is what this motion is all about.

I accept and fully support the concept that the media has a role, indeed a responsibility, to hold governments and oppositions to account. However, some media companies, particularly News Ltd media companies—and there are others—seem extremely reluctant to hold the current federal opposition to any worthwhile form of account. Let me be quite clear that I am not seeking to curtail anybody's right to free speech, including those with whom I may disagree. I also accept that everyone, including redneck extremist columnists and shock jocks like the Andrew Bolts, Alan Joneses and Piers Akermans of this world—and there are
others—should be free to express whatever opinion they like. But in return for that freedom they must, in my view, meet three criteria: what they say must be within the law; when they are expressing an opinion, it must be clearly identified as an opinion and clearly distinguishable from reporting; and, whether it is opinion or reporting, it must be factually correct.

The media's pleading that they are a special case is becoming increasingly hollow as their behaviour and their failure to be effectively accountable to their readers and the wider community continue to erode public trust in their industry—and, perhaps more importantly, contribute to the degradation of our public debate. Of course, it comes as no surprise that one of the people most responsible for the declining quality of public debate in this country, the Leader of the Opposition, should be unable to grasp the concept that freedom of speech also carries with it a responsibility to be fair and accurate. His recent speech to the Institute of Public Affairs saw him arguing that insulting and humiliating media articles, and hurt feelings, are the price we have to pay for freedom of speech. In his criticism of Andrew Bolt's conviction under section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act, the Leader of the Opposition accepted that Mr Bolt's articles were, 'almost certainly not his finest' and 'there may have been some factual errors'.

Exactly the same could be said of the passages referring to Mr Abbott, the Leader of the Opposition, in Bob Ellis's 1997 book Goodbye Jerusalem, but this did not prevent Mr Abbott suing Mr Ellis and his publishers because his feelings had been hurt. Obviously the Leader of the Opposition believes that the hurt feelings of a few Indigenous Australians are a price we have to pay, but his hurt feelings and those of his mates are not. And what happened to Bob Ellis's right to freedom of speech? We should not, perhaps, be surprised at the audacious way in which the Leader of the Opposition brushes aside the factual inaccuracies in Mr Bolt's articles, despite the judge in the case saying that among the reasons for his findings was 'the manner in which the articles were written, including that they contained errors of fact, distortions of the truth and inflammatory and provocative language'—after all, virtually every statement made by Mr Abbott since becoming Leader of the Opposition has been a paragon of factual errors, distortions of the truth and inflammatory and provocative language.

This is where I do not think the Finkelstein report goes far enough, when it comes to sanctions for inaccuracy in media reporting and opinion. Prominently publishing or broadcasting apologies, corrections or retractions is all very well—and I agree with the report's recommendations about strengthening these processes—but there are far more serious consequences for democracy if a media article misleads the public. A misinformed public cannot possibly form reasonable views about matters of national importance. As a society, we seem to have little difficulty deciding what is socially acceptable behaviour in most walks of life. For example, our legislatures, our regulators and our legal system seem to be able to determine what constitutes misleading advertising. I fail to see why it should not be possible to do the same for misleading media stories.

Penalties of commercially significant amounts do appear to lead to improved behaviour, and in recent months we have seen Apple fined $2½ million for misleading consumers about its iPad; and internet service provider TPG fined $2 million over its misleading advertisements. In my view, fines such as these for publishing blatant untruths or misleading news reports, or temporary suspensions of the right to publish or broadcast, would lead to a
major improvement in the accuracy and fairness of our media. When a media outlet, journalist or redneck shock jock deliberately broadcasts or publishes a statement that they know is factually wrong and it is subsequently proven that they knew it was factually wrong they ought to be subject to an appropriate penalty.

As far as independent oversight of the media is concerned, I agree with the Finkelstein report's recommendation to replace the Australian Media and Communication Authority and the Australian Press Council with a new media council. However, I believe stricter rules are required for council membership to ensure the required degree of independence. To start with, no-one who has held elected political office should be eligible for appointment. And, while it is important that the council has knowledge of the media industry through members with media experience, the majority of its members should comprise appointees with legal, regulatory and community experience. And no members with media experience should be currently employed in the industry.

It is also vital that such a new regulatory body be provided with adequate resourcing to enable it to enforce statutorily-defined sanctions against today's financially and politically powerful news media companies.

We have recently seen announcements by Australia's two largest media organisations about major changes to the structure of their organisations and also about significant changes in share ownership of some media companies. In the light of these developments it is imperative for our democracy that federal parliament act sooner rather than later to rectify the manifest deficiencies in our current media accountability arrangements.

I repeat what I said earlier: I am not seeking to curtail anybody's right to free speech, least of all of those with whom I may disagree. I will always strongly support the media's role and responsibility in holding governments and oppositions to account. But I am seeking to impose greater accountability on those who claim the right to free speech and who then deliberately and constantly breach that right and the community trust that goes with it.

Mr NEVILLE (Hinkler—The Nationals Deputy Whip) (11:10): It gives me great pleasure to speak on this private member's motion concerning the proposed News Media Council and to canvass issues that arise around the recommendations of the Finkelstein report. I have great regard for the member for Bendigo. I have worked with him on committees and I have enjoyed the pleasures of his very pleasant electorate. But on this issue I cannot agree with his direction, much less that of his party.

Let there be no doubt where I stand on this matter. In conscience I stand for a free, vibrant and robust media as a guarantee of an informed public and, ultimately, for the proper function of democracy. I also stand for a diverse media and, in my time in this place, I have railed against the concentration of media ownership. I take some pride in being one of the architects of the Howard government's cross-media laws, which limit ownership of newspapers, television and radio stations in particular markets to two out of three.

I hold the view that a radio licence is a privileged instrument and carries with it an obligation of diversity, community engagement and news delivery. I do not believe that this obligation is satisfied by endless, if not mindless, networking. For that reason, radio stations should be required to maintain local content and use. Time does not permit an analysis of television which is competitive and which offers a wide range of news and current affairs. But
I would make the observation that, after the 6 pm regional news bulletins in the early evening, all subsequent news and current affairs programs are very much Sydney-centric.

As new means of news, information sharing and even advertising move into uncharted waters of electronic dissemination and convergence with old media, we need to have a vibrant independent news and that is the most important thing of all. We do not need, nor will I support, the external control of media content. That is ultimately what would happen with a news media council. That said, it is evident that the motivation for the Finkelstein inquiry was the insecurity of the Gillard government in the face of sustained media inquiry, scrutiny and comment. In the face of one of the poorest government performances in our history, replete with stumble after stumble—the mining tax, the carbon tax, the wasteful school halls program, the pink batts scheme and the growing enormity of the illegal boat people saga—is it any wonder that the media should be critical and that the best of our print commentators should fiercely hold the government to account? To claim that this is unfair or a biased attack on the Gillard government and to desperately try to link it to the UK hacking scandal and the Leveson inquiry is as pathetic as it is opportunistic. I suspect that the member for Bendigo has been asked to put his toe in the water and test the mood of the public with respect to greater media control.

Honourable members interjecting—

Mr NEVILLE: He is a very brave man and I am sure he would be capable of it. Although the government's position is not yet plain, a core recommendation of the Finkelstein inquiry revolves around the establishment of a new body, the News Media Council, to set journalistic standards for news media, in consultation with the industry, and to handle complaints made by the public when those standards are breached.

Finkelstein says the News Media Council would:

... have those roles in respect of news and current affairs coverage on all platforms, that is, print, online, radio and television. It will thus explicitly cover online news for the first time, and will involve transferring ACMA functions for standards and complaints concerning news and current affairs. It will replace the voluntary APC with a statutory entity.

Further, Finkelstein says:

The News Media Council should have secure funding from government and its decisions made binding, but beyond that government should have no role.

He claims:

The establishment of a council is not about increasing the power of government or about imposing some form of censorship.

But I, for one, doubt that very much.

In essence, the report proposes an outside body to take over the role of the Australian Press Council and the media regulatory role of ACMA as well as having control functions over convergence content. While I concede the Press Council has at times been accused of self-interest and of being dismissive of public complaints well made, I am sure an internal renewal of the council and a code of conduct composed by the industry itself is infinitely preferable to a heavy-handed external regulator.

In a media release on 2 March this year, Malcolm Turnbull, the member for Wentworth, made this point about the comparative powers of ACMA and the Press Council:
It is worth noting that the segment of the media which is most criticised for bias and inaccuracy—and indeed the member for Bendigo did this in his speech this morning—is in fact commercial radio which is already subject to regulation by ACMA. Mr Finkelstein is critical of ACMA in its media regulation role, but if media outlets unregulated by Government (such as metropolitan newspapers) have a better track record for balance and accuracy than commercial radio (which is regulated), doesn't that make an equally valid case for reducing rather than increasing the regulation of the media?

Former High Court Judge Ian Callinan made the point that any form of regulation is far too risky. He said:

The struggle for free speech has been long and painfully achieved and I wouldn't want to go back on it.

He made the further point that the way to control the media was through focused defamation laws.

Senator George Brandis, even in this last week, described to the Samuel Griffith Society how freedom of the press is watered down by the appeal to victimhood. He said: 'Today it is the self-styled progressives of the Left who want to ban things. In particular, they want to eliminate expressions of opinions which they find offensive. Sometimes this takes the form of overt prohibitions, of which section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act is an egregious example. As witnessed in the Bolt case, freedom of speech and its corollary, freedom of the press, are, for these people, values of less importance than respect for certain favoured groups which are identified in the minds of the—

An honourable member interjecting—alleged victimhood. Thus, paradoxically, victimhood becomes the basis for the new privilege. Is it really the role of government to be telling people what they might say? But this is the very point of the political correctness movement: to shape the language so that the ideas of which it disapproves are eliminated from public discourse.' And haven't we seen enough of that?

You can go back over history, and a free press has been able to give opinions which have been criticised here this morning. You can go right back to 1898 and Emile Zola's famous article 'J'Accuse' in the Paris newspaper L'Aurore.

Captain Dreyfus, who had been given a life sentence on Devil's Island in Guiana, was saved as a result of Zola giving his opinion on the front page of that paper—a very brave opinion. And in All the President's Men we had Woodward and Bernstein virtually bringing down President Nixon. There are many examples of this in the history of good journalism. What I do not want is some external body controlling that sort of freedom, and I will oppose it bitterly.

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter—Chief Government Whip) (11:20): A strong and independent media is one of the key cornerstones of our democracy. Edmund Burke is said to have remarked, 'There were three estates in parliament but, in the reporters' gallery yonder, there sat a fourth estate more important far than they all.' Yet it is also worth reflecting on what Oscar Wilde said: 'In old days men had the rack. Now they have the press.' That is an improvement, certainly, but still it is very bad and wrong and demoralising. Somebody—was
it Burke—called journalism 'the fourth estate'. That was true at the time, no doubt, but at the present moment it is the only estate—it has eaten up the other three.

Press independence is important, but who is it we are granting this independence to? This question matters. A democracy dominated by the press is no democracy at all. A democracy in which the journalists create rather than report the news is a democracy in decay. The situation is rendered much worse when, to create the news, journalists start adjusting the truth in their quest for the next Quill Award or other journalistic award, or, worse, when journalists are encouraged to sex up, embellish, misrepresent or do whatever it takes to create a headline for circulation's sake.

From our media we expect many things. At the very least we expect quality, we expect truth and we expect diversity. Sadly, all those three things have been lacking in the UK of late, and we have certainly found ourselves searching for them here in Australia. When the media gets it wrong, those adversely affected deserve the opportunity to have those wrongs addressed. At the moment in this country that is very, very difficult. We have defamation laws and all the proceedings and costs that go with them, which people know to be costly, cumbersome, protracted and, on many occasions, unsatisfactory. Of course, they can go to the Australian Press Council, an industry led body that is fully funded and controlled by the industry, but, to do so, they have to forgo their right to take defamation action if they are not successful there.

As the Finkelstein inquiry points out, 'The Australian Press Council suffers from serious structural constraints. It does not have the necessary powers or the required funds to carry out its designated functions. Publishers can withdraw when they wish or alter their funding as they see fit.' The media proprietors have acknowledged the inadequacies of the Press Council in recent times by making adjustments themselves, some of which have been welcome. The three-year warning required to walk away from the Press Council is a good example, and I have noted some more high-profile corrections in the papers under the APC logo. These are welcome changes but, from my perspective, they are not enough.

The Finkelstein and convergence reviews are both very complex and very voluminous in their presentation, but two issues really stand out: what to regulate and who regulates. There seems to be an emerging consensus that we do not need myriad regulators, but one regulator covering all platforms. The big debate today both inside and outside of this place is: who is doing the regulating. It is very clear that the self-regulatory regime has not met the expectations of the Australian community despite the best efforts of proprietors in recent times to tidy them up. It is clear to me that we do need a publicly funded regulator as Finkelstein recommended; one of course at arm's length from the government. This idea that the government is going to be briefing these independent regulators and telling them what to do is, in my view, folly.

On that basis, I support the motion put forward by the member for Bendigo as the best way not only to protect the standards and diversity of our media, not only to protect those who have been adversely affected by wrongs perpetrated upon them by the media, but also to protect the media itself. The best way to restore confidence in the media in this country is to demonstrate to people that the government has put in place an independent regulator capable of protecting media interests and broader Australian interests. (Time expired)
Mr FLETCHER (Bradfield) (11:25): We can all agree on the principle that a vibrant, independent news media is vital to a healthy democracy; it is vital in keeping citizens informed; and it operates generally by testing and holding up to scrutiny the government's policies and actions. It offers a forum for dissenting voices to be heard and it often discloses information that the government of the day may regard as inconvenient. In fact, it is a universal truth that governments of all persuasions are generally unhappy with the media coverage they receive. This government has been unhappy across a whole range of issues, be it pink batts, be it Building the Education Revolution or be it the inconsistency between its pre-election promise on a carbon tax and its actions after the election. So it is not surprising that this government has been frustrated with the press coverage it has received. Perhaps it is timely to remember the maxim of Lord Northcliffe, who said, 'News is what somebody somewhere wants to suppress; all the rest is advertising.'

There can be no question that reporting is a messy business, and journalists and news outlets will often make mistakes, sometimes with very serious consequences—for example, people who are the subject of false allegations or imputations. But the question presented by this motion is whether further regulatory intervention is desirable to foster a vibrant, independent news media—regulatory intervention such as that proposed in the Finkelstein report to establish a new regulator to be called the News Media Council. I believe the answer to that question is 'No', firstly on the grounds that I doubt the government's motives in proposing such greater regulation of the media, and secondly on the grounds that I doubt the merits of the proposal.

Let us turn firstly to the government's motives. Who can forget the then Leader of the Greens, Senator Bob Brown describing criticism of his party by the Australian as the work of the News Limited 'hate media'. We know that the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Conroy, is furious with the Australian for its coverage of the NBN. In fact, in Senate estimates he accused the Australian newspaper of 'waging a war' against Labor and trying to destroy the NBN.

So the so-called independent media inquiry was a perfect piece of political payback from an experienced practitioner of that particular art. We might ask the question: if an inquiry was truly needed, why was its principle focus on the print and traditional media, as opposed to, for example, the booming online sector? Is it because that is about the closest you can come to having an inquiry into News Limited without expressly stating that you are targeting that company?

There has been some link suggested to the phone hacking scandal in Britain, but absolutely no evidence or credible allegations of similar conduct in Australia. Senator Conroy said that this inquiry would deal with the impact of technological change, for example, the migration of digital to digital and online platforms. But why is this necessary? Why was such an inquiry necessary when he already had an inquiry underway to consider these very issues, the Convergence Review announced in December 2010?

If we can question the government's motives, the merits of its proposal are even more questionable. What we can all agree on as the terms of the motion before us suggest, is that the business models of newspapers are under pressure. Newspapers have a commercial interest in surviving, but there is a great public interest in the survival of newspapers as well;

FEDERATION CHAMBER
if newspapers disappear and nothing replaces them, there is a risk that our citizens will be less well informed and our democracy will suffer.

The motion appears to suggest that falling revenue is some kind of evidence of a loss of the social licence to operate due to lower editorial standards. If that were true, then presumably the problem would solve itself, as the mover sees it, because newspapers would collapse and this evil would no longer go on. In fact, that analysis is completely wrong. The real issue is that the business model of expensive journalism, cross-subsidised by classified advertising revenue, is no longer sustainable and newspapers are struggling to find a new and workable business model. Like many Australians, I am very concerned about this and I very much hope the transformation exercise currently being carried out by the management of companies like News Limited, Fairfax, APN and others is successfully achieved.

The key issue is this: if you want to maximise the prospects of success and survival of the newspaper sector, the last thing you would do at this stage is burden them with additional expensive regulatory compliance. The fundamental reason that we on this side of the House object to the proposed new model is that a robust, inquisitive, unconstrained free press is critical to our democracy. It is not surprising that it gets up the government's nose. But that is not the question; the question is about sustaining a robust free press.

Debate interrupted.

**Carbon Pricing**

Debate resumed on the motion by Mr Chester:

That this House:

(1) notes:
(a) that the carbon price came into effect on 1 July 2012;
(b) the Government's repeated assertions that only Australia's '500 biggest polluters' will pay the carbon price;
(c) community concern that the social and economic impacts of the carbon price have not been fully investigated;
(d) research that indicates the carbon price will have a disproportionate impact on small businesses, regional industries, and regional communities;
(e) concern:
   (i) regarding the impact of the carbon price on at least 104 councils in rural, regional and urban Australia which have received notices of potential liability from the Clean Energy Regulator; and
   (ii) within regional communities that the $200 million Regional Structural Adjustment Assistance Package is inadequate to meet the needs of adversely affected communities, particularly those exposed to the Government's 'contract for closure' policies; and
   (g) that the Government's $36 million advertising campaign to promote the Household Assistance Package provides no information on the policy that has led to the payments to households; and

(2) highlights that the Government should have deferred the introduction of the carbon price until after the Australian public has had its say at the next election.

Mr Chester (Gippsland) (11:31): I appreciate the opportunity to debate this very important motion. Just because the carbon tax was introduced on 1 July it would be an absolute folly to think this government has addressed all of the issues in relation to it. With the short time that I have available to me today, I would like to address some of the key points.
of the motion before the House—in particular, the impact the carbon tax has already had in regions like Gippsland, the likely impacts it will have in the future, and the failure of this government to accommodate the impacts on regions like the Latrobe Valley while at the same time wasting more than $30 million on an advertising propaganda campaign.

The first big myth about the carbon tax is the repeated assertion from those opposite that only Australia's so-called biggest polluters will actually pay the carbon tax. That is about as misleading as the Prime Minister's original promise that there will be no carbon tax under a government she leads. Everybody pays the carbon tax. Our local football and netball clubs pay through increased energy costs to run their lights at night for training and matches; our local aged care facilities and hospitals pay the carbon tax through increased energy costs; and even the United Dairy Farmers of Victoria have estimated the increased energy bill for dairy farmers would be at least $5,000 per dairy farm, with no compensation and no capacity to pass those costs on to anyone else. You are simply making the Australian dairy farmer less competitive with international trading partners at a time when they desperately need every bit of assistance they can get.

Just one hospital in my electorate, the Latrobe Regional Hospital, has budgeted in this current financial year for a $200,000 increase in its energy bills as a direct result of the carbon tax. Government members like to claim that those energy costs, those increases in electricity prices, are not all related to the carbon tax. I will not even try to have the argument with them because the question is: why make it harder for a hospital? Why make a difficult situation even worse for small business? Why act ahead of the rest of the world and take away the clear competitive advantage for the Australian economy of a cheaper and more reliable form of baseload energy? I have examples in my electorate such as the Lakes Entrance fishing fleet based at the port of Lakes Entrance. It is a major fishing fleet. The general manager of the Lakes Entrance Fishermen's Cooperative contacted me. I have an email here from Dale Sumner outlining some of his concerns about the carbon tax. I would like to quote from his email. He said:

Without a doubt, the Carbon Tax will impact heavily on the Fishing industry.

Well, there is news: he is not one of the 500 biggest polluters but he is telling me that he will be impacted 'without a doubt'. But the government tells me that only the 500 so-called biggest polluters will pay the carbon tax. Let's read on. Mr Sumner said:

… the Co-op has a significant Power usage Bill as a result of the Cold Storage & Ice Production equipment, most of the plant is either new or built in a way to reduce power load, it's just energy intensive.

I am sure that is a news flash to the government as well: it actually takes energy to freeze the fish and prepare them for market. He goes on to say:

Our estimated increase in Power alone under the Carbon Tax is $24,000 pa, this will ultimately either lead to the end of the Co-Operative or increased costs to the fishers.

The majority of the 3500 to 4000 tonne of product landed here at Lefcol leaves via Road Freight, so we expect this to increase as costs further up the chain are passed all the way down to the fishers.

Fishers are in a poor position with increased costs as they are price takers, we don't set prices, our product sells for what it sells on any given day, we don't have the luxury to pass the costs onto consumers.

He then goes on to say:
For example, if Lefcol, as a result of increased costs, say to fishers that our charges are being increased by 10c a kilogram, they have two decisions to make—either walk away from Lefcol as they can no longer afford it or wear the costs as they can say that their fish are worth 10c more per kilo on the market. In the market system we operate, prices of fish are driven by demand and set in a market auction system.

He goes on to say further:

As I mentioned, the fishing industry is poorly placed under the carbon tax as they can't pass on cost increases like many other products can.

The simple fact of the matter is, everyone pays the carbon tax every day of the week. The report in today's News Ltd paper should come as no surprise to people on this side of the House. The carbon tax is killing confidence in the small business sector right across Australia, particularly the retail sector. Business owners are absorbing the higher cost because the market is flat and not in a position, just like the Lakes Entrance Fishing Cooperative, to pass on those costs. The report in the news today found that, in a survey of 186 small business owners, 75 per cent wanted the carbon tax scrapped because it was making a bad situation worse.

In Gippsland, and the Latrobe Valley in particular, the uncertainty and the drop in confidence directly associated with this government's carbon tax—remember this is a carbon tax that the Prime Minister promised we would never have—is also exacerbated by another policy, the government's flagship policy called 'contract for closure'. I am not surprised that we do not hear much about contract for closure from those opposite. In fact I have not heard a backbencher sprouting the benefits of contract for closure. I do not even hear any dorothy dixers in question time on this particular policy issue. The reason for that is it is a dog of a policy. The government remains determined to shut down 2,000 megawatts of coal fired power stations in the Latrobe Valley, or in Australia more generally, and negotiations are supposedly continuing today with the Latrobe Valley based power generators. I do not think there has ever been a more poignant example of public policy stupidity than contract for closure.

We have the stupidity of using taxpayers' money to compensate generators for the closure of their assets—assets which would close anyway within about 15 to 20 years. Then we have the stupidity of using taxpayers' money to compensate households for higher electricity prices because we will not be using the cheapest available form of baseload energy that is available to us. In addition to that we have the stupidity of using taxpayers' money, again, to pay unemployment and other benefits to people who have been displaced by this policy.

In fact this policy is so stupid that I do not think it will actually happen. The minister for industry and resources knows that it is stupid because he is out there at the same time talking about exporting Latrobe Valley brown coal. If we follow the minister's logic, it is okay to burn Australian coal in China, India, Korea and Japan but it is not okay to burn it in the Latrobe Valley. It is okay for a Chinese, Indian, Korean or Japanese power station worker to have a job burning Australian brown coal but it is not okay for our Morwell, Moe, Traralgon or Churchill power station worker to have a job burning Australian brown coal. The billions that are going to be wasted if this contract for closure policy continues could be better spent on a whole range of better public policy issues, in particular the National Disability Insurance Scheme. The government has no plans in terms of how it is going to pay for that.
Time is against me going through all the details that are raised in the motion. I would like just to point out the hypocrisy in the government's claim that the carbon tax impacts have been exaggerated. I would invite any member opposite to come to the Latrobe Valley and tell the 30 Energy Brix workers, who were made redundant a week before the carbon tax was implemented, that our claims have been exaggerated. I would invite any member opposite to come to the Latrobe Valley and try selling that story to the engineering workshop owners and to their staff who have seen jobs dry up as the power generators have announced a reduction in maintenance contracts. You can try telling that to the construction workers in the Latrobe Valley and to the young apprentices in Gippsland who have been put off in the last three months due to the lack of new projects, which is directly linked to the lack of confidence in the future as a result of this government's carbon tax and its destructive contract for closure proposals.

I do repeat my offer earlier to simply answer this question: at a time when business is doing it tough, why make it tough for Australian business owners? As for the government's repeated promises to assist the adversely impacted regions, let me tell the House what a farce that has become. All talk and no action would sum up the government's efforts in regard to this. In the Latrobe Valley we have had various ministers come down many times and they have not agreed, yet, to even fund the socioeconomic impact study to actually measure the true implications of the carbon tax and the contract for closure policy.

There are no guidelines in place for the $200 million under the regional structural adjustment systems package, and the minister confirmed that after the budget. We have the tax in place, the impact is already being felt and there are no guidelines for the government's flagship program of assistance.

Let's put that $200 million into perspective. If you shut down Hazelwood Power Station, the loss is about 550 to 600 direct jobs, and their salaries alone are worth $100 million per year. So the $200 million the government is talking about in terms of structural adjustment is meant to be shared right across Australia, but shut down Hazelwood and you would not even compensate the Latrobe Valley for two years worth of wages for the workers at the Hazelwood Power Station.

I stand here bitterly disappointed with the performance not only of this Prime Minister but also of those opposite who used to stand up for the blue-collar workers in regional areas like the Latrobe Valley. This Prime Minister promised there would be no carbon tax under the government she led, and it is only the grubby deal with the Greens which has forced this government into this position. I call on those opposite who are genuine in their passion for the blue-collar workers in places like the Latrobe Valley to stand up and start representing the heart and soul of the Australian Labor Party, which used to be so proud of its representation of those workers in my region.

There is an absolute crisis of confidence in my community directly linked to the uncertainty this government has created through its reckless decision to legislate for the world's biggest carbon tax. I commend the motion to the House.

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (11:41): I have to say: if the member for Gippsland thinks there is a crisis of confidence in his community, perhaps he could start speaking to them a little more frankly about climate change and the way this country needs to address one of the biggest challenges that faces us. Perhaps with a little less misinformation his community
might have a slightly different view. I find it hard to believe that a person could make that speech if he actually believed that climate change was real. To stand there and talk about the impact in regional areas of action on climate change without any recognition whatsoever of the extraordinarily impact that climate change itself will have on regional areas if we, as part of the world effort, do not take real action to reduce the growth in greenhouse gases is somewhat to be in denial.

I assume that the member for Gippsland does believe in climate change. I assume he supports his own side's policy to act on climate change. I assume he supports the same targets that we have, as his side does. I assume that he would stand in his own electorate and tell them that he agrees with the targets that we set and he agrees with the need to act, but he could also tell them that his policy is to actually take tax money from taxpayers and give it to business—give it to the biggest polluters—which is really an astonishing approach. It is known to be far more expensive than the market driven mechanism that we have introduced, but that is the policy which he supports. He believes in climate change, he thinks we need to act, he supports the targets that we have set but he thinks he should do it in a more expensive way: he should take the money out of the taxpayers' pockets and give it to big business, paying big polluters to cut their pollution. We, on the other hand, have gone for a market mechanism approach which is seen around the world—including, for most of its history, by the Liberal Party—as the most effective way to act. It is the appropriate thing to do.

We in Australia have been incredibly lucky. We had in the ground at the time when it was of greatest value enormous reserves of fossil fuel. For the last 100 years, as the growth in the use of fossil fuels has grown, we have been the right country in the right place at the right time, and we have prospered on the back of that and continue to do so. We have cheap fossil fuels in abundance, and that has been very good for us, but in the last years we have seen a dramatic change in the approach of countries around the world to where they draw their energy use from. We have massive investments in renewable technology and in renewable energy, and two of the biggest countries in that field are the ones that most often get accused of not acting by the opposition: the United States of America and China. There are massive investments in renewable energy; in fact, 50 per cent of the investment in new power last year was in renewables, not in fossil fuels.

If the part of the world's activity from which we draw our economic strength—fossil fuels—is shrinking year by year, we would be mad not to try to decouple our prosperity from the old way of doing things; we would be mad not to try to move our economy from a fossil-fuels-reliant economy to a renewables-reliant economy.

I have said many times that we often think in Australia that our wealth is in the ground. There is a lot of wealth in our ground, and it will be there and we will make use of it for years to come. But when you look at our capacity to innovate, our capacity to invent, there can be no doubt that we have even more capacity in our minds. Our capacity to find new ways of doing things is second to none, and you can see that through the work of our researchers and our scientists. We are one of the leading countries in new ideas and innovation per head of population, and that is where we should be now. We have, as a nation, this capacity to invent. We have more wind, sun, waves and hot rocks than most of the world—more than virtually any other country. But there are countries that are further away from the equator than Tasmania that have more solar power than we do. Outer Mongolia, with the same population,
has 20 per cent renewables; we have eight per cent. Who are we kidding if we think this nation can continue to rely on the old way of doing things when the rest of the world is moving to the new? That is why we needed to introduce—a market based mechanism, a price on carbon, to drive innovation.

The member for Gippsland has referred to whether or not the community understands it. Let me put a few facts on the table. I doubt that the member for Gippsland will go back to his electorate and repeat these, but I campaigned on signing the Kyoto protocol in 2004.

Mr Chester: Did you campaign on the carbon tax?

Ms OWENS: Yes, I did. I campaigned on the Kyoto protocol in 2004. I campaigned on an emissions trading scheme in 2007, as did he.

Mr Chester: In 2008!

Ms OWENS: Well, my apologies. The member came in when that was the Liberal Party's policy. Other members of the opposition campaigned in 2007, as the opposition did, on an emissions trading scheme. Then, we had a white paper, a green paper, an exposure draft. It went through the House of Representatives. It tried to go through the Senate twice. There were two years of debate on this, during which both sides of politics agreed that an emissions trading scheme—a market based mechanism—was the way to go. And that was right up to 2009.

In 2010, on Julia Gillard's first day as the Prime Minister, she said she would introduce a price on carbon. In the week before the election, she made a statement at the press club, which was reported in all the major press as Julia's 'carbon price promise', where she said that if she was Prime Minister after the election she would take that as a mandate to put a price on carbon. Rewriting of history is great, but in that week leading up to the election, two people—

Mr Chester interjecting—

Ms OWENS: The member might actually like to google 'Julia's carbon price promise' and read the entire statement, because she actually said both things in one sentence. She said 'market based mechanism', said yes to a price on carbon and said no to a tax. And that is why we have a market based mechanism, a trading scheme with a fixed price for three years—which, incidentally, was Liberal Party policy, and you did not call it a tax then. It is amazing how, when you had a policy of a fixed price, it was an emissions trading scheme, and now, remarkably, there is a different word. The misinformation—I am reluctant to use the word 'deception', because I think it is actually ignorance on the other side over there—regarding your own policy, and our policy for that matter, is quite extraordinary.

We have always been committed to a market based mechanism—certainly for as long as I have been a member of this parliament, and that was what I campaigned for in 2004—and we remain so. And so will you be. As soon as you change leader again, you will go back to your natural state, which is a market based mechanism.

Mr Chester interjecting—

Ms OWENS: As soon as you change your leader again, is what I said. I was silent for you, even though I thought you were talking nonsense, and I would really appreciate the same courtesy, thank you.

Mr Chester interjecting—
Ms OWENS: No wonder your electorate is a little alarmed; they have you as a member. It is not surprising. Both sides of politics believe we need to act on this. Both sides set the same target, and both sides agree to act. The difference between the two sides is that the Liberal Party's and the National Party's policy is far more expensive and will rip the money out of the pockets of taxpayers. This is an absolutely astonishing motion.

We have at the moment an opportunity in this country to grasp the future in both hands. I saw the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Abbott, interviewed recently and he was asked about peak oil and what it meant. It was clear that he did not know what it meant, but when someone explained to him that it meant that production would eventually start to fall in the world—we would find the biggest oil reserves and, over time, production would start to fall—he made this extraordinary claim that that did not matter because, as the price of oil went up, we would be prepared to go to greater lengths to obtain it. This is all true, but the amazing thing was that he was happy enough for us as a country to go through a process where the price of oil and coal goes up and up and up because they get harder to find and not to act on it.

We have an opportunity now. As a nation faced with climate change but endowed with the most extraordinary resources for renewable energy sources and a capacity to develop those renewables that is unmatched in the world, we have an obligation to grasp that future. The opposition might want to stay in the past. We heard from the previous speaker that that is exactly where he wants to stay. He thinks we can stay with fossil fuels forever. Well, we cannot, because the rest of the world is moving. It is moving now and we are well advised to go with it. That is why I support our policy and totally reject this motion. (Time expired)

Mr COULTON (Parkes—The Nationals Chief Whip) (11:51): I acknowledge the previous speaker and thank her for the leniency she showed to me in the chamber last week—but that is as far as it goes! I am sorry the member for Parramatta has left. I could give her a quick history lesson. The member for Gippsland was elected in June 2008. He actually campaigned against an emissions trading scheme, as it was then, along with the rest of the Nationals. It was the first time that the Rudd juggernaut came to a head and there was a huge swing away from the government. Indeed, the member for Gippsland's by-election was the first public indication that people were opposed to putting a price on carbon. The campaign, with the La Trobe power workers getting behind the member for Gippsland and the Nationals, is now a matter for the public record. The member for Parramatta also said that, in the week prior to the election, the Prime Minister indicated she was going to put a price on carbon, but the memory I have of that week is that she actually said, 'There will be no carbon tax under a government I lead.' I thought that was fairly clear, but, once again, that is history.

The issues at stake here, as stated in the member's motion, include the fact that, under the government's scheme, the biggest polluters will pay. Also, research shows 'the carbon price will have a disproportionate impact on small businesses, regional industries and regional communities'. That is indeed correct. If you go back to Professor Garnaut's regional white paper, he said that regional communities would have an economic downturn of 20 per cent while urban areas would have a downturn of eight per cent. Right from the start, as a member who represents one-third of the area of New South Wales, the largest rural electorate in New South Wales, how could I ever support a scheme that was going to disproportionately disadvantage my electorate compared to electorates elsewhere? The idea that the biggest polluters will pay is an absolute nonsense. We are starting to see that now.
It was interesting that, in the House last week, members of the government were talking about the not so great rise in the cost of living index and expenses. It has come to the fore now that small businesses are that squeezed—they are in such a precarious position—that they are not game to raise their prices. They are actually absorbing the cost of the carbon tax because to increase their prices in the fragile state that many of these businesses are in now would mean losing even more customers. That is actually giving a distorted view of why electricity bills have not risen thus far. Over the weekend I received my electricity bill and, for this quarter, it has gone up $109, just for the carbon tax. It has gone up more than that, but the carbon tax component was that amount. So it is coming through.

If you go through to local government—and the federal government has identified some of the bigger councils and the issues mainly to do with emissions from landfill—you will see there are a whole range of things that local government deal with. There is street lighting, keeping their swimming pools clean and the energy required for that, the cooling for aged-care facilities and, in my electorate, many of the aged-care facilities and preschools are owned by local government, which are the local communities. I was speaking to a general manager in my electorate this morning and, because of rate pegging in New South Wales, the increase to their costs brought about by the carbon tax cannot even be met by the allowable amount that they can increase their rates. So ratepayers in regional Australia are going to suffer a decline in services. That is before 2014 when we start to see the increased freight charges coming through and what that will do not only to the cost of construction but also to road building with bitumen, which is petroleum based. The increase in the cost of asphalt bitumen will also come through.

Another thing that is having an effect in my community is the cost of refrigerant gas. It has gone up by 300 per cent. A refrigeration mechanic from Dubbo came to see me. He is a small operator, employing six people, and he was commenting on the cost of refrigerant not only for people who need that for household appliances but particularly for large-scale businesses. For instance, if the local bowling club has a mishap and loses the refrigerant in their coolrooms, it will be up for thousands of dollars in costs to repay that.

I heard the member for New England, in an astounding outburst last week, saying that farmers were going to be exempt, that the carbon tax was not a pricing mechanism and that the Carbon Farming Initiative was going to be a wonderful thing for Australia. He did not mention where the extra funds were going to come from for running irrigation pumps; for the electricity needed to shear every sheep; for the water that is pumped around a property to water the livestock; for the urea, a fossil based fuel. There is a huge cost of inputs. All the farm chemicals such as 2,4-D and Roundup are all based on petroleum, so all these costs are coming through.

We have a Carbon Farming Initiative that has no guidelines and no methodology. Indeed, to implement a methodology that would allow a credit for soil carbon that was of a high enough value to be tradeable, the cost of that process would negate any benefit to farmers. Farmers have worked out that the CFI, the Carbon Farming Initiative, will be of no benefit to them and have stayed away from it in droves.

Volunteer groups in my electorate are also under the pump from the carbon tax. I had a meeting with some of the men's sheds in my electorate a couple of weeks ago, and we are looking at maybe pooling men's sheds across New South Wales, or even Australia, together
and maybe trying to get some sort of a discount on their power, because men's sheds run
electric equipment, lighting, heating and things like that and they are having an issue with it.

To a large extent, Meals on Wheels now come in a frozen form. Meals on Wheels in
Dubbo has a large cold storage facility and the cost of electricity is starting to impact on the
services it can provide. Even smaller Meals on Wheels are suffering from this—they have to
cook the food themselves and all that energy requires a large amount of electricity, not to
mention schools, universities and hospitals that are suffering, but for no environmental gain.
The government has stopped talking about trying to protect the environment with this some
time ago and we are now talking about putting a price on carbon. But we are not seeing a
quantifiable measure.

In my electorate, with this great Green initiative that we have going through, we are seeing
the emergence of wind farms—and that might be a speech for another day. A great irony of
this is that there are quite a few hundred tonnes of concrete that secure the base of a wind
tower. On one side of Mudgee there are coal mines that are shipping at a rapid rate to China
coal that gets turned into wind farms that get shipped back to Australia whereby we can
generate a cheaper but cleaner form of electricity. But the great irony of it is that the cement
that secures the wind farms at Mudgee now comes into Sydney heads on a ship from Asia as
clinker and the last refinement is done at Clyde and is put on a truck and sent over the
mountain to Mudgee, past the closed Kandos cement plant.

Despite the member for Hunter saying—because Kandos is now in his electorate and it was
in mine—that the carbon tax did not close that cement plant, Cement Australia have been
telling me for four years, 'When the carbon tax comes in, cement plants will close.' When the
carbon tax came in Kandos cement closed, and now our wind farms are being based on
cement coming from China. Where is the sense in that?

(Time expired)

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (12:01): I listened with interest to the impassioned
contribution of the member for Parkes in support of cement. I asked him to stay in the
chamber, because I will have a question for him on that particular issue. I too have cement
works in my electorate, particularly in the Southern Highlands of my electorate, where Boral
cement works owns a coal mine which provides the electricity supply for that cement works.
It is only the coexistence of the coal mine and the cement works which continue to enable the
Boral cement works to exist on a profitable basis.

