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SITTING DAYS—2015

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

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Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Craig Scott MP  
Second Deputy Speaker—Mr Robert George Mitchell MP  
Members of the Speaker’s Panel—Mr Russell Evan Broadbent MP, Mr Alexander George Hawke MP, Mr Ian Reginald Goodenough MP, Mrs Natasha Louise Griggs MP, Ms Sarah Moya Henderson MP, Mr Stephen James Irons MP, Mr Ewen Thomas Jones MP, Mr Craig Kelly MP, Ms Michelle Leanne Landry MP, Mrs Jane Prentice MP, Mr Donald James Randall MP, Mr Ross Xavier Vasta MP, Mr Brett David Whiteley MP, Mrs Lucy Elizabeth Wicks MP

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

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Liberal Party of Australia
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Deputy Leader—Hon. Julie Isabel Bishop MP  
Chief Government Whip—Mr Scott Buchholz MP  
Government Whips—Mr Andrew Alexander Nikolic, AM, CSC and Ms Nola Bethwyn Marino MP

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

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

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Members of the House of Representatives

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

Heads of Parliamentary Departments
Clerk of the Senate—R Laing
Clerk of the House of Representatives—D Elder
Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—C Mills
Parliamentary Budget Officer—P Bowen
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Each box represents a portfolio. **Cabinet Ministers are shown in bold type.** As a general rule, there is one department in each portfolio. However, there is a Department of Human Services in the Social Services portfolio and a Department of Veterans' Affairs in the Defence portfolio. The title of a department does not necessarily reflect the title of a minister in all cases.
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Hon Tanya Plibersek MP</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Senator Claire Moore</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manager of Opposition Business (Senate)</td>
<td>Hon David Feeney MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for the Centenary of ANZAC</td>
<td>Hon Matt Thistlethwaite MP</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Dr Jim Chalmers MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Leader of the Opposition in the Senate</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon Penny Wong</td>
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<tr>
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The SPEAKER (Hon. Bronwyn Bishop) took the chair at 09:00, made an acknowledgement of country and read prayers.

**BILLS**

**Migration Amendment (Maintaining the Good Order of Immigration Detention Facilities) Bill 2015**

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Dutton.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr DUTTON (Dickson—Minister for Immigration and Border Protection) (09:01): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Migration Amendment (Maintaining the Good Order of Immigration Detention Facilities) Bill 2015 amends the Migration Act 1958 to support the government's commitment to strong border protection and the establishment of a safe and effective system of immigration detention.

The government has a responsibility to detainees and other people in our immigration detention facilities to ensure that they are free from harm. The government is also responsible to ensure that these facilities themselves are in good order, peaceful and secure. In amending the Migration Act 1958 the government is providing those working in our detention facilities with the tools they need to protect the life, health or safety of any person, and to maintain the good order, peace or security within an immigration facility.

The amendments in this bill address issues arising from incidents at a number of immigration detention facilities, which highlighted uncertainty, on the part of the immigration detention service providers, as to when it may act when confronted with public order disturbances in immigration detention facilities. This uncertainty was considered in the Independent review of the incidents at the Christmas Island Immigration Detention Centre and Villawood Immigration Detention Centre (the Hawke-Williams report), conducted by Dr Allan Hawke AC and Ms Helen Williams AO in 2011. The Hawke-Williams report recommended that the Department of Immigration and Border Protection more clearly articulate the responsibility of public order management between the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, the immigration detention service provider, the Australian Federal Police and other police forces who may attend an immigration detention facility.

The amendments in this bill provide a legislative framework for the use of reasonable force within immigration detention facilities in Australia. Specifically, the bill provides clear authority for the use of reasonable force in immigration detention in Australia to:

- protect a person's life, health or safety; or
- maintain the good order, peace or security of the facility.
The provision of a legislative framework for the use of reasonable force will provide the immigration detention service provider with the tools needed to provide the first line of response and ensure the operation of the immigration detention network remains viable, against a backdrop of a change in the demography of immigration detention facilities.

The onshore immigration detention network holds an increasing number of detainees who present behavioural challenges including:

- an increasing number of people subject to adverse security assessments;
- people who have been convicted of violent crime, drug or other serious criminal offences; and
- others deemed to be of a high security risk, such as members of outlaw motorcycle gangs.

The presence of high-risk detainees with behavioural challenges has the potential to jeopardise the peace, good order and security of our immigration detention facilities and the safety of all people within those facilities, including staff and visitors.

The use of reasonable force is not a new concept to the Migration Act 1958. Various provisions in the Migration Act authorise the use of reasonable force in specific circumstances. For example, it may be necessary in certain circumstances to use reasonable force to carry out identification tests. There are currently, however, no provisions in the Migration Act 1958 that authorise the use of reasonable force as proposed in this amendment.

In the absence of legislation, officers and staff of the detention services provider rely on common-law powers, as conferred on ordinary citizens, to exercise reasonable force when it is necessary to protect themselves and others from harm or threat of harm. The extent of this authority is, however, limited.

Clearly, using reasonable force to manage issues of physical safety, good order, peace and security in an immigration detention facility is a matter for parliament to decide, not the common law.

This bill provides for suitably trained and qualified authorised officers to use such reasonable force against any person or thing as the authorised officer reasonably believes is necessary to:

- protect the life, health or safety of any person in an immigration detention facility; and
- maintain the good order, peace or security of an immigration detention facility.

In particular, the bill provides for an authorised officer to use reasonable force if that officer reasonably believes it is necessary to:

- protect a person from harm or a threat of harm;
- protect a detainee from self-harm or a threat of self-harm;
- prevent the escape of a detainee from an immigration detention facility;
- prevent a person from damaging, destroying or interfering with property in an immigration detention facility;
- move a detainee within an immigration detention facility;
- prevent action in an immigration detention facility by any person that endangers the life, health or safety of a person or disturbs the good order, peace or security of that facility. For
example the detention service provider having to use reasonable force to separate visitors
who are fighting.

The bill inserts into the Migration Act 1958 the new definition of 'immigration detention
facility', that is: a detention centre established under the Migration Act 1958, or a place
approved by the minister as a place of immigration detention. This restricts the powers in this
bill to immigration detention facilities in Australia, including Christmas Island.

The bill inserts a provision that prevents the minister or the secretary from authorising an
officer as an authorised officer unless the officer satisfies the training and qualification
requirements determined by the minister in writing.

The bill inserts provisions that specifically limit the exercise of the power to use reasonable
force by authorised officers, preventing them from doing any of the following:

• using reasonable force to give nourishment or fluids to a detainee in an immigration
detention facility;

• subjecting a person to greater indignity than the officer reasonably believes is necessary in
the circumstances; and

• doing anything likely to cause a person grievous bodily harm, unless the officer reasonably
believes that doing so is necessary to protect the life of, or to prevent serious injury to,
another person (including the authorised officer).

Provided the reasonable force is exercised in good faith, the bill bars court proceedings
against the Commonwealth, including an authorised officer. This provision provides the
appropriate balance between protecting authorised officers in the exercise of the power to use
reasonable force and ensuring that the power is exercised in good faith. The provisions in this
bill send a clear message to authorised officers that force is not to be exercised capriciously or
inappropriately.

To further ensure that the use of force will not be abused, the bill will provide for a
statutory complaints mechanism. This mechanism will allow a person to complain to the
secretary about the exercise of the power to use reasonable force. The amendments will
require the secretary to provide appropriate assistance to any complainant.

This complaints mechanism does not restrict a person from making a complaint directly to
another source such the state or territory police services, the Australian Federal Police or
indeed the Ombudsman. An appropriate complaints mechanism is an important accountability
measure in relation to the exercise of the power to use reasonable force.

The government considers that safe and effective immigration detention policies and strong
border security measures are not incompatible. This legislation strikes an appropriate balance
between maintaining the good order of a facility and the safety of the people within it and the
need to ensure that the use of force is reasonable, proportionate and appropriate. The
government is maintaining stronger border security measures, but is ensuring that all people
in immigration detention facilities, including the detainees themselves, are safe from harm.

The preparation for the passage of this bill includes the introduction of risk mitigation
measures and governance controls. These measures will be in place and ready for the
implementation of this legislation.

These measures include:
• the development and implementation of appropriate governance instructions and administrative arrangements to guide authorised officers in the use of reasonable force;

• the establishment of agreed protocols for the handover of responsibility for dealing with disturbances in immigration detention facilities between the department, the detention service provider, the AFP, state and territory police forces;

• ensuring authorised officers meet capability and training standards, and hold appropriate qualifications to enable them to appropriately use reasonable force in immigration detention facilities; and

• the use of rigorous incident reporting mechanisms for advising of all instances where reasonable force is used in immigration detention facilities.

In conclusion, the government will continue to use immigration detention as a tool to manage compliance with Australia's migration law and the removal of those who have no right to remain in Australia. Immigration detention will continue to support the orderly processing of migration to our country.

I trust this bill will have the support of members, most particularly those with an interest in ensuring the safety of all people in immigration detention facilities, and I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.

Australian Border Force Bill 2015
First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Dutton.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr DUTTON (Dickson—Minister for Immigration and Border Protection) (09:11): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Australia's border is a national asset that defines the space within which our democratic and sovereign nation state can prosper. It supports a strong economy by serving as a global gateway for trade, and enabling business and the operation of free markets. It supports strong national security by interdicting prohibited goods and people who seek to do us harm. The border also contributes to a prosperous and cohesive society with a rich and diverse culture, by promoting the freedoms and responsibilities of Australian citizenship and helping to create safer communities.

In short, our border creates the space where we can be who we are and become who we want to be as a nation.

Maintaining our borders as a secure platform for legitimate trade, travel and migration is a core responsibility of the Australian government and this is a responsibility we take very seriously. There is little point in having a planned migration program or laws around the movement of goods and people if we cannot protect the integrity of those programs.

In the environment of ongoing growth in trade and travellers to Australia, the Australian Border Force Bill 2015 and the other border protection reforms being implemented by this
government position our nation to confront the challenges posed by increased border interactions.

This bill establishes the statutory office of the Australian Border Force Commissioner, who will command the Australian Border Force as a new, front-line operational border control and enforcement entity within the Department of Immigration and Border Protection that will enforce customs and immigration laws and protect Australia's borders.

The Australian Border Force Commissioner will be our most senior border law enforcement officer who will lead a professional and agile team of highly trained officers tasked with protecting and maintaining our borders.

The commissioner will have the same standing as other heads of key national security related agencies, such as the Commissioner of the Australian Federal Police or the Chief of the Australian Defence Force.

The powers and functions of the commissioner are conferred under the Customs Act 1901, the Migration Act 1958, the Maritime Powers Act 2013 and other Commonwealth laws.

The commissioner will also be the Comptroller-General of Customs, with responsibility for the enforcement of customs law and the collection of border related revenue.

The Australian Border Force will not be a separate agency for the purposes of the Public Service Act 1999, the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013, or the Privacy Act 1988. The secretary of my department will remain the accountable authority for PGPA Act purposes and will remain the agency head for Public Service Act purposes.

The secretary will make available the resources, strategy, policy, corporate and enabling support the Australian Border Force needs to operate effectively.

This removes unnecessary duplication and enables the deployment of a greater proportion of resources into the front line. It also contributes to a more efficient government footprint that will assist in achieving fiscal repair and ensuring the sustainability of government operations.

The Australian Border Force will bring together the people, capability and systems from across my portfolio that protect the border and facilitate the lawful passage of people and goods.

This bill also enables the full integration of the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service and the Department of Immigration and Border Protection into a single department of state.

Staff performing operational functions in the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service will move into the Australian Border Force. Departmental staff who will transfer into the Australian Border Force include those working in immigration compliance, enforcement, detention services and other operational functions. All other functions from the service will be integrated within the broader department.

By removing the traditional silos of immigration and customs, my department—and within it the Australian Border Force—will deliver an improved capability that truly focuses border policies, strategy and operations in an integrated and holistic way.
The establishment of an integrated border entity is not a new concept. It has been a theme of global border reform, in particular in the United States through the Department of Homeland Security and a series of reforms at the UK Home Office.

In bringing forward our reforms, we have studied these overseas experiences carefully. The model the government is implementing takes account of what has worked well for other countries, but also takes into account the unique challenges we face here.

The Australian Border Force will encompass not only those people who staff our air and sea borders at airports and ports, but also those involved in detection, investigations, compliance and enforcement in relation to illicit goods and illegal visitors. This includes management of detention facilities and the removal of noncitizens who do not have a right to remain in Australia.

The Australian Border Force will also include staff who serve beyond our borders, working in operational roles with our regional partners to secure Australia's maritime zone, prevent and deter illegal arrivals and the movement of prohibited goods.

While the Australian Border Force will deliver an important law-enforcement and national security capability in its own right, it will not operate alone. The Australian Border Force will work in close collaboration with national security, defence, law enforcement and intelligence partners domestically and overseas to deliver a secure border.

This integrated approach has proved to be a key element of our government's success under Operation Sovereign Borders in stopping the destructive people-smuggling trade.

To underpin community confidence in Australia's immigration, customs and border arrangements, it is imperative that the Australian Border Force is established as a professional and disciplined workforce.

The bill provides that certain immigration and border protection workers in the Australian Border Force or performing services for the force may be requested to make and subscribe an oath or affirmation. This requirement sets an up-front marker that the government and the public expect the highest standards of professionalism and integrity for officers that are exercising significant enforcement powers. The commissioner will also be required to make and subscribe an oath or affirmation on commencement of his or her office.

An employee who has made or subscribed such an oath or affirmation must not engage in conduct that is inconsistent with the oath or affirmation.

This bill also gives power to the secretary and ABF Commissioner to give written directions in connection with the administration and control of the department and Australian Border Force respectively, and the performance of functions or exercise of powers.

Directions may be made in relation to the setting of essential qualifications for the performance of duties, the mandatory reporting of serious misconduct or criminal activity and the implementation of the professional integrity system for my department.

These directions are binding and failure to follow them represents a breach of the Australian Public Service Code of Conduct.

These provisions will enable the highest standards of operational effectiveness and professional integrity to be achieved throughout my department.
To ensure a safe working environment and increase resistance to corruption, the bill provides that all Immigration and Border Protection workers may be required to undergo an alcohol-screening test, an alcohol breath test, an alcohol blood test or a prohibited drug test.

While the focus of the testing will be on operational and high-risk areas, any departmental employee may be selected randomly for testing.

In addition, the bill provides that alcohol screening involving a breath or blood test, and/or a prohibited drug test, may be required if an incident occurs such as a workplace injury or death involving a motor vehicle, vessel, the discharge of a firearm or physical force.

The Australian Federal Police, Australian Crime Commission and Australian Customs and Border Protection Service all currently apply similar drug- and alcohol-testing arrangements. The Australian Defence Force also operates a prohibited substance testing program.

To further strengthen integrity arrangements, the bill establishes resignation and termination provisions in circumstances involving serious misconduct.

Where an employee is suspected of serious misconduct such as corruption, a serious abuse of power, a serious dereliction of duty, or any other seriously reprehensible act or behaviour and they tender their resignation, the secretary of the department or the ABF Commissioner would be able to defer the date of effect of resignation by up to 90 days.

This will enable an APS code of conduct investigation to be finalised and where a breach decision is made, consider whether to impose a termination of employment sanction.

Additionally, in cases where the employment of a departmental officer is terminated under the Public Service Act 1999 as a result of serious misconduct, the secretary or ABF Commissioner will be able to make a serious misconduct declaration that excludes the termination of employment from review for unfair dismissal under the Fair Work Act 2009.

These provisions provide a strong signal that serious misconduct will not be tolerated.

Part 6 of the bill establishes important information protections, similar to provisions that are in place within the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service and a range of other Commonwealth agencies.

These protections prohibit the unauthorised making of a record or disclosure of protected information. Breach of this requirement is punishable by imprisonment for two years.

This provision provides assurance to industry and our domestic and international law enforcement and intelligence partners that sensitive information provided to the Australian Border Force and my department more broadly will be appropriately protected. The provision also enables authorised disclosure where this is appropriate.

In summary, the reforms delivered through this bill support the government's priority of ensuring Australia's ongoing success as an open economy and as the world's most successful immigration nation.

This will enable the Australian Border Force and the department to create stronger borders. Stronger borders will contribute to safer communities and a prosperous and cohesive society.

This bill deserves the support of all parties. We must take this opportunity to enhance Australia's capacity at the border to manage exponential growth in trade and travellers and combat transnational crime syndicates seeking to exploit our systems.
The government is serious about border protection. The measures in this bill underscore that commitment, and I commend it to the House.

Debate adjourned.

**Customs and Other Legislation Amendment (Australian Border Force) Bill 2015**

**First Reading**

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by **Mr Dutton**.

Bill read a first time.

**Second Reading**

**Mr DUTTON** (Dickson—Minister for Immigration and Border Protection) (09:23): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Customs and Other Legislation Amendment (Australian Border Force) Bill 2015 will repeal the Customs Administration Act 1985 and amend a number of other Commonwealth Acts, including the Customs Act 1901.

Consequential amendments proposed in this bill will ensure that all Commonwealth legislation reflects the changes to organisational arrangements and statutory roles associated with the integration of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection and establishment of the Australian Border Force within the department.

The Australian Border Force Bill 2015 establishes the statutory office of the Australian Border Force Commissioner and also designates the commissioner as the 'Comptroller-General of Customs'. In that capacity, the holder of the position will have general administration of the Customs Act and the various provisions within other Commonwealth acts and regulations that confer powers and responsibilities on Customs and on officers of Customs.

This act generally substitutes references to the 'Chief Executive Officer of Customs' with 'Comptroller-General of Customs' or 'Secretary of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection'; and the 'Department of Immigration and Border Protection' will generally be substituted as the successor agency to the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service.

The terms 'officer of Customs' and 'Collector' are being retained, and the provisions in a range of Commonwealth laws that are linked to these defined terms generally remain unchanged. The associated powers will be exercised by those officers within my department who are appropriately authorised and trained, in accordance with established protocols and guidelines. In many, but not all cases, these officers will be within the Australian Border Force.

There are three matters in the bill that I specifically want to mention. These are the amendments to the Crimes Act 1914, the Law Enforcement Integrity Commissioner Act 2006 and the Work Health and Safety Act 2011.

First, in relation to the Crimes Act: there are several provisions that currently apply to officers of Customs or the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service that will be crucial to maintain when the service integrates with the Department of Immigration and Border Protection.
The Australian Customs and Border Protection Service currently falls within the definition of a law enforcement agency within part IAB, which deals with 'controlled operations', and part IAC, which deals with 'assumed identities'. A controlled operation involves the participation of officers from law enforcement agencies and is carried out for the purpose of obtaining evidence that may lead to the prosecution of a person for a serious Commonwealth offence, or state offence with Commonwealth aspects. An assumed identity is a false identity that is authorised to be adopted by an officer of a law enforcement agency to facilitate the collection of intelligence and investigation of offences of Commonwealth laws.

Part IAB currently exempts officers of Customs who are involved in a controlled operation from criminal liability for a Commonwealth, state or territory offence.

In addition, Part IAC currently exempts officers of Customs from criminal liability for a Commonwealth, state or territory offence in respect to things done in the course of acquiring or using an assumed identity.

These are important provisions. In its 2013 report into Organised crime in Australia, the Australian Crime Commission details the significant impact serious and organised crime has on the everyday lives of Australians. The commission conservatively estimates organised crime costs Australia $15 billion annually and notes the ability for such crime to undermine our border integrity, erode the confidence in institutions and law enforcement agencies and damage our prosperity and regional stability. This form of crime reaches across borders and can include trafficking in drugs or in people, corruption, and money laundering.

With the increasing threat of serious organised and transnational crime, it is vitally important that Australia's border arrangements continue to be able to operate with relevant powers and protections to conduct operations that counter these threats. Accordingly, the bill substitutes the Department of Immigration and Border Protection for the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service as the primary agency with overarching responsibility for protecting our borders. It therefore ensures these provisions will continue to apply to officers in my department when the new organisational arrangements are in place.

The second matter I want to highlight relates to amendments to the Law Enforcement Integrity Commissioner Act, or the LEIC Act.

The broad objectives of the LEIC Act are to strengthen the integrity of prescribed Commonwealth law enforcement agencies and to enable the prosecution of corrupt officials and their criminal counterparts. To this end, the Law Enforcement Integrity Commissioner and staff at the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity (ACLEI) are empowered to detect and investigate corrupt conduct by using a combination of coercive information gathering and law enforcement powers.

The Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity focuses on serious and systemic corruption risks, such as criminal compromise, infiltration and other corruption.

The Australian Customs and Border Protection Service is currently prescribed as a law enforcement agency under the LEIC Act. This bill proposes that the integrity commissioner's jurisdiction would be broadened to apply to the Department of Immigration and Border Protection on a whole of agency basis, from 1 July 2015.

My department plays a critical role in protecting Australia's sovereignty and managing the movement, each year, of millions of people and goods across the border. In fulfilling this role,
immigration and border protection workers have access to secure environments, protected systems and sensitive information. Officers are also entrusted with powers to authorise or prevent the movement of people and goods across the border and also the power to grant permissions associated with the stay of non-citizens in Australia. The Australian community expect these workers to demonstrate the highest level of integrity and professionalism in the exercise of such powers and in the protection of sensitive information.

I have every confidence that the vast majority of officers meet that expectation.

As a department charged with responsibilities that are so integral to strong national security and a strong economy, however, it is only appropriate that there are strong controls in place to detect and investigate corrupt behaviour and to ensure any workers who act corruptly are prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

This bill will therefore ensure the Law Enforcement Integrity Commissioner has an unhindered ability to investigate suspected law enforcement related corrupt activity across my department, regardless of the role, location or job title of an individual officer, including in non-operational roles.

There is one further matter in this bill I would like to mention, and that relates to proposed amendments to the Work Health and Safety Act, or the WHS Act.

The WHS Act imposes duties on persons conducting a business undertaking and workers to protect the health and safety of themselves and others. The thresholds imposed by these provisions are that workers should exercise 'reasonable care'.

The WHS Act also provides that nothing in the act requires a person to take or refrain from taking any action that would or could reasonably be expected to be prejudicial to Australia's national security or defence.

Sections 12C and 12D of the WHS Act enable the Director-General of Security and the Chief of the Defence Force to make declarations clarifying how the provisions within the WHS Act apply or are modified in cases relating to Australia's national security and defence. These declaration provisions importantly assist in providing assurance to front-line officers about how they can meet their obligations under the WHS Act while also fulfilling their obligation to protect Australia's national security and defence.

These declarations can only be made with the agreement of the Minister for Employment.

The Chief of the Defence Force currently has a declaration in place under this section of the WHS Act to cover certain elements of Operation Sovereign Borders. This declaration covers both Australian Defence Force personnel and ACBPS workers who are working together to protect Australia's sovereignty.

Into the future, workers in the Australian Border Force, like their counterparts in the Australian Defence Force and some other national security agencies, will at times be involved in fast-moving and inherently high-risk activities. This is particularly evident in the on-water maritime border protection environment, where some of the risks are difficult to predict and control in comparison to other workplace environments. Employees involved in these special operations (such as fishery or Southern Ocean patrols) often need to make difficult, time-critical judgements, and any uncertainty could threaten the effectiveness of the activity or the safety of the officer or others.
Amendments proposed in this bill will give the ABF Commissioner the ability to assure Australian Border Force workers in these environments and remove any doubt that they can professionally and diligently perform the tasks required of them without any legal or operational uncertainty about how the WHS Act applies. It will do this by enabling the ABF Commissioner to make declarations under the section 12C national security provision and section 12D defence provision of the act, clarifying how the act applies or is modified in particular operations.

At all times, the secretary of my department and the ABF Commissioner will continue to give precedence to the health and safety of immigration and border protection workers and other persons in the workplace, and promote the objectives of the WHS Act. Employees will continue to undertake risk assessments and be provided with the training and equipment they need to undertake the important roles the government and the Australian community need them to.

The bill also includes important safeguards around the making of a declaration by the ABF Commissioner. The ABF Commissioner must take into account the need to promote the objects of the WHS Act to the greatest extent consistent with the maintenance of Australia's national security and defence. To make a declaration, the ABF Commissioner must consult with the secretary of the department. In addition, for declarations under section 12C, the Director-General of Security must be consulted and, for a declaration under section 12D, the Chief of the Defence Force must be consulted. The ABF Commissioner must also seek the employment minister's approval prior to a declaration being made.

This amendment to the WHS Act appropriately recognises the risks faced by Australian Border Force officers in protecting Australia's sovereignty and security.

This bill deserves the support of all parties. Together with the Australian Border Force Bill 2015, it will assist us to remain prosperous, strong and secure in the 21st century as we deal with increased demands and threats to our immigration and border protection systems.

This government is serious about strong and effective border protection. The measures in this bill underscore that commitment, and I commend it to the House.

Debate adjourned.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition (Sunset Extension) Bill 2015

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Tudge.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr TUDGE (Aston—Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister) (09:35): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I am pleased to introduce this bill to extend the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition Act 2013 for three years, until 28 March 2018.
In the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition Act 2013, or act of recognition, parliament recognised, for the first time, that the continent and the islands now known as Australia were first occupied by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

While not a substitute for constitutional recognition, the act demonstrates the parliament's multipartisan commitment to recognition, and is an important step on the road to a referendum.

The act of recognition passed the previous parliament with unanimous support. An important part of the act was its two-year sunset date, included to make sure that parliament and the people knew that the job wasn't done. The member for Hasluck has likened it to a post-it note on the fridge, a reminder for us to complete the job. The act is an important form of recognition. But the ultimate goal remains constitutional change and that is the goal we have firmly in our sights.

Since the introduction of the act we have taken a number of key steps towards a referendum to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Constitution.

The act required us to undertake an assessment of our nation's readiness to support a referendum. This included an assessment of the proposals that would be most likely to obtain the support of the Australian people, and the levels of support amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the wider public, and state and territory governments.

On 27 March 2014 a review panel was appointed in accordance with the act. The review panel's report was tabled on 19 September 2014.

The final report makes clear that we have not yet reached a point where we can proceed immediately to a referendum. But by taking certain concrete steps, we can get there. The report notes that to give a referendum the greatest chance of success, a number of preconditions need to be met, including agreeing a final proposal that can win the support of Indigenous Australians, parliaments and the people; setting a clear time frame to show renewed commitment and urgency; and significantly raising the profile and understanding of constitutional recognition across the population.

The review panel also recommended that the act of recognition be extended for no more than three years, to demonstrate continuing commitment while we prepare the country for a referendum.

I can assure the parliament that the government is absolutely committed to holding a referendum to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Constitution. It would be a watershed moment. It would right the wrongs of the past. It would acknowledge our shared history and the incredible value we place on our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage. It would be one of the most powerful, unifying moments in our nation's history. And that is why we must work together now as a parliament to get this right. Failure is simply not an option.

The government is taking action on the recommendations of the review panel. In December, the government announced an additional $5 million for the Recognise campaign, to help raise awareness of why recognition is so important.

We have indicated our desire to proceed to a referendum as soon as the nation is ready—by, we hope, 27 May 2017, and our willingness to work across parliament, with Indigenous leaders and the Australian people to get it there.
In a few months' time, the joint select committee will report on its favoured model for constitutional recognition. From there, we will enter a period of discussion and engagement with the Australian people to arrive at the proposition that has the best chance of success.

During the past two years, the act of recognition has had an impact. We have a multiparty process in place through the Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, the review panel's final report, and a clear set of recommendations to guide our path towards a successful referendum. But there is much work to do. We are still at the beginning of this journey, rather than near the end point.

We need more time, and we need to keep the post-it note there. Three years is ample time to get us to our goal. Three years, not just to see how we go, but to do everything in our collective power to achieve a constitutional change.

During this period, we must redouble our joint efforts to find consensus on a time frame, a process, and ultimately, a form of words capable of winning support from a majority of Australians nationally, and in a majority of states. It is imperative that we now work together to turn this aspiration, shared by so many Australians, into a reality.

Debate adjourned.

National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2015

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Pyne.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House and Minister for Education and Training) (09:40):

I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Introduction

A high quality and high status vocational education and training sector is fundamental to a skilled workforce and a productive economy.

The coalition government is overhauling the skills and training system with a package of significant reforms that elevate trades and vocational education to the centre of Australia's economy.

It is a sector that is very important to students, to employers, including small businesses, and to this government.

It is critical that training is providing future employees with the work-ready skills they need for employment, and is also effectively upskilling those already in the workforce.

We are ensuring that training providers and the qualifications they issue are of the highest quality, maintain their relevance to employment outcomes and can operate as efficiently as possible.

This government is also taking steps to ensure that training providers operate in a modern and responsive regulatory environment.
The National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011 is the principal piece of legislation that provides the framework for the national regulation of the training sector through the establishment of the national VET regulator, the Australian Skills Quality Authority, known as ASQA.

The act commenced in 2011 and is enabled by a text-based referral of powers from participating states and the Intergovernmental Agreement for Regulatory Reform in Vocational Education and Training, agreed by all state and territory ministers.

The bill supports ongoing VET reform measures, including giving ASQA capacity to respond rapidly to emerging issues, allowing ASQA to more effectively target regulation to higher risk registered training organisations, and technical enhancements to facilitate more effective and efficient regulation.

Turning to the specifics of the bill, schedule one makes amendments to the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act. Schedule two presents transitional arrangements for the amendments contained in schedule one.

Advertising or representing a VET course without identifying the registered training organisation

The bill contains an amendment to improve transparency in the marketing of training. This measure has come about in direct response to the negative impact of marketing by third parties, often referred to as brokers, in the training sector, and in particular in the VET FEE-HELP market.

A potential vocational student should be able to clearly identify the registered training organisation responsible for the qualification they are signing up for. This new provision will require any person advertising or representing a nationally recognised training course, to clearly identify the provider responsible for the qualification in their marketing material.

This amendment will complement requirements in the revised national standards requiring transparent marketing by training providers, including the requirement that third party arrangements are to be covered by a written agreement.

Under the proposed amendment ASQA will be able to pursue anyone, not just training providers, who does not make it clear who is responsible for the quality of the training, and will have access to a broader range of enforcement options.

In line with this amendment, the bill will also clarify the coverage of 'person' to include organisations that are constitutional corporations for coverage of the civil penalty and offence provisions in part 6 of the Act. This will enable ASQA to take action against persons in contravention of provisions such as false and misleading marketing.

Introduce a quality standard provision

The bill establishes the capacity for the minister to make standards in relation to quality in the vocational education and training sector.

It is envisaged that the standard making power will be engaged in circumstances where a quick response is required to emerging issues that affect the quality and integrity of the training sector. The minister would be expected to consult with employers, training providers and the states and territories, in developing any quality standard.

Adherence to the standard will be a condition of registration for training providers.
This quality standard making power provides the ability to respond more rapidly to emerging issues than the current structure allows for, and sends a clear signal that, when required, the government will take action against those who want to undermine quality in the training sector.

Seven-year registration

The bill contains an administrative amendment to extend the maximum period of registration from five to seven years.

This amendment will allow ASQA to more effectively target resources to higher risk registered training organisations. It will also cut red tape for consistently compliant registered training organisations, as instead of having to re-register every five years they will only have to go through the process every seven years.

In a further reduction of red tape, it will help align and streamline the regulatory requirement of re-registration for multi-sector providers.

Most importantly, the amendment improves the efficiency of the national regulator, allowing it to redirect regulatory effort away from renewal processes and towards better targeted or more random auditing, compliance and enforcement actions against poor quality providers.

Re-registration based auditing has been identified by ASQA as a less effective approach to quality assurance compared with targeted or random audit activities.

Effectiveness of the national regulator

To improve the effectiveness of ASQA to deal with unscrupulous practices, the bill makes a suite of administrative amendments.

For example, currently the act only allows the regulator to request information from a regulated registered training organisation, not from persons purporting to be a regulated entity. The bill will correct this situation, and allow the national regulator to request information from persons holding themselves out as a registered training organisation.

The bill will amend the definition of VET information and an information disclosure clause so that ASQA can improve its information sharing with other agencies.

The bill will also streamline processes for issuing written directions by amending the act to remove the need to first issue a 'notice of intention' for written directions, whilst still maintaining natural justice requirements for administrative sanctions.

To ensure timeliness in relation to search warrants, an amendment allows search warrants to be issued by a person employed in a court of a state or territory who is authorised, by law, to issue search warrants.

Other minor administrative measures

Finally, the bill contains a suite of minor administrative amendments that improve the clarity of the act in relation to reviewable decisions, clarify an immunity from self-incrimination clause, clarify the definition of a registered training organisation, update the definition of ministerial council and amend the act to replace ‘Australian Qualifications Framework’ with ‘VET Quality Framework’.
Conclusion

The amendments contained in the bill continue the government's work in partnership with students, employers, training providers and the states and territories to reform Australia's national vocational education and training system.

This bill complements quality reforms already undertaken including:

- Introducing tough new National Standards for Registered Training Organisations, which require training providers and their brokers to be up-front with students and provide clear information about any VET FEE-HELP loans, state entitlements and subsidy arrangements that they sign up to, and which make training providers ultimately responsible for services delivered by third parties on their behalf.

- Providing $68 million over four years to bolster the capacity of ASQA to enforce new national standards.

- Launching a new National Training Complaints Hotline, a joint initiative with the states and territories, to make it easier for students, employers and others with an interest in VET to report, and have actioned, their concerns about quality.

- These changes will be further complemented by anticipated reforms to also tackle a number of issues specific to VET FEE-HELP.

These amendments send a strong and unambiguous message to anyone who seeks to undermine VET quality or take advantage of vulnerable students or the taxpayer, that their actions will not be tolerated.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.
ambitions for Australian higher education in generations. It aims to make it possible for Australia to develop the best higher education system in the world. Above all, this will enable our students to get an education of the quality they need and deserve in this world of intensifying international competition. It will do so while making Australian higher education more equitable, affordable and accessible than ever before. This is the right package at the right time for Australian universities and colleges. More importantly, it is the best package for students. It has been designed thoughtfully and deliberately following careful review, consideration and consultation. All the higher education peak bodies around Australia support the core elements of these reforms. They know how necessary these reforms are. It is something of an achievement that we have been able to unite the entire higher education sector around these reforms.

This bill maintains the thrust of the reforms announced as part of the 2014-15 budget, paving the way for the highest quality education, a more level playing field for students and greater autonomy for universities. Firstly, the government is ensuring that students have vastly expanded choices in what they study and where they study it. For the first time ever, every Australian students studying at a registered higher education institution in an accredited undergraduate course will receive Commonwealth support. This means that all students studying bachelor and subbachelor level courses in Australia will receive support. As a result, an additional 80,000 students a year by 2018 will receive government support. Many of these people will be the first in their families to experience the benefits of higher education. Secondly, the reform bill does what the shadow assistant Treasurer has long advocated as a necessary reform for higher education in this country—that is, deregulate student fees. The member for Fraser has also written: 'There is no reason to think that fee deregulation will adversely affect poorer students.' The reason is that HECS means that no one needs to pay one cent up-front.

The reform bill has always been about improving the quality of the education our students get, making the system fairer, increasing opportunity and diversity and ensuring that Australia has a strong, competitive higher education and research system. We cannot allow the quality of our degrees and our higher education system to be left behind amid intensifying global competition.

The Higher Education and Research Reform Bill includes important changes from the original package. These are been introduced following broad consultation with universities, higher education peak bodies, the crossbenchers and, most importantly, my colleagues, who have taken a keen interest in the amendments since the first reform bill and who have been responsible for driving change in the second. They are retaining indexation on HECS debt by the same consumer price index that was applied previously; freezing the indexation of outstanding HECS debts for primary carers of a newborn child for up to five years while they are earning under the minimum repayment threshold; creating a structural adjustment fund of $100 million over three years to assist universities to transition to a more competitive market, including those in regional areas; and providing an unprecedented package of scholarships, including a dedicated scholarship fund within the Higher Education Participation Programme. This will ensure that the assistance is focused on regional, remote and low-SES students. The reform bill guarantees that no domestic student can be charged more for a course than an international student can.
As a further safeguard, the government will direct the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission to monitor prices in higher education. Like the previous bill, this reform bill will also remove the unfair VET-FEE-HELP and FEE-HELP loan fees, benefiting 130,000 students. It will extend the Commonwealth subsidies to all Australian students studying accredited bachelor level courses at all registered higher education providers for the first time. It will extend funding to an uncapped number of diploma, advanced diploma and associate degree level courses for the first time. So this government is extending the demand driven system, whereas the shadow minister for education, on the other side of the house, is talking about recapping positions for undergraduate courses and driving the system backwards rather than driving it forwards. In fact, he wants more regulation, more socialism at universities, which is exactly what the previous government—

Ms Bird: That's an exaggeration.

Mr PYNE: No, it is not. It is not actually an exaggeration. He wants to recap the positions of undergraduate degrees. Your government, the previous government, actually extended the demand driven system to undergraduate degrees. Your shadow minister is opening the door to recapping the positions, which is socialism at university. I am afraid it has to be called for what it is. Your shadow minister for education, Senator Carr, is a member of the socialist faction of the Labor Party. So, if the socialist faction of the Labor Party do not like the name, why don't they change the name? Why do they continue to call themselves the socialist faction of the Labor Party? By his own words, the shadow minister for education has described himself as a socialist. Why don't you ring him and ask him? He will tell you.

These reforms maintain—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr PYNE: Isn't it fascinating? Isn't it fascinating how the only moment of passion the Labor Party can raise in this debate is when they are described as what they are, which is trying to reintroduce socialism in universities? That is the part where they try to interrupt the speaker, because they do not want the speaker to make that point.

This reforms maintain the spirit and the objectives of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme, which was created by Labor over 25 years ago. One of the interesting things about this debate over the last few weeks has been how the former Labor leaders who introduced the Higher Education Contribution Scheme, and those around the Labor Party at the time who were advising John Dawkins about the Higher Education Contribution Scheme, have been so disappointed in the approach of the Labor opposition to this issue, in walking away from serious reform. They are proposing reforms. John Dawkins is proposing support for this measure. He describes it as not a very significant reform that Labor is opposing. People like Bruce Chapman, the father of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme, David Phillips, who was an adviser to John Dawkins when he was the Minister for Employment, Education and Training, and Peter Dawkins, who is an academic who used to work for John Dawkins when he was the education minister, are proposing, through columns and through discussions with the government and the crossbenches, ways of achieving higher education reform, because they are so bitterly disappointed in the Labor Party's approach to this bill, in walking away from serious reform. People like Maxine McKew, the former member for Bennelong, say that Labor should support reform. Gareth Evans—the former deputy leader of the Labor Party in opposition, the former Senate leader and the Chancellor of the
Australian National University—is urging the Labor Party to support reform. So the sensible members of the Labor Party—people who used to believe in reform, in creating jobs, in supporting families and in extending opportunity to more students around Australia—are urging the Labor Party to support this bill: John Dawkins and Gareth Evans.

Here is another one: the member for Fraser, the shadow Assistant Treasurer. He supports reform. He has written about reform. He has had to eat his words.

Dr Leigh: Mr Deputy Speaker, I seek to intervene.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Is the minister willing to give way?

Mr PYNE: Yes, I will.

Dr Leigh: Can the minister name a single vice-chancellor who supports his entire package, cuts included?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Leader of the House, we are in the phase of summing up; but if you would like to respond to the question, you may. It would not normally be allowed, but I will ask the Leader of the House to respond to the question.

Mr PYNE: Free-flowing debate is a good thing in this chamber and there should be a lot more of it, so I am happy to take the intervention. I can tell the member for Fraser that there are 41 universities in Australia and 40 out of 41 vice-chancellors support the higher education reform bill. They want the bill passed. I have never met a vice-chancellor who wanted to have a cut—never met one!—but I can tell you that I have met 40 out of 41 who support the government's higher education reform bill.

I know the member for Fraser is embarrassed. I would be embarrassed too, if I was a reasonably intelligent member as the member for Fraser is—someone who can put some words together and write a book, and he has written several. He is an intelligent academic. I would be embarrassed, too, if I was forced to eat my words in the humiliating way the member for Fraser has been forced to eat his words over the higher education reform bill. He knows, and John Dawkins knows, and Maxine McKew knows, and Gareth Evans knows—they all know that reform to our universities is required. If we do not reform universities—if we do not give universities the opportunity to be their best selves—they will stagnate, and the member for Fraser knows that. It will be a slow decline into mediocrity. Those are not my words; they are the words of the vice-chancellors and Universities Australia. We will be facing a slow decline into mediocrity if we do not allow reform.

How could the Labor Party come in here and oppose these bills when they know themselves that, when they were in government, they cut $6.6 billion from the higher education system? I have the document here and I am going to table it. Go through the $6.6552 billion of cuts to higher education; that is how much they cut from higher education. Now they come in here and oppose the government which is trying to get revenue flowing back to the universities to replace that $6.655 billion. We are trying to help the universities to gain revenue. How are we going to do that?

We are going to do it by asking the people who get the most benefit from their education to make a slightly larger contribution. At the moment students are paying about 45 or 48 per cent of the cost of their education and the taxpayer is covering the other half—more than half. All we are asking students to do with this reform bill is to pay about half each with the taxpayer—fifty-fifty. At the moment they pay just under 50 per cent of the cost of their
education; we are asking them to pay about fifty-fifty. What benefits do they get? They get the lowest unemployment rate of anybody in the economy. They earn 75 per cent more over a lifetime if they have an undergraduate degree. They have longer life expectancies. They have better health outcomes. They get a significant private benefit. There is also a public benefit, and that is why the government is happy—

Honourable members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order!

Mr PYNE: Mr Deputy Speaker, thank you for controlling the chamber so successfully during this debate. There is also a public benefit, and that is why the government is prepared to continue to use taxpayers' money to subsidise the education of students at university. Therefore, we are still prepared to pay about fifty-fifty.

But it is not the government's money, it is the taxpayers' money—the taxpayers of Australia, the vast majority of whom do not have an undergraduate degree. The vast majority of people are prepared to subsidise the education of students at university because they know it is good for the students and they know it is good for society in general. We certainly support that ambition and that philosophy. I commend this bill to the House. I am very much looking forward to its transition to the Senate where I believe, in the fullness of time, it will be successful.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is that this bill be now read a second time.

The House divided. [10:09]

(The Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Scott)

Ayes ........................77
Noes ........................54
Majority ..................23

AYES

Alexander, JG
Baldwin, RC
Briggs, JE
Broadbent, RE
Buchholz, S
Christensen, GR
Coleman, DB
Dutton, PC
Fletcher, PW
Gambaro, T
Goodenough, IR
Hartsuyker, L
Henderson, SM
Howarth, LR
Hutchinson, ER
Jensen, DG
Joyce, BT
Kelly, C
Landry, ML
Ley, SP
Marino, NB
Matheson, RG

Andersson, KL
Billson, BF
Broad, AJ
Brough, MT
Chester, D
Ciobo, SM
Coulton, M (teller)
Entsch, WG
Frydenberg, IA
Gillespie, DA
Griggs, NL
Hawke, AG
Hogan, KJ
Hunt, GA
Irons, SJ
Jones, ET
Keenan, M
Laming, A
Laundy, C
Macfarlane, IE
Markus, LE
McCormack, MF
Question agreed to.
Bill read a second time.
Message from the Administrator recommending appropriation announced.
Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House and Minister for Education and Training) (10:20): by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is that this bill be now read a third time.

The House divided. [10:21]

(The Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Scott)

Ayes ......................78
Noes ......................54
Majority ...............24

AYES

Alexander, JG
Baldwin, RC
Briggs, JE
Broadbent, RE
Buchholz, S
Christensen, GR
Coleman, DB
Dutton, PC
Fletcher, PW
Gambaro, T
Goodenough, IR
Hartsuyker, L
Henderson, SM
Howarth, LR
Hutchinson, ER
Jensen, DG
Joyce, BT
Kelly, C
Landry, ML
Ley, SP
Marino, NB
Matheson, RG
McNamara, KJ
Nikolic, AA (teller)
O'Dwyer, KM
Porter, CC
Price, ML
Ramsey, RE
Robert, SR
Ruddock, PM
Simpkins, LXL
Southcott, AJ
Sudmalis, AE
Taylor, AJ
Truss, WE
Van Manen, AJ
Whiteley, BD
Williams, MP
Wood, JP

Andrews, KL
Billson, BF
Broad, AJ
Brough, MT
Chester, D
Ciobo, SM
Couton, M (teller)
Entsch, WG
Frydenberg, JA
Gillespie, DA
Griggs, NL
Hawke, AG
Hogan, KJ
Hunt, GA
Irons, SJ
Jones, ET
Keenan, M
Laming, A
Laundy, C
Macfarlane, IE
Markus, LE
McCormack, MF
Morrison, SJ
O'Dowd, KD
Pitt, KJ
Prentice, J
Pyne, CM
Randall, DJ
Roy, WB
Scott, FM
Smith, ADH
Stone, SN
Sukkar, MS
Tehan, DT
Tudge, AE
Vasta, RX
Wicks, LE
Wilson, RJ
Wyatt, KG
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

Tax and Superannuation Laws Amendment (2014 Measures No. 7) Bill 2014
Excess Exploration Credit Tax Bill 2014
Second Reading

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

Mr FLETCHER (Bradfield—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Communications) (10:23): I am pleased to rise to speak on the Tax and Superannuation Laws Amendment (2014 Measures No. 7) Bill 2014, an important bill which will amend various taxation laws to implement a range of improvements to Australia's tax system. In the time that I have available to me this morning, I want to focus specifically on the amendments in this bill which give effect to the coalition's measure included in the 2014-15 budget to allow individuals the option of withdrawing superannuation contributions in excess of the non-concessional contributions cap made from 1 July 2013 and associated earnings, with these earnings to be taxed at the individual's marginal tax rate. I want to make three points in my
contribution. Firstly, prior to the introduction of this bill, there has been a nasty problem in the tax system which has led some Australians to face marginal tax rates of up to 93 per cent; secondly, while the previous Labor government sought to address this problem, they did so in an inadequate way; and, thirdly, the Abbott government is acting to solve this problem.

Firstly, I will speak about the nature of this problem and the fact that, as the tax laws have stood, Australians could be exposed to extremely high rates of penalty tax in circumstances where they made an innocent and inadvertent mistake in the amount that they contributed to superannuation. As we know, there are limits on the amount that any Australian can contribute to superannuation so as to enjoy the benefits of concessional treatment—the concessional treatment, of course, being that moneys which are paid into a superannuation fund are taxed at the rate of 15 per cent rather than the individual’s marginal tax rate. The policy reason underlying this concessional treatment is to encourage people to make provision for their own retirement through building up a significant superannuation balance which, in turn, means that they are not reliant or not entirely reliant on a government funded pension.

The important point is that the concessional tax treatment is only available up to the concessional contributions cap, which in 2014-15 is $30,000 for those under the age of 50 and $35,000 for those 50 and above, but in previous years, under the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd government, was $25,000. The position was that individuals were taxed on any superannuation contributions in excess of their cap at the top marginal tax rate. The combined effect of a number of provisions under the law as it previously stood was that the total tax that could be applied to some breaches was as high as 93 per cent. This was an exceptionally punitive rate of tax, and it could apply in circumstances where an Australian made an innocent error.

Let me describe a number of ways in which it was possible for people to innocently find themselves in the position where they were exposed to this very high tax rate. One scenario would be that a person was salary sacrificing a large amount of money into their superannuation fund and made a calculation error as to the amount that they were able to contribute without attracting the excess contributions tax. Another scenario was that an employer could make additional concessional contributions to the employee’s superannuation fund in ignorance of other contributions made by the employee, and the combination of the two sets of contributions could potentially trigger the excess contributions tax. Another scenario was one where a person had a windfall and made an error by contributing too much of that to superannuation without realising the serious consequences that may follow.

Another scenario—and one that occurs not infrequently—is that Australians make a decision in terms of contributing to superannuation in reliance on advice from a financial adviser or an accountant and it is possible for people to receive bad advice. So, if you make a contribution which exceeds the limits and you end up, through a range of circumstances that I will describe shortly, being in the position of facing marginal tax as high as 93 per cent, you could find yourself in that position not because of any conscious decision you have made but because you acted in reliance on advice and it turned out that the advice was flawed.

The particular scenario where you could end up, under the law as it previously stood, facing a marginal tax rate as high as 93 per cent was that, if you made a contribution and you exceeded the cap—which, as I said, used to be $25,000—the position used to be that you were then exposed to the excess concessional contributions tax of 31.5 per cent. But if you
were also making a non-concessional contribution—that is, a contribution made out of post-tax income—you also faced a limit, which in previous years was $150,000 or you could bring forward two additional years and in practical terms have a limit of three times $150,000. But, if you exceeded the non-concessional contribution, then any excess amount attracted a tax of 46.5 per cent.

When you put those two sets of provisions together, the position was that, in certain circumstances, Australians could be exposed to a marginal tax rate of up to 93 per cent on a superannuation contribution, because in some circumstances you would make a payment that exceeded the concessional contribution cap but also happened to tip you over your limit for non-concessional contributions. Once you were over that limit, you faced, as I have mentioned, potentially a marginal tax rate as high as 93 per cent. So it is a very poorly drafted set of provisions which visited upon Australians who made an innocent mistake extremely harsh and unfair consequences.

Throughout the period of the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd government, the coalition called on Labor to address this matter. Unfortunately, Labor made an inadequate and half-hearted attempt to deal with this problem. Let me spend a moment talking about the way that Labor responded. The first response was in 2010, when the then Labor government passed legislation which allowed the Commissioner of Taxation to exercise a discretion for the purposes of excess contributions tax before an assessment was issued. This was an inadequate response to this very serious problem.

Recognising the inadequacy of the response, in 2013 the Labor government had another go, introducing legislation which allowed individuals to withdraw any excess concessional contributions made from 1 July 2013 from their superannuation fund without penalty. So, in a year when the concessional contributions cap was $25,000, as it was for most of the years of the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd government, if you inadvertently put in $28,000, for example, this new law would have allowed you to remove the excess $3,000 without penalty, and instead you would have that amount subject to tax at your ordinary marginal tax rate. This was a partial solution to the problem I have described.

It was a partial solution because the law was not changed in relation to excess non-concessional contributions. It was changed in relation to concessional contributions but not in relation to non-concessional contributions, so the problem remained that, if you inadvertently made a non-concessional contribution and you went beyond the limits in doing so—and that could occur for any of the many innocent reasons that I have explained—there was and, prior to the passage of the bill before the House today, there remains no capacity to correct that problem.

This matter was dealt with in a report by the Inspector-General of Taxation in March 2014 entitled Review into the Australian Taxation Office’s compliance approach to individual taxpayers—superannuation excess contributions tax. That report made a number of points. It observed that, while a smaller population of taxpayers exceeded the non-concessional contributions cap as opposed to the concessional contributions cap, the impact on those taxpayers was more severe. Further, the tax office statistics showed that, across all years, approximately half of taxpayers who exceeded their non-concessional contributions cap were within the lowest taxable income range. In other words, it is incorrect to assume that people who were caught by this measure were necessarily wealthy. The statistics show that around...
half of taxpayers were within the lowest taxable income range. For this reason, the report recommended that the government consider whether the current treatment of excess non-concessional contributions should be aligned with that of excess concessional contributions to minimise adverse impacts on affected taxpayers.

That brings me to the final point I want to make in my remarks this morning. The Abbott government are acting to solve this problem, and we are acting in a way which gives effect to the policy commitment that we took to the last election: that we would develop appropriate mechanisms to address all inadvertent breaches of the superannuation contribution caps where the error would result in a disproportionate penalty. The measure that is contained in the bill today was announced as part of the 2014-15 budget.

The amendments in this bill deliver on that commitment. The change that will be given effect to if this bill passes into law will allow people the option of withdrawing excess contributions and any associated earnings, and the earnings will be taxed at the individual's marginal tax rate. This measure will apply to non-concessional contributions made from 1 July 2013.

This is an important measure which gives Australians an opportunity to correct an inadvertent mistake and in turn to avoid the punitive aspects of the existing excess contributions tax regime. These changes will ensure that the treatment of excess concessional contributions and of excess non-concessional contributions is broadly consistent. So, unlike Labor's half-baked approach to this problem, the coalition is introducing a comprehensive solution. The amendments are expected to affect around 1,000 individuals in 2013-14. Those individuals will now be relieved of facing a very difficult problem—a problem which, frankly, resulted in a capricious and unfair response to what was in many cases an inadvertent error.

The measures in this bill deliver on the government's election commitment. We said we would develop an appropriate process which addresses inadvertent breaches of the contribution cap where the error would result in a disproportionate penalty. We said we would do that, and in this bill we are giving effect to that commitment. These amendments are consistent with our economic strategy to drive growth, to create jobs and to have a more flexible, dynamic and competitive economy. We have identified a serious design flaw in the tax system and, with the measures in the bill before the House this morning, we are acting to correct that design flaw.

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (10:36): It is a pleasure also to speak on this particular bill, the Tax and Superannuation Laws Amendment (2014 Measures No. 7) Bill 2014, because it goes to some very important issues around taxation and superannuation and continues the good work that Labor did in repairing some inadvertent clauses that meant that some people were being taxed at a higher rate than otherwise they should have been. It is good to see that work continued. While I will not deal with every schedule in the bill, there are a number that are very important. But it also gives me an opportunity to talk about the importance of superannuation and not only the government's record on superannuation but also Labor's record on superannuation.

It is curious for me and, I suspect, for many other people to see that the Abbott government is so concerned, as you might hear in some speeches, about fairness in superannuation and how unfair some elements might have been for certain individuals. But the reality is starkly
different. The reality is that the Abbott government, in opposition, has always fought against superannuation and any increases for ordinary people to see their life savings grow larger and to become more independent in retirement. It also has taken a number of measures in government to ensure that that is the case—that people suffer direct, positive disadvantage.

You could not go beyond the superannuation guarantee to see that more starkly. The superannuation guarantee is currently at 9.5 per cent, albeit the government has opposed this at every step. The Abbott government, I have to say, has worked very hard in this particular area to make sure that the increase from nine to 12 per cent, which Labor started, is delayed for as long as possible. This is a great shame, because if we are going to talk about fairness and equity, and if we are going to talk about sustainability and ensuring that people are as independent as possible in retirement, then the superannuation guarantee is the best method that we have for ensuring that that happens, and an increase from nine per cent to 12 per cent is the way that we can continue to make sure that that actually happens. While we talk about sustainability, we should also consider sustainability in terms of people's independence in retirement. The Liberals announced their first delay of that increase from nine to 12 per cent as part of the original MRRT repeal bill, which means now that, as part of a deal with the Palmer United Party, the Liberals have made a third delay, meaning the full 12 per cent will not be reached until 1 July 2025—a long, long way away. Any good person looking at the superannuation system would look at the cost to individual people and what that means to their retirement savings and retirement future.

I have to say that of all the election promises broken—there are not really many that have been kept—the con job on superannuation would have to be one of the largest. The Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, has form in this area, and I dare say he has not changed his views even today. In 1995, this is what Tony Abbott said in Hansard:

Compulsory superannuation is one of the biggest con jobs ever foisted by government on the Australian people.

I would love to ask the Prime Minister whether he still believes that is the case—whether compulsory superannuation is one of the biggest con jobs ever foisted by government on the Australian people. But that was a long time ago, 1995. But as recently as March 2012 the Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, also said this at a press conference:

We have always as a Coalition been against compulsory superannuation increases …

So there you have it: the Prime Minister of Australia on the record. He does not support superannuation. He does not support the super guarantee. He does not support the increase of superannuation.

The litany of violence against this really great system, and people in retirement, continues, and it particularly continues through the low-income superannuation contribution, which has been axed as part of this government's cost-cutting measures. The low-income superannuation contribution is simply a contribution made on behalf of individuals with an adjusted taxable income of $37,000 per year or less—a very low or modest income by any measure. This represents an enormous number of Australians' working annual salary. In fact, it represents about 3.6 million Australians, two-thirds of whom are women. In this place, we often talk about the inequity of our superannuation system and the average balances. There is an enormous gap between what men retire on and what women retire on. One of the best ways to redress that gap—not to close it but to start to redress that gap—was the low-income
superannuation contribution. Rather than being a gift or some sort of extra contribution on the part of government, it was really to return to those individuals tax paid on their behalf out of their fund, to redress the amount of tax that they had already paid. It is a small amount of money—the amount payable was up to $500—but it made a big, big difference. In fact, that difference is significant for people on very low incomes as a proportion of what they may retire on.

In fact, if you take it together with the pause in the superannuation guarantee, delayed till 2025, industry estimates that the combined negative impact on our national savings pool by 2025 will be $150 billion. That is the sort of money that is being ripped out of the system and ripped out of the retirement savings of so many low-income working Australians, who are doing their bit for the country but not being supported by their government.

I could not possibly speak on these bills about taxation and superannuation without looking at the impact that they have specifically on business. Despite all of the rhetoric and all of the words that you will hear from government—because that is all they are: their, 'Nudge, nudge, wink, wink, we're on your side,' with small business—this is an anti-business government. The Liberals are anti business. They are anti business not through their words but through their actions. They are anti business; they are anti superannuation; in fact, they are anti worker. I would like to see what they are pro. Pro-something would be really good, but they are just not. I know that is the held belief, the myth or what they tell people, but, 'Nudge, nudge, wink, wink, we're on your side,' just does not cut it for me.

I have a look at the record. What is the actual record of the government? What have they actually done, as opposed to what they say they either will do or might do? In 2014, just last year, the government budget made some very significant cuts to industry, to small business programs, to small business taxation assistance, to the CSIRO, to CRCs and also to a number of regulators. This is anti business. This is anti small business. It is anti big business. It is anti everybody. It is anti our economy. It is anti superannuation and it is anti workers. These are significant cuts; they are not trivial little things. These include various industry and small business programs totalling more than $845 million cut out.

The Liberals might say, 'We're cutting waste and we're putting in place efficiency cuts and all the rest of it,' but they are not just cutting; they are completely eliminating from the face of the Australian workplace and our economy organisations such as Commercialisation Australia—really important organisations that help innovate, grow our economy and create jobs. Commercialisation Australia has a very important role to play and is good value for money. How can you talk about on one hand growing the economy and being pro business but at the same time take from them one of the very instruments and vehicles that is used to create jobs and innovation. Commercialisation Australia—gone. The Innovation Investment Fund—gone. Australian Industry Participation—trying to make sure that in a globalised, competitive world with competitive markets Australian industry and business get a hand up, not a handout, and have an opportunity to participate on that global level—gone. Enterprise solutions; industry innovation councils that were doing fantastic jobs; Enterprise Connect—connecting small business with employment and business and growth opportunities—industry innovation precincts that help our young innovators to succeed and grow; textile, clothing and footwear small businesses that need our help to compete, innovate and stay competitive at a global level; and the building innovative capability organisation as well.
These are enormous cuts. There were $1 billion in cuts in investment, skills and training programs, including a litany of programs that have been cut. If there is one thing in particular that small business talked to me about—and I am sure they talked to government about it as well—it is that they actually want investment and assistance with skills and training programs not only for themselves but for their workforce, for people who need that assistance. If we are to believe the rhetoric from government about innovation, economic growth and the path to creating jobs and all of those things, hoorah, that is great, but how do you get there? You do it through investing in people, skills and training. You cannot talk about it and then just take all the money away and say, 'Do it yourself.' That is just not going to work.

So what have they cut? The national Workforce Development Fund. They have cut things like the National Partnership agreement on training places, alternative pathways programs, the Accelerated Australian Apprenticeships program, trade tools for apprentices—a whole heap of things that actually did deliver and work. This government does not see value for money. They know the price of everything but the value of nothing. They do not understand the value of people or of innovation. They talk the words; they just do not understand what they mean. They do not understand that, if you invest in someone or a business early, they grow and help the economy to grow, they employ people and in turn government is better off with better revenue and being better able to compete with our neighbours. But the government does not understand that. It cuts all that at every opportunity and says: 'Aren't we good? We're saving money.' It is saving so much money that no-one will have a job soon. That is how far this government is going.

This government made a promise that it would create a million jobs. That was just a figure plucked out of the air; who knows how you get to a million? They just grabbed a figure from the air and said, 'A million sounds good, so we'll create a million jobs.' But, in reality, every single day the Tony Abbott government has been in office, jobs have gone backward. In fact, now unemployment, sadly, has reached 6.4 per cent. That is a really high rate. I think—I cannot recall exactly—that the last time it was that high Tony Abbott was employment minister or something like that.

Dr Leigh: Sounds right!

Mr RIPOLL: Sounds right—and it is. But, sadly, he promised the reverse. He said: 'No, we're going to create jobs. There'll be more jobs.' There are not.

On top of this the Abbott government has cut $1 billion in support payments for, as I said, trade programs, trade tools and apprentices, but they went further. They thought: 'That's a fair bit of damage. We'll go out there and smash small business and business. But let's go further,' Tony Abbott and the Liberals believe that small business will just cop it on the chin and, nudge nudge, wink wink, we're on your side buddy, no worries at all, so what do they do? Tax loss carry-back. That is $1.3 billion worth of direct assistance to small business which basically said: 'We recognise that in tough global economic times there will be some businesses that could do with a bit of a repay on taxes they have already paid. If you find a particular year like last year or this year tough and you have already paid taxes in the past, we will allow you to claw some of that back.' That was a really good program and well supported by small business. How good and successful was that program under Labor? $1.3 billion successful. This government took it away. They look them in the eye and say: 'We're on your side. We're pro-something,' and then they just take the money off them.
Instant asset write-off was one of the most productive and efficient programs you could give to small business. You directly say to them: 'If you invest your money into equipment, into growing your business, the government will support you. We're not going to give it to you for free, but we'll give you an instant asset write-off rather than having to wait till further down the track at tax time. This was such a successful program that its value was $3.2 billion.

Tony Abbott's Liberal government took that away. Again: nudge nudge, wink wink, small business we're on your side. That is the myth, but in fact they are antibusiness because they take that away from them.

Labor put in place half a billion dollars worth of special depreciation rules for motor vehicles, and the Liberals took it away. Everywhere I look on the record I just see the facts, and the facts tell me this: they are antibusiness, they are antisuperannuation, they are antiworker, they are anti trade apprentices, they are anti the auto industry. They do not want an auto industry in this country; it can just leave. That was the message loud and clear.

Labor, on the other hand, stands on its record. We support business, we support growth and we support jobs. *(Time expired)*

Mr IAN MACFARLANE (Groom—Minister for Industry and Science) *(10:51)*: I shall not bother responding to the previous speaker. There was so much misinformation in that speech that would take all of the 15 minutes allocated, and I have something far more positive to talk about. But I will just say that that diatribe lacked one thing. I am sure the member for Oxley is an extraordinarily generous person and when people ask him for things he gives them to them without even a second thought. That has been the problem with the Labor Party: every good idea got given a prize. Every bad idea got given a prize. In fact, every idea got given a prize, and that is why this country is staring at a debt of $667 billion. Not once in that previous speech did we hear the member for Oxley actually say how he was going to fund any of those programs. He has no money. He has no plan. And he is just throwing money at a problem, with some faint hope that the next generation will be able to pay it back. So I did sit there with a wry smile on my face. It is little wonder that every time the coalition comes to government we inherit a massive debt from the previous government, and of course this time around is no exception.

I come here today to speak of something far more positive and something really important to your home state, Deputy Speaker Goodenough, and to the home state of other members in this chamber. We are as a government addressing an issue, which again was promised but never delivered by the Labor Party—that is, an exploration and development incentive which will incentivise small exploration companies to go out and discover new deposits of minerals and the like. It will provide the opportunity for those to be developed. It will create jobs for Australians and will continue to reinforce the opportunities for the resource industry which we acknowledge are under pressure—and we do not try and blame the previous government for that; we got rid of some of the things they did, like the mining tax. But the general situation within the resource sector is largely because of a fall in commodity prices.

I come here today to speak to the debate on the second reading of the Tax and Superannuation Laws Amendment (2014 Measures No. 7) Bill 2014, the exploration development incentive. This bill amends the income tax law to implement a scheme to stimulate greenfields minerals exploration in Australia. This is done by allowing Australian
resident shareholders in exploration companies to deduct the expense of eligible mining exploration activity against their own taxable income.

In simple English, that means that if you, the individual Australian, invest in a company that is conducting exploration, then you will get a flow-through benefit in terms of your taxable income; you are able to take some of the tax benefit that the company has and flow it back into your personal income tax situation.

The measure is badly needed to secure continued growth in the minerals industry in Australia and, as I said, it is long awaited. I confess that I had a few failures—not many—last time I was the minister for resources. This was one of them. I was unable to convince the Treasury at the time that this scheme was needed, but give me a second chance and I will not miss it. We have taken up this opportunity. It was a shame for the resources sector that, in the six years that intervened in my ministry, the Labor Party promised that they would introduce this measure but they never did. Instead they introduced a tax. And why are we not surprised by that? This was a new tax: 'Hello, here we come. A tax on the mining industry, a tax that deters investment, a tax that had a number of machinations—'

**Dr Leigh:** You said you were going to be positive!

**Mr IAN MACFARLANE:** I am being positive. The end of the story is positive. This was a tax which caused the mining industry a great deal of concern, and it took a coalition government to be elected to remove that tax. Unfortunately, it was almost too late. In fact, it was too late in terms of the budget position, because, as we know, not only did they introduce a tax which did its best to kill off investment in the mining industry in Australia, but of course that tax did not raise the money it spent.

That is typical of Labor. They introduce a tax; they spend all the money before they get it. And of course the tax did not raise anything like the money that they had predicted. Again, we should not be surprised by that. The end result was detrimental to not only the mining industry and the investment industry in Australia; it was also extraordinarily detrimental to the budget.

Over the past decade, our national prosperity has been sustained on the strength of a sector that has generated billions and billions of dollars in export revenue, and it accounts for about 10 per cent of our GDP and around 270,000 Australian jobs. The Bureau of Resources and Energy Economics, BREE, projects Australia's earnings from resources and energy commodities to increase at an average rate or seven per cent a year from 2013-14, to a total of $274 billion by 2018-19. While we owe much of our economic strength to exploiting our mineral riches, we cannot take the sector's continued prosperity and economic drive for granted.

The investment boom has tapered off—there is no doubt about that—and the industry is facing significant challenges, which again reinforces the value of rescinding the MRRT, the minerals resource rent tax. While the sector's estimated $157 billion contributed to the GDP was around 10 per cent in 2013-14, we expect exploration expenditure for the same period to decrease by around 12 per cent compared to 2012-13.

A 0.4 per cent increase in petroleum exploration expenditure was more than offset by a 32 per cent drop in mineral exploration. That reflects the confidence, or lack of confidence, that the industry has in terms of commodity prices and where they may be going.
Our government, the Abbott government, is determined that the impetus in our exploration industry is restored. The exploration development incentive, known as the EDI, delivers a commitment made before the last election—and, true to our word, that is a commitment delivered. We made that commitment because we acknowledge that the future prosperity of the mining sector in the Australian economy is dependent on our ability to make more mineral discoveries and new mineral discoveries. It is entirely reasonable for the government to address the barriers to private sector investment in one of the country's most important sectors. A strong resource exploration sector is a key to economic growth—that is a given. It is a key to stronger regions, which is crucially important to people on this side of the House but doubly important to someone who grew up in regional Australia, still lives in regional Australia and represents regional Australia with a passion. And of course the resource sector is a key to stronger regional employment, and that is what puts people into towns in rural areas, such as we have seen particularly to the west of Toowoomba, where I currently live, and to the south of Boondooma, where I grew up.

We are seeing that area repopulated by the resource sector. As the farming industry became more and more efficient and required less and less labour, towns were literally dying on their feet. But with the growth in the resource sector, particularly in the area between Toowoomba and Roma—and particularly with coal-seam gas—we have seen new families come to the district and we have seen young people stay in the district and go on not only to work in the industry but to work as professionals with degrees from universities, staking their claim to being long-term residents of the region.

To have a resource sector that continues to expand in Australia we need the junior mineral exploration sector to generate greenfield exploration activity in Australia. This is the R&D of the industry; this is what they do best. The small exploration companies go out and find these resources and then either joint-venture or, more often, are taken over by larger companies which then develop them.

The junior mineral exploration sector in Australia has been struggling, as I said, for two main reasons. The junior companies face a tax disadvantage relative to larger mining and exploration companies. They face a significant time lag between the expenditure—that is, the money they are putting out—and deducting those costs from eventually assessing earnings. And so, unlike a large company, which is already in production and which can deduct its exploration costs against its income, smaller exploration companies do not have that advantage. And, of course, in an increasingly tight capital market, this risk—in what is already a high-risk investment—is resulting in difficulty in attracting capital needed to conduct the exploration. We need to address that.

There was a time not long ago when resources stocks dominated the IPO statistics. However, analysis undertaken by the business advisory and accounting group, HLB Mann Judd, found that falling commodity prices and reduced investor sentiment impacted negatively on the resource company IPOs in 2013. We should not be surprised by that: they had six years of being battered by a Labor government. But also—as I said—the commodity fall has certainly impacted on confidence. HLB Mann Judd said that the low volumes reflected the difficult conditions that the sector faces, and this continues a downward trend that has been evident for several years—in fact, more than a decade.
In 2012 the number of small IPOs was over 50 per cent lower than in 2011, and capital raising fell by more than 63 per cent on 2011 levels. We as a government recognise the potential of the overall sustainability of the broader resource sector as capital becomes difficult to raise and greenfield exploration suffers as a result. The Exploration Development Incentive proposed under this amendment will be available to junior mineral explorers incurring eligible greenfield exploration expenditure in Australia. Greenfield exploration that will be eligible for the tax offset will be limited to onshore minerals exploration. For the purposes of the EDI, the term 'greenfield' relates to exploration and prospecting in an area that does not contain mineral resources with a level of confidence of inferred or greater as assessed under the Joint Ore Reserves Committee Code—or JORC Code as it is known. An 'inferred mineral resource' is a resource where the quality and grade are estimated on the basis of limited geological evidence in sampling.

In simple English: this initiative is aimed at finding new resources for new jobs in Australia. It is not aimed at proving up resources that already exist or which we can be reasonably assured exist. Perhaps one of the great examples of greenfield exploration is BHP Billiton's Olympic Dam mine in South Australia, which was discovered in the 1970s by Western Mining Corporation. It is now considered one of the world's largest mineral deposits.

The EDI will not apply to exploration for quarry materials; or petroleum exploration, including exploration for natural gas, coal-seam gas or shale oil; or for geothermal energy resources. The EDI is capped at $100 million. The cap will apply through an ex-post modulation process—something I have used before in another part of my industry portfolio. Participating companies will notify the ATO of the lesser of the exploration expenditures and the tax loss for the financial year. In terms of those who will be eligible to claim a tax benefit under this legislation: a greenfields mineral explorer is an entity or an affiliate entity that has not carried out any mining operations in the relevant year.

The EDI is not without precedent. One of the issues that we faced is that other countries—particularly Canada—have had flow-through share schemes for some time which have been incredibly successful. In Canada we have seen that scheme raise over $5 billion for exploration since 2006. Our goal with this scheme is that once this initial fund is used we are in a position to assess how we can improve the scheme and how it can continue so that we can emulate the fantastic success of the Mineral Exploration Tax Credit program in Canada.

The Canadians do have a great eye for opportunity. We are, of course, fierce competitors and the best of friends. In fact, this table was given to this parliament by Canada. But that does not mean we just sit in awe of them. We want to emulate and improve on their scheme, and we want to see industry bodies consider the EDI to be a long-term investment strategy for the Australian mineral sector. And they are optimistic that the scheme will work. They have been part of us working up the proposal, and as we continue to do that we will ensure that opportunities are there for all Australian exploration companies and that, of course, we create more jobs for Australians.

**Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (11:06):** I rise to speak on the Tax and Superannuation Laws Amendment (2014 Measures No. 7) Bill 2014 and move:

That all words after "That" be omitted with a view to substituting the following words:
"whilst not declining to give the bill a second reading, the House condemns the government's unfair tax policy, that threatens to widen the gap between the rich and the rest after a generation of rising inequality."

This bill makes seven changes to tax laws. The first schedule puts in place an ongoing fix to the issue of excess non-concessional superannuation contributions. The previous Labor government enacted similar measures on a temporary basis in 2012 and 2013. The Inspector-General of Taxation recommended a change of this nature.

The second schedule is a non-controversial machinery of government change which moves the tax investigative and complaint-handling functions of the Commonwealth Ombudsman to the Inspector-General of Taxation and merges that function with the Inspector-General's existing function of conducting systemic reviews. That ensures that the Inspector-General of Taxation has the power to take up individual cases as well as systemic matters.

Schedule 3 codifies a long-standing administrative practice of exempting certain compensation payments from capital gains tax. Schedule 4 ensures that people affected by superannuation fund mergers are not made worse off, and the previous Labor government announced an intention to enact a similar measure. Schedule 5 provides a more consistent basis for the tax office to share information regarding the proceeds of crime. Schedule 7 is an omnibus schedule of non-controversial mechanical tax measures.

Schedule 6, to which the previous speaker referred, puts in place a capped and caveated program with the aim of boosting minerals exploration. This is a worthy goal as the member for Brand noted in his speech on this bill last night. At the end of the Labor government, there was an estimated $230-billion pipeline of committed capital investment, and direct employment in resource operations across the country was at 250,000 people. Employment in the mining sector has now fallen to under 230,000 people and exploration is beginning to dry up.

The question that the member for Brand raised last night was whether a scheme of this kind will have the desired impact. All of us in the House share the government's goal of boosting minerals exploration but a flow-through share scheme similar to this has been enacted and repealed at certain points in Australian history. It was enacted in the late 1950s and curtailed in 1973. A scheme introduced in the late 1970s by the Fraser government wound up in 1985 because it was being used for tax avoidance and because inquiries found that it contributed little towards mineral exploration.

As the member for Brand noted:

I cannot emphasise enough my personal belief that these explorations activities are not driven by the taxation regime. They are driven by a belief that there are minerals out there to be found and there are customers out there that need has minerals, and they are driven by great belief in our mission that our explorers have to do the jobs as well as they can do them and as safely as they can do them. Minerals exploration is supported not only by tax arrangements but also by terrific organisations such as Geoscience Australia, which has provided key work which has underpinned minerals and resource exploration in Australia in the past. Those of us on this side of the House will watch with interest how this mechanism works noting that it is an expensive mechanism at a cost of around $100 million and a system which is both capped and caveated. We will watch with interest to see whether it achieves the desired goal of boosting resource exploration.
My second reading amendment went to the issue of inequality. I do want to say something about inequality because, whenever we speak about tax in this place, it is important to recognise the broad context in which we are having these debates. Ours is a nation where over the last generation the top one per cent have doubled their income share and the top 0.1 per cent have tripled their income share. Earnings data from the Bureau of Statistics employee earnings and hours survey showed that for those at the 10th decile, the bottom 10 per cent, their real earnings gained from 1975 to 2014 was $7,000 or 23 per cent. For those in the top 10th of the distribution, their real earnings gain over the same period was $47,000 or 72 per cent. Earnings have risen three times as fast at the top of the distribution as at the bottom of the distribution.

When we speak about superannuation in this place, it is vital to recognise that the Abbott government, upon coming to office, made the decision to raise superannuation taxes for the three million Australians earning less than $37,000 a year—two thirds of them women—while cutting superannuation taxes on the 16,000 Australians with more than $2 million in their superannuation accounts. Those are the priorities of those opposite.

Economic inequality may have risen but egalitarianism remains fundamental to Australian national identity. Ours is a nation where, as the early settlers like to say, 'Jack is as good as his master—or maybe better.' As one 19th-century commentator put it: 'In England, the average man feels he is an inferior; in America that he is a superior; in Australia he feels as an equal. That is indeed delightful.' Mark Twain saw it; Anthony Trollope saw it; DH Lawrence saw it. It was not a dream and we did not make it up.

Egalitarianism is a regular feature of speeches by my Labor colleagues. Michelle Rowland summed up the appeal to immigrants of Australia as a nation that is 'prosperous, free and instinctively egalitarian'. Bill Shorten noted that ours is a country where the welfare of the weakest and the welfare of the most powerful are 'inseparably bound together'. Andrew Giles warned that we must not 'return Australia to a gilded age of inequality, whereby if you are not born into wealth, the game of life is rigged against you'. Senator Penny Wong noted 'a critical ingredient for a fairer society is equality of opportunity'. Brendan O'Connor pointed out: The idea that inequality is the price of growth, that prosperity and equality are alternatives, is ... not borne out by a calm examination of the evidence.

Others have noted the intergenerational consequences of inequality. Pat Conroy said:
I have a one-year-old daughter, and I want her to grow up in a society that is fair and equitable, where she has the best chance of advancing, based on her hard effort and her intelligence—not on the size of the bank balance supporting her.

Jim Chalmers succinctly pointed out that 'inequality in one generation breeds inequality in the next'. Tanya Plibersek drew attention to the global ramifications of inequality:
There is the simple idea that we should, where possible, work to eliminate some of the most dire forms of inequality that exist in our world. This speaks to something larger than a mere policy difference. We see a role for government in tackling inequality, whether it be at home or abroad.

Inequality need not just be an issue of the Left. I searched in vain for a single comment of this kind from one of my colleagues on the right of politics. It was not always that way. A century ago, Republican President Theodore Roosevelt told an audience in Kansas:
The absence of effective … restraint upon unfair money-getting has tended to create a small class of enormously wealthy and economically powerful men, whose chief object is to hold and increase their power.

In June 2000 The Australian newspaper published a week-long series on inequality. Its lead editor, Paul Kelly, argued that ‘inequality in Australia today is a serious social issue’. A decade and a half on, with inequality higher still, there is little evidence that those on the right take inequality seriously. Prime Minister Abbott's view is:

... in the end, we have to be a productive and competitive society and greater inequality might be inevitable.

His hand-picked business adviser, Maurice Newman, believes that we should not talk about inequality because 'words such as equality and egalitarian have become a refuge for bad policy'. Christopher Pyne said baldly, 'I do not believe there is an equity problem in Australia.' In response to NATSEM modelling showing that his budget made poor single parents 11 per cent worse off and rich singles better off, Treasurer Joe Hockey described his critics as 'engaging in 1970s class warfare' and 'old-style socialism'. Every time I hear someone on the right criticising talk of inequality as class warfare, I think of Warren Buffett's response. He said:

There's class warfare, all right, but it's my class, the rich class, that's making war, and we're winning.

We need a deeper conversation about inequality. I say to my coalition colleagues: if you would like to engage in a serious evidence-based debate about inequality, just name the time and place. With Australian inequality as high as it has been in three-quarters of a century, we cannot afford to have the nation's conservatives shouting slogans. We need them engaged in a discussion about how much inequality our social fabric can bear.

In the time available to me I want to respond to some of the comments made by the Assistant Treasurer in question time. The Assistant Treasurer has shown a new-found concern with the facts and with economic commentators and parliamentarians knowing and depicting the facts accurately. What surprises me is that he has not called his boss on this. The government says that the economy is headed in the right direction but, when the Reserve Bank made its views about economic growth clear, it was clear that growth was continuing at a below trend pace 'with domestic demand growth overall quite weak'. Unemployment is worse than it was at the peak of the global financial crisis. The total number of hours worked per month has scarcely changed since December 2011, despite three years of population growth.

If the Assistant Treasurer is interested in facts, he might question whether this government really is headed in the right direction. With confidence down, unemployment up, growth down and serious problems across the economy now is the time to ask whether we are headed in the right direction. Yet this is a government that withholds facts or misstates them. In the last budget, Treasury prepared the family impact statement as usual, but it was then withheld from the budget so Australians could not see how the budget affected families. The Charter of Budget Honesty brought down by Peter Costello requires the government bring down an Intergenerational report every five years, but the Treasurer is currently in breach of the Charter of Budget Honesty. He has broken that law. There are no sanctions contained in the law, but the Treasurer is in breach of the Charter of Budget Honesty.
He gets facts wrong across the board. He says that fuel excise is a 'progressive tax' when the evidence shows that it is regressive. He says that the poorest Australians 'do not have cars', but in fact the majority of people in the bottom decile, as his own data shows, have cars. He says his own electorate of North Sydney has 'one of the highest bulk-billing rates in Australia' when in fact the stats show that it has one of the very lowest in all of Sydney.

He said that typical Australians pay nearly half their income in tax. That is a corkscrew. When the Treasurer says that you are working July, August, September, October, November and December just for the government, he is not talking about the typical Australian. The average income tax rate sits at around 19 per cent, so the Treasurer is out by more than a factor of two. If we include all taxes then Australia’s tax-to-GDP ratio is about one-third, not a half. Who pays half of their income in income tax? I did some numbers on this. It turns out it is somebody earning $10 million a year. Their average tax rate ticks over 48 per cent. So, yes, maybe for people with eight-figure incomes the Treasurer is right. I suggest he spend a little less time in boardrooms with harbour views and more time with the 98 per cent of Australians who are not in the top tax bracket.