I would have thought that a proud member of the coalition getting up in not only
vociferous support of the cement works within his electorate would probably have a broader
interest in the viability of cement throughout New South Wales and Australia. For that reason,
I would ask the member for Parkes, when he gets back to his office, to pick up the phone to
the Liberals who sit on the Wingecarribee Shire Council. He might be scratching his head and
wondering why I am asking that he pick up the phone to the Liberals who sit as councillors on
the Wingecarribee Shire Council. It is because the voting record of the Liberals, the coalition
members, on the Wingecarribee Shire Council are putting at risk the future of that cement
works, because they are voting against the continuation of the increased export of coal from
the coal mine in Berrima. It is absolutely critical that we get bipartisan support from all
sensible thinking people, or people who know a little bit about economics—and I am sure the
member for Parkes would like to include himself in that group—and that we have sensible
voting and sensible support for the cement works in my electorate, as we need sensible support for the cement works in electorates right around the country.

As I sat and listened to some of the contributions from the member for Parkes, particularly as he spoke about the impact that rising electricity prices are having on fine community organisations, such as Men Sheds, I had to think to myself, 'Where have these guys been for the last four or five years when electricity prices have been increasing 10, 20 and 30 per cent per annum?' Is this a newfound affection for running campaigns against electricity prices—particularly as their mates in coalition governments around the country have done absolutely nothing as we have seen skyrocketing power bills and continue to see skyrocketing power bills? Where have these guys been on that issue? It is another phone call that they might like to make to their colleagues who have a real capacity to do something about power bills in the states of Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia. If he really wants to do something about the cost of power bills that are affecting the fine community organisations such as those mentioned by the member for Parkes, he should make a phone call to Premier Barry O'Farrell to do something about the absolute price gauging that is going on with New South Wales power.

The purpose of the motion, brought to us by the member for Gippsland, is to address the issue of climate change, climate change policy and how we put in place the most effective and efficient mechanisms for dealing with our contribution to addressing global warming and greenhouse gases, that we do it in a way that enables our economy and our society to transform itself, and that we take small steps now to ensure that we do not have to take big steps into the future.

I am pleased to see the member for Fremantle on this side of the House in the chamber at the moment, because I know she has been a passionate campaigner on the issue of climate change. We on this side of the House believe that climate change is a reality. It is official policy from those who sit on the other side of the House but, when you hear their members speak on it, you can sometimes be forgiven for being confused on it.

The Australian government, acting on the strong scientific advice of the CSIRO and that of the Bureau of Meteorology, as opposed to talkback radio experts, has put in place a strong course of action to deal with climate change. The opposition have been making hysterical claims about the carbon price as 'a wrecking ball that will destroy whole industries and towns and our way of life'. Those are their words, not mine. They have been saying this, despite the fact that they went to two elections with a policy of putting a price on carbon and introducing an emissions trading scheme. We are nearing the three-year anniversary of the Leader of the Opposition saying that that was the most sensible way to deal with climate change. It is the most sensible way of dealing with it and economists around the world agree on that. But what we are seeing from the opposition in response to this critically important reform is a political scare campaign. The motion from the member for Gippsland is just another episode in this sorry saga, which is the opposition's scare campaign.

The Leader of the Opposition and his coalition colleagues have been travelling around the countryside and doing everything that they can do to talk down the economy and scare people. And nothing scares them more than good news for the economy. They have been a little bit wobbly over the last few weeks as the economy has received some good news—that is, that inflation is not going through the roof, as has been predicted by those on the other
side, and, instead of whole towns being wiped off the map and millions being added to the unemployment queues, unemployment is going down and employment is going up in this country. We are one of the only countries in the world that can boast that record. Our unemployment rate is half that of the United States and most economists are predicting that, by the end of the year, unemployment in Europe will head to well north of 10 per cent. Overall, we have not seen the doom and gloom predicted by the other side. The most recent labour force figures show that, despite the ongoing difficulties in the global economy, unemployment grew in July by an additional 14,000 jobs. Full-time employment grew by 9,200 jobs and part-time employment also increased by just short of 5,000 jobs. Whilst Australia's unemployment rate fell marginally, to 5.2 per cent, it is still the envy of the entire world.

The motion mentions the situation faced by local government. I heard some statements from local governments in my electorate on this particular issue. I would like to confine my concluding remarks to the situation facing local government. It is a fact that local governments which own landfill facilities, better known to us as waste dumps, do face the prospect of having a carbon price liability if their annual emissions are in excess of 25,000 tonnes. At least one local council in my electorate faces the prospect of having to pay a carbon price, based on the current price of $26 per tonne, on any emissions from solid waste entering the landfill from 2012 to 2013—not on heritage emissions, because we agree that it is unfair for councils to have to pay a carbon price on those so-called heritage emissions that have resulted from any waste that has been deposited into the ground prior to 1 July this year.

That is, of course, if local councils around the country who own their own landfill and their waste dump facilities do absolutely nothing to mitigate or to reduce their emissions. But smart councils, including Shellharbour council in my own electorate, are putting in place mechanisms to ensure that they do do something. Far from incurring a liability, they believe that they can actually make a profit out of capturing, storing and converting fugitive gases from their landfill and converting those into energy. So not only can they make money out of generating a power source from methane emissions from their landfill and selling that back into the grid for a price; they can also gain renewable energy certificates for that process. So these councils can actually make money out of the scheme which has put a price on carbon. And of course that is exactly what was designed to occur, because when you put in place a market mechanism it encourages people to think of creative ways to deal with this, and it also puts in place an economic imperative for them to do that. So good on those councils who are taking these steps. I encourage other councils to do exactly the same.

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (12:11): I rise today to support this very important motion from the member for Gippsland. As the motion states, the carbon tax came into effect on 1 July 2012 and was supposed to impose $23 per tonne of carbon dioxide emissions on the so-called 500 biggest polluters. Australians are concerned and confused about the effect of the carbon tax, because the Prime Minister and the Labor government have not been up-front and have not been completely truthful with the Australian people about its disastrous consequences. There is confusion and chaos, because the Clean Energy Regulator constantly updates and revises its hit list of companies and local councils. At one stage, it was supposed to be 500, and then 250; now the list has been revised to 315, of which 77 operate solely in Queensland.
In late July, almost a month after the carbon tax came into effect, the Clean Energy Regulator decided that an additional 24 organisations, primarily electricity providers, would be added to the list of so-called big polluters. On 7 August, the list was revised again. Little wonder then that confusion reigns when it comes to this toxic carbon tax.

When the Prime Minister of Australia said, four days before the 2010 election, that there would be no carbon tax under a government she led, Australians understandably took that promise at face value. As history has recorded, the Prime Minister broke that promise and, indeed, the trust of the Australian people.

As the motion notes, the Labor government has spent $36 million on an advertising campaign to explain that millions of Australians would be receiving extra money in their bank accounts under the Household Assistance Package. At no point in any of the advertisements did the Gillard Labor government actually tell Australians why this money would be suddenly appearing. Nor did the Gillard government explain why everyday cost-of-living expenses would be increasing.

Although the Prime Minister has refused to be direct with the Australian public, she is fully aware of why this compensation package is required, because a $9 billion a year carbon tax will affect every level of the Australian economy. The carbon tax will hurt small business. It will hurt regional industries and communities and will affect many councils across Australia, including the Brisbane City Council. The Australian Local Government Association has estimated that, even after taking into account local government financial assistance grants, the carbon tax will impact local councils to the order of $185 million. That figure does not, however, include the effect on landfill operations, which will impose significantly higher costs on Brisbane City Council, which is why Brisbane was included on the Clean Energy Regulator's hit list in the first place, despite being one of the largest purchasers of green power in the country and spending millions of dollars on green initiatives.

The Lord Mayor of Brisbane has reminded the Gillard government, time and time again, of the $15.8 million annual impact that the carbon tax will have on Brisbane. However, what the government has not admitted is that every single council across all urban and regional communities will be indirectly hit by the carbon tax. For all Australian communities, the carbon tax will make it more expensive to take rubbish to the tip, more expensive to run council trucks, and more expensive to run local swimming pools, libraries and community centres.

Councils with landfill operations, a basic responsibility of local government, will be hit even harder.

It is little wonder that a survey report in the Courier Mail today indicated that only seven per cent of small businesses will vote Labor at the next election, because they and all Australians know that a Labor government does not support small business. As this motion states, the Labor government should have deferred the introduction of this confusing and chaotic carbon tax until the Australian public could have their say at the ballot box. The Australian public deserves a Prime Minister they can trust and a government which knows how to govern effectively; with the current Labor government they have neither.

I can promise every constituent in Ryan that there will be no carbon tax under a coalition government. Should the coalition be elected to form government at the next election, we will
Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (12:16): I rise today to talk about the carbon price and, in particular, how it impacts on part of my electoral division—specifically, Norfolk Island. Norfolk Island is one of the most beautiful places in the Commonwealth of Australia. It is just a few miles wide and has a population of between 1,500 and 2,000 people, some of whom are registered to vote in the electorate of Canberra.

There have been some recent comments by the Liberal senator for the ACT, Gary Humphries, about the carbon price and its impact on Norfolk Islanders. As we have seen from the coalition time and time again, they have made a range of claims about the carbon price that are based on misinformation and a desire to perpetuate a scare campaign. In fact, just before we rose after the last parliamentary session, I had an exchange with the member opposite on this very issue. As I said to the member opposite at that time, the sky did not fall in on 1 July this year—and the Liberals are now claiming that the carbon price is somehow destroyed the economy of Norfolk Island. This is more scare-mongering based on misinformation and fear from the coalition.

Let me go to some of the specifics of the carbon price and address some of the furphies that Senator Humphries alleges. First, let me refute the myth that the carbon price is having a negative effect on the economy of Norfolk Island. The Administrator of Norfolk Island, Neil Pope, issued a media release on 9 August this year under the heading 'Carbon tax impact negligible'. This is what the Norfolk Island Administrator said about the carbon price:

The advice we have received would indicate that there is little to no impact on households on Norfolk Island. The major reported impact for mainlanders is the increase in electricity prices due to coal fired power stations, estimated to be approximately $9 for every $100 in electricity charges. As Norfolk Island's electricity is generated by a combination of solar and diesel, and the diesel does not come from Australia, there is no impact on electricity prices.

I should point out that the Administrator of Norfolk Island put the word 'no' in capital letters. Let me reiterate that there is no impact on electricity prices on Norfolk Island because of the carbon price. These are the facts. But the coalition is not interested in facts. Senator Humphries spouted more misinformation when he also told the Senate that the permanent population of Norfolk Island dropped between 2007 and January 2012 and this is somehow linked to the carbon price. According to this logic, some residents of Norfolk Island left five years ago because of a very small increase introduced in July this year—that is anticipating, I have to say!

Yes, tourism numbers on Norfolk Island have dropped, and I urge everyone who can visit this most magnificent, beautiful and unique part of Australia to do so. But the high Australian dollar is a factor in tourism numbers, and tourism across Australia is affected by our strong economy.

The next bit of misinformation being peddled by the Liberals is that the cost of living on Norfolk Island will rise dramatically under the government's carbon price package but not one cent in compensation will be paid to Norfolk Islanders. It may come as something of a
surprise to the coalition, but Norfolk islanders do not come under the Australian tax system. It may come as a shock to Senator Humphries and members of the coalition that Labor's very generous and targeted compensation package is aimed at helping Australian taxpayers manage the very small price increases that will occur as we put a price on carbon pollution.

The carbon price will have a very small impact on the cost of living, and the government is providing households with assistance to meet this impact. Treasury estimates that the impact on the cost of living from the carbon price will be an increase of just 0.7 per cent in the CPI. That is less than 1c in the dollar. As I have repeatedly pointed out, the government is providing assistance to nine in 10 households, which on average is $10.10 per week.

Senator Humphries, like many in the coalition, seems a bit confused when it comes to policies aimed at tackling climate change. The scare campaign claiming that the carbon price is damaging Norfolk Island's economy is plain and simply wrong. The fact is that the Labor government is working to deliver a Norfolk Island road map. I am very proud to be part of this. We are working with the people of Norfolk Island to ensure their economic and social prosperity through a range of measures and access to services, access to benefits as outlined in the road map, provided by the Australian tax system and a fair contribution to the tax system in return for the benefits. I have travelled to Norfolk Island many times, I have spoken to the people—(Time expired)

Mr EWEN JONES (Herbert) (12:21): I thank the member for Canberra for her contribution because it gives me the chance to talk about what is probably the greatest island in Australia, Magnetic Island, which is off the coast of Townsville. The only reason Norfolk Island does not have exposure to the carbon tax is that they do not buy their diesel from Australia. If they bought their diesel from Australia, they would be exposed to the carbon tax. If you want to speak about compensation for all things carbon tax, I would like to speak about Magnetic Island. There is no compensation for the ferry and the barge that go to Magnetic Island. There will not be any compensation going to the people who live on Magnetic Island and commute on a daily basis to Townsville. The barge service that takes the goods and services across will not get any compensation for the carbon tax on the diesel that they burn, so the goods and services that they take across—the milk, eggs and basic commodities that go to Magnetic Island—will cost even more under the carbon tax.

We have had personal responses. Friends of mine had Le Paradis restaurant at Nelly Bay. It is a fantastic feed there and they are great people but they have struggled with the electricity price rises, and the carbon tax is just one of those things.

I want to talk about what the member for Parkes talked about—refrigeration mechanics and the distances that they have to travel. Madam Deputy Speaker Livermore, you would know all about this because of the distances in your electorate. Before the carbon tax, it would have cost a refrigeration mechanic between $3,000 and $5,000 to fully load his van to take on his road trips. Now, with the 300 per cent increase in the cost of refrigerants and the carbon tax applied to that, it costs up to $12,000 to fully equip a refrigeration van for the distances we travel. This is about regional centres. People from the cities have to understand how much more we do.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you would also know about the distances we travel when it comes to sport, dance, athletics and things like that. I remember a mate of mine, Billy Green. In the seventies he went to work in the Bank of New South Wales in Barcaldine. He played for
Barcie, and they played against Winton. If they beat Winton in Winton, they used to run off
the field and hop into their cars or onto the team bus—and they did not take their boots off or
get changed until they hit Longreach. That is about an 800 kilometre round trip to play
Winton in Winton and get the living daylights beaten out of them by those blokes up there,
because they play tough. That team bus is now going to be subject to the carbon tax.

When parents take their kids to regional athletics, they will be subject to the carbon tax—
all the team buses that go through everywhere. My nieces and nephews, when they travel
from Ayr to all the swimming carnivals, are going to be subject to the carbon tax on the buses
that they go on. All the cane farmers and small crop farmers around Townsville, the Burdekin
and Hinchinbrook are price takers; they are not price makers. The price of sugar at the
moment is quite good—we have a lot of things going on in the sugar market—but they are
exposed to the carbon tax, while their competitors in Brazil and India are not.

When it comes to their weedkillers, insecticides, phosphate based fertilisers or the diesel they
use in their tractors, they receive no compensation. This is something that we have to worry
about in the regions all the time.

The length of time it takes to get power to the city from Gladstone to Townsville makes our
power even more expensive. To top it all off, you have the Townsville City Council and the
Townsville dump. The Labor state government forced amalgamation upon Townsville and
Thuringowa. Townsville council had $104 million but now has only $34 million. Townsville
City Council is still one of the 34 councils. I have asked the question before. If they had
stayed as two separate dumps in Townsville and Thuringowa, would they be exposed to the
carbon tax? At the moment, Townsville ratepayers are exposed to the expense of between $6
million and $9 million for the Townsville City Council dump. That is before the Townsville
City Council turns on a light, starts a car, fills a pothole or anything like that. You must
understand that these are real issues in the regions and will always be real issues in the
regions. The council must either cut services or raise rates. It is not fair and it should be
cancelled.

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (12:26): This motion seeks to keep alive a debate that I suspect is
running out of wind out there in the electorate. That is certainly the case in the electorate that
I represent. I will try to respond to some of the matters that have been raised in the course of
this debate and those in the written motion but, obviously, five minutes will not allow me to
speak in detail about all of those matters.

To begin with, it is a fact that only the large polluters pay a tax for each tonne of carbon
emitted after they have used up their free permits. I stress that point: after they have used up
their free permits. Having paid a fee for each tonne of carbon they then have the options to (a)
reduce their emissions, (b) absorb the costs of their emissions or (c) pass the costs on to their
customers. I suspect that each organisation will determine which of the options they will
adopt, because all three options are available to them. Of course, if costs are passed on to
customers and those customers are themselves business operators, they in turn may pass the
costs on to their own customers. I say 'may' because several business operators that I know
have said to me that they do not intend to pass those costs on but intend to simply absorb
them into their own operations. They will absorb them because, in truth, they know that those
costs are relatively minimal.
Again, those businesses have options as well and whether they wish to pass the costs on is a matter for them. It is however of serious concern that some business operators are using the introduction of a carbon tax as an excuse to increase prices and to do so at much greater amounts than the true impact of the carbon tax. I am pleased to see that the ACCC is acting on this matter and has already identified several businesses that have attempted to exploit the introduction of a price on carbon.

It is also of concern that rising prices due to other factors are also being rolled together with carbon price impacts, and the real cause of many of the price increases are being masked by retailers without breaching ACCC standards. A good example of that is where a business says, 'The increases in these costs are attributable to the carbon tax, plus the value of the Australian dollar and so on.' They do not specifically break down the proportion of the increase attributable to the carbon tax but make sure that they put carbon tax in there first and foremost and very prominently, clearly trying to pretend that the carbon tax is the main contributor to the price increases when the reality is that that is not the case.

A good example of that is the example of the power utilities and local government, which the members opposite have referred to. Can I say in respect of the issues relating to local government that I spoke about this matter on 22 May in a House adjournment speech, and I refer members to my speech, where I outlined, step by step, why those local government authorities which claim that the carbon price will significantly put up their rates are misleading their residents and their businesses. It may be convenient to shift the focus onto carbon price without breaching the ACCC standards, but it is also unethical.

Treasury has estimated that the carbon tax impacts will be 0.7 of a per cent. That figure has not been disputed by any reputable authority to date, and for most households that figure will add about $500 per year to their household bills. Putting aside the government's Household Assistance Package, which nine out of 10 households will share in, the fact remains that costs to both households and businesses, wherever they are located, are likely to be impacted much more by interest rate movements, fluctuations in the value of the Australian dollar and changes in the price of crude oil, yet relatively little is ever said about those factors.

There are many reasons why some businesses around the country are facing tough times. Attempting to lay the blame on a carbon tax is dishonest political opportunism and as immoral as the antics of some unethical business operators who are doing much the same. I suggest that members opposite address the real issues that are causing difficulties to both their residents and the businesses within their electorates, because if they do that they might in fact be of real help to them, as opposed to running with the scare campaign. (Time expired)

Ms Marino (Forrest—Opposition Whip) (12:31): The motion by the member for Gippsland covers many issues, but I will concentrate on the part that says:

… the carbon price will have a disproportionate impact on small businesses, regional industries, and regional communities …

There is no doubt that regional communities, regional businesses and regional families will bear the brunt of the government's tax on energy, which basically is Australia's historic competitive advantage, particularly in overseas markets. It will be a major blight on rural and regional communities, and it is already.
Everything coming to or going from a regional community will cost more. It will cost more to move anything by truck from July 2014, when diesel is hit by the carbon tax. There will be a reduction in the diesel fuel rebate of 6.85c a litre on all heavy vehicles delivering vital goods to and from regional communities. That is expected to cost the industry and its customers $510 million in 2014 and 2015 alone, on top of this year's 2.4c a litre rise in the diesel fuel excise, and that will mean higher costs and greater impact on regional areas.

People—particularly on the other side—forget what a big country this is. We live in regional areas. In 2007, Australian trucks transported 277 million tonnes of food and animals around the country, and the proposed tax will add cost to every single tonne. I remind members that in Western Australia, in the south-west, you basically cannot produce, consume or receive any good or service that has not been delivered on the back of a truck. We know that the ships and trains are already paying additional carbon costs on every litre of fuel, adding cost to every ounce of product they shift.

The House also needs to be aware that the carbon tax is already hitting road transport for perishable goods, including the food that every Australian family needs. The trucks that need refrigerant gas are facing a massive increase in costs right now. South West Express is a local transport company based in Bunbury, in the south-west of WA. It has already been hit by the carbon tax. In July this year, South West Express had three trucks whose cooling units broke down, and they needed to be regassed. The cost of the replacement gas has gone up, due to the carbon tax, by $75 a kilogram. The cost of the replacement gas in July, following the imposition of the carbon tax, for a complete regassing of a truck which had had a breakdown of a cooling unit was $750 more. Where previously it might have cost South West Express $500 to regas each of its trucks, it is now over $1,000 a unit. And these costs will have to be passed on to consumers when they buy the fresh food being transported.

Of course, all consumers who need to regas their car air conditioning this summer will discover that they will be paying Labor's tax again, and the tax keeps hitting families and businesses in ways that they have never envisaged—and it keeps increasing. That is what people are forgetting. Regional people rely on transport for everything. The tyranny of distance makes people in regional areas particularly vulnerable. The tyranny of this government, however, is much worse.

I am going to briefly touch on what we have heard today about the numbers of small businesses who literally have had to absorb this tax. They are in such a competitive environment that they have to try to absorb this tax. That means that each of these businesses is going to have less profit. It could mean that they have to put off workers and it is a great issue to those small businesses.

I look perhaps at those people who are dairy farmers like me. Around Australia we cool about nine billion litres of milk on farm that has to be brought back to about four degrees before it will be collected by a processor. I cannot find whether it is a processor or one of the major supermarkets at the moment who is standing up and saying, 'Yes, we understand that this is going to cost you more and, yes, we will increase your price to cover that.' Farmers are going to have no choice but to absorb it. But that is not all: they are going to cop the tax on diesel as well. They are going to cop the tax on fertiliser—anything that uses energy to produce it, whether it is feed, whether it is fodder, whether it is the irrigation. If they pump they are going to be paying the carbon tax again and again. It is a compounding, cascading
tax. It will be paid over and over, and I would like to see how many times, if you pick, package and send an apple off from one of the orchards in Donnybrook, the carbon tax is going to apply in that refrigerated supply chain.

We know that the best thing we can do is not only get rid of the government but get rid of the carbon tax along with it. We need to repeal this tax to support regional families' businesses and commitments. (Time expired)

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (12:36): We have heard a lot of negativity and nonsense from those opposite with respect to this issue, clearly, showing once again they are the apostles of Alan Jones and the disciples of Lord Monckton. About 60 per cent of our economy will be covered by a carbon price. The carbon price is not applied to agricultural emissions, emissions from cars—like commercial vehicles—off-road agricultural forestry or fishery uses. We are seeing fewer than 500 companies at the moment—there are about 300 mentioned in relation to this particular coverage—making them pay for that which they have done in the past for free: pollute our atmosphere.

We are providing assistance to nine out of 10 households. The average income in Blair is about $59,000 a year, so you can see that more than nine in 10 of those people living in my electorate will receive assistance. Almost six million households have received tax cuts. Four million households have received an extra buffer of 20 per cent and above and a million Australians will not have to pay tax as a result of our clean energy package.

All those who might be listening to this debate should listen to the fact that small business operators pay tax—personal income tax. Not all of them are in corporate structures. A lot of them are in a position where they are PAYE taxpayers, and we have given $47 billion in personal tax cuts since we were elected and have lifted the tax-free threshold. Many small business operators are low-income earners.

Those opposite voted against the tax cuts for them. Those opposite, again, backed up the fact that they would not support jobs and small business during the GFC by voting against taking action on climate change and supporting small businesses, households and individuals, pensioners and self-funded retirees with our clean energy package.

They talk about the impact on councils. I will give you an example of two regional councils, one being the biggest council in the country—$3.2 billion is the annual revenue for the Brisbane City Council. The carbon price impact on their budget is $15.8 million—and the member for Ryan came in here as a councillor from that council. They wasted $1.9 billion on tunnels, and the interest payments they are incurring on that are far greater than the carbon tax impact on their actual operations. Ipswich City Council has a $450 million turnover ever year. Guess what? The impact on their budget is 0.7 per cent—exactly what the Treasury model said.

It is the same thing with the coalition governments in New South Wales and Victoria: the Treasury modelling has proved accurate, and we know that we will see a 20 per cent growth in wages by 2020—that is what Treasury says.

We will see 1.6 million new jobs in this economy by 2020. Since 1 July Whyalla has not been wiped off, Gladstone has not been wiped off and we have $107 billion in investment in the coal industry. We have seen 14,000 jobs created as the first example of jobs being recorded in the ABS data. I am waiting for the jeremiads and the financial Armageddon to
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arrive, but it has not happened, has it? It has not happened, because the python, the
constrictor—whatever analogy you like—has not arrived. This was the mother of all scare
campaigns, and it has not proven to be accurate or true. Those opposite will be hoist with their
own petard, because people know that that has not been their experience—that it has not had
the impact on their personal budgets, their lives and their businesses.

Even the mayor and deputy mayor of a regional council like the Somerset Regional
Council in South East Queensland, who are not card-carrying members of the Labor Party,
said to me and to Mark Dreyfus, the Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy
Efficiency, 'We absorbed it.' They said, 'We're going to take the advantage of the landfill, the
carbon credits, the carbon farming initiative.' So they will get credits for it because of what
they are doing, because they are operating landfill sites. And they will get the benefit of it.

And the farmers in my area—I have met with many of them and talked to them about it—
will get the advantage of the carbon farming initiative. All those old National Party people
opposite, who voted against an income source for farmers, should hang their heads in shame.
Those opposite know these jeremiads have not proven to be accurate.

Mr McCormack (Riverina) (12:41): I have known Greg Carroll all my life. He is a
typical country bloke. He is a family man, he is a community minded person and he was an
outstanding sportsman whose family name is synonymous with Australian football in my
area. And Greg is a businessman—and a good one. He owns and operates the grain handling
company M C Croker Pty Ltd, which has depots in Coolamon, Cootamundra, Griffith,
Ladysmith and Marrar. Cootamundra and Marrar are manned full time while Coolamon,
Griffith and Ladysmith are used mainly for storage and are manned when required.

Croker has the combined capacity to hold 55,000 tonnes of grain, oilseed and pulse and
5,000 tonnes of fertiliser, and offers services such as storage, handling, mixing, blending,
pelletising, spreading, transport, export packing and testing. Greg is an honest straight
shooter—no mincing his words. This morning he told me that the carbon tax would cost his
business between $80,000 and $100,000 a year. That is straight off his profit, straight off his
bottom line. This comes by way of a $6 per container slug by the shipping and stevedoring
company he uses—and Croker moves 100 of those per week—as well as higher electricity
charges, not all state based, and other on costs caused by this unnecessary, unmandated
carbon tax.

Croker is a company that proudly claims to be 'small enough to care, big enough to deliver'.
It has high turnover costs but operates in a volatile industry with small, hard-won margins. I
put it to Greg, quite tongue in cheek, that this was improving the environment, but I will not
lower the dignity of the parliament with the response he gave me—as I said, he is a straight
shooter. He knows, as all of us do, that it is not going to do one thing to global temperatures,
it is not going to do one thing to lower sea levels and, really, it is not going to do one thing for
the environment. We all know that. It has been a little more than two years since the Prime
Minister uttered those infamous words, 'There will be no carbon tax under the government I
lead.' Yet here we stand today, debating the impact the introduction of the carbon tax has had
on Australia—a carbon tax introduced by this Labor Prime Minister under the Labor
government she leads.

The 1 July introduction of the carbon tax has been felt by every Australian as they have
watched their costs of living increase. My electorate office receives daily phone calls from
constituents concerned about the impact of the carbon tax and wanting to know why they receive no direct compensation—certainly no compensation with the Household Assistance Package that is going to offset the increases in their day-to-day living costs. Many constituents tell me they have used the estimator online only to discover that the only compensation they will receive is from tax breaks—tax breaks that, as I said, will not adequately compensate the direct hit on the hip pockets of those hardworking Australians whom those on that side purport to represent and have forgotten.

Many self-funded retirees find it hard to believe they will not receive any direct compensation because they are self-funded, yet retirees who do claim a pension will receive some meagre assistance. These are people who have worked hard to set themselves up for retirement and the government has completely ignored their set of circumstances and the impact the carbon tax will have on them. I recently conducted an electorate-wide survey in which I asked constituents if they supported the introduction of the carbon tax. What do you think they said? ‘Absolutely not’—the overwhelming majority stated they do not support the carbon tax. There can be no clearer indication that Australians want the carbon tax and this Labor government gone.

Businesses are also feeling the heat from the carbon tax. I recently spoke with a local restaurateur who advised me his business is only just covering operating costs let alone turning a profit and he fears he will have to close his restaurant by the end of the year due to the direct impact the carbon tax will have on his bottom line. This is not an isolated case. Business owners right across Australia fear for their livelihoods as the carbon tax starts to force prices up and up across the board—price increases they will be forced to wear unless they pass them on to customers. But customers are wary of spending their money and are instead keeping it in their wallets as they do not know what hidden costs may be ahead.

This is a tax that the government sees as a magical cure to so-called climate change and exemplifies this government's commitment to the environment over the citizens of Australia. In my electorate I have the Wagga Wagga City Council, the Coolamon Shire Council and the Griffith City Council, who are all going to have to pay the carbon tax. These councils collectively represent fewer than 100,000 people yet are considered by this government to be among Australia's biggest polluters. How ridiculous!

The hit list also includes Riverina Beef at Yanco, Snowy Hydro and the Visy pulp and paper mill at Tumut. These businesses are all good employers. They are not big polluters; they are all good Australian businesses. They deserve respect and they do not deserve the carbon tax. (Time expired)

Mr CHEESEMAN (Corangamite) (12:46): I take great pride in rising today to speak on this motion. We have heard all sorts of claims coming from the opposition about what impact the price on carbon will have. They have said that this will create devastation. It will create massive price rises and lead to massive job losses. According to their claims, it will lead to Whyalla being wiped off the map. Tony Abbott has said that the impact on the cost of living will be almost unimaginable. Joe Hockey has said it will drive up the price of everything. Barnaby Joyce said that it would force working mothers to pay up to $100 for a roast. And we have heard all sorts of other claims coming from the coalition.

The reality, of course, is completely different. Despite the fear campaign being waged by Tony Abbott and the Liberal and National parties, the reality is that 1 July has come and gone
and the python is not squeezing the economy. The wrecking ball has not created mass destruction and devastation on our economy. Indeed, the Treasury modelling is shaping up to be spot on, suggesting that the impact on our economy will be less than 0.7 per cent. The reality is that Tony Abbott has spent the last 12 months running a fear campaign—a fear campaign not based on fact but designed to scare working families.

Meanwhile, this Labor government has continued to argue the case around why polluters must pay for their pollution and why it is important to put in place household compensation packages, to ensure that Australians are shielded from the costs of a price on carbon. Indeed, we have provided compensation to nine out of 10 households, a very Labor thing to do. We put in place compensation that equates, on average, to about $10.10 per typical family, with the impact being passed on by those that generate the pollution being substantially lower than that. We have also been able to use this opportunity to lift family tax benefits and put in place increases to pensions and other government payments, ensuring that Australians can live comfortably with a price on carbon.

The reality is that Tony Abbott, for the last 12 months, has been running a scare campaign. As I said earlier, 1 July has come and gone, the wrecking ball has not struck the Australian economy, the python has not started squeezing the economy and the cobra has not struck. Indeed, I am sure that, when electricity bills start arriving in the next few weeks, Australians will see straight through the fear campaign, which Tony Abbott has been running, as a deceitful campaign and a campaign based on fear mongering and scaring Australians rather than on the facts. I know the coalition do not like hearing the facts, but the reality is that putting a price on carbon is the right thing to do for our economy, it is the right thing to do for our planet and it is reform that only Labor will deliver in a way that will protect Australians from unnecessary price increases.

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa—Second Deputy Speaker) (12:51): I rise to support the motion as moved by the member for Gippsland, and that is specifically: 'The concern regarding the impact of the carbon tax on at least 104 councils in rural, regional and urban Australia which have received notices of potential liability from the Clean Energy Regulator.'

I was shocked when two of my councils were named in that list: the Maranoa Regional Council based in Roma, my own home town, and the Western Downs Regional Council based in Dalby in my electorate. They were straightaway labelled as big polluters. These are councils that employ people and create jobs. The families live in these towns, their children go to school, they shop in town, and yet they are labelled as big polluters. I could not believe it. The Western Downs Regional Council with a population of 32,000 is a very large geographic area. The Maranoa Regional Council based in Roma is 13,000. They are the approximate population figures as at June last year.

The Maranoa Regional Council have said that their electricity bill will rise by around $200,000. The mayor said that, logically, they are going to have to pass that cost on. Who to? To the ratepayers, and this is just the start of it. The ratepayers are going to be burdened with another cost, and it is going to be reflected in their rates notices that go out this year because councils have to make sure that they do not run deficit budgets and run up big debts. They are going to have to pay this tax. The mayor went on to say that they will look at retro-fitting some of the buildings, but that also is going to cost money and these are councils that are struggling. They do a magnificent job, but they struggle, day-to-day, and their only source of

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revenue is Financial Assistance Grants from the federal government or the ratepayers’ rates that they receive. When I wrote to the minister about this, he advised me that these councils were included because they are natural gas suppliers. That is why they are considered big polluters. Natural gas is the fuel used in various types of businesses and households, and natural gas suppliers were chosen to be the point of liability to ensure effective and efficient coverage.

I want to touch on another business enterprise in my electorate—and I could probably name many of them—but this one, in particular, came to my attention recently and it is a Goondiwindi business that is going to be hit by the carbon tax.

This is a business that processes grain and packages it for export. I ask the minister: how do you compensate an exporter for the increased costs that they will have to bear as a result of the increased cost of electricity that they will be paying? We hear day to day in the House from the Prime Minister and other ministers, 'Oh, there's a compensation package.' This business was advised by its electricity provider that, as of 1 July this year, there would be a carbon charge applied to the electricity account that they receive. They have estimated that that is going to cost them an extra $70,000 to $80,000 in the first 12 months. Where do they pass that cost on to when they are an exporting enterprise? Do they pass it down the line or up the line or do they absorb it?

This is a business that employs 33 people. It is an important part of the food processing chain—grain cleaning and grain packaging. Of course, most of this grain is going on to export markets, which is already very difficult for exporters given the high value of our Australian dollar. There is no compensation package for this enterprise. So either they will absorb it or they will have to go back to the producer, the farmer, and say, 'We now have to pay you less because we have greater costs as a result of the carbon tax.'

I say to the Prime Minister that it is about time that she got out there and spoke to the real people and visited some small businesses. The Prime Minister should do as we on this side of the House have done—go and visit small business after small business and talk to the real people who are going to be affected by this insidious carbon tax, the effects of which are going to cascade across the country. (Time expired)

Mrs D’ATH (Petrie) (12:56): Once again we hear the argument that the sky is falling in. I think the opposition are just desperate for this carbon price to fail. Let us put some facts into this debate. We hear members of the opposition time and time again quoting the Prime Minister from 2010, stating that there would not be a carbon tax under a government she leads. It is important to also put that into context and look at what the Prime Minister also said in 2010 before the federal election. She said that the federal Labor Party and a federal Labor government remain committed to delivering an emissions trading scheme—a policy that we took to the 2007 election and to the 2010 election. What are we delivering for the people of Australia? We are delivering an emissions trading scheme that comes into effect in 2015. What has this government had to do to achieve that? In forming a minority government we had to sit down and negotiate for a Multi-Party Climate Change Committee to look into how we achieve that aim, and we now have a fixed-term carbon price for three years. Why have we done that? We have done that so that in the long term we could deliver on our promise to the Australian people that we would have an emissions trading scheme to operate well into
the future in this country. I am proud of that commitment. I am proud that we are delivering on that commitment.

Let us look at some of the other comments that we have heard. We have heard from the member for Riverina that the pensioners contacting his office are getting meagre assistance and self-funded retirees are not getting anything. Again, let us put some facts around that. The fact is that pensioners are getting compensation, or household assistance, of around $10.10 per week—more than the estimated cost of the impact of the carbon price. With respect to self-funded retirees, to make a statement in this House to say that self-funded retirees get nothing is just misleading. The fact is that many self-funded retirees who may be on the seniors healthcare card or are low income would also get some assistance.

We heard from the member for Riverina that people in his electorate are scared to spend money. I am not surprised, when the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Treasurer are running around saying how bad our economy is—despite them going overseas and saying how great it is—and you have the Premier of Queensland actually stating in a press conference that Queensland is bankrupt and then within a very short period of time that same day saying: 'Well, actually, no, we are doing quite well. Our economy is growing. Don't panic.' A Liberal premier comes out and says, 'We're bankrupt'—and you are surprised that people are worried about spending money!

We should be talking up our economy. When it comes to our economy, we are the envy of the developed world. These are the things that we should be talking about. If we want to stimulate spending in our economy and productivity, then we have to stop talking down the economy. So Liberal parties at the national and state levels need to stop talking down our economy and trying to scare people. If I hear one more example from members of the opposition about businesses in their electorates and the increases in their electricity prices! I would like a member of the opposition to come into the chamber and not just quote dollar figures but actually tell us the percentage of that increase. It would be a nice change to hear what the percentage increase is. When the opposition talk about thousands of dollars of extra electricity costs, they are not talking about percentage. Why? What you will hear is that it equates to 10 per cent or less. It equates to what Treasury has estimated as the cost of electricity as a result of the carbon price.

There are many electricity providers who, when they are currently sending out bills, are also sending out a brochure. That brochure shows where every $100 of their electricity bill goes. The brochure says that $51 goes towards the network, poles and wires; $20 towards retail, customer service and programs; $20 towards wholesale electricity generation; and $9 towards the carbon price. Unfortunately, every person whose electricity provider in Queensland is a state government owned electricity provider is not getting this flyer, because the state government refuses to let the state government owned electricity providers circulate it. Those are the facts. The facts are that GST had an impact on CPI of 2.5 per cent, but we did not see any household assistance to anyone then. (Time expired)

Debate adjourned.

Mr Byrne (Holt) (13:01): I move:
That further proceedings be conducted in the House.
Question agreed to.
Australia-Serbia Relations

Debate resumed on the motion by Mr Hayes:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) there are well over 100,000 people of Serbian origin currently living in Australia, with approximately five per cent in the electoral division of Fowler;

(b) the Australian Federal Police and Serbian Police recently signed an agreement to cooperate on transnational crime including money laundering and drug trafficking, which is an example of the growing strength of Australia's bilateral relationship with the Republic of Serbia;

(c) the Republic of Serbia recently gained European Union candidate status which suggests an increased potential for future economic cooperation and provides an opportunity for large-scale investment from Australia and a strong cultural and educational exchange;

(d) in 2011, the trade between our two countries increased by 23.8 per cent; and

(e) since March 2012, Serbia has been awarded the preferential status under Australian Customs Act 1901, which has the potential to further increase the trade relations; and

(2) recognises:

(a) that significant progress has been made in Serbia and other countries in the region that participated in the devastating civil war, in moving away from conflict and towards reconciliation and cooperation; and

(b) the great economic, social and cultural contribution of the Serbian people to the vibrancy of our multicultural society.

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (13:02): I wish to speak about Australia's relationship with the Republic of Serbia and the contribution that people of Serbian origin make to our vibrant multicultural community. Serbia's good relationship with Australia has been facilitated by a significant migration of people from Serbian origin to Australia. They have made a tremendous contribution and great inroads to our society. The Serbian community primarily started arriving in Australia at the conclusion of the Second World War. Currently, there are over 100,000 people of Serbian origin living in Australia. Interestingly, five per cent of the Serbian population in Australia live in my electorate of Fowler. Serbian is one of the top five languages spoken in my electorate, following Vietnamese, Arabic, Cantonese and Khmer.

Members of the Serbian community throughout my electorate make a significant and valued contribution in a range of areas. Serbian people are often very keen sportsmen and women, which is evident in the national success in respect of tennis, basketball, water polo and many other sports. As a result of their passion for sport and physical activity, a number of Serbian sporting organisations presently operate with strength in my electorate.

The Bonnyrigg Sports Club is one of the largest sports clubs in my electorate, with entertainment facilities and two sports clubs operating within it. There is the Bonnyrigg White Eagles Football Club, with President Jovan Prlic, and the Bonnyrigg FC, which is the juniors club, with President Dragan Mandic. The Bonnyrigg White Eagles currently play in the NSW Telechoice Premier League, while the junior FC is a very successful part of the Southern Districts Junior Soccer Association.

I have had the opportunity on a number of occasions to meet with the general manager of the club, Jason Woods, and with the club president, Jovan Cubrilo. I am aware of the very
positive contribution that members of the Bonnyrigg Sports Club, particularly the Serbian youth of my area, make to our community.

Only recently I attended the 26th Serbian Folkloric Festival held at the club. The festival is a very large three-day event that celebrates Serbian tradition through food, song and dance and various other forms of entertainment for young and old to enjoy. More than 1,000 children from all around Australia and overseas participated in the folkloric dancing, proudly displaying the traditions of their parents and grandparents. The event was attended by a number of members of the Serbian community as well as their guests, including the Serbian Orthodox Bishop for Australia and New Zealand, His Grace the Right Reverend Irinej; the Serbian Ambassador to Australia, Her Excellency Neda Maletic, who is actually sitting in the gallery today; and a number of state members of parliament, including the member for Cabramatta, Mr Nick Lalich, himself a Serbian immigrant to this country. We were all highly impressed by the hospitality which was shown to us as well as the colour, vibrancy and positive spirit displayed by the Serbian community, showcasing their culture and their traditions.

The Obilic Basketball Club was founded in 1999, consisting of players from across my electorate. The name is derived from the famous medieval Serbian hero Milos Obilic, who was renowned for his heroic actions during the famous Battle of Kosovo in 1389. Many local members of the Obilic Basketball Club are former or current players in the New South Wales basketball league or the Australian basketball association. I want to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of Stevan Sipka, the club president, for establishing and leading the Obilic Basketball Club. The management committee members—including my very good friend Alex Glumac, the club's media officer, as well as Zoran Salipur, Aleks Kuzmanovic, Svetlo Gavrilovic, Milos Prlic and Milan Vasiljevic—need to be commended for the hard work they do in providing opportunities for the young people in my area who want to engage in basketball. The Obilic club will be hosting the 2012 Draza Mihailovic Cup, a Serbian diaspora basketball tournament played annually in cities throughout Australia. I wish the Obilic club all the very best in this very competitive event.

Besides sport, food and dance, religion and the preservation of culture are very important to Serbian Australians. I need to say how active this community is. There are two Serbian Orthodox churches in my electorate: the Serbian Orthodox Mission of St Luke the Apostle in Liverpool, led by Reverend Father Aleksandar Milutinovic, and the Serbian Orthodox Church of St George in Cabramatta with Father Djuro Djurdjevic. I have had the opportunity of visiting both of these churches for masses and seeing how very significant they are in shepherding the needs of the Serbian community.

I also recently attended the Orthodox saint's day celebration of St Nikolaja Zickog organised by the Serbian National Defence Council in Canley Vale. I appreciated being invited to attend such a significant day in the calendar of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and enjoyed immensely participating in a very, very large traditional Serbian banquet. I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge my very good friend Milovan—‘Misha’, as we know him—Karajcic and his supportive wife Boja. Misha is the President of the Serbian National Defence Council, a Serbian community organisation in my electorate. I wish him well in the next council elections in a couple of weeks' time.
I thank him for keeping me up to date about the local Serbian community and making me feel welcome on each occasion I attend.

Last week I spoke on the customs tariff amendment bill in this place, which will allow Serbia to have preferential treatment when it comes to trade with Australia. This amendment to the Customs Act will undoubtedly facilitate growth in trade and greater cooperation between our two countries. Despite being worth just over $14 million, trade between Australia and the Republic of Serbia has grown rapidly. It rose by almost 24 per cent over the last 12 months alone.

The cooperation between Australia and Serbia extends well beyond economic and people relationships. Increasingly, there has been significant collaboration between Australia and Serbia in the area of law enforcement and fighting transnational crime. This cooperation was furthered earlier this year with a visit by the then Serbian Deputy Prime Minister the Hon. Ivica Dacic. I had the opportunity to meet with him personally and see the product of his work. His visit resulted in the signing of a memorandum of agreement between the Australian Federal Police and the Serbian Police on cooperation in tackling transnational crime, particularly in relation to drug trafficking.

The Republic of Serbia has certainly done a great deal to develop into a modern, democratic society with positive and expanding relationships not only in its own immediate region but throughout Europe and the world and, very fortunately, with us here in Australia. Through the enthusiastic efforts of the hardworking Serbian Ambassador to Australia, Her Excellency Neda Maletic, the other representatives of her mission and the Serbian representatives in our community, the relationship between Australia and the Republic of Serbia is not only great but it is developing on a daily basis.

Serbia has an ancient culture and traditions observed by the young and by the young at heart. The Ambassador is a very strong and compassionate voice for the Serbian community across Australia. As well as furthering the good relationships between Australia and the Serbian Republic, you are not only fostering people's culture and retention of their traditions but positively developing the relationships between our two great nations. (Time expired)

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (13:12): Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the presence in the gallery today of the Serbian Ambassador to Australia, Neda Maletic. Ambassador, thank you for coming here today, and congratulations on the fine work you are doing with the Serbian community here in Australia which, as the good member for Fowler said, now numbers almost 100,000 people. I know that you have your hands full, and we hope that you continue enjoying your time as the Serbian Ambassador here in Australia for many years to come.

Going to school here in Australia in the 1970s and early 1980s, I, like most Australians, learnt very little about the long and proud history of the Serbian nation other than the history of the start of World War I with the assassination of the Austrian Archduke. I did not learn that Serbia was our ally in both World War I and World War II. But in the 1990s, when I was working as the export manager for my parents lighting business, I had the privilege of travelling to Dubai, where I met a gentleman named Voja Djordjevic. Voja was a Serbian who lived in Kuwait when the Iraqis invaded. Afterwards, he moved to Dubai, where he set up a business. He was our business partner in Dubai. I had the great privilege of staying with Voja at his family villa in Dubai and enjoying his hospitality on my many visits there. I also
enjoyed his wife's Serbian home cooking and had the pleasure of indulging in one or two of
the fine Serbian wines and cognacs that they served.

I was also staying with him during the NATO bombing in Belgrade. That was a very
distressing time for all Serbian people. I sat up one night with Voja and I asked him to explain
the history of Serbia and the Serbian people, because here in Australia we were simply not
taught about it. We sat up talking all night, and it gave me a much greater appreciation of the
difficulties and the struggles that Serbia as a nation has had over many centuries.

I commend the motion moved by the member for Fowler. I support it 100 per cent.
Member for Fowler, I know that you have a very large Serbian population in your electorate. I
do not think I have as many, but I do have many good Serbian people in my electorate. One
thing I have found is that, although sometimes Serbians might seem a little gruff on the
outside—like my good friend Voja—inside they have a heart of gold. I know that our
Serbian-Australians today are fiercely proud of being Australian. They are patriotic and they
are hardworking. They have made strong contributions to our nation and that will continue in
the years to come. Today they are a valued thread of the fabric which makes Australia the
great nation that it is.

Last week I spoke on the motion about the change to our tariff regime, which gave Serbian
firms greater opportunity to export their goods here to Australia. I thought it would be
interesting to have a look at how small our trade with Serbia actually is. Our two-way trade
with Serbia at the moment is only around $14 million. Serbia actually ranks as only
Australia's 134th largest trading partner. So the increase that we have had is coming off a low
base and it is very welcome. I am sure that in the years to come the two-way trade between
our nations will continue to increase and the relationship between our countries will continue
to grow over the years.

As part of that two-way trade, Australian companies should look at opportunities to export
to Serbia. In the entire financial year of 2011, exports to Serbia were only a little over $2.7
million, which places us as one of the smallest trading nations with them. Those exports were
made up of $500,000 worth of hand and machine tools; $479,000 worth of prams, toys, games
and sporting goods; $335,000 worth of medical equipment; and $195,000 worth of specialised
machinery and parts. So not only does opening our trade relationship further with Serbia give
Serbian countries a greater opportunity to export to Australia; many Australian companies
should also benefit from the improved two-way trade.

The other thing mentioned in the motion is that the Serbian nation has recently gained
European Union candidacy status, which would suggest, correctly, that there is a greatly
increased potential for Serbia to become part of the European Union and increase the trade
and prosperity for Serbia's people. I note that Serbia is hoping that they will have ascension to
the EU by 2015. We hope that will come true. I think the sooner the better for Serbia to be
part of the European Union. We hope for all the people in Serbia that comes true very
quickly.

Several months ago, I had the pleasure of attending with the ambassador a dinner for the
association of camp inmates of Republika Srpska, which I was very proud to attend and speak
at. Another thing I learnt about Serbia was that at Bonnyrigg they had a commemoration to
Draza Mihailovic, who was a Serb general during World War II. Another thing not taught to
our kids during school—it was one thing I never learnt—is how the Serbs were our staunch
allies during World War II. General Draza Mihailovic was a Yugoslav Serb general who, after the Nazis invaded Belgrade, retreated to the mountains and worked with bands of guerrillas. In fact, his groups are credited with rescuing more than 500 Allied airmen who were downed in Nazi occupied territory.

In 1948, President Harry Truman issued him with the American Legion of Merit, which is the highest order that a foreign national can be awarded by the American government.

I would also like to take this time to mention the Liverpool council elections which are coming up. The Liberal Party are very proud to have a local Australian of Serbian heritage—a proud local, a local small-business man working in the design sector, a proud father of two—Vladimir Skataric, standing for Liverpool council for us. We as Liberals are very proud to have a Serbian standing for Liverpool council and we wish him all the best.

The Serbian nation, as I said, has been through a very difficult period of time. Although we greatly welcome this motion, one thing that is raised with me by many Serbian people is that they were disappointed with an earlier motion brought to this parliament with regard to Srebrenica. We hope that all people of Serbia, Bosnia, Croatia and the Balkan regions can put those differences behind them, move on and realise that there were crimes and atrocities committed by both sides. No one side was completely guilty; no one side was completely innocent. It was a very difficult war. Rather than continue to bring up in this parliament things like the Srebrenica events, it would be far better to put those events behind us and look forward to the future where all people from the Balkan regions can move together, integrate as part of the European Union and be a vital part of our world economy.

Again, congratulations to Ambassador Maletic. I hope that you are here for many more years. I hope that you continue your good work and that the Serbian community here in Australia continue the great work that they have done in integrating in our society and making a valuable contribution.

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (13:21): I too would like to acknowledge the presence of Serbian Ambassador Neda Maletic, who has been serving Serbia extremely well and has been informing the community here as well, including members of parliament. I also welcome the opportunity to be able to speak on this very important motion today, even though I only have a few minutes and there is much more that I could say. I would like to congratulate the member for Fowler for bringing this motion to this House. It helps us focus on the resilience of the Serbian people—in Serbia, their forefathers, those around the world and especially those in communities in our electorates all around Australia. I am sure that every member of parliament here has a Serbian community. I certainly have quite a few members of the Serbian community, as well as two Serbian Orthodox churches, in my electorate.

Many people around Australia are somewhat aware of the very deep difficulties experienced in the former Yugoslavia in the later years of the 20th century. Fewer people, though, would fully appreciate what happened in those years. Much of what people may think when they think of that time may have been devised and processed through the US government's media machine under the then Clinton administration. Our knowledge of those times and our understanding of Serbia and its people more generally can only improve and become deeper from a renewed focus with an open mind. Since those tragic days, Serbia has become an important part of Europe and has ensured that they have a dynamic democracy, are
involved in all international scales of international talks on international issues and are part of the greater international community.

If we look at the issues of Serbia, they go back to the early 19th century, to the days of the Ottoman Turk occupation of their land and then that of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, through to the devastation of World War I and World War II. Serbian people suffered greatly during those wars. Of course, there were the great allies of Australia and the Allied forces. We hear many heroic stories of the partisans and those who continued to fight the Nazi oppression, even after the Nazi occupation. There are many heroic stories about where they fought side by side with many members of the Allied forces. Subsequently, there was the takeover by the communists, whose Baltic peoples only started to emerge through the horrors of the 1990s.

I note that in 2000, after the decade of political troubles that so affected the former Yugoslavia, Serbia's economy improved and was on the way up. Since that time, in possibly the first decade of peace and democracy Serbians have enjoyed for many years—I go back to the Ottoman Empire and onwards—people are now confronted by the worst global financial crisis, which has hit all nations, especially European nations.

The 21st century has been a new dawn for the Serbian people, a new century in which they have had an opportunity to rebuild their economy—rebuild their nation and succeed in building a vibrant democracy, which will continue for many years. Much work has been done and much work continues to be done. They have a market economy, which has largely been rolled out and nurtured. Renewed membership of the International Monetary Fund in 2000 was followed by rejoining the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Trade liberalisation, enterprise restructuring and privatisation was followed by the signing of the stabilisation and association agreement with Brussels in 2008 and the full implementation of the international trade agreement with the EU in 2010. That set the path toward possible EU membership in the months or years ahead after an economic contraction due to the GFC that many countries are experiencing. Serbia experienced growth of 1.7 per cent in 2010 and 3.1 per cent in 2011. Serbia is doing much better than some of its neighbouring countries in the region but there is still a long, hard road ahead as we all battle through this economic crisis that has hit the world.

As I said from the outset, Serbs are resilient. I know this to be true from the communities in my electorate. We have over 100,000 people of Serbian background who have made Australia their home. Serbian migrants have brought with them a culture which is rich and dynamic. Historically, Serbia is a literary and artistic nation that has produced many great authors, poets and artists. Of note was Ivo Andric, the 1961 winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature.

In my own electorate I have many Serbian migrants who are now fully fledged members of the Australian community. The Serbian community is serviced by the Serbian Orthodox Parish Community of Sveti Sava located in Mary Street, Hindmarsh, serviced by the Very Reverend Father Zoran Ivanic, who does a great job, and the Serbian Orthodox Church of Sveti Sava of Woodville Park. (Time expired)

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (13:27): To my constituents of Serbian origin and to the ambassador I say: dobar dan. I welcome the opportunity to speak today about a country that has over the last number of decades changed, advanced and developed immensely. I had an opportunity to visit Serbia in 1985 and experienced firsthand the lively capital city of Belgrade and its surrounds, Avala, Sava River Island and even visited Marshal Tito's tomb.
Coming from Australia at that time, when the shops closed at midday on Saturday, to a city where the shops remained open until 10 pm was quite an experience. There are well over 100,000 people of Serbian origin currently living in Australia. A number of my constituents are from Serbia, or are of Serbian origin, arriving in Australia from all parts of Eastern Europe, including Croatia and Bosnia.

Serbia has recently undergone changes that have helped see the country progress. Under the former president, Boris Tadic, Serbia applied for European Union membership in 2009. The European Commission delivered its opinion on the application in October 2011, and early this year Serbia was accepted as an official European Union candidate. While European Union membership is yet to be officially awarded to Serbia, once achieved it will provide the country with a voice in interstate decision making and will continue the cooperation initiated in December 2009 with the abolishment of visa requirements for Serbian passport holders wishing to travel to existing EU member states. This move is a positive step forward for a country that has been greatly damaged by war.

A significant number of Serbians came to Australia during the 1990s from the then Yugoslavia; and while respecting and taking on the Australian way of life, they, nevertheless have kept their traditions, customs and values alive. The most prominent Western Australian Serbian community landmarks include the two churches in North Perth. Every year on 7 January they are filled by hundreds of people for the Orthodox Christmas. Two other landmarks in Western Australia include the Serbian Community Centre in Maddington and the home of Dianella White Eagles, formed in 1978 under the name of Dianella Serbia.

Serbia's rich and extensive culture has contributed to our nation by expanding on the existing multicultural traits that our nation is built on. Apart from contributions such as food and cuisine, which are enjoyed by many, there are a number of Serbians who are well known in Australia and worldwide. Although we cannot claim him for Australia, in the sporting arena perhaps the best known Serb is tennis great Novak Djokovic. In Australia we should also acknowledge Australians of Serbian origin such as national soccer team players Milan Ivunic and Milan Blagoevic. There are also well-known media personalities of Serbian origin such as Karl Stefanovic of the Today program, and how can we forget media personality and Australian 'lambassador' Sam Kekovich.

In the light of improving relations between Serbia and Australia, the Australian Federal Police and the Serbian police have signed an MOU with the aim of working together closely to combat transnational crime. While the MOU is the first formal agreement between the two countries, it does represent a continuation of the longstanding, solid relations established with Serbia during postwar years.

There has been a tendency by some in this country to malign Serbia and those of Serbian heritage for what happened in the civil wars and with Kosovo. I would suggest that there is always more than one side to a story and one should always be very careful in taking a populist view on such issues. Before one criticises Serbia and Serbs, prior to making any form of judgement they should research history and the actions of all sides.

In conclusion, I thank the member for Fowler for putting this motion forward. A number of Cowan constituents are originally from Serbia or are of such descent. One of my staff members is of Serbian origin; a refugee from the wars. Serbs in my area form a significant part of the electorate community, and I wish to take this opportunity to thank them for their
positive contribution and for working with me as their federal representative in making Cowan such a great place to live and work. With those constituents, I look forward to an ever increasing and strengthening relationship between Australia and Serbia in the future.

Sitting suspended from 13:32 to 16:01

BILLs

Crimes Legislation Amendment (Slavery, Slavery-like Conditions and People Trafficking) Bill 2012

Second Reading

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

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (16:01): The Crimes Legislation Amendment (Slavery, Slavery-like Conditions and People Trafficking) Bill 2012 deals with some of the most unspeakable acts that humans can commit against other people, including slavery, slavery-like conditions and people trafficking. It also deals with organ trafficking, which is an incredibly diabolical crime. Clearly these are crimes that do not occur particularly regularly in Australia, but when they do we want to make sure that the full force of the law would be brought down against perpetrators.

People who would be subject to this type of crime—be it forced labour, forced marriage, organ trafficking or harbouring a victim—would be the most vulnerable people in our society. If you were trafficked into slavery, you would generally come from very disadvantaged conditions, often overseas. The impact on victims of such ordeals would leave them traumatised for life. Clearly in modern-day Australia we have no place for this type of violence, intimidation and deprivation. As a community, we do not accept, under any circumstances, the crimes of slavery, trafficking and forced marriage. These forms of abuse have absolutely no place in Australia.

The coalition will support this bill, which seeks to strengthen and expand the ability of prosecutors and investigators to prevent and fight these crimes by introducing harsher punishment, as well as new offences for forced labour, forced marriage and trafficking of both people and organs. The coalition does not believe it is important to amend this bill. The coalition does, however, believe it is important to amend the bill if it is appropriate to do so, depending on the recommendations that are put forward by the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee. Clearly we agree with the intent, but we just want to make sure it is drafted correctly and does not have any unintended consequences. Given the seriousness of the issues this bill deals with, the government should have waited for the findings of the Senate committee to ensure that the legislation clearly outlines and reflects our society’s values on slavery and trafficking.

The amendments proposed by this bill seek to ensure that the slavery offence applies to conduct that renders a person a slave, as well as conduct involving a person who is already a slave. It extends the application of existing offences of deceptive recruiting and sexual servitude to non-sexual servitude and all forms of deceptive recruiting and increases penalties for debt bondage offences. It also amends existing definitions to broaden the range of exploitative conduct that is to be criminalised. The Crimes Act 1914 is to be amended to
increase the availability of reparation orders to individual victims of Commonwealth offences. Consequential amendments are proposed to the Migration Act, Proceeds of Crime Act and Telecommunications (Interception and Access) Act. Although the offences are described as new, most amount to definitional changes of existing offences in divisions 270 and 271 of the criminal code. The important new offences concern organ trafficking and forced marriage.

The bill will criminalise the conduct of a person who conceals, harbours or receives a victim through trafficking, slavery or a slavery-like offence. This bill will also criminalise the conduct of a person who uses threats, deception or coercion to bring about a marriage or a marriage-like relationship. Importantly, this would also apply to third parties involved who may not be the victim but are party to a forced marriage. The forced marriage offences include strict liability for being party to a forced marriage. If the prosecution establishes that a person was forced into a marriage, the other party is presumed to be guilty of an offence unless he or she can establish a lawful excuse. This is justified on the basis that the elements needed to establish the excuse would usually lie peculiarly within the knowledge of the accused and it would be significantly more difficult for the prosecution to disprove than for the accused to establish. It is possible that the imposition of strict liability could result in injustice in particular cases and it is therefore recommended that the government's justification be closely examined.

Given the nature of forced marriage, it is often difficult to gather reliable statistics. Therefore, one can assume that the cases that we know about are probably only a portion of what might be occurring in private. These new laws will criminalise forced marriage and put in place penalties of up to seven years in jail. It is important to make sure that the appropriate punishment for these inhuman crimes is put in place to act as a sufficient deterrent. It is vital that we legislate to protect young people at risk of forced marriages, as the harmful consequences can include emotional and physical abuse, as was a loss of education and a restriction of freedoms.

This bill will also create a stand-alone offence of forced labour where a reasonable person in the position of the victim would not consider themselves free because of the use of threat, coercion or deception. The existing offences of slavery and forced servitude are to be broadened to include forced labour. This is to capture the apparently increasing incidence of slavery-like conditions outside of the sex industry. The existing definitions, which require the use of force and threats to maintain the condition of servitude, will now include the use of coercion, threat or deception. Coercion will include duress, psychological oppression and abuse of power or taking advantage of a person's vulnerability. The prohibition does not extend to conditions justified or excused by or under a law. It also does not extend to lawful detrimental action under standard relationships between employers and employees. However, the extent to which this is the case needs to be carefully examined. Phrases like 'psychological oppression' and 'taking advantage of a person's vulnerability' have a strong subjective element and it is not inconceivable that they might be alleged in an industrial relations context. Of particular concern are the strict liability offences and the expanded concept of coercion, which is open to abuse in an industrial relations context. Under this bill, the new laws criminalising forced labour will attract criminal penalties of up to 12 years imprisonment.

Importantly, this bill also creates a stand-alone offence criminalising the trafficking of a victim either to or from Australia or within Australia for the removal of his or her organ or
organ trafficking. This amendment will clarify the circumstances in which an offence of organ trafficking will apply, including situations where a victim's organ is not ultimately removed. These organ-trafficking offences will ensure that Australia meets its international obligations as well as comprehensively criminalise this conduct.

Organ trafficking is currently covered, though not explicitly, by the human-trafficking provisions. The consent of the victim of the procedure will be immaterial. There appears to have been only one discontinued investigation in Australia, although it is estimated that, globally, up to 15,000 kidneys are bought and sold illegally each year. The trade is alleged to exist substantially in China, Pakistan, Egypt, Colombia and the Philippines. It is reported that patients can pay up to $200,000 for a kidney to criminal gangs who harvest these organs from vulnerable people, often for as little as $5,000.

The World Health Organization recently warned of the alarming rise in the illegal trade of human organs, reporting that an estimated 10 per cent of transplant procedures involved black-market organs and that around one new kidney is sold every hour on the black market. That is why it is so important that we legislate against this evil trade that plays on people's vulnerability and weakness. This bill will seek to punish those who exploit victims of the illegal organ-trafficking trade.

It is really difficult to imagine a more horrendous crime than that of organ trafficking, and the fact that it is on the increase should concern all members of this House. I do congratulate the government for taking these measures to make it a separate offence.

This bill will ensure that those who help to enslave or traffic people can be charged, as well as those who keep the slaves. This will broaden the ability of prosecutors and the courts to bring all those involved to justice. This bill will also establish the much-needed stand-alone offence of organ trafficking, and will also improve the availability of reparations to victims of these offences, including people trafficking and slavery. Importantly, this bill will broaden the existing sexual servitude offence to apply to all forms of servitude and deceptive recruiting offences. The penalties to be imposed range from four to 25 years imprisonment, which is broadly within the continuum under the existing provisions. It is important that they be scrutinised to ensure that penalties for trafficking are consonant with people-smuggling provisions.

The Coalition reserves the right to move amendments based on the recommendations of the relevant Senate committee inquiries. Once again, I would have thought it would have been prudent for the government to wait for that Senate committee to report, but in this instance we do not oppose the passage of this bill. Indeed, we highly support its intent, but surely it would make sense that it be properly scrutinised by the parliament through the committee process. I would urge the government to consider that in future when it does set its legislative program so that these committee inquiries can be concluded before we look at it in either chamber.

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (16:11): I too rise to support the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Slavery, Slavery-like Conditions and People Trafficking) Bill 2012 and I think it is a bit of an indictment of a modern society that we need to even contemplate this. People trafficking is something that would seem very foreign to most of us in this place. The bill before us will amend the Crimes Act 1914 to establish new offences listed under the concept of slavery and people trafficking and extend the existing definition to include forms of exploitation that have emerged, or become increasingly common, over recent years.
The new offences that will be included under the concept of exploitation within the Australian criminal legislation include forced labour, forced marriage, harbouring a victim of organ trafficking and a number of slavery-like offences. Broadening the legal definition of slavery and people trafficking and criminalising a wide range of offences that fall under these two categories will ensure a more thorough approach, particularly in respect of the prevention, but also the detection, of these activities, as well as looking at the protection of victims within our legal system itself. It also expands the traditional understanding of the term 'capture' to involve non-physical forms of domination, including psychological oppression and misuse of a person's vulnerability. Importantly, the bill will also increase the penalties to reflect the seriousness of offences relating to enslaving and trafficking of people.

There were, as I understand it, 45 allegations of trafficking of persons reported to the Australian authorities last year. Almost all of these were adult Asian females that had come into the country for the purpose of commercial or sexual exploitation. Regrettably for those of us in New South Wales, 65 per cent of those cases related to Sydney issues. Many victims are brought to this country under false pretences or feel trapped, whether it be due to debt or debt-related issues, fear or threat. They often have difficulties in reporting their situation, given the fact of their language barriers. That does make it certainly a concern, particularly in an electorate like mine, which is the most multicultural electorate in the whole of Australia. In addition to that, 30 per cent of my electorate is Asian.

Project Respect, an Australian trafficking in persons advocacy group, has suggested for several years that around 1,000 women are trafficked for prostitution alone each year in this country. According to the United Nations, in terms of a global position in the vicinity of 27 million men, women and children are either owned or denied their freedom by working in slavery-like conditions. In addition to that, 40 million people are also cited by the United Nations as being refugees. That shows the dimension of the issue. Of these 27 million, 800,000 people are trafficked across borders for the purpose of sex work, migrant workers, debt slaves, child soldiers or any other degrading purpose. Of the people trafficked across borders, not unexpectedly, 80 per cent are women and girls.

From my participation as chair of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement, I am aware that human trafficking is identified as one of the fast-growing transnational crimes and one of the three most profitable transnational crimes, along with drugs and arms trafficking. The people involved in this do not do it simply because they wish to be people traffickers; they do it because there is money to be made in this business. They are prepared to sell people. People trafficking is a sad reflection on any modern society and demonstrates that many in this world do not value human life and freedom.

I commend Commissioner Tony Negus and his Australian Federal Police. I think they are doing a fantastic job in this regard. As I said, from my involvement in the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Law Enforcement, I am certainly aware of the work that they are doing. They are certainly making a difference in this respect through applied intelligence and detection methods. Whilst Australia is not immune to the evil of this crime, certainly when looking at many other parts of the world we remain relatively unscathed—although, as I indicated a little earlier, the number of Asian women being brought into this country for sexual exploitation certainly makes you wonder. The only reason they are coming here is that there is a market.
The bill will further strengthen our ability to fight predators in this area and also protect the victims. It will ensure that we are far more efficient in monitoring and detecting illegal transaction activity and all that associated with people trafficking.

One of the new offences created in the bill includes the definition of 'forced labour', where a person does not feel the freedom to leave a place of employment due to threat, compulsion or deception. I have spoken many times in this place about the vulnerable position of migrant workers—and outworkers often find themselves in this situation. One thing that is within the Australian psyche is the issue of sweatshops. People engaged in exploitation in this area of employment are generally migrant workers. They are very, very vulnerable to exploitation due to significant language difficulties and a lack of understanding of the Australian legal system and their rights at work. This bill criminalises forced labour and establishes the punishment for predators to be as high as 12 years of incarceration.

The recent amendments to the fair work bill, which was carried in this place—although I know it was opposed by those opposite—were aimed at protecting the rights of contract workers in the textile, clothing and footwear industry. The bill was a very significant step towards ensuring that vulnerable people in this country are not exploited. Last Saturday I, along with Bich Thuy Pham, from Asian Women At Work, addressed a forum on the exploitation of workers. Particularly in south-west Sydney, people of migrant background are being forced to work in sweatshops—people who did not understand their legal rights, did not understand what is available to them and did not understand their rights at work.

A division having been called in the House of Representatives—

Sitting suspended from 16:20 to 16:37

Mr HAYES: Before we attended to the division, I was indicating that, when members of the opposition voted against the provisions of the Fair Work bill, with respect to outworkers they should be conscious of the fact that those amendments, like these amendments, were not done just because they could be done; they were done because there was a market in exploiting migrant workers. Regrettably, much of that exploitation occurs in my electorate. To line up and take a political position to oppose industrial relations legislation that seeks to protect these people is tantamount to closing your eyes to the issue of exploitation itself. It is a lack of options that forces desperate people, looking for their own survival and that of their family, into working and living conditions that would deny them essential basic human rights.

We should take all measures to ensure that we are not as a nation inadvertently party to the exploitation or ill treatment of individuals.

This bill broadens the definition of 'servitude' from the existing 'sexual servitude' to cover industries other than just the sex industry. People are being exploited and subjected to slavery and trafficking in a number of environments. The bill ensures tough consequences for those who assist in violating victims, even if they are not involved in enslaving them.

The need to establish a tough regime in respect of combating organ trafficking is unbelievable but necessary. Although Australia is lucky enough not to have a large number of issues of organ trafficking, this is a serious global issue and requires urgent attention. The AFP are investigating their very first case of alleged organ trafficking now as a result of the trade that is occurring in human body parts. As I said, it is a very sad reflection on modern society. Unfortunately, there are many individuals who are desperate to survive and are forced
to risk their health and their lives and resort to selling organs on the black market. Many are unwilling participants in this very sad and chilling trade.

The criminals in many of these countries use people's vulnerability, with respect to deception, violence or coercion, to obtain organs from the poor, mainly in underdeveloped countries, and sell them at astronomical prices to critically ill patients in more affluent countries. According to the World Health Organisation there are about 10,000 operations annually.

The bill criminalises the use of threat or coercion with respect to forced marriage or marriage-like relationships. Being a party to such an offence would bring a new punishment exceeding seven years imprisonment. Regrettably, there are increasing reports in this country that Australian-born girls as young as 14 or 15 are being forced into unwanted marriages overseas. These girls should be entitled to the same degree of protection as any other girl—daughters or, in my case, granddaughters. It is very regrettable that we now find ourselves in a situation where we need to make laws about that, but it is necessary. Forced marriages, forced labour, the trafficking of people for sexual purposes and organ trade do not have a place in modern society. We need to accept that these are certainly realities around the globe and we should be doing everything humanly possible to prevent their occurrence in this country and to co-operate with international law enforcement to attack those who perpetrate that trade elsewhere. This bill encourages greater protection of the vulnerable and those who are exploited and increases the punishment for those who participate in taking advantage of the victims.

I would also like to use this opportunity to commend the very good work of the Josephite Counter-Trafficking Project and the Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans. These two organisations do a tremendous job in assisting the victims of people-trafficking. The Josephite Counter-Trafficking Project was established by the Sisters of St Joseph in 2005 to provide spiritual and emotional support to victims of trafficking. I know because I have actually met the sisters as they have been operating in my electorate doing precisely that, particularly with young Asian women who have been trafficked in this country for sexual exploitation. The sisters closely collaborate with government agencies and non-government organisations, including the Red Cross and the Salvation Army, to establish a healing process for those who have undergone the trauma of people-trafficking. The Sisters of St Joseph have demonstrated the importance of government departments, the Australian Federal Police, NGOs and members of the wider community working together to effectively address the issue of people trafficking.

As I said from the outset, it is sad that we need to make laws in this respect. However, the crimes are certainly occurring to fulfil a market. As we know in terms of prostitution, there is a market for forced labour in this country. I commend this bill and the efforts of the government to eradicate this vile form of trade occurring within our boundaries.

**Mr CRAIG KELLY** (Hughes) (16:43): I rise to speak on the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Slavery, Slavery-like Conditions and People Trafficking) Bill 2012. On a point of principle, this is obviously an issue where there is an agreement between the government and the opposition. Combating and stamping out all forms of slavery and people trafficking has been a bipartisan ideal of this parliament since Federation. It was back in 1953 that Australia first became a signatory to the UN slavery convention under the prime ministership
of Sir Robert Menzies. The slavery convention binds signatory countries to prevent forced labour from developing into conditions analogous to slavery and for the overall complete suppression of slavery in all its forms.

I would note, however, that the Crimes Legislation (Slavery, Slavery-like Conditions and People Trafficking) Bill 2012 has been referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs. I also note that the bill has also been referred to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee. The chair of the House committee, the member for Moreton, reported to the House in late June that to avoid duplication the House committee would end its inquiry. I agree that there is nothing to be gained from duplication of this inquiry, and that forcing stakeholders to double their submissions will not benefit either committee, or be in the best interests of the stakeholders. This is also true for the public hearings involved in looking into these bills.

It makes good logical sense not to run parallel inquiries in both houses. As such, I fully support allowing the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee to lead the inquiry into these bills. However, I do point out that the member for Moreton suggested on 28 June this year that the House committee could not add 'value to the work of the Senate inquiries'. Sadly, we here in this House will not benefit from the value of the work of the Senate committee. The Senate inquiry has been given a completion date that will not coincide with the consideration of these bills by the House of Representatives. As such, we will not be able to fully benefit from the inquiry that is currently taking place. We must be sure that, if the inquiry is to take place in only one of the two committees, both houses can properly benefit from its findings.

One particular aspect of slavery that is covered in this bill is forced marriage. I believe this form of slavery is worth highlighting as one of the most inhumane forms of slavery of all. Unfortunately, this form of slavery still exists widely across the globe today, even here in Australia. The impact this has on those involved can lead to self-harm and even suicide. A forced marriage is a union where one or both people do not want to marry each other but are forced to, usually by family members, against their wishes. It exists in, and is a blight upon, many countries across the globe. People may be physically threatened or emotionally blackmailed into a marriage with someone they do not want to marry. This may be due to cultural, religious or financial reasons.

Regardless of the reason, the impact on those forced into a marriage remains the same. Forced marriage goes against a person's human rights. It strips people of their right to self-determination and puts them in a situation that is harmful. Many people who are forced into marrying are young, mainly young girls. Girls as young as 10 years of age are reported in countries such as the UK as being forced into marrying against their wishes. The harm that comes from forced marriage can manifest in many ways, from psychological problems such as depression and anxiety to physical abuse at the hands of the partner or the families. Many who are forced into marrying end up harming themselves, and some even take their own lives. They feel they do not have control over their own lives, and often that is worse than having no life at all.

Sadly, we have recently seen forced marriage arrive on our shores. There have been cases, apparently, where Australian girls have been taken overseas to countries where they have no legal protections and are forced to marry against their will. In many cases they are even forced
to marry members of their own family. We have seen a recent ABC *Four Corners* program, titled 'Without consent', which cites several cases of young girls living in Australia who were forced into unwanted marriages back in Pakistan. We have also heard a recent case of a 13-year-old girl who told her teacher at a Melbourne high school that she would not be attending classes anymore because she was due to travel overseas to be married. Fortunately, the teacher contacted the Victorian Department of Human Services, who used our Family Law Act to make an application to the Federal Magistrates Court for that child's name to be placed on an airport watch list so her parents would not be able to remove her from Australia.

Last year we also saw a case, reported in the *Australian*, of a 16-year-old Australian girl who won the right to be placed on an airport watch list to stop her parents taking her to Lebanon for a forced marriage, only after a federal magistrate ruled that there was a psychological risk to the girl unless the court intervened to stop her from being married to a man she had met only once.

But what was particularly concerning about this case was that the young girl was actually forced to take that court action by herself and in secret from her parents. Equally disturbing was that the court said such applications are now becoming increasingly common. There was another case, also reported in the *Australian*, back in 2010 where a Sydney family was banned from taking their daughter, 17, to Lebanon for an arranged marriage after she had been forced to call the Australian Federal Police from home while her mother was out, saying she had been booked to fly out of Australia against her will.

This problem is also happening in the UK. We know that last year the British government, which has a special task force on forced marriage, investigated more than 1,400 cases of forced marriage, which were mainly occurring in Islamic communities. However, I do note that the Australian Muslim scholar Tariq Syed is reported as confirming that forced marriage was a cultural practice that is being applied in many different countries across Asia, regardless of their religion.

We in this parliament need to send a very clear and unambiguous statement with this bill. Forced marriage, the forcing of a young girl into a marriage she has not consented to, is not just another multicultural practice. Forced marriages are completely abhorrent to our Australian way of life and must not be accepted. We must also look at education programs to make sure that new migrants are fully informed of our laws here in Australia, which provide that a forced marriage is considered a criminal offence. We must also teach our vulnerable young girls in schools of their rights so that, if they are in a situation where they are being forced into marriage, they know our Australian police forces will support them.