The Treasurer is at war with the facts and is attempting to hide the facts. Australia now has a situation where universities do not know what fees they are allowed to charge, students enrolled do not know what fees they will be asked to pay, doctors do not know what will happen to their incomes, electricity generators do not know what will happen with the renewable energy target and big business do not know whether they will be hit with a 1½ per cent paid parental leave levy for an unfair Paid Parental Leave scheme the government said they will not proceed with. Confidence in Australia is falling and this government is at the heart of that problem.

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

**Ms MacTiernan:** I second the amendment.

**Mr BUCHHOLZ (Wright—Chief Government Whip) (11:22):** It gives me great pleasure to stand here in the House and give an overview of, and speak to, the Tax and Superannuation Laws Amendment (2014 Measures No. 7) Bill 2014. The bill has its complexities. It has seven schedules to it. Schedule 1 provides for fairer taxation of excess, non-concessional superannuation contributions. Schedule 2 transfers to the Inspector-General of Taxation the tax investigation and complaint-handling function of the Commonwealth Ombudsman. Schedule 3 talks about CGT exemptions for compensation and insurance. Schedule 4 provides certainty for superannuation fund mergers, which are happening in the marketplace as we speak. Schedule 5 speaks to the disclosure of tax information relating to proceeds-of-crime orders. Schedule 6 speaks about the exploration and development initiatives that this government is putting in place. Schedule 7 deals with miscellaneous amendments.

The public who are listening to these proceedings do not have the same regard for debates on tax and superannuation legislation as they do for question time. There is no theatre around it. But this is where we do the heavy lifting in this House. The outcomes of these debates influence the direction of our markets. These debates—and, hopefully, the victories we will have—give certainty to sectors of the market who are looking to the superannuation space for certainty for their funds into the future.
Schedule 1 deals with the fairer taxation of excess, non-concessional superannuation contributions. This government has introduced fairness to the taxation of excess, non-concessional superannuation contributions—after-tax contributions made by an individual. We believe the current treatment of breaches of the non-concessional contributions cap can be punitive and need to be made fairer. The overall tax rate that has applied to some breaches has been as high as 93 per cent, which is alarming. We are honouring our election commitment to make sure inadvertent breaches of the non-concessional contributions cap do not occur and thus do not receive a disproportionate penalty. We are delivering on our commitments at the election. There is an expectation from the Australian public that we tidy up some of these areas, and these bills are the vehicle for those amendments to be put.

Most breaches of the non-concessional superannuation contributions caps are inadvertent and can be due to events that are out of the taxpayer’s control. The changes the government is introducing will allow people the option to withdraw these excess contributions and any associated earnings, with the earnings taxed at the individual’s marginal tax rate. The measure applies to the non-concessional contributions made from 1 July 2013. The measures provide Australians with the opportunity to correct their mistakes and avoid the most punitive aspects of the excess contributions tax regime. It will ensure that the treatment of excess concessional and non-concessional contributions is broadly consistent. This bill tightens up the wording so that there is greater clarity for mums and dads and those brokers or agents who are giving advice, which will hopefully take away the ambiguity that exists at the moment. The government consulted widely on these measures, and our approach balances compliance costs against measures to discourage aggressive tax planning strategies. Everyone looks for loopholes. So if we can make legislation more understandable, more transparent, we will not then have a growth industry driving outcomes we do not want. This measure is expected to affect around 1,000 individuals to 2013-14, resulting in average tax saving of around $15,000.

Schedule 2 of the bill transfers the tax investigation function of the Commonwealth Ombudsman to the Inspector-General of Taxation. That is not in itself controversial, but I will take you through some of the reasoning for it. The schedule transfers from the Commonwealth Ombudsman to the Inspector-General of Taxation the complaint-handling function and the general tax revenue function relating to individuals. Inspectors will now have a single, specialised scrutiny agent for handling both individual tax complaints and systemic tax reviews. All investigations and complaint-handling powers and functions relating to taxation administration by tax officials will now be handled by the Inspector-General of Taxation. Centralising these functions will purely provide efficiencies in that department.

The role of external scrutiny is to provide independent assurance that ATO services are well managed and fit for purpose and that public money is being used properly. The current external scrutiny systems for the Australian Taxation Office include the Commonwealth Ombudsman, the Inspector-General of Taxation, the Auditor-General, the Board of Taxation, the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, the courts and the parliament. So in no way is this a dilution of anyone’s right to make a complaint; there are many vehicles for that. This is just about trying to streamline the complaints department so that customers of the Australian Taxation Office are able to get quicker and accurate resolution of their issues. The transfer of tax complaints to the Inspector-General of Taxation will also enable earlier flagging of
emerging issues that require more general review, and this ensures better customer outcomes for both individual complaints and the government.

We note that Labor at one stage wanted to close down the Office of the Inspector-General of Taxation. That was a commitment during their 2007 election campaign. To their credit, they dropped it in the following year. At that time the then Assistant Treasurer said, 'The Inspector-General of Taxation plays an important role in ensuring high standards of tax administration for Australian taxpayers'—and we believe that statement to be sound. Subsequently, in 2013, he acknowledged that the Inspector-General of Taxation 'has an important role to play in the functioning of our tax system by providing independent oversight of the Australian Taxation Office and helps to underpin community confidence in the taxpayer system'. So from the commentary in this place and other places, there is wide-held support for that office. We would expect Labor support. The new arrangements are scheduled to commence on—

Mr Perrett: That's generous of you, Scotty!

Mr BUCHHOLZ: I diverted from my speech because I come to this House in the spirit of bipartisanship. On schedule 3, the capital gains tax exemption for compensation and insurance: this schedule provides certainty about the operations of the capital gains tax law, which in itself can be complex. In brief, the schedule confirms the existing administrative treatment of the capital gains tax exemptions relating to life insurance and compensation, providing greater certainty for taxpayers, businesses and superannuation funds. There is a large grey area there and these funds are becoming full of capital, and it is imperative that as a government we provide clear and transparent vehicles of legislation so that there is a clear path, taking away ambiguousness.

The measures in the schedule were announced by Labor in their 2011-12 and 2012-13 budgets. The schedule addresses complexities in the law that affect trustees and beneficiaries where a trustee receives compensation or damages for loss or injury to beneficiaries. The policy intent is that neither the trustee nor the beneficiary should be subject to capital gains tax where compensation is received by the trustee in respect of a claim made for injury suffered by a beneficiary of the trust. That, in itself, is the summary of schedule 3. Similarly, there is a CGT exemption for taxpayers such as trustees who hold life insurance policies and annuity instruments for beneficiaries.

The schedule also clarifies that where the trustee of a superannuation fund holds a total and permanent disability policy for a member, the fund trustee will not be subject to capital gains tax nor be taxed on revenue account. The government is legislating the measures and providing certainty around complex issues of interpretation of the capital gains tax legislation.

The government has consulted widely with stakeholders. Minor amendments were made following consultations to ensure that the legislation achieves its intended purposes—that is, to deliver certainty for taxpayers, businesses and superannuation funds. This measure is estimated to have a small but unquantifiable cost to revenue over the forward estimates period.

Schedule 4 provides certainty for superannuation fund mergers. Again, in my opening commentary, I said that these mergers are taking place in the market as we speak. This measure makes it clear that a tax integrity rule will not be triggered when a member's super
benefits are involuntarily transferred from one super fund to another as a result of a merger between two funds which is outside the member's control.

A rule known as the proportioning rule requires the proportion of the tax-free and taxable components of a member’s interest in a fund to be retained on transfer of the interest. The super industry has been seeking certainty because applying the proportioning rule in a merger transaction could, in some circumstances, have left some members in a worse tax position than if the merger had not gone ahead. It is not the intention or the will of this government to disadvantage members. The schedule will ensure that the application of the proportioning rule does not disadvantage the interest of the member whose interest is being transferred involuntarily, say on a merger of funds.

The government is getting on with its legislative program. This measure is one of Labor’s announced but unenacted measures that was inherited on our coming to government so I see no hurdles. When this bill is put to the House, it should have bipartisan support for the immense amount of good it will do throughout the industry.

Schedule 5 speaks to disclosing tax information relating to proceeds of crime orders. This measure amends the tax law to clarify the Australian Tax Office's ability to share protected taxpayer information with Commonwealth, state and territory law enforcement agencies concerning proceeds of crime orders.

Differences between the Commonwealth's unexplained wealth orders and state and territory unexplained wealth schemes has led to uncertainty for law enforcement agencies about whether they can use protected information shared by the ATO for the purpose of a proceeds of crime order. The most notable example of the differences between state and territory and Commonwealth unexplained wealth orders is where a state or territory law does not require a person to have committed a criminal offence for an order to be made. This measure clarifies that all orders relating to unexplained wealth that may be made under a state or territory law will be included in the definition of a proceeds of crime order, regardless of whether there are differences between the state or territory and Commonwealth schemes.

A person's tax information may be of central importance to investigations, law proceedings and enforcement concerning the proceeds of crime. In most cases, a state or territory law enforcement agency would request protected information from the ATO in order to make a proceeds of crime order. However, the ATO is prevented from sharing a person's tax information with authorised law enforcement agencies in order to support or enforce a proceeds of crime order that already exists. This measure will remove any doubt about the ATO's ability to share protected information, which is the ambiguous area of that bill. The new arrangement will come into place upon royal assent.

In the time remaining to me, on the government's exploration expenditure incentive: the government has delivered on its election commitment to introduce an incentive to undertake exploration for mineral resources. The mining sector has long sought a form of incentive that recognises the long lead times between investment, exploration and production. There are some tax measures we will put in place to assist that sector. Labor introduced the minerals resource rent tax, which failed to produce anything like the levels of revenue Labor predicted in its first year. In the 2012-13 reporting period, the mining tax raised a couple of hundred million dollars, or just five per cent of the amount it was intended to.
Mr Perrett: A couple of hundred million shouldn't be thrown away. Could help the budget!

Mr BUCHHOLZ: I take the interjection from the good member from the other side. The mining tax revenue raised was not Labor's high point. Only Labor could come up with a tax, spend the money and have the tax raise little or no money—less than five per cent of its forecast revenue. It was not Labor's finest hour in the parliament.

Schedule 7 is on miscellaneous amendments. This is rats-and-mice stuff. Predominantly, tax law amendments, and tax and superannuation laws are not sexy, but they important to the country. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (11:37): I rise to speak on the Tax and Superannuation Laws Amendment (2014 Measures No. 7) Bill 2014. Before I do, I congratulate the member for Wright on his promotion to whip. I am sure he will do a good job. I hope it will not keep him from turning up to touch football on Tuesday mornings but I do congratulate him.

Mr PERRETT: Thank you for that guidance, Mr Deputy Speaker. The bill before the House has seven schedules. I am only going to focus on one of the schedules but I will just quickly go through the seven schedules.

Schedule 1 amends the Income Tax Assessment Act 1997 and Taxation Administration Act 1953 to change the taxation treatment of excess non-concessional superannuation contributions, and that is going to be the part of the legislation I will focus on, so I will return to that.

Schedule 2 amends the Inspector-General of Taxation Act 2003 to transfer the tax investigation and complaint-handling function of the Commonwealth Ombudsman to the Inspector-General of Taxation, and merge that function with the Inspector-General of Taxation's existing function of conducting systemic reviews.

Schedule 3 amends the Income Tax Assessment Act to provide an exemption from capital gains tax for certain trustees and beneficiaries, and for certain compensation and insurance payments.

Schedule 4 amends the income tax legislation to provide that individuals whose superannuation benefits are involuntarily transferred from one superannuation plan to another are not disadvantaged by being unable to bring forward accumulated tax losses. This schedule also amends tax laws to remove the need for a rollover benefit statement to be provided to an individual whose superannuation benefits are involuntarily transferred.

Schedule 5 amends tax laws to allow taxation officers to record or disclose protected information to support or enforce a proceeds of crime order.

Schedule 6 amends tax legislation to provide a tax incentive to encourage investment in small mineral exploration companies undertaking greenfields mineral exploration in Australia. For constitutional reasons, the Excess Exploration Credit Tax Bill 2014 provides for the imposition of the excess exploration credits tax. All of this legislation is supported on both sides of the chamber—by the opposition.
Schedule 6 in terms of the excess exploration credits tax, for anyone interested in this topic, I would refer to the speech delivered late last night by the member for Brand, Gary Gray. This is a good initiative that, hopefully, will ensure that there are significant amounts of exploration done over the next little while. We have some mines, particularly in Queensland, that are nearing the end of their life and, obviously, it is a long time between exploration, development and export of these resources.

Schedule 7 makes a number of miscellaneous amendments to various taxes and superannuation laws that I will not go into in any great detail.

I return to schedule 1, dealing with superannuation. Superannuation in Australia is, I think, one of the Labor Party's great achievements. It has been able to transform the way Australians approach their retirement. I will just give a little history of superannuation. Going back to March 1973, the Whitlam government established a national superannuation committee to look into the possibility of a national superannuation scheme—that was way back in March 1973. By February 1974, it is interesting to note that the superannuation coverage had reached 29 per cent of employed people—just to put it in context.

The Fraser government, when that report was delivered to them, rejected the committee's recommendations to establish a partially contributory universal pension system with an earnings related supplement. They said no. At the time, or by February 1974, 53 per cent of employed people were covered by superannuation so that increased from 29 to 53 per cent.

Then the Hawke-Keating governments established a mandatory superannuation scheme through the superannuation guarantee, which was a legislated minimum employer contribution to superannuation which covered most employees. They also did some other things, including increasing the taxation applied to certain superannuation lump sums—that came in in July 1983—introducing a tax on superannuation contributions and a reduction in tax on benefits from 1 July 1988.

The superannuation coverage increased from 53 per cent to 71 per cent by November 1991—so 53 per cent when they started through to 71 per cent—and the pool of accumulated superannuation savings was around $146 billion at the end of 1991, which is equivalent to 38 per cent of GDP.

The Keating government introduced legislation to support the superannuation guarantee in parliament in 1992 with the rate to progressively increase from three per cent for small employers and four per cent where the employers' base year payroll was above $1 million from July 1992 to reach nine per cent by July 2002. This was certainly my first interaction with superannuation as an employee. I remember those discussions and the wage increases forgone by employees in that process.

Superannuation coverage increased from 71 per cent in November 1991 to 81 per cent of employed people by November 1995; and the pool of accumulated superannuation savings rose from around $146 billion at the time Paul Keating became Prime Minister to around $238 billion in early 1996—equivalent to 46 per cent of GDP.

Under the Howard government, the Howard government's first budget in 1996 saw the introduction of the superannuation surcharge for higher income earners—a measure that was later abolished; I will acknowledge that. Their other significant policy was the increase to superannuation preservation from age 55 to 60 on a phased-in basis. They also introduced the
superannuation co-contribution arrangements and that superannuation assets had to be divided between parties in a marriage breakdown, which is much of the work of family lawyers nowadays because of so much wealth that has gone into superannuation.

The superannuation coverage increased for all employees from 90 per cent in November 1995 to 93 per cent by August 2002; and the superannuation pool rose from around $238 billion in March 1996 when the Howard government came in to $1.2 trillion at the end of 2007, which is equivalent to 110 per cent of Australia's GDP.

Then, under the Rudd government, one change that I am particularly proud of, as a member of that government, was the removal of same-sex discrimination from acts governing Commonwealth superannuation schemes. From memory, that was supported by both sides of the parliament and it was great to see that moment of bipartisanship in terms of making those changes. Under the Gillard government we saw the pool of accumulated super increase from $1.2 trillion in June 2010 to $1.6 trillion in June 2013—obviously not a significant change but there was something called the global financial crisis which created a lot of heartache and stress for people who had retired. Under the Abbott government we saw the delay in the increase in the superannuation guarantee to 12 per cent by two years and also the abolition of the low-income superannuation contribution.

The pool of accumulated super increased from $1.7 trillion to $1.9 trillion in September last year, which is equivalent to 117 per cent of the GDP—surely a great success story for both sides of the parliament in terms of making sure that Australians will be set up for their retirement. Obviously as members of parliament we do cop a bit of stick about our superannuation arrangements. There are two types of MPs and senators: those who were elected before 9 October 2004 and those who were elected after. Of the 226 MPs and senators, 72 per cent were elected after that date and they are on an accumulation scheme; those elected before have a slightly different arrangement. Whilst they do not have the numbers on the floor of the House of Reps or the Senate, they do have the numbers in the executive, so it might be a while before we see any changes there.

The proposed changes to superannuation in this legislation are mainly to do with the concessional tax treatment of superannuation contributions. These are limited by caps on concessional contributions—which are essentially those contributions made by employers that are taxed at 15 per cent—and non-concessional contributions, which are basically the contributions from after-tax income. Caps on the amount of concessional and non-concessional superannuation contributions were introduced by the Howard government under their 'simpler super' changes. Up until the 2012-13 financial year, a tax was applied on contributions in excess of the caps. As the member for Wright touched on, whenever there are opportunities for people to take advantage of our financial system that is what happens, and governments respond to those taking advantage. I am not suggesting there is anything illegal going on; people are minimising their tax payments. Super is set up to provide for people in retirement but if people are arranging their circumstances to avoid paying tax, governments have to be aware of that.

The falling concessional contributions cap from 2009 contributed to increasing numbers of taxpayers becoming liable to excess contributions tax, with over 52,000 excess contributions tax assessments issued by the ATO in the 2009-10 financial year; whereas in the previous year there had been around 18,000. The Gillard government responded to this by having a
once-only option for people to have excess concessional contributions taken out of their superannuation fund and assessed as income at their marginal tax rate. Obviously with the marginal tax rates no-one would be paying at the 15 per cent. These changes were supported by both sides of parliament.

In the 2014-15 budget, the government announced that individuals would have the option of withdrawing superannuation contributions in excess of the non-concessional contributions cap made from 1 July 2013 and any associated earnings, with these earnings to be taxed at the individual's marginal tax rate.

The changes in this legislation are fundamentally fair—I certainly have not received too much feedback from my electorate about them—and are supported by both sides of the chamber. The number of taxpayers who breach the non-concessional cap is relatively small. There have been 1,940 assessments issued for breaches and 709 assessments issued in relation to breaches of the concessional as well as the non-concessional cap. Interestingly, the amounts by which individuals breach these caps are generally small, with the median amount being $5,876. Interestingly again, it is not the higher income earners who are penalised; most of the breaches of the non-concessional caps have been made by taxpayers who had taxable income of less than $50,000.

In conclusion, the changes proposed by schedule 1 affect only a relatively small number of taxpayers and many of them do not have relatively high incomes. The proposed changes weaken the existing deterrents for taxpayers who exceed non-concessional caps but there will continue to be a limit on annual contributions into tax-preferred superannuation. Combined with the rise in the non-concessional cap to $180,000 from 2014-15, it is likely that only small numbers of taxpayers will be affected by the changed arrangements in the medium term. The legislation is supported by the opposition. I could spend more time talking about the flow-through shares initiative, and the excess exploration credits tax is a great initiative as well. I hope that it will do its bit to ensure that the mining jobs of the future are being created at the appropriate time. I commend the legislation to the House.
changes, which were announced in the last budget and are being legislated in this bill, will provide taxpayers with a single specialised scrutiny agency for the handling of both individual tax complaints and systemic tax reviews. That is an important step forward.

Schedule 3 deals with capital gains tax exemption for compensation and insurance. In brief, the schedule confirms the existing administrative arrangements. As is the case with so many schedules in these bills, it gives certainty where a grey area has arisen. Schedule 4 again provides certainty for superannuation fund mergers, to make it clear that a tax integrity rule will not be triggered when a member's super benefits are involuntarily transferred from one fund to another as a result of a merger between the funds. As some previous speakers this morning have outlined, schedule 5 is a measure that amends the law to clarify the ATO's ability to share protected taxpayer information with Commonwealth, state and territory law enforcement agencies concerning proceeds of crime orders. Again, this schedule is designed to remove any doubt about the ATO's ability to share protected information with law enforcement agencies.

In conclusion I will turn to schedule 1, which deals with the fairer taxation of excess non-concessional contributions. I will not go as far as the previous speaker, the member for Moreton—to give a long history of superannuation in Australia; I will seek to confine myself to the subject of this schedule. I will, however, make one comment on the member for Moreton's contribution. In his long history of superannuation in Australia, he mentioned the superannuation surcharge that was introduced by the former Howard government. There is an interesting anecdote on superannuation. When that surcharge was introduced by the Howard government, Labor opposed its introduction and, when it was abolished by the Howard government, Labor opposed its abolition, which is a bit of a window into how Labor has approached some of the superannuation issues in recent years—and schedule 1 is a case in point. This is a critical schedule to correct some of Labor's failure that was very obvious during the last parliament.

Schedule 1 will introduce some fairness to the taxation of excess non-concessional contributions—contributions that are made from an individual's after-tax money. As the then parliamentary secretary made clear back in the first week of December last year, the bill will introduce some much needed fairness. Indeed, through the last parliament we repeatedly called on Labor to do something and we pledged that, if they did not, we would upon government. This schedule does just that. It is important to give some tax fairness to those who inadvertently breach those caps. The current treatment of non-concessional contribution caps can be punitive. The overall tax rate that has applied to some of the breaches has been as high as 93 per cent. So the change that the government is introducing through this schedule to the bill will allow people the option of withdrawing these excess contributions and any associated earnings, with the earnings taxed at the individual's marginal tax rate.

Other speakers have gone into great detail about the purpose and the benefits of this particular schedule. I am very glad that we are legislating this now. It was a glaring problem that, unfortunately, Labor did nothing about during the last parliament. But it is being rectified in this parliament. I noticed the member for Moreton says that it has bipartisan support. That is good to hear, but it should have been something that was fixed a few years back. I will leave my remarks at that. I know the member for O'Connor is keen to follow me with his contribution, particularly on schedule 6 of this bill.
Mr WILSON (O'Connor) (11:58): The member for Casey is exactly right: today I rise to speak about the Tax and Superannuation Laws Amendment Bill (2014 Measures No. 7) Bill 2014 but with particular emphasis on the Exploration Development Incentive. People who have been in the mining and resource industries for many years know that mining is cyclical and that with the ups comes the downs. All levels of government know the importance of the industry, and the federal government is working hard to show its support. We have already eliminated two major threats to the industry—the carbon tax and the mineral resource rent tax.

The Exploration Development Incentive is of great importance to my electorate and is yet another measure the federal government is putting in place to assist the exploration, mining and resources industries to get back on track. I am proud that Kalgoorlie, one of Australia’s premier mining centres, is a big economic driver in my electorate. In 1893, when Irishman Paddy Hannan struck gold in Kalgoorlie, Kalgoorlie was born by the fortune-seekers from across the country descending on the region. Over the next 120 years, the mining of gold, along with other metals such as nickel, has been a major industry and today employs about one-quarter of Kalgoorlie’s workforce and generates a significant proportion of its income.

The Super Pit, the biggest open pit mine in Australia, is located right next to the town and has been operated by Kalgoorlie Consolidated Gold Mines since 1989. At 3.6 kilometres long, 1.6 kilometres wide and a depth of more than 600 metres, the Super Pit is as deep as Uluru is high and about the same circumference. The Super Pit produces up to 850,000 ounces of gold every year. But, as great as the Super Pit is for the Goldfields’ economy, the current reserve has a finite life, as all current deposits do. This is an important point when looking at the future of the region’s economy and also Australia’s.

While greenfields exploration expenditure has remained relatively stable in real terms over recent years, it has fallen as a proportion of total exploration from 40 per cent to 33 per cent over the last decade. In December 2014, the Australian Bureau of Statistics reported that quarterly exploration expenditure had halved in the two years to September 2014, with metres drilled down by more than a third over the same period. Tax incentives for small mining companies to undertake exploration is not a new concept. They applied during the 1960s and 1970s and were one of the factors that produced the various mining booms of that era. These incentives were later repealed.

The Henry tax review recommended that, if earlier access to tax benefits from exploration expenses is to be provided, it should take the form of a refundable tax offset at the company level for exploration expenses incurred by Australian small-listed exploration companies, with the offset set at the company income tax rate. The mining sector has long sought a form of incentive that recognises the long lead times between investment, exploration and production. Small exploration companies often must wait many years before tax losses from exploration expenses can be utilised. Many will never generate sufficient income to utilise their losses.

Last year, the Minister for Industry, the Hon. Ian Macfarlane, chose Kalgoorlie to regionally launch the Exploration Development Incentive scheme. Starting on 1 July 2014, the EDI is a $100 million incentive allowing investors in junior companies to deduct a proportion of exploration expenditure against their taxable income. The introduction of the EDI shows the government recognises that mining is a capital-intensive business. Mining is a
high-risk business, particularly when companies are starting up their exploration. Most exploration happens to be unsuccessful, but that is not a reason not to do it. It has even been likened to gambling—you could spend a lot of money, with no guarantee of finding any new deposits. But the geological knowledge from that exploration is invaluable and will be available for other exploration efforts to work with. The company may not make any money with it, but it will contribute to more efficient and targeted prospecting in the future.

The EDI will create better incentives and more opportunities for businesses and individuals to succeed. It will strengthen the pipeline to ensure that future mining activity continues to underpin the growth of the Australian economy, allowing investors to deduct a proportion of mining exploration expenditure against their taxable income. While in Kalgoorlie, Minister Macfarlane reiterated:

"Exploration is a precursor to development and production and exports. If you're not doing the exploration work then the future looks grim.

Greenfields exploration involves discovering new deposits in new geographical locations rather than areas surrounding known ore deposits. The discovery of new deposits is important for the future supply of resources, as existing deposits will eventually be depleted. Greenfields exploration is high risk, but it can provide large rewards if a new deposit is discovered. At the moment, we are facing the reality of a 10-year low in greenfields exploration, and although there are some drillers who remain pessimistic about the EDI and think it is not enough, in reality the $100 million will generate $300 million worth of capital for exploration. If we have long-running operations looking at closing in the next five to 10 years, we need to be finding the new deposits now so that the industry will keep running for another 100 years.

The purpose of these amendments is to encourage investment in Australian junior mineral exploration companies through the creation of a new form of tax credits to be known as the Exploration Development Incentive Credits. These credits arise from the amount of exploration expenditure that is unable to be claimed as a tax deduction by these companies. Junior companies can currently raise their exploration funding either from the stock market or via agreements with senior mining companies or other investors; they do not have internal sources of investment capital on which to draw. While junior companies are relatively small in size, they undertake a significant proportion of petroleum and other minerals exploration, often undertaking activity on behalf of larger companies. Typically, exploration costs far exceed the profits, if any, generated by junior mineral exploration companies. Such losses are very rarely utilised, as these companies rarely make sufficient profits to fully utilise all of their accrued losses as tax deductions.

The South Australian Chamber of Mines and Energy Chief Executive, Jason Kuchel, said:

"Many people do not realise that the junior sector is critical to resource development, being the "engine room" needed to find the mineral resources upon which the economy is so dependant.

Senior mining companies are subject to a number of important limitations, which effectively prevent them from issuing EDIs. Only a greenfields mineral explorer can issue EDIs. A greenfields mineral explorer is identified as having: greenfields minerals expenditure for the relevant income year; both a constitutional corporation and a disclosing entity for Corporations Law purposes; and neither itself, nor 'any other entity that is connected with or is an affiliate of the entity' extracted minerals for the purpose of producing assessable income."
The amounts must be spent in relation to exploration activity: only within mainland Australia—where expenditure incurred in relation to offshore exploration for any mineral cannot give rise to an EDI; where the exploration company holds a mining, quarrying or prospecting right; and where the area under exploration has not been identified as containing an ‘inferred’ resource.

The tax offsets provided through the incentives are capped at $100 million over three years. The cap manages the cost to the budget and protects it from fluctuations in greenfields exploration expenditure. When the EDI was announced, Chief Executive of the Chamber of Minerals and Energy of Western Australia Reg Howard-Smith said:

CME has been calling for incentives, such as a mining exploration tax credit, to boost the critical minerals exploration sector.

… … …

We have seen the competitiveness of Australia as an attractive place for exploration expenditure decline with research showing Australia’s share of global exploration has reduced from 21% in 2002 down to only 12% in 2012.

… … …

Exploration is the lifeblood of future industry. With sensible and encouraging policy initiatives such as the Exploration Development Incentive, there are positive signs for establishing the future pipeline of projects.

There have been two other major wins for the resources sector since this government’s election. In July 2014, we repealed the carbon tax, saving Australia’s minerals industry $1.2 billion a year when the price of emissions permits, the impact on diesel fuel and higher energy charges are included. The carbon tax alone would have cost mining companies an additional 6c per litre on diesel, increasing operational costs significantly.

The Australian Mines and Metals Association were emphatic in its support of the carbon tax repeal. AMMA chief executive Steve Knott said:

Repealing the carbon tax removes one of two ideologically driven, flawed taxes imposed by the former government that have added unnecessary costs and risk to investing and doing business in Australia.

In September 2014, we repealed the mineral resources rent tax, which damaged international investor confidence in Australia, particularly in the energy and resources sector. The repeal of the MRRT and its associated expenditure will not only improve the budget bottom line but also save millions of dollars in compliance costs for small, medium and large entities.

After the repeal of the MRRT, Chief Executive of the Minerals Council Brendan Pearson congratulated the Senate for being able to find common ground. He said:

In just four sitting weeks, the new Senate has repealed the carbon and mining taxes thus demonstrating that with policy intent and goodwill the Australian Parliament can remove the blockages to stronger and more durable economic growth.

Rio Tinto chief executive Sam Walsh said he strongly supported the repeal of the tax. He said:

This will be a positive step for investment and good for jobs in the mining sector.

The MRRT was never necessary as Australians were already sharing in the benefits of the mining boom through the high company tax payments, royalties and community spending.

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, 25 February 2015

CHAMBER
Fortescue Metals Group chief executive Nev Power said the repeal would encourage Fortescue to continue contributing to Australian society in other ways. He said:

The repeal of the MRRT is a sign that Australia is open for business and serious about encouraging mining development and investment.

But there are still threats to the resources industry, including the WA state government's current review of mining royalties, specifically the review on the gold royalty. Gold mining is an industry that has sustained Western Australia since the late 1800s. In WA alone, the gold mining industry employs approximately 20,000 people. The gold sector pays more than $300 million in taxes and royalties to the government of Western Australia which helps build our roads, schools, hospitals and police stations. Any increase could put jobs and, ultimately, communities at risk. Any rate royalty increase will have a significant impact in the region.

According to a report by Deloitte for the Gold Royalties Response Group, over the past six years the average cost of gold production for WA gold mines has doubled from $511 an ounce to at least $1,100 an ounce. As production costs have risen, companies have had to shed staff. Doray Minerals Managing Director Allan Kelly has claimed the industry cannot bear any additional costs. He said:

WA gold miners continue to face tough operating conditions. Any increases in royalties will see mines close and jobs lost. More than 4,000 direct jobs in gold were lost last year as a result of miners being forced to downsize and the reality is that any additional costs will result in more job losses and seriously damage our industry.

Mr Kelly rejected any suggestion that phasing in a royalty increase over a number of years would be an acceptable outcome for the gold industry. He said:

This would simply mean death by a thousand cuts for gold miners. Such a move would damage investor confidence and erode any positive sentiment in the sector.

We cannot keep hammering our productive industries. I will oppose any move that places more pressure on the gold industry. I urge the Western Australian government to seriously consider the impact any changes to gold royalties would have on the viability of small- to medium-mining operations in my electorate.

But back to the bill currently before the House. Another organisation to see the benefit of the EDI is the Minerals Council of Australia. In December last year Dr John Kunkel, Deputy Chief Executive of the Minerals Council of Australia, released a statement in which he said:

The Excess Exploration Credit Tax Bill 2014 recognises the need to reinvigorate Australia’s exploration effort.

The EDI is a timely and practical commitment to the future of the Australian minerals industry with small Australian exploration companies facing real challenges securing capital. Available to junior companies with no taxable income and to their investors, the EDI addresses the situation whereby junior explorers are unable to access the immediate deduction for exploration expenditure. Importantly, it will allow explorers to leverage additional investment in their companies and to retain existing shareholdings.

The EDI will make exploration investment in Australia more attractive and it deserves universal parliamentary support.
Dr Kunkel is completely right: even if an exploration program, financed in part by the issue of EDIs, should not find any deposit, the geological knowledge from that program will be available for other exploration efforts to work with. As such, any EDIs issued will still have a positive outcome even if no actual economic discovery is made, as it will contribute to more efficient and targeted prospecting in the future. The incentive recognises that the future prosperity of the mining sector and the Australian economy is dependent on our ability to make new mineral discoveries.

Along with repealing the carbon tax and MRRT, the EDI is about ensuring that we regain and maintain the momentum of discovery and ensure that we have a rich and prosperous way forward. I would like to thank and acknowledge the member for Brand, who last night indicated the opposition's support for this legislation, and welcome the bipartisan position on this vitally important boost to the exploration industry. To anyone eligible in my electorate, I cannot stress enough how important it is for you make the most of the EDI. There is a long way to go before we can say we are anywhere near the top of the cycle, but at a federal level at least, we are doing everything we can to make sure that comes sooner rather than later. I commend this bill to the House.

Mr CHRISTENSEN (Dawson—The Nationals Deputy Whip) (12:14): I rise to speak on the Tax and Superannuation Laws Amendment (2014 Measures No. 7) Bill 2014. This bill contains a number of amendments to fix technical and drafting defects, repeal redundant provisions and address some of the unintended consequences of the current tax and superannuation laws. But the part of this bill that has the biggest impact on my electorate and on the nation relates to schedule 6, as the member for O'Connor has been talking about: the exploration development incentive. The Excess Exploration Credit Tax Bill 2014 seeks to provide an incentive to encourage investment in small mineral exploration companies undertaking greenfields mineral exploration in Australia.

Consideration of this legislation and its value to my electorate and to the national economy comes down to some simple propositions: do you believe in the resource industry or do you not believe in the resource industry; do you appreciate just how many dollars the resource industry puts into this economy and how reliant we are on revenue from mining to provide the services that we enjoy; and do you understand the number of jobs that come from the resource industry, directly and indirectly? I can assure you people in my electorate know too well the importance of the resource industry. They saw firsthand what happened when Australia played to its strengths, with our abundant resources delivering jobs in regional centres—and funding cushy lifestyles for inner city socialists in the capital cities. They saw firsthand what happened when those same inner city socialists launched a class war on the country's biggest industry.

I mention this because it is that class war—a socialist fight against people working hard for a decent living—that will attack this legislation here today. It is that class war—a fight against any company or industry that has the temerity to make money while employing thousands of people—that will decry any industry incentive as 'corporate welfare'. Yet, strangely, those bleating about 'corporate welfare' are the same people who insist that we pour billions of dollars into industries that would never, ever survive on their own—all in the name of worshipping the false climate gods. Yes, there are those who do not believe in the resource sector, who do not appreciate the value and the importance of the sector to the economy.
There are those who will attack the sector in any way they can because their political ideology dictates that all mining must be shut down. They exist predominantly in the Australian Greens, and the Greens are aided and abetted by the Labor Party, the party who presided over the most destructive government our country has seen and led an attack—directed by the Greens—on the No. 1 income earner for this country, the mining industry.

Rather than playing to our strengths and providing incentives for the development of this critical industry, as this legislation seeks to do, Labor and the Greens wanted to tax it to death. They refused to recognise the contribution that resources made to the coffers of this nation but thought $11 billion could easily be bled from what they called 'superprofits'. While their mining tax was a total disaster for the budget, given that it raised a tiny fraction of the cost of the schemes that the Labor Party linked to it and spent in advance, it did have a big impact on the industry in terms of sovereign risk. Large mining companies, with operations all over the world, looked at the then Labor government and what they were doing and their attitude towards mining—namely, to stop it from making a profit—and they reassessed their priorities in the global environment. What the Labor Party did was give those miners a very good reason to operate in another country, to employ citizens of another country and to create tax revenue for a government in another country. That made their Green mates happy because that would mean fewer businesses making that dirty thing called money and more people on the dole queue and under government control. The Labor era pushed the miners away. But that era is over.

We now have before us legislation that does the opposite. It is all about attracting miners to this country and providing an incentive to create wealth for all Australians. The incentive provided under this legislation is capped at $100 million over the next three years, which will manage the cost to the budget and protect it from fluctuations in expenditure for greenfields mining exploration. The Association of Mining and Exploration Companies said the Abbott government's exploration incentive scheme would:

— encourage much needed investment in greenfields exploration which is at historic lows. It will also create jobs for exploration support services such as drilling contractors and geoscientists.

Greenfields exploration is essential to make new discoveries that will become the mines of tomorrow to generate jobs and Government revenue streams.

Feedback from the industry also reports that junior explorers in Australia struggle to raise capital for exploration. As a result, exploration for new mineral discoveries has reached a 10-year low. Is it any wonder? We had Labor and the Greens doing everything that they could to shut them down for seven years. The previous Labor-Greens government demonstrated by their actions that they did not believe in the resources industry. They did not appreciate the value and understand the importance of the industry, unless, of course, it could help them get elected. Labor could put up the pretence of believing in the industry for an election campaign. In 2007, I have got to note, they committed to a scheme similar to this legislation. But, once elected, they became the Greens' whipping boy and nothing was done. They were happy to get paddled, '50 shades of green' style, but nothing was done. In 2010, the Labor Party once again committed to a scheme similar to the legislation that we debate today. But, once elected, again they became the Greens' whipping boy—'50 shades of green'—and nothing was done. It is no wonder at all that exploration for new mineral discoveries is at a 10-year low.
Now they are in opposition, Labor have demonstrated their anticoal stance. The ABC reported—and it is online—that the Leader of the Opposition, Bill Shorten, ‘doesn't see much of a future for the coal industry’. The shadow environment minister, Mark Butler, told the ABC that he wanted the coal industry phased out. These are the statements of a party that does not believe in resources. In contrast, we have the Prime Minister, on a visit to the mining region of Central Queensland in October last year, saying this:

This is a sign of hope and confidence in the future of the coal industry. It's a great industry and we've had a great partnership with Japan in the coal industry. Coal is essential for the prosperity of Australia. Coal is essential for the prosperity of the world. Energy is what sustains prosperity and coal is the world's principal energy source and it will be for many decades to come.

But the Prime Minister, Australia, and the people who want jobs and prosperity have an uphill battle, because, even today, we have a Labor government in Queensland—returned there with the assistance of the Greens and their PR arm, GetUp!—that is determined to stop the resource industry in its tracks. The Galilee Basin, in Queensland, has the potential to unleash enormous wealth for Australians and to bring tens of thousands of jobs to Queensland. But Queensland Labor promised to take away the incentive for building the vital infrastructure linking key mines, such as the Carmichael mine, with the port at Abbot Point in my electorate of Dawson. What is more, they have promised to delay the necessary port expansion by not allowing dredge spoil to be disposed of on a suitable site located on land.

Labor and the Greens did not want disposal of this dredge spoil at sea, so we went all in to find a land based solution—yet they still attack it. They say it will destroy the so-called internationally significant Caley Valley wetlands or, as the locals know it, the Kaili Valley wetlands. These are wetlands that were man-made. The locals will tell you that gun clubs back in the 1950s actually diverted water courses and turned a dry area into a wetland for the primary purpose of duck hunting. That is how that wetland came into creation. But Labor and the Greens use it as an excuse. In stopping or, at least, delaying the Abbot Point and Carmichael mine rail infrastructure, Labor and the Greens are putting at risk thousands of jobs and billions of dollars in government revenue and are denying millions of desperate, poor people across the world access to what they need—and that is energy.

Millions of people in India remain without electricity, and the cheapest and easiest means of bringing these people out of energy poverty is coal. Australia produces some of the best and cleanest coal in the world. If we had any compassion for the world's poorest people, we would be encouraging exploration and the development of new mines to help supply the cheapest form of electricity available to those people.

The University of Queensland's Energy Poverty Research Group says:

Modern, clean and efficient energy services are crucial for human well-being and facilitating social and economic development. Energy poverty denies billions of people in the developing world access to modern energy services.