In the short time remaining to me, I would like to quickly comment on the aspect of this bill which clarifies our law with regard to organ trafficking. Unfortunately, here in Australia we often think that we have a world-class organ transplant program. Although we have a very successful rate of organ transplant in Australia, we are rated only 24th in the world. In fact, Australians are only likely to receive half the number of transplants as citizens in the top countries. For example, in 2010 Spain performed 78 transplants per one million citizens, whereas in Australia we performed only 43. There has been a recent improvement, but it comes off a very low base. Because of our poor performance in being unable to match Spain for number of organ transplants, 1,000 people per year in this country miss out on transplants as a result.
We support this bill because we must have a legal framework in place so that the sorts of stories we hear about—forced marriages and organ trafficking—are a thing of the past. There must be protections in place to stop the abuse of rights and to save those who are forced into this living nightmare. The bill we are considering makes a step in this regard, and I welcome that. However, there have been some concerns with the application of strict liability. Once again, this is a case in point where members of the House would have benefited from reviewing the thorough analysis currently being prepared by senators involved in the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee. On balance, however, I believe the inclusion of these strict liability interpretations are justified on the basis that those authorities prosecuting those parties in a forced marriage will have more difficulty in disproving an excuse under the law than the accused will have in establishing one.

By and large, the amendments contained within the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Slavery, Slavery-like Conditions and People Trafficking) Bill 2012 will be supported by the coalition. In reviewing a number of the submissions to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee, it could be anticipated that a number of amendments will be brought on to correct a number of technical errors and iron out some of the recognised complexities at a later stage in the bill's passage. Perhaps by then we will have the benefit of a completed Senate inquiry into this legislation.

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (16:54): The Crimes Legislation Amendment (Slavery, Slavery-like Conditions and People Trafficking) Bill 2012 is a significant piece of legislation that provides much-needed amendments to the Criminal Code, most critically in the areas of slavery-like practices, forced marriage and organ trafficking.

This is important legislation and I am particularly proud to be speaking on this bill today. There are amendments here that are of great consequence. However, I want to talk first about the way this bill addresses the evils of forced organ donations and organ trafficking. The shortage of organ donors in Australia and worldwide has been well documented and this shortage has created an evil black market in organ trafficking. This illegal trade preys on, and exploits, the vulnerable and the poor. Although it is a criminal offence to traffic a person to remove an organ, we know that this abominable trade exists. As a vocal and passionate campaigner for organ and tissue donation, I am pleased that these amendments will make clear the specific circumstances in which an organ related offence will apply.

There are thriving criminal operations trafficking human organs because of the shortage of organ donors worldwide and the increasing demands for organs, given the medical advances in donor replacement. That is why we need more organ donors and to continue the incredible work of those who raise awareness of organ and tissue donation here in Australia. I am the current chair of the Parliamentary Friendship Group for Organ and Tissue Donation here in Parliament House. I set up the group when I was elected in 2010, having spent three or four years on the board of the Gift of Life Foundation here in Canberra. The member for Brisbane was deputy chair and we managed to have a few events that were highly successful in terms of raising awareness amongst our parliamentary colleagues of organ and tissue donation and also of the misinformation that exists in the community about what actually happens when people die and what actually happens in the whole process of organ and tissue donation. I think we did a pretty good job of that, and I miss the member for Brisbane being involved in
the parliamentary friends group, but now look forward to her colleague, the member for Higgins, following in her footsteps.

In that time on the Gift of Life Foundation board, I was involved in a major transformation and reform of organ and tissue donation here in Australia. The former Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, invested $150 million in completely revamping the way that Australia manages organ and tissue donation, and I was involved in those really early days of establishing what it meant and how it was going to work, and most importantly, on the communication and education programs. That $150 million has gone into a range of activities in terms of streamlining the process, providing clinicians on site and boosting the ability of us to conduct transplants. As a former speaker mentioned, Australia is a world leader in organ and tissue donation transplants; we are the world's best practice. Unfortunately, we have significantly low numbers of people donating their organs and tissues, and one of the major elements of that investment in the $150 million, apart from the streamlining of the processes and enhancing the medical teams and abilities, was conducting significant and broad-reaching education and community communication programs.

We have seen two tranches of those programs roll out. One is the It's OK program, but the most recent one is about the fact that you need to have the conversation with your family to let them know your intentions if you do want to become an organ and tissue donor. It is vitally important because, unfortunately, once you have passed on, families can overturn your decision. So it is really important that you let them know that you are very strongly committed to being an organ and tissue donor and that you want those wishes fulfilled once you have passed on. That is vitally important.

I know, as a result of that campaign and also from the work that we have done here in Canberra, that a number of school students throughout Canberra—particularly from schools that have been involved in the Terry Connolly walk we do around the lake every year to celebrate organ and tissue donation week—have been having conversations with their parents about making their intentions clear and also discussing what their parents want to do.

So the students, our young Australians, are in a way actually 'managing up' this conversation on organ and tissue donation. It is vitally important, and it would be nice if it were a two-way conversation—with our children having the conversation with their parents and the parents having the conversation with their children.

Once you have passed on, it is really up to the family to make the decision, so you may need to make your intentions clear that you want to be an organ and tissue donor. I really applaud recent moves by the New South Wales government. There has been a great deal of confusion as a result of what actually constitutes you signing your intention. Apart from having the conversation, a lot of people have cards that they get from Medicare. In New South Wales they have had for many, many years, I understand, a system whereby when you get your driver's licence you can sign up to be an organ and tissue donor. People were under the impression that they had actually given consent to be an organ and tissue donor through their New South Wales licence, but it had no real force. That is why we keep coming back to the need to have the conversation with members of your family and let your intentions be known.

We have a very strong community here that is very active in organ and tissue donation and raising awareness about it. As I mentioned before, Terry Connolly, who was a former judge here and a former Attorney-General in the ACT, unfortunately died riding up Red Hill when
he was only 50, and he donated his corneas. It was a significant donation and one that really resonated with the community and raised awareness amongst the legal community as well as other parts of the Public Service and the school community that I just highlighted.

I have seen reports suggesting that up to 10 per cent of kidney transplants are carried out with illegally obtained kidneys. Organs Watch, an organisation that monitors the illegal traffic of organs, has estimated that 15,000 to 20,000 illegally-trafficked-kidney operations occur each year. That is a significant number. Obviously the most effective way to end the unlawful trade in organs is to drastically increase the number of people leaving their organs for donation. However, as we work towards this goal, we must also provide the tools to prevent the trafficking of illegally obtained organs.

The previous speaker's comments on organ and tissue donation are to be applauded. But the reason that Spain is such a world leader in terms of organ and tissue donation is that they have a very different system to ours. So, in a way, it is comparing apples and oranges. That said, compared to other countries that have a similar system to Australia, we are still way behind. So we do need to make significant improvements. We are improving as a result of the reform program we introduced, but we still need to do a lot more.

The measures contained in this bill provide law enforcement agencies with the necessary mechanisms to investigate and prosecute crimes such as organ trafficking and other exploitative actions. We know that as enforcement agencies begin to close loopholes and prosecute criminal behaviour, people engaged in organ trafficking, as well as those involved in barbaric, slavery-like practices, will look for ways to escape detection. After widespread consultation, the government is now introducing amendments that seek to establish new offences and extend the application of existing offences, along with measures designed to amend existing definitions that address other forms of coercion and oppression. The stand-alone offence of organ trafficking will clarify the circumstances in which an organ related offence will apply.

Another very important component of these amendments is the establishment of new offences dealing with forced marriage. We have been made aware that forced marriage does sometimes occur in Australia and we know this is not always reported. That is why specific criminalisation of this practice is necessary. It must be stressed that these amendments in no way target consensual religious or cultural marriages. These amendments talk about 'forced' marriages. For me, as a woman, I think slavery and forced marriages are probably my worst nightmare.

It is one of those things where, if my nieces or my godchildren travel overseas, I am always worried sick about something—more the slavery than anything else—like that happening. I know that is an extreme reaction to one of my nieces or godchildren travelling overseas, but it is one of my worst nightmares. We see those movies where women are corralled into packing cases, ready to be farmed off as sex slaves or slaves of other kinds. It is a woman's worst nightmare; hence my compulsion to speak on the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Slavery, Slavery-like Conditions and People Trafficking) Bill 2012 today. As a woman, the thought of that actually happening is my greatest fear. I really fear for it happening to my godchildren and my nieces.

Repression of women and taking away their freedom is the denial of the most basic human right. With respect to the forced marriage issue, so too is the right to choose a partner and the
right to marry, free from compulsion and intimidation. So many women throughout the world do not share the same rights that we have in Australia, rights that we take for granted.

In closing, another important amendment contained in this bill provides clarification of issues around the use of consent as a defence. We are talking here about truly despicable and heinous crimes, including suppressing someone's free will and their ability to make their own decisions. The amendments to this bill provide clarification so that defendants cannot escape liability if their actions lead to a victim acquiescing to his or her treatment.

The bill further addresses another and related crime, that of debt bondage. The government recognises that current penalties do not adequately indicate how serious the offence of debt bondage really is. There are measures here that indicate the seriousness of offences related to debt bondage, a practice we know can result in slavery-like practices and the suppression of basic rights and freedoms, particularly for women.

Overall, the amendments contained in this bill are designed to address both the overt and more subtle forms of coercion and exploitation, including psychological oppression and the abuse of power or a person's vulnerability. The amendments in this bill will protect the most vulnerable and will enhance the ability of law enforcement agencies to prosecute those who commit these most serious crimes. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms GAMBARO (Brisbane) (17:07): I rise also to make a contribution to the debate on the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Slavery, Slavery-like Conditions and People Trafficking) Bill 2012. I just want to add my comments to the comments of the previous speakers, including those of the member for Canberra.

The bill was introduced into the House by the Attorney-General, the Hon. Nicola Roxon, on 30 May 2012. Most people seem to think of slavery as some prehistoric happening that comes from another era, something that is a blight on our history and something that should be long forgotten. We associate it with the 19th century and before and with the shameful actions of a bygone era. Thankfully, the more traditional forms of slavery have been abolished and are to be seen no more. But, sadly, some forms of slavery, mainly forced labour, forced marriage and organ trafficking still exist. As the Attorney said in her second reading speech:

A common factor of contemporary slavery and trafficking—from forced labour and forced marriage to organ trafficking—is the misuse and abuse of power. And such an abuse has no place here in Australia.

I want to add my comments to those of the member for Canberra. I enjoyed working with her for a limited time on the Parliamentary Friendship Group for Organ and Tissue Donation here in parliament. I also want to commend her on her work previously on DonateLife. Previously, before coming to this place, I was an ambassador for the AMA in Queensland for raising awareness of organ donation. We have come a long way. There have been a number of very successful campaigns. The member for Canberra spoke about the 'It's OK' campaign, which has been running quite successfully, and about having the conversation. The conversation is a difficult thing to have, but more and more people are talking to their loved ones and, in recent times, we have definitely seen an increase in the number of organ donorship rates.

Where it does fall apart, however, is when the family has to make the decision, and sometimes the family can decide that they do not want to proceed. More coordination also needs to be done in hospitals to make sure that the right people are there to speak to the family, particularly at this very delicate and vulnerable time—people who are trained on how
to speak to the family and how to deal humanely and compassionately with them when the moment of donation occurs.

So a lot of work has been done there, but I believe there is still a lot more work to be done, particularly in the coordination stage in hospitals and on making sure that GPs also have an active role to play. GPs are the most trusted people that members of the community go to and I think that they can play a more active role in increasing awareness and making sure that they run on-the-ground campaigns to encourage their patients to sign up, to fill out the forms, and to make sure that they do have the conversation with their loved ones.

All of the speakers in this debate have spoken about the bill. The coalition is largely supportive of this bill. However, we reserve our right to move amendments in the other place depending on the outcome of the committee inquiries around the bill.

The bill amends the Criminal Code Act 1995 to insert offences of forced labour, forced marriage, organ trafficking and harbouring a victim. The amendments proposed by this bill seek to ensure that the slavery offence applies to conduct which renders a person a slave, as well as conduct which involves a person who is already a slave. It extends the application of existing offences of deceptive recruiting and sexual servitude to non-sexual servitude and all forms of deceptive recruiting—and, sadly, that is occurring all over the world at the moment: people are promised lucrative jobs only to find that they are fronts for sexual servitude. The bill also increases penalties for debt bondage offences. It also amends existing definitions to broaden the range of exploitative conduct that is to be criminalised.

The Crimes Act 1914 is to be amended to increase the availability of reparation orders to individual victims of Commonwealth offences, and consequential amendments are proposed to the Migration Act 1958, the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 and the Telecommunications (Interception and Access) Act 1979. Although the offences are described as new, most amount to definitional changes to existing offences in divisions 270 and 271 of the Criminal Code. The important new offences concern organ trafficking and forced marriage.

Organ trafficking is currently covered, though not so explicitly, by the human trafficking provisions. These amendments are not controversial, and it is hoped that the prosecutions will be extremely rare. The consent of a victim of a procedure will be immaterial. There appears to be only one organ trafficking investigation in Australia, though it has been estimated that there are from 15,000 to 20,000 kidneys bought and sold illegally each year. The trade is much more substantial in countries such as China, Pakistan, Egypt, Colombia and the Philippines.

The existing offences of slavery and forced servitude are to be broadened to include forced labour rather than just sexual servitude. That is apparently to capture the increasing incidence of slavery-like conditions outside the sex industry. It is widely reported that there has been an increase of these slavery-like conditions in areas such as hospitality. The existing definitions, which require the use of force and threats to maintain the condition of servitude, will now include the use of coercion, threat or deception, and coercion includes duress, psychological oppression, abuse of power or taking advantage of a person's vulnerability.

As to the abuse of power—and the member for Canberra spoke about this—our power is the most fundamental right that we have. When we lose our power, we are in quite a desperate situation. Everyone should have the ability to control his or her destiny.
The prohibition does not extend to conditions justified or excused by or under a law. The penalties imposed will range from four years to 25 years imprisonment, which we believe is a good thing. They are within the continuum under the existing provisions. It is recommended, however, that they be scrutinised to ensure that penalties for trafficking are consistent with people-smuggling provisions.

When we are dealing with issues such as forced marriage, it becomes difficult because many religious cultures, unfortunately, see it as acceptable; and many cultures see the marriage of a 12- or 13-year-old as acceptable. However, there is one underlying principle: it is not acceptable in this country. In their submission to the committee, the Migration Institute of Australia said:

The victims of such offences are often vulnerable, with limited English language skills and anxiety over their migration status which is often uncertain. They fear the perpetrators, the criminal justice system and deportation. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that victims of forced marriage may also be subject to further exploitation as they may be used to sponsor a person to come into Australia.

The Settlement Council of Australia also provided a submission to the committee. In their submission they said that they supported the proposed legislation because they believe that, by broadening the range of exploitative behaviour covered and by increasing the penalties imposed on offenders and compensation offered to victims, those vulnerable in the migrant and refugee communities will be better protected.

It is very pleasing to see a consensus amongst all of the stakeholders on this bill, and they make some very good points in their submissions. The new penalties for the new offences, and the increases in existing penalties, are, in my view, entirely appropriate and, hopefully, will act as a sufficient deterrent for people thinking of committing these crimes.

In conclusion, the coalition fully support the intent of the bill. As I said earlier, we reserve our right to make some amendments, again depending on the outcomes of the committee inquiry. I commend the bill to the chamber.

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (17:17): I, like the previous speaker, am very pleased to rise to speak on the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Slavery, Slavery-like Conditions and People Trafficking) Bill 2012. Australia first put together its national strategy on slavery and slavery-like conditions in 2003, so this bill has been a while coming. But it is a very, very important bill—since 2003 the ways that some very evil people in this world have found to exploit others has no doubt changed. Today the great majority of victims of people trafficking identified in Australia have been trafficked for exploitation within the commercial sex industry. That is probably, for many of us, the way we think of slavery. However, over the past two years Australian authorities have identified a number of men and women who have been trafficked for exploitation in other industry sectors. At the same time, investigations have indicated changes in the techniques used by traffickers to adapt to law enforcement activity and changes in migration regulations.

The nature of people trafficking varies from region to region and from country to country. In its most visible form, it usually involves women and children trafficked for sexual exploitation. But around the world we can find other examples of people being trafficked for other purposes, including forced labour in a range of industries—construction, forestry, mining, domestic and sweatshop labour and hospitality—illicit adoption, street begging,
forced recruitment into the military or armed forces, the harvesting of body organs and, as we have heard, forced marriage.

People trafficking occurs across international borders but it also occurs within nations. A range of people may be involved in the trafficking process. The stories that we as Australians have seen far too often on various current affairs programs which show us the plight of some of the people who have been traded into the sex industry are appalling. But long before it gets to that stage, there are many people involved in the trafficking process, including those engaged in the initial recruitment, those that arrange transportation and those that arrange false documentation. There may also be a broker, a brothel owner, a factory supervisor or a household head—somebody who directly exploits trafficked people.

Traffickers commonly recruit their victims by appealing to their hopes, or that of their families, for a better life or escape from economic or social distress. Often there are threats used; force or abduction can be used. Trafficking can occur whether people move by legal or illegal means. Victims of trafficking are not always physically detained. The level of control and the nature of the control may vary. They may employ a number of ways of preventing their victims from escaping, including debt bondage, intimidation, physical or sexual violence against the victim themselves or against family members, detention, threat of denunciation to migration authorities and withholding of personal identity documents, including passports.

Since Australia's whole-of-government anti-people-trafficking strategy was established in 2003, the majority of identified victims have been found to be in the legal and illegal sex industry. But we are seeing significant changes to that in Australia and around the world, and it is appropriate that we have now moved to update our laws, expand the range of definitions and broaden the scope of the laws to people who assist in setting up this appalling trade.

This bill will amend the Criminal Code to establish new offences of forced labour, forced marriage, harbouring a victim and organ trafficking. It will broaden the definition of exploitation to include a range of slavery-like practices. It will extend the application of existing offences of deceptive recruiting and sexual servitude to apply to all forms of servitude and deceptive recruiting. It will ensure that the slavery offence applies to conduct which reduces a person to slavery as well as conduct involving a person who is already a slave.

It will amend the existing definitions of exploitation to include a range of slavery-like practices and to capture more subtle forms of coercion, including psychological oppression and the abuse of power and a person's vulnerability. It will increase the penalties applicable to the existing debt bondage offences to ensure they adequately reflect the relative seriousness of the offences.

At the community cabinet in Parramatta around Easter time, the Prime Minister was asked a question about this policy by one of the women in the audience who is heavily involved in her community—a woman I know quite well. It was interesting that, of all the issues that could have been raised at that community cabinet, this was the one that that particular community wanted to raise, particularly the issue of forced marriage. When you have community leaders in one community or another choosing that topic to raise, you know there are stories going on in our communities that most of us are not aware of.
She talked to me later. She talked of the difficulty we would find in so many of the grey cultural areas in her community and in others. There is no doubt—from talking to that woman and a number of others—about the commitment of the women in that community to protect vulnerable girls and women from forced marriage. I am pleased that we are making these changes to the law in support of that community. I know, as they do—and as the government knows—that this is not an easy task. The legislation has to cover a range of offences, and applying it will cause us to find more grey areas. There is no doubt that this legislation will be amended over time, as our communities get more familiar with their protections and the ways they can protect themselves and other members of their community from this appalling conduct.

As perpetrators become increasingly aware of investigative and prosecutorial techniques, they change their modes of operation accordingly. It is essential that we regularly review the offences against slavery and people trafficking to ensure they are responsive to emerging trends. As I said, I have no doubt that, as our communities start to use these laws more fully, we will find a whole range of things in our communities that we will wish to respond to. The measures in this bill are intended to ensure our law enforcement agencies have the appropriate tools to investigate and prosecute the broadest range of exploitative behaviour.

The bill is a result of really widespread public consultation. We released two discussion papers on slavery, people-trafficking and forced marriage and also sought submissions on an exposure draft of the bill. Responses to those consultations revealed broad support for the measures proposed by the bill.

Forced labour is currently criminalised where it is connected to the offence of people-trafficking, but it is not criminalised where it is not connected to the events of people-trafficking. This bill changes that to create a stand-alone offence that would ensure that, in addition to the prosecution of a trafficker, labour exploitation at the place of destination could also be prosecuted.

Forced marriage is, again, a very important area. Following reports that forced marriage is occurring in Australia but is underreported, specific criminalisation of this practice is warranted. The forced marriage offences would criminalise the actions of a person who uses coercion, threat or deception to cause another person to enter a marriage against his or her will or a person who is a party to but not a victim of a forced marriage. The criminalisation of forced marriage is not intended to target consensual religious or cultural marriages. It is intended, absolutely, to target cases where one party or the other does not feel that they have a choice, that they do not feel that they are entering into a marriage of their own free will.

Harbouring a victim is also dealt with by this bill. The definition of trafficking in persons under the trafficking protocol encompasses the criminal conduct of individuals who are involved in the harbouring or receipt of persons. The proposed harbouring offences would fulfil our obligations under the trafficking protocol by targeting the conduct of persons who assist another person in their slavery and trafficking activities. Regarding the many people who are involved in setting up and managing the trafficking of human beings, this section specifically targets people who assist a third party—again, a very important improvement.

We have also noted that there is a rise in the number of individuals identified as being exploited in industries other than the sex industry—for example, domestic or hospitality industries. It is important that these provisions are recast so that they apply broadly to
situations of exploitation in all industries. We can see examples in my community and others that I have been made aware of—and in some cases I have tried to assist—where people feel that they must work under incredibly poor conditions. They have had their passports seized and in many cases feel that if they complained to me or anyone else they would be instantly deported. In our community now we have people who are working for either no money or very little money under appalling conditions and under fear of dramatic repercussions if they complain. I have been at mobile offices in my electorate where people have told me of their circumstances but were not game to tell me the name of their employer or their own name. So I am well aware that we have people in our communities who are well and truly being exploited in this way.

The existing penalties for debt bondage are not sufficient to reflect the relative seriousness of debt bondage offences. Enforcement of a debt is one of the most significant factors pointing to the exercise of ownership over another person—that is, slavery. The proposed higher penalties would reflect the seriousness of the offences and have the effect of making them capable of being included as alternative counts on indictment—again, a very important improvement. We know now that in the people-trafficking crime syndicates, for example, there are many people who are effectively moved from one country to another and they or their families remain in debt bondage until the debts are paid off. They are appalling circumstances for a person to be in—not circumstances that any of us should accept. I am really pleased to see that the existing penalties have been raised.

The situation of many victims in Australia does not conform to the popular image of people-trafficking and slavery-like practices involving abduction, violence and physical restraint. In a lot of cases they tend to involve more subtle forms of coercion. The amended definition of a threat in this bill includes threat of coercion. Coercion would be defined to include physical and non-physical elements, including psychological oppression, abuse of power or taking advantage of a person's vulnerability.

This is an important bill. It has been on its way since 2003. Since then, there have been many new ways for people to be exploited around the world, and we are seeing changes in the way that people are exploited in Australia. Again, I am incredibly pleased to be speaking to the bill. I commend it to the House, and I am very pleased to see that there is genuine bipartisan support for this action.

Mrs MARKUS (Macquarie) (17:30): I rise to speak on the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Slavery, Slavery-like Conditions and People Trafficking) Bill 2012, which offers amendments to the Criminal Code Act 1995, to include offences associated with forced labour, forced marriage, organ trafficking and harbouring a victim.

We are fortunate in Australia that slavery, trafficking and associated crimes are not common. It remains beholden to this parliament, however, to strive to protect the vulnerable people in our society from abuse, irrespective of their gender, age, socioeconomic background or ethnic identity. These crimes are unacceptable in any modern, progressive state, and the legislative response of the Australian parliament must firmly assert the complete rejection of these behaviours by Australian society.

I recently met with two constituents in my electorate, Mrs Helen Levingstone and Mrs Elizabeth Sorrell, who are activists with the Stop the Traffik action group. Like many other
members of my electorate, Helen and Elizabeth were tremendously concerned that the issue of human trafficking, slavery and exploitation be proactively addressed by this House, and were keen to impress upon me their belief that it is the responsibility of all Australians to be vigilant defenders of the basic human rights diminished by slavery and slavery-like conditions.

This bill aims to clarify the nature, circumstances and conditions of slavery and slavery-like conditions, inclusive of forced marriage, labour and organ trafficking. Expanded prosecution and investigative powers contained in the legislation will assist the efforts of Commonwealth law enforcement and legal agencies, seeking to fight these crimes. Similarly, appropriately harsh penalties will serve as a deterrent to those seeking to abuse and manipulate others.

The bill proposes to amend the Crimes Act 1914 to increase the availability of reparation orders to victims of Commonwealth offences and proposes consequential amendments to the Migration Act 1958, the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 and the Telecommunication (Interception and Access) Act 1979.

Although the coalition supports the principles established in this bill the amendments to its current form may be necessary, and this parliament should await the review and recommendations of the Senate Standing Committees on Legal and Constitutional Affairs and the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs. Wiser counsel and reflection would have brought this government to realise that the seriousness of both the issues that this bill deals with and the tough measures that it introduces, necessitated a pause until the findings of both committees could be reported and, if necessary, amendments made to this bill, rather than pushing forward, as they do now, to introduce this bill through this House before these processes have concluded.

Thematically, this bill addresses many very serious issues and its purpose is commendable. Critically, the proposed amendments recognise the deeply complex nature of exploitative relationships between the perpetrators who create, and the victims of, slavery or slavery-like conditions. These interactions often occur quietly, unnoticed by even the nearest neighbours, and may involve established patterns of intimidation and domination. This bill will criminalise the concealment, harbouring or trafficking of victims of slavery or slavery-like conditions.

Importantly, these amendments will also outlaw associated behaviours intimately connected to forced marriages, criminalising the use of threats, deception or coercion to bring about marriage or a marriage-like relationship. Whilst it is tremendously important that Australia's body of legislation clearly prohibits the use of duress, force or intimidation to bring about marriage or a marriage-like relationship, it is equally important that legislation, including this bill, carefully and explicitly identifies specific offences with close consideration of the possible impact of the law in question. With this in mind, I draw the House's attention to subsection 2 of section 270.7B of the bill. This subsection deals with forced marriage offences and states:

(2) A person commits an offence if:

(a) the person is a party to a marriage (within the meaning of section 270.7A); and

(b) the marriage is a forced marriage; and
(c) the person is not a victim of the forced marriage.

According to subsection (4) of the same section, 'Subsection (2) does not apply if the person has a reasonable excuse' for entering into the marriage. The notes attached to this subsection, however, place a reverse onus upon the accused to prove their own innocence, stating:

A defendant bears an evidential burden in relation to the matter in subsection (4).

The second party to a marriage, where the first is found to have been forced into the marriage, is therefore presumed to be guilty of a very serious criminal offence unless he or she can establish evidentiary proof otherwise. Surely this represents a tremendously troubling precedent that sits very uncomfortably within our legal system.

Given the proposed lengthy custodial sentences of up to and including seven years, more careful considerable of the casual allocations of onuses of proof should have been undertaken by this government. More importantly, this government should have waited until after the Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs and the House of Representatives Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs had thoroughly investigated and expertly reviewed the proposed legislation. This portion of the legislation must be very carefully examined and the possible and long-term repercussions of its implication explored.

This bill proposes to created several standalone offences that criminalise behaviours or acts associated with the creation and promotion of slavery or slavery-like conditions. Organ trafficking is a disturbingly frequent internationally problematic issue. Many thousands of organs are bought in the black market every year, and the trade is believed to be particularly prolific in areas of North Africa, South America, China and the Asia Pacific. Organs may be sold for several hundred thousands of dollars by the criminal enterprises that sustain this trade—the victims receiving only a very small proportion of these sums in return for their body parts.

It is estimated by the World Health Organization that one in 10 transplant procedures involve organs obtained on the black market—a figure that continues to rise rapidly. The revolting exploitation of vulnerable people by organ traders is truly horrific, most commonly occurring in impoverished areas where the poor are easy prey to mercenary butchers. The consent or refusal of victims to participate is immaterial. The harvesting of human organs for sale is a terrible crime against humanity. This bill will create a standalone offence, criminalising the traffic of a victim to or within Australia for the removal of organs.

This bill will also create a standalone offence for forced labour, with explicit reference to conditions in which a reasonable person in the position of the victim would not consider themselves free because of the use of threat, coercion or deception. These amendments will clarify and expand existing definitions that require the use of force and threats to maintain the condition of servitude. The use of duress, psychological oppression, abuse of power and exploitation of vulnerability will now be held to denote the use of coercion.

The seriousness of these offences will be recognised by penalties that include custodial sentences of up to 12 years. Whilst the principles that guide this portion of the proposed amendment are commendable and indeed are an important progressive legislative step, it is important that the appropriate review of the bill's language, direction and specified intent be undertaken. Portions of the bill are open to particularly broad interpretation and equally broad and unspecified context. How, without further clarification, is one to identify what specific
behaviour and circumstances would denote that a party was taking advantage of a person's vulnerability?

It is not reasonable to expect this House to pass such vague terminologies into law without far more careful consideration of the potential repercussions in the courts. Once again, the government should have waited until after the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee and the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs had thoroughly reviewed the bill's contents, implications and practical enforcement issues.

This bill will clarify and expand existing legislative frameworks which have been developed with the express purpose of protecting vulnerable people in Australia and overseas against exploitation. Stand-alone offences are here created, explicitly criminalising organ trafficking and forced labour. Existing legislation is broadened in this bill to include all forms of servitude and deceptive enticement, in addition to existing sexual servitude offences. Forced marriage is an increasingly global issue and it is entirely appropriate that this House support legislation that seeks to combat such a destructive trend and provides explicit legal protections for people vulnerable to exploitation, be it by a stranger, a family member or a loved one.

The penalties this bill will impose for all these offences are heavy, carrying the possibility of substantial jail time, but this reflects the seriousness of these crimes. This bill has much to commend it and marks a progressive step in the evolution of the collective Australian legislative body. The coalition, however, is certain that such important legislation must be the subject of very careful review and will reserve the right to move amendments based on the recommendations of both Senate and House of Representatives committees.

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (17:42): I rise in support of the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Slavery, Slavery-like Conditions and People Trafficking) Bill 2012. I do so after thorough consultation with a number of my constituents who have outlined to me their views on the issues of people trafficking and slavery. From the outset, I would also like to recognise the very important work of a number of organisations, including that of the Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans, ACRATH; and Catalyst, which is a faith based organisation which operates in my electorate. Both of these groups have led the way on addressing the issues of human trafficking and slavery, particularly in raising awareness at a local level.

In speaking on this bill I would like to specifically address three aspects: the broadening of the definition of 'exploitation', strengthening the capability of prosecutors to combat people trafficking, and improving the availability of reparations to victims of people-trafficking. The bill will amend divisions 270 and 271 of the Criminal Code and section 21B of the Crimes Act to reflect the ever-changing nature of these issues and expand the definition of 'exploitation'.

As outlined in the explanatory memorandum, this bill will also strengthen and expand the capability of investigators and prosecutors to combat people-trafficking and slavery, in particular for the purpose of labour exploitation, and to facilitate the prosecution of these offences. Finally, this bill will also improve the availability of reparations to individual victims of people smuggling, including people-trafficking.
I would now like to turn to the rationale for this bill. It is estimated that there are up to 27 million slaves in the world today. It is a shocking statistic in the year 2012. This is an issue that, contrary to what some may think, is not an ancient evil but a contemporary problem with very real and tragic consequences, both overseas and in our own backyard, as exposed, for example, in the case of the Queen and Tang, 2008.

The Australian Federal Police have also conducted 300 investigations into human trafficking and slavery offences between 2004 and 2011, resulting in 13 convictions. The US State Department estimates that some 800,000 victims are trafficked across international borders every year, with millions more enslaved in their own countries.

So this is a vital piece of legislation that recognises that these issues do not exist in a vacuum but rather are dynamic and ever-changing. Consequently, the legislation must reflect this.

I would like to turn to the broadening of the definition of exploitation to include a range of slavery-like practices. This legislation ensures a more comprehensive response to these crimes. As outlined by Fiona David from the Australian Institute of Criminology, key debates still coalesce around issues including the realities of transnational migration for work, the difficulties of defining and proving key concepts such as exploitation and sexual violence, and the challenges of giving due respect to the agency of individuals in situations where choice is heavily constrained.

If the United States Trafficking Victims Protection Act 2000, which was designed to achieve similar outcomes to this bill, tells us anything, it is that a narrow understanding of trafficking and exploitation makes for ineffective and oversimplified legislative solutions. It is therefore crucial that we do not make the mistake of narrowly interpreting this complex set of issues.

It is also essential that we recognise that trafficking is not only a matter of sexual exploitation but also of labour exploitation. As outlined by the Australian Human Rights Commission, while Australia has so far focused on trafficking for sexual exploitation, a key issue at the recent national roundtable on people trafficking was how Australia could improve its response to the emerging issue of labour trafficking. This is becoming increasingly important in a time of labour shortage. Migrant workers may find themselves in debt bondage arrangements in a range of different industries, with little or no control over their conditions of work. Their passports may be withheld. They may be subjected to physical or psychological abuse. This is not just happening in the sex industry, it is happening in other industries too. So, by broadening the definition of exploitation and inserting new offences and provisions in the Criminal Code, we will ensure a more thorough and comprehensive response to what is a dynamic and complex set of issues.

I would like to turn to strengthening the capacity to prosecute. The bill also strengthens the mechanisms available to prosecute people and organisations who commit these prescribed crimes. As highlighted by Bernadette McSherry from Monash University:

Those who are victims of labour-trafficking and slavery are largely invisible, tend to work in isolation, often have limited proficiency in English and limited interaction with the general populace and are thus usually voiceless and vulnerable. If the purpose of the criminal law is taken to be not only to punish moral wrongs; but also to preserve and encourage social welfare, then forced labour, slavery and debt bondage for both sexual as well as other services should be subject to investigation and prosecution.
By amending the existing provisions in divisions 270 and 271 of the Criminal Code, this bill will increase the penalties for the base and aggravated offences of debt bondage from 12 months and two years imprisonment respectively to four years and seven years imprisonment. These appropriate changes reflect the serious nature of these crimes and will also have the effect of making them indictable offences capable of being included as alternative counts on indictment. As outlined by the Attorney-General in her second reading speech, this bill will protect our society’s most vulnerable people: the women and children—and, at times, men—who fall victim to this abhorrent trade.

My recent joy at becoming a mother has particularly led me to focus on the welfare of young girls and children generally who are victims of slavery and slavery-like conditions. Children are often employed and exploited because, compared to adults, they are obviously more vulnerable, are cheaper to hire and are less likely to demand higher wages or better working conditions. We see the worst of this around the world—for example, in some cases, in West African cocoa production; in Central European cotton farms; and in the Middle East and in our own region. This government is committed to helping developing countries address the main causes of unfair child labour practices through its work with UNICEF. By reducing the debt burden of poor families and providing better access to primary education for children throughout the world, we are helping to limit the reasons why children are exploited.

In my electorate of Greenway there has been very strong support for the strengthening of these laws regarding people-trafficking from community organisations, religious groups and individuals. On 19 July I had the pleasure of spending some time with three of my constituents from the faith based organisation Catalyst, Jed Evans, Daniel Tuckwell and Greg Wood, who outlined to me the stark reality of what is a tragic trade. They detailed for me the heinous situations experienced in Uzbekistan, for example, where children are often forced from school to pick cotton and the crops use some of the very highest levels of pesticide, which permeate and poison the children at such a vulnerable age, and in West Africa, where children experience extreme abuse while working on some cocoa farms. These are the realities of the slave trade today. I would like to acknowledge the great work of Catalyst on shedding light on these issues and thank them for their endeavours to end slavery.

On 12 June and as recently as this afternoon, I spent some time with Sister Noeline Simmons from the Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans to specifically discuss this legislation. I note that ACRATH participated in the extensive public consultations undertaken in developing this bill and was recognised by the Attorney-General as providing valuable input in shaping and refining the reforms. ACRATH is committed to the wellbeing of people trafficked into Australia, whether for sex work or for work in other industries, for organ trafficking or for forced marriage. I would like to put on record the support of ACRATH for this legislation. In particular, they are pleased to see the forced and servile marriage aspects included in this bill. I also note that ACRATH believes more needs to be done with respect to the availability of reparations to victims of these offences, and this is something I will continue to advocate for in this place.

I would particularly like to note that ACRATH gave some very practical examples of antislavery provisions and, in particular, brought forced marriages to the fore. They highlighted to me that this does continue to occur in a number of countries, including a
number of African nations where it is not necessarily religiously based but, rather, culturally based. It is a growing concern. They highlighted to me this afternoon the very practical issue that government departments need to move quickly where there is a suspicion of forced marriage. They gave me an example of a 16-year-old girl who was quite articulate but was taken overseas. Her passport was withheld from her and the struggle was about how to get her back into this country. As they pointed out, this is unfortunately an issue which is so new on the radar for many institutions that it is insufficiently understood. Although they highlighted the cooperation that they received in this particular case from the Attorney-General's Department, the big practical issue is the money to bring these girls back to Australia. They highlighted to me how the AFP is very alive to the issue but that there needs to be a better understanding generally by government agencies about these specific circumstances. They further highlighted to me how it is important when these legislative changes go through for the law to be backed with resources to increase the awareness of forced marriage. An example they gave was prospective couples being interviewed separately as a way of unearthing problems through the immigration system. Another practical step forward may be for GPs to have leaflets in their surgery providing the educational imperative that is necessary for people who need to understand that they have support and specific rights.

I commend the Attorney-General, to whom I made representations some months ago on the issue of country of origin and ensuring that slavery practices are monitored for goods that are imported into Australia—that there is some sort of certification process. A number of organisations have been at the forefront of ensuring that our retailers and manufacturers in Australia that use inputs from overseas product are encouraged to have some form of certification that their product is slavery-free. As recently as this afternoon I noted that Nestle is apparently going to have their product certified by the end of the year. Australia is one of the first countries in which this is being done. They have specifically said it is due to pressure from organisations such as Stop the Traffik in Australia that this is able to be done.

Both ACRATH and Catalyst have asked that the government ensure that the supply chain of goods brought into Australia is slave-free. As I have mentioned, it is something I have raised with the Attorney-General and the foreign minister, but I also plan to raise the issue of the procurement of goods with the finance minister. I believe the community I represent and the wider Australian community want to know where goods are sourced and they want to understand the conditions in which the sourcing takes place, so I thank organisations like ACRATH for all their hard work in this area.

Australia is party to a number of international treaties which are aimed at eradicating labour exploitation and protecting children's rights, including the Slavery Convention and the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery. Australia has also ratified a number of International Labour Organisation conventions. These instruments, together with this legislation, highlight Australia's very strong commitment to ending human trafficking and exploitation.

This government understands that factors such as poverty, lack of employment and income generating opportunities and, often, a lack of education make people vulnerable to exploitation. That is why Australia's aid program directly addresses these factors through the Millennium Development Goals. Our aid program also funds specific programs aimed at combating trafficking and slavery, including the Tripartite Action to Protect Migrant Workers
within and from the Greater Mekong Sub-region from Labour Exploitation, which is a five-year program being implemented by the ILO to reduce the exploitation of vulnerable migrant workers and their families in the Greater Mekong subregion.

I note again that labour exploitation is an issue of serious importance to many decent local people living in my electorate. It may not be the most glamorous topic or receive the most coverage in our mainstream media, but it is certainly very important, and it has been highlighted by the large number of representations I have received. I thank the Attorney-General in particular for her work on the issue and commend the bill to the House.

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (17:56): It is good to have the opportunity to speak on bills on which there is genuine bipartisan support. I note that there have been some concerns raised about the reporting times of the House and the Senate committees which are looking into the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Slavery, Slavery-like Conditions and People Trafficking) Bill 2012. But I think that, by the time this bill passes through to the Senate, the reports will be in, and amendments can always be made there.

Being ex-AFP and a former member of the military police, I have always had an interest in the issues covered by the bill, and that is why I am speaking on it today. Among the measures in the bill are some changes in definition. The bill also specifies some new offences. I am going to concentrate tonight on the new offences. I start with organ trafficking, which we have heard quite a bit about in recent times. References have been made by other speakers to the case of an elderly lady with kidney problems who is being prosecuted for bringing a young girl from the Philippines to Australia for organ harvesting. Organ harvesting is a terrible thing. Legislation needs to be used to send a very clear message to those who might contemplate such action. The organ trafficking industry is said to be worth well over $200 million a year, and some 15,000 kidneys are bought and sold each year. This trade is alleged to occur largely in countries such as China, Pakistan, Egypt, Colombia and the Philippines. In those countries, human life is not valued quite as highly as it is here. There are similarities between organ trafficking and the exploitation of children—through, for example, child pornography—in that, in such countries, people see that there is money to be made by exploiting other people, as in the case of this young woman from the Philippines. Those who live in First World countries such as Australia are, as we have seen, willing to buy into the organ trafficking trade, and through the internet they can take advantage of somebody, whether through child pornography produced overseas and bought by Australians or by the procurement of organs from an unwitting person or a person who thinks that they can generate some income out of organ trafficking.

These are exactly the sorts of things that we need to be on our guard against and send a very clear message to the Australian population that it is just not acceptable. It is only through this and through the United Nations and our diplomatic efforts overseas that we shall encourage all countries to make a very clear statement on these matters. It is not like selling crops: this is the exploitation of people, and whether it is leveraging them into these situations through their financial hardships or doing it unbeknownst to the person that is concerned, we must send a clear message through diplomatic signals and to the Australian people—citizens and residents of this country—that it is just not acceptable. We should never allow the human organ trafficking and sale of human organs to be acceptable, and we need always to be on guard against it.
I turn now to the issue of forced marriages. The act of forcing another person into a marriage will now be covered under this legislation, and will include strict liability to anyone found guilty. This will be justified on the basis that the elements needed to establish the excuse would usually lie peculiarly with the knowledge of the accused, and it would be significantly more difficult for the prosecution to disprove than for the accused to establish.

As the previous coalition speaker mentioned, we have some concerns that it is possible that the imposition of strict liability could result in injustice in particular cases. We strongly recommend that the government justifications be closely examined. When we have the reports in from the House and Senate committees, I hope that will be covered.

Forced marriage has a long history. It was originally conducted to acquire a captive. It has a history among the upper classes in Europe and is, unfortunately, still practised in parts of South Asia, East Asia, the Middle East and Africa. I note that at CHOGM in Perth there was certainly a commitment to end the practice of early enforced marriages of girls. I know that in Australia the act of forced marriage is often carried out for immigration purposes, and I know that this happens among those with origins in the Middle East, Africa, some parts of Europe and Asia. If someone says anything is not the Australian way then they are always maligned in this place and in the wider community, but the reality is that we should be very suspicious of teenage girls being granted visas to marry men in their 50s or 60s, and I commend the Department of Immigration and Citizenship for being on guard against specifically these sorts of things.

My personal view is that if you have never met the person that you are lined up to marry then it is absolute rubbish and should always be rejected. To have the resources in place to catch people out and to hold people to account for trying to do this sort of thing is the right way to go. In this country there is an expectation that a marriage involves a man and a woman, that there is a history between them and that, hopefully, the love is very strong. It is completely inconsistent for a forced marriage or, in my view, an arranged marriage to be considered legitimate. When a visa is involved, that gives us an opportunity to hold people to account for doing things which, I think, are clearly not legitimate. We know that forced marriages place vulnerable young people—often girls—at risk. When we talk about the difference in age being so substantial, as with people of 16 marrying people in their 50s or 60s, it certainly looks a whole lot like paedophilia to me.

With respect to the resources that are in place, the hard line from the department of immigration is certainly required. We have seen a lot of people wishing to come to this country for a better life. My personal view is that, if someone wants to apply to come to this country and they see their future here, working hard and providing for their family, that is a great thing. We should encourage people to do that in the correct way. But there does seem to be a disturbing culture amongst certain ethnic communities, who feel that, to have a marriage, you have to bring someone from the old country over here. The sad part is the fact that the parties to the marriage have never met. That is a situation that the department and governments of any persuasion should reject.

Forced marriage and trafficking are terrible situations. For the protection of people both in Australia and overseas, sending clear messages about what is acceptable, regardless of any cultural excuses, through this sort of legislation is, in principle, the right way forward. I look
forward to this legislation passing once due consideration has been given to the House and Senate committee reports.

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (18:07): I rise to support the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Slavery, Slavery-Like Conditions and People Trafficking) Bill 2012 and commend the Attorney-General, Nicola Roxon, for putting forward these amendments. This bill establishes new offences of forced labour, forced marriage, organ trafficking and harbouring of a victim. It will also modify the scope and application of existing offences of slavery, deceptive recruiting, sexual servitude and trafficking persons and will increase the penalty for the offence of debt bondage.

Under the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, trafficking is defined as:

… the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.

Between June 2004 and June 2011 the Australian Federal Police undertook 305 investigations and assessments of people trafficking and related offences. Thirteen people have been convicted of such offences in Australia. This nefarious activity leaves a dark stain on our society. It is a blight on our nation’s soul.

In speaking to this legislation I want to praise the work of people who very deeply influenced me in this area, the Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans. I had a meeting with Christine, Carolyn and other people from ACRATH again today and I commend their work and the focus on this important issue that they help bring to this parliament and to parliamentarians. Two things that they particularly drew to my attention were valuable in today's discussion.

The first was that the Palermo protocol, which is the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, suggests that compensation for victims of human trafficking should come not at the point after conviction of the exploiter but before the conviction, because this often makes the trafficked person more capable of testifying about those crimes. In other words, if you have a woman who has been sexually trafficked and now has secure accommodation, some means of sustaining herself and support then she is more likely to participate in a court case than if she were hanging around until a court case is concluded, which as we all know can take ages.

Victims of trafficking identified in Australia have mostly been women trafficked for exploitation in the commercial sex industry. However, we have seen trafficking occur in agriculture, construction, hospitality, domestic services and recreation industries. Australia's long role in tackling human trafficking and slavery is illustrated through our ratification of the International Convention to Suppress the Slave Trade and Slavery on 18 June 1927 and the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutional Practices Similar to Slavery on 6 January 1958. Slavery offences were not explicit in Australian law until they were introduced in 1999. We signed the trafficking protocol when trafficking offences were enacted in 2005 through the Criminal Code Amendment (Trafficking in Persons Offences) Act 2005. Following this, we ratified the trafficking protocol on 14 September of that year. In 2008, the United Nations estimated that 2.5 million
people from 137 countries had been trafficked to another 137 countries around the world. Almost 20 per cent of the trafficking victims were children. Since 2003 the Australian government, under both Liberal and Labor leadership, have provided $50 million to support antitrafficking initiatives, including specialist investigation teams for the Australian Federal Police.

The legislation addresses a number of gaps in the current offence regime. Those who suffer people trafficking and slavery are faced with a lifetime of mental and physical anguish. They are subject to abhorrent and heinous offences. In a modern society in a modern age this should not be occurring, particularly in a wealthy country like Australia. This bill, under the leadership of Attorney-General Nicola Roxon, the member for Gellibrand, illustrates the Australian government's commitment to combating all forms of slavery and people trafficking.

We are doing what we can to protect people from the darker recesses of this society. I was pleased when the UN special rapporteur on trafficking in persons, Dr Joy Ngozi Ezeilo, noted that Australia had 'demonstrated strong leadership in combating trafficking of persons regionally and domestically'. This is an area in which Australia should continue to be active. In particular, it should be seen in the context of attempts to get people involved in sexual servitude into Australia. We do not have the kinds of problems that occur in the Middle East, where domestic servants are exploited by large numbers of people. But the Attorney-General has been working very hard to see that this legislation combats the sex trade properly. I commend the government's bill to the House.

Dr STONE (Murray) (18:14): I too wish to speak on the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Slavery, Slavery-Like Conditions and People Trafficking) Bill 2012. We have been very serious about the antislavery bills in this House before, but this bill amends the Criminal Code Act offences covering forced labour and harbouring a victim, and it introduces two additional offences—they are forced marriage and organ trafficking.

I think is extremely important to acknowledge a growing trend in some of our not-so-near neighbours, where there is, it seems, a growing business for people who are very poor having organs removed, often for very little remuneration but compromising their health. You also have to wonder, when these offences occur, if a person who is having their kidneys or some other organ removed really understands what the consequences are and what the alternatives were for them. We are, as I say, establishing these new offences of forced labour, forced marriage, organ trafficking and also the harbouring of a victim.

The bill ensures that the slavery offence applies to conduct that renders a person a slave as well as conduct involving a person who is already a slave. We have to remember that this is always about profit. It is always about one party wishing to get a commercial advantage out of the exploitation of another—it might be a child or it might be a man, but most commonly it is a woman. We are also to extend the application of existing offences of deceptive recruiting and sexual servitude to apply to non-sexual servitude and all forms of deceptive recruiting. It may be the case, for example, that slavery involves young boys spending much of their lives on fishing vessels, but that may be overlooked. They are not obvious—they are not seen begging on the streets of Cambodia; they are not seen as women in brothels in some other countries—but those boys serving out their lives on fishing vessels until they can escape are just as much slaves and in need of protection by law.
This bill also increases the penalties applicable to the existing debt bondage offences to ensure they are in line with the serious nature of the offences. It broadens the definition of exploitation under the criminal code to include all slavery-like practices. It amends existing definitions to ensure that the broadest range of exploitative conduct is criminalised by the offences, including psychological oppression and the abuse of power or taking advantage of a person's vulnerability. In Australia we have to be particularly aware of the potential for that psychological oppression and abuse of a person when a woman is engaged or married to an Australian national and she has come from another culture where there is a different expectation about the rights of the woman. The woman may not be aware that there is such a thing as rape in marriage. She may have no economic independence whatsoever and be particularly vulnerable to psychological oppression and abuse of power.

We must be very aware of that potential in Australian society and be aware when it occurs that the woman and her children, if there are children, need special support. This bill improves the availability of reparations to victims. There may be serious consequences for a woman in Australia perhaps being deported because part of her circumstances is that she is an illegal in our system. It is often very difficult in the first instance to identify the victim and make sure that there are proper reparations for that victim—including returning her to her home country to give her a new life and perhaps a new identity.

We make much in Australia of, for example, our chocolate or our cocoa having labels which say, 'This product has been produced without any environmental damage.' Sometimes the labels suggest that there has been no child slavery involved, but the reality for many commodities like cocoa, which eventually goes into chocolate, is that the children in some African countries are in slave-like conditions. I refer in particular to places like Ghana. We are aware of that circumstance. The other day we introduced illegal logging legislation. Perhaps we as a nation need to be looking much more closely at the importation of other products where we know that the labour has not been legally engaged and the workers, whether children or adults, have not had their rights properly protected. We are now concerned about illegal logging. When are we going to be concerned about illegal production of the choice foods we eat by forced labour?

I am also most concerned that there is more encouragement for countries where most of this global trafficking in persons, or even national trafficking, occurs. I refer to a report from February 2009 by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Global report on trafficking in persons. It states:

... sexual exploitation was noted as by far the most commonly identified form of human trafficking (79%) followed by forced labour (18%). This may be the result of statistical bias.

I referred at the beginning of my remarks to the case of young boys on fishing vessels. The UN report states:

By and large, the exploitation of women tends to be visible, in city centres or along highways. Because it is more frequently reported, sexual exploitation has become the most documented type of trafficking, in aggregate statistics. In comparison, other forms of exploitation are under-reported: forced or bonded labour; domestic servitude and forced marriage; organ removal; and the exploitation of children in begging, the sex trade and warfare.

We have recently tried to help some of the child victims who have been forcibly recruited into armies, particularly in countries in Africa. We know the great damage it does to a young...
person psychologically, emotionally and physically. We need to be aware that the data collected on human trafficking very often, as this report shows, over-represents the highly visible sexual exploitation, ignoring those other forms of abuse such as servitude or slavery—for example, domestic servitude. In the Middle East, some countries depend on the labour of guest workers, men and women. Often the conditions under which they work and their freedom of movement are curtailed by the culture and the business arrangements that they face.

There is also a disproportionate number of women involved in human trafficking not only as victims but also as traffickers. Female offenders have a more prominent role in present day slavery than in most other forms of crime. This needs to be addressed, especially in cases where former victims have become perpetrators. We need to be aware that it is not only men exploiting women; it is sometimes women exploiting women. So when we are looking for the perpetrators of these crimes, we need to look widely.

I am also concerned that some people are wondering whether this legislation will rebound to include such things as child labour on family farms in Australia. I do not think we would be so stupid in Australia to include such things as, say, a young child picking fruit on their family farm or helping with the shearing, as I did from an early age. I was always a rouseabout in my family shearing sheds from the age of about eight. I loved the work. I was never paid, but I did not expect to be. I worked very hard and I did not expect to exercise much choice about the matter at the time either, given my farm family's culture. I think we have to be very sensible in Australia about separating out those sorts of family labour expectations as not in the same league as young children who are sold into slavery due to the extraordinary poverty faced by their family. In countries such as Cambodia, young children end up as beggars in Phnom Penh or the girls are sold into the sex trade when they have graduated from being the props in a begging situation—for example, with an older woman holding a young baby—to the baby being old enough to work in a brothel.

I mention this in passing because some people have said, 'Isn't this just another way of a government trying to capture the family farm traditions of Australia in legislation, forbidding the family farm the tradition and sometimes necessity of all hands on deck when the seasonal work is on?' I do not think this government intends that and I think it is a furphy to be worried about that situation. What I am concerned about is that more Australians should be aware of the Criminal Code, which now includes issues of forced marriage and forced labour. If people see a couple where it is apparent that one, usually the woman, is in a circumstance which is unfair and brutalising to the woman, where her freedoms are curtailed or she is being psychologically oppressed, it is the duty of all of us, as citizens, to do something about that situation, not just observe from a distance and say: 'Tut, tut. They would do that, they're from some other place.'

These are important additions to the legislation. Australia as a developed nation needs to help lead the world in identifying any of these criminal offences in our own country and to support other, less developed, nations where they need support in developing their criminal codes or the policing of their labour or workforce situations. We of course also, through our foreign aid budget, will assist other nations or communities where extreme poverty makes children and women vulnerable to being sold into the sex trade or as labourers, or even to being forced to sell their organs. I commend this bill to the House.
Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (18:25): I welcome the opportunity to speak on this important legislation, which strengthens Australia's position and contribution when it comes to the terrible scourge of trafficking in human beings which flows from and into conditions that amount to modern day slavery. I commend the minister for bringing forward this necessary update to our domestic legal framework, as it will put our law enforcement agencies in a better position to investigate and prosecute exploitative criminal conduct through all its evil, evolving twists and turns.

This legislation is aimed at ensuring the broadest range of exploitative behaviour is captured and criminalised, including by introducing new offences of forced labour, of harbouring or receiving a victim of trafficking or slavery and of forced marriage. The bill extends the existing offences of deceptive recruiting and sexual servitude and increases penalties for existing debt bondage offences, as well as improving the availability of reparations to victims. I note too, in keeping with this government's commitment to thorough process, this legislation has been formed after the release and consideration of two discussion papers on slavery, people trafficking and forced marriage.

I have some direct professional experience of witnessing and combating the practice of trafficking. While in Kosovo I chaired a working group on trafficking in persons, primarily women and girls, who were being trafficked for the purposes of prostitution. The absence of law enforcement that followed the withdrawal of Serbian forces in June 1999, coupled with the slow build-up of effective interim police services, enabled organised crime, and with it the trade in human beings, to flourish. Women and girls were being trafficked from Eastern Europe to Kosovo as a transit point to Albania and Italy and as a final destination, because of the large international military and civilian police presence. Compared to drug trafficking, this was a crime involving large financial rewards and little risk for those involved. Drug traffickers were relatively easy to convict if caught with drugs and there were serious penalties; people traffickers were more difficult to convict due to the intimidation experienced by victims, who could be afraid to testify. Even if convicted, people traffickers would rarely be subject to serious penalties. Further, whereas drugs cannot be resold once used, a person can be sold and resold many times. This is what had happened to many of the young women that we met in Kosovo. They reported feeling an overwhelming sense of helplessness and degradation from being in a foreign country, a long way from home, where they did not speak the language and were forced to provide sexual services for men for up to 15 hours a day. They were under the control of organised criminal gangs who had their passports, who regarded them as being in debt to them and who threatened harm to their families back home if they tried to run away.

We drafted world-first legislation that implemented in Kosovo the protocol to the UN convention on transnational organised crime relating to the trafficking of women and children, with an emphasis on the rights of the victim to protection, shelter, health services, assistance with repatriation, legal advice, interpreters and compensation. The legislation also criminalised the users of trafficked women, not just the criminal organisations carrying out the trafficking. It criminalised the intentional withholding of identification documents and it provided for the non-criminalisation of the trafficked person, whereby a trafficked person would not be held criminally responsible for prostitution or for illegal entry, presence or work if the person was a victim of trafficking.
Educating the international civilian presence about the issues was a particular challenge I was involved in. The UN could and did instruct its civilian staff and police not to patronise particular bars that were known to use or were suspected of using trafficked women and girls, but it was very difficult to deal with the military contingents, as the UN did not have jurisdiction over them.

It was a matter of visiting the different commanders for each national contingent and asking them to put in place measures and training for their soldiers. Trafficking in persons is a complex phenomenon encompassing such issues as gender discrimination, economic exploitation and globalisation.

Debate interrupted.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

National Disability Insurance Scheme

Debate resumed on motion by Mr Christensen:

That this House:

(1) recognises that the:

(a) proposal of a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is a once-in-a-generation landmark reform that has the potential to deliver better quality of life outcomes for Australians with disabilities;

(b) schedule for implementation of the NDIS, as proposed by the Productivity Commission, will take seven years, spanning the life of three Parliaments; and

(c) NDIS is a reform that involves the cooperation and support of state and territory governments, the disability support services sector, people with a disability and their families and carers;

(2) notes the bipartisan and cross-party support for the implementation of the NDIS;

(3) declares its support for policy stability on the NDIS over the life of those three Parliaments and until the scheme's full implementation; and

(4) resolves to immediately establish a Joint Select Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme which will:

(a) oversee the implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme;

(b) be subject to terms of reference to be agreed upon by the Prime Minister and Opposition Leader and ratified by this House;

(c) be comprised of 4 Government members and/or Senators, 4 Opposition members and/or Senators, 1 Greens member and/or Senator and 1 non-aligned member and/or Senator;

(d) be jointly chaired by 1 Government member and 1 Opposition member; and

(e) remain in existence until the full implementation of the NDIS is achieved; and

(5) transmit a message to establish a Joint Select Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme to the Senate for concurrence.

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa—Second Deputy Speaker) (18:30): I rise this evening to support the motion moved by the member for Dawson which recognises the proposal for a National Disability Insurance Scheme. This scheme is a once-in-a-generation landmark reform that has the potential to deliver a better quality-of-life outcome for Australians with a disability. The motion notes the bipartisan and cross-party support for the implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme, and recognises that the schedule for the implementation of the NDIS as proposed by the Productivity Commission would take some
seven years, spanning the life of three parliaments. Furthermore, it recognises that the NDIS is a reform that involves the cooperation and support of state and territory governments, the disability support service sector, people with a disability and their families and carers, and declares its support for policy stability on the NDIS over the life of those two parliaments and until the scheme's full implementation.

I give my wholehearted support to this motion in relation to the NDIS. It is not where we start; it is where we ultimately reach the other end. If we do not start we will never get to the end. At the start we always talk about the end-point and the absolute cost that is suggested in the media and has been discussed around this House. Perhaps we would never start. I note, however, that there is support on both sides of the House and I would certainly give my wholehearted support as well.

We are the lucky country, if not the luckiest country on earth, by our own benchmark. I think the measure of any nation is how you look after those people who are less fortunate than ourselves. Among others who are legislators and members of parliament, I am here as the voice of the people of Maranoa to speak on their behalf on this very issue. We all need to take that very first big step. I will outline the case of one person with a disability in my electorate—there are many but I have chosen one who is on the public record in the media in my electorate.

When this family saw the announcement that perhaps the Productivity Commission's recommendations would be taken up by both sides of the House, they gained a great deal of hope. Jesse Braithwaite, who has lived in Chinchilla almost all of his life—he went to school there and he still lives there with his family—turned 21 in September. It is about the time that he wants to move out of home but, unfortunately for Jesse and his family, there is not a home nearby. So, there is no option to move out of home into another home to have a life not separated from his family but at least a little more independent. Any family that has had to look after a child or someone with a disability—whether it is something they were born with or as the result of an accident—knows it becomes a totally consuming occupation for that family.

Mrs Braithwaite said that Jesse is considered low functioning. He has the capacity of a two-year-old and needs 24-hours-a-day care seven days a week. The Braithwaite family have a disability support worker who has assessed their situation and has recommended Jesse goes on a waiting list for a place in a supported living home. The problem with this is that there is no home in the town where he lives. That means Jesse would have to move into another home to have a life not separated from his family but at least a little more independent. Any family that has had to look after a child or someone with a disability—whether it is something they were born with or as the result of an accident—knows it becomes a totally consuming occupation for that family.

Jesse was recently offered a place in a supported living facility. The only catch to this is that it is a 3½-hour drive away. So the situation for many families in rural communities is that there is not that support. There is not a home. There may be support in the community but when they want to move out of home or if the parents sadly pass on one day, where do Jesse and people like Jesse go to? That is the situation that we have to start to get our minds around in the longer term.

I am in full support of this private member's motion. I am in full support of the NDIS. We have to take this first big step. I will certainly be doing all I can to make sure we bring about some development in this area. (Time expired)
Mrs ELLIOT (Richmond—Parliamentary Secretary for Trade) (18:35): I rise to speak on the national disability scheme and the difference it will make to those Australians with a disability and the care that they receive. The government is working towards a future where all Australian children and adults with disabilities lead lives of dignity and opportunity. That is why we are delivering the first stage of a national disability insurance scheme. It is now one year since the government released the Productivity Commission's report into disability care and support. The Productivity Commission recommended an NDIS be established to end what is essentially a very cruel lottery that many Australians with disabilities face when they try to access the care and support that they need.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme will start in Australia from July 2013 in up to four locations across the country. From mid-2013, about 10,000 people with significant and permanent disabilities will start to receive support. By July 2014, that figure will rise to 20,000 people. For the first time in our nation's history people with a significant and permanent disability will receive lifetime care and support, and that is regardless of how they acquired their disabilities.

There are so many people right around the country who have worked for so long to see a national disability scheme in place. Under an NDIS, people with a disability will have their individual needs assessed and they will be able to have much greater choice over the standard and quality of care that they receive. It is a scheme that will deliver Australians with disabilities the services they need when they need them.

Indeed, Australians with a disability and their families and carers have waited long enough. We must act, and the government is acting, to make the NDIS real. The fact is that everyone knows someone who struggles with a disability. Everyone knows a family that struggles to find care for their family member who has a disability. It is an issue that many locals continue to raise regularly with me.

We also note that currently there are vast differences in the care that people get. It often depends on where they live. Of course, that is grossly unfair for those living in regional and rural Australia. When people talk about the care that they receive today, they often say that it can be rationed, that not everybody gets care and that many people do not get enough care. We want to see a national disability scheme make a difference to people with disabilities right around our nation, in every state, territory, suburb and, indeed, town—particularly, as I say, for those from rural and regional areas such as in my electorate.

The government is getting on with the job of building an NDIS, and we are working with the states and territories through COAG. We have set up the Select Council on Disability Reform of treasurers and disability ministers from around the country. This is the appropriate forum to progress this work because states and territories have primary responsibility for the care and support of people with disabilities. We do not want people with disabilities to have to wait any longer. We do not need another committee. We cannot let anything delay the NDIS. This is a long-overdue reform that we are delivering on and we cannot have it delayed. An NDIS will give all Australians with significant disability the peace of mind to know that their care and support needs will be addressed no matter where they may live or how they acquired their disability.

It is intended that the NDIS will produce the following outcomes for people with disability: the individualised care and support that they need over their lifetime; more choice and control
in their lives through a person centred, self-directed approach to service delivery, with that individualised funding; and disability care and support that is more accessible and which will meet nationally consistent standards. So it is certainly very wide ranging.

At its heart, the NDIS is all about our nation working towards giving people with disabilities a much better future—more care, more support and more choice about how they run their lives. It is a Labor government that is delivering upon this, and we are very proud to be delivering this, particularly when you look at the history of the reforms of Labor governments of which we have seen so many that have made a major difference to the lives of people right across this country.

If we look over the past decades at where Labor governments have delivered, in 1907, it was a minimum wage; in 1909, an age pension; in 1994, Medicare, one of the greatest reforms we have seen in this country; in 1992, a superannuation scheme; and, in 2010, paid parental leave. Now, we are building a National Disability Insurance Scheme. It is another major reform by a Labor government to improve the lives of thousands of Australians. It is a very long overdue reform that many people throughout this country have called for for a long period of time, and we want to do it by working with the community, working with the states and working through COAG to deliver this real reform. This is an idea whose time has come. We have to move forward with this. We cannot have further committees to hold this up. We need to all work together to get an outcome that actually delivers for Australians right across the country. Those Australians who have a disability and their families and carers need to have this reform in place.

Mr Wyatt (Hasluck) (18:40): I rise to speak on the motion put forward by the member for Dawson, Mr Christensen. I think this is a landmark situation in which we have the opportunity of working not only with a bipartisan approach but with a tripartisan approach, including every member in this House. What I find frustrating with the way governments sometimes do business is the way we make announcements that make it seem as though a program will be rolled out this year—that the immediate impact will be in the very near future. But when you read the fine print, you find it is July next year. You find that the amount of money is not sufficient to cover the expectations of all of those families that are affected.

In my electorate of Hasluck, I have a disability services forum on which I have a number of parents and caregivers who give me an inkling as to what they go through on a daily basis and what they hope will be a major reform by the Australian parliament in respect of the provision of services based on need. You talk to carers, and their job is a 24/7 job. Their hopes and aspirations for their child or the person they care for are no different to those of any other parent, but they know that they have some challenges. They know about and have raised with me the issue of what happens for post-secondary schooling: what jobs can my son or daughter undertake? What are the services that governments will offer?

I want to acknowledge quite openly the states and territories that have been at the forefront for several decades of providing the services that people currently access. I would have thought with the NDIS that we would have seen a genuine commitment to the full level of funding at a much earlier point so we could provide the level of support that each of these families and each individual needs. I know one of the other great challenges for them is: what happens to my child when I die? Who is going to look after them? Who is going to give them...
the care, consideration and love? That tripartisan approach is absolutely critical if we are to roll out effective support services that meet the needs of individuals.

I had the experience of meeting with 60 carers and I had them speak to me for three minutes each about their context and situations. At the end of that I had a heart that was heavy for the pain that they experience and the uncertainty in access to services—the uncertainty of the future of the person that they care for. I hope that we do not see any proposition for a committee as being an impediment but that, like the committees that have been established to deal with the Murray River context that you chaired, Mr Deputy Speaker Windsor, it is a bipartisan approach of genuine commitment to ensuring that all those Australians who have need of the NDIS have the NDIS, that we look at real funding that will provide the services and that we do not give a false sense of hope, because the disappointment for many will be very bitter. Certainly, in the people that I interact with, in my electorate and outside of it, the expectation that this parliament—and that is all of us—will deliver an NDIS that will meet their needs is going to be shattered for many because the trial sites are only in certain locations.

Certainly I know that our own minister with responsibility for this, the Hon. Helen Morton, who is the Minister for Mental Health and Disability Services, has made a strong commitment to all of the groups I have been to, where she said that the state will not abrogate its responsibility and will continue. Premiers came with high hopes and expectations to COAG but were frustrated with the lack of detail. I think it is important that the Prime Minister in her dealings with leaders of the states and territories has an open and frank discussion that allows for compromise and flexibility, because a one size fits all model will not work, but we certainly have the capability and capacity to deliver something that is real and meaningful to those who are affected. I feel a sense of frustration for those in my electorate who I know are unlikely to get those services, because based on the interview I heard with Minister Macklin on Adelaide radio the definition around the degree of disability has not been finalised and I think it is a long time coming.

Mr LYONS (Bass) (18:45): I rise in the House to speak on the National Disability Insurance Scheme and to not support the member for Dawson in his motion. The NDIS is a landmark achievement for the Labor government. I am proud that we are working towards a future where all Australian children and adults with a disability will lead lives of dignity and opportunity. For too long the current system of care and support has let people living with a disability, their families and their carers down. I have heard stories in my own community and in my past role at the Launceston General Hospital. The determination and dedication of carers and parents has contributed to this significant scheme. I applaud their hard work. I have already mentioned in this place the hard work of Jane Wardlaw and Margaret Reynolds, among others, in this process.

There is a real push in Tasmania for the NDIS. Both my state and federal Labor colleagues understand the importance of solving this issue of disability care and funding. The federal Labor government is committed to the success of the NDIS and has made $1 billion available to help roll out the launch sites around Australia. Four million people in Australia have some kind of disability and 1.25 million have a severe or profound disability.

Under the NDIS Australians living with a disability will be assessed to receive individualised care and support packages and will have the power to make decisions about
their care and support. The care a person receives should not be determined by the silo of funding where they fit; it should be determined by the services they need. The NDIS recognises the many struggles and challenges some Australians face in obtaining what the rest of the community consider an ordinary life. For the first time, Australians with a significant and permanent disability will receive care and support over their lifetime, regardless of how they acquired the disability.

As I mentioned earlier, in my home state of Tasmania there has been much enthusiasm for the NDIS. The Premier, Lara Giddings, said in her statement on Tasmania being a launch site for the NDIS:

This is a landmark moment for Tasmanians with a disability, their families and the organisations that work so hard to support them.

In Tasmania, young Tasmanians aged between 15 and 24 living with a disability will have access to the NDIS and it is my hope the NDIS will then be available to all Tasmanians. The Tasmanian minister for disability said:

Support for this age group is essential, as they're at a critical point in their lives where they're likely to leave secondary education to move on to further education, vocational training or employment.

By targeting this age bracket, we are helping them make that transition or, alternatively, receive the supports they need to keep them engaged in their communities.

It is expected that almost a thousand young Tasmanians will benefit from the NDIS launch. A launch focusing on this age group will enable support to be provided to individuals at a critical transition point, enhancing their independence and promoting their participation in community and employment. The Tasmanian government is committed to contributing up to $2 million a year, with the remainder of the funding coming from the federal Labor government.

Labor governments across the nation have demonstrated their commitment to better outcomes for Australians. In stark contrast, the Liberal governments said they were not able to find the funding required to bring the NDIS services to their states. Demonstrating their deep apathy towards those with a disability, they played politics and simply failed to put the best interests of the nation at heart. I again commend the federal and state governments for their partnership to achieve better outcomes for people living with a disability and look forward to the launch of the NDIS in Tasmania.

I note the member for Dawson has called for a select committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme. This is a delaying tactic. Either that or they want to mislead the constituents and take credit for the NDIS. We on this side of the chamber do not want people with a disability to wait any longer. They waited 12 years under the Liberals, when funding went backwards, when Commonwealth funding grew at 1.8 per cent, less than inflation. And the shadow Treasurer wants them to wait now. He told the press club he would not commit, he wanted to see how it unfolds. Members opposite claim in this motion that they want to make a committee contribution. If those opposite have any funding suggestions for the NDIS, let us hear them. Let us hear your policy. People with a disability have waited long enough. We are getting on with the job. We do not need another committee and therefore I do not support this motion.

The NDIS has the potential to do for disability what Medicare did for health in this country and what superannuation savings have done for retirement savings. As I said, the services
available should not be determined by the silo of funding a person is categorised in or by how they acquired the disability. I am very proud the government has made the hard decision and is going to do what is right. My advice to the mover of the motion and the opposition is: get off the fence and get on with the job.

Mr VAN MANEN (Forde) (18:50): I thank the member for Bass for his positive contribution to this debate but, as usual, he is totally misinformed. I speak in support of the motion from the member for Dawson. I want to clarify a couple things for the member for Bass before he scurries out of the room. The objective of the joint select committee is not to delay the implementation of the NDIS; it is designed to be an oversight of the implementation of the NDIS. I think the merit in the proposal is there for all to see, given the government's track record over the past few years of implementing programs. So I fully support the proposal from the member for Dawson. If the member for Bass had bothered to read the actual motion, it is set up to include four government members, four opposition members or senators, a Greens member and an Independent member. So it is truly designed to be bipartisan.

As we are all aware, the rollout of the NDIS will span several parliaments and will require the support of both sides of parliament to ensure that it is successfully implemented. As proposed by the Productivity Commission, the NDIS will take some seven years spanning three parliaments for its full implementation. We should be doing everything we can to ensure that we give the NDIS the best possible start by establishing this joint committee until full implementation is achieved.

I have had many discussions with constituents back in the electorate around the need for the NDIS, in particular with a constituent who had suffered an accident at work and whose life would be forever changed as a result. This man is the father of two young boys and now spends his life in a motorised wheelchair as a full quadriplegic. After meeting with him at his home, I discovered that it cost him around $200,000 per year just to stay alive. He has carers working around the clock, 24/7, and spends a considerable amount of money making changes to his family home to make it disability friendly. The cost of hiring carers and the cost of medications, which are often not covered by any kind of concession, are astronomical. The saddest part of the story is that he was a young man in the prime of his life with two young children and this accident at work, which involved nothing silly being done, has not only cost him his mobility and brought about a massive change of life but also cost him his marriage. This is just one example of how tough it can be for people living with a disability, not only in my electorate of Forde but in electorates all around the country.

I regularly receive inquiries in my office, in addition to requests for financial assistance from families with young children struggling to afford life's basic essential around the necessary aids and medications for those children with special needs and disabilities. I have also been alerted to concerns from parents of disabled children who worry about what will happen when they become old or pass away. They think, 'Who will look after my child then?' Something needs to be done to ensure that these people are given the support that they need to live a comfortable, dignified life and to assure them that their children, whom they love dearly, will be looked after when they pass away. We are still waiting to hear about how the first phase of the NDIS will be completed, when the government has only allocated $1 billion out of the recommended $3.9 billion which the Productivity Commission said was necessary.
We have also yet to hear details about how the NDIS will be funded into the future. I can think of a few ways it could be funded now. We have had a few cost blow-outs on various Labor projects, including the NBN, and more recently on Labor's failed border protection policies. It brings into sharp focus the importance of this committee to ensure that the funds that are allocated are properly spent in a timely and efficient manner, to ensure that the National Disability Insurance Scheme is implemented as efficiently as it can be.

Ms VAMVAKINOU (Calwell—18:56): I rise to speak to the motion moved by the member for Dawson and to congratulate him for bringing to the House this very important motion about the National Disability Insurance Scheme. I agree with the sentiments of proposal (1)(a) in the member for Dawson's motion that the:

… National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is a once-in-a-generation landmark reform that has the potential to deliver better quality of life outcomes for Australians with disabilities;

However, I will not, like my other colleagues, be supporting his call for this to be referred to a special committee for oversight.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme is very much a centrepiece of this government's way of thinking and the manner in which it has resolved to act, in order to support people with disabilities and to help them to lead a more active and productive life. We hope to achieve this by focusing on what it is we can help people with disabilities to achieve, rather than what they cannot achieve. It is fitting that we are debating this particular matter this week, a few short days away from the opening of the Paralympics Games in London. Too often in today's society, disability often equates in the minds of people to disadvantage, and that is why the government are even more committed to ensuring that the NDIS is implemented as quickly as possible because of the potential scale and quantum of change that it represents.

We only need to look at our Australian Paralympic athletes to realise that with social change and the right support anything can be achieved. Since the games in Atlanta in 1996, our athletes have maintained our nation's place in the top five on the gold medal tally, including a No. 1 ranking at the Sydney 2000 games.

In a similar way, and in the spirit of assisting Australians with disabilities, the National Disability Insurance Scheme will ensure that people with disability will be helped to tap into unknown levels of potential that will benefit not only them but society as a whole, and more importantly those people who are charged with caring for them.

Over the years as the member for Calwell, I have had many conversations with my constituents. I have heard many pleas from parents who have children with disabilities—as members opposite made reference—and their single, greatest anxiety is what will happen to their children once they are no longer around to look after them. It is one of the most poignant pleas that I have ever had to be at the receiving end of as a member of parliament. Finally, we have a scheme that responds to the real human face of those anxieties and concerns. In putting together the National Disability Insurance Scheme, the government is showing that it has understood people's needs and it is now responding to those needs.

Apart from our own discussions with people over the years, the system the government has put in place has been formed through substantial feedback through the Shut out report of the National People with Disabilities and Carer Council and is underpinned by feedback from the
Productivity Commission's inquiry and the Every Australian Counts campaign. So there has been a lot of consultation and a lot of feedback, and a lot of input has gone into designing this scheme.

The government is aware that the current disability system encourages crisis, metering out support only when it is desperately needed—and with meagre and inadequate resources. The government has listened and understood how people with disability often feel shut out and frustrated at not being able to join—in this case, those who can—in the workforce and to contribute larger to society. So I am pleased that the government is responding to these needs through this scheme. I want to reiterate that people with disabilities have waited a lifetime almost for government action in this area of concern, and it is with great pleasure that I am able to support the implementation of the NDIS.

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (19:01): I take pleasure in joining this debate and I commend the member for Calwell on her contribution. I am sorry that she cannot quite come at joining us in supporting the motion, but I understand her passion for people with disabilities. Assisting those less fortunate is one of the passions that has brought many of us to this place from both sides of the House, including the member for Dawson, who spoke so eloquently this morning on this motion. There have been very few more important motions in this period set aside for private members' business during my four years as the member for Gippsland.

In his speech, the member for Dawson explained his personal association with disabilities, and I commend his speech for not only its passion but also the intellectual basis from which he delivered it. It was an intelligent, coherent and entirely accurate summation of the need for a national disability insurance scheme. It was also very politically astute, because it called on members of both sides to lay down their swords and take up the spirit of bipartisanship to deliver the NDIS.