A report produced by a wide group of international agencies led by the World Bank recently reported that about 1.2 billion people—nearly as many as the entire population of India—still live without access to electricity, while 2.8 billion people rely on wood, crop waste, dung, and other biomass to cook and heat their homes. The World Bank said that, unless the world addresses the widespread problem of energy poverty, other efforts at economic development are likely to fall short.
If we fail to encourage the resources sector through legislation such as this, we will fail to address the urgent need of billions of people living in energy poverty. If we allow the Queensland Labor government and the extreme Greens to shut down our own economic prosperity through our resources sector, we will confine millions of people to poverty. India and China are moving very quickly to deliver electricity to more people, but they cannot keep up with demand. India has extended the reach of its grid to an average of 24 million more people each year—and they have not done it with solar panels—and yet 306 million people in India remain without electricity. In China, 612 million people—nearly twice the population of the United States—do not have clean fuel for cooking and heating. If they do not have clean fuel for cooking and heating, they are forced to resort to other means. According to an article by National Geographic in 2013, about 3½ million people, mainly women and children, die each year from respiratory illness due to harmful indoor air pollution from wood and biomass cooking stoves. Last night I watched a video about this energy poverty. It featured a Nepalese family and a baby that was dying. You could see it dying in this video from respiratory disease caused directly by this stuff. That is what the Greens do. The solution to this enormous problem is at hand. We have the resources here in this country to produce reliable, affordable energy—and India, for instance, wants to buy it from us. Even though worldwide wind power has grown at an average rate of 25 per cent and solar energy at a rate of 11.4 per cent since 1990, those two forms of renewable energy—along with geothermal, waste and marine energy—contribute barely one per cent to global energy consumption.

If the Greens and Labor believe in equality, in helping the world's poor and in ending suffering then they must believe our resources sector—with the cleanest and most environmentally friendly coal in the world—can alleviate energy poverty throughout the third world. We can bring these people up to the standards that we enjoy today. The Greens must believe in providing encouragement and incentives to those who can help bring millions of people out of poverty and let those poor people of the world enjoy a tiny fraction of the benefits enjoyed by those who sit in their leafy inner city suburbs of Melbourne and Sydney, those latte-sipping socialists who condemn proposals like this and think that mining is dirty. I have to tell you that it is not. Mining is actually humanitarian. Mining supports jobs in regional Australia, in electorates like mine.

I support this bill. I strongly support the mining exploration tax credit. It is a very welcome scheme that will go some way to rebooting the mining sector in this country. I look forward to junior miners taking advantage of this throughout the Bowen Basin and perhaps even the Galilee Basin and getting jobs back up and running throughout Central Queensland. I am glad to hear that this has the support of those opposite, but they really need to start talking up resources. They need to start talking about the positives of resources rather than constantly trying to demonise them. Coal provides jobs. Coal provides power. Coal can alleviate energy poverty throughout the Third World. I support the bill.

Mr FRYDENBERG (Kooyong—Assistant Treasurer) (12:28): Firstly, I would like to thank those members on both sides of the House who have contributed to this debate. I welcome the opposition's decision not to oppose the bill. Schedule 1 makes the superannuation tax laws fairer. It is a measure that delivers on an election commitment. When
individuals exceed their non-concessional contribution, they need no longer be subject to the highly punitive excess contribution tax regime. It will enable individuals to save for their retirement with more confidence.

Schedule 2 transfers the Commonwealth Ombudsman's investigative and complaint-handling function relating to tax law to the Inspector-General of Taxation. The transfer will concentrate scarce tax expertise in a single agency, enabling more efficient use of that expertise and improved customer focus. The changes will also simplify the scrutiny landscape.

Schedule 3 makes minor amendments to the taxation laws to ensure the proper functioning of capital gains tax provisions in relation to life insurance policies. The intention is that compensation and damages received by trustees and beneficiaries—for example, for a workplace injury—are not subject to capital gains tax. This schedule puts into legislation another of Labor's 92 announced but unenacted measures left to us on coming to government.

Schedule 4 clarifies the capital gains tax treatment of assets when one superannuation fund merges with another. This schedule will legislate yet another of Labor's announced but unenacted measures. Schedule 5 clarifies the ATO's ability to share information with Commonwealth, state and territory law enforcement agencies seeking proceeds of crime orders. Schedule 6 and the Excess Exploration Credit Tax Bill 2014 provide for the introduction of an exploration development incentive to encourage investment in small mineral exploration companies undertaking greenfield exploration in Australia. The coalition is delivering on another election commitment.

Schedule 7 makes a number of amendments across the tax law to provide certainty to taxpayers. They make sure the law operates as intended by correcting technical or drafting defects, removing anomalies and addressing unintended outcomes. I commend this bill to the House.

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

Question negatived.
Original question agreed to.
Bill read a second time.

Message from the Governor-General recommending appropriation announced.

Third Reading

Mr FRYDENBERG (Kooyong—Assistant Treasurer) (12:33): by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.
Excess Exploration Credit Tax Bill 2014
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

Mr FRYDENBERG (Kooyong—Assistant Treasurer) (12:34): by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

Broadcasting and Other Legislation Amendment (Deregulation) Bill 2014
Second Reading

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

Mr CLARE (Blaxland) (12:35): The Broadcasting and Other Legislation Amendment (Deregulation) Bill 2014 is part of the government's so-called regulation repeal day. Most of what is in the bill is part of the routine function of government. The former Labor government repealed 16,794 acts and regulations during its time in office—all part of the ordinary work of government. It is important work, but we did not make a song and dance about it. This government has taken a different approach, holding regulation repeal days and making a lot out of very little.

The first regulation repeal legislation saved the communications industry $35 million. I said at the time that that was in and of itself a good thing, but its value should not be overestimated. You do not put out a press release when you vacuum the lounge room, and that is what the government was effectively doing there. If it was vacuuming the lounge room last year, then this is really a mopping-up of the bathroom, because this bill saves industry just $350,000, according to estimates from the Department of Communications. Having said that, much of the bill is straightforward, and we agree with it.

The purpose of the bill is to amend the Broadcasting Services Act 1992, the BSA; the Radiocommunications Act 1992, the RadComms act; and the Australian Communications and Media Authority Act 2005, the ACMA Act. It does a number of things. Firstly, it removes a number of provisions in the Broadcasting Services Act, which were associated with the simulcast of analog and digital television signals in the transition to digital broadcasting and the restack of spectrum, which commenced after the last analog signal was switched off. Given that digital television rollout is complete, these changes make sense and should be supported.

The bill also amends the framework used by the Australian Communications and Media Authority to plan the broadcasting services band spectrum by removing requirements in the Broadcasting Services Act and the Radcomms Act, which are no longer necessary. The bill also removes the requirement for reports to be made to ACMA under the New Eligible Drama
Expenditure Scheme to be independently audited. The opposition is satisfied that compliance with this scheme is of a sufficiently high level and there are alternative mechanisms available for ACMA to ensure this continues to allow the removal of this requirement. The requirement that ACMA reviews industry codes of practice will also be removed under this legislation. The bill also amends the process by which the calculation of media diversity points is made in some commercial radio licence areas and introduces grandfathering provisions for commercial broadcasting licences which would be in breach of the statutory provisions on control as a result of fluctuations in population.

There are, however, some other areas of the bill that are more contentious. The bill makes a number of changes to captioning. For example, it seeks to remove the requirement for free-to-air broadcasters to report annually on compliance with obligations which require them to provide captioning of programs to assist vision- and hearing-impaired consumers with access to electronic media and to replace these obligations with a complaints based assessment process. The legislation also changes aspects of captioning-target obligations for subscription television and the assessment of the quality of captioning of live and pre-recorded broadcasts for free-to-air and subscription broadcasters. It also removes the requirement for a statutory review of captioning obligations.

The opposition has been contacted by representatives of the deaf community who are concerned about these changes. When the minister introduced this bill in the House in October last year, he said:

The ACMA and my department have consulted with industry and key accessibility groups on a range of potential reforms that primarily seek to improve administrative arrangements for the free-to-air broadcasters and subscription television licensees while requiring that they continue to meet their captioning obligations.

It turns out that those assurances that key accessibility groups had been consulted were not entirely accurate. The deaf community does not feel that they were properly consulted on these reforms. Members of Parliament received letters from the Chief Executive Officer of Deaf Australia, advising that Deaf Australia was not consulted on this legislation.

The bipartisan report of the Senate Environment and Communications Committee on this bill was critical of this lack of consultation with the deaf community. The report stated:

The committee notes that a large number of submitters indicated that the consultation process in relation to this bill had been inadequate. The committee agrees that the breadth of consultation in relation to this bill has been insufficient. As a consequence the effect of some of the proposed amendments appears to have been misunderstood, and inadequate attention was given to a range of serious concerns and interests.

This lack of consultation reflects poorly on the minister and on the government. It is their responsibility to make sure that all affected stakeholders are engaged and consulted when legislation before the parliament affects them.

Over the last month the Labor Party has done what the government should have done. We have sat down with deaf advocacy groups and the broadcasting industry and worked through their concerns with the changes that are proposed in this bill. As a result of that work, we have developed a reasonable compromise that both sides have agreed to: that is, 1) restoring the requirement for free-to-air broadcasters to report annually on their compliance with captioning obligations; and 2) restoring the statutory review of captioning to occur in 2016.
This will allow a comprehensive review of all of the issues that legitimately concerned both the broadcasters and representatives of the deaf community. I will move amendments to that effect in this debate. I understand those amendments have now been circulated in my name. My office has also consulted with the minister's office on these amendments, and I understand that the government will support them. May I take this opportunity to thank the minister for that and thank his office for the work that they have done with my office on that. This is the sort of work that should have been done by the government. They should have sat down with the deaf community and consulted them on these changes, but they did not do that. They were more concerned with the headlines that come from a set piece regulation-repeal day rather than getting the substance right and making sure that the deaf community are properly consulted. These amendments get the government out of this mess, and I hope they do a better job on consultation with the next regulation repeal bill that they bring to this place.

Mr FLETCHER (Bradfield—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Communications) (12:43): I am pleased to rise to speak on the Broadcasting and Other Legislation Amendment (Deregulation) Bill. This is an important bill that amends the Broadcasting Services Act 1992, the Radiocommunication Act 1992 and the Australian Communications and Media Authority Act 2005. It will remove unnecessary legislative provisions and in turn reduce the regulatory burden on the broadcasting industry. Today, I want first of all to speak about why reducing the regulatory burden is important; secondly, to argue the amendments in this bill seek to get the balance right between the objective of regulation and the burden it imposes; and, thirdly, to describe specifically the way in which some of these amendments will reduce the regulatory burden.

Let me turn firstly to the importance of a reduction in the regulatory burden. The Abbott government recognises that prosperity and jobs come from the business sector, but business is facing an excessive regulatory burden, and that burden imposes costs, slows down the rate at which business occurs and diverts resources. This is bad for growth, it is bad for business and it is bad for employment. It is no exaggeration to say that red tape is a serious problem in our economy. It is clear that the prevalence of red tape has a negative impact on productivity. The statistics as to how Australia performs compared to other jurisdictions are sobering. In 2014, we ranked 124th out of 148 countries for the burden of government regulation in the world competitiveness index. The cost of doing business in Australia relative to other nations is simply too high. The Productivity Commission, for example, estimates that regulatory compliance costs could amount to as much as four per cent of Australia's gross domestic product, a truly staggering number.

One of the particular problems with red tape is its tendency to continue to grow. Reporting obligations which are in place and which have been put there, in many cases, for the best possible reasons out of the best possible motivations tend to grow and grow and grow. Governments in general tend not to bother to come back and review regulatory provisions, regulatory frameworks, to determine whether they continue to be fit for purpose, and regulation often persists long after the problem which it was designed to address has passed into history. So, if government does not take decisive and proactive action, the unfortunate reality is that red tape tends to be ever expanding.

That is an ongoing structural feature, but on top of that we have the cyclical reality that this government succeeds the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd government, a government which showed an
extraordinary and almost unprecedented enthusiasm for adding regulatory burdens to the Australian economy. The Rudd-Gillard-Rudd government added over 21,000 new regulations and repealed 105, notwithstanding the promise made by the former Prime Minister, Mr Rudd, in 2007 that his government would have a ‘one regulation in, one regulation out’ policy—a promise that was never honoured.

Red tape is a particular issue in the communications sector, a sector which is heavily regulated. Rapid changes to technology are driving, in turn, very rapid changes in business structures and business models. But the regulatory framework which presently applies to the media industry, to the telecommunications sector, to the radiocommunications sector, to broadcasting and so on is based on a mid-1990s world of stable technologies and business models. With the communications sector being as heavily regulated as it is, there are significant cost burdens and inefficiencies faced by the sector, and in turn those get passed on in the form of costs borne by consumers. It is for this reason that Communications Minister Turnbull and I, as his parliamentary secretary, have been enthusiastic participants in the government-wide deregulation agenda. We are strongly committed to reducing red tape in the communications sector.

Let me therefore turn to the measures in this bill and the way in which they seek to strike the right balance in the broadcasting sector and redress some errors. I want to touch particularly on two specific measures: reform in relation to the captioning obligations and reform in relation to the new eligible drama expenditure regime. Let me turn firstly to captioning. The bill contains in schedule 6 a set of amendments to the provisions in relation to captioning.

I should first describe what I am talking about. Captioning is the presentation of the audio component of television content as text on the screen. The purpose for imposing an obligation on broadcasters to provide captioning is to assist viewers who have a hearing impairment—a significant section of the community. The government strongly supports all Australians having access to television services, including of course ensuring that hearing-impaired Australians are able to have the benefit of television services. We believe that captioning of television services is a very important part of achieving this objective.

I want to emphasise, therefore, that this bill does not reduce captioning standards or targets, and the government will not be making any changes to captioning targets. Instead, the measures in this bill are designed to achieve the objective of reducing the reporting requirements. In particular, under the Broadcasting Services Act as it presently stands, television broadcasters face a detailed requirement to provide the Australian Communications and Media Authority with reports on their compliance with their captioning obligations on an annual basis.

We have consulted with industry and with accessibility groups in relation to these issues with the aim of improving administrative arrangements for the free-to-air broadcasters and subscription television licensees while at the same time ensuring that they continue to meet their captioning obligations. The policy objective reflected in the provisions in the bill before the House is to amend the existing captioning framework to remove annual reporting requirements and to seek to revert to a complaints-only process.
Having said that, I want to acknowledge the fact that the shadow minister spoke of some amendments that he intends to move. I foreshadow that the minister will have more to say about the government's response to those amendments when he sums up this debate.

I also note that the captioning requirements which are faced by subscription television licensees are even more complex than the requirements which apply to free-to-air television services. That being said, the government does not consider that a move to a full complaints based system for subscription television licensees would be appropriate at this time. We want to make sure that we are not overreaching in the approach contained in this bill. Instead, our intention is to conduct further consultation with the industry—and with other relevant stakeholders, I hasten to add, including of course advocacy groups and representative groups, peak bodies, for the hearing impaired. Our objective in that consultation will be to identify ways in which the existing arrangements for captioning on subscription television can be improved from a regulatory burden perspective.

Certainly, though, this bill does contain some amendments which seek to provide additional flexibility right now for subscription broadcasters, including a 12-month exemption from captioning obligations for new channels, an aggregated captioning target across related sports channels, and more-targeted requirements applicable to repeat programming.

The government appreciates the suggestions which have been received from stakeholders as part of the extensive consultation process, which has included consideration of the bill by a Senate committee. Of course, through that Senate committee process, a range of stakeholders have had the opportunity to examine the bill and to provide feedback. Certainly the government is appreciative of many of the suggestions that have been made, and the government has agreed to the suggestion that the bill be amended to require the Australian Communications and Media Authority to undertake a review of the operation of the captioning requirements under the Broadcasting Services Act.

I now want to speak about a second important measure in the bill, which relates to the audit requirements under the new eligible drama expenditure scheme. The scheme requires that certain subscription television channel providers and licensees must spend at least 10 per cent of their total programming expenditure on new Australian or New Zealand drama productions or co-productions. Licensees and channel providers are required to provide an annual return to the Australian Communications and Media Authority which must be cleared by a registered auditor. The current scheme has been mandatory since 1999, and the authority advises that there has been a high level of compliance. The bill contains measures to remove the audit requirement and the requirement for the authority to provide related 'compliance certificates'. The government considers this appropriate, partly in recognition that there has been a high ongoing level of compliance to this point. I emphasise that the changes will not affect the level of new Australian drama expenditure required from the subscription television industry. In other words, again these measures are about striking the right balance between, on the one hand, maintaining the core obligations and, on the other hand, seeking to remove unnecessary requirements.

Thirdly, I want to speak briefly about the ways in which the measures in this bill will reduce the regulatory burden. I have spoken, for example, about some of the reductions in regulatory burden applicable to subscription broadcasters as regards some specific detailed captioning requirements. In relation to the new eligible drama expenditure requirement, by
removing the audit requirements as well as removing the requirement on the Australian Communications and Media Authority to provide compliance certificates, the measures in this bill are going to remove a significant administrative and financial burden on the subscription television industry. But again I emphasise it is about striking the right balance so that these measures will not affect the level of new Australian drama expenditure required from subscription television. The government understands that at least five subscription television licensees and at least eight channel providers will no longer need to engage auditors to review their returns under the new eligible drama expenditure scheme.

The measures in this bill make an important contribution to the coalition's agenda to reduce red tape but to do so in a way that preserves the underlying purpose of the regulation. There is, as has been foreshadowed, more consultation that the government intends to engage in—for example, further consultation in relation to the detailed captioning requirements for subscription television. As I have indicated, while we have addressed some measures in that area, the broader set of requirements in relation to subscription television is not dealt with in this bill, because, amongst other things, we want to engage in full consultation before we take any measures in that area forward.

The Communications portfolio has made a strong contribution to the government's overall deregulatory policy thrust, and that is important because communications is a heavily regulated sector and there are significant opportunities for greater efficiencies. To date, our red tape reduction measures in the Communications portfolio have generated cumulative savings of over $70 million for consumers and businesses and resulted in over 3,400 pages of redundant or obsolete regulation being repealed. This has contributed to the government's overall goal of removing $1 billion in the cost of unnecessary regulation from the economy each year. I am pleased to commend the measures in this bill to the House.

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (12:56): I am pleased to have the opportunity to make a contribution on the Broadcasting and Other Legislation Amendment (Deregulation) Bill 2014, which makes some changes to the Broadcasting Services Act and a number of related acts. These include the digital switchover and restack. As we know, analog services ended in December 2013, so these provisions and the related provisions concerning simulcast rules were, indeed, fulfilled more than a year ago. Other amendments concern planning powers, auditing expenditure, compliance with new eligible drama rules, licence areas, and the ACMA's role in the code of practice review.

I want to focus most of my remarks on the issue of captioning, which is contained within this bill. Listening to the community of interests around this issue has informed Labor's approach on this matter and the amendment that the shadow minister has brought before the House. Just to give you an idea of some of the community of interest that has been alive in this matter, in October 2014 I received correspondence from Deaf Australia which said in part:

I am unsure if you are aware of Federal Government's bill covering certain elements of the Broadcasting Services Act that deals with captioning issue ... Along with Media Access Australia, Australian Federation of Disability Organisations, Deafness Forum of Australia, Australian Communication Consumers Action Network and the Human Rights Commission, we are concerned that the deregulation was drafted with provisions that approach the whole issue solely from the perspective of the television industry ... The elements of the drafting does not appear to have any knowledge of how captioning works in practice and how it will be regulated in real-world situation.

CHAMBER
I am quoting that directly just to illustrate the level of concern that many who are concerned with this legislation have expressed.

The minister's second reading speech on this bill in this place said:

Reflecting stakeholder feedback, the communications portfolio deregulation road map identified captioning reporting as an area for reform in 2014.

I am sure that is true, but the problem is that some key stakeholders in the accessibility area were not afforded sound consultation, and that is a fact that has been conceded in the Senate inquiry outcomes, which I will discuss in a moment.

There are two limbs to the opposition's amendment that we have before us. The first is about the review of captioning requirements and compliance reporting. I turn specifically to the Senate committee inquiry, which recently gave its report into this matter. Part of what it discussed in terms of captioning obligations was the issue of granting exemptions from captioning obligations for new subscription television channels from one to almost two years depending on when the new service commences and removing the obligation for the ACMA to conduct a review of captioning obligations by 31 December this year.

Schedule 6 of the bill, concerning captioning, was as I said a specific area that was addressed in the Senate committee report, and I want to turn to paragraph 2.71 of the report and its discussion on consultation:

A significant number of the submitters to the inquiry expressed concern that there had been a lack of adequate consultation in relation to the proposed amendments to captioning obligations and NEDE scheme audits.

Here are a couple of examples. Deaf Australia said:

… we did not have an opportunity to provide any detailed feedback. They [the Department] just told us what the proposed changes were going to be. I do not believe that there has been any adequate or appropriate consultation with consumers or broadcasters.

It goes on in paragraph 2.73 to note the Age and Disability Discrimination Commissioner, the Hon. Susan Ryan, agreed that the captioning amendments in the bill should be delayed pending further consultation. Paragraph 2.74 says:

Mr Varley from Media Access Australia noted that the bill proposes to repeal the provisions requiring the ACMA to undertake a captioning review by 31 December 2015.

It goes on:

Mr Deaner from Screen Producers Australia argued that there had also been a lack of adequate consultation …

Paragraph 2.76 says, to their credit:

Dr Pelling, Department of Communications, acknowledged in evidence to the committee that consultation in relation to the proposed measures in the bill could have been improved:

… … …

I think it is true to say that in an ideal world we would have preferred to have an exposure draft; but, given the timing of the process and the way the bill was developed, an exposure was not able to be released.

Kudos to the department for acknowledging that. We do all learn from experience, but I think it is a salient reminder that, while we may all be focused on a certain area of intent—in the government's case it is to demonstrate that this spring cleaning needs certain fanfare to go
with it—we need to remember what underlies that, and that is to ensure that we have sound policy arising as a result.

I will very briefly look at some of the committee's comments:

The committee acknowledges that access to captioning is of fundamental importance to the deaf and hearing impaired communities. I do not believe anyone in this place would dispute that. In conclusion, paragraph 2.85 says:

The committee notes that a large number of submitters indicated that that the consultation processes in relation to the bill had been inadequate.

I think I have made that point, but I would also like to turn to a couple of matters that were raised in the human rights committee of the parliament concerning these issues.

In the 16th report of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights the committee looked at this bill and raised a couple of matters of questions for the minister, seeking his advice as to the compatibility of the amendments with the captioning obligations of the right to equality and non-discrimination and the related rights of persons with disabilities. These were the questions sought, and the minister provided a number of responses, which were contained in the 18th report of the human rights committee. It was noted that many of these elements could in fact be justified on the basis that they were proportionate or otherwise fulfilled a legitimate policy expectation of the government.

I will point to one of the interesting elements arising from the 18th report, and that is in relation to the blanket exemption from captioning requirements for all new subscription television services for at least one year. The committee noted that it remained concerned that this might still have an adverse impact on deaf and hearing impaired viewers because, if there were no captioning requirements for all new TV subscription content, that content would of course then be inaccessible. As noted in paragraph 2.12 of that report:

... it is not clear to the committee that the limitation is proportionate to those objectives. This is because there is currently a mechanism by which a subscription service can seek an exemption if required (that is, through an application to ACMA, which must assess each application on its merits).

The point I am making here is that we have in the bill before us provisions for a blanket exemption for new subscription TV services when in fact there is a provision for exemption by application already contained here. I note the conclusion the committee came to on this point:

... the automatic exemption for at least 12 months for all new subscription services from the requirement to provide captioning of content may be incompatible with the right to equality and nondiscrimination.

I simply note these. I do not intend to move any amendments, but I simply wish to note this. We know it is a fact that captioning requirements on subscription TV licensees are more complex than those which apply in the free-to-air environment. But, to again quote the minister I his second reading speech:

To achieve a better outcome in the long term—

that is, in relation to subscription television services' captioning requirements—

the Department of Communications will conduct further consultation with the industry to identify ways in which the subscription television captioning regime could be improved to best suit the needs of all stakeholders.
I commend the department on the work I know they will diligently carry out. I simply urge them to take into account some of the comments that have been made by the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights in relation to that issue.

I do want to mention something a bit closer to home: the work, the efforts and the passion of two individuals, David Cunningham and Paul Robertson. They are the co-creators of the Dangerous Dave show. It is a collaborative disability project which aims to present through the media, utilising ICT, the broad spectrum of issues facing Australians with a disability.

I had the pleasure of sitting down with Dave in Seven Hills, to discuss not only this bill but also to film a pilot interview in which we discussed a wide range of issues confronting people with a disability, including how people with a disability are portrayed in the media and how successful the Broadcasting Services Act has been in achieving its objectives, including its stated aim of taking into account the portrayals in programs that are likely to incite or perpetuate hatred against or vilify any personal group on the basis of physical or mental disability.

Amongst other things, Dave and Paul are working to: improve community awareness, understanding and education of disability in all its forms; increase the level of people with disabilities participating in the media; and fight the stereotypes that often surround people with a disability. As University of Wollongong academic Shawn Burns wrote in The Conversation:

Too often, media representation of people with disability is embedded within familiar models of 'tragedy' and 'hero' – but the weekend's coverage of potential changes to the disability support pension and the welfare system paint an equally distorted and harmful image.

As people with a disability Australia president, Craig Wallace told The Sydney Morning Herald regarding classifying people into having permanent and non-permanent disabilities:

'The reality is that it isn't as simple as that. I've got a permanent disability and I work.' Mr Wallace also cautioned against the media demonising people with disabilities … 'We are not rorters, we are not slackers,' he said.

These incidents I believe highlight why Dave and Paul's project is so important in informing and breaking down stereotypes. They also help to inform me how disappointed they were regarding the fact that the ABC's Ramp Up website, which worked to address these very issues, has come to an end.

The late-great Stella Young said, in a co-written article in the editorial of 5 June 2014 on the Ramp Up website:

After much speculation about the future of Ramp Up since the Federal Budget announcement, we have some news to share.

As many of you are aware, in 2010 the ABC received funding to establish an online destination to discuss disability in Australia. … Our current contract with DSS finishes on 30 June this year and has not been renewed.

The publication of ABC Ramp Up will cease on 30 June—
That was last year—
however the website will remain online as a resource for the disability community.

... ... ...
... Ramp Up has published over 500 pieces of original content ...
And I would urge everyone watching or listening to go and have a look at some of those amazing pieces of original content. It is an archive of 3½ years of discussions and conversations regarding disability in Australia. includes, if you read nothing else, ‘17 things Stella Young wanted you to know’.

I have also had an abiding interest in the ability of ICT to be a transformational power in terms of the digital divide but also more broadly of being an enabler of people with a disability. I want to acknowledge some of the amazing successes that have been taking place and the potential for ICT and captioning, for people with a hearing impairment, but also for people with a visual impairment through audio description. I think we need to do a lot more as a society to increase access to audio description. Just to give you a useful description, this is from the ABC audio description trial in April 2013:

Without knowing what's on screen, TV becomes a guessing game for Australia's 600,000 blind and vision impaired people. That's where audio description (AD) comes in. AD is a track of narration which describes important visual elements of a TV show, movie or performance. It's delivered between lines of dialogue and means that those who are blind or vision impaired can switch it on to keep up with the action without relying on other people.

It notes that audio description was provide for a number of programs for the trial, including: Rake, Lowdown and Summer Heights High—I would love to know how Rake was audio-described—just to give a flavour of some of the very important things I think we should be doing more of as a community to improve accessibility in this area.

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment) (13:11): I rise to speak on the Broadcasting and Other Legislation Amendment (Deregulation) Bill 2014. This bill amends three other pieces of legislation, streamlining them into one, to implement industry preferred changes in the communications portfolio.

This bill will amend or remove provisions in the Broadcasting Services Act 1992 which were associated with the simulcast of analog and digital television signals in the transition to digital broadcasting and the restack of spectrum which commenced after the last analog signal was switched off. The bill will also amend the framework by which the Australian Communications and Media Authority plans broadcasting services band spectrum. Through the removal of certain requirements in the BSA and the Radiocommunications Act 1992, which are no longer considered necessary.

I welcome the implementation of amendments to this bill for my constituents in my electorate of Paterson, because of the many ways its introduction can directly benefit them. I will focus on one particular amendment that will benefit my constituency—that is, the proposed changes under schedule 2 permeating the digital switch-over and restacking.

By way of providing context, in my electorate unreliable digital television reception is the No. 1 local issue impacting my constituents across the length and breadth of Paterson. Schedule 2 of the bill proposes to remove definitions and references to the simulcast period and the restacking process. It inserts new definitions and descriptions which better reflect the post-analog environment. Greater transparency and less ambiguity in legislation is always a positive step. Based on the feedback of major interest groups at the bill submission stage, this is one area that was incredibly deficient.

At the end of the simulcast period, analog transmissions were to cease and broadcasters were required to meet quotas for the transmission of high definition digital programming.
Thousands of my constituents currently suffer poor quality digital television signals that regularly drop out, and more often than normal on hot summer days. Every time the nation gets together to watch a major sporting event, I can almost rely on the digital signal to drop out each and every time. My phone rings off the hook for days. I want to use this speech as an opportunity to tell my electorate I am listening and the government is listening.

This amendment bill makes small but essential changes surrounding the spectrum allocation debate, a debate which I am actively involved in with my local broadcasters, the department and my ministerial colleagues to try to fix these digital issues. I am glad I am able to speak about this bill today because the mess that Labor left spectrum allocations in has contributed to the No. 1 point of aggravation in my electorate.

As I said previously, thousands of my constituents currently suffer poor-quality digital television signals that regularly dropout, even more on hot summer days. Deputy Speaker Kelly, you might ask, 'Why does this matter?' It matters because my sports-mad constituents want nothing more than to watch New South Wales win the State of Origin or Jamie Whincup take on the mountain, but the signal has dropped out on each of these occasions. It matters because my constituents in Paterson deserve better.

The last analogue services ceased in Paterson in November 2012, and a reorganisation of the television services—or a re-stack—commenced in my electorate at that time. It was intended to utilise the most efficient use of digital dividend spectrum resulting from the switch to digital television. In the light of these proposed amendments and their impact upon the references to the core primary commercial television broadcasting services, I want to take the opportunity to discuss how these reforms, had they transpired earlier, may have increased transparency a number of years ago when the previous government hastily switched over from analogue to digital technology.

Prior to the switch-over in November 2012, I warned—repeatedly warned—the previous government that existing self-help transmitters would have to be upgraded and new transmitters installed across my electorate to ensure that my constituents would continue to receive reliable digital television reception. My lobbying to Regional Broadcasting Australia Holdings, which is jointly owned by the commercial broadcasters, resulted in upgrades to self-help transmitters at Elizabeth Beach, Smiths Lake, Stroud, Forster and a new transmitter located at Anna Bay. Today, thousands of my constituents still have unreliable digital television reception. Areas like Karuah, the Tilligerry Peninsula, Medowie, Stroud, East Gresford, Gresford and Bulahdelah either have very little or no service. Prior to November 2012, these residents had reasonably reliable analogue reception to fall back on. Now, they do not.

There are two separate issues at play here: interference and coverage of black spots. The phenomenon of atmospheric ducting, which I am advised creates conditions by which the Illawarra transmitter at Knights Hill, which broadcasts all channels on identical frequencies to the Newcastle transmitter at Mount Sugarloaf, results in major interference and dropouts. My constituents who only have the option of signalling to the Mount Sugarloaf transmitter suffer increased problems relative to their distance to the transmitter, and while conditions that result in atmospheric ducting are more prevalent in warmer weather—which means that many of these issues arise during the major television events, such as the NRL and AFL grand finals and the Bathurst 1000—towns like Bulahdelah face these problems all year round.
More than a third of my constituents have experienced these problems for over five years, and they are justifiably livid. Much of the anger stems from the previous government's 'Get digital ready' campaign that dishonestly—dishonestly!—promised my constituents that the changeover would result in equal to or better than television reception. Many of those contacting my office have never had worse television reception. Prime TV, that was previously broadcast on a different frequency now also fails, along with other channels, since the retune. While the nation enjoyed watching the Bunnies take on the Bulldogs and win their first premiership in 43 years last year, my electorate got the raw end of the carrot after constituents experienced dropouts in the reception all day across vast areas of my electorate.

Before last year's race on the mountain at Bathurst, Ford announced that it would no longer be competing. Now, to Ford and Holden fans this was the end of an era and so this is why there was much interest in the telecast for my constituents, many of whom could not watch it. On every one of these occasions my office phones rang off the hooks for days.

I wrote to Steve Brown, broadcasting engineer and technology manager at NBN TV Newcastle, who I would contend is probably the most knowledgeable expert on the local problems specifically impacting on my electorate. I asked Mr Brown to provide an update on the issue since the retune in September 2014. Mr Brown concedes that the installation of self-help transmitters has largely resolved the majority of interference problems on the Tomaree Peninsula and Anna Bay areas. It has also filled in the coverage gaps in locations like Boat Harbour, Corlette and Nelson Bay.

Mr Brown said, 'The only true fix for this problem is to have Wollongong—the Knights Hill transmitter—and Newcastle—the Mount Sugarloaf transmitter—on different frequencies. However, this will be difficult as no frequencies are available. Adding more, smaller transmitters to provide additional alternative coverage will not provide a 100-per-cent fix to the problem. However, the solution that RBAH has proposed for the Hunter-Port Stephens region will significantly improve the situation. Viewers then need to re-point their antenna to new transmitters. An education-and-awareness campaign targeting affected households as to the benefits in pointing their antenna to the transmitters to optimise their reception and viewing experience is absolutely critical.'

We know that when the self-help transmitter commenced transmission at Anna Bay it provided a fix both to interference and to poor coverage areas in a majority of homes in Anna Bay and surrounding suburbs. When I receive calls from constituents who are still experiencing reception issues in those areas, on almost every occasion the viewer's antenna is not aligned to the optimal transmitter.

I agree with Mr Brown that viewers need to be informed of their options. The commercial broadcasters could assist by running community announcements to educate viewers. When I met with the broadcasters they advised me that if ACMA were unable to reallocate the clashing frequencies then the only other solution was three new sites—at Peppers Mountain in the Stroud region; at Wallaroo Forest to service Karuah, Medowie and Tilligerry Peninsula; and in the Bulahdelah area—plus power upgrades to existing sites, including Gan Gan, and the addition of commercial networks to the Vacy transmitter, that currently only broadcasts ABC and SBS. Despite the fact that Regional Broadcasting Australia Holdings fully funded the latest transmitter installation at Anna Bay to service their viewers, the broadcasters
advised that they were unwilling to deliver the proposed package that included similar transmitters without co-funding from the Commonwealth.

My question to Regional Broadcasting Australia is: why were you willing to fund a fix to the problem for your viewers in Anna Bay and surrounding areas while leaving the remaining viewers across my electorate in the dark? While I am extremely disappointed with the commercial broadcasters' request for taxpayers' funds to improve television reception in my electorate, I have met with both the Prime Minister and minister of Communications to ask for this project to be co-funded. I am pleased that both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Communications took the time to listen to my concerns and there is a plan in place.

For remaining households that should be able to access terrestrial signal, the broadcasters that profit from delivering advertising into viewers' homes have a responsibility to their advertisers and to their viewers to ensure the content can be seen. The recent retune has exacerbated an already frustrating situation. In fact, I questioned ACMA about the issue. The response I got from ACMA said, 'There are well-known spectrum constraints in the Newcastle, Sydney, Illawarra areas.' ACMA also advised me they had extensively consulted with broadcasters on this. In fact November 2010 was the first meeting of the restack planning advisory group which involved my regional broadcasters.

What concerns me is the next part. The group discussed these issues and plans for ways to address them. In July 2011 they presented the working group with two options for incorporating the block planning in the use of the channels. Option A was that Newcastle be co-channelled with Bowral and Mittagong, and Illawarra be co-channelled with the Central Coast. Option B was that Newcastle be co-channelled with the Illawarra as it was before and for the Central Coast to be co-channelled with Bowral and Mittagong.

In the government's view, through ACMA, the preferred option was option A. This would remove the problem of occasional interference by seasonal ducting through co-channeling down to the Central Coast. That was not a huge issue because the Central Coast in most parts can tune into the Sydney stations. But what we found in the July 2011 meeting was that none of the broadcasters in the Hunter supported option A. Their concern was that if people tuned in to the Sydney service in the event of a ducting event, they might never retune to regional services and therefore cost a loss of revenue. I say to them: you made a decision to increase this problem; you need to make a decision and fund the solution to this problem. I call on them to do it urgently.

This bill will also change aspects of captioning obligations for subscription television and the assessment of quality of captioning of live and pre-recoded broadcasts for free-to-air and subscription broadcasters. I welcome the changes proposed in the captioning of programs to further aid the vision impaired. My electorate of Paterson has one of the oldest demographics nationwide and features a high volume of aged care facilities where these concerns have been related to me. I am enthusiastic about the proposed changes to amend part 9D of the BSA to accommodate complaints in relation to captioning. According to the explanatory memorandum, the proposed changes aim to improve administration arrangements and increase flexibility for free-to-air broadcasters and subscription television licensees in complying with caption regulations.

Although, a lot of my constituents could argue what is the point of captioning—when a third of my constituents cannot even see the television screens let alone the captions. I have
spoken on this issue ad nauseam advocating for my constituents and I am disappointed in the fact that Regional Broadcasting Australia are yet to submit their proposal to build the additional towers in my electorate.

Shirley Brown, the new chair of RBA, has been in contact with my office and originally told me that this proposal would be submitted during the first sitting week of the parliament. I was then told that this proposal would be submitted on Monday 23 February. Now this has been delayed and I have been told the proposal will be submitted next Wednesday 4 March. I implore RBA to submit their proposal as soon as possible to ensure that we can get the construction underway and the upgrades done before next summer. We, unlike the previous government, will not be handing out money without doing our due diligence. So again I call on broadcasters to lodge their proposal urgently to ensure this infrastructure program is underway as soon as possible. I support this bill and commend it to the parliament.

Ms CHESTERS (Bendigo) (13:27): I rise to speak on the Broadcasting and Other Legislation Amendment (Deregulation) Bill 2014. In the few minutes that I have before this debate gets interrupted, I want to reflect on a few of the comments made by the previous speaker. I too am from a regional area, central Victoria, and we too have had our challenges when it comes to broadcasting and picking up channels, particularly on hot days. The reception does drop out. I do get the occasional phone call from people saying they are concerned because they have lost their television coverage whether it be for a sporting event or on bushfire days when they are making sure that they are able to keep in touch.

But what I get more calls about in my electorate when it comes to telecommunications is the lack of access to fast-speed broadband. So I would challenge the previous speaker on that because, for most other regional MPs, when it comes to telecommunications, the issue that we are most inundated about is having access to fast-speed broadband and reliable internet, and that is why the rollout of the NBN is so important.

As previous speakers have said, the Broadcasting and Other Legislation Amendment (Deregulation) Bill 2014 is fairly non-controversial, now that we have resolved the issue of captions. This bill was part of the government's so-called regulation repeal day. For most of the previous governments that we have had in this place, what is in this bill would be seen to be routine of government yet this government has taken a different approach and has basically put all this cleaning up, so to speak, into one particular big day and made a big noise about it.

This particular bill will only save the industry about $350,000 according to estimates by the Department of Communications. Having said that, this bill is fairly straightforward. It does talk about broadcasting. In my particular area, as I mentioned, broadcasting is quite topical. What we broadcast is also quite topical. At the moment, we are in the middle of the WNBL basketball finals. Being a basketball fan and a bit of a tragic when it comes to basketball, I was very upset to learn that this will be the last season that the WNBL will be broadcast on the ABC, ending a 35-year relationship between the ABC and the WNBL. So while this bill speaks specifically about some tidy-ups within the department—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 43. The debate may be resumed at a later hour. The honourable member for Bendigo will have leave to continue her remarks when the debate is resumed.
Mr MARLES (Corio) (13:29): I rise to speak about the Abbott government's proposed $157 million cut to family day care services and how this will unfairly impact on mums and dads in my community of Geelong. Services provided by the City of Greater Geelong support more than 350 children in the community, providing a much needed and valuable service often where there are no alternative forms of child care available. The government's proposed changes to funding for family day care will be a recipe for disaster for families in Geelong and pose a real risk to the capacity for both high-quality and affordable care to be provided.

The city has warned that these changes will mean that not only parents are forced to foot the bill with higher fees but jobs will also be lost through the reduction of support staff. Family Day Care Australia has warned that this will increase fees for parents by $35 a week. This presents another broken promise from the Liberal government. Before the election Tony Abbott pledged that he would make child care more accessible and affordable for parents. Now the families of Geelong are forced to pay the price for another Liberal breach of faith, another broken promise, that will cost local families dearly. Today I call on the government to immediately dump these proposed cuts and give Geelong families a fair go. The mums and dads of Geelong deserve better than Tony Abbott.