Disability is not a political issue. This is not an area where any member should seek to score political advantage. We are talking about ground-breaking reform that will take years to develop and several parliaments to deliver. This is not a Labor reform. This is not a Liberal reform. The Nationals will not own it any more than the Greens or the Independents. This is about taking steps in this place to make sure that the lives of people with disabilities and their carers are just a little bit easier.

We in this place are not going to cure their ailments and we are not going to solve all their problems. They will continue to struggle under the unrelenting burden that disability can bring. But we may be able to make things just a little bit easier. We may be able to help people with disabilities achieve their full potential. We may be able to alleviate the culture of crisis-driven responses to disability, where in many instances assistance is not provided until carers are at the end of their tether.

Like the previous speaker, I have spoken to many in my electorate and learned a lot about disability in my time in this place. I have copies of letters here from people forced to care for their children 24/7 and despair over what will happen to their children later in life. These are people who have been born with a disability. In more recent circumstances in my electorate, there is the case of 23-year-old Leongatha footballer, Beau Vernon, who became a quadriplegic this year after a tragic injury on the football field. He was the vice-captain of the team, with a whole life of football and off-field achievements ahead of him, and he is now facing the fact that he has hospital fees, carers, equipment and aids costs that are estimated to
be about $3.2 million over the course of his lifetime. Young Beau is recovering remarkably well. He is being helped by his loving family and friends and a very charitable football community in the Gippsland and greater region that is fundraising to help meet some of the costs that he will face.

But, whether it is through losing the genetic lottery at birth or whether it is by a terrible piece of bad luck and acquiring a disability later in life, we need a better system of support across Australia. That is why I believe the NDIS is so important. So I am deeply disappointed by the decision of some members of the Labor Party to attack this motion during their speeches in the House earlier today. I believe they have made a terrible error of judgment. This is an opportunity for this parliament and this government to rise above the day-to-day pettiness of politics and deliver some ground-breaking reform. It will take men and women of good faith on both sides of the chamber to deliver the reform and to give it the funding that is desperately required. The disability sector knows that. I refer members to the statement this morning by Dr Ken Baker, Chief Executive of National Disability Services. In his statement today, Dr Baker said:

Parties at both levels of government should recognize that this is a long-term reform which requires support from both sides of politics. To deliver the NDIS in full, political opponents across successive parliaments both federally and in the states are going to be required to work together for the greater good.

We have a motion before the House this evening which is all about the greater good. This motion supports the need for a joint select committee on the NDIS which will bridge the political divide and commit this place to working together to deliver better quality of life outcomes for people with disabilities and the people who care for them. I commend the motion and I urge all in this place, particularly the Prime Minister, to recognise what a great opportunity lies before her to create a lasting legacy that will live beyond this parliament and beyond the political ambitions of individual MPs. We can do so much better on this issue if we are prepared to work together. I congratulate the member for Dawson on the approach he has adopted.

Like others in this place, in my maiden speech I reflected on the need to provide more support for people with disabilities and their carers. This is a great opportunity that lies before the House at the moment. This motion deserves the support from both sides of the House and also from the crossbenches. We hear many speeches in this place about the need for improved access to health services, the remarkable dedication of carers and the savings they provide to the government, and the importance of early intervention to help children with special needs achieve their full potential. This is an opportunity for this House to do some good on behalf of people with disabilities and their carers. I commend the member for Dawson. I commend the motion to the House. (Time expired)

Ms SAFFIN (Page) (19:06): I am pleased that we as a nation are embarking on the establishment of the National Disability Insurance Scheme. It is something that has long been needed and it is something that the government has committed itself to. It has done a lot of the work necessary to get to the stage where we are undergoing trials.

I have listened very carefully to members on all sides talk here. I was just listening to the honourable member for Gippsland saying that we need to work together to effect groundbreaking reform. We already have the groundbreaking reform. A lot of the policy work
has already been done. Sure, there is a lot of work to be done to make sure that the scheme is fully implemented and will work, but a lot of the policy work is done. It needs all of us to support it 100 per cent to make sure that we get there. If there are any issues to be worked out, and there will be, we need to work them out in a collegiate way so that as a nation, through this parliament, we are 100 per cent behind all of the people who need the services.

I want to talk a little bit about what the NDIS will bring and some of the work that I have been doing in my electorate on this issue. Under an NDIS, as we call it, people will for the first time be assessed to receive individualised care and support packages. That is something I have been advocating for a couple of decades in the work that I have done in the community and when I worked in the community sector. Your needs should not be dependent on a model of service. It is about the service you need as an individual. We have to make sure that those services are tailored to fit you and not the other way around. Also, it is about people having the power to make decisions about their care and support, including choosing their service provider. Of course, this is what it is about. This is the ideal. I know that in country areas it is sometimes going to be a bit of a challenge to work all of that out, but that is what we will work towards. We will work towards it and we will get there. People will be assisted by local coordinators to help manage and deliver the support, and access a system they can easily navigate which will link them to mainstream services. These are really important components of what the NDIS will be about.

In my area last year, in October 2011, I was speaking at RED Inc: Realising Every Dream. That is a local NGO run by the wonderful Jenny London. What was said there was that getting this work done quickly is an essential step towards delivering the kind of care and support that is needed. It is what people with disability, their carers and families rightly expect of us. It is what we have to get on with, and it is what the government has got on with. I would like to put on record my thanks for the then parliamentary secretary who had disability in his portfolio, Bill Shorten. It was something that he took up when he was in that portfolio area. He was determined that it was something that we would work towards. It is something that a whole lot of us had worked on, but it was really good to be in government and be able to work on it.

In my electorate of Page, the National Disability Insurance Scheme means better support for people with disability, it means people with disability having a say in how they are supported and it means making sure that support reaches those who need it. It also means breaking down barriers to schooling, work and community life.

It would be nice if we could come in here and talk about disability issues in a really positive way. I read the private member's motion, and I thought: 'There's always an edge and barb. Why don't we just get on and work with each other to make sure that people with disability and people in the sector are not subjected to the ongoing unpleasantness?' Commonwealth funding for disability in fact went backwards under the last federal government. I do not want to drag all of this up, but it is a reality. I would like to see the opposition commit totally to the NDIS. I am not saying that the opposition should do so without caveats and qualifications, because we all have things like that which we insist on, but let us commit to it and just get on and make it happen.

Mrs GRIGGS (Solomon) (19:11): I thank the member for Dawson for bringing to the House the very important issue of disability, and it is with pleasure that I rise to voice my
support for the National Disability Insurance Scheme, the implementation of which has—
contrary to what those on the other side say—bipartisan and cross-party support. I, along with
my coalition colleagues, strongly support the Productivity Commission's recommendations on
providing a better deal for Australians with disability and their carers. Earlier this year I
pledged my support to and got involved in the Every Australian Counts campaign, the
national initiative designed to raise awareness and support for a disability system for all
Australians.

I have had a long association with people with disabilities. When I was in my early teens,
my father was confined to a wheelchair almost overnight. Luckily for him, with intensive
rehabilitation and sheer determination he was able to regain the use of both of his legs and to
give away his wheelchair for the rest of his life—or so he says. In my early 20s I was
involved—as you would probably surprised to learn, Madam Deputy Speaker Vamvakinou—
in the Miss Australia Awards, through which I raised $30,000 for Carpentaria Disability
Services, which is a program for the families of children and adults with disabilities and high
support needs in the Northern Territory. It was through this program that I became
reacquainted with the pressures faced by the loved ones and carers of people with disabilities.
It was also through the awards that I met Jeffery McCourt and Raymond Roach, both of
whom, along with their extended families, still today have a special role in my life. My
husband Paul and I provided respite care for Jeffery until his late teens, when he was too big
for me to lift. Jeffery was born with cerebral palsy. His parents were grateful to Paul and I,
knowing that we cared for Jeffery with as much love and care as we would have had he bee
nour own son. Caring for Jeffery gave us great joy—particularly to our son, who thought that
he had another brother. It also gave us a real insight into and appreciation of what it means to
care for a person with disabilities 24/7.

Like many of my colleagues here, I am a campaigner for better support services no matter
how severe a person's disability is. I have mentioned Tahnee Afuhaamango in this place
before. She is another dear friend of mine. Tahnee is a world swimming champion who
continues to break records. I understand that she is the first person with Down syndrome to be
included in an Institute of Sport program in Australia—in fact, she is the first person to be
included in such a program anywhere in the world. I admire Tahnee, Jeffery and Ray, who are
all in their own way hardworking, tenacious, determined and courageous people who have
never allowed their disability to hold them back.

As has been raised in this place before, the coalition is committed to delivering the NDIS—
a program designed to provide people with a significant and permanent disability with support
over their lifetime, regardless of how they acquire their disability. Earlier this year the Leader
of the Opposition, Tony Abbott, spoke at the National Press Club, reiterating that the NDIS
will be a priority for a coalition government. We have pledged to work with the Gillard
government to implement the recommendations as soon as possible, and only bipartisanship
will ensure that the NDIS proceeds smoothly.

Movement on this issue, however, appears to have stalled. Sadly, the only funding Labor
has committed to is $1 billion over four years, which is almost $3 billion less than the
Productivity Commission recommended over the same period. In the lead up to the last
budget the coalition called on the government to provide funding certainty; to this date
nothing has happened. To this end the coalition has proposed to establish a joint
parliamentary committee chaired by both sides of politics to make it work. This is the only way, and it is time that the Gillard government stopped playing politics with this issue. Our communities have spoken and a clear message has been sent to all of us that we should provide proper support for people with disabilities and their carers. The coalition will continue to place this issue above politics and will work towards a better deal for people with disabilities. It is time for the Gillard government to stop playing politics, get serious and get this issue sorted. (Time expired)

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (19:16): As someone who has had a longstanding interest in disability issues broadly, I welcome the opportunity to speak on this motion regarding the National Disability Insurance Scheme. For too long people with a disability, their families, their carers and the people who work within the sector have been sidelined and neglected. The result is that today we have a serious deficiency in the services available to people with a disability—services vary from one state to another, and it depends on which state you live in as to what kind of service you can access. It is a system that needs an overhaul and that has too often pushed people out of sight and out of mind. That seems to have been the mentality and the mindset of people in the past. It is time that is changed, because people with a disability should be treated no differently to anyone else. Every Australian counts.

I have listened to speakers from both sides of the chamber on this debate and I do not question for a moment the sincerity with which members have spoken with respect to the motion before us. The reality, however, is that if you are going to speak to this motion it is one thing to talk about sincerity and the issues that are of concern to you and it is another to have a look at the facts. I want to raise some of the facts with respect to this matter, because members opposite have consistently used the word 'bipartisanship' with respect to the motion.

Let us look at some of the facts. Fact 1: it was this Gillard Labor government that put the National Disability Insurance Scheme on the agenda, that commissioned the Productivity Commission inquiry and that received the report back in August last year—almost a year ago. Fact 2: this government has committed $1 billion over the next four years and, while the member for Solomon says that is a relatively small amount of money, it has in fact brought forward the starting time for the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Fact 3: it was the South Australian, ACT and Tasmanian governments that immediately embraced and committed to the trials proposed. All of those governments are Labor governments. Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia initially made no such commitments. Fact 4: in fact, New South Wales and Victoria only came on board after widespread public backlash caused those governments considerable embarrassment. We needed the public to get on board before the governments of New South Wales and Victoria made caring commitments. Fact 5: the Queensland government continues to walk away from this scheme. Campbell Newman cannot find $20 million for a National Disability Insurance Scheme but he can find $120 million for the Gold Coast racetrack.

Let me put an additional fact on the table. The South Australian government, a smaller government than the Queensland government, found its $20 million up-front without debate, without argument, in order to get on with the job of bringing in a national disability insurance scheme. If you want to talk about bipartisanship, you do not do it simply by words; you have to match the words with your dollars, as South Australia, the ACT, Tasmania and now Victoria and New South Wales have done.
The substance of this motion is to form a committee of federal parliamentarians. The fact is that disability is a joint responsibility between the federal government and the states and territories. The federal government acknowledged that and quite properly has formed a state and federal government select committee on disability reform, with the state and federal disability ministers and the treasurers of each state being part of that committee. That is the way it should be, because they are the people who will ultimately carry responsibility for the delivery of the National Disability Insurance Scheme across the country.

As I said earlier, people with a disability, their carers and the support workers in the sector have waited long enough. They want to see the government getting on with the necessary reforms. They do not want to see more committees and hear more talk about what might or might not be done. They know what is being proposed—and it is being proposed, I might add, in conjunction with a number of consultative committees that have been established to help the government work through this, with people who come directly from industry and know exactly what is needed and how best to achieve it. It is time to get on with the job. It is time to make a national disability insurance scheme real.

Mrs MARKUS (Macquarie) (19:21): I rise this evening to support the motion moved by the member for Dawson relating to the National Disability Insurance Scheme. While we may debate what each side of politics has or has not done and has achieved or has not achieved over recent decades with regard to caring and responding to the needs of people with disabilities, all of us agree that it is important that a national disability insurance scheme be implemented. I think that is fairly consistent with what everybody has said today. The most important people in this debate are the people with a disability in our communities, their families, those that care for them and the industry sector that endeavours to provide and deliver services, often when they are stressed, under pressure and under-resource.

I have consistently supported the NDIS. Having worked for more than 30 years with people with a disability and their families, I have seen firsthand the challenges they have faced. My own mother is legally blind. While she did not focus on her disability—she focused on her ability—she still had needs and has special needs as she ages. I believe it is absolutely critical that we provide people with a disability, their families and their carers with the regular care, support, therapy and equipment that they need. We would all agree on that. As mentioned by the member for Dawson, the NDIS is a once-in-a-generation landmark reform that has the potential to deliver better quality-of-life outcomes for Australians with a disability.

The coalition has placed a significant emphasis on the importance of this scheme. This is why the coalition believes that the parliament should immediately establish a joint select committee to oversee the implementation of the NDIS. We know that what we can achieve when we come together and agree is quite powerful. The rollout of an NDIS will span three parliaments. We know it will take longer than one term. The coalition recognises that there needs to be a mechanism to lift the NDIS beyond partisanship and to ensure it is owned by the parliament, thereby facilitating successful outcomes for all who are directly impacted by a disability.

The Productivity Commission has provided the best road map for achieving an NDIS. The Prime Minister needs to explain—and I ask this honestly—why she continues to encourage a strategy that differs from the guidelines set out by the commission. Until the Prime Minister
does this I can only assume that the Labor government is not committed to ensuring the successful delivery of the NDIS long term.

In fact, to date the Prime Minister has constantly undermined the legacy and longevity of the program since the first day the scheme was introduced into parliament. In the 2012-13 budget, the government failed to adequately provide for the first phase of the NDIS, by allocating only $1 billion of the $3.9 billion that the Productivity Commission said was necessary over the forward estimates to commence the launch site. It is unfortunate the Gillard Labor government's increasing debt and interest bill is delaying the full introduction of the NDIS, and as a result is delaying the necessary reforms to improve access and delivery of services to those with a disability, their families and carers. The federal Labor government will be spending more each financial year on debt interest costs than it will spend in total over the next four years on the NDIS.

Furthermore, the Gillard government has failed to commit to the Productivity Commission's target date for the full NDIS by 2018-19. In essence, the Prime Minister has put a small down payment on a program to which the government will not give any long-term commitment or support. People with a disability and their carers and families deserve more than this thinly veiled attempt to appear committed. The NDIS is a reform that requires the cooperation and support of state and territory governments, we all agree, as well as the disability support services sector and most importantly people with disabilities, their families and their carers.

Such reform will take all stakeholders coming together and working together. A workable NDIS will only take effect with states, territories and all the stakeholders incorporated in the plan and in the development as well as in the implementation. It is critical to the success of the initiative that the Prime Minister treat all stakeholders as partners. I reiterate the Leader of the Opposition's and the member for Dawson's call for the Prime Minister to accept the proposal to establish a joint parliamentary committee to be chaired by both sides of politics. It is important that the implementation of the NDIS remain beyond partisanship, and has the commitment of this parliament so that we can ensure the NDIS endures well into the future. (Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Vamvakinou): 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.

Norman, Mr Peter

Debate resumed on motion by Dr Leigh:

That this House:

(1) recognises the extraordinary athletic achievements of the late Peter Norman, who won the silver medal in the 200 metres sprint running event at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, in a time of 20.06 seconds, which still stands as the Australian record;

(2) acknowledges the bravery of Peter Norman in donning an Olympic Project for Human Rights badge on the podium, in solidarity with African-American athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos, who gave the ‘black power’ salute;

(3) apologises to Peter Norman for the wrong done by Australia in failing to send him to the 1972 Munich Olympics, despite repeatedly qualifying; and
(4) belatedly recognises the powerful role that Peter Norman played in furthering racial equality.

**Dr LEIGH** (Fraser) (19:27): Iconic images emerge from every Olympic Games: golden girl Betty Cuthbert taking home three gold medals in Melbourne, Kieran Perkins's stunning performance from lane 8 in Atlanta, Cathy Freeman carrying the Australian and Aboriginal flags after winning the 400 in Sydney. But perhaps the most powerful image of the modern Olympics is this: *Life* magazine and *Le Monde* declared it one of the most influential images of the 20th century, an image of three brave athletes of the 1968 Mexico City games making a statement on racial equality. And one of them was Australia's Peter Norman.

It is Peter Norman's role in that moment, in taking a stand against racial injustice, that I want to talk about. In the 1968 Mexico City games, Peter Norman ran a time of 20.06 seconds in the men's 200-metre final, winning the silver medal and in the process setting the Australian record that still stands today. As recently as the 2000 Olympics, Norman's time would have won him the gold medal. But in 1968, it was when the *Star-Spangled Banner* began to play after the medal presentation that Peter Norman became a part of history. The two Americans, Tommie Smith and John Carlos, stand with heads bowed and one arm raised, a black glove on the right hand of Smith and one on Carlos's left. Their posture and shoelessness symbolise black poverty and racial inequality in the United States, sending a powerful message to the world for racial equality.

Prior to the presentation, Smith and Carlos told Norman of their plan. 'I'll stand with you,' he told them. Carlos recalled he expected to see fear in Norman's eyes but he did not. 'I saw only love,' Carlos said. On the way to the dais, Norman borrowed an Olympic Project for Human Rights badge from white US rower Paul Hoffman. After Carlos forgot his gloves, Norman came up with the idea that the two Americans should share one pair of gloves. A protest like this on a global stage had never been done before—at the time it was electrifying. Racist slurs were hurled at Smith and Carlos. IOC President Avery Brundage, a man who had had no difficulty with the Nazi salute being used in the 1936 Olympics, insisted the two be expelled. In that moment, Norman advanced international awareness for racial equality. He was proud to stand with Smith and Carlos, and the three remained lifelong friends.

At his funeral in 2006, Smith and Carlos gave eulogies and were pallbearers. As for Norman himself, he competed in the 1970 Commonwealth Games, but was not sent to the 1972 Olympics. Some said that this was because of his action in 1968; others say that financial pressure prevented the AOC from sending a full complement of athletes. What is clear is that in 1972, Norman consistently ran qualifying times for the 100 and 200 metres but was not sent. It is also clear that he never complained about his treatment. He never stopped thinking about himself as a runner. His trainer, Ray Weinberg, said, 'He always called me coach.' Thirty-two years later it took an invitation from the United States Olympic team for him to be part of the 2000 games—the United States Olympic team.

The apparent treatment of Peter Norman was symbolic of the attitude of the late sixties and the early seventies, the view that sport and politics should not mix. In the early 1970s, a group of brave protesters took a stand against apartheid in South Africa, interrupting games played by white-only sporting teams. History has vindicated those anti-apartheid protesters and history has vindicated Peter Norman. I am grateful that his 91-year-old mother Thelma, his sister Elaine Ambler and her husband Michael can be here today.
Every Olympic Games produces moments of heroism, humanity and humility. Its motto is: 'Citius, Altius, Fortius'—‘Swifter, Higher, Stronger.’ In 1968 Peter Norman exemplified this—swifter, because of his record that still stands; higher, because he stood tall that day; and stronger, because of the guts it took to make a stand. In that simple act of wearing that badge, Peter Norman showed the world he stood for racial equality. He showed us that the actions of one person can make a difference. It is a message that echoes down to us today. Whether refusing to tolerate a racist joke or befriending a new migrant, each of us can—and all of us should—be a Peter Norman in our own lives.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Vamvakinou): On indulgence, as the mother of a young son who loves running, I would like to welcome Mrs Norman to the chamber.

Mr ALEXANDER (Bennelong) (19:32): I rise to recognise the unique contribution made by Australian athlete Peter Norman to the worlds of both sport and politics. In sport Norman's feet did the talking, becoming the highest achieving Australian male sprinter in our nation's history. In politics, Norman's statement was not through the delivery of a speech but simply through the wearing of a badge. The badge said: 'Olympic Project for Human Rights'. The venue was the 1968 Mexico Olympic Games. The year 1968 is often referred to as the year the world changed—the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy; the raging of the Vietnam War; riots in Paris; industrial strikes across Europe; and uprisings in Czechoslovakia and Pakistan.

In the United States, violence engulfed civil rights protests across the nation. In response, Harry Edwards, famous for his revolutionary musings as Professor in Black Leadership at San Jose State College, formed the Olympic Project for Human Rights. Blurring the fine line between sport and politics, the OPHR called for the instant dismissal of Avery Brundage as the president of the International Olympic Committee, the banning of competitors from South Africa and Rhodesia, and the reinstatement of Muhammad Ali's title as world boxing champion. Talk of protests by athletes at the games was met by threats from Brundage, who claimed that the Olympic Games was not the place for political statement and any action would be met with official sanction. Two of Harry's most famous students were outspoken athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos, who were favourites to win gold and silver in the 200 metres final. What no-one expected was Australian Peter Norman, who split the two Americans to take out the silver medal.

Norman's time of 20.06 seconds would have won gold at the Sydney Olympics and still stands as the Australian record 44 years later. No Australian male sprinter has since won an Olympic medal of any description and yet it is a stain on our nation that Peter Norman was immediately ostracised by the Australian media and by athletics officials. Despite running five Olympic qualifying times for the 100 metres and 13 for the 200 metres, the Australian Olympic Committee preferred to send no male sprinters to the 1972 Munich games.

Norman's crime was to give a silent expression of solidarity to Smith and Carlos. Walking into the Olympic stadium in their black socks with one hand clad in a black glove and the other carrying their running shoes, Smith and Carlos proudly wore OPHR badges as a statement against racism and segregation in the United States. On the way out to the medal ceremony, Norman spotted another US athlete wearing an OPHR badge and asked if he could borrow it. The simple gesture to wear this badge on the dais as Smith and Carlos raised their fists in protest condemned Norman to never represent Australia again.
The shame for Australia is not limited to the immediate reaction from the media and Australian officials banning Norman from the 1972 games. The further embarrassment is that 32 years after Mexico, as we celebrated with such national pride at the Sydney Olympic Games, Peter Norman received no formal recognition. Just as Atlanta had done with Muhammad Ali four years earlier, the opening ceremony for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games offered a unique opportunity for national healing, to give our nation a chance to make peace with Peter Norman. Yet recognition instead came from the US track team with Edward Moses inviting him to join them and Michael Johnson reportedly calling Peter Norman, 'My hero.' It is the greatest irony that the most celebrated moment of the Sydney 2000 games was the victory by Cathy Freeman in the 400-metre final.

In 2006, Norman passed away. His impact was so great that the US track and field federation declared the day of his funeral, 9 October 2006, Peter Norman Day. In the most fitting tribute, Tommie Smith and John Carlos travelled to Australia to deliver eulogies and to serve as pallbearers. I thank the member for Fraser for raising this motion. To Peter Norman's family, some of whom are present here today, I hope that you can accept our regret at the way Peter was treated and that his recognition did not come during his lifetime. Peter George Norman is truly an Australian legend and deserves to be celebrated by athletes, schoolchildren, historians and politicians across the nation.

Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (19:37): I am honoured to speak about a man I never met but a man I wish I had met. As the only white man ever invited to the Martin Luther King games and with his own day on the US track calendar, it is certainly time we gave much greater recognition in Australia to Peter Norman as a man, an athlete and as a believer in the universal principle of equality. In preparation for this motion, I very much enjoyed reading a lot about Peter Norman and talking with family and friends. I note statements this week from the Australian Olympic Committee and Athletics Australia, and I particularly mention welcome contact from Peter's brother, Laurie, and his coach and the manager of the athletics team, Ray Weinberg. I also note the attendance today of Peter's mother and sister, showing us all that this matters to the Norman family—mostly I hope with pride, but maybe with a little pain following the events of 44 years ago and the journey that Peter went through until his untimely death six years ago.

Firstly, Peter the man. He sounded like good company, a community focused man and a hard worker. He started as an apprentice butcher. I note from what I could see from the famous photo that he still had all 10 fingers. I really liked reading that even after he won a silver medal he returned to play 67 games for West Brunswick football club, even after the Olympic success. As policymakers we wrestle with the community sport versus elite sport issue. Peter Norman provides food for thought, and, as a separate legacy, he is an example not only for elite sportspeople but also for us to think about—it is not an either/or choice; we can achieve both.

Secondly, Peter the athlete. He was fast—very fast. He still has a record time. He was the Aussie champion from 1966-70. I think we are all jealous of how he mastered the art of the fast finish. It is always dangerous to make big cross-generational statements, but Peter Norman would definitely be in the mix for Australia's finest sprinter ever and is already listed by the official AOC historian as one of Australia's finest ever athletes.
I have purposely spoken of the man and the athlete before the moment that has us here tonight. Because without being a fine man, or a fine athlete, the choice and the challenge that were put to Peter Norman in the dressing room following the 200-metre final in 1968 would never have occurred. He earned his right to do something extraordinary, by being a man and an athlete of many skills and talents.

So, thirdly, the podium stand. Peter Norman went to Mexico to run fast for himself, his family and his country. He did. He did not plan or conspire in the events that followed. He was approached by the first- and third-placegetters. At the very moment when he had reached the top of his own sporting challenges, rather than being able to rest and celebrate, he was hit with another challenge. One, thankfully, he gracefully recognised was bigger than sport and more universal than his own celebrations. I put it to all Australians: what if Peter Norman had said no? What if he had shown disgust at the suggestion or shaken his head when the statement by Smith and Carlos was made? In the circumstances, he was a great diplomat as well as a fine athlete. He brought three people and two nations closer together by standing silently and proudly, committing the crime of displaying a borrowed badge.

His words in response to the approach of Carlos and Smith: 'I will stand with you,' are outstanding words in the circumstances immediately following the race and are the timeless legacy that we celebrate tonight. These five words speak as loudly to the challenges of reconciliation in Australia today as they did to racial equality in the US in the late sixties. It is to Peter Norman's eternal credit that he recognised the significance of the moment and rose to his own challenge. I note the words of the member for Bennelong, who mentioned San Jose State University. There is a 23-foot statue at San Jose State University. It has the two Americans there with an empty spot for the silver medallist. When you first hear about it you think: 'The Yanks have done it again and forgotten the Aussie.' But when you read about it more and think about it you realise that it is all about Peter Norman. It is inviting you, the visitor, to stand in the place of Peter Norman, to take up the challenge that he accepted and stand with those seeking the universal principle of racial equality. I say thank you to the member for Fraser for bringing on this motion and, belatedly, thank you to the Norman family for producing a great man, a great athlete and a great diplomat. (Time expired)

Mr TEHAN (Wannon) (19:42): It gives me great joy to rise as well on this occasion to support those speakers before me, who have spoken so eloquently, and to recognise Peter's family, who are with us today. The 1968 Summer Olympics have a special place in my heart for two reasons: they were held in the year that I was born and I spent three years in Mexico City as a diplomat, during which time I went out to the stadium. I have seen where Peter ran on that day, so it gives me great joy to speak on this motion.

The 1968 Summer Olympics were famous for three things: Dick Fosbury inventing the Fosbury flop; Bob Beamon jumping 55 centimetres further than anyone else had jumped and so breaking the long-jump record, which stood until 1991, and the black power medal ceremony. Peter Norman's courage was there for all to see. As this motion rightly recognises, all Australians should proudly recognise his bravery on that day. As the motion acknowledges, we should also recognise Peter's athletic prowess. As Peter's good friend Mike Hurst pointed out in a moving article on Peter's death, and I would recommend that everyone read it, Peter had two problems when he started out: he was a slow starter and he was asthmatic. You need to go to Mexico City and try to acclimatise yourself to the altitude to get
a sense of what it must have been like as an asthmatic to go there and achieve what he achieved. It is quite extraordinary. It took me three to six months to acclimatise to the altitude. All our athletes who went there and acclimatised and performed so well should be recognised, but it is particularly Peter, for what he did and the time he ran, that we should note.

There is one point, however, that respectfully I would like to raise. That is, we have to be very careful with point No. 3 of the motion because the research that I have done would seem to show that Peter himself, when it came to the 1972 Olympics, recognised that he probably was not going to be selected. That was based on his performance at the 1972 Australian athletic championships. Ron Carter quotes Peter as saying:

I ran a shocker. I'm history. I'm out of the team. All I had to do was win even in a slow time and I think I would have been off to Munich. I felt a lot older than 30 today.

So, on point No. 3, we need to be a little bit careful. He was selected for the 1970 Commonwealth Games and there did not seem to be an issue around that. I think that, in recognising all the other elements, we have to be a little bit careful there. Aside from that, this motion that Dr Leigh has put forward is significant. It recognises a fantastic individual and a fantastic performance by Peter Norman at the Mexico Olympics.

I now refer in particular to what the member for Lyne had to say. That statue in San Jose is a truly remarkable piece of art. The way you have described it—how you can stand between, how you can place yourself in the shoes of Peter Norman—lets you ask yourself: do I have the courage to do what Peter did? It was not easy in those times. Here in Australia, we still had not put to bed the White Australia policy and we all know what was going on in the US during those times. I asked myself when I was preparing for this debate whether I would have been able to do what Peter did. I would hope that the best in me would have been able to; I really do. But unless you could place yourself in that situation at that time, I do not think you could clearly say that you would. That statue sums that up. It asks all of us to make sure that we fight for racial equality and that we are brave enough to place ourselves between those two athletes.

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (19:47): I am very happy to contribute to the debate on this motion by the member for Fraser because, in essence, what we are acknowledging today is the capacity in each of us to live according to the best human qualities, irrespective of what we do or where we live. It is timely, as the London Olympics end and our Australian athletes return home, that we remember an extraordinary Olympian, Peter Norman, for his sporting achievement, but more importantly for his bravery and his humanity. I acknowledge Peter Norman's family members as well, here in the parliament today.

As others have mentioned, Peter Norman was a remarkable athlete. His effort in winning the silver medal in the men's 200 metres at the Mexico City Olympics is a track and field achievement that grows in stature as time passes. As the motion notes, Norman's time of 20.06 seconds is still the Australian record. It is incredible to think that, with all the training and sports science innovations that have occurred in the meantime, Peter Norman's record still stands 44 years later.

Peter Norman's counsel in support of Tommie Smith and John Carlos and his act of solidarity in wearing the Olympic Project for Human Rights badge was an integral part of a gesture whose power resonated around the world. Norman's part in that act of defiance was regarded—and is still regarded, especially in the United States—as a notable contribution to
the struggle by African-American athletes for equality and justice. Yet Peter Norman's protest was not particularly heeded or welcomed in Australia. It is a travesty that Australian Olympic officials reprimanded Norman for his action and that the Australian media ostracised him. Despite him repeatedly qualifying for the 100-metre and 200-metre sprints during 1971-1972, the Australian athletics authorities did not send him to the 1972 Munich Olympics—the first modern Olympics since 1896 when no Australian sprinters participated.

Just as Peter Norman's part in the black glove and barefooted salute of John Carlos and Tommie Smith struck a blow for the civil rights movement in the US and elsewhere, so we have seen the scourge of racial discrimination and prejudice in this country tackled front on by Australian sports people.

John Pilger wrote an article last week entitled 'How the chosen ones ended Australia's sporting prowess and revealed its secret past' that considered the many Indigenous sports people who have suffered discrimination and intolerance in Australia. He reflected on the treatment of the Australian light-heavyweight boxer Damien Hooper, who was sanctioned during the London Olympics for stepping into the ring wearing a T-shirt that bore the Aboriginal flag. Damien Hooper said: 'I am proud of what I did. I am representing my culture, not only my country.' I am not sure how anyone could really argue with that, and I am not sure how much respect we pay to the example of someone like Peter Norman if we do not also acknowledge the courage and legitimacy of Damien Hooper's actions.

Pilger also wrote about an Aboriginal leader, the late Charlie Perkins, who played first division soccer in England. Pilger noted that:

In the 1960s, Charlie led “freedom rides” into the north-west of New South Wales, where “nigger hunts” were still not uncommon. Abused and spat at, he stood at the turnstiles of local swimming pools and sports fields and demanded that a race bar be lifted.

In 1993, footballer Nicky Winmar stood to confront the Collingwood fans who had racially taunted him and lifted his St Kilda jumper to point with angry pride and defiance to his black skin. Winmar was best on ground that day.

These are just some of the many instances in which Australian sports people have shown that in sport, as in other fields of endeavour, what matters is not just the time you run or swim, the goals you kick, the runs you score or the medals you win. What matters is also what you believe and what you do about those beliefs. There are opportunities in all walks of life to see inequities in the world and to speak out or act out against them. Sport at the highest level creates opportunities not only to perform at your best but sometimes to go further than that and demonstrate the best qualities of the human spirit.

Peter Norman knew the truth of that and he lived that truth. Always modest about his part in one of sport's greatest moments, he said towards the end of his life, 'I was only a pebble thrown into still, deep waters.' That is what he told Tommie Smith when he visited the US a year before his death. Then he said, 'My hope was that the ripples would reach the shore of love.' John Carlos spoke at the time of Peter Norman's funeral and he encouraged Australians to know his story and his example better. He said, 'Go and tell your kids the story of Peter Norman.' Well, tonight we are telling the story, and I thank the member for Fraser for bringing this motion and giving us the opportunity in our own ways to be the storytellers of one of Australia's great tales and to make an act of remembrance for one of Australia's greatest sportsmen.
Mr IRONS (Swan) (19:52): I rise to speak on the member for Fraser's motion, which includes recognising the extraordinary athletic achievements of the late Peter Norman, who won the silver medal in the 200-metre sprint event at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics in a time of 20.06 seconds, which still stands as the Australian record. I will include in my speech parts of an editorial obituary for Peter Norman, who passed away in 2006.

One of the most dramatic events in Olympic history came in 1968 when Tommie Smith and John Carlos, the US 200-metre medallists in Mexico City, stood on the victory dais barefoot, heads bowed and gloved fists raised during the playing of the Star-spangled banner. The third man in the photograph of this enduring symbol of protest against racial discrimination was Australia's Peter Norman, the silver medallist, who died suddenly at age 64 in 2006. He too became an icon of the American civil rights movement, if an unlikely one. In the photo he wears a badge identical to those worn by Smith and Carlos, identifying the Olympic Project for Human Rights. But Norman's participation was more than a token. While he did not raise a fist, he did lend a hand—that was how Smith explained it.

The member for Fraser's motion also acknowledges the bravery of Peter Norman in donning an Olympic Project for Human Rights badge on the podium in solidarity with the African-American athletes, Tommie Smith and John Carlos, who gave the 'black power' salute. The Americans had discussed their plan with Norman, then a 26-year-old physical education teacher and Salvation Army officer, before the ceremony. When Carlos realised he had forgotten his black gloves, Norman suggested the two share Smith's pair. Norman borrowed a badge, which he then attached to his tracksuit over his heart. After the ceremony, Norman explained himself simply—'I believe that every man is born equal and should be treated that way.'

The motion also calls for the parliament to apologise to Peter Norman for the wrong done by Australia in failing to send him to the 1972 Munich Olympics, despite him repeatedly qualifying, and to belatedly recognise the powerful role that Peter Norman played in furthering racial equality.

After their protest, Smith and Carlos were expelled from the games. Their competitive careers were shattered and their marriages crumbled under the strain. The Australian team's chef de mission, Julius 'Judy' Patching, resisted calls from the country's conservative media for Norman to be punished, telling the athlete in private: 'They're screaming out for your blood, so consider yourself severely punished. By the way, have you got any tickets for the hockey today?' Patching seemed mystified as to what the fuss was about, though he did warn the athlete to be careful.

We have heard eloquent submissions and speeches by other members of this place, but I want to speak a bit more about Peter Norman the man. For me, as a 10-year-old in 1968 who thought I could I run a bit, he was an inspiration, and he is still an inspiration to many athletes in Australia. I spent four years running for the biggest athletic club in Australia—the Box Hill Athletic Club—and after that and he was always spoken about highly at that club. He is still regarded as Australia's greatest ever sprinter.

It was with the Melbourne Harriers that Norman won his first major title: the Victorian junior 200-metre championship in 1960. He was the Australian champion for the five years from 1966 to 1970 and became known for his fast finishing. He took a relay bronze at the 1966 Commonwealth Games and 200-metre gold at the inaugural Pacific Games in Tokyo in
1969. In the Mexico City final, Carlos, on the inside, eased up slightly when he saw his college teammate Smith winning easily. But Norman, in lane 6, had begun his trademark surge around the final bend and nipped Carlos by 0.04 of a second. Smith set a world record of 19.83 seconds; Norman was clocked at 20.06 seconds, which, as I said before, remains the Australian national record to this day.

Norman retired from international competition after finishing third at the Australian trials for the 1972 Munich games. He continued running until 1985, when an Achilles tendon injury became infected and gangrene set in. He avoided amputation only because one doctor argued with his colleagues that you cannot cut off the leg of an Olympic silver medallist. Norman was confined to a wheelchair while he relearned to walk. After Norman recovered he worked for the Melbourne department of sport and recreation. He was active in athletics administration, Olympic fundraising and the organisation of major events like the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

Norman underwent triple bypass surgery a month before he died of an apparent heart attack while mowing his lawn. Peter Norman was and still is an Australian legend of athletics and sport.

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (19:57): I too rise to speak on the member for Fraser's wonderful motion regarding an apology to the Olympic champion and silver medallist Peter George Norman. I do not use the word 'champion' lightly—I tell Peter's family that now—but Peter Norman was a champion, and not only because he was a five-time Australian 200-metre titleholder and his time of 20.06 seconds from the 1960s still stands as the Australian 200-metre record. Peter Norman was a champion because he won Olympic silver in 1968. Peter Norman was also a champion because he captured the hearts and minds of fair-minded people everywhere when, in 1968, his actions and support for two African-Americans sent a clear message to people around the world, especially in Australia, that basic human rights and equality for all are important.

On the morning of 16 October 1968, US athlete Tommie Smith won the 200-metre race in a world record time of 19.83 seconds, with Australia's Peter Norman second with a time of 20.06 and the USA's John Carlos in third place with a time of 20.1 seconds. After the race was completed the three went to collect their medals at the podium, and the others discussed this with Peter Norman, as other speakers have mentioned earlier. The two US athletes received their medals shoeless but wearing black socks to represent black poverty.