Queensland: Cyclone Marcia

Ms LANDRY (Capricornia) (13:31): I rise today to update the House on a catastrophic event that has impacted my electorate of Capricornia. On Friday, 20 February Cyclone Marcia struck the Capricorn Coast causing mass devastation. It first hit land near Shoalwater Bay as a category 5 cyclone. It impacted Yeppoon as a category 4 cyclone and directly hit the city of Rockhampton as a category 3 cyclone. A state disaster declaration is current for Rockhampton, Yeppoon and Marlborough districts.

People have been left shaken by this event. I want to send out a big thank you and acknowledge all of the people and professional services—police, fire and rescue, ambulance, weather bureau, council staff and volunteers like our SES crews, who are working tirelessly to help those affected. I particularly want to thank those workers making every effort to have the power restored to all homes in the affected areas. I thank all of those affected for their patience and the care and consideration they have shown to those worse off than them. I also acknowledge the work of the Australian Defence Force.

So far reports indicate that over 1,314 dwellings have been damaged, with 160 destroyed or severely damaged. Nearly 100,000 premises had no power directly after the impact and approximately 30,000 are still without power. At least 100 families still have no place to live. I am in constant contact with the disaster management centres. I gave the Deputy Prime Minister a debrief as we visited the devastated areas on Sunday as well as an update to the joint party room yesterday.

Organ and Tissue Donation

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (13:33): This morning the shores of Lake Burley Griffin were a sea of pink, yellow and white, as thousands of Canberrans turned out to take part in the annual Gift of Life's DonateLife Walk around the lake. It was fantastic to see so many Canberrans. There were students from St Clare's, Merici, Narrabundah College, Grammar and
the ANU. There were people from the private sector and the public sector. There were thousands of Canberrans out there showing support for organ and tissue donation. It was a wonderful event. It has gone from strength to strength. It is bigger and better every year.

Members know of my keen interest in organ and tissue donation and transplantation matters. I have seen firsthand the difference that transplantation can make to those who have been incredibly ill. I have also seen the difference it can make to families who take that enormous and difficult decision to donate their loved one’s organs. Many of them gain comfort knowing that something good has come from a sudden, unexpected and tragic death. They know they are saving and improving the lives of others. It is a selfless decision at a time of tragedy. I urge all members to continue to take a leadership role on this important issue. We need to ensure our loved ones are aware of our decision to donate our organs and tissues.

**Yarra Valley Grammar**

Mr SUKKAR (Deakin) (13:34): On 18 February I was pleased to welcome to Deakin His Excellency Sir Peter Cosgrove, along with his wife, Lady Cosgrove, and the Most Reverend Anglican Archbishop of Melbourne, Dr Philip Freier, for the official opening and dedication ceremony of Yarra Valley Grammar school’s recently completed science and maths building. Yarra Valley Grammar is very well known in my electorate of Deakin. It is a vibrant, independent Christian college that caters to students from early learning to year 12.

The new science and maths facility will replace the old science block, which was tragically destroyed by an electrical fire one day before the start of the 2012 school year, destroying nearly a third of the senior school campus. The school community responded to this disaster with a can-do attitude, with plans put in place to turn adversity into opportunity through ensuring a bigger and better facility rose from the ashes of what was lost. I was excited to tour the state-of-the-art facilities and also to answer some impromptu questions from the year 12 legal studies class, who are already using the facility. The building features six new science labs and nine maths classrooms and is equipped with world-class technology. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the whole school community for their resilience and in particular to Principal Mark Merry for his great work.

**McAuley Community Services for Women**

Mr WATTS (Gellibrand) (13:36): Last weekend I attended the inaugural Fed Up Lunch at Flemington Racecourse with almost 300 other Victorians to raise funds for McAuley Community Services for Women. McAuley provides vital services for women and their children who have experienced family violence. The event was organised by a group of five like-minded mates—Michael Jones, Toby Potter, Peter Fraser, Scott Walker and Nick Poole—who heard about McAuley’s work on the radio and wanted to help. They were fed up with family violence in our community and wanted to do their bit to make a difference.

After almost 12 months of planning—much of it at the pub—the Fed Up Lunch raised $30,000 for McAuley Community Services for Women. It was a massive effort. It is great to see that we are starting to see a shift in community attitudes towards this issue and that these kinds of local initiatives are starting to emerge. The funds raised by this lunch will be vital for McAuley in being able to continue to provide crucial assistance to women and their children who are escaping from family violence. There are a number of organisations like McAuley in Victoria who are desperately in need of funding to provide these critical services. Without
future funding for these organisations, many of the women and children who are experiencing family violence in our community will have nowhere to turn. It is great to see that members of our community, a group of mates with a common interest, are doing their bit to respond to this crisis and take a stand on these issues. I congratulate everyone involved and I look forward to attending many more Fed Up lunches in the future.

Hutchinson, Mr John

Mrs WICKS (Robertson) (13:37): I rise to honour the outgoing captain of the Central Coast Mariners Football Club, John Hutchinson, a well-known resident of my electorate of Robertson. 'Hutch', as he is locally known, recently announced that this will be his last season wearing the distinctive yellow and navy jersey. His record both on and off the pitch is outstanding and I know he will be missed for his control and vision on the ball in the Mariners' midfield and for his legacy in helping to build such a strong culture at the club. He has demonstrated loyalty, dedication and a fighting spirit that has resonated on the pitch, in the dressing room and in our community across the Central Coast, most recently as a Gosford Australia Day Ambassador.

As a foundation player, Hutch has competed in more than 260 competitive matches for the mighty Mariners, including in the AFC Champions League, the FFA Cup and the old pre-season cup. But it is in the A-League where his contribution has been the most significant. In this coming weekend's derby against the Newcastle Jets, he has the opportunity to become the equal most capped player, alongside Matt Thompson, in the 10-year history of the A-League, playing his 221st match. He became the Mariners' first championship winning captain in 2013 and also won the premiership with the club in 2008 and 2012.

My family and I are proud members of the Mariners and I am sure I speak for the 'yellow army' and football fans across the country in thanking John Hutchinson for his fantastic contribution to the Central Coast. You will be greatly missed.

Road Safety

Ms MacTIERNAN (Perth) (13:39): Progress on road safety requires a fiercely bipartisan commitment—each government needs to build on the work of the last to continue the momentum. I understand this, as I spent over seven years on the Ministerial Council on Transport. So a unilateral decision by the Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development to scrap the heavy haulage five-star safety rating scheme is irresponsible and wasteful. This project, which was to provide a clear market incentive for trucking companies to lift their game and improve road safety, was developed after a 13 per cent increase in road fatalities in New South Wales in 2009. It was supported by Liberal and Labor state governments and, indeed, was co-funded by the New South Wales Liberal government. Industry leader Ron Finemore chaired the steering group and there was strong commitment from the industry. Now it seems that a former National Party member got in the ear of the minister and nearly two years of hard work has been abandoned without discussion with this very senior committee and without any formal discussion with industry.

The 2014 crash statistics show 200 heavy haulage fatalities. This is a significant increase from the previous year and it demonstrates we have a very serious problem. We need to do more, not less. It is totally wrong to abandon the development of a system that has improved safety in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand. (Time expired)
Hinkler Electorate: Anzac Centenary Local Grants Program

Mr PITT (Hinkler) (13:41): I rise to acknowledge the great work of Malcolm Webb, the current president of the Woodgate RSL Sub Branch. I had the good fortune last week to attend the dedication of their new memorial, which was built with the help of a $10,000 grant from the federal government as part of the Centenary of ANZAC. It was a great pleasure to represent the minister on that day. But an important thing that I was not aware of until I arrived on that day, 19 February 2015, is that it was the anniversary of the commencement of the Dardanelles campaign. So they were very selective about the date they chose for the unveiling of those memorial. The event was well attended by members of the local community, a small beachside community, including Harry Smith, who came up from Hervey Bay. Harry, a retired lieutenant-colonel, was a platoon commander at the Battle of Long Tan in Vietnam. I would also like to thank Brian Tidyman, from the Hervey Bay RSL, who went out of his way to bring along the Anzac flame, one of only 20 Australia-wide, which the Hervey Bay RSL is recipient and keeper of, and show it around the electorate of Hinkler. It was a great opportunity.

The memorial has four pillars—representing the Army, Navy, Air Force and Nursing. You can imagine the dawn service at a memorial where the sun will peak over the top of the sand dunes on a beach that is 15 kilometres long and generally deserted. It will be a fabulous dedication to the men and women of the Australian services. I was very fortunate to be there, and certainly Woodgate is one of the best kept secrets in Australia.

Lalor Electorate: St Francis of Assisi Primary School

Ms RYAN (Lalor—Opposition Whip) (13:42): I rise today to pay tribute to St Francis of Assisi Primary School in my electorate. I visited there earlier this month to do a flag presentation at a whole school assembly and was absolutely thrilled to listen to the entire school sing both verses of the national anthem—which always makes me smile—as well as their school song. They do those things to celebrate learning, diversity and shared values.

After the assembly I met with parents. I was approached by one of the mothers in that community, Ana Matei. She came to speak to me to thank me personally because her family had received their permanent residency the week before. She asked me sincerely to bring her thanks to this place and send it to the other place. Permanent residency for Ana; for her husband, Marian; and for her children, Ana and Ilinca, is an important thing. Ana wanted everybody at Parliament House to know how much they appreciate it, what it will mean for her future and what it means for her children. She wanted to say a huge thank you to the Australian population and, in particular, the Australian parliament for allowing them to have permanent residency in our community.

Mallee Electorate: Wimmera Machinery Field Days

Mr BROAD (Mallee) (13:43): The Wimmera Machinery Field Days will be held from 3 to 5 March. This is a great event and I would encourage those of you who are not in this chamber to come along. One of the great things about the Wimmera Machinery Field Days is the volunteer committee that puts the event together. The event is a showcase of the latest developments in farming practice, machinery, equipment, technology and service. The field days committee has maintained a long charter to foster innovation and development in primary production and agribusiness. This event injects $3 million into the local economy.
and, more than that, there will be over $200 million worth of machinery on display. It is a great chance for you to buy a feed, catch up with a mate and perhaps buy a tractor. Everyone needs one of those!

The estimate of what the field days generate for the local economy is about $50 million in trade. There is the country gourmet pavilion, with lots of things to look at there, and the country lifestyle precinct. I will have staff attending all three days of the field days. Luckily for me, I will be out of here on Thursday and at the field days, so come along, say g'day and enjoy a wonderful day. My commendations to the people who are running this year's Wimmera Machinery Field Days.

Ovarian Cancer Australia Teal Ribbon Breakfast

Dr CHALMERS (Rankin) (13:45): This morning, Ovarian Cancer Australia put on the Teal Ribbon Breakfast here at Parliament House. It was very pleasing to see members from all parties attend that really important event where the Ovarian Cancer Australia friends talked about their national action plan for ovarian cancer research.

I want to pay tribute in particular to someone who was a great friend of mine and to this side of the House—and, indeed, to the member for Reid—Bridget Whelan. She wrote the introduction to this policy document—an introduction that was read out to the group. I still remember when Bridget was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. Today her message as a survivor of this dreadful disease was shared with the room. Bridget wrote: 'What women want is a cure. To us, it's that simple.'

Improving awareness among policymakers and also among the general community is vital to achieving that goal. That is why the work of people like Bridget and other survivors, like Paula Benson, the chair of Ovarian Cancer Australia, and all her colleagues is so important and so meaningful. The same goes for all the medical researchers who are involved in this crucial field.

The Prime Minister was there and the Leader of the Opposition; the health minister and the shadow health minister; and a whole range of colleagues. We all spare a thought for the brave sufferers and survivors of ovarian cancer and their families, and for the families of the thousand women who die from this disease each year in Australia.

Whelan, Ms Bridget

Mr LAUNDY (Reid) (13:46): I want to say thank you to my friend Jim, the member for Rankin. As I said in my maiden speech, I actually come from a Labor family. The New South Wales right is a very strong part of the Labor Party family. Paul Whelan, Bridget's father, and my father are very good friends. I went through school with Bridge, and her older brother John is one of my best mates. Bridge is still one of my best mates. Bridge is that good a mate that, when I lost my marbles and decided to do what I am doing now, Bridge rang and I picked up the phone. She had not long left Mark Arbib's employ and had seen what the job did to Mark and his family. I have three young kids. Bridge said, 'Look, I want to talk you out of this.' I spent an hour on the phone with Bridge. She was going through the worst of times—confronting the battles that she has confronted—and here she was, thinking of me and my family.

She is an amazing woman. What she wrote—Jim, you are right—she tried to deliver in Melbourne a few weeks ago, but she only got through a couple of lines. She is an amazing
woman. It is an amazing cause and we need to do all we can in government. They asked for funding today, and we need both sides to come together and make it a reality. To Bridge: well done.

**Kruger, Mr Alec**

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari) (13:48): Alec Kruger was born at Donkey Camp on the banks of the Katherine River on Christmas Day, 1924. His mother, Yrambul Nungarai, or Polly, was a Mudpurra woman from Wave Hill. She married Frank Kruger, the son of German and Irish immigrants. As a child of mixed Aboriginal descent, Alec was subject to the Aboriginal Ordinances of 1911 and at the age of three he was taken away from his family and institutionalised. He was a member of the stolen generations.

At the age of 10, Alec was sent to Loves Creek Station to work for the Bloomfield family. He was immediately put to work helping with the driving and mustering of cattle and wild horses. In 1942 he discovered, oddly, that the Bloomfields were not paying his wages into a trust for him. Kruger was legally bound to the Bloomfield's employ and could not leave them without their permission. He planned his escape from the Bloomfields, waiting patiently for them to take him into Alice Springs to sell cattle from the 1942 muster.

While they were away from their camp in Alice Springs he sneaked to the Army barracks and joined up, terminating his employment with the Bloomfields. By 1945, he was discharged from the Army. He later held various jobs working as a gardener, driver and deckhand in Darwin. In 1955, he met and married Nita Palmer. He was a great family man.

During the 1970s he became involved with politics, working for various Aboriginal organisations. He lost his case, in the High Court, as a member of the stolen generations. His great autobiography is called *Alone on the Soaks*. His is a life we should all remember. He was a great Australian and I am looking forward to attending his funeral next Thursday.

**Papua New Guinea**

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (13:50): I was delighted to join you, Mr Deputy Speaker Scott, and my co-chair of the Parliamentary Friends of Papua New Guinea, the member for Corio, to welcome to the House today our colleagues and friends from the Papua New Guinea parliament who are with us in the chamber. It highlights the importance of our relationship with our nearest neighbouring country. As we discussed, I think every member of parliament's first trip should be to Papua New Guinea, before they go anywhere else.

The gentleman and colleagues who are with us today represent two of the most difficult seats in the Western Province. They face not only the tyranny of distance but the tyranny of topography as well, with very difficult challenges in health and access. They are doing a remarkable job in delivering services to their members out in those difficult areas. That is why I was delighted to be invited about 10 days go to the opening of the new Pacific International Hospital in Port Moresby.

This hospital is outstanding. In fact, I predict people will want to be medivacced out of Australia to this hospital. It boasts the best facilities I have seen. It has everything—X-rays, CAT scans, pathology labs, dialysis machines and four operating theatres—and is staffed by some of the best doctors and nurses from around the world. I congratulate Doctors Amyna and Mohammed Sultan for their absolute determination to make this project a reality.
Budget

Ms McGOWAN (Indi) (13:51): Budget cuts to local government have had a huge impact in Indi. Let me explain: with a budget of 60 million, a population of 6,000 and over 6,600 square kilometres, Towong is one of the smallest councils in Victoria. Towong has a reputation for being innovative, efficient and punching well above its weight.

The Commonwealth's financial assistance grant of $3.6 million represents 22 per cent of the council's income. Over three years, the indexation freeze amounts to a loss of income of over $658,000. In Towong, a one per cent rate increase yields $47,000. This, along with new rate capping measures in Victoria, means that lost funding cannot be recouped through rate increases.

Towong works hard to be financially responsible and, over the past five years, has generated internal savings over $400,000. There is simply no fat left to cut.

Council is now looking to reduce services such as immunisation, maternal and child health, mobile library, road maintenance, transfer station operating hours and even public toilet cleaning on weekends. In Towong’s case it is the community that will suffer due to the indexation freeze—communities that cannot go without services and infrastructure that larger regional and metropolitan areas take for granted.

I call on the government to reverse the decision to freeze indexation in the next budget and stop hurting our small rural councils.

Hume Electorate: Cowra Business Chamber Awards

Cowra Main Street Refurbishment

Mr TAYLOR (Hume) (13:53): I was fortunate to be able to attend the Cowra Business Chamber awards a couple of weekends ago in Cowra of course. There was a room of innovative small businessmen and women—the backbone of the local economy in Cowra.

I would like to congratulate all nominees and award winners on the night. Special mention must go to Brooks Beds R Us for winning the Excellence in Business Award; and to Brumby Aircraft—an extraordinarily innovative business in Cowra that I have talked about before in this place—who were presented with the Extraordinary Business Achievement Award for their export deal with China.

There is also some innovation along Cowra's main street for the next few months. I have an electorate office in Kendal Street, and the block right outside my office is undergoing a revamp. A multimillion dollar investment will see the four main blocks of town transformed, and I am assured by council the wait will be worthwhile.

Heavy vehicles have been bypassing the main street roadworks and travelling right past Cowra Public School. Parents contacted my office to see what could be done about the danger of the school pedestrian crossing now being located right next to a roundabout for heavy vehicles.

I am pleased to announce, after representations from my office, that Cowra Council is now operating the roundabout with flashing lights and personnel each school afternoon. It is hoped that when the streetscape is finished in a couple of months a more permanent solution can be found for heavy vehicles through town.
Richmond Electorate: Anzac Centenary Grants

Mrs ELLIOT (Richmond) (13:54): I rise today to update the House on the Anzac Centenary grants program in my electorate of Richmond. I had the great pleasure recently in announcing that the Tweed Heads & Coolangatta RSL Sub Branch will receive $53,000 in federal funding to host a re-enactment of the Gallipoli landing on Anzac Day this year in 2015. I was pleased to announce that with the secretary of the RSL, Dr John Griffin.

The Gallipoli re-enactment will occur in the Jack Evans Boat Harbour at Tweed Heads prior to the Dawn Service on Anzac Day 2015. It is expected that thousands will attend this very important Anzac Day commemorative event.

I would like to congratulate the Tweed Heads & Coolangatta RSL Sub Branch on this important project. This will be a major event and an important opportunity to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the First World War and to recognise and honour all those who served our nation.

I was also very pleased recently to be in Byron Bay announcing that the Byron Bay RSL Sub Branch will receive $39,400 in federal funding to refurbish the existing Byron Bay War Memorial gates and build a cenotaph wall. This grant will go towards improving and refurbishing those existing memorial gates, the construction of a new cenotaph and a research project by local schoolchildren on the First World War veterans whose names appear on the pillars of the memorial gates.

I congratulate the Byron Bay RSL Sub Branch on this important project, the Tweed Heads & Coolangatta RSL and the groups within my electorate who will be receiving the Anzac Centenary grants. I look forward to commemorating the centenary of the First World War with all of those wonderful organisations.

Food Labelling

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (13:56): I believe that the free market is the greatest tool that we have to increase the prosperity, wellbeing and opportunities for all citizens. In many circumstances, government interference in the market makes the problem worse. There are limited areas where government intervention can facilitate the efficient working of the free market—and they include the prevention of coercion, abuse of market power and misleading conduct.

That brings me to the issue of food labelling. We have recently had Australian consumers infected with hepatitis A from eating contaminated berries. We can ask: how could mixed berries be contaminated by hepatitis A? One way is when raw human sewerage is used as a cheap fertiliser—a practice still used in China today.

I am happy to buy my shoes, clothing and electronics from China but, having travelled extensively there, I can tell you: when it comes to food grown in China, especially berries, I will pass. But how can I pass, if products sold on the market today such as berries have a label saying: 'Packed in Australia from imported fruit.' Imported from where?

The nondisclosure of the country of origin simply reduces market pressure on that country to get in and clean up its act. I appreciate the complexity of some food production, but the nondisclosure of where food is grown is simply misleading conduct and should be captured under our existing laws.

CHAMBER
Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month

Ms CLAYDON (Newcastle) (13:57): Today is Teal Ribbon Day, and I rise to share the story of an ovarian cancer survivor and good friend of mine, Victoria Phillis. Each year 1400 women in Australia, like Victoria, are diagnosed with ovarian cancer and 1,000 lose their battle with the disease.

Ovarian cancer can be difficult to diagnose with symptoms that often mirror less serious and more common health problems. Thankfully, Victoria did not ignore her symptoms and persisted with health professionals to get a correct and early diagnosis, and is now a 14-year survivor.

Importantly, today also marks the launch of National Action Plan for ovarian cancer research. A coordinated approach to research is a critical part of Ovarian Cancer Australia’s 25/25 vision, aimed at improving the five-year survival rate of ovarian cancer by 25 per cent by the year 2025. Central to this vision is the need to improve awareness and early diagnosis; improve the identification of women at greatest risk; and increase access to effective treatments and care.

My electorate of Newcastle hosts world leaders in ovarian cancer research like Dr Nikola Bowden from the University of Newcastle and Hunter Medical Research Institute. A coordinated approach to research will enable Dr Bowden and her colleagues to help more women like Victoria survive beyond five years from diagnosis. I have pledged my support for the 25/25 vision and encourage others to do so.

Kitchen, Mr Jack

Mr VAN MANEN (Forde) (13:59) I would like to acknowledge young Jack Kitchen today in the House. Young Jack suffered the loss of his father in a tragic accident last year, and this weekend he is competing in the Jimboomba Stadium Cross.

He has always had a love of motocross, and his father built a motocross track on their family property and, while building that, he lost his life. Jack's mother said that he always wanted to go out on a track and race with his father but, over the last few months, he has ceased to do that.

The local motocross community, including people from across Australia, have rallied to help support the family. I wish young Jack every success in his ride in the Jimboomba Stadium Cross this weekend. (Time expired)

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

MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:00): I inform the House that the Minister for Trade and Investment will be absent from question time today and tomorrow, as he is leading a business delegation to New Zealand, including major Australian infrastructure companies. The Minister for Foreign Affairs will answer questions on his behalf.
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Australian Human Rights Commission

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs—Deputy Manager of Opposition Business) (14:00): My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs representing the Attorney-General. Yesterday I asked the minister what senior role was offered to the President of the Australian Human Rights Commission, what consultation occurred with other senior members of the government and whether this role was offered with the authority of the Prime Minister. The minister said she would come back to the House with an answer. What was the alternative role the government wanted Professor Triggs to take?

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (14:01): I can advise that no such offer was made.

Foreign Investment

Ms SCOTT (Lindsay) (14:01): My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister please advise the House of the steps the government is taking to ensure Australia's foreign investment framework is properly enforced?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:01): I thank the member for Lindsay for her question. I know her area very well, having lived there for 12 months back in the 1980s. Her area, and Sydney more generally, is full of aspirational people who want to buy their own home. Home ownership is the great Australian dream and the government's job is to ensure that there are no needless obstacles placed in the way of people realising this great dream.

Some 80 per cent of first home buyers buy an established residential property, and they should not face illegal competition from non-resident foreigners. It is illegal to buy an existing residential property if you are a non-resident foreigner. This is the law as it has been in place for many, many years. I think it was the Hawke government that put this law in place. But I regret to say that the law against non-resident foreigners purchasing existing residential properties was not enforced under the former government. Not once. There were no prosecutions, no divestment orders were made—not one.

Mr Husic interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Chifley will desist.

Mr ABBOTT: This was a government that could do lots of things. It could put in a carbon tax, it could put in a mining tax, it could stop the live cattle trade, it could start the people-smuggling trade. But one thing it could not do was enforce the laws against non-resident foreigners purchasing existing residential property.

Ms Owens interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Parramatta will desist.

Mr ABBOTT: This government and this country welcome foreign investment, and foreigners are welcome to purchase new residential property because we want to increase the stock of residential property available to people. But it has got to be the right investment on the right terms that advance our national interests. The Foreign Investment Review Board does have to be properly financed. Every year, quite rightly, the Foreign Investment Review Board handles literally thousands of applications because, quite rightly, people from overseas find Australia an attractive place to invest. But it does need to be properly financed. The
people who make the applications to the Foreign Investment Review Board should be funding it, and so there will be an application fee regime established—much the same as exists in New Zealand but much less than the 15 per cent tax impost which is placed on foreign property acquisitions in Singapore and Hong Kong.

Yet again this is an example of this government getting on with the job and dealing with the real issues facing the people of Australia, and home ownership is as vital as any of them.

**Australian Human Rights Commission**

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:05): My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, representing the Attorney-General. In light of the foreign minister’s answer, how does that answer sit with the following exchange from estimates yesterday:

Senator WONG: So a specific role was mentioned by the Attorney in his conversation with you?

Mr Moraitis, Secretary of the Attorney-General’s Department said:

Yes, and we conveyed that to Professor Triggs.

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (14:05): Yesterday in estimates the Secretary of the Attorney-General’s Department said that no inducement was offered to Gillian Triggs and that she was not asked to resign. I have spoken to the Secretary of the Attorney-General’s Department this morning and he confirmed to me that Professor Triggs was not asked to resign, that she was not offered an inducement to resign, and I would back the Secretary of the Attorney-General’s Department over anyone on that side. If that is what the Secretary of the Attorney-General’s Department said, then I believe the Secretary of the Attorney-General’s Department.

Mr Shorten: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. In light of the strong endorsement by the foreign minister of the Secretary of the Attorney-General's Department.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Mr Shorten: I seek to table the secretary of the department's words.

The SPEAKER: Is leave granted? It is already on the public record.

Mr Shorten: It is indeed, Madam Speaker.

**Foreign Investment**

Mr VARVARIS (Barton) (14:06): My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer outline to the House why it is essential to strengthen our foreign investment framework for residential real estate and agriculture?

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney—The Treasurer) (14:06): I thank the honourable member for Barton for asking a question that is relevant to the Australian people and something of great interest to people in his electorate. With the Prime Minister I went with the member for Barton to Kogarah this morning where we met with potential home purchasers and met with a local real estate agent, and we were able to better understand some of the challenges that many people face right around the country in being able to purchase a home—their first home.

Importantly, it is very important that we have integrity in the foreign investment regime of Australia. It is very important to have integrity. So we have announced today, after a period of
consultation with the community, that we are going to impose a civil penalty regime on people from overseas who purchase existing Australian real estate and do not get proper approval. There is also going to be a fee regime for any foreigner who wants to buy Australian residential real estate. It will be $5,000 for any purchase under $1 million and $10,000 for any foreigner who wants to buy Australian real estate between $1 million and $2 million, and then it will increase by $10,000 for every $1 million after that. The same will apply in agricultural land. We are also going to set up a register so that we can better understand who is buying what.

It is vitally important for the Australian people not only that we have laws—certainty in fact—around the foreign investment regime but also that the laws are enforced. That is hugely important. So I thought, 'Why haven't Labor done that? Why didn't Labor actually impose proper penalties? Why didn't Labor enforce the laws?' Do you know what I found? I found a press release from the member for McMahon—our old friend, 'bungling Bowen'—from 18 December 2009. That is my wedding anniversary, actually. As Assistant Treasurer, Mr Bowen said:

Temporary residents will be exempted from notification of proposed acquisitions of established residential real estate for their own residence, new residential real estate and vacant residential land. Further, the restriction preventing student visa holders from purchasing a property valued at over $300,000 will be removed.

So he was removing all the checks and balances. The problem was that his own successor, Nick Sherry, in 2010 said that that was a really bad idea from the member for McMahon. He said that the new provisions that he was announcing—in 2010—would 'mean that anyone trying to flout Australia's strict foreign investment rules will face tough new penalties that will be fully enforced'. The problem was that Labor never enforced them—not once. We are the best friends of Australian consumers. We are the best friends of households.

**Australian Human Rights Commission**

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:10): My question is to the Prime Minister. Yesterday the Secretary of the Attorney-General's Department was asked about Professor Triggs:

Did you understand that he wanted her to resign?

And Mr Moraitis replied:

That was an option I understood from that discussion.

But today the Prime Minister directly contradicted the secretary of the department. So, Prime Minister, who is telling the truth?

**Government members interjecting—**

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:10): That is right: not the Leader of the Opposition. I stand by the comments that I made in this parliament yesterday and I stand by the comments I made earlier today in Sydney. The bottom line here is that there was an inquiry into children in detention. It did not take place when there were 2,000 children in detention under members opposite. It did not take place then, because the president of the Human Rights Commission had a discussion with Labor ministers and thought that it would be a political inquiry. So, having refused to have a political inquiry when there were almost
2,000 children in detention, she goes ahead and has a political inquiry when there are under 200 children in detention.

Mr Dreyfus: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The Prime Minister is making no attempt to be relevant to the question that he has been asked. Direct relevance is what is called for.

The SPEAKER: The member will resume his seat. The Prime Minister has the call.

Mr ABBOTT: Madam Speaker, let me make it crystal clear. Members of the government are happy to take any number of questions on this subject, because the president of the commission has not been asked to resign and no inducement has been offered. The president of the commission herself seems to agree that no inducement has been offered. All of these questions indicate that this government has succeeded in stopping the boats and getting children out of detention, which is the real issue. Getting children out of detention is the real issue. This government has succeeded; members opposite monumentally failed.

Agriculture

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (14:12): My question is to the Minister for Agriculture. Given Chinese government owned company Shenhua's Watermark coalmine is about to be developed in the heart of the Liverpool Plains, what have you, as Minister for Agriculture, and your government done to protect the Liverpool Plains from mining and what will you do to stop this mine going ahead and irreversibly damaging some of the best agricultural land in Australia? Doesn't massive coalmining in the heart of some of the most fertile farmland in the country demonstrate the failure of the National Party to stand up for farmers against the mining industry?

Mr McCormack: What have you ever done for farmers? You're a disgrace.

The SPEAKER: The parliamentary secretary will desist. The Minister for Agriculture has the call.

Mr JOYCE (New England—Minister for Agriculture) (14:13): I thank the honourable member for his question.

Mr Champion interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Wakefield is pushing his luck.

Mr JOYCE: Might I remind the House—to get the chronology of this right—that the exploration rights for that mine were granted by the Labor Party for $300 million, by a minister who has been called to be corrupt by ICAC—former Minister Macdonald. You would remember him, wouldn't you—one of yours? So what we on this side were handed are the actions of a corrupt minister, and we are trying—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr JOYCE: It looks like some people on that side might know him better than others. So I am happy that you asked me a question about the actions of a corrupt Labor Party minister and what they have done and how we are trying to deal with this issue. I acknowledge that the only area we now have to deal with it is under the water trigger, but we can only deal with it in a specific area. We are looking at this. We are doing our very best in the very limited area we have, because of state legislation and because a corrupt Labor Party minister set this up.

Honourable members interjecting—

CHAMBER
The SPEAKER: There will be silence on both sides of the House!

Foreign Investment

Dr GILLESPIE (Lyne) (14:14): My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development. Would the Deputy Prime Minister please update the House on what actions this government has taken to ensure sustainable foreign investment in agricultural land and agribusiness?

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development) (14:15): I thank the honourable member for his question. He, like most Australians, appreciates that over the years Australia has depended very heavily on agriculture and our farming industries to underpin our national economy. For more than a hundred years it was said that our country rode on the sheep’s back, and wool and other farm industries certainly underpinned our national economy. But over recent times there has been a growing interest in the importance of our agricultural land, particularly in these days of food security concerns and growing populations around the world, and our precious agricultural resources are regarded very highly around the world.

We have always had foreign investment in agriculture in Australia. You can go right back to 1788. From then onwards, there has been foreign investment in agriculture, and that investment has played an important role in developing modern agriculture, bringing new technology to our country. But we have a right as a nation to be sure that investments in our country are not contrary to the national interest.

Over recent times, there has been an explosion in foreign purchases of land in this country. In Queensland, the only state that has a register of foreign land ownership, the level of foreign land ownership has trebled over the last decade, under the watch of the previous Labor government. They stood by and did absolutely nothing.

Mr Perrett interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Moreton, if he wishes to stay, will cease interjecting.

Mr TRUSS: They had a trigger in place for reporting to the Foreign Investment Review Board, but it was so high that there was no farm in the country that would ever set off the trigger—would ever, in fact, have to be reviewed. Under Labor, a foreign investor could come in and buy every single farm in Australia without ever having to ask. They could have bought every farm in the country without ever having to ask. But, of course, if a foreign investor wanted to buy a little house in the town near the farms that he had bought, he did have to go to the Foreign Investment Review Board to get approval. Under Labor, any farm was for sale, but for houses in town you had to ask. This was simply not a policy that was in our national interest.

Mr Brough interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Fisher will desist. You will withdraw.

Mr TRUSS: We are making a decisive change. Once the purchases reach $15 million or the purchase is valued at $15 million, Foreign Investment Review Board approval will have to be sought.

Ms Owens interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Parramatta is warned!
Mr TRUSS: This means that we will have an understanding of what level of foreign ownership there is in our country. We will still welcome investment that is in our national interest, but we will know what is happening, and we will have a say to ensure that our precious agricultural land is used productively also for future generations.

**Australian Human Rights Commission**

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:18): My question is to the Prime Minister. Does the Prime Minister believe that the Secretary of the Attorney-General's Department gave truthful evidence to Senate estimates yesterday?

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: There will be silence on my left!

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:18): Of course I have full confidence in the Secretary of the Attorney-General's Department, and I have absolute faith in the veracity of the Secretary of the Attorney-General's Department. I welcome this line of questioning though, because what it emphasises is the core problem, and this is why this government has lost confidence in the President of the Human Rights Commission.

The President of the Human Rights Commission chose not to inquire into children in detention when there were almost 2,000 in detention, because she consulted with Labor ministers and decided that the inquiry would be political. But, having refused to have a political inquiry in the time of the Labor government, she goes right ahead and has a political inquiry under this government, even though the number of children in detention has fallen from almost 2,000 to under 200. So there is a 90 per cent reduction in the number of children in detention—90 per cent plus, almost a 95 per cent reduction in the number of children in immigration detention—thanks to the policies of this government, thanks to our stopping the boats, and this is when the President of the Human Rights Commission decides to have an inquiry.

Like the President of the Human Rights Commission, I want to see the children out of detention. The only way to get the children out of detention is to stop those boats, and that is exactly what this government has done. That is exactly what members opposite were not capable of doing. And that is why the most compassionate thing you can do, the best thing you can do, is stop the boats. You failed; we succeeded.

**Economy**

Ms MARINO (Forrest—Government Whip) (14:20): My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer outline the importance of building a strong and prosperous economy for all Australians?

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney—The Treasurer) (14:20): I thank the honourable member for Forrest for her question. I know that when she engages with her local community—because I have been there—so much of the focus is about jobs, about prosperity and about how we can have a better quality of life and even leave a better quality of life to our children or grandchildren, as the case might be. And we can do that through jobs, growth and opportunity. Since coming to government we have worked away at those three key beacons that are going to help to drive the future of Australia.
Jobs: since we have come to government, an average of 600 jobs a day has been created, as compared with 200 jobs a day under Labor. And jobs also come about by removing the shackles on business. We got rid of the mining tax—the great moment of pride for the member for Lilley, who I see is actually still here. The mining tax, which he saw as a great success story, was a handbrake on mining investment.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: There will be silence on my left, particularly from the member for Rankin.

Mr HOCKEY: We got rid of the mining tax and we got rid of the carbon tax, which was a burden not just on business but on every household to the tune of $550 a year. And we got rid of the red tape on business, getting rid of $2 billion of red tape burden, particularly on small business. Seventeen thousand pages of regulation and red tape we got rid of in our first year of government, and that is just jobs.

Ms Butler interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Griffith will cease.

Mr HOCKEY: How do you boost growth? Well, one of the signature policies that we delivered in the last budget was, in fact, the biggest infrastructure program in Australia’s history. We announced the equivalent of eight new Snowy Mountains schemes to be built over the next decade—projects such as WestConnex in Sydney, the Gateway Motorway project in Brisbane and the North-South Corridor in Adelaide. We have committed to those projects, and we committed to the East West project in Melbourne, which has now been ripped up by a Labor government, along with the Labor Party ripping up 7,000 jobs. How proud they are. How proud the Labor Party are not only to see 600 people sacked in Melbourne because of that project not going ahead but that they have stopped the creation of 7,000 new jobs. Shame, Labor, shame.

Of course, it is about opportunity. Where is the opportunity for Australia’s growth and prosperity going to come from in the future? That is one of the reasons why we have signed three new trade agreements with some of our biggest trading partners. That opens the door to small business, opens the door to jobs and opens the door of opportunity for everyday Australians. We are getting on with the job of governing the country in the best interests of the Australian people.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (14:24): Before I call the honourable the Leader of the Opposition, I wish to advise the House that we have with us today the Deputy Speaker of Papua New Guinea, the Hon. Aide Ganasi, accompanied by committee chairs and staff from the Papua New Guinea parliament and the Papua New Guinea Pacific Parliamentary Partnership Project in the Queensland parliament. Their visit is part of a program coordinated by their parliaments, the Australian parliament and the Centre for Democratic Institutions at the ANU. We make you very welcome.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!
Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:24): My question is to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, how is it possible to view the following evidence from the Attorney-General yesterday as anything other than seeking a resignation and offering another job? I quote Attorney-General Brandis:

It was my wish that Professor Triggs, having reflected on her position, would recognise that it was untenable and was doing the commission harm … I did say to Mr Moraitis that I hoped Professor Triggs could be encouraged or would be willing to serve the government in other capacities …

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:25): I do not know what Shorten QC is trying to establish here, but all he is establishing is that he is not interested in the real issues that concern the Australian people. Yet again, Canberra insider nonsense—that is all this is. Canberra insider nonsense is all he is interested in, while every day this government is getting on with the job of looking after the Australian people.

This government has lost confidence in the President of the Human Rights Commission. We have lost confidence in the President of the Human Rights Commission—

Ms Plibersek: Why did you offer her another job, then?

The SPEAKER: There will be silence on my left.

Mr ABBOTT: because she thought it was political to have an inquiry into children in detention when, under Labor, there were 2,000 of them but somehow it was okay to have a politicised inquiry into children in detention when, under this coalition government, there are fewer than 200 of them. We have lost confidence in the President of the Human Rights Commission because she thought it was somehow okay to recommend $300,000 in taxpayers' money to be paid to someone who murdered his wife and his child— that a wife and child murderer should be paid $300,000 because the government had the hide to keep this person in detention because he would obviously have been a menace to the community. If members opposite think that people like that should be compensated—they had better stand up and explain themselves to the Australian people. It is precisely because people like that have no judgement—members opposite have no judgement—that they are engaging in this kind of grubby nitpicking now.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: There will be silence on my left.

Ms Plibersek: Why did you offer her another job, then?

The SPEAKER: The member for Sydney! Once again, we are hearing a cacophony of noise, which is building to a wall of noise and will not be tolerated. If it continues, there will be many people who will have to leave the chamber.

Mr Brendan O'Connor interjecting—

The SPEAKER: We will begin with the member for Gorton, who may leave under 94(a) now.

The member for Gorton then left the chamber.
Iraq and Syria

Mrs McNAMARA (Dobell) (14:27): My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. I refer the minister to the three British schoolgirls who have travelled to Syria to take part in the terrorist conflict. Will the minister update the House on what the government is doing to prevent young Australian women leaving to participate in the Syria and Iraq conflict?

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (14:28): I thank the member for Dobell for her question, and I recognise her deep concern in relation to this national security issue. The government is taking strong action to address the evolving threat posed by foreign fighters. Sadly, we are seeing a younger cohort seeking to join the conflict in Syria and Iraq and an increasing number of young females. Members of this House will no doubt feel deeply for the frantic family and friends of three British schoolgirls who are thought to have travelled to Syria to join Daesh. It is hard not to be pessimistic about their fate.

But Australia has our share of such stories, some with tragic results. Family and friends of a 22-year-old girl from the Gold Coast were devastated last year when she was murdered within days of arriving in Syria. Her death was not martyrdom; it was a tragic, senseless loss. Yet more women are either joining their foreign fighter husbands or apparently seeking to find partners—the so-called jihadi brides—or are otherwise providing support for terrorist organisations. Some are joining all-female groupings which impose Daesh’s sick and misguided doctrine on other women in Daesh-controlled areas. According to estimates, women now account for nearly one-fifth of all foreign fighters. Over 500 women are believed to have come from Western countries. Thirty to 40 Australian women are known to be either engaging in or supporting terrorist activity in Syria, Iraq and here in Australia.

This defies logic given we know the attitude of Daesh towards women. If the killings and executions are not enough, Daesh has published instructions on the treatment of sexual slaves, which includes raping and beating women. Even children are not immune, with instructions encouraging sexual assault on girls who have not yet reached puberty.

Young women are joining Daesh, yet they are being exploited in the most appalling way. They are being used by men who know nothing but hate, used as sexual slaves, manipulated for propaganda and recruitment purposes and in some cases ending their lives as suicide bombers. Many are being radicalised online, seduced by slick exploitation of social media to spread Daesh’s depraved narrative.

The coalition government is committed to countering the propaganda that terrorist groups are spreading online, but family and friends are likely to be the first to see changes in young people who are radicalising. Family and friends need to reach out to young people at risk before it is too late. The government will work with them. Through a range of community programs the government is taking firm steps to combat the radicalisation of young Australians, including women and girls, to keep this country safe from terrorism.

MOTIONS

Attorney-General

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:31): I seek leave to move a motion of censure against the Attorney-General:
Leave not granted.

Mr SHORTEN: I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the Leader of the Opposition from moving the following motion forthwith:

That the House censures the Attorney-General:

(1) for launching an unprecedented attack on the Australian Human Rights Commission designed to undermine its independence;

(2) for treating an independent statutory office holder with contempt; and

(3) for directing the Secretary of the Department of Attorney-General to offer an inducement to the President of the Australian Human Rights Commission in return for her resignation.

Prime Minister of Australia, lying is not insider nonsense. It is proof that the Attorney-General and his government have failed the test of leadership. Yesterday you plumbed a new depth in using the power of the executive branch—

Mr Abbott: Madam Speaker, this is a suspension motion. It is not a censure motion, and it is not permitted under the standing orders to accuse people of lying.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition has the call, and the point the Prime Minister makes is true. Address your marks to the censure motion and desist from unparliamentary language. In fact, withdraw.

Honourable members interjecting—

Mr SHORTEN: Yesterday and today we have seen a shocking attack by the most powerful man in Australia upon the president—

The SPEAKER: I will have silence. The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat.

Mr Abbott: Madam Speaker, he has used an unparliamentary term, and he should withdraw it.

The SPEAKER: I ask the honourable Leader of the Opposition to withdraw.

Mr SHORTEN: I withdraw.

Yesterday and today we have seen the Attorney-General and the rest of his government reach a new and shocking low. When people like the Attorney-General or the Prime Minister of Australia, with all of the power of government, use their positions to bully and intimidate independent statutory office holders then we should suspend standing orders to discuss this matter. The actions yesterday—and as much as the Prime Minister and Attorney-General want to say it is not the real issue—when powerful men in remarkable positions of strength use their authority not to lead the nation but to attack critics then we have a severe problem with the strength of our community and our government in this country.

I understand that the Prime Minister, the Attorney-General and members of the government may not approve of the President of the Human Rights Commission's report, but what I do not understand is that, rather than dealing with the issues in the report, what they have done is attack her character. They have attacked her character. What we also saw yesterday was the embarrassing and scandalous situation where the President of the Human Rights Commission was forced to sit two people down from the Attorney-General, a target as the Attorney-General turned on her and attacked her. Then we saw she had to put up with the assassination of her character by the Attorney-General and by this man. We have seen an assassination of
character. This is the tool in trade. I believe Australians are sick and tired of an angry Tony Abbott. I believe Australians are sick and tired of the constant overreach of the Prime Minister of Australia.

Being Prime Minister of Australia is a remarkable privilege. It is a bully pulpit to be able to advocate ideas.

The SPEAKER: I would remind the Leader of the Opposition that this is a suspension motion.

Mr SHORTEN: Yes. But what we mean is, whilst it is a bully pulpit, it is not a pulpit for bullies, and that is what we are seeing with this government. We should suspend standing orders because what we have seen with this attack on the President of the Human Rights Commission is a new low by the most powerful man in Australia against an upright, proper and decent woman. We have seen in this attack by the Prime Minister the classic overreach of the angry Prime Minister. He says that he does not like what she has written, so therefore she must resign.

We have seen word games played by this government. When is a resignation not a resignation? When Tony Abbott and George Brandis ask for it. When is an inducement not an inducement? When these ministers and the Attorney-General offer it. The President of the Human Rights Commission understood perfectly well what was happening when the secretary of the department came along and said, 'I'm sorry to tell you this, but the Attorney-General's lost confidence in you; the government's lost confidence in you.' You cannot sack this statutory office holder. There is a clear implication if you say to this independent statutory office holder, 'the government has lost confidence in you, but you cannot be sacked'; there is only one course of action being asked for by these powerful people—the Attorney-General and his leader, the Prime Minister—it is clearly putting pressure on her to resign.

Then we hear about the embarrassing spectacle that no job was offered. Today the foreign minister gave a strong and appropriate defence of the Secretary of the Attorney-General's Department. She certainly defends the secretary of the department; she said he is a very truthful person. We agree. We think he is a truthful person. What we do not believe is that we are hearing the truth from the Attorney-General or from this Prime Minister.

You can just see the decision-making in the inner sanctum of this government—at least the bits that we have not seen already leaked. They would have sat around and said: 'We want this woman gone. We want her out of the position.' That is what they would have said. You can see them saying: 'George, send a messenger to get rid of the messenger. Send her the message that we no longer have confidence but if she does the right thing and fits in with the agenda of this government we will find her a job somewhere else.' Unfortunately for this government and its bullying ways, the President of the Australian Human Rights Commission was not playing ball.

Prime Minister, I think you underestimate many Australians when you dismiss this matter as an 'insider issue'. I think there are a lot of Australians who have been appalled by your conduct and your character assassination of this President of the Australian Human Rights Commission. I think you have reminded a lot of Australians what they deep-down feel about you, that you are a—
The SPEAKER: I would remind the Leader of the Opposition that this is a suspension motion.

Mr SHORTEN: It is a suspension of standing orders motion. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The SPEAKER: Then kindly refer to it.

Mr SHORTEN: It is important to suspend standing orders because Australia has been reminded of the character of this Prime Minister and of this Attorney-General. Never could we have imagined such a scenario. I know there are good members of the government—perhaps not those who are yelling out—who are deeply uneasy at this open attack on an independent statutory office holder.

I congratulate the member for Wentworth, who has come out and been supportive of Gillian Triggs. I also acknowledge that the foreign minister seems to have some quiet confidence in Gillian Triggs. And I know there are more of you out there—probably even more than supported the spill motion. This is why we have to support the suspension of standing orders motion.

No government minister should be proud of the last 48 hours. No government minister should be proud of the absolute plumbing of the depths and this attack on this respected, independent person. What is it about the Abbott government and the Attorney-General that they do not understand the separation of powers? What is it about this government that, when the President of the Australian Human Rights Commission comes down with a report that the government does not like, all of a sudden the independent office holder must go?

Please, members of the government, Attorney-General and Prime Minister, do not treat Australians as mugs and say: ‘No resignation was sought and no alternative job was offered’. We can play the word games, Mr Prime Minister. You can talk about how ‘no inducement was given’. Your messenger said to the President of the Human Rights Commission, ‘the government no longer has confidence in you’—there you go, character assassinating again.

But they knew they could not sack this office holder, so the clear implication of saying to Gillian Triggs, ‘The government has no confidence in you,’ is ‘You must resign’. That is the clear implication. Then, they said: ‘We will look after you. We will find you a special role.’ Now the government has said today in parliament, ‘There was no special role offered’. Yet, yesterday, the Secretary of the Attorney-General’s Department said there was a role offered.

The foreign minister was left to hang out a bit today when she said, ‘no special role was offered’. Yet it was in Hansard yesterday that the secretary of the department said there was. Someone is not telling the truth here, and I believe it starts with the Attorney-General and it starts with the Prime Minister.

What the government needs to understand is that, rather than shooting the messenger as they are doing here, they should be taking heed of the message. I believe that many Australians, be they Liberal or Labor supporters, or any other party, they have— (Time expired)

The SPEAKER: Is the motion seconded?

Mr Dreyfus: I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.
Mr Pyne (Sturt—Leader of the House and Minister for Education and Training) (14:42): The government will not be supporting a suspension of standing orders from the Leader of the Opposition, because the Australian people expect us to get on with the job of good government in this country. That is what the Australian people expect us to do in this place. They do not expect us to get down in the chum bucket—

Ms Butler interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Griffith will desist and is warned.

Mr Pyne: We are not going to hop into the chum bucket with ‘Beltway Bill’—

Mr Burke: Madam Speaker, normally in a suspension motion debate we are reluctant to raise points of order; but, when members are not being referred to by their correct title, it should be withdrawn and dealt with appropriately.

The SPEAKER: I call the Leader of the House.

Mr Pyne: I withdraw. I am not surprised about the sensitivity of the Manager of Opposition Business, because the simple fact is that the whole strategy of the opposition today has been to talk about a matter which people in Australia must be scratching their heads about and wondering why on earth Labor thinks this is the most important thing we could be talking about today.

On this side of the House, we are talking about jobs for Australians; the 600 new jobs a day that we are creating. We are talking about growth; 2.7 per cent growth this year, versus 1.9 per cent in the last year of the Labor government. We are talking about child care; the Minister for Social Services has been down at the National Press Club today talking about how to make the lives of ordinary Australians easier every day because of the good decisions this government makes around child care, around jobs, around families, around foreign investment in Australia. We are protecting Australians through national security, stopping Australians from being subjected to terror attacks. That is what this government is getting on with every day. We are planning things for small business, so small business can continue to be the engine room of the economy; to create jobs, to create growth.

What is the Labor Party doing? The Labor Party are popping their heads right in the chum bucket. All they want to do is talk about the detritus of Australian politics. That is what they want to talk about. They want to have a big argument about a matter that the Australian public would be thinking about as, ‘Surely, our elected politicians have more important things to do?’

So we will not be supporting the suspension of standing orders, because we have a whole raft of business today on the daily program to deal with. We are right in the middle of a debate about the Broadcasting and Other Legislation Amendment (Deregulation) Bill 2014—an important bill to change Australia for the future and to change Australia for the better. I know that my colleagues are lining up to speak on the Appropriation Bill (No 3). They are, in fact, lining up to speak on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) because they know they can talk in general about their electorates, about projects in their electorates, about the infrastructure of the 21st century and about dams that we plan to build in northern Australia to fix the mess that Labor left us with. They are going to talk about the roads of the 21st century, like the North-South Corridor, and how we are generating growth and generating income for the Australian public, creating jobs so that they can feed their families.
That is not what Labor is interested in. Labor is not interested in any positive development for Australia. All they want to do is cheer bad news. But I do not hear them cheering when the ANZ job ads are up for the eighth month in a row. The eighth month in a row! ANZ job ads are up, retail trade has been up every month for the last seven months and there were more new company registrations last year than at any time on record. More company registrations! There was an increase in the loans for new housing starts in Australia last year. Confidence is returning to the Australian economy and to the Australian people. And Labor wants to snuff that out because Labor thinks that if they can flatten the mood of the Australian public, then the Australian public will look elsewhere than to this government.

But the Australian public know that this government is getting on with the job to make their lives easier, because that is why we are elected. We are not elected to be involved in beltway discussions about what happened in Senate estimates yesterday. That is what the Labor Party wants to do. We are elected to put the Australian public first on every single day of our jobs, and that is what we have been doing for 18 months. We have been a good government and, my, we have had a lot to clean up from the mess left behind by the Labor Party.

We also need to make the important point that it is the height of hypocrisy for the Leader of the Opposition to come into this House and lecture us about trust and integrity. To lecture us! This is the man who took out two prime ministers! It was not enough for 'Backstabber Bill' to get rid of one prime minister; it was not enough to get his way to the top and to be sitting in that chair but to get rid of two—so he did! Francis Urquhart would be proud of him!

Mr Mitchell: Madam Speaker, I have a point of order: as was previously raised by the Manager of Opposition Business, the member is not referring to members by their titles. If I could hear it from here I am sure you—

The SPEAKER: Resume your seat. The Leader of the House has the call.

Mr PYNE: For the Frank Underwood of Australian politics to be lecturing us about trust and integrity is really the height of hypocrisy.

Government members interjecting—

Mr PYNE: I will not say what some of my colleagues are trying to encourage me to say, but the simple fact of the matter is that he not only got rid of Kevin Rudd he also got rid of Julia Gillard, and now he sits in a seat that he always wanted and he thinks he is going to jump over the table and get to this seat, but he is not going to do so.

This is what his own colleagues think of him. Paul Kelly wrote about it in his book—and he is with us today in the House. I quote—

Mr Burke: Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There were a number of points of order taken by the earlier speakers about the fact that it is a suspension motion and that they need to be relevant to the motion.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the House has to explain why it should not be suspended and he is putting that case.

Mr PYNE: The Leader of the Opposition ranged very widely over the debate, and we did not take that point of order. But, unlike the Maritime Union of Australia, I think we should
always treat the journalists of The Australian well; so they should be recognised properly when they are in the House, rather than how Andrew Burrell was treated by the Maritime Union of Australia yesterday. But to be lectured by the Labor Party about trust and integrity is really quite laughable. If it were not so serious it would be laughable.

This is the political party of Eddie Obeid, Joe Tripodi and Ian Macdonald. This is the party that supported Craig Thomson for every step of the way, and continues to do so.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: There will be silence on my left and my right!

Mr PYNE: This is the political party that decided that a good Speaker, in Harry Jenkins, needed to be axed on the last day of sittings and that Peter Slipper, the former member for Fisher, should be inserted in his place. And that did not end well! This is the political party of the New South Wales Labor Party that has been mired in corruption and discussions about corruption for decades—not just recently. Goodness knows what they got away with before the ICAC! It beggars belief to be lectured by the Labor Party when for six years of chaotic government they got rid of two prime ministers, they axed the Speaker in favour of Peter Slipper, the former member for Fisher and they supported Craig Thomson all the way through. And this is the man here who supported Craig Thomson; he supported him right through the process.

And Peter Slipper—it was written in the Daily Telegraph on 27 April:

On Tuesday, Ms Gillard said she supported Mr Slipper's planned return if a criminal investigation into misuse of entitlements cleared him first.

Mr Shorten was then on Sky News. Mr Shorten was asked about this support of Peter Slipper by Julia Gillard and he said:

BILL SHORTEN: I haven't seen what she said, but let me say I support what it is that she said.

DAVID SPEERS: Hang on, you haven't seen what she said...

BILL SHORTEN: But I support what my Prime Minister said, so.

DAVID SPEERS: Well what's your view?

BILL SHORTEN: Well my view is the Prime Minister's view is ...

... ... ...

DAVID SPEERS: But you don't know what that is.

BILL SHORTEN: Well, I'm sure she's right.

'I'm sure she is right!' Then he stabbed during her in the back! Now, with friends like Bill who needs enemies? And everybody in his caucus knows it to be true.

So the government will not be supporting the suspension of standing orders. We will be getting on with good government as soon as we have dispatched this particular motion.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: But first there will be silence on both sides of the House.

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs—Deputy Manager of Opposition Business) (14:52): Standing orders should be suspended to allow this censure motion to be moved. There should be a censure of the Attorney-General for launching an unprecedented attack on the Human Rights Commission, for treating an independent statutory officer with contempt and for directing the...
Secretary of the Department of the Attorney-General to offer an inducement to the President of the Human Rights Commission in return for her resignation.

This Attorney-General has behaved in a disgraceful and shameful manner and that is why standing orders should be suspended. It is a shameful and disgraceful attack on a statutory officer to do what this Attorney-General did, which was to send the secretary of his department off to Sydney to demand the resignation of an independent statutory office holder.

This statutory office holder has tenure. She has a five-year tenure by the act that establishes the Human Rights Commission. And the reason that this sort of statutory office holder is given five years tenure is to protect her from governments like this one, it is to protect her from prime ministers like this one, it is to protect her from attorneys-general like the one we presently have, who think that the appropriate response to a statutory office holder carrying out to the letter her duties under the statute under which she was appointed is to attack her personally in the lowest form of personal attack. All this government can think of is to attack her personally rather than respond to the important matters that this President of the Human Rights Commission was raising in her report.

Just to remind you all, it is about the children. You all seem to have forgotten that it is about the children. It is not about Professor Triggs and, in particular, it is not about the timing of this report; it is about the children. This government has forgotten the rule of law. That is why standing orders should be suspended. It has forgotten that the role of the Attorney-General is to defend statutory office holders, not to attack them. This Attorney-General deserves censure, not just by this House but by the Australian people and that is why standing orders should be suspended.

The evidence in Senate estimates yesterday could not have been clearer. It went for hours with the Attorney-General himself giving evidence; Mr Moraitis, the secretary of the department, giving evidence; and Professor Triggs herself giving evidence. The picture that emerged was clear: the secretary was sent on the instructions of the Attorney-General to Sydney to demand the resignation of Professor Triggs and a job was offered to her, not the nonsense that we have had from the Prime Minister today denying that there was any request for resignation, not the nonsense that we have had from the Prime Minister today denying that there was an inducement. Mr Moraitis said yesterday:

The Attorney-General wished me to point out that the government was prepared to consider a specific senior role which was mentioned to me and which I conveyed for Professor Triggs.

That is what the secretary of the department said in his evidence yesterday, none of this denial that we have had from the government today. That is why this censure should be debated in this House and that is why standing orders should be suspended.

What happened to good government? Or was this from the period before good government started because it was on 3 February? Is good government starting tomorrow perhaps? This does concern the people of Australia, not as was suggested by the Leader of the House, not as was suggested by the Prime Minister—that the people of Australia will not be concerned with these issues. The people of Australia are concerned with these issues because they want a government that respects the rule of law. They want a government that looks after independent statutory office holders. They want a government that does not attack members—
The Speaker: The time for this debate of 25 minutes has expired. The question is that the suspension motion be agreed to.

The House divided. [15:01]

(The Speaker—Hon. Bronwyn Bishop)

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

AYES

Albanese, AN
Bird, SL
Brodie, G
Burke, AS
Butler, TM
Chalmers, JE
Chesters, LM
Claydon, SC
Danby, M
Elliot, MJ
Feeney, D
Fitzgibbon, JA
Gray, G
Hall, JG (teller)
Husic, EN
King, CF
Macklin, JL
Marles, RD
Neumann, SK
Owens, J
Perrett, GD
Ripoll, BF
Ryan, JC (teller)
Snowdon, WE
Thistlethwaite, MJ
Vannikou, M
Wilkie, AD

NOES

Abbott, AJ
Andrews, KJ
Baldwin, RC
Bishop, JI
Broad, AJ
Brough, MT
Chester, D
Ciobo, SM
Coulton, M (teller)
Entsch, WG
Frydenberg, JA
Gillespie, DA
Griggs, NL
Hawke, AG

CHAMBER
Hendy, PW
Hogan, KJ
Hunt, GA
Irons, SJ
Jones, ET
Keenan, M
Laming, A
Laundy, C
Macfarlane, IE
Markus, LE
McCormack, MF
Morrison, SJ
O'Dowd, KD
Pitt, KJ
Prentice, J
Pyne, CM
Randall, DJ
Roy, WB
Scott, BC
Simpkins, LXL
Southcott, AJ
Sudmalis, AE
Taylor, AJ
Truss, WE
Turnbull, MB
Varvaris, N
Whiteley, BD
Williams, MP
Wood, JP

Hockey, JB
Howarth, LR
Hutchinson, ER
Jensen, DG
Joyce, BT
Kelly, C
Landry, ML
Ley, SP
Marino, NB
Matheson, RG
McNamara, KJ
Nikolic, AA (teller)
O'Dwyer, KM
Porter, CC
Price, ML
Ramsey, RE
Robert, SR
Ruddock, PM
Scott, FM
Smith, ADH
Stone, SN
Sukkar, MS
Tehan, DT
Tudge, AE
Van Manen, AJ
Vasta, RX
Wicks, LE
Wilson, RJ
Wyatt, KG

Question negatived.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (15:07): I ask that further questions be placed on the Notice Paper.

DOCUMENTS

Presentation

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House and Minister for Education and Training) (15:07): Documents are presented as listed in the schedule circulated to honourable members. Details of the documents will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings.

COMMITTEES

Selection Committee

Report

The SPEAKER (15:07): I present report No. 20 of the Selection Committee relating to the consideration of committee and delegation reports and private members' business on Monday, 2 March 2015. The report will be printed in today's Hansard and the items accorded priority for debate will be published in the Notice Paper for the next sitting. Copies of the report have been placed on the table.
The report read as follows—

Report relating to the consideration of committee and delegation business and of private Members' business

1. The committee met in private session on Tuesday, 24 February 2015.
2. The committee determined the order of precedence and times to be allotted for consideration of committee and delegation business and private Members' business on Monday, 2 March 2015, as follows:

**Items for House of Representatives Chamber (10.10 am to 12 noon)**

**COMMITTEE AND DELEGATION BUSINESS**

**Presentation and statements**

1 **Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit:**


   The Committee determined that statements may be made—all statements to conclude by 10.20 am.

   **Speech time limits**—
   
   Dr Southcott—5 minutes.
   
   Next Member—5 minutes.

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

**PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS**

**Notices**

1 **MR KATTER:** To present a Bill for an Act to provide for warning labels in relation to imported food, and for related purposes. (*Imported Food Warning Labels Bill 2015*)

   (Notice given 24 February 2015.)

   **Time allotted**—10 minutes.

   **Speech time limits**—
   
   Mr Katter—10 minutes.

   [Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 1 x 10 mins]

   *Presenter may speak to the second reading for a period not exceeding 10 minutes—pursuant to standing order 41.*

2 **MRS PRENTICE:** To move:

   That this House:

   (1) congratulates the Government on honouring its election commitment to change indexation arrangements for Defence Forces Retirement Benefits and Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits military pensions;

   (2) condemns the $17 billion in cuts made to the Australian Defence Force (ADF) under the former Labor Government to its lowest level since before World War II;

   (3) recognises:

   (a) that those budget cuts caused job losses among the 3000 small and medium businesses which service the ADF; and

   (b) the extra risk placed on Australian service personnel by Labor's failure to purchase new artillery;

   (4) condemns the cuts by the former Labor Government to entitlements of unmarried soldiers for flights to see their families;
recognises the depletion in force readiness caused by Labor's reckless decision to cut reserve training days by up to 30 percent; and

(6) repudiates the decision to cut funding to the Australian War Memorial.

(Notice given 9 February 2015.)

Time allotted—50 minutes.

Speech time limits—
Mrs Prentice—10 minutes.
Next Member—10 minutes.
Other Members—5 minutes each.

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

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

3 MS O'NEIL: To move:
That this House:
(1) acknowledges that:
   (a) there is a significant, ongoing and growing need for emergency relief, financial counselling and related programs, to support the most vulnerable Australians;
   (b) local organisations play a critical role in the delivery of these programs around Australia; and
   (c) volunteers are a crucial and valued part of this network;
(2) condemns the Government for:
   (a) cutting core social services to the most vulnerable Australians, while increasing demand for those services through other elements of their unfair budget; and
   (b) the covert way in which funding decisions have been made and implemented; and
(3) calls on the Government to:
   (a) restore funding to social services; and
   (b) provide clarity and funding certainty to affected housing, homelessness services, neighbourhood centres, advice bureaus and other community service providers around Australia.

(Notice given 24 February 2015.)

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

Speech time limits—
Ms O'Neil—5 minutes.
Other Members—5 minutes each.

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

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

Items for Federation Chamber (11 am to 1.30 pm)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Notices

1 MS CLAYDON: To move:
That this House:
(1) notes that International Women's Day:
   (a) will be celebrated globally on Sunday, 8 March 2015;
is a day to celebrate the economic, political and social achievements of women, and to review how far women have come in their struggle for equality, peace and development; and

(c) in 2015 will reflect on the Beijing Platform for Action, a progressive blueprint for advancing women's rights launched 20 years ago at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing;

(2) notes that:

(a) at the launch of Beijing +20 in 2014, United Nations Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka identified that a number of critical areas for women raised in Beijing 20 years ago still require significant action to address, including:

(i) reducing women's share of poverty;
(ii) improving access to health and education;
(iii) ending violence against women;
(iv) ensuring women's full participation in decision-making;
(v) ensuring women's equal opportunities in the economy;
(vi) removing gender stereotypes;
(vii) increasing women's role in the media; and
(viii) protecting the human rights of all women and girls; and

(3) urges all Members of Parliament to be leaders in their community and act on the advancement of gender equality in Parliament.

(Notice given 23 February 2015.)

Time allotted—30 minutes.

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

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

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

2 MR E. T. JONES: To move:

That this House notes that:

(1) this Government is committed to delivering a White Paper on Developing Northern Australia that will set out a clear and well defined policy platform for unlocking the potential of the north, including consideration of the recommendations of the final report of the Inquiry into the Development of Northern Australia;

(2) providing customs and border security at Townsville Airport is in line with one of the recommendations in the Development of Northern Australia final report;

(3) the extra benefits to trade and tourism are important to opening Townsville to the international market and continuing Townsville's strong economic position in Northern Australia;

(4) this Government is committed to creating more local jobs and opportunities for the North Queensland community; and

(5) this continues the Government mantra of being open for business, and under new management.

(Notice given 12 February 2015.)

Time allotted—60 minutes.

Speech time limits—
Mr E. T. Jones—10 minutes.
Next Member—10 minutes.
Other Members—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = \(2 \times 10 \text{ mins} + 8 \times 5 \text{ mins}\)]

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

3 MS McGOWAN: To move:
That this House:

(1) notes that:
(a) the Government has committed $100 million (GST exclusive) over four years to the delivery of the Mobile Black Spot Programme (MBSP);
(b) the MBSP is expected to provide around 250 to 300 new or upgraded mobile base stations across Australia;
(c) more than 6,000 locations around Australia have been nominated by the public, local councils, state government, community representatives and businesses as having ineffective or non-existent mobile phone reception; and
(d) the future viability and safety of communities in rural Australia and the electoral division of Indi are dependent on effective mobile phone coverage; and

(2) calls on the Government to allocate significant additional funding to the MBSP in 2015-16 to provide additional new and upgraded mobile base stations across Australia.

(Notice given 24 February 2015.)

Time allotted—30 minutes.
Ms McGowan—5 minutes.
Other Members—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = \(6 \times 5 \text{ mins}\)]

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

4 MS PARKE: To move:
That this House:

(1) notes:
(a) revelations that certain brands of imported frozen berries grown and/or packaged in China are suspected of having infected Australians with Hepatitis A through contamination with faecal matter;
(b) that Food Standards Australia and New Zealand presently only require 5 per cent of frozen berries imported into Australia to be tested and even then, not for Hepatitis A;
(c) that local berry growers are subject to demanding chemical and biological testing and inspection procedures at the growers’ expense;
(d) that consumers who want to know where their food comes from face confusing country of origin labelling, for instance, the words ‘made in Australia’ can mean that all of the ingredients are made or grown elsewhere but are packaged in Australia;
(e) that this is an important public health issue demanding a strong Government response in the areas of food standards and food labelling; and
(f) that consumers are entitled to have:
(i) confidence that the food they buy for themselves and their children is safe; and
(ii) detailed information as to its ingredients and origins; and
calls on the Government to ensure comprehensive testing of food imports to Australia and appropriate labelling of food with regard to ingredients and origin.

(Notice given 24 February 2015.)

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

Ms Parke—5 minutes.

Other Members—5 minutes each.

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

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

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Abbott Government

The SPEAKER (15:08): I have received a letter from the honourable Leader of the Opposition proposing that a definite matter of public importance be submitted to the House for discussion, namely:

The failure of the Government to provide stable and competent government at a time of increased cost of living pressures for Australian households and families.

I call upon those members who approve of the proposed discussion to rise in their places.

More than the number of members required by the standing orders having risen in their places—

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (15:08): This government has failed to look after the cost-of-living concerns of Australians. But the question underpinning this, the question I think is on the minds of a lot of Australia’s now, is: is Tony Abbott the worst Prime Minister Australia has ever seen? In fact, is this the most disappointing Liberal government Australia has ever seen? In order to support the proposition that Tony Abbott is the worst Prime Minister Australians have ever seen I would submit for the consideration of the parliament, and indeed the Australian people, rising unemployment. We had the Minister for Education giving a reasonable impersonation of that famous Iraqi Communications Minister ‘Comical Ali’ when he said employment was a great argument to justify this government. Well, 100,000 people extra on the unemployment queue really shows what is happening in this country.

It is not just unemployment that is a problem for this government and, more importantly, for Australians. We have seen 11 million Australians have their superannuation payment levels frozen. We have seen $100,000 degrees on the table. Only this misfit Liberal-National government would propose deregulation of universities, and the outcome will be higher prices and fewer people going to university. We have seen them say they are going to be a government for Indigenous Australians, but they have cut half a billion dollars in funding, including very important funding in terms of community legal aid, and Australia has one of the most shameful rates of Indigenous incarceration. We have seen this government—not just the Prime Minister but all the contenders for his job—queue up and say absolutely resolutely that they support the $80 billion in cuts to schools and hospitals contained in that budget. Pensioners have suffered under this government with a cut to their rate and indexation proposed. We have seen this nation go backwards on climate change. We see the $6,000 cuts
to family payments. We see this government cutting child care by $1 billion, including very important family day-care programs. That is a significant list of failure by this government.

This government love to lecture the opposition and say they are interested in what real Australians are interested in. I tell you what, real Australians are concerned about rising unemployment, the demise of much of our manufacturing, the extra slugging of pensioners, the GP tax, the $100,000 degrees and the $6,000 cut in payments to families—not to mention the heinous cuts to education and health care. But just in case last week people thought this was the worst government and the worst Prime Minister that we have ever seen, then we had this week. We have got more leaks than the Titanic coming from the government. We have got propositions from the government where they are leaking against each other saying that some people did or did not support the GP tax—although they all support the GP tax. We have even had the Attorney-General, who is hardly noted for his judgement, warning the Prime Minister that the Prime Minister was playing with fire when he was politicising national security—far be it for the opposition to accuse the Prime Minister of politicising national security! But proving that even a stopped clock can be right twice a day, maybe the Attorney-General was onto something.

Not only do we have leaks from within the government, we have got the ultimate bunker-busters coming from the Prime Minister's enemies in the Liberal Party. I have got to meet this fellow, the treasurer of the Liberal Party. He seems to have a lot to say for himself. He emails his 'preferred version' of political violence upon the Prime Minister. But what I am really interested in is seeing whether there are any more emails coming from the treasurer of the Liberal Party. If the treasurer of the Liberal Party will not even back his own Prime Minister and warns there are severe problems in the government, how on earth can the rest of Australia believe this is not the worst government ever. Of course, the Prime Minister is supported by his great band of allies—in case you do not know who I mean, I refer to his frontbench. The Prime Minister is doing more morning TV shows than Kerri-Anne Kennerley. We have got the 'Minister for Backbench Communications'. And, of course, we have got Scott Morrison—the less said the better.

But even more serious than some of the undermining of the Prime Minister from within his ranks—the tsunami of leaks—is the public health scandal which is this inadequate government's inadequate handling of berry contamination. It should not have taken 10 days for this government to decide to test 100 per cent of these berries coming from this region of the world. Twice this week in question time we have asked the Prime Minister about this—since he has apparently got his finger on the pulse of what is going on in Australia. We said to him: how many Australians have been exposed to contaminated berries? He does not know. This hero of our borders cannot tell us how many hundreds of thousands of Australians have potentially been exposed to contaminated berries. But it gets worse than that. He cannot tell us how many people potentially will contract hepatitis A. He cannot even tell the parents of school children in Queensland, South Australia and Victoria whether their children have been exposed. This is a delinquent government asleep at the wheel. But not only are the berries and the leaks problems; we have the shocking ongoing strategic saga of the submarines. Somehow we have a $20 billion or $30 billion contract being promised on the back of an envelope for a couple of tawdry South Australian votes. This is a disgrace.
I actually agree with what the member for Grey said—that is Rowan Ramsey, for those not familiar with him. He is a good man, and I agree with him; and I am going to quote the good man’s words from Liberal Party meeting room. He said it was important that these hulls are welded in Australia. Oh, yes, it is, and we will agree to support that proposition. But again we have them jumping through the hoops about what a competitive tender is: what did Kevin Andrews mean? What did David Johnston promise? Where is David Johnston?

What this has shown is that this is the worst, most cynical government we have seen in Australian history, with the worst, most cynical Prime Minister in Australian history. Look at his attitude today, saying, 'No-one really cares if I bully and intimidate the President of the Human Rights Commission. Australians aren't interested in that.' What a thug. What a bully.

I understand that when you are the Prime Minister of Australia you have a marvellous pulpit to articulate a vision for the future. It is a great opportunity to lead this nation in the necessary debates it has, but it is not a pulpit for bullies. It is not a pulpit to intimidate, harass or put undue pressure on an independent statutory office holder. Those pictures yesterday told 1,000 words; they were pictures of Gillian Triggs, independent President of the Human Rights Tribunal, sitting two people down from her assassin—her boss, in one way—the Attorney-General, George Brandis.

It defies credibility, members of the government, that you could be someone who is independently appointed for a fixed period of time and a powerful secretary—to be fair, on instructions from an even more powerful Attorney-General, working at the behest of the most powerful man in Australia—comes to you and says, 'We have no confidence in you but, by the way, we can find you a suitable appointment in some other capacity.' That is an inducement to resign. That is a most inappropriate form of conduct. Sure, this cynical government can say, 'We don't care. It does not matter; no-one cares. When you're in trouble, break glass and bring out Comical Ali, Christopher Pyne, to have a crack.' The truth of the matter is it is much more serious.

We understand that we must support our independent statutory office holders. Which judge is next? Who is next going to feel the weight of Tony Abbott's anger and wrath? What on earth did Gillian Triggs—Professor Gillian Triggs, respected jurist and President of the Human Rights Commission—do to deserve this outlandish attack from this Prime Minister? Yesterday in question time, the Prime Minister made a most undignified, unedifying assault. This worst Prime Minister Australia has ever seen—fresh from wrecking the confidence of Australian business and causing mayhem with his unfair budget—launched what I thought was the worst moment of his political career when he launched that unedifying attack from the position of the most powerful man in Australia. He is the head of the executive branch of Australia and he used the full authority bestowed on him by the Australian people to attack this individual president for writing a report he did not like. He traduced the independence of the Human Rights Commission.

I know, and Australians are reminded, that we have a Prime Minister who is unfit to be the Prime Minister of Australia. He is psychologically unsuited for the task of leadership. He cannot restrain his anger at people who disagree with him. Many have felt his wrath: advocacy groups, climate change advocates, economists, the unions—you name it, this Prime Minister attacks all. The backbenchers, Malcolm Turnbull—everyone has felt his wrath, even the poor old whip, Mr Ruddock.
The real issue here is that we have a Prime Minister who is not focused on the needs of ordinary Australians. He is an arrogant, cynical Prime Minister whose government is taking Australia in the wrong direction, and it needs to stop. (Time expired)

Mr McCormack (Riverina—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance) (15:19): This nation has had 33 opposition leaders since Federation. We have just heard from the worst of them. Eighteen of those opposition leaders have become Prime Minister; God help us if ever that man becomes Prime Minister. Let us hope he does not. But I will take him up on a few points.

He talked about jobs. Let me tell him, as he scurries from the chamber, that job advertisement levels as measured by the ANZ are at their highest levels in over two years, with job ads growing a healthy 13.6 per cent through the year—the fastest yearly growth in more than 3½ years. More than 200,000 jobs were created just last year—213,900. This equates to around 585 new jobs, each and every day, or a new job every 2½ minutes. In 2014, jobs growth was more than triple the rate seen in 2013 when Labor was last in power. The Dun and Bradstreet business expectations survey released on 3 February 2015 found that the outlook on employment is the most positive it has been for a decade.

When I attended school, and that was a little while ago now, students were graded A to D for their educational prowess or lack thereof. If I were marking the current government and opposition for their respective performances and policy proposals during the 44th Parliament, I would award us an A for effort. I would give a D to those opposite—absolutely a D. The attendance record of those opposite has been pretty good.

Ms Plibersek: Oh, come on!

Mr McCormack: I hear the deputy opposition leader saying, ‘Come on!’ You are only worth a D, but I will give you marks for turning up. Your behaviour and attention, however, leave a bit to be desired. Maybe you could improve on that as you work towards the next election. Maybe you could work on your discipline. In this game you have to be straight down the line and tell it like it is.

I acknowledge that there is much work for the government to do. I acknowledge that there is a job to be done. We are putting our shoulder to the wheel despite the relentless negativity and obstruction from those opposite. We have done very well in many of the key areas we said we would prioritise prior to the 2013 election. We have delivered. The carbon tax has gone; that means $550 savings for the average household and family. The boats have it stopped. They came in their hundreds under Labor—their hundreds—but we stopped them. Just one has arrived since the responsible people were put in power. That has saved money. It has allowed more places for humanitarian purposes and, most importantly, has saved lives. The roads, as promised, are being built. Contrast our record with those who rightly occupy the opposition benches. Let us dig a little deeper into this dreaded D that Labor has deserved for its underachievement—in fact, D could be quite a theme for Labor.

They are in denial. They are refusing to believe the result of the 7 September 2013 election. They are delusional, thinking they are still in government. I say to them: get over it. They are divided and they are dysfunctional. The factional rift is still wide and it is growing by the day.

The opposition leader is a puppet. He is a mere puppet played by the unions and, if anyone thinks the unions are not up to their old thuggish ways, then just take a look at the front page
of *The Australian* today—a bit of biff, bully boy tactics; typical union tactics—disgraceful. It might have worked on the wharves once upon time, but there should be no such room for standover militancy—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**Mr McCormack:** I can hear them yelling, because they love their unions. In Australia in 2015—and the next Labor speaker would do well to come to the despatch box and say that that behaviour that went on yesterday was deplorable.

Labor are disinclined to help this nation back to prosperity, back to economic stability, back to business confidence, back to jobs growth. Just take the scrapping of the East West Link project in Melbourne by the new Daniel Andrews Labor Victorian government—a loss of a billion dollars in investment as compensation and 7,000 jobs. We heard from the Treasurer today in question time—7,000 jobs; typical Labor.

Labor are becoming increasingly desperate. They plumbed the depths when in government and they are no better in opposition with the member for Maribyrnong in charge—deplorable, disruptive to good government, destructive, disliked. They are derelict in their duty to provide sensible, measured, reasonable and mature opposition as we did when the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd government was sending this country to the wall.

Labor treated Australians with disdain. The dilemma we face is to get Australia working again and to overcome the debt and deficit—they are two words—

**Ms Owens:** You doubled it!

**Mr McCormack:** I hear the member for Parramatta—two words that Labor should be very familiar with, two D-words: debt and deficit. As far as debt, $123 billion of cumulative deficits—if we let it go untouched, it will be $667 billion which future Australians are going to be saddled with, because of Labor being derelict in their duty.

The contrast between coalition success after spending less than 18 months in government and Labor's legacy of six years in office could not be starker. The coalition is building a strong and prosperous economy, and a safe and secure Australia. In less than 18 months in government, the coalition has had a remarkable number of achievements. We are opening up new market opportunities for Australia following preferential trade agreements with South Korea, China and Japan; and we are getting on with one with India. Our focus will now turn to conclude a trade agreement, as I say, with India by the end of this year to open up more opportunities for Australian producers, exporters and farmers.

I know that not too many people on the other side really care too much about farmers, but we do. We are working to continue to deliver improved health and education services for regional Australia. Minister Nash only recently announced a new mapping classification system to better identify doctor shortages, which is working towards our commitment to improve better access to medical services in regional and remote Australia. I appreciate that Parramatta is not regional and remote Australia, but I tell you what: those people matter. We care about those people on our side of the House.

We are building stronger regional economies, because we recognise the vital role that rural and country areas can and must play in overcoming Australia's national challenges and driving development. The government has made a record $50 billion-plus investment in transport infrastructure—the largest by any government in Australia's history.
We know that the former minister, Minister Albanese, talked a lot about it—the member for Grayndler. He talked a lot about it, but Warren Truss, the Deputy Prime Minister, is getting on and doing it, and funding it. We have launched our signature billion dollars National Stronger Regions Fund currently taking applications to specifically support investment—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr McCormack: They are very loud over there, Mr Deputy Speaker Scott, because they obviously like what I am saying about regional Australia. I know not many of them have ever represented regional Australia, not many of them have ever cared about regional Australia, but regional Australia grows the food that is put on their tables.

The National Stronger Regions Fund will specifically support investment in priority, economic and infrastructure projects to drive growth in the regions. We have committed $300 million to get construction underway on the iconic Melbourne to Brisbane inland rail project. They talked a lot about it when they were in government. They had case studies done on it, and all that sort of thing. We are getting on with the job of doing it. There is $100 million to address mobile phone black spots across the mobile phone networks in regional Australia, and that is so important. We have committed another $100 million—

Ms Collins: You cut a billion dollars out of local government!

Mr McCormack: You never provided anything. We are getting on with the job of actually giving real money. There is $100 million for rural research; $15 million to improve market access; $20 million for biosecurity; and $8 million for safe, effective chemical access for farmers.

I heard the member for Maribyrnong talking about biosecurity. Fair dinkum: talk about hypocritical. That side did nothing about biosecurity when they had six years on the government benches; nothing about food labelling. What do we ever hear, Mr Deputy Speaker? Absolutely nothing, diddly squat, zilch, zero. We are getting on with the job of fixing the problems.

Under a range of programs contributing to building stronger regions and communities, we are able to deliver $2.34 billion in water infrastructure upgrades for the Murray-Darling Basin. I hear them go silent, because they could not have given two hoots about the Murray-Darling Basin. I tell you what: we are legislating also to cap water buybacks to 1500 gigalitres. I know that will mean nothing to those opposite, but it gives security to our farmers and our river communities, and that is so very important.

In our short term in government to date, we have managed to recommence and expand Australia's live cattle trade. So you can see all the good things that we have done. All your side gave to this country was debt and deficit, and that is why you deserve a big fat D for your performance.

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (15:29): The reason we have this matter of public importance before us today is that this government is failing to provide stable and competent government at a time when Australian families are really struggling.

I travel around Australia a lot in my role and I can tell you: I have spoken to nobody in the last 17 months who says that after 17 months of Liberal-National government they feel better
off. They feel under pressure, they feel cost-of-living pressures, but they also fear the future because of the measures in the last budget in May that the Treasurer still has not managed to get through the parliament—measures like a GP tax, the petrol tax, $100,000 university degrees and cuts to pensions. There are cuts to pensions of $23 billion, which will add up to about $80 a week off the average pension after a few years. There are family support cuts and $80 billion in cuts to schools and hospitals. People are worried about the billion dollars cut from child care and what that will mean for the availability and the affordability of child care, particularly in the area of family day care. They know that, under this government, the average family who are on around $60,000 a year will be $6,000 a year worse off. So they certainly feel the pressures right now, and they fear the pressure of the future when costs like these $100,000 university degrees are added in.

What is the government's response to these kitchen table issues that are concerning the families of Australia? What is their response to the worries that are keeping parents awake at night—worries such as: how do I find child care for my children? How do I afford it? What is going to happen to school education funding in the future? How am I going to afford university for my one, two or three children? What is the government's response? A knighthood for Prince Philip. If you are talking about an illustration of a government profoundly and deeply out of touch, you do not have to look any further than the response of this government to those cost-of-living pressures that Australian families are concerned about.

We have some of the highest rates of unemployment in 12 years. Unemployment in Australia today is higher than it was during the height of the global financial crisis. How can it be that, having survived the global financial crisis, unemployment today is actually higher? One hundred thousand people have joined the unemployment queue. In fact, it is the highest rate since the Prime Minister was the employment minister back in the day.

What do we hear from this government in response? I heard one of the worst interviews I have heard in a long time when I heard the Treasurer talking to Linda Mottram on ABC Radio; I think it was Friday of the last sitting week that we were here. The interviewer put to the Treasurer, 'Treasurer, you are talking about unemployment. What about the Youth Connections program that you have cut in this budget?' Under the Youth Connections program 93.4 per cent of those who received help were still in education or employment after six months. It has been fantastically successful. I certainly know the Youth Connections program in my electorate. I have met Youth Connections providers around the country, including some in very disadvantaged areas who are helping kids who are homeless or who are from very difficult family backgrounds. They are helping them to get and stay employed, and what was the Treasurer's response? Not even, 'Tough time, had to make a tough cut.' He said, 'I've never heard of that program. I don't know what that program does. I can't be expected to know every program the government runs.' He should not have cut it if he did not know what it was.

Mr McCormack interjecting—

Ms PLIBERSEK: We have the government making excuses. Do you know Youth Connections in your electorate? Yes, you do.

Mr McCormack interjecting—
Ms PLIBERSEK: No—he does not know Youth Connections in his electorate. Here we have a situation where a Treasurer is so out of touch that he would rather smoke cigars than actually read his own budget papers and work out the programs that he is cutting. What impact will this have on Australian families? This is what we see today: a government that is out of touch, chaotic and unable to govern because they are preoccupied with their own leadership contest. (Time expired)

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (15:34): I am pleased to make my contribution to today’s matter of public importance. I have here the letter that was sent to the Speaker proposing it. It reads:

Dear Madam Speaker
In accordance with standing order 46, I desire to propose that today on Wednesday 25 February 2015, the following definite matter of public importance be put to the House for discussion …

It talks about providing a stable and competent government and about increased cost of living pressures for Australian families. This is on the letterhead of the Leader of the Opposition, the Hon. Bill Shorten. What bald-faced hypocrisy for the Leader of the Opposition to table an MPI talking about stable and competent government and increased cost of living. When they were in government for the previous six years, we saw the most incompetent, the most dysfunctional and the most chaotic government in our nation’s history. In every single portfolio there was complete chaos and complete dysfunction.

Where should we start? How about the economy? The Treasurer in 2012 stood up there at the dispatch box and said, ‘The four years of budget surpluses I announced tonight’. We know what happened there. If we go into border protection we see more chaos: 50,000 arrivals, 800 illegal boats, $11 billion in cost blow-outs in defence—the lowest level of defence spending as a proportion of GDP since 1938. If we look at mining and resources, we had the mining tax announced and then changed—eight times. There was complete chaos and dysfunction. In agriculture we saw the live cattle fiasco. In small business we saw a revolving door of small business ministers. It was just a disgrace. What hypocrisy to come in with such a matter.

Then we come to cost-of-living pressures on Australian families. I am glad the member for Parramatta is sitting at the dispatch box, and the member for Chifley and the member for Werriwa are here—and I will not forget the member for McMahon, who is also sitting there; he is another member from New South Wales. You lot might be interested in some figures recently released by the Australian Energy Regulator that showed the number of households in New South Wales that had their electricity disconnected because of that toxic carbon tax which pushed up the price of electricity in this country.

These are the numbers. I hope you take note, Member for McMahon. You may be asked questions later on this, so please grab a pen or a pencil to write this down. From 2009-10 to 2013-14 we had a 100 per cent increase in the number of households in New South Wales that had their electricity disconnected. I am sure, Member for Parramatta, that many of those people were in your electorate. In New South Wales, 32,000 households had their electricity disconnected because of the carbon tax increasing prices. On top of that, another 63,000 households in New South Wales were on payment plans because they had trouble paying for their electricity because of the carbon tax. You lot voted time and time again to block the repeal of the carbon tax, and you come in here and talk on an MPI about increased cost pressures on households. What an absolute disgrace you lot are!
The member for Sydney came in here and whinged about cuts and increased costs. The biggest increased cost pressure on family households today is the interest payment on the debt that you guys ran up. It is $13½ billion this year, which gets put down to every single family in Australia, because of the waste and the mismanagement of the six years of you lot in government. That works out to an increase of $560 every year for every man, woman and child just to pay the interest on their debt. For the average household of four, it is over $2,000. That is the cost of the interest on the debt from your mismanagement and your incompetence—and you come in here and you move this MPI. What a disgrace!

We are getting on with the job. There is no magic solution. There is no magic pudding. We cannot reduce cost-of-living pressures by borrowing and spending more money. Sadly, that is the recipe that they have. 

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott): I let the member for Hughes carry on a bit there, referring to me as the person who was doing all these nasty things. You might reflect on that the next time you speak in this chamber.

Mr BOWEN (McMahon) (15:39): We have seen the priorities of this government on display over the last 48 hours, and the Australian people have seen them as well. This is a government that cannot work out whether their biggest priority is to decide when to tear down their Prime Minister or how to tear down a statutory independent officeholder. They are going around the corridors of this building saying, 'Shall we do it this week or shall we do it next week or should we wait until after the budget?' There are little minions all around the building deciding on timing and when they should tear down the Prime Minister of this nation and there are other people deciding on how to tear down a professor of law who holds an independent statutory office.

The Prime Minister showed at question time that he just does not get it. He stands at the despatch box and says, 'We don't agree with the Human Rights Commission president.' That is not the point. The former government did not agree with things the Human Rights Commission did either, but we did not try to tear down somebody who has an important role in the Australian legal system, whose independence is vital and important to Australia's legal system, whose independence has been sacrosanct and respected by governments of both persuasions in the past—but not by this government.

The Prime Minister comes in here and says, 'We are more focused on real issues, important to the Australian people.' Well, guess what? Good governance is important to the Australian people. Honesty and integrity are important to the Australian people—and the Australian people know they do not get it from this Prime Minister. They also understand that, when this government talk about issues important to the Australian people, there is nothing they least like to talk about than their unfair budget—their unfair budget which has seen the Australian principle of fairness thrown out by this Treasurer; their unfair budget which has seen confidence smashed right throughout the Australian economy.

I was watching Senate estimates before—as one does—and I saw the Minister for Finance plaintively pleading with the estimates committee and telling them that absolute confidence is high. 'There's nothing to see here,' he said, 'Confidence is going well.' He obviously was not aware of the evidence of the Governor of the Reserve Bank. I am a bit worried: the Governor of the Reserve Bank is an independent statutory officeholder and he has given evidence that the government will not like. He told the House of Representatives Economics Committee:
We have a significant lack of confidence—I think more in the business community than among households—to expand, invest, hire and innovate. To my mind, that pervasive sense of caution and feeling you do not want to take a risk is the thing I worry about most when it comes to getting growth.

That was the Governor of the Reserve Bank giving evidence before the House of Representatives Economics Committee. The same day, he gave evidence that he did not advise the cabinet about the federal budget, unlike what had been leaked out by the government; unlike what had been briefed out of the cabinet room by the government. They were caught out by the evidence of the Governor of the Reserve Bank, for whom we on this side of the House have respect. We on this side of the House respect the office of Governor of the Reserve Bank as well as the individual, just like we respect the office of every single statutory independent officeholder and just like we respect the importance of fairness and confidence in the Australian economy.

The fact is that this government has overseen a situation where we now have 795,000 unemployed people right across the country—the highest level since 1994. There are more unemployed people in Australia today than at any time since 1994. This government inherited a situation where Australia had lower unemployment than the United States, and now we have higher unemployment than at any time during the global financial crisis. And they claim good economic management! They claim that confidence is high. They claim that they are creating economic growth, when they know that growth is below trend and—as independent analysis shows—will continue below trend on this Treasurer's watch, because this Treasurer has seen confidence smashed.

We saw confidence begin to fall in the lead-up to the budget when the Treasurer was flagging emergencies and crises and all the cuts he would need to make. We saw confidence fall even further, and go through the floor, when the Australian people actually saw the budget for the first time, and they lost confidence in this Treasurer and this Prime Minister. The Australian people lost confidence in the Prime Minister and the Treasurer last May, just as their party room lost confidence in them this week. They walk around the corridors saying, 'Maybe we should let down the budget and then we should take over. Or maybe we should strike first so they don't make another mistake in the budget.' We know these conversations are occurring. We know this is a dying government at war with itself. But the Australian people want a government focused on the real issues—focused on unemployment and focused on a fairer Australia. (Time expired)

Mrs GRIGGS (Solomon) (15:44): What we know is that when those opposite were in government they were chaotic and dysfunctional. They were out of touch. That is why the Australian people voted them out. Those opposite were working on gossip and innuendo and focusing on Canberra—that really, really, works; it really resonated with the government. It really resonated with the Australian people! You were out of touch. You did not even know—

Mr Bowen: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. This is another outrageous attack on your good self. We won't stand for it.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott): I thank the member for McMahon for his protection!

Mrs GRIGGS: Sorry, Mr Deputy Speaker. I was referring those remarks to the shadow Treasurer, not to you. I think it is quite ironic that they should come in here, particularly the Leader of the Opposition, and put their names to this MPI. The Leader of the Opposition leads
a party which, when in government, saw four leadership spills, and he had a hand in every single change of Prime Minister. Yet he comes in here and tries to lecture us about stability, after six years of absolute chaos and dysfunction. Those opposite have the audacity to come in here and lecture us. What a joke! I can't believe it! They talk to us about cost of living pressures. Well, they implemented the carbon tax. We got rid of it. We listened to the Australian people. They did not want the carbon tax. We got rid of the carbon tax.

Those opposite come in here and start lecturing us about stability. The Australian people know what we are focused on. We are focused on putting measures in place to protect Australia and to ensure that there is financial stability and security over the long term. The McClure report on Australia's welfare system was released today. The report, which was commissioned in 2013 by the then Minister for Social Services, the Hon. Kevin Andrews, examines the welfare system to make sure that it is sustainable for the future—so that it is efficient and effective for the future. This government is working hard to ensure that Australia will be able to support those who need help, while respecting those who contribute to that support—something which those on that side do not know anything about. The current system has evolved over many decades, and it is complex.

**Opposition members interjecting**—

Mrs GRIGGS: Mr Deputy Speaker, do you know what? When they were speaking, we gave them the courtesy of listening. They should give us the same courtesy—particularly the member for Griffith, who is a serial offender and who is not even in her seat. At least when we are not sitting in our seats we give you the courtesy of listening and being respectful—something that you guys know nothing about.

**Opposition members interjecting**—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order on my left! If you are out of your seat then you are disorderly if you are interjecting.

Mrs GRIGGS: They are an absolutely dysfunctional rabble. The member for Griffith is going to go to her seat. Good. Now you can interject!

Ms Butler interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Solomon has the call and will be heard in silence.

Mrs GRIGGS: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. The message is that we on this side actually recognise the importance of having a sustainable welfare system—one that can handle supporting generations into the future. If it were up to the Labor Party, those on the other side, we know from their history that they would empty out the public coffers.

Mr Craig Kelly: Again.

Mrs GRIGGS: That is exactly right—again. We know that, because they left us with a projected debt of $667 billion. Debt, deficit, chaos and dysfunction is certainly the Labor way. We know that we are providing a sustainable place for everyone in the future. We want to make sure that the welfare system is one that can be sustainable into the future. We have got rid of the carbon tax. We have stopped the boats. They said we couldn't. They said it was a slogan. We have proven them wrong. We cannot risk having those guys back on these
bench. Over six Labor budgets, those opposite increased spending by over 50 per cent. 

(Time expired)

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga) (15:49): My goodness! In this MPI, let us have a look at a few facts of what has actually happened under the life of this government. Unemployment is at a 13-year high. How shameful that so many Australians are out of work because of the dysfunction and chaos of this government. We have seen this government take the absolute sledgehammer to this budget. I want to go through some of the facts of what this means for Australian families. There have been $5⅓ billion worth of cuts to family payments. Whose pockets do you think this is coming out of? The pockets of Australian families—the people whom you all suggest that you might like to represent. Go down to the High Street and talk to your families. Talk to a single-income family, earning $65,000 a year, with a couple of kids at school. Your government is taking $6,000 a year out of the pockets of those families. It is only the Labor Party who is stopping you from taking that money out of the pockets of families. That is what you want to do to families. And don't worry, we will be telling families what you intend for them every day between now and the next election.

We will also be making sure that pensioners understand what it is that you want to do to them. Only this government would consider doing this—not the Howard government. This cut was never considered by the Howard government but it has been considered by this government; in fact, the legislation for it has been through the House of Representatives. You all voted for a cut to the indexation of the age pension and the carer payment. Have you told carers that it will be out of their pockets? That is where the money is coming from. Have you had the guts to say to carers that you are going to take money out of their pockets?

The Australian Council of Social Service has estimated this is worth $80 a week. Every member of the Liberal Party and every member of the National Party want to take $80 a week out of the pockets of age pensioners, disability support pensioners and people on the carer payment—all those carers who do an extremely important job. Every single member of the Liberal Party and every single member of the National Party want to take that money out of the pockets of those pensioners. The Parliamentary Budget Office has estimated this is worth $23 billion. That $23 billion will come out of the pockets of pensioners and out of the pockets of carers. Shame on every single member of the Liberal Party for attacking pensioners in this way.

Of course the most shameful cut of all is what this government want to do to young unemployed people. They are saying to young unemployed people that they want to put them on nothing for six months. They want them to have nothing to live on at the same time, of course, that they are cutting emergency relief. So the emergency relief providers in suburbs and towns all around Australia are facing the cuts that come from this government's budget. They will not get any food from emergency relief because of the cuts of this government. And of course they are saying to young unemployed people: 'You'll have nothing to live on for six months. You can go on Work for the Dole for a while. If you still cannot find a job, you'll be on nothing again for another six months.' That is what they are saying.

If you want to talk about chaos and dysfunction, this government are all chaos and dysfunction. All we see week after week are leaks from that side of the parliament instead of concentrating on the people who deserve all of our support—the families, the young people who are unemployed and the pensioners who have worked so hard. We know how important
it is that we maintain support for these people in our community. All the government want to
do is destroy their opportunity for a decent life.

Mr WYATT (Hasluck) (15:54): Like my colleagues, I thank the opposition for raising
this matter of public importance. It is almost a Dorothy Dixer, because the cost-of-living
pressures for Australian households and families are what this government is focused on. The
member for Jagajaga raised a couple of interesting points. She said, ‘Take a sledgehammer to
the budget.’ Think about this statement from Wayne Swan:
The Government shouldn’t be chasing the same resources as the private sector—that would only add to
price pressures, and ultimately feed through to the cost of living for Australian households.
What is more important is Labor converted the records surpluses of the Howard government
into record deficits. Labor delivered around $200 billion of deficits, with $123 million of
deficits to come. Labor promised a surplus in 2012-13 on over 500 occasions, but what they
delivered were more deficits.

Currently government bills exceed income by over $100 million a day. So you do have to
take a sledgehammer at times to a budget, because we cannot continue to live beyond our
means. We are in this problem because Labor would not stop spending. They even tried to
lock in billions of dollars of new spending, earmarked for years after they left office. The
International Monetary Fund recently confirmed that for the six-year period from 2012 to
2018 Australia was forecast to have the largest percentage increase in spending of the 17 IMF
advanced economies profiled.

It was also interesting to listen to the member for Jagajaga talking about the impact on
families. But Labor did not consider single mothers who were moved from pensions that gave
them an income to Newstart. Labor left them in poverty. So do not come into the chamber and
be hypocritical in that sense.

Ms Kate Ellis: What have you done about it?

Mr WYATT: It is good to hear from you, Member for Adelaide, because at least you are
contributing to the conversation for a change.

We are keeping parents' costs down and putting money in their pockets through our
families package, which will be released in coming months. As a strong, stable government,
we are delivering a small business company tax cut as part of our small business and jobs
package. We are improving oversight of rules about foreign investment in our agricultural
land and residential homes. Under the coalition government, Australia’s retail trade numbers
have risen month after month since mid-2014, to be up 4.1 per cent through the year. Building
approvals are up 8.8 per cent on a year ago. Job ads, as measured by the ANZ Bank, are at
their highest for more than two years. We are opening up new markets through free trade
agreements with Korea, Japan and China.

Perhaps those opposite would like to hear again what this means to those who elected this
government at the 2013 election. It means that a young person today has more chance of
getting a job when they finish school or university. It is easier for that young person to upskill
and to move into an even better job. It is easier for them to fill up their car with petrol and to
stock their fridge with food. This government's stability has created an opportunity for a
young person to save for a house or for their overseas holiday.

Mr Husic interjecting—
Mr WYATT: It will be easier for them to contemplate starting their own businesses, Member for Chifley. It will also be easier for them to attract foreign investment into that business. Their businesses will be able to employ and train others. They will be able to access financial advice that is sound and not advice that will lead to them going astray. Their parents should be able to afford aged care that is close to their home. Going to the doctor or to see a specialist will not be a hassle for them. Down the track, it will be easier for them to get affordable child care for their children. Their children will enter a world-class school system, a world-class higher education system and the cycle will begin again.

A strong government is important and this coalition government is focusing on what is needed for families. I cannot pretend it is all economic roses at this point. This time two years ago, our economy was in the shaky hands of some of those opposite, and we have not yet plucked out all of the policy weeds that still remain from the work, programs and initiatives that they put into place.

On this side, we respect the taxpayer. We do not take our stewardship of the public dollar lightly. Today we are committed to reviewing the social security system. This government will focus on families, focus on the economy and focus on a better future for all Australians, to ensure that they have the life they expect. (Time expired)

Ms KATE ELLIS (Adelaide) (16:00): I rise today to speak about the failure of the government to provide stable and competent government at a time of increased cost-of-living pressures for Australian households and families. We have seen some extraordinary scenes in the last few weeks from those opposite. We have seen the division, the leaking, the spill motions, the manoeuvring, the betrayals and the ongoing plotting. In recent days, particularly today and yesterday, we have seen the frustration building up in those opposite and we have seen them taking it out in Senate estimates, with appalling behaviour—the sort of bullying that we have never before seen in this parliament. We have seen this in the last couple of weeks. While some people observing this may have found it interesting, many people have found much of the behaviour entirely extraordinary. Some people may have found it a little bit satisfying to see the Prime Minister under such pressure, as he faces his now inevitable fate, but the truth of the matter is that this is a time when, more than ever, the Australian public need a government that is focused on them, a government that is focused on their households and their families.

We just heard from the member for Hasluck, who would have you believe that Australian families have never had it so good as they now have it under this government. The truth is that, if you go out and speak to the community, speak to Australian families, about what is actually happening and the pressures that they are debating around the kitchen table each night, you know that there are great levels of concern out there, that there are huge pressures on the family budget and that, far from the rosy picture that the member for Hasluck would paint of what is happening out there in today's Australia, we are actually faced with unemployment at a 13-year high. That is not just a statistic; that is something that is impacting on real families right across Australia. Those opposite, particularly my South Australian Liberal colleagues, seem to be going out of their way to increase the unemployment rate, to drive out jobs in the automotive sector, in submarines and in shipbuilding. In the last 24 hours, we have actually had the member for Hindmarsh cheering along the loss of Airservices Australia jobs in Adelaide. We know that this is having very real impacts on family budgets.
Far from having a government that is focused on solutions for Australian families, instead what we have in those opposite is a government that brought down a budget which only made things worse. We have a government that introduced severe cuts, of more than $5.5 billion, in family payments, leaving some families in Australia $6,000 a year worse off. That is the reality we are dealing with.

I am particularly interested and involved in the Australian childcare debate and the childcare space. We know in this area that, when the government—who got elected promising that they would make child care more affordable and more accessible—came to office, the first thing they did was cut over $1 billion from childcare programs. We have seen in recent days the long-awaited Productivity Commission report and the recommendations on childcare reform for the future. I should say that I and the Labor Party are absolutely supportive of constantly working to improve our childcare system. We want to see greater affordability. We want to see greater accessibility. But we also want a government that does not just talk; we want a government that acts. So, whilst we are hearing from those opposite that they are just about to fix all of these problems, the reality for Australian families is something quite different. The reality is that those opposite are still currently pursuing more cuts to the Australian childcare sector.

At a time when the Minister for Social Services may go to the Press Club and talk about the solutions which are about to come out, we actually have a bill before this parliament right now—which those members opposite are supporting—which cuts the modest, means-tested childcare benefit, which only low- and middle-income families receive. We have a bill which the government's own department has said will be detrimental to over 500,000 Australian families. That is still on the agenda of this government. We have cuts to the family day care sector which we know will increase fees by $35 a day. So we are saying that we will absolutely play a constructive role, we will work with the government, with any other stakeholders, towards improvements for the childcare sector, but we are also very clear: they need to remedy the damage that they have already done and they need to stop their cuts. (Time expired)

Mr LAUNDY (Reid) (16:05): It is always an honour to speak on an MPI. I know that we normally stand up here and throw abuse backwards and forwards, but I get the honour of following the member for Adelaide, who has got a very exciting time ahead of her—a tough gig—and I cannot hurl abuse at a lady at such an exciting time. I am also a little bit shy of time, so I thought I would attack it a little bit differently at the tail end of the debate today. I thought I would focus on some facts—something normally glaringly missing from the speeches of those standing opposite.

Put simply, this MPI revolves around competence and cost of living. Today I would like to tackle that back-to-front. On cost of living: this government came into power with a pledge to get rid of the carbon tax. Doing this not only decreased the average household's bills by $550 a year but we kept in place the compensation package that went with the carbon tax. I noticed today—it was particularly interesting—that the alternative Treasurer of this country was batting at third drop, quite a hefty demise, and of course the major part of the compensation package was that the tax-free threshold was increased to $18,200, a fact that he battled to grapple with last week. The second point about the carbon tax is that, in the December quarter, households on average around Australia experienced a 5.1 per cent decrease in their
electricity bills, the biggest drop since statistics have been measured, obviously putting more money in families' pockets.

Interest rates have had a 0.25 per cent decrease in the last month. Whilst we focus traditionally on mortgages—and that is a good thing; $750 saved to a family on a typical $300,000 mortgage—it is also important on the business side of the equation. Lower cost of funds equals increased investments and jobs, and that is always a good thing. Petrol prices are an average 43c a litre cheaper today than at the budget. If you look at overall inflation at the December quarter you will see that it is sitting at around 1.7 per cent. Obviously that is a very low rate.

I will move to competence. In my electorate of Reid, there is no bigger issue than WestConnex. This week we have found that, if there is a Labor government elected in New South Wales, they will walk away from the vast majority of the project, exactly like their cousins south of the border did.

Let's have a look at the free trade agreements that we have got through. We have agreements with Japan and Korea in place. Funnily enough, that feeds into cost of living in so far as it will lag as we produce investment and expand business into the country. If you look at a Mazda 3 car, for example—the most popular car bought in Australia—in January it decreased in price by $2,100.

I see the member for Wentworth has joined us. If you want a better example of competence, I will talk about the NBN. The member for Wentworth will deliver the NBN $29 billion cheaper than Labor would have, and our approach will deliver $16 billion more in economic benefits. As an ex-publican—and I can tell you that I have a link to the member for Wentworth that goes into the pub field as his father was a hotel broker—I can tell you how to make a lot of money out of beer coasters. It is by putting drinks on the back of them, not by designing $70 billion and $80 billion worth of capital investment.

We have a basic structural deficit. Here it is in a nutshell. We can do two things about it. We can tackle it or we can put our heads in the sand. Those sitting opposite continue to have their heads in the sand. There are $5½ billion worth of savings that they proposed that they should get out of the way and get through; otherwise, the future of our kids and the future of this great country will be placed in great jeopardy.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Whiteley): The time for this debate has expired.

**BILLS**

**Broadcasting and Other Legislation Amendment (Deregulation) Bill 2014**

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Ms CHESTERS (Bendigo) (16:09): As I was saying before, this particular bill is fairly routine for government. This particular bill was part of the government's regulation repeal day. They made a big deal about it, yet this bill only saves the industry around $350,000 according to estimates made by the Department of Communications. Having said that, much of this bill is straightforward and we on this side agree with most of it.
The purpose of the bill is to amend the Broadcasting Services Act 1992, the Radiocommunications Act 1992 and the Australian Communications and Media Authority Act 2005. It does a number of things. Firstly, it removes a number of provisions in the Broadcasting Services Act which were associated with the simulcast of analogue and digital television signals in the transition to digital broadcasting. I want to highlight the word 'transition' because one of the previous speakers, the member for Page, went to great lengths to criticise the previous government for having a transition period, saying that during that period people within his electorate lost their service. When you are transitioning, it does take time. It takes time to make sure you do a rollout properly.

Given the digital television rollout is complete, the changes in this bill make sense and should be supported. It should be noted, however, that these changes in no way will solve the infrastructure issues that the member for Page outlined in his contribution. That is a critical point. In the bush—and I am an MP with a country electorate—most of the issues that we have when it comes to broadcasting go back to old, out-of-date infrastructure and the need for there to be investment in infrastructure.

Bush broadcasting infrastructure is an issue around Australia, including in my own area. Prime, Southern Star and Channel 31 are just a couple of channels that I have received complaints about to do with lack of service and lack of ability to watch. Rarely do I receive a complaint, however, about the broadcasting quality WIN. Perhaps that is because in my part of the world we still have a very active local WIN office. They are very keen to see the people in our area receive good coverage.

I want to take a moment to highlight what WIN are doing in broadcasting and how important they are to our region and why it is important we see that infrastructure flow into regional broadcasting services. WIN are a major partner in our community. Every night WIN delivers local news to rural and regional homes around Australia. It is not just one of Australia's biggest regional news services; it also makes sure that we have news specific to Bendigo. Our local journos do their best to keep up with what is going on locally.

WIN in Bendigo also sponsor a number of community events and, without their support, it is unlikely that these events would occur. They range from everything from the Bendigo International Madison to the Elmore field days, the Bendigo football club, the Bendigo Inventor Awards, Bendigo community health fundraisers and charities. There are hundreds of events every year that the Bendigo WIN team support. Without them in Bendigo, these local groups and communities would miss out. So the role of our regional broadcasters is very important, not just for the local content that they deliver but for the way in which they support our local communities.

To that I would also like to add the importance of our local ABC. This is another broadcaster that is important to regional Australia. It is disappointing, however, to stand here and say that, because of federal government funding cuts, the ABC has announced that it will not be broadcasting the WNBL next season. This will end a 35-year partnership between the WNBL and the ABC. The ABC has been a leader in broadcasting women's sport and has played a significant role in boosting the development of women's sport in Australia. So it is disappointing after a 35-year partnership that this decision has been made. I believe that any decision to cancel the television broadcast of women's sport will have a detrimental effect on
the participation in the sport, which will reduce the pool of talent available within Australia. That is because, without broadcasting, sponsorship dollars will dry up.

I met with Basketball Australia only last week. They said to me that the entire Opals team is underpinned by a strong and competitive WNBL. I know that I am joined by many in this House in support of the WNBL, including the member for Herbert. Unfortunately, my team, the Bendigo Spirit, went down to the Townsville Fire last weekend, but I am sure that we will rally this weekend and beat Sydney University and go on to win the grand final three times in a row. So these two regional centres are actively involved in their sport, but without broadcasting, without the televising of these games, fans would not be able to see their teams when they travelled. For example, if Bendigo is successful this weekend and we do play Townsville in the grand final, it will be the last broadcast match that Bendigo Spirit fans will see, unless the government acts to restore funding to the ABC so that they can continue the broadcasting next year.

Those are just two examples of how important broadcasting is in the regions and how we need to see infrastructure dollars flow. Like I said, those infrastructure dollars are not part of this bill. This bill does not actually save much money for the industry. This bill does not go to the core of the infrastructure issues that the member for Page highlighted in his contribution.

This bill also amends the framework used by the Australian Communications and Media Authority to plan the broadcasting services band spectrum by removing requirements in the Broadcasting Services Act and the RadComms act which are no longer necessary. As we know, this bill also removes requirement for reports made to ACMA under the New Eligible Drama Expenditure Scheme to be independently audited.

A number of the amendments made in this bill are uncontroversial. The ones that are controversial, however, relate to captioning. This bill has made an array of changes. For example, the bill seeks to remove the requirement for free-to-air broadcasters to report annually on compliance with obligations which require them to provide captioning of programs to assist vision and hearing impaired consumers with access to electronic media and to replace these obligations with a complaints based assessment. This bill also removes the requirement for a statutory review of captioning obligations. The moment that this came out, like many of my colleagues, I was contacted by people in the community that had concerns, particularly those from within the deaf community. It turns out that the minister's original assurances that key groups had been consulted were not accurate. The deaf community certainly did not feel that they had been consulted on these reforms.

A bipartisan report of the Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee on this bill was very critical of the lack of consultation with the deaf community:

The committee notes that a large number of submitters indicated that that the consultation processes in relation to the bill had been inadequate. The committee agrees that the breadth of consultation in relation to this bill has been insufficient.

This is a Senate committee reporting on the lack of consultation, which is such a common problem for this government. It is disappointing that the Minister for Communications has failed to communicate on this very important issue with a number of people in the community affected by this bill. The lack of consultation reflects poorly on the Minister for Communications. It is his responsibility to make sure that all affected stakeholders are engaged. Don't worry, Minister, Labor has done it. Labor has consulted and, through this
work, has come up with a compromise that ensures that the concerns of the deaf community are being taken into account.

I will finish by referring to the comments made by the member for Page towards the end of his contribution, which I think were in bad taste. I believe his words were: ‘Why are we worried about captions for a few people when people in my electorate do not have pictures on the screen?’ That completely misses the point that the deaf community was trying to make. Yes, there is an issue with infrastructure and, yes, we need to see government working in partnership with our regional broadcasters to make sure that regional communities have pictures on their screens. But it is an entirely separate issue when this bill seeks to disengage an element of our community by changing the reporting of captioning obligations for people within the deaf community. It is just disappointing that a flippant remark was thrown into this debate, which I think waters down and dismisses the very serious concerns that have been raised by people within the deaf community.

It should be noted that the changes before us will not solve the infrastructure problems. The money the industry will save as a result of this bill, about $350,000, would probably not even fund the construction of one new broadcasting tower—not even one. That is the problem with this bill. It is a lame attempt to demonstrate that government is getting on with doing something for broadcasting. This bill is another example of a government desperate to put forward a program, desperate to say that it is repealing red tape, when all it has done is what good government does every day—not yesterday, not tomorrow but everyday—that is, to update their acts to ensure that they are consistent with the times. Local content and regional broadcasting are important issues. I call on the government to come up with a decent plan for regional broadcasting to ensure that we continue to have good regional content.

Mr WILLIAMS (Hindmarsh) (16:22): I rise to support this bill, but, before I doing so, I want to address a point that the member for Bendigo raised about Labor's consultations. If that was anything like their consultation for the mining tax—where there was no consultation or, where there was, it resulted in a tax that raised a couple of cents per person in Australia—then we are in a lot of trouble. But onto the important matters at hand. The government has adopted a strong deregulatory policy agenda and is progressing changes on the way in which regulation is created, implemented and reviewed. The key principles of this reform agenda include: that regulation only occur where absolutely necessary; regulation should not be the default position in public policy; and important consumer protections need to be maintained. As we know, the former Labor government simply announced sweeping media and telecommunications reforms and more regulation without consultation. Any possible changes to media or telecommunications regulation must be consultative and reflect this government's ongoing commitment to better regulation.

Let us look as the track record on better regulation so far. In our bid to boost productivity and reduce regulations, we took to the Australian people at the last election a target of a billion dollars per annum of savings in regulatory costs to industry and not-for-profits. We have far exceeded that with over $2 billion, as outlined. The communications portfolio is still fundamentally based in the mid 1990s as far as its regulatory framework goes, and that is why things need to change. The measures passed on repeal day, 1 March 2014, together with the submissions from repeal day in October last year, will generate cumulative savings of over $94 million for consumers and businesses with 3400 pages of redundant or obsolete
regulations repealed. It is common ground that regulation has a cost to those entities which must comply with—good regulation balances these costs against the assessed benefits by ensuring that regulation is appropriate for its objective.

Going to some of the specific matters of this bill, one matter is the reconsideration of the need for strict compliance measures, such as requiring broadcasters to complete annual captioning reports up to 445 days after the broadcast, even though the sector has near 100 per cent compliance rate; or requiring subscription broadcasters to prepare detailed applications to temporarily exempt new channels from captioning, when a significant majority are granted on the merits in any case. It also requires ACMA to review the content classification rules and codes, when the codes are already subject to regular review. These are all examples of regulatory requirements that do not reduce safeguards for consumers but have a clear cost for broadcasters and ACMA.

The bill also removes unnecessary legislation, as I said, and reduces the burden. The amendments form part of the government's communications portfolio commitment to the Australian government's deregulation agenda. The government strongly supports all Australians having access to television services and the captioning of television services is an essential and important part of achieving this goal. The bill does not reduce captioning standards or targets. The government will not make any changes to captioning targets now or in the future. The coalition is simply seeking to reduce the regulatory burden on industry and improve the administrative arrangements associated with broadcasters captioning obligations.

One particular amendment of this bill, part 9D, aims to assist viewers with a hearing impairment by requiring Australian free-to-air broadcasters and subscription television licences to meet specified levels of captioning for television programs.

I want to talk about regulation and compliance in a different way. Last Friday I hosted the Prime Minister at Deloitte in my electorate and I discussed a Deloitte report, 'Get out of your own way: Unleashing productivity' with him. The cover page of the report said:

Australia has a problem—

Mr Champion interjecting—

Mr WILLIAMS: and Nick Champion is a part of that.

Australia has a problem and its colour is red. We need to free our economy from the stranglehold it has on Australian productivity.

Deloitte goes on to name a number of areas of regulatory burden that could be removed. It is pleasing to note that they talk about business more so than government. They make the point that the private sector imposes many rules and regulations of its own, and these carry a huge cost. They came up with a figure of $94 million to administer and comply with the public sector rules, which we are addressing, but also $155 million to administer and comply with self-imposed rules and regulations in the private sector. This affects our productivity gains, and this is why the government is so intent on reducing red tape and regulatory burdens across the board—firstly in the public sector where we can make tangible differences to improve their operations and then to encourage the private sector to take a look at their rules and regulations.

The cost of these rules is significant, as outlined. It is something that we as a community need to address from a number of angles. The Deloitte report also looks at some structural
challenges on a strategic level. They have outlined this in a way that the Labor government could never have executed or implemented properly. That is the difference between the two sides: we use our private sector background and expertise to fix the problems Australia faces and we look forward to creating a strong and prosperous economy.

In closing, the changes we are outlining are required. We have made some significant achievements in this deregulation agenda, but there is more work to do. That work is incumbent on government and on the private sector to tackle unnecessary rules and regulations in our workforce and in our business operations. The better we can do that, the better our productivity can be and the better our economy can be.

Mr CHAMPION (Wakefield) (16:29): It is always a great pleasure to follow the member for Hindmarsh. He actually made an interesting point, about the Deloitte report that he referred to, that it is the private sector that is imposing many of these regulations and rules that so frustrate people. I think that is an interesting point because people tend to point the finger at government, and in fact much of the red-tape burden, if you like—which is part of modern society, I think—is actually private sector driven.

Needless to say, we support the Broadcasting and Other Legislation Amendment (Deregulation) Bill 2014. It is part of the regulation repeal day, that great march against the complexity of the modern world. There is just one problem for those opposite: the previous government repealed 16,794 acts and regulations, so it is not as if there is one side of parliament that is in favour of complexity and unnecessary regulation and another side of parliament that is not. Nobody is in favour of excessive red tape. Nobody is in favour of unnecessary acts and regulations. Everybody is in favour of doing what is sensible and pragmatic. That is what we do as a nation, as a parliament. This is simply the normal course of business in this place.

But unfortunately, rather than just presenting this as the normal work of government and getting on and doing it, they have to make all this spin and hoo-ha and PR about what is entirely unremarkable. That has sadly been, I think, the mark of those opposite. We see now much division and instability in those opposite. The member for Wentworth sits there stony faced. Of course, he is up to his neck in it; we know that. And they are so focused, I think, on the salesman and not the policies, not the substance of what they are doing, that they are tying themselves up in knots. It is not good for this country, and I can tell you that many of the people I meet out in my electorate are entirely unimpressed with those opposite, who promised adult government and have given us childish games and spin, PR and the oversell.

This bill focuses on getting rid of some of those regulations that were to do with the transfer from analog television to digital television. I think everybody would regard that transfer as being a successful one. I know that in my electorate we led the way. There are a couple of suburbs in my electorate, Hillbank and Craigmore, which were in the shade of the Mount Lofty television tower. For 25 years and perhaps longer they had terrible TV reception. One of my predecessors, Martyn Evans, in the seat of Bonython—

Mr Fitzgibbon: Good bloke!

Mr CHAMPION: a great bloke—helped to fix up some of those reception problems with ABC and SBS. But of course the commercial television stations were still intermittent. They broke up. There were various problems for them.
It was one of my election commitments to fix up TV reception in Craigmore, and we managed to do that in my first term. You know, when 150 people turn out to see the tower being constructed, that it is a popular thing. On Friday at midday, I think, most of them were there just to make sure it was actually happening. But that, I think, was evidence of how, if you get a clear signal, you take it for granted—television is part of modern life—and if you cannot get it you know all about it.

It is disappointing to hear remarks from those opposite failing to acknowledge the importance of captioning. Captioning is important for deaf Australians. I have a number of concerns, I guess, about the way that the government had been approaching consultation and indeed policy outcomes with deaf Australians. We know that the Minister for Communications, when he was introducing this bill, said:

… ACMA and my department have consulted with industry and key accessibility groups on a range of potential reforms that primarily seek to improve administrative arrangements for the free-to-air broadcasters and subscription television … while requiring that they continue to meet their captioning obligations.

But then we later heard from the Chief Executive Officer of Deaf Australia that Deaf Australia had not been consulted. That is not a really good outcome. We note that another arm of this government later acted to defund Deaf Australia and indeed impair its ability as a lobby group, as a voice for deaf Australians. That is really concerning. So we have government legislation not taking into account their needs, and then we have a defunding of their organisation. That is very concerning indeed.

The bipartisan report of the Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee has also identified that consultation on this bill was inadequate:

The committee notes that a large number of submitters indicated that … the consultation processes in relation to the bill had been inadequate. The committee agrees that the breadth of consultation in relation to this bill has been insufficient.

That is not a great reflection on the Minister for Communications. He has probably been busier consulting his backbench—well, not his backbench, not yet anyway; we await that moment in time, once they conclude on a successor to the current Prime Minister. We all know what is going to happen; it is only a matter of time, I guess, before that happens.

So there is a lack of consultation and a defunding of the organisation, and then of course we see other government policy which will directly impact on deaf Australians. First of all, there is the potential privatisation which is being examined by the Department of Finance at the moment, not taking into account any consultations with Health or any consultations with the Department of Human Services. It is just Finance, bean counters, looking at privatising Australian Hearing, an organisation that has been around since 1947, and the National Acoustic Laboratories as well, as part of that. These two institutions provide vital services and vital research. If you go out to Macquarie University, in Sydney, to the Australian Hearing Hub, you see the impact of that research not just on services but on technology and on medical exports, which do not just help Australians but help the world.

All of this is being done as part of an obsession with privatisation, because this is an institution which has survived many governments. It started out in the Chifley government to help veterans who had been injured by prolonged gun and artillery fire. It was there to help children who had suffered in the rubella outbreaks. It survived the Chifley government, the
Menzies government, Gorton, McMahon, Whitlam, Fraser, Hawke and Keating, and Howard. This was a national institution. Indeed, to give some credit to Prime Minister Howard, he actually increased funding in this area. So that is something that needs to be taken account of. This was an area of bipartisan support, yet we see in this bill, in the defunding of Deaf Australia and in the privatisation of Australian Hearing and the National Acoustic Laboratories a really concerning impact on deaf Australians.

We know that the government are now talking about welfare reform, hoeing into the disability support pension—being able to access it and the very structure of it. So we wait to see what will happen there. We know that the government defunded Gonski, undertaking $80 billion worth of cuts. The impact of these cuts is yet to flow through to schools, hospitals and state governments. We know there has been a culture of conservative state governments standing mute in the hope that something will happen within the government and that, down the track, some fix will be made. Who knows? The member for Wentworth might be more agreeable than the current Prime Minister. We just do not know, and we await the deliberations of their party room, I guess, on that front. We have no idea about what possible future policy approaches might be done. It is a very big concern, because we know that that Gonski funding had disability loadings in it which would have helped and made a huge difference in that area, not just for deaf Australians but for all of those children who have a disability and who deserve a fair go at school.

As I said before, government, of course, is a leviathan, and I guess that is why we hear those opposite talking about red tape repeal day and all the rest of it. But the one concerning thing about this is that, for all the rhetoric of those opposite, we still find in this area one arm of government acting intolerably, without consultation with deaf Australians. We see the defunding of their organisation. We see the potential privatisation of the services that they use year in and year out. That is very concerning, and this bill represents just one part of our concerns in this area.

To conclude, red tape repeal—the repealing of unnecessary regulations—is not the province of one side of parliament; it is something that has been done regularly in this parliament and in state governments. We should not have to deal with the hoo-ha, the PR and the spin of those opposite. We should not have to deal with the rhetoric of those opposite, which is so frequently over the top. They do themselves a disservice, because the community knows that we live in a modern world where regulation is necessary. The situation with some of our foodstuffs coming from overseas demonstrates that, in a modern, complex world, you do need regulation that will protect consumers and the public interest. Labor stands ready to have a modern regulatory approach to these things, but the community should not have to put up with those opposite blowing their trumpets every time some minor amendment, minor regulation or unused act is repealed in this House.

Mr HUTCHINSON (Lyons) (16:41): I apologise to those in the gallery, because some of them may be a little confused as to what the legislation before the House today, the Broadcasting and Other Legislation Amendment (Deregulation) Bill 2014, actually entails. We heard the member for Wakefield talking about pretty well everything else there. He did mention, though, towards the end of his contribution the word 'policy'. That is very much, as I think we all know, a policy-free zone on the other side of the House at the moment.
Empathising with every Australian is fine if you offer a solution, but there are no solutions coming from those opposite. It is only complaints—no solutions.

We are in the business—tragically, it is our lot in life—of fixing up the mess of six years that we inherited from those on the other side. They were the bad tenants that trashed the joint and have locked the door to stop us getting back in to fix it. That is the reality. The debt that we inherited was not a clean sheet of paper. It was not a clean sheet of paper that we inherited on 8 September. We had deficits literally as far as the eye could see that were booked up by the previous government—some might even say booby traps left by the previous government for the incoming government to deal with. Every single day, this government is having to deal with the reality that our revenue is $110 million less than our expenditure, and it is simply unsustainable. So, until those on the other side can offer a solution, they deserve not to be heard.

To the bill at hand. I am pleased to rise and support it, and I am pleased to see the Minister for Communications in the chamber here before me. I will just reference some of the comments that he made in a keynote address recently. He mentioned semaphores, and so I thought I would reflect on them. There is a semaphore that runs up the Tamar River, Deputy Speaker. You may not be aware of it, but many years ago it was used to signal to the town of Launceston when ships were coming through the heads at Low Head. There was a second semaphore at Mount Direction, about halfway down the Tamar River, on the eastern side of the Tamar River, in the electorate of my colleague the member for Bass, and then one on Windmill Hill. For those who know where the aquatic centre now is in Launceston, right next to it, on Windmill Hill, there was formerly a semaphore thing. But I guess it goes to show that communications is an evolving and changing place every day whether it be from carrier pigeons to the marathon runners to the mail services to the telephonic services, satellite services increasingly and, of course, the world we live in today that is inhabited by the internet, email and the different ways that we communicate.

I represent a regional electorate. I represent those communities essentially outside of the population centres in Tasmania. My electorate covers 50 per cent of the island state. The communities that make up my electorate reasonably demand and expect that their communication services are at least comparable, and it is so pleasing to see that when the new government came to power the Minister for Communications refocused the disaster that was the NBN rollout; there was an attention to those communities that were not like South Sydney, Caulfield or so forth, which had quite reasonable ADSL services. The emphasis or attention was on those communities that had none or very poor communications. That has been welcomed.

We have had a very successful rollout of wireless NBN throughout my electorate. Indeed, the simplicity and the capacity of people to be able to, if they wish, sign up for that technology has been encouraged and welcomed. The mobile phone black spots—I am going to put my hand up and say that we are the mobile phone black spot capital of Australia. I think we nominated over 140 sites. I understand that the $100 million the current government has committed will not be able to solve every issue, but certainly there are communities there that are anxiously awaiting news in that regard.

But television absolutely is still important. It is a way that many regional households and communities still like to get their evening news. There were real challenges. I note the
comment of the member for Wakefield and am very pleased that in his electorate the transfer over from analog technology to digital was a smooth one. That has not always been the case in parts of the electorate that I represent. The topography in particular has presented challenges. I again thank the minister, his staff and the department for responding when we have communicated with his office about the challenges that some communities are still having in respect of television communications.

But the critical thing to remember here is that there has been broad consultation about this bill. There are a number of recommendations after that consultation. Out of the Senate committee report there were two recommendations that addressed some of the concerns that were raised, and it is very pleasing to see that that consultation has taken place. It is good to know that those on the other side are indeed supporting this bill.

The purpose of the bill is to amend the Broadcasting Services Act 1992, the Radio Communications Act 1992 and the Australian Communications and Media Authority Act 2005 to implement industry preferred changes in this portfolio. The bill intends to amend or remove provisions in the act which were associated with simulcasts of analog and digital television signals in the transition to digital broadcasting and the restack of spectrum which was commenced after the last analog signal was switched off. I will not go into detail in that space; others have covered that. The bill will also rationalise requirements for operators in the industry, including removing the requirements for free-to-air broadcasters to report annually, so it is a red tape issue as much as anything else—not reducing the standards but just making it easier for business to report. What we want from business and business in this space in particular is to offer the best services that they can to as many Australians as they possibly can. Compliance and regulation are indeed important; but, when that compliance and regulation becomes burdensome, it is the responsibility of government to responsibly look at removing where they can. That has been a priority of this government since day one.

It also changes parts of captioning target obligations for subscription television and the assessment of quality of captioning of live and prerecorded broadcasts for free-to-air and subscription broadcasters.

As I mentioned, the communications portfolio has done its bit and identified as a particular target of reform red tape and green tape as particular targets for reform, as they are subject to substantial levels of very complex and sometimes necessary regulation. But, where it is not necessary, we have acted. The proposed changes have been introduced as a result of consultation with industry and other stakeholders, including the hearing impaired. Indeed, those groups have expressed some concerns, and they have been addressed in the changes and amendments to this bill. The bill responds to those as well as other concerns about subscription television licences and the radio and television broadcasting sector.

Free-to-air television lobby group Free TV in its submission to the National Commission of Audit claimed that free-to-air broadcasters were subject to a considerable number of reporting requirements, including those that were unnecessary or had substantial penalties for non-compliance. A number of government members have also for a long time expressed concern about the loss of local media voices and that the local diversity and competition in regional and rural areas would be lost unless adjustments were made. Those adjustments have been made. To reflect: I do not have any one centre. I have three metropolitan centres in which media providers are located. Indeed, their transmissions into regional areas of Tasmania are
absolutely critical to services and to the capacity of people to receive their evening news via television. In my electorate—or any large rural and regional electorate—we would be particularly concerned if television and radio in the forms they are currently presented were in any way compromised.

I believe also that people should voice in some respects their discontent with the ABC's decisions, particularly in regard to rural and regional Australia. The recommendations that came out of the Lewis report highlighted the fact that there was absolutely no necessity for services, particularly services in regional Australia, to be impacted by those modest cuts. The capacity was there, within management, with inefficiencies—that can be found in every business—to make those things. Whereas it appears that decisions have been made—which perhaps were the decisions that management had already reconciled to undertake—that have been detrimental to some services in regional Australia, and regional Tasmania as well, and that is particularly disappointing.

The legislation that rationalises the delivery of new digital television will also be welcomed by the people in my electorate of Lyons who have been particularly affected by the switch-over from analog to digital services. As I mentioned before, we have had major problems in Tasmania in certain areas that we are still addressing that have much to do with the topography of certain parts of the state. In particularly hilly areas, with mountains in between—often in country communities—newly designated towers which are supposed to provide signals have not provided that. During the switch from analog to digital some people who had enjoyed full television reception for years lost all services. I refer particularly to my constituent Derek Thompson from Moltema in north-west Tasmania. His situation is typical of a number of calls we have had in that particular area over a number of months.

Moltema is a country area about 10 minutes drive north of Deloraine, a major northern rural Tasmanian town. The Thompsons, like most of their neighbours, have always had good television on analog, but it is one of those black-spot areas in my electorate of Lyons for mobile phone coverage. So they not only cannot access mobile phone coverage but increasingly they cannot access television. With the switch-over to digital television, Mr Thompson lost all television reception, so basically they lost all contact with the world.

Mr Thompson thought he had prepared for the changeover to digital—previously investigating all the research and installing the necessary equipment—to make the changes smooth. But he and some of his neighbours lost their services anyway. Mr Thompson, despite not having spare cash to invest in all the extras that digital television providers said he needed, persisted; he bought new aerials and other equipment and even climbed up on his roof a number of times to point the aerial in different directions, finally pointing it at a tower on a distant mountain, after it was discovered that a reception tower nearby had been switched off.

We eventually got television reception back for Mr and Mrs Thompson, and then they and their neighbours lost it again when a new 4G mobile network was introduced in their area. We found out that the Thompsons and their neighbours needed to install a filter on the back of their television sets to filter out the interference that came from that new mobile phone network. Fortunately the first filter that he tried was the one that fixed the problem, but it just highlights the fact that there are particular challenges in rural and regional areas that sometimes those living in the big cities do not always appreciate. But again I thank the
Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (16:56): I rise to speak on the Broadcasting and Other Legislation Amendment (Deregulation) Bill 2014. The purpose of this bill is to amend the Broadcasting Services Act 1992, the Radiocommunications Act 1992 and the Media Authority Act 2005. This legislation implements changes to the communications sector which, I am advised, are broadly supported throughout the communications sector. Among the changes to be introduced by these bills are the amendment or removal of provisions necessary in the transition to digital broadcasting; and the amendment of the framework used by the Australian Communications and Media Authority to plan the broadcasting services band spectrum by removing some requirements which are no longer necessary.

Deregulation is something the Labor Party supports, where appropriate. It is often necessary in order to improve efficiency, especially in industries like communications which have changed so much since the time of Federation, when we were talking about telegraphs and the like, through to the digital age. The former Labor government implemented many deregulation reforms. We did not have press releases put out when we did this, because deregulation is important to maintain and improve competition and productivity in the Australian economy. The former Labor government, without any fanfare, without putting out local press releases, repealed 16,794 acts and regulations. This is the everyday work of governments. You do not need a press release. You do not need to give yourself a medal and say, 'Aren't we great!' just for turning up and doing our job. Unless you are devoid of reason, unless you are devoid of vision, no government would ever do that. So it is sad to see the 'red-tape day' trumpeted by those opposite as 'one of the great achievements' of their 18 months of being in government.

One of the reforms included in this bill will remove certain requirements for free-to-air broadcasters in reporting on compliance with obligations requiring them to provide captioning of programs. And that is what I am going to particularly turn my mind to in this speech. The vision and hearing impaired community are particularly concerned that these changes will reduce the captioning services provided, and may eventually result in the loss of the requirement for there to be 100 per cent captioning from 6am to midnight on primary free-to-air channels. Deregulation may be necessary, but it always needs to be coupled with extensive community consultation and engagement with the affected industry or community or stakeholders.

Unfortunately with this legislation, the Abbott government, and in particular, the Minister for Communications, have not consulted adequately with the vision and hearing impaired community that may be affected by this bill. I would urge the minister to recognise that even if stakeholders are deaf it does not mean that you do not consult with them. We are living in the information age, and those of us who are not hearing impaired receive information almost constantly, from the moment we wake in the morning and sometimes until we go to bed with an iPhone in our hands. From radio to television and to the internet; if we miss a radio or television broadcast we can download the broadcast and record it, or see it on our phone and listen at our leisure. The days when the entire community is watching the same bit of media are long gone. It is a fragmented media market now.
However, the digital age is a particularly different reality for those Australians who are hearing impaired. One in six Australians are affected by hearing loss, and around 30,000 Australians have total hearing loss. With an ageing population these numbers are only going to increase, with now one in five Australians being over 65. People with hearing loss, obviously, can still be very productive members of society. They hold down all sorts of jobs, they are taxpayers, they are workers and they can do many things. In fact, one of the things that I do note about former Prime Minister John Howard was that he was hearing impaired, but he got on with the job of working hard for the Australian people in the way that he saw fit. That is something I often mention in terms of working with a disability and still going on to serve your community. So one-sixth of the Australian population currently relies on broadcast captioning to receive information.

Recently in Queensland we felt the brunt of Cyclone Marcia cross the coast just north of Yeppoon. I have a sister and her partner who live in Biloela, which was affected by Cyclone Marcia, and they also have a property at Byfield, that was particularly hammered by the cyclone. I know what it is like. There are electricians out working hard at the moment trying to restore power. As Queenslanders, when we have so many cyclones and floods and with so many of us living on the coast, we know how important the information is.

During Cyclone Marcia so many of us were tuned into our radios or watching television to get the latest forecast of where the cyclone was likely to make landfall and how dangerous it would be. The difference between a category 3 and a category 5 can be life or death in terms of how people respond. So we do need to make sure that the communications are appropriate. The hearing impaired people in the vicinity of the cyclone would have been relying on captioning to get the latest news broadcasts. I know that there was also some Auslan interpreting being done when Premier Palaszczuk was communicating with people, but the captions still play an important part. Imagine how fearful it would have been for them not to have had access to this information.

The reliance on captioning by the hearing impaired is real and vitally important and, as I said, will only become even more important in the years ahead as we enter this time where we have two generations retired simultaneously. The fear of not having access to that captioning service is also real and should have been taken much more seriously by the Minister for Communications. Maybe the Minister for Communications finds it easier to talk about himself than to hear the concerns of those people who are hearing impaired?

The concerns of the hearing impaired community were also reflected in the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights in their Sixteenth Report of the 44th Parliament in the Senate, which examined the bill. It said:

… the committee considers that the measure would represent a limitation on the right of persons with disabilities …

The report sought further advice from the Minister of Communications.

The Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee conducted an inquiry into the bill. Mr Kyle Miers from Deaf Australia, in evidence to that Senate committee, said:

… ‘information is power’. We access information through various mediums: radio, public announcement systems, theatre, the arts, online, emergency announcements. There are various mediums
to access information, but many of those are not accessible to deaf people, because they are not captioned. So, we rely heavily on accessible information via the television.

The Community and Public Sector Union said that any reforms to captioning regulation should be focussed on improving captioning services for deaf and hearing impaired Australians.

My electorate has a particular connection with these reforms. Deaf Services Queensland is located in Moreton, on Ipswich Road. It is an organisation that has been operating in my electorate since 1903. It is the leading provider of support services and information to the deaf and hard-of-hearing community in Queensland—not just in Brisbane but right up to the Cape—from Coolangatta to Cunnamulla, to Camooweal and to everywhere in between. It is a very worthy service. I have been in consultation with the CEO of this service, Brett Casey, and its employees over many years. I know that Brett Casey might be watching this speech at the moment—hopefully, having someone translate it—a big thumbs up to you, Brett, for the input you have had into this speech. Brett Casey has for many years been involved in community events. He has turned up to community events and they have organised translators to be there so that the hearing impaired can access the information as well. Brett Casey, the CEO of Deaf Services Queensland, commented about the proposed reforms from the government, 'Implementing a complaint based assessment process therefore puts the onus on the deaf and hard of hearing viewers, who would then need to complain in regards to the captioning standard.'

He went further, explaining his disappointment with the government's handling of this reform: 'My understanding is that it was a Liberal government that developed the compliance regime in 2001 when captioning was introduced on free-to-air broadcasting for prime-time viewing with amendments to the broadcasting act. It seems the LNP are forever 'giveth' and then 'taketh' from the community. Seems the broadcasters have some close LNP friends.'

After listening to the hearing impaired sector, Labor has worked through the concerns that they have raised and have sought changes to the bill. I note that the member for Blaxland and shadow communications minister is in the chamber, and has raised many of these concerns. He has sought changes to the bill that will make it more palatable for the Labor Party. These changes will ensure that broadcasters will still be required to report annually on their compliance with captioning obligations. Labor has also ensured that there will be a statutory review next year, in 2016, of all the issues that concern the deaf community and broadcasters, including captioning.

To their credit, the Abbott government have understood these concerns and have supported the changes put forward by the Labor opposition.

However, I do stress again that this is where the government should have consulted much more thoroughly. It should have engaged with the deaf community and the broader communications area. Minister Turnbull definitely was negligent in not doing that. He failed to address the real concerns of a vulnerable sector of the community and the hearing impaired community deserves much better. In fact, all of the people involved that will be impacted by this legislation deserve better. Perhaps the communications minister could spend less time talking about himself to the backbench—those 39 and counting—and more time doing his job.
With the changes made to this legislation by Labor, by the member for Blaxland, the honourable Jason Clare, this is now a bill which will ease the regulatory burden in the communication industry but will retain the safeguards around these vitally important services that I have detailed. I support this piece of legislation.

Mr WHITELEY (Braddon) (17:08): I am pleased today to have the opportunity to speak on the Broadcasting and Other Legislation Amendment (Deregulation) Bill 2014. It is amazing isn't it? Each and every day we wander in here and the scaremongers are at work. They know no shame, they know no boundaries whether they are trying to scare students or scare pensioners and now they are trying to scare people with a hearing impairment. It is extraordinary.

Mr Coleman: It is wrong.

Mr WHITELEY: It is wrong, as the member for Banks just prompted. And that is not what we are here for. Yes, we can have our political debates on the deep philosophical policy issues that face our nation; that is fine. Those opposite need to cut out this nonsense of trying to lower themselves to a point of just scaring people to make base political points.

This bill does not reduce captioning standards or targets. Let's just clear that up for one moment. The minister has left the chamber at the moment but I am sure he must have sat there with his mouth tightly closed as he had to listen to a number of the contributions from those opposite who were making downright incorrect, false, misleading, deceptive claims. This bill does a lot of things. It is basically a red tape reduction bill. It is trying to find more efficient administrative arrangements, as this government has been trying to do since it was elected. But please, those opposite, do not come in here and use parliamentary privilege to try and scare vulnerable people in our community by spreading completely false information.

As I said, this bill is about reducing the regulatory burden around captioning standards and targets. If those opposite read the bill or took the time to have their researchers and their speech writers actually look at the details of the bill and the ramifications of the bill, they could not find their way to the speeches that they are contributing today. They should actually look at the facts and maybe then we could move on in a positive fashion.

The coalition went to the election committing to cut the regulatory burden for businesses to boost productivity. Businesses, entities, bodies—whatever you want to call them—within the communications sector are no different. The Department of Communications is a big department. It is responsible for what some would argue are the most central planks of our day-to-day life. Whether it be mobile phones, the digital economy, broadband or online safety and security—keeping in mind that the cyber safety helpline that has been introduced recently has had 95,000 hits in the last financial year—our telephone services, our television services, radio or Australia Post, it is a huge department with a huge responsibility to deliver services that are probably a central plank in the lives of each and every one of us.

What the department is trying to do, as we would expect all departments under the instruction of their ministers and obviously the Prime Minister to do, is find ways to make life easier within the departments when it comes to administrative arrangements. We do not want to try and cut corners or take people to a lesser value for the service but just to find sensible ways to save red tape and that is what this bill does. Again, I repeat: there is nothing in this
bill that will reduce captioning standards or targets. They should stop saying that on the other side.

Since the Abbott government was elected, we have been seeking new opportunities to lift the burden on businesses and help them to do what they do best—that is, to employ more people and create economic growth. Governments should not be in the business of employing people. Governments should be in the business of creating an economic environment and a social environment where the rest of the country, the private sector, can thrive, have confidence in the future, prepare to invest and hope that at the end of the day someone will gain a job from it because we are creating wealth and building the essence of this nation. No part of the economy is exempt from this government's search for red tape reduction.

I note the minister has released the Communications portfolio: Deregulation Road Map 2014, which outlined this government's deregulation agenda within the communications portfolio. This bill implements a number of the measures identified in that report. I take great exception to speakers previous who indicated that the member for Wentworth should hang his head in shame because he has not consulted. What a ridiculous assertion to make in this place. There was a deep consultation process through this with industry to identify other opportunities to ease the regulatory burden including repealing the redundant licensing and planning provisions that regulated the digital switchover and restack processes. What a tremendous advancement in our lives. The biggest revolution in this area since the introduction of colour TV, I suspect, in 1975 was the switchover from analogue to digital.

Measures included in the bill will: amend the Australian Communications and Media Authority's planning powers to implement more streamlined processes when planning broadcast spectrum; remove the requirement for reports made by certain subscription television licensees and channel providers to ACMA under the new eligible drama expenditure scheme to be independently audited; introduce minor amendments to the control and ownership provisions; remove the requirement for ACMA to review codes of practice under sections 123A and clause 29 and schedule 6 to the BSA; and, finally, make consequential amendments to schedule 4 of the BSA as a result of the Acts and Instruments (Framework Reform) Bill 2014. That is what this bill is about.

The last two decades have seen an explosion in the advance of technology and communications in a way that probably most would not have expected. Our children do not quite get it. I have young adult children and they think this is the way the world has always been—we have always had mobile phones and we have always had access to the Internet and done all the things that they have become accustomed to. They look at us cross eyed when we try to inform them that this is not the way it has always been, that 10 and 15 years ago life was vastly different, let alone 35 or 40 years ago, in the case of many who sit in this chamber. The world is a vastly different place and technology has exploded.

The Minister for Communications, who is now back in the chamber, is one of the few in my view who have demonstrated both here in his leadership capacity and in business his acumen and ability to be a leader in this part of the economy. We are in good hands. To assert from the other side that this minister has not consulted or in some way does not understand the implications of the bill that he has signed off on, so to speak, is just a ludicrous claim.

Unfortunately, in many cases laws and regulations have lagged behind those advances and to some degree that is what this bill is about. It is a catch-up bill in many respects. It is trying
to bring the regs and red tape processes in line with the advancements in technology. It is a mismatch at the moment—we have processes that are matched to the 1970s and the 1980s let alone the 1990s. This is what this bill is about. We all know that regulatory measures of 15 years ago will not apply. This bill will rectify those outdated regulations and help the industry to remain competitive and not be bogged down with redundant red tape.

There is no doubt that the digital revolution rolls on, with weekly announcements of technological breakthroughs and tech companies announcing with much fanfare their latest gadgets. Members in this place are probably some of the quickest to attach themselves to these gadgets. I notice some of my colleagues walking around with Maxwell Smart watches and so on. We are in the midst of this explosion of technology and we have people of all ages—grannies, grandpas, mums, dads, children and young adults—wanting to be a part of the technological advances that make our lives so much more interesting and make what is going on around the world more accessible, even though some would say that that is not always a good thing. Generally I think it is a good thing. If we can keep technology under control and keep it out of the hands of those who seek to do evil, do wrong and infiltrate the minds of our young people, we are on the right track, but let us not suggest for one minute that the advances in technology have not been good for humankind.

As I have previously stated in this chamber, there are areas of my electorate of Braddon on the north-west coast and King Island that have all sorts of problems with television reception—and I am pleased the minister is here because he and his office are aware of this. I note some of my colleagues, on this side at least, have been drawing attention to this as well. Residents in Queenstown, Rosebery and Strahan—the mining towns of my community; the wealth creators of my region that send off masses of taxes that enable other social services to be provided to every other part of the state of Tasmania—may not be big in number but are mighty in their contribution to our electorate. I get calls from those in the mining towns. It is fair to say that there are not a lot of services available to them and there is not a lot to do, but they love their community. TV and technology access is a very important part of their lives. Imagine how they feel when the TV reception suddenly disappears in the middle of an exciting cricket match, a football game, the news or, dare I say it, Q&A—maybe that would be a good time for me for it to go down, but that is another matter. That is just not acceptable and there is a lot of work to be done.

Whereas in the past poor television reception resulted in a grainy or fuzzy picture, which was frustrating enough, now with digital television it is all or nothing. Poor reception results turn immediately into no reception results at all. It is all right for me to chuckle out the side of my mouth—I do not experience that in the suburban area where I live; that does not happen to me on a frequent basis. It is so frustrating for them. It happens regularly.

I have written to the major television stations—I had only one courteous response; the others did not even respond—asking them: one, to explain what is going on; two, what the solutions are; and, three, what they are prepared to do about it. Some of my colleagues have already mentioned this. I say to them today publicly in the privileged place that this is that they have a responsibility. Businesses are saying to me in chambers of commerce that this is a bit rich—'The television station salesmen come and sell me packages of adverts on the pretence the ad for my products is going throughout my region, reaching every nook and cranny, down to the West Coast and onto King Island.' They do not get a reduction in their
bill when it is found that for a day and a half there was probably only 20 per cent reception in the mining towns on the West Coast.

They have an obligation. They are taking revenue. They provide a great service—do not get me wrong; do not mishear me—but they do have an obligation if they are taking money for advertising from businesses to advertise in every nook and cranny of my electorate to make sure that that ad reaches the people that it has been paid to. I call on them today to find solutions. There are solutions. There must be a solution in this explosion of technology that I spoke about. I know it is relay upon relay upon relay—I get all that—but you cannot tell me that there is not a way to get a better result.

According to Southern Cross Austereo, who did take the time to respond to me, the signal is beamed from Launceston to Devonport, relayed from Devonport to Burnie, relayed from Burnie to Waratah, relayed from Waratah to Rosebery and, finally, relayed from Rosebery to Queenstown and Strahan. The signal is getting weaker and weaker as it goes along. We have to get it fixed. I call on the television stations to do the right thing. I am happy to work with them to communicate with the community about that. While the West Coast of Tasmania is struggling, it is not just there; there are other patchy places in the electorate. It is really important that we get this matter fixed.

What an exciting world we live in! Advances in technology are giving us access to magnificent options to reach family and friends around the world and to do business around the world. This bill is to pull away the regulations that are so out of date it is not funny. I commend the minister and I commend the bill.

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga) (17:23): I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak on the Broadcasting and Other Legislation Amendment (Deregulation) Bill 2014. As I am the shadow minister for disability reform, this bill is of particular interest to me as it seeks to amend certain requirements for the captioning of television. Of course, this is a critical service for people with hearing impairment right across Australia. Captioning, the text version of the audio component of a television show, enables deaf and hard of hearing Australians to engage with news, current affairs, sport and entertainment. Captioning enables deaf and hard of hearing Australians to enjoy television in the same way as the rest of us. Without it, people with hearing impairment face significant barriers to accessing information that so many of us take for granted.

Submissions to the Senate inquiry into this bill make clear the importance of captioning to the deaf community in Australia. Kyle Myers, the CEO of Deaf Australia, stated in Deaf Australia's submission to the inquiry:

There are various mediums to access information, but many of those are not accessible to deaf people because they are not captioned ... we ... the deaf and hearing impaired community ... rely heavily on accessible captioned information via the television.

Another respondent in Deaf Australia's submission stated:

We miss out on a lot of information every day wherever we go. We cannot hear radio because it is hard for deaf people to understand ... We rely on information from news and programs on TV when adequately captioned and where available. It provides us with daily information of what is happening every day. Hearing (non-deaf) people listen to radio, public announcements and ALL TV programs every day at any time ... We are the ones who are missing out a lot.
And another respondent said:

Captioning is vital to accessibility. All programs should be captioned. The deaf and hard of hearing should not be confined to set hours or types of programs. It is a simple means of increasing accessibility.

So the message from deaf and hard of hearing people across Australia is that we should not be limiting access to captioning. Certainly Labor would oppose any measure which sought to water down the requirements on broadcasters to provide captioning or which sought to reduce the availability of captioning. Following the introduction of this bill, we received correspondence from the deaf community raising their concerns about the original form of this legislation. Over the last month, Labor has done what the minister should have done. We have sat down with deaf advocacy groups and the broadcasting industry and worked through their concerns with the changes that are reflected in this bill. As a result of this work, Labor has developed a compromise that I am pleased to say both sides have agreed to. This will restore the requirement for free-to-air broadcasters to report annually on their compliance with captioning obligations and it will restore the statutory review of captioning, which will occur in 2016. This will allow a comprehensive review of all the issues that concern the deaf community and broadcasters.

I am very pleased that the shadow minister, who is here in the chamber, has moved amendments to this effect in this debate today, and I understand that the government has agreed to support these amendments in full. I thank the shadow minister, the member for Blaxland, for his work on these amendments. In particular, I thank the peak deaf bodies who have provided feedback to me and the member for Blaxland. I note that the shadow minister, the member for Blaxland, has also successfully secured the support of broadcasters for these amendments. Frankly, this is work the government should have done themselves. They should have sat down with the deaf community and consulted them on these changes, and I am very disappointed that the Minister for Communications did not do that. It seems the government was more interested in trumpeting 'Regulation Repeal Day' than doing proper consultation and getting the policy settings right. Nevertheless, it is good that the amendments moved today by Labor will be supported by the government and we will see captioning protected so that deaf Australians will not be disadvantaged.

Of course, this piece of legislation is not the only issue facing deaf Australians. Let's not forget that, just two days before Christmas, the Abbott government savagely cut funding to disability organisations. They slashed funding for Deaf Australia. They also slashed funding for the Deafness Forum of Australia. These two peak organisations together represent the approximately four million deaf or hard of hearing Australians. These cuts will affect hundreds of thousands of Australians living with a disability, including deaf and hard of hearing Australians. And I am sorry to say that this is only one of the many changes that the government has made which will impact on the deaf community. The government has also walked away from its promise to fully implement Gonski measures that would have better assisted students with a disability. Clearly, this government has no understanding of what these cuts will mean to children in our schools who need these services. It was in fact only a few weeks ago that the extraordinary Drisana Levitzke-Gray was awarded Young Australian of the Year for her work advocating for the rights of deaf children. I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate her on her award and thank her for all the work she has done for the deaf community. Drisana is deaf herself and an inspiration to many people in Australia,
Mr COLEMAN (Banks) (17:33): I am really pleased to have the opportunity to speak on this important piece of legislation, building as it does upon the strong work of the coalition
government in the broader deregulation area and specifically in the communications space.
Since our election 18 months ago, with our two repeal days, the various measures we have put
forward to the parliament have saved about $94 million in compliance costs and other
associated costs and got rid of about 3,000 pages of redundant legislation. That is an
incredibly important part of public policy in this area.

One of the questions you have to think about in this area is why there is so much regulation
to be repealed. Understanding that is really important to understanding why the initiatives of
the government in this area are so critical. The television industry would have to be one of the
most highly regulated parts of the Australian economy, particularly in the free-to-air industry.
What this government recognises is that many industries are changing and none more so than
television and particularly free-to-air television. In that context, the last thing you want to do
is burden industry with unnecessary red tape that does not do anything helpful for consumers, viewers or businesses and that really, frankly, gets in the way of running a sensible business operation.

You have to go back to the question of why there is so much regulation in free-to-air television. To do that you have to think: what is the public asset that free-to-air broadcasters enjoy access to, how is it linked to the high degree of regulation in this area, and how is that changing? The asset that free-to-air broadcasters have privileged access to is spectrum. It is a bit of an abstract term; most of us probably do not spend a lot of time thinking about what it means, but it means certain bits of the airwaves that are particularly valuable and that allow you to transmit a moving picture, in a nutshell. Historically that has been what is called the analogue spectrum; more recently we have moved to the digital spectrum, which I will come to in a moment.

What we have faced for many decades is a situation where the only way you could get a moving picture into the home was through the broadcast spectrum. There was no other way of doing it because scientists and engineers had not come up with any other way of doing it. That meant if a business had access to that spectrum, it was in an incredibly privileged position. Empires were built on that access. Understandably, governments of various persuasions said, 'If we are going to give you access to this extremely valuable public good, we are going to require you to comply with certain regulations.' That is why we see such an extensive list of regulatory requirements in the free-to-air area. Of course over time scientists and engineers have worked out other ways of getting a moving picture into the home. As that occurs, the power of broadcast spectrum will decline.

We started out with the VCR in the eighties, and in the nineties DVD players came along. We also had cable and satellite in the nineties and then, from the early 2000s onwards, first fixed-line and then mobile internet have been of sufficient quality to get a moving picture into the home—not just into the home but into a whole bunch of other places.

As a consequence of that, the free-to-air industry has changed quite radically. It does not have a monopoly on getting that access to the home, and the habits of viewers are changing considerably. It is very important to understand this background.

You have to think: where is this all headed? I suspect there will be a day when broadcast spectrum will become completely irrelevant, and that is when all homes will have access to a sufficient quality picture through other means—most likely the internet and in some places mobile or satellite. But that day is coming. It is probably within this decade—within that time frame—and then broadcast spectrum is frankly meaningless.

The situation faced by free-to-air broadcasters is they have gone from being a monopolistic provider of television services to the home to one delivery mechanism amongst a number—although free-to-air today is still the only way every home in Australia can get broadcast-quality content.

The member for Braddon was talking about problems which persist with broadcast spectrum. There are of course a number of homes, particularly in regional Australia, that cannot get broadcast-quality TV. They rely generally on a satellite service, but the vast majority—99 per cent of Australian homes—can get broadcast-quality in the home via broadcast spectrum. The percentage of homes that can get broadcast-quality 24 hours a day is
rising—through the tremendous work of the Minister for Communications, ably assisted by his parliamentary secretary—and will continue to rise through the sensible NBN, which we are building, and the growth of mobile networks. But it is still not 100 per cent—it is still a way off but it will eventually be 100 per cent.

Broadcast spectrum will be irrelevant, because everyone will have access to a moving picture, and at that point, the broadcast networks will have no particular standing that is any different to anybody else in the world. Anybody at that point will be able to provide exactly the same thing into the home.

Massive changes are going on in the industry and, when industry and markets change, governments should change too. The fundamental question we, as a government, must ask ourselves, is: what is our role here; why is the government involved in this; what is it in fact that we are attempting to do; what are the problems we are attempting to solve; how involved do we have to be; do we have to hold the hand of the television industry every step of the way; or should we get out of the way and remove regulation that does not help while keeping important regulation in place that protects viewers?

The changes in the industry are well reflected by some numbers and it is interesting to look at how things have changed in the television industry—with all of this informing the appropriate response from government. If you look back to 2003-04—so 10 years ago—the broadcast networks Seven, Nine and Ten collectively made EBITDA, a measure of profit, of $740 million. Ten years later, because of all the forces that we have been discussing, that had dropped to $493 million—so that is about a one-third drop over 10 years. That might not sound so bad but, if you contrast that with what was happening in the economy more generally, it is actually a very steep decline. For instance, federal government revenue in 2003-04 was $188 billion; in 2013-14, it was $374 billion. So federal government revenue nearly doubled, and the television sector profitability in that same time was reduced by a third.

Ten years ago Foxtel did not make any money at all; last year it made twice as much as the entire free-to-air television industry combined. So Foxtel made EBITDA of $970 million. So this is a changing marketplace and, in that context, it is important that the government responds sensibly.

One of the things that the previous government did and handled with a degree of competence was the restack from analog to digital spectrum—television broadcasters now use a smaller part of the spectrum, which enabled an auction process for the previous analog spectrum and the government raised considerable funds from, principally, the mobile telecommunications industry so that was a sensible reform. The amount of spectrum for the free-to-air industry was compressed for the benefit of the broader economy.

If we look at the measures before us today, sensible one and all—captioning is something we have spoken about quite a bit this afternoon, and the government is absolutely committed to the maintenance of very high-quality standards in captioning. Captioning is in fact required on free-to-air broadcasts 100 per cent of the time on the primary channels between 6 am and midnight, so the vast bulk of viewing.

There have been some anomalies and some unnecessary complexity in the system, and it is good to see that the opposition is supporting some of the sensible adjustments to the
captioning regime that are included in this bill, such as the 12-month exemption from captioning obligations for new channels; the ability to aggregate a captioning target across a number of sporting channels when they are offering related programs—for instance, a tennis event; and a number of other things to do with record keeping ACMA, the regulator, is certainly nothing if not a record keeper and if we can reduce the requirements for records to be kept and forms to be filled out it is to be entirely encouraged.

Drama is a highly regulated part of the Australian television industry, and a number of subscription TV channels are required to spend about 10 per cent of their programming budget on local drama, supporting local producers, actors and so on. That continues but there is no longer a need for an annual audit of that process. That is a sensible reform and, again, a very sensible red-tape reduction measure. In my electorate of Banks there are numerous pay TV channel providers that are very important in our community, and I certainly commend TVB, which provides terrific Chinese language services right across Australia, and World Media, who provide Arabic and other language services right across the nation. It is important that we do not overly burden these subscription TV operators with unnecessary form filling, and it is good to see that we have made that change.

Licence area population is a very complex area in which many lawyers have made a lot of money over the years, but we are making things a little simpler. If ACMA chooses to change the definition of a licence area, rather than having the potential impact of a broadcaster being required to sell a station and/or to provide substantially more local content, that will not be required. That is a good thing because if ACMA changes the definition of a licence area, nothing has changed in terms of what the broadcaster is actually doing; they are still broadcasting the same shows to the same people and therefore the requirements should not change, because they are not in themselves changing anything at all.

As we talked about before, digital