Tommie Smith wore a black scarf around his neck to represent black pride. John Carlos had his tracksuit top unzipped to show solidarity with all blue-collar workers in the US and wore a necklace of beads which he described as being 'for those individuals that were lynched or killed that no-one said a prayer for, that were hung and tarred'. Carlos and Smith also made a raised fist gesture. For the benefit of those people from generations X and Y, it is a symbol like that at the Olympic stadium that is known to many as the 'black power salute'—to show their support for human rights. Both US athletes intended on bringing black gloves to the event but Carlos, in the hubbub and excitement, forgot his, leaving them in the Olympic village.

It was Peter Norman from Australia who suggested that Carlos wear Smith's left-handed glove, differing from that traditional black power salute. That is an explanation for something that until today I had never understood about that photograph. So when the Star Spangled
Banner played, Smith and Carlos delivered the salute with heads bowed, a gesture which became front-page news around the world, not necessarily for all the right reasons. Peter Norman, who was neither black nor American but lived in a country alongside racism—I think most Australians would admit that—also wore a human rights badge on his shirt during the ceremony to show support for the two African Americans. Norman, a noted critic of the White Australia policy, used his badge to express his empathy with their ideals.

It was this silent gesture by Peter Norman that began the change from a black power salute to a human rights salute. This truly epitomises how signs and symbols can challenge people's perceptions and generate widespread change. That does not mean that your decisions to effect change come without a price. Sadly, as his family knows, Peter Norman was reprimanded by Australia's Olympic authorities and the Australian media ostracised him. Norman was also banned for two years on his return, probably at his peak running time. Despite Norman running qualifying times for the 100 metres five times and the 200 metres 13 times during 1971 and 1972, the Australian Olympic track team, sadly, did not send him or any other male sprinters to the 1972 summer Olympics in Munich—the first modern Olympics since 1896 where no Australian sprinters participated.

Peter Norman made a brave choice when he decided to support Carlos and Smith. Norman's decision to support Carlos and Smith, to stand up for equality and human rights and to openly criticise the White Australia policy made him a true hero and champion. It is for that that he should be remembered. Sadly, Norman passed away on 3 October 2006 at the young age of 64—eerily, almost 38 years to the day from when he made his grand gesture on the Olympic podium. While Norman did not lend a fist, as he said, he certainly did lend a hand. His actions are an example to all that one small act can make a difference. I often say that wearing a badge is never enough, but on this occasion it was a good start. It is the way that we as people, as parliamentarians and as members of our communities can build on the foundations to make a real difference to the world.

These are tough times for Labor supporters. It may be time for two badges, some might suggest. But the next time that anyone thinks of wearing a badge to support awareness of diabetes, breast cancer, our troops or whatever the topic is, I will also think about how brave people can go one step further to challenge perceptions, just like Peter Norman did. For me he will always be a true Olympic champion. (Time expired)

Debate adjourned.

Education Funding

Debate resumed on motion by Ms Smyth:

That this House:

(1) condemns the Victorian Liberal Government for scrapping the ‘School Start Bonus’ and ‘School-based Education Maintenance Allowance’ payments and calls for them to be immediately reinstated; and

(2) considers that:

(a) the Victorian Liberal Government's cuts to the Education Maintenance Allowance will affect some of the most disadvantaged students across Victoria, and their families; and

(b) these cuts, combined with cuts which have already been made by the Victorian Government to Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning and the Victorian TAFE system, will cause long-lasting
damage to the Victorian education system, particularly for those who are most at risk of leaving the school system early without proper skills and training.

**Ms SMYTH** (La Trobe) (20:03): Victorians are forming a clear picture of what the Baillieu government means for their kids' education. Vote Liberal and you are effectively writing off the education system. After the Leader of the Opposition's remarks today undermining public schools, it is pretty clear that Liberals everywhere are singing from the same song sheet when it comes to slashing the nation's education budget.

The Baillieu government has taken the axe to funding for families with children at primary school, secondary school and TAFE. Earlier this year it scrapped the school start bonus for families and it slashed the education maintenance allowance. These are payments that many lower income families and the schools that they send their children to have come to rely on. It means that they will have less money available for things like uniforms, textbooks, stationery and excursions—the types of things that you might reasonably expect in the education system.

I know that some school principals expect overall they will lose up to $40,000 as a result of the cuts. That is an extraordinary amount for a school to cover in a year, and for some schools it simply is not going to be possible to fundraise to cover the shortfall. It has gotten to the stage where I understand, according to recent reporting, some schools are asking parents to pass on government grants so that they can maintain basic education standards. A survey of 200 primary school principals undertaken by the Victorian Principals Association recently found that their schools have lost around $2.3 million in funding as a result of these cuts.

At the same time as Ted Baillieu is slashing funding, federal Labor have introduced the schoolkids bonus, which naturally was opposed by the coalition. While we are helping to support Victorian students and their families through the schoolkids bonus, the Baillieu government is taking money from local schools and families. Labor's schoolkids bonus is available to around 10,500 families in my electorate alone, which is around 18,000 eligible children, and that will mean about $11 million in support provided locally by the federal government for families with children in schools across my electorate.

The federal government has already committed over $65 billion to schools over four years. This includes $2.4 billion to provide computers in schools, opposed by those opposite, who plainly again this evening take no interest in the debate at hand. There is $2.5 billion for trade training centres, once again opposed by those opposite. There is $16.2 billion in capital investment in schools, opposed by those opposite. Labor has also allocated around $13.6 billion in this year's budget for schools, early childhood and youth programs. We have invested in these programs because we believe that education and training gives people the opportunity to go on to fulfilling work and fulfilling lives. Education creates opportunity and improves our society. For low-income families in particular, it has the capacity to change lives for the better.

The Liberals seem to see funding of education as a drain on resources rather than a social good. Perhaps during the course of this debate some of our coalition colleagues will choose to distance themselves on the issue of the school start bonus and EMA cuts by the Baillieu government, just as they have distanced themselves on the question of TAFE funding. The ruthless cuts to TAFE funding have had a harsh impact on the TAFE sector and a disproportionately harsh effect for Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning students and vocational education and training students. Significantly, they will have some of their most
severe effects on regional communities. I understand that this is a source of some agitation amongst those opposite who represent or profess to represent regional constituencies. These regions rely on TAFE institutions for employment opportunities and for the health of their local economies, and I am sure the member opposite knows that all too well, as his colleagues do similarly.

Now is the chance for those members to say something on the record which reflects the concerns of their communities. Now is their chance to say emphatically that education is important and that it should not simply be the federal government that is dipping its hand in its pocket to support students and families once again. I am sure the member opposite will agree. Now is their chance. Indeed now is your chance to call on your state coalition colleagues in the Baillieu government and ask them to reinstate the school start bonus, the EMA and TAFE funding. Now is their chance to set a reasonable tone on behalf of Liberals and Nationals in a national discussion about education. I hope that they will take the opportunity to do so. I am afraid that it is unlikely that they will. I suspect, given the comments of the Leader of the Opposition today, that they will simply follow the track record of the Baillieu government in making further cuts to education and to public schools. I fully expect that with their hands on the reins of power they will undermine our national education system in addition to the Victorian education system.

Mr McCormack (Riverina) (20:08): I note that the member for La Trobe gave notice of this particular private member's business on 31 May. Much has happened in relation to education in the ensuing period. Not all of it—indeed, none of it—has the government coming out smelling like roses. This argument being proffered by Labor is a bit rich and the member for La Trobe, who has just left the chamber, knows full well the fact that it is quite hypocritical. She has been in Victoria long enough to know that the state and its schools did not fare too well under Labor when, firstly, Steve Bracks was Premier from 1999 to 2007, followed by nearly 3½ years under John Brumby.

The Victorian education minister, Martin Dixon, the member for Nepean, is a good man. I know him well. He has been in the Victorian Legislative Assembly since 1996 and is doing his best to clean up the mess left by Labor. Whilst in opposition Mr Dixon served in several shadow cabinet roles, including education and training, education services, skills and employment and innovation. So he knows only too well what is required to give Victorian students the best opportunities to get good marks and a good job or be able to continue in their studies. He is carrying out that task diligently, enthusiastically and successfully.

Just hours after claiming that all schools will get more funding, today the education minister in the federal parliament refused to guarantee that no school would be worse off under Labor's school funding changes, and this affects Victoria. Just this afternoon in an interview on Sky News PM Agenda, the schools minister was asked to guarantee that no school would be worse off, and he refused to do so on several occasions. It now seems that the truth is finally out there. I can see the member opposite pointing things out to me, but he knows full well that Victorian school students would do a lot better under a coalition government, and after the next election, hopefully that will occur. The Liberal and Nationals will be in government federally to complement the Victorian Liberal-Nationals state government, and students in his state will fare much better.
After cancelling their response to Gonski this week, due to the revelation that modelling based on the department of education's own figures showed that one in three schools in Australia will lose under the Gonski changes, it is time for the federal education minister to provide some answers. He must immediately guarantee that no school, including those in Victoria, will be worse off in real terms, or he must admit that 3,254 Australian schools, including many in the state of the member for McEwen opposite, will lose under Labor's new funding model, including 2,330 government schools. It is a national disgrace that Labor would leave schools and parents in this cloud of uncertainty and we know full well with the school halls fiasco, that cost $16 billion, and we would not even be having this debate about money being wasted in education and provisions for Victorian schools being allegedly taken away, if federal Labor had spent the money wisely and given principals the autonomy to spend the money which would best suit their own school's needs. We have seen in private schools—

An honourable member interjecting—

Mr McCormack: I can't hear the interjection, but I am sure it's silly. We have seen in private schools, right throughout Australia, how their schools benefited from making their own decisions about where their money should be spent and to provide good school halls and good classrooms, at a good cost—not this absolutely wild builders' early retirement fund that unfortunately beset the public system.

Even with the additional $5 billion per year in 2009 dollars proposed by the Gonski review, we have heard today that a third of all schools will be worse off. It is just not acceptable. The member for McEwen knows it. The Victorian opposition knows it. Under a federal Liberal and Nationals government, they will certainly be better off in Victoria and right throughout Australia. Regional schools, right throughout Australia, are not properly funded and not under Gonski, and they need to be because they do it tough. Country schools are doing it very tough and only tonight the shadow parliamentary secretary for regional education, Senator Fiona Nash, explained to our party room just in fact how tough they are doing it.

Mr Symon (Deakin) (20:13): I speak in support of this motion moved by the member for La Trobe. The member for Riverina has spoken on this motion, but I ask the question, 'Where are the Victorian Liberals?' Whilst the member for Riverina might want to talk about some issues with federal funding, this motion is actually about state funding, and in particular, it is about state funding that has been ripped off from local schools and taken away from parents. Although the member for Riverina says that education delivery for students and parents will be better under a Liberal coalition government, we have one of those in Victoria and I can tell the House that parents, students and schools are far worse off under a Liberal coalition government.

In 2006, the Victorian state Labor government delivered on a commitment to help families with children starting school at prep or year 7 by introducing School Start Bonus. This $300 payment has helped families pay for items, such as uniforms and textbooks, at the time when these expenses hit the hardest. Most parents know that when their child starts school, or moves from primary to secondary, that is the time when the bills really start rolling in. And it is quite simple to see why. The expense of sending a child to school year to year does not go away, but starting a new school certainly means that the expense goes up, whether it be new
uniforms, new books or new ways of getting to school. Ask any parent who has a child at school and they will tell you.

But of even greater concern is the slashing of the education maintenance allowance by the Baillieu Liberal government. This payment that was previously paid to parents with a healthcare card and, importantly, to the school that their children attended has been trashed. Schools that relied on this funding of around $117.50 for a primary student and $235 for a secondary student now receive no funding at all from the education maintenance allowance. Some schools stand to lose up to $80,000 in funding, as reported in the Age on 27 May 2012 in an article entitled 'Poorer students to miss out'. This funding has allowed schools to help out families who could not afford the necessary uniforms and school equipment, to help ensure that all students had a chance of a good education. Frank Sal, from the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, said:

Much of the restructuring of government school funding seems to have been extremely underhanded. And in that article he was talking particularly about Victoria.

Cuts to the EMA and the School Start Bonus are a discrimination against students who come from poor families, and this budget grab of $19 million by the Victorian Liberal government is typical of the attitude of the born-to-rule. As an example, I would like to talk about a school in my electorate, Ringwood Secondary College, which is a very large, highly regarded and highly popular school, with parents from many kilometres around trying to send their children there. Ringwood also takes a lot of very local students who come from an area that is low SES. They have sent a letter out to parents which says:

Essentially, whereas the EMA was paid half to the parent and half to the school, next year the total EMA payment will be made to the eligible parent directly. It will be the responsibility of the eligible parent to forward this money to the school to pay for subject materials et cetera.

They then have a very helpful table of the 2012 school year versus the 2013 school year. The letter goes on to say that in 2012, the School Start Bonus, available if you have a student starting in year 7, is $300. In 2013, not applicable—zero. The EMA school portion in 2012, $235 and the EMA parent portion in 2012, $235—a total of $470. But in 2013, the EMA school portion has been cancelled—no money; and the EMA parent portion is $300, or for a student in year 8 and up to 16-year-olds, $250. So that is $250 or $300 compared to $470 for the previous year.

Importantly, Ringwood Secondary College in 2012 was able to enter into agreement with parents to facilitate the payment of subject materials, computers, equipment and/or general charges prior to commencing as funds go into the school. But in 2013 the secondary college is unable to help with the payment of subject material, computers, equipment and/or general charges as no EMA funds will come to the school—not a dollar. In summary, this means that a parent of a year 7 student eligible for EMA will be able to draw on $777 with the School Start Bonus and EMA in 2012 and this figure will fall to $300 in 2013. A parent of a student from year 8 up to the age of 16 will be able to use $470 in 2012—which will fall to $250 in 2013. These changes mean a big deal for our local students. Students who need the money most are being deprived. It is an outrage. It should be stopped. I call on the Victorian Liberal Party to withdraw it. (Time expired)

Mr MITCHELL (McEwen) (20:18): It is always good to follow Mr Symon and his eloquent speeches, particularly about TAFE. I want to commend the member for Riverina for
having the intestinal fortitude to turn up and do this while his Victorian colleagues go and hide under their rock. Unfortunately, though, his speech had nothing to do with the motion before the House. In fact, he did not even know who the relevant minister is. He should know—it is one of his lot; one of the Nationals.

At the 2010 election the Baillieu Liberals and their lapdog Nats made the following commitments: Victorian teachers were to be the highest paid in Australia and there would be no public service cuts. What a difference two years makes! Victoria has faced a series of cuts to public education funding, including the ripping of hundreds of millions of dollars out of TAFEs, the cutting of the education maintenance allowance for low-income earners, and ending the School Start Bonus whilst decimating the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning. The actions of the Baillieu Liberals represent the largest attack on Victorian education in a generation—an attack on education that is worst than the Kennett era. Many people have said that it is worse than the Kennett era, because at least he had a plan. Sure it was all about cutting and it was a cruel savage one that led to the skills shortage in Victoria but, unlike Baillieu, he actually had a plan.

Not content with slashing $500 million from Victoria's education budget last year, the Baillieu government delivered another series of cuts in this year's budget: slashing the school portion of the EMA, cutting school staff bonuses and slashing the TAFE. On 24 May 2012, Peter Hall said that reports that the TAFE sector could lose 2,000 jobs because of funding cuts were 'alarmist'. But, so far, in fewer than four months, we have seen Bendigo TAFE sack 120 staff; Kangan TAFE sack 150 staff; Box Hill TAFE sack 200 staff; Gippsland Advance TAFE, which is in nationally held territory, cut 68 jobs; and GippsTAFE cut 35 staff, including an entire department, because of these savage and cruel blows. Hundreds of TAFE courses will be cancelled.

The member opposite defends his Liberal-National mates. On 20 August 2012, the crisis training courses for CFA firefighters was dumped because of the Baillieu government's TAFE cuts. All the Victorian CFA firefighters now have to do distance education in New South Wales because those opposite do not care about education at all. So far we have seen Swinburne University announce it will close its Lilydale and Prahran campuses, and of course the member for Casey, back under his rock, does not come in here and defend his mates who have actually done these cuts.

The EMA, as was pointed out, is very important to families of low income. It helps them and it helps the schools. With the schools losing that money, that cuts out excursions, extracurricular activities, uniforms and that sort of thing for people who are low-income earners. The Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning has also been cut. Sixty-five per cent of students in my region finish high school, which is 17 per cent below the national average, yet the Liberal-Nationals go straight into parliament and what do they do? They cut education and they cut VCAL. Despite promising to have a course in Wallan Secondary College, in the first budget they cut it. The teachers had been employed, classes had been done and the first thing they did was cut it.

The member for Riverina, in his strong defence of his mates down in Victoria, talked about Victorian schools. Let's go to the first thing that was listed to be cut by Ted Baillieu—or Mr Fail-You, as he is commonly known—the now Premier of Victoria. The first thing to be cut was the previous Victorian government's—the Brumby Labor government—10-year plan to
rebuild every school in Victoria. So far, Sunbury Secondary College in my electorate has had three audits on urgent works that need doing. Not one cent has come forward. Minister Hall, the bloke who claimed that he was dead against it but kept going ahead with it, has been out to the school. They have had three audits and not one red cent has come forward. Despite what the Nationals may think when they are in government, writing out audits is not going to make problems go away. They are still going to be there.

The fact of the matter is that, when you look at what they have done and what they will continue to do while in government, it is an absolute disgrace. Particularly country areas in Victoria are affected with the loss of TAFEs, but the Nationals and the Liberals do not care. Minister Hall has not only sold out country Victoria in record time; he has sold out our kids, sold out TAFE and sold out education—all because he wanted a car and a title.

Mr CHEESEMAN (Corangamite) (20:23): On 27 November 2010, the Liberals in Victoria won a very close election by the smallest of margins. They came to office on the promise that they would do nothing—that everything would continue on and that there would be no job cuts in key areas such as education, health and the like. Since then, we have seen nothing but broken promises. We have seen jobs lost from the Victorian Public Service, we have seen jobs lost from the TAFE sector and, importantly and very disappointingly, we have seen resources pulled away from families and schools to deliver the key education commitments that I would have thought would have been bipartisan.

From the start of this year parents received the news that the new school start bonus would be cut by the Baillieu government. Not only were schools informed of this but also they were informed, as I understand it, that they would be responsible to communicate it to parents. This effectively means that the Baillieu government was itself too gutless to write to parents to inform them that the government did not see the importance of the school start bonus. It is a gutless act not to inform parents directly and instead to require principals to inform students.

In contrast to the approach adopted by the Liberal Party and in particular by the Baillieu government, federal Labor does understand how hard it can be to start kids in school, and as a consequence of that fact we have put in place the schoolkids bonus to help support kids and families in their education needs. Through this bonus we have structured a very generous arrangement whereby the money in question will be paid at the commencement of term 1, when parents realise—often suddenly—that their kids have grown since the conclusion of term 4 and that they require new uniforms and also that new books need to be bought for their kids before the commencement of the school year. Labor recognises that in Victoria and across Australia we have a semester system—we have the first semester and we have the second semester. With this in mind we have structured the second payment to be made at the commencement of term 3 to support kids and their families in their need to buy winter uniforms and textbooks for the commencement of that term.

Labor also recognises that secondary school students often have greater education requirements than their primary school brothers and sisters. That is why we have provided a two-tiered system of some $410 for primary-age students and some $820 for secondary students. Anyone who has kids knows that secondary students require more investment in books and other such things. There are some 9,000 families across the broader Geelong region who will benefit from the schoolkids bonus. I know that all of those families very much support and recognise the role that governments can play—particularly honest governments.
which get on with doing what they say they are going to do, unlike the Baillieu government, whose primary election commitment at the 2010 state election poll was that it was going to do nothing. There was nothing to fear and nothing to be worried about in electing a Liberal state government—‘we’re not like Jeff Kennett; we’re going to take a meat axe to the public service, to schools and to the health care system.’ But since then—(Time expired)

Debate adjourned.

**Haemochromatosis**

Debate resumed on the motion by Ms Hall:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) Haemochromatosis Awareness Week is held from 13 to 19 August 2012 and aims to raise awareness of the symptoms and treatment of haemochromatosis;

(b) haemochromatosis is an iron overload disorder and is the most common genetic disorder in Australia; and

(c) more than 100,000 Australians, approximately 1 in 200 people with European ancestry, have the genetic predisposition for haemochromatosis;

(2) notes with concern that:

(a) the condition is seriously underdiagnosed even though haemochromatosis can be easily diagnosed by a simple blood test; and

(b) many people may be suffering from the symptoms without knowing the underlying cause;

(3) acknowledges the work of the voluntary advocacy and support group Haemochromatosis Australia in facilitating Haemochromatosis Awareness Week;

(4) recognises that the symptoms of iron overload include, at:

(a) lower levels, chronic fatigue and joint pain leading to arthritis; and

(b) higher levels, liver cancer, diabetes and serious tissue damage including the weakening of the heart muscle; and

(5) asks all Members to support Haemochromatosis Awareness Week by raising awareness of the condition in their electorates.

Ms HALL (Shortland—Government Whip) (20:29): Haemochromatosis Awareness Week was held last week, between 13 and 19 August, to raise awareness of a common but little-known disorder. Haemochromatosis is a disorder that many people may not be familiar with, yet it is one of the most common inherited genetic disorders in Australia. One in 200 Australians with European ancestry is affected by it; in fact, my son-in-law is a carrier but does not have the disease.

Haemochromatosis is a build-up of iron leading to iron overload in the body. Our bodies normally absorb only the amount of iron that they need from our food each day. People with haemochromatosis absorb too much iron. Their bodies store excess iron, in time leading to an iron overload. The condition is seriously underdiagnosed. Many people suffer symptoms of the disorder without realising the underlying cause. The most common symptoms people experience include chronic fatigue, weakness, lethargy, weight loss and joint pain leading to arthritis. These are all chronic diseases that come from haemochromatosis, along with liver cirrhosis and liver cancer, diabetes, heart muscle weakness and serious tissue damage—all preventable if haemochromatosis is diagnosed early enough.
Not everyone will experience these symptoms. Each person has their own individual level at which they might start to feel some of the symptoms of iron overload. Some people will have no symptoms at all; however, serious organ and tissue damage is still being done in the absence of symptoms. This is why early diagnosis is so important. Haemochromatosis is diagnosed by a simple blood test which can be easily done at your next check-up with your GP. Your doctor can order blood tests to check your iron levels. If there is a reason to believe you might have haemochromatosis your doctor can test you via another simple blood test for the gene mutation which causes the disorder.

The good news is that haemochromatosis is easily treated once diagnosed. If detected before damage is caused, treatment can ensure that people live healthy, successful and long lives. The uncontroversial and simple treatment for haemochromatosis is giving blood to unload the iron from your body, known as venesection. As well as unloading the iron from your body you are doing a social good by donating your blood. It is the same method used for blood donations. Haemochromatosis is not a blood disease, so many people receiving treatment at the Australian Red Cross Blood Service can still donate their blood, as did the member for Fowler, and I am sure he will share his story with the House shortly. The blood service is able to use blood donations from people with haemochromatosis to save lives, provided they are eligible to donate blood.

Haemochromatosis Awareness Week is so important because early diagnosis is vital to prevent organ damage, serious health problems and even premature death. It can have serious consequences for your health but it is easily treated with early diagnosis, and it is simple. Haemochromatosis Australia is a voluntary, not-for-profit support and advocacy group for people with haemochromatosis. The group’s aim is to raise awareness of the condition to make sure that people are diagnosed with the condition before serious damage occurs. They have an information line which people can call for the cost of a local call to get more information about haemochromatosis. The number is: 13019028.

If you have been diagnosed with haemochromatosis it is important to talk to your family about being tested. Children are not usually tested until they are 18 years old. Early diagnosis gives the family the chance to take control of the condition and ensure, with simple treatment, that their lives are relatively unaffected. It can be difficult to explain these things, and the Haemochromatosis Australia information line can also help you talk to your family. I am pleased to support Haemochromatosis Awareness Week and I ask all members to join me in helping Haemochromatosis Australia achieve their vision that no Australian experiences the symptoms of haemochromatosis, by raising awareness of the condition in their electorate.

Mr McCormack (Riverina) (20:34): Haemochromatosis is the most common genetic disorder in Australia. One in 200 people carry the gene but only one in three of these carriers will actually develop the condition. It is a privilege to follow on from the member for Shortland, who I know has a passionate interest in this particular area, and I commend her for putting this motion to the House.

Even though statistics report that more than 100,000 Australians have the genetic predisposition for haemochromatosis, it is a silent disease, and not many have been educated about the issues it can cause if it remains undetected.

We heard the member for Shortland say that early diagnosis leads to a much better life for those people with this disposition.
From 13 to 19 August, public information sessions and events were held across Australia to raise awareness of this very common but not well-known genetic condition. The week's aim was to highlight the need for early detection and treatment so that those born with the genetic condition can lead normal, healthy lives. Not-for-profit organisations such as Haemochromatosis Australia are dedicated to highlighting the genetic disorder and making it well known throughout local communities. At present there are not many other awareness groups out there pushing for people to get themselves checked or promoting a routine blood test which could lead to an early diagnosis. Early treatment prevents complications and results in normal health and life expectancy.

Unfortunately, the symptoms of haemochromatosis can mask themselves as other complications in the body. Many people, particularly men, ignore the warning signs and just keep pursuing their everyday activities when a simple blood test could solve their problems. Haemochromatosis affects both men and women and is more likely to occur after the age of 40. However, there have been cases of the genetic disorder in younger people. People with haemochromatosis absorb too much iron in their diet and, if undetected and untreated, the excess iron can cause organ or tissue damage that can potentially result in premature death. According to Haemochromatosis Australia, the body typically stores around one gram or less of iron. However, a person with haemochromatosis absorbs a great deal more iron from their food than is necessary. Iron stores of five grams or more then build up inside the body. Organs such as the liver, heart and pancreas are affected and ultimately damaged. Without treatment, haemochromatosis can cause premature death.

Many issues arise when a condition such as haemochromatosis goes untreated. Because of the gradual build-up of iron in organs and joints the liver can become enlarged, leading to other serious diseases such as cirrhosis or liver cancer. However, it is not only the liver that can be destroyed by an overload of iron. Excess iron levels stored up over many years can also cause heart disease, diabetes, issues in the endocrine system, sexual dysfunction or arthritis. Iron overload might actually show no symptoms in the earlier stages, even though organ damage is occurring. A simple routine check-up with your general practitioner can lead to early detection, which is exactly what Haemochromatosis Awareness Week is all about—not finding a cure but promoting awareness of the condition in the community.

My late father-in-law, Bernard Shaw, who died in 2000 aged 61, was affected by this disorder. The electorate of the Riverina fortunately does not have a huge pocket of this genetic condition, but the knowledge still needs to be out there. I commend the member for Shortland for putting this to the House. Hopefully people who might be listening could go and have a check-up with their local GP and perhaps nip this in the bud.

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (20:38): I, too, would like to thank the member for Shortland as she brings worthwhile matters to the attention of the House on so many occasions. On this occasion, she reminds us that last week was Haemochromatosis Awareness Week. During the week Haemochromatosis Australia, a voluntary advocacy and support group, has been raising awareness of this distressing medical condition.

Haemochromatosis is an inherent iron overload disorder. I was surprised how little people knew about it, including me, until recently. Haemochromatosis Australia notes that, in order for a genetic condition to be passed on, both parents must be carriers of the abnormal gene. More than 100,000 Australians, or one in 200 of European ancestry, have the genetic
predisposition for this disorder. The number could be a lot higher considering the reports of high levels of haemochromatosis sufferers that go undiagnosed. In fact, it was only 10 years ago that I discovered that I am also a carrier of that defective gene. It is something I share with my mother, apart from my personality.

It came by chance and is something that I suppose many people in my situation would not have been tested for. Other than my mother being diagnosed, I probably would not have had the test in the first place to discover if it had been passed on to her sons. Hopefully, I am not showing any great effect of it at this stage, but if I start limping I will know the reason for it.

The high occurrence of this disorder certainly warrants greater effort and awareness of the symptoms. In my case, it was discovered by accident because my mother was being tested for something else. Awareness needs to be raised, as many people who are believed to be suffering from these symptoms are unaware of what relationship they have with haemochromatosis as a disorder. The symptoms include chronic fatigue, lethargy, skin pigmentation and joint pain which could be considered to be arthritic or lead to arthritis. In some cases extreme symptoms include liver cancer, diabetes and weakening of the heart muscles which can lead to heart failure. These are serious symptoms which can be very distressing if the person does not know the cause and about the possible treatments that are available.

The onset of the symptoms can be gradual, resulting in the condition not being diagnosed until middle age. The condition can be hard to diagnose, because the symptoms may be confused with those of other diseases. Iron overload disorder is more common in men than in women, due to the nature of the menstrual cycle. The disorder can be detected by a sternum test or possibly through a liver biopsy, as the iron accumulation is particularly damaging to that organ. Treatment involves regular blood removal to remove the excess iron. This is quite simple—it just means giving more blood. I have been giving blood for many, many years. It made no difference to the blood, and it was not even detected when I was giving blood that I was a carrier of this defective gene. People that have this disorder simply need to give blood regularly. This brings me to the fact that one in three Australians will need blood some time in their lifetime. But regrettably only one in 30 Australians actually donates blood. Giving blood, whilst it might take an hour out of your day, makes a lot of sense and one donation of blood can save up to three lives. I think that is a pretty important as well.

Part of the answer to haemochromatosis is early diagnosis and understanding that the treatment is not severe, which would put a lot of people's minds at rest, providing they know and know early the symptoms and also that there is a simple cure. (Time expired)

Mrs ANDREWS (McPherson) (20:43): I rise to speak on the member for Shortland's motion on Haemochromatosis Awareness Week which was held between 13 and 19 August. As we have heard, haemochromatosis is an inherited disorder which causes an iron overload in the body, resulting in the intestines absorbing too much iron from the diet. In normal circumstances, the body will only absorb the iron from the food we eat so that it can meet its daily requirements. However, those people who suffer from haemochromatosis will absorb much more iron than the body needs. This iron, needing somewhere to go, builds up in their bodily tissue, eventually leading to an overload that can lead to organ or tissue damage and potentially death if it is left untreated. Although haemochromatosis is a potentially life-threatening illness if left untreated, it is remarkably easy to detect and to treat. A simple blood
test can let a patient's doctor know whether they have a higher than usual iron level which will lead to more specific tests that may confirm a haemochromatosis diagnosis.

It is estimated that one in every 200 people who are of European descent in Australia will suffer from haemochromatosis, making it the most common genetic disorder in Australia. If we were to take that number and make an estimate according to the national population of roughly 22½ million people, over 100,000 people would currently be affected or expect to be affected by haemochromatosis. The best way to treat haemochromatosis is to safely manage a patient's iron levels. This is done through what is known as venesection, which requires the removal of 300 to 500 mls of blood. This amount may sound familiar because it is the same process and amount that is used to donate blood. As withdrawing blood is the best method to help manage a person's iron levels and the disorder does not, as many may presume, affect the blood, the withdrawn blood can be safely donated to the Australian Red Cross. Inadvertently many haemochromatosis patients are helping save the lives of their fellow Australians, just by getting their necessary treatment.

Those patients who are unable to undergo venesection treatment can be prescribed iron chelators instead. Although there are potentially life-threatening consequences if left untreated, haemochromatosis can easily be detected, diagnosed and treated. However, like many other medical issues, the main issue is awareness. As I mentioned before, one in every 200 Australians will be affected by haemochromatosis and, until symptoms show, many people who may have a predisposition to developing the disease or the illness are unaware that they may be at risk. So awareness is all the more important considering how easy it is to detect and to treat the disorder so as to prevent permanent damage to the body. We are therefore fortunate that Haemochromatosis Australia does a fantastic job in promoting awareness of the disorder and providing sufferers with information on how to manage their treatment and also to provide support to them and their families. Without the hard work being done by organisations such Haemochromatosis Australia, who run awareness campaigns and pull together available information for the community's benefit, many Australians would be suffering from the effects of illnesses which could be offset by early detection or simple precautions.

I would like to note for my constituents that Haemochromatosis Australia will be holding a meeting at the Pines Shopping Centre at Elanora on the Gold Coast on 25 August to provide people with haemochromatosis and their families with the opportunity to discuss their experiences and find out more about how to live with the disorder. I urge all of my constituents who are unsure whether they may be at risk of developing haemochromatosis to consult with their GP. Once again, I would like to voice my support for the efforts of Haemochromatosis Australia and the fantastic work they are doing in the community in raising awareness about this easily manageable disorder.

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

GRIEVANCE DEBATE

Debate resumed.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Lyons) (20:48): The question is:

That grievances be noted.
Mr TONY SMITH (Casey) (20:48): I rise tonight to talk about one of our most important and revered institutions, the Reserve Bank of Australia. This coming Friday the bank's governor and deputy governor will appear before the House Standing Committee on Economics for the second of its semi-annual oversight hearings. Since November 2010, some of the committee's attention has been devoted to what has been described in the media as the 'banknotes bribery scandal'. It is on this important, yet unhappy, topic that I feel compelled to speak tonight. Securency is a company half owned by the Reserve Bank that produces the polymer substrate used in Australian banknotes. Note Printing Australia is a wholly owned subsidiary of the bank that prints those banknotes. In addition to their work on Australian currency, both companies also sought contracts with foreign governments. In pursuit of that overseas business both companies retained the services of foreign business agents.

In May 2009, the Melbourne Age began to publish a series of stories, alleging that some of Securency's foreign business agents may have used their commissions to bribe foreign officials. At that point in mid-2009, matters were referred to police and legal matters are ongoing. My interest and the public interest lies elsewhere. As this issue has unfolded, serious questions have been raised in the media about the governance practices at the highest levels of our Reserve Bank. In response, senior bank officials have repeatedly asserted the ignorance of allegations about possible illegality at Securency or Note Printing Australia before media reports first surfaced in mid-2009. For instance, in a letter written to the Treasurer on 2 June 2010, the governor of the bank wrote:

Audits of both Note Printing Australia and Securency took place well before the Age first raised its allegations in May 2009. Neither the board of Securency nor the Reserve Bank was aware of those allegations until that time.

In August 2011, the Age published new assertions that:

The leadership of the Reserve Bank failed to alert police after the bank received damning evidence in 2007 that its subsidiary Note Printing Australia was implicated in the bribery of foreign officials. The bank also rejected those assertions in a statement that read:

The implication the Age seems to be drawing is that people in the company and the bank had information indicating illegality but did not act appropriately on that information.

The apparent inference contained in the questions is unwarranted.

A fortnight later at the Economics Committee hearing held in late August 2011, the then deputy governor, Ric Battellino, was asked about the substance of those stories in the Age. During questioning, Mr Battellino confirmed that in May 2007 the board of Note Printing Australia received a report that included allegations by one of the firm's staff members. The then deputy governor said:

Allegations had been made by one of the staff members that the agents had said certain things. The agents denied those.

When asked whether as a result of those allegations the Note Printing Australia board should have called in police, Mr Battellino noted that it 'had hired a very sound legal firm to investigate the matter'.

At the next hearing, which was in February this year, I expanded this line of questioning to what Reserve Bank officials themselves, as distinct from the Note Printing Australia board,
were told and when. I could not pose those questions to Mr Battellino because he had retired 10 days before the hearing. So I asked the governor what he and other senior bank officials knew about the nature of those allegations by the Note Printing Australia employee. Governor Stevens initially stated:

If you are asking whether the person in question wrote a letter or something to the bank, I do not think that he did, no.

But then in the final moments of the hearing in answer to the final question of the day, the governor revised that earlier statement. Mr Stevens said:

I have been reminded while we have been talking that, in fact, the deputy governor invited that person to put that in writing, which he did, and give it to the deputy governor. That written statement on the matter was available to the Freehills people that did the investigation in 2007. So, whereas I said I thought that we were aware of it but that it was not documentary, in fact it was invited to be put in documentary form, which it was.

Of course, it was entirely appropriate that this briefing paper was made available to Freehills. But that action in and of itself does not allay lingering concerns about the bank's internal decisions and judgements. The question is whether the bank, with all its moral authority as one of the key custodians of Australia's financial integrity, should have taken action of its own accord once it was in possession of this memorandum. This document, whose existence was revealed at last February's hearing, constitutes important black-on-white evidence of precisely what was said, when it was said and to whom it was said.

This document means there is an opportunity to assess the decisions made by senior Reserve Bank of Australia officials in mid-2007 and to form a judgement, on the basis of this written brief, as to whether the bank leadership should have independently determined that it had a public responsibility in mid-2007 to refer those concerns to the police. The contents of that memorandum may vindicate the decisions and judgements of the bank or they may not. Only when we see its contents will these outstanding questions be answered.

As I indicated previously, the parliament has no business involving itself with ongoing legal matters. But let me also say that it has every business involving itself with the governance of the Reserve Bank. Let no-one say that because legal matters may be outstanding there can be no parliamentary oversight. Parliament must always tread carefully in these circumstances but it must equally never forgo its oversight function. It is only through rigorous parliamentary oversight that any deficiencies may be identified and rectified. It is only through rigorous parliamentary oversight that the rest of the world can be confident that the disinfecting qualities of sunlight are at work in Australia.

Let me make it clear that I cast no aspersions on the bank in general or on Mr Battellino in particular. In the lead-up to this Friday's hearing I have reflected considerably on this matter and have taken further time to examine the public record since 2009. As a result, I feel compelled to make the following observations. It is unfortunate that the existence and receipt of this memorandum were only revealed in the dying moments of last February's hearing. Now that we know this written brief exists, I think it is fair to say that the issue is likely to rise again this Friday and beyond. In this light, I think Governor Stevens would do well to take the initiative and table the 2007 written brief at the hearing to be held this Friday. Naturally, any legal issues relating to names or other matters can be addressed appropriately. It is because I hold the Reserve Bank in such high regard that I offer this suggestion, because if these
Age Pension

Ms BURKE (Chisholm—Deputy Speaker) (20:57): I rise tonight to speak about the appalling clawback of pension increases perpetrated by the Victorian Liberal government through cuts to the energy concession for Victorian pensioners. This is an appalling thing that is happening in my state as we speak.

Pensioners do not have it easy. Life on a fixed income is a difficult balancing act between keeping a roof over your head and making sure the lights turn on and the house is warm. At the end of the day there is often not much left over and very little capacity to increase your income. Indeed, there is no capacity; you are living on a fixed pension.

The Gillard government recognises the challenges faced every day by pensioners. I am proud to say that this Labor government has delivered the biggest increases to pensioners in Australia's history. Thanks to this government's reforms, single age-pensioners now receive $755.50 a fortnight and couples receive $1,139. Whilst this is an increase, it is still very difficult to make ends meet. The Gillard government also provided pensioners with a lump sum payment a few months ago, and age pensions will increase permanently in March next year by $338 for singles and $510 for couples. We recognised when entering government that pensions needed to be reviewed, particularly for single-income earners, because they do not have the same capacity that couples do to pool together resources. All of this money is to help pensioners keep on top of the cost of living—to stay afloat. It is not to get ahead; it is just to continue.

Let us be clear: this money is not a luxury. It is essential. As I often say to the many individuals in my electorate who complain that they cannot get a pension or a full pension, 'You try living on it full-time and see how you go', particularly if you are living in a rental property, as many in my electorate are, where rents are very high. It is a very difficult thing. So every cent being delivered to a pensioner is a cent they need, a cent they spend.

But across the country we see heartless Liberal state governments reaching into the hip pockets of pensioners and taking this money away. In New South Wales, the Liberals are taking it through public housing rent increases and in Victoria the Liberals are taking at least $11 million off pensioners by cutting their concessions on winter energy bills. Whether it is through higher rent or higher energy bills, the act is the same. It is a racket that is tantamount to stealing from people who need the money the most.

I was contacted a couple of weeks ago by Margaret Marsden, who lives in my electorate, after her power bill arrived. Margaret and her husband are on a full pension and were dismayed on opening their energy bill to find that their winter concession had been cut. This was not something they had been expecting. There had been no advance notice given to them. The Baillieu government was as quiet as a mouse announcing these cuts. In Margaret's own words:

The state government did this behind our backs. There was no forewarning given to us. It was a real shock to see this sudden increase in our bill; it wasn't something we were prepared for. We feel betrayed by the state government. This was a price rise we didn't need and shouldn't have to pay. The whole thing just feels very unfair.
Margaret contacted the office of her local state member of parliament, the Liberal member for Burwood, Graham Watt, to raise her concerns. She was told that her MP would get back to her. That was weeks ago and she has not heard a peep in reply. It is not just Margaret and her husband who are feeling the pain of this sneaky and cruel Liberal Party cash grab.

On Saturday morning I had the pleasure of holding a very cold and wet but nevertheless very informative regular mobile office at the Eaton Mall in Oakleigh. There, I met yet more pensioners who had literally trudged out in the cold and wet desperate to talk to me about the pain being inflicted by the reduction of their winter energy concessions. What they were most aggrieved about was that they had been given an increase by the federal government to offset charges from the carbon price and, with no warning, that has just been taken back by the state government getting rid of their concession. It just came out of their power bills. These people are living pay to pay; they budget everything. So, when suddenly a bill arrives and your concession has been decreased, it is a big hit to the family budget because there is no way to offset it. These people have no other ability to gain any more income.

Two delightful women came to see me—it was freezing and they had rugged up appropriately—and they were deeply concerned at the effect of this price increase on their ability to pay their bills and to keep on top of expenses. Indeed, both of them expressed their complete terror and their complete horror at what they saw around them. They were at pains to say they were not sleeping very well at the moment because they were concerned that the Baillieu government would sell off more public housing stock. They had recently moved into a development that had come about as part of the National Housing Affordability Scheme and were living in terrific apartments in Oakleigh, apartments that you could not afford as a pensioner. They would be no way you could afford to live there and they were terrified that their homes would be sold underneath them.

I was at pains to say I did not believe that that was the state government's intent but these women were so terrified that the stories going around about decreasing and selling off public homes that they can no longer sleep at night. This is highly inappropriate. I share their concerns that we will see housing stock lost in my area. Housing in my area is very expensive—it is quite attractive. The Kennett government did it—the right thing, sell off the stock. Once it is gone, it is gone and you can never afford to buy it back in my neck of the woods.

Why do people want housing stock in my neck of the woods? Because there is transport, there are services, this is where their families and communities live, where their churches are. They should not be forced out just because they are pensioners. I call upon the Baillieu government to assure people in public housing that they are safe, that their housing will not be sold from under them. I am also calling on the Baillieu government to do something about a development called the Gateway lands on Power Avenue and Warrigal Road which has come to a grinding halt—700 houses—because it is caught up in the St Hilliers debacle.

We have all talked about the Ararat Prison, but nobody is talking about a massive housing development in my electorate that has come to a grinding halt. It is concerning that houses will not come on the market. Some of the development was actually privately purchased off the plan by individuals. They are very concerned, and so are the neighbours, because this massive housing development is now sitting there vacant, which is causing quite some concerns about safety. Again, a lot of the locals have been contacting the local Liberal state
member and, to date, we have no answers. Indeed, council, at my insistence, have been down there to ensure the safety around this big development. I just do not think it is good enough.

The pensioners who come to see me do not think it is fair. They should not have to shoulder this burden. They do not feel they are being given a fair go, and they are right. This is a government that has proven its willingness to rob money from people who need it most, people who have worked hard all their lives and have a right to feel secure and comfortable in their retirement. This is an age group who never had the benefits of superannuation. They have saved and they have supported their families, but this is how they are living. They are living on a pension and they should not be caused to suffer for it. They are suffering at the hands of a heartless and deceitful state government—a Liberal government that centred its election campaign on reducing the cost of living. What a hollow promise that turned out to be. They could be helping to reduce the cost of living, but they are not.

Let us be clear on the facts on electricity prices. Ninety per cent of the cost of electricity is driven by the infrastructure investment and state regulation. State governments are best placed to help reduce household costs and make it a little easier for people in need. Rather than put the needs of pensioners first and help keep their biggest bills as low as possible, Ted Baillieu's government has reached into their pockets and taken their money. The increased compensation for pensioners from the federal Labor government was there to ensure that they were insulated from any price rises, that they could be confident they could pay their bills and have enough money left over to enjoy a quality of life and actually turn the heaters on. It was not a licence for the state government to slash the concession entitlements that pensioners rely on. Victorian pensioners are being unjustly treated and they are feeling the pain. It is cruel and disdainful and I call upon Ted Baillieu and his government to reverse this awful decision. But I feel that while the Victorian winter is cold—this has been an incredibly cold winter in Melbourne—it is not as cold as the hearts of the Victorian Liberal government.

**Homelessness**

*Mrs MARKUS* (Macquarie) (21:07): While so many Australians struggle to afford the rising costs of living that affect their most basic comforts, such as heating their homes, tens of thousands of Australians do not even have a home to heat, with families living in tents and children forced to sleep rough. Across Australia and particularly in greater Western Sydney there is a severe lack of affordable housing, which is pushing families out of the rental market and onto endless public housing waiting lists.

Homelessness, however, goes beyond whether Australians can afford to rent a roof over their heads, with domestic and family violence and family or relationship breakdown leading to around a third of Australia's homelessness. Such issues are not easy to address. The question is how we as a society can ensure that those who slip through the cracks are taken care of.

To emphasise how widespread this crisis is, I want to highlight some key figures that were released this year by Homelessness Australia. There is estimated to be 105,000 Australians who are homeless every night. That is one in every 200 Australians without safe, secure or affordable housing. In 2011, 220,000 Australians received support from specialist homelessness services. This equated to one in every 100 people. One in every 38 Australian children under the age of four spent time in a homelessness service over the course of 2009 to 2010. Every day more than half the people who request immediate accommodation from
homelessness services are turned away. Two in every three children who need support are also turned away, as are almost 80 per cent of families.

Prior to being a member of parliament I worked for more than 25 years as a social worker. I am very much aware of the conditions that the homeless endure and I have a strong understanding that, once homeless, it can be challenging to re-establish the resources and overcome the barriers to again become a part of mainstream society.

In fact, a survey released this month by Journeys Home found that people who first become homeless at a young age are more likely to experience persistent homelessness later in life.

Not only is one of the key challenges breaking the cycle; it is also increasingly challenging to get support, as shelters and providers are struggling to meet the demand. For this reason, I was touched when I met Cassidy Strickland and her mother, Linda. Cassidy is just 10 years old, and is an inspired example that anyone can make a difference. Cassidy told me, and I think it is a good lesson for everyone:

Everybody has strengths and weaknesses but everybody can make a difference. You just have to focus on what you can do, not what you can't do. Think about how it can be done and not how it can't be done.

When Cassidy was just eight years old, she saw a man going through her family's garbage bin. Cassidy was confused and concerned that someone could be that hungry and desperate for food. Cassidy thought long and hard about how she could help this man. He needed food and all Cassidy had was her pocket money. Cassidy went to her mum and asked if she could go and buy some food to give to the homeless man. Cassidy's mum was reluctant. She did not think they would be able to find the man and had no idea where to start.

Cassidy's mum, Linda, suggested another idea: volunteering at the local community kitchen, and that is what they did every Wednesday night. After months of helping out, Cassidy learned that the community kitchen was closed on weekends. 'What would they eat?' Cassidy thought and asked, approaching her mother again. 'Mum,' Cassidy said, 'We have food; we should feed everyone on the weekends.' Cassidy's mum was reluctant. The job seemed just too large. Again, Cassidy reminded her mum, 'Think about what we can do, not what we can't.' Since September 2011, every Saturday night, Cassidy and her mother have met the homeless in the park at Richmond, and they feed a growing number of people. Over the holiday season, when the community kitchen is closed, they meet the homeless three nights a week, sacrificing holiday activities to use that money to support the homeless.

Cassidy said that the youngest person who comes is just two months old and the oldest is 86. Some live in cars, some live in storage boxes, and one man lives in a grandstand. It is amazing and inspiring what a 10-year-old girl has accomplished. Cassidy told me:

In every community there is work to be done and in every heart there is the power to do it, because everyone has a heart and everyone has the ability to make a difference. You just need to focus on what you can do and not what you can't do.

How inspiring. Cassidy and Linda Strickland, I think you are both amazing. I think Cassidy has a wonderful future ahead of her.

There is no easy answer to homelessness, as almost every case is unique. Their presence and our response is a test of our compassion as a society. I think everyone would agree that Cassidy and her mother set a shining example to everyone here that anyone can make a difference, that as a community there is more that we can do to support the sector. As Linda
said to me, 'Feeding the homeless is just the tip of the iceberg; there is so much more that can be done'—much more, in fact.

In May this year a team of volunteers collected data for the homelessness vulnerability index survey in the Upper Blue Mountains. The results revealed an alarmingly high rate of life-threatening diseases and untreated injuries. Sadly, a staggering 45 per cent of those surveyed were living rough in cars and squats, and 42 per cent were considered to be at greater risk of early death due to having multiple risk factors associated with long-term homelessness. These are not unique figures. They are representative of a national crisis, but this can be tackled with strategic planning and appropriate resourcing. With the right kind of support, people can overcome barriers and again enter mainstream society.

In August the Australian Council of Social Service released its annual Australian Community Sector Survey. Within this survey 81 per cent of agencies said they could not meet the demand for services. More startling is that, with regard to the concerns facing the sector, more than half of the organisations highlighted funding as the key issue, stating that funding was too little and not certain enough.

In 2008, then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd declared homelessness was a 'national obscenity' and promised a 12-year plan that would cut homelessness in half. Yet, in 2012, in the Gillard government's attempt to stay afloat financially, the Minister for Housing has confirmed the worries of the sector by stating that he would have to find savings to provide any further funding to extend the Rudd agreement beyond June 2013.

As a result, there are now reports that some organisations may close earlier rather than face an uncertain future without government support. I echo the concerns raised by the shadow minister for housing and call upon Minister O'Connor to make clear whether the government will continue to fund programs for the homeless after June 2013 and to urgently work with the states and territories rather than dictate to them.

In addition to the uncertainty imposed by the Gillard government, services addressing the issues and the needs of the homeless are also under increasing financial pressure as a result of higher levels of demand, insurance premiums, wage indexation and reporting requirements. As a result, Homelessness Australia has reported that service providers have been forced to restructure to minimise staffing costs and are unfortunately losing skilled and experienced workers. It is clear that this government continues to let down the least fortunate Australians and those people who dedicate their working lives to providing these vital services. It is apparent that the current funding arrangements that the Rudd government was so proud of do not come anywhere close to meeting the demand.

I truly believe that the parliament can endeavour to do more for this often forgotten sector. A coalition government would work to reverse the trend of unaffordable housing, one of the driving factors pushing people into homelessness. Following that we would then address the non-financial causes of homelessness, working with the states and territories to deliver more targeted programs. The coalition recognises that we need to do more than give the homeless a meal and a bed for the night. Not to take away from the significance and importance of that, but we need to give the homeless a pathway out, one step at a time, finding solutions for the challenges that they need to overcome. The efforts need to be urgent and they need to be sustained.
I know from my experience of more than 25 years working in the sector that there are opportunities and Australians can step out of homelessness and become significant contributing members of society. This will require us to work with the states and territories to develop strategies to make a practical difference on the ground and give people the opportunities that they deserve.

**Homelessness**

**Melbourne: City Planning**

Ms SMYTH (La Trobe) (21:17): I have much to say this evening on the topic of the growth boundaries of Melbourne, but I think I will spare a moment to begin my contribution by remarking that members will know that the federal government has invested a record $20 billion in an affordable housing agenda, including a $6 billion investment in social housing which was opposed by the Liberals and Nationals in this place. It was part of our stimulus package and unfortunately it was conveniently forgotten by the previous speaker in this evening's grievance debate. Despite this, and despite years of underinvestment by the Howard government, including a 30 per cent reduction in spending on public and community housing during the Howard years, there is a great deal more work to be done in the context of housing affordability and availability in Australia. It would be worth members such as those preceding me this evening bearing that in mind in their contributions in this place.

Returning to my contribution to this evening's grievance debate, there has been discussion in recent weeks about the growth boundaries of Melbourne, the quality of life that we presently experience in our city, housing availability and affordability and the likely shape of our city's future. It is not a conversation confined to Melbourne. It is one which most of our nation's big cities face. It is a timely discussion in Melbourne, however, given recent decisions of the Baillieu government in relation to the expansion of our urban growth boundary. It is also timely since our city has recovered, happily, its 'World's Most Livable City' gong. Whatever stock one puts in the global livability survey's findings, it does present an opportunity for us all to consider what makes our cities right around the country livable.

The survey measures cities against categories of health care, culture and environment, stability, education and infrastructure. While I tend to think of those characteristics as reflecting the desirability of a city, livability surely must also consider other factors, including the sources of local employment available to residents, the availability of transport and the affordability of housing across all parts of the city. In 2009 COAG's objective in reforming capital city strategic planning was:

To ensure Australian cities are globally competitive, productive, sustainable, liveable and socially inclusive and are well placed to meet future challenges and growth.

While this is a comprehensive and laudable objective, it presents a very complex set of criteria to satisfy, particularly in the context of the rates of growth facing many of our major cities. The COAG expert advisory panel which recently reviewed our capital city strategic planning systems has emphasised that Australia is at a critical point in the development of its cities. It noted that factors such as population growth, demographic change, increasing energy costs and the transition to a knowledge-based economy all have changed many of the assumptions inherent in the development of our cities.
I cannot hope to address all of those issues comprehensively in a brief debate this evening but I will make a start. The pressures of growth and the balancing act of urban planning are especially relevant to my own electorate of La Trobe. Two of the four local government areas within my electorate are Cardinia and Casey. Cardinia Shire, with a population of over 77,000 residents, has reported that it is the third fastest growing municipality in Australia, behind only Wyndham and Melton. In the last 10 years its population has grown by some 60 per cent, with predictions that the next 10 years will see the population reach around 130,000—bigger than Darwin today. The city of Casey, with a population of 240,000, is Victoria's most populous municipality. About 7,600 people are moving into Casey every year, it is estimated. Together these municipalities are expected to have a population of over half a million by 2030. Seventy-six per cent of workers who live in Casey drive to work, compared with 65 per cent across Melbourne, and seven per cent use public transport or walk to work compared with 14 per cent across Melbourne.

The Victorian government's expansion of the urban growth boundary will see further residential development and several new suburbs on the fringe of Melbourne as the city's boundary expands by around 6,000 hectares. The federal government's national urban policy describes some of the difficulties facing growth corridors. It notes that large distances between housing developments and key centres of employment is a growing problem in these areas. It notes that this can limit social and economic opportunities and puts strain on transport infrastructure. The policy discusses the establishment of local employment precincts and looks at the improvement of skills and the participation of local workforces as ways to enhance liveability, reduce commuting times and promote economic prosperity.

Members will know that under federal Labor investment in skills and education has been almost doubled. The uncapping of university places has resulted in a 25 per cent expansion in the number of students taking up tertiary education across Victoria. In my electorate of La Trobe we fared even better, with a 36 per cent increase in students taking tertiary study as a result of Labor's reforms. This alone will have very long-term positive impacts on opportunities for residents, the development of industry and our local economy. It will also be important that we encourage new industry in regions such as mine to support a growing population.

The federal government's infrastructure spending in Victoria has also gone from around $89 per person under the Howard government to $201 per Victorian today. This more than doubles the annual infrastructure spending that was in place when we came to office. All told, we are providing an unprecedented $6.8 billion from our six-year nation-building program to rebuild and renew Victoria's road, rail and public transport infrastructure. These kinds of investments need to be supported by sensible state planning policy schemes. Their effectiveness relies in part on state and territory governments making thoughtful decisions about the expansion of their cities' boundaries. Their effectiveness also relies on state governments putting their hands in their pockets to support infrastructure rather than just putting their hands out.

The Hawke-Keating government promoted the use of brownfield sites for residential development and the current national urban policy also includes a focus on infill development. It is a difficult balance to get right, the balance between greenfield development and infill development. But in view of the recent expansion of the urban growth boundary by
the Victorian government many are questioning whether Melbourne is in fact getting that balance right. I think it would be worth looking much more closely at the potential for increased infill development to reduce our reliance on greenfield development. While it might be easier for policymakers to rely on the abundance of new land available for residential development, there are complex problems that the continued expansion of the growth boundary presents. How do we meet increased infrastructure costs for new communities? Specifically, how do we meet the costs of public transport, road transport, new schools, hospitals and other important services and amenities? As our population ages, will we have the workforce to sustain the upkeep of such infrastructure?

How do we respond to increasing car dependency? How far is reasonable for residents of new estates to travel each day to work, school and leisure activities? Perhaps less obvious are the implications for social inclusion and the risks of social isolation. Many of us are very aware that it takes a great deal of effort to establish community support services. Setting up a community organisation, a legal service or a welfare service in a new community with limited transport options and residents who are time poor is undoubtedly difficult. These are often the means by which those people on the margins of our society are supported. In new residential estates, the potential for compounding social isolation because of a lack of support services is high.

For these reasons, and because I am concerned that we are encroaching on land which is of high environmental importance or has significant agricultural value, it seems to me that we should be considering much more thoroughly the potential for development of infill sites. To that end, I have been interested in the work being undertaken by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute in relation to what they call greyfield sites. These are sections of land in inner and middle suburbs, occupied but under-utilised, where residential buildings are failing through a lack of modernising investment. They are buildings in which energy, water and communications infrastructure is often in need of upgrade. Their report, titled *Towards a new development model for housing regeneration in greyfield residential precincts* suggests that taking greyfield precincts the size of around 10 suburban lots and redeveloping them in a coordinated manner would be effective. Working on a larger scale than the usual one- or two-lot developments could lead to a much more efficient design to enable greater density and diversity of housing, with resulting improvements for affordability and sustainability.

The report suggests that there is potential for improved medium density housing, as well as high-quality public spaces, consolidation of car parking and space for commercial and business premises. As the report itself identifies, there are various matters that would need to be considered in detail in order to encourage greyfield residential projects of this kind, including new planning policies and processes at a state level. Greyfield investment may also be assisted by financial incentives, and those that are mentioned in the report are certainly worthy of further detailed consideration at all levels of government.

As I mentioned earlier, my comments this evening are only a very brief contribution to a large national discussion on urban growth and development and how best all levels of government might respond so that our cities continue to be livable.

**Resources Sector**

*Mr O'DOWD* (Flynn) (21:27): Our resources sector has been swimming along in what have become increasingly rough waters. We have just experienced what could possibly be the
The biggest boom in mining that our country has ever seen, but it has become clear that conditions are more difficult for the industries that kept us going through the global financial crisis. They face increasing input costs, falling commodity prices, IR laws, unstable government and a high Australian dollar. All these things are causing concern for our mining and industrial sector. On top of that, we have the carbon tax and the MRRT. The waters are rough enough without these extra burdens on industry, which will impact on every industry and are vital to our prosperity.

That is why the carbon tax is the cork in the snorkel of Australian industry. It will cause our aluminium, manufacturing, processing and every other industry to face the serious prospect of discontinuing any further investment in this country. Despite over $100 million worth of investment and development projects in and around Gladstone, companies are facing tightening margins and are now looking for ways to reduce costs to offset this. We have already seen job losses across the aluminium and mining sectors. This is a sign of the times, showing that the window of investment opportunity has narrowed considerably. The writing has been on the wall now for some time. Australia’s debt position has highlighted our continued dependence on the resources sector and this all but dictates our future.

We need the resources sector like we never have before if we are to have any hope of improving our economic viability in the long term. There has been much speculation recently around whether the end is near for the mining boom. Whilst my primary responsibility is to my constituents in the electorate of Flynn, I feel an inherent obligation to voice the concerns of this industry to the rest of our nation over the lack of direction and instability of the current government.

Government ineptitude only compounds several other factors which are combined to make it more difficult for companies to justify future investment in Australia. Very recently, Anglo American signalled that, out of its seven criteria for assessing country investment suitability, Australia failed on five counts. In fact, further to this, they highlighted that the only nation that was considered a higher risk than Australia against the criteria was the Republic of the Congo.

Commodity prices is the next issue—and it is a big issue. The Australian recently reported that $7.7 billion will be wiped off the value of coking coal exports. Prices that we saw for coal post the flood crisis were never going to hold up for that long, and unfortunately what has happened is that the coal prices dropped. Last quarter Rio Tinto took a 12 per cent cut—and that was based on the Canadian prices to the Japanese market. They have identified that there has been a 38 per cent reduction in the value of this commodity over the course of the last 12 months. We are heading out on our own in waters uncharted and we do not know when this coal price will turn around or how long it will be down. We do not know whether it will be down for four or five years or when it will come up again.

Prices right across the commodity market have also fallen. Aluminium is down eight per cent; copper, five per cent; lead, eight per cent; nickel, three per cent; tin, six per cent; zinc, five per cent—and on it goes. Since December last year the price of thermal coal per tonne has dropped steadily. It has dropped from $120-130 per tonne to $80 per tonne—and $80 per tonne is considered to break even. At these prices, new developments are brought into serious jeopardy. Add the carbon tax and the MRRT and you have a situation where companies are struggling to find good reasons to invest in Australia.
Our electricity prices are also a big factor in our manufacturing and mining industries—and I have spoken before on these issues. The price of electricity for households over the five years between 2002 and 2007 remained reasonably stable, but since then, up until 2011, prices have gone up about 40 per cent in real terms. It is reported that prices are projected to rise by another 30 per cent by 2013-14. The EUAA cites the carbon tax as another cause for further price rises. I have been shown evidence that the carbon tax impacts on electricity prices for virtually all small business, such as the Biggenden Meatworks.

I recently received a letter from UnitingCare Australia which highlighted the Queensland Council of Social Services statement that more than 7,000 residential electricity consumers had lost their power—had their power cut off—in the first quarter of 2011-12 because they could not pay their bills. I asked the Prime Minister during question time recently if she could guarantee that the rate of households that have their power cut off will not increase because of the higher electricity prices due to the carbon tax. Of course, the Prime Minister did not adequately address this issue, in my opinion, and blamed the states.

On behalf of my constituents in the electorate of Flynn, I call upon the government to listen to the people. I call on the government to listen to small business. I call on the government to listen to industry and what is left of our manufacturing industry. I call upon the government to listen to our miners. We do not want the carbon tax in Central Queensland. We want our steelworks, our car manufacturing and our oil refineries to continue. We do not want the carbon tax. We want our refineries to continue. We do not want the carbon tax in Central Queensland. We want our steelworks, our car manufacturing and our oil refineries to continue. We do not want the carbon tax.

Industries in resources in Central Queensland are among the fastest growing and well-positioned in the world, but they need help. They cannot do this alone, and we cannot tax them out of existence. Whilst these companies were making good money, the bubble has burst and we look at a sadder picture altogether.

Domestic political turmoil and the Treasurer's unrelenting attack on some of the most successful individuals have undoubtedly added pressure onto what have become more difficult trading conditions for our miners. I would argue that something needs to change and change very quickly. If we are to learn anything from the past five years, it is that the focus needs to shift towards greater balance between what we can gain from the resources sector versus what we can offer in return as a sound and stable environment in which to do business. This will be imperative if we are to realise our vast natural wealth and meet the continual growing needs of a hungry and developing world, on top of rectifying our own financial situation.

**Rail Infrastructure**

**Mr MURPHY** (Reid) (21:35): Despite the fact that we celebrated the end of the Howard government almost five years ago, the consequences of incompetent and destructive decisions of that bad government still linger. In particular, the decision by the then Minister for Transport and Regional Services, the Hon. John Anderson, to sell-off the federally owned rail freight carrier, National Rail, to Pacific National, a company that had the stated intention of scrapping the remaining New South Wales electric locomotive fleet, completed the destruction of hundreds of millions of dollars of publicly owned railway equipment.
Since that time, no electric locomotives have operated over the extensive electrified rail network in New South Wales, yet railway operators in the rest of the world have continued to expand both electrified route kilometres and the number of electric locomotives in service. One may reasonably ask why rail freight operators in our country abandoned electric freight haulage.

It has been put to me by professional engineers with experience in the railways that many of the problems that have arisen in the Australian railway industry are the result of the rise of the culture of managerialism—the notion that the performance of all organisations can be optimised by the application of generic management skills and theory. To a practitioner of managerialism there is little difference in the essential skills required to run a hamburger shop, an advertising agency or a railway. The experience and skills pertinent to an organisation's core business are considered secondary, yet who would expect that a person with limited technical understanding could possibly make informed decisions, particularly in an industry like the railways? This is a widely held view amongst professional railway engineers.

The consequence of ill-informed decisions, compounded by Howard government ministerial incompetence, meant that, with the exception of Queensland, instead of expanding long-distance railway electrification, valuable rolling stock was cut up for scrap and electric infrastructure was dismantled. With few exceptions, all major countries are investing heavily in railway electrification since policymakers in those countries, making rational decisions based on evidence, understand that railway electrification is the key to a safe and sustainable transport system. Basically, electric locomotives are cheaper, stronger and cleaner.

In Britain, for instance, in a continuation of the previous Labor government's policies, electrification is central to the conservative government's strategic plans for railway investment, with new schemes totalling 4.2 billion pounds, which includes the electrification of the Midland Main Line as part of a high-capacity 'electric spine' passenger and freight route from Yorkshire and the West Midlands to Southampton. The British government hopes this will encourage private investment in electric freight locomotives. Completion will enable further electrification in the period up to 2024.

The former Labour government transport secretary, Lord Adonis, told the BBC that the massive investment involved would be worth it, saying:

With the electric trains you get a quieter, cleaner, more reliable and much cheaper train which benefits passengers and it also benefits the taxpayers because it's much cheaper to keep an electric railway going.

Russia, a country with even greater distances between centres of population than Australia, has electrified approximately half of its 86,000 kilometres of railways, the routes with the greatest traffic, and, although reliable figures are hard to come by, it appears that in contrast to Australia a significant proportion of freight in that country is transported by electric railways.

In the United States, a public policy institution identified the serious issues that would be addressed by railway electrification. I suggest that similar conditions apply in Australia and include: excessive oil consumption—an average Australian vehicle has fuel consumption of 13.8 litres per 100 kilometres, which is almost double the OECD average of 7.6 litres per 100 kilometres; economic, energy and environmental costs with related national security issues.
that result from excessive oil consumption; lack of non-oil-based transportation, which means that there is no alternative for essential transportation that does not use oil; an inadequate railway capacity; and a chronic underinvestment in long-lived beneficial infrastructure, in particular railway connections between the major cities.

In my electorate of Reid, the federal government is addressing some of these issues with the investment of $840 million in the construction of the Northern Sydney Freight Corridor. Although this project has significant public support, I have also received some complaints from my constituents who are rightly concerned about the expected adverse impact of noise and toxic emissions from the many diesel locomotives that will be passing through residential areas in North Strathfield, Concord West and Rhodes once the project is completed.

Aside from the obvious financial benefits mentioned by Lord Adonis, the environmental advantages of railway electrification over diesel operation are considerable. In particular, there is the absence of toxic emissions that affect railway crews and people who live near railway lines that operate diesel trains. When the GST was introduced in July 2000, I asked the then minister, John Anderson, a question on warnings by the World Health Organisation about the effects of diesel emissions, which are expected to increase as a result of increased consumption of diesel fuel brought about by increased subsidies. Extraordinarily, my question was dismissed by Minister Anderson, who suggested that I should find the answers that I was seeking in the material he had already released. Of course, there was no such information to be found, and any concerns that I had about the effects of toxic diesel emissions were summarily dismissed in a manner that typified the responses of the Howard ministry to questions about the destructive consequences of that government's policies.

Most recently, the World Health Organization has ruled that diesel fumes cause cancer—a determination that appears to make diesel exhaust as important a public health threat as passive smoking. According to Kurt Straif, director of the International Agency for Research on Cancer, which is part of the World Health Organization, in an article in Britain's *Guardian* newspaper:

'It's on the same order of magnitude as passive smoking.' …

'This could be another big push for countries to clean up exhaust from diesel engines.'

I have recently received a reply to an email that I wrote to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, the Hon. Anthony Albanese, detailing concerns of my constituents—in particular those of the residents of the large number of new apartments which have recently been built adjacent to the tracks of the new Northern Sydney Freight Corridor. In that email, I requested that the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure investigate the possibility of returning a number of mothballed electric locomotives to service to replace at least a proportion of the diesel locomotives that would otherwise emit a large volume of toxic diesel exhaust in a built-up urban area. I forwarded the minister's response to the Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Railways Association for comment. His response ignored any concerns about the effect of toxic diesel emissions and then went on to tell me in effect that electric locomotives would not be introduced because, 'Rail must compete with road transport, and it is imperative that the transit time for freight trains be reduced.' What he is evidently concerned about is the short delay of about 10 minutes that changing from electric locomotives to diesel locomotives at Broadmeadow would add to a journey time of between 17½ hours and 21 hours between Sydney and Brisbane.
How do I know that the delay would be no more than 10 minutes? That is easy—I just looked at the record. As well as old New South Wales railway timetables which include an electric-to-diesel locomotive change at Broadmeadow and which are available on the internet, there are short videos on YouTube showing locomotive changeover procedures in other parts of the world which may be short as seven to eight minutes—a minimal delay that no-one could reasonably suggest would undermine the competitiveness of the railways.

So instead of a cogent argument all I received was a repetition of the bad advice that the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure had received from an organisation that purports to advance the interests of the Australian railway industry, all the while ignoring the real and serious impact of toxic emissions from polluting diesel locomotives that will inevitably be replaced by far cleaner electric locomotives. The only question is: when?

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott):** Order! The time for the grievance debate has expired. The debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 192(v). The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

_Federation Chamber adjourned at 21:45_
QUESTIONS IN WRITING

Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities
(Question No. 1015)

Mr Briggs asked the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, in writing, on 23 May 2012:

In respect of government grants provided to Terrain Natural Resource Management, (a) how many have been provided, and (b) for each grant (i) what was the dollar value, (ii) on what date was it approved, (iii) under what program was it provided, (iv) under what terms was it provided, and (v) what was the purpose.

Mr Burke: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

Since 2008, the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities has provided 18 grants to Terrain Natural Resource Management for a range of purposes. Grants have been provided under the Caring for our Country Initiative for outcomes such as improving the quality of water entering the Great Barrier Reef lagoon, protecting threatened species and enhancing habitat condition and connectivity, and undertaking environmental recovery works to address immediate impacts from floods and cyclones.

All Caring for our Country grants are subject to standard contracts and their terms and conditions.

The full details of each grant including the dollar value, date approved, the purpose and the program under which it was provided is below.

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<tr>
<th>Program Component</th>
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<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Approval date</th>
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<td>Water Quality Grants and Partnerships - Terrain Natural Resource Management</td>
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<td>Reef Rescue</td>
<td>Water Quality Grants and Partnerships - Terrain Natural Resource Management</td>
<td>Delivering additional water quality grants to sugar cane farmers in the region in 2009/10</td>
<td>21/10/2009</td>
<td>$420,000 *GST Excl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring for our Country - Natural Heritage Trust</td>
<td>Disaster Recovery</td>
<td>Regional Disaster Environmental Recovery</td>
<td>To undertake environmental recovery works to address immediate impacts from the flood and cyclone in Queensland in 2011.</td>
<td>23/03/2011</td>
<td>$400,000 *GST Excl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring for our Country - Natural Heritage Trust</td>
<td>Regional Base Level</td>
<td>Regional Investment</td>
<td>To improve biodiversity, restore coastal and aquatic habitats, encourage sustainable farm practices and build community skills, knowledge and engagement in 2008/09</td>
<td>23/06/2008</td>
<td>$1,450,000 *GST Excl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring for our Country - Natural Heritage Trust</td>
<td>Regional Base Level</td>
<td>Regional Investment</td>
<td>To improve biodiversity, restore coastal and aquatic</td>
<td>24/06/2009</td>
<td>$1,459,000 *GST Excl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Component</td>
<td>Grant name</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Approval date</td>
<td>Value GST Inc</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
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<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Base Level</td>
<td>Regional Investment</td>
<td>To improve biodiversity, restore coastal and aquatic habitats, encourage sustainable farm practices and build community skills, knowledge and engagement over three years from 2010/11 to 2012/13</td>
<td>28/06/2010</td>
<td>$4,377,000</td>
<td>*GST Excl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reef Rescue</td>
<td>Water Quality Grants and Partnerships - Terrain Natural Resource Management</td>
<td>To improve the quality of water entering the Great Barrier Reef lagoon in 2008/09</td>
<td>15/10/2008</td>
<td>$6,502,000</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reef Rescue</td>
<td>Water Quality Grants and Partnerships - Terrain Natural Resource Management</td>
<td>To improve the quality of water entering the Great Barrier Reef lagoon over three years from 2009/10 to 2011/12</td>
<td>24/06/2009</td>
<td>$5,925,448</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reef Rescue</td>
<td>Water Quality Grants and Partnerships - Terrain Natural Resource Management</td>
<td>Delivering additional water quality grants to sugar cane farmers in the region in 2009/10</td>
<td>8/02/2010</td>
<td>$330,000</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reef Rescue</td>
<td>Water Quality Grants and Partnerships - Terrain Natural Resource Management</td>
<td>Minimising Off Farm Movement of Nitrogen and Phosphorus</td>
<td>7/01/2011</td>
<td>$330,000</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reef Rescue</td>
<td>Water Quality Grants and Partnerships - Terrain Natural Resource Management</td>
<td>Minimising Off Farm Movement of Nitrogen and Phosphorus</td>
<td>7/01/2011</td>
<td>$330,000</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reef Rescue</td>
<td>Reef Rescue research and Development Program</td>
<td>To increase the managed area of habitat critical to the long term persistence of nationally threatened species and ecological communities by building resilience for Cassowary, Mahogany Glider and Littoral Rainforest</td>
<td>4/11/2011</td>
<td>$750,000</td>
<td>*GST Excl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Component</td>
<td>Grant name</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Approval date</td>
<td>Value GST Inc</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Caring for our Country - Natural Heritage Trust</strong></td>
<td>Community Coastcare</td>
<td>Cattana Wetlands - environmental education for sustainability</td>
<td>21/11/2008</td>
<td>$27,302</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Caring for our Country - Natural Heritage Trust</strong></td>
<td>Community Coastcare</td>
<td>Local government coastal reserve planning and management in far north Queensland</td>
<td>21/11/2008</td>
<td>$248,500</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Caring for our Country - Natural Heritage Trust</strong></td>
<td>Community Action Grants</td>
<td>Whyanbeel Action Group Biodiversity Enhancement Project</td>
<td>8/12/2009</td>
<td>$20,860</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Caring for our Country - Natural Heritage Trust</strong></td>
<td>Community Action Grants</td>
<td>Eubanangee and Wyvuri Wetlands - Community Engagement and Pest Control</td>
<td>15/10/2010</td>
<td>$18,150</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Caring for our Country - Natural Heritage Trust

Community Action Grants

Bloomfield River Mouth (Banabila) Reserve Restoration Project

To provide local Indigenous employment opportunities to restore the mouth of the Bloomfield River. Work undertaken will include weed control, revegetation and restricting vehicular access to the site.

1/11/2011

$18,744

N/A

* Denotes the grant funding is provided to Terrain Natural Resource Management via the Queensland State Government.

**Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy**

(Question No. 1016)

Mr Fletcher asked the Minister representing the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, in writing, on 28 May 2012:

Further to his answer to question in writing No. 700 (House Hansard, 8 May 2012, page 51) how many premises of the first release sites of (a) Scottsdale, (b) Midway Point, (c) Smithton, (c) Brunswick, (d) Townsville, (e) Kiama, (f) Armidale, and (g) Willunga, were connected (i) overhead, and (ii) underground.

Mr Albanese: The Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

The first release sites for the NBN were chosen and designed to test the variety of locations and operational conditions likely to be encountered in the overall rollout of the NBN.

The pattern of connection methodologies employed was varied to enable an assessment of performance in these trials. The lessons from these trials are now being incorporated in the design of the volume rollout. Accordingly, the particular characteristics of these trials cannot be considered indicative of the likely experience in the rollout overall.

**Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy**

(Question No. 1085)

Mr Briggs asked the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, in writing, on 20 June 2012:

For (a) 2008-09, (b) 2009-10, (c) 2010-11, and (d) 2011-12, what was the total cost of overseas travel for departmental staff.

Mr Albanese: The Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

The total expenses for overseas travel for departmental staff for the years asked are as follows:

2008/09 $505,066
2009/10 $513,079
2010/11 $406,524
2011/12 $402,408
Employment and Workplace Relations and School Education, Early Childhood and Youth
(Question Nos 1098 and 1107)

Mr Briggs asked the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth, in writing, on 20 June 2012:

For (a) 2008-09, (b) 2009-10, (c) 2010-11, and (d) 2011-12, what was the total cost of overseas travel for departmental staff.

Mr Garrett: The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial Year</th>
<th>Cost ($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>1,411,916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>1,263,988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>1,185,431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-12 (YTD 31 May)</td>
<td>925,265</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Social Inclusion
(Question No. 1108)

Mr Briggs asked the Minister for Social Inclusion, in writing, on 20 June 2012:

For (a) 2008-09, (b) 2009-10, (c) 2010-11, and (d) 2011-12, what was the total cost of overseas travel for departmental staff.

Mr Butler: I am advised that the answer to the honourable member's question is as follows

The Minister for Social Inclusion is supported by staff of the Department of the Prime Minister & Cabinet. Please refer to HOR response 1082 for details on overseas travel expenditure by departmental staff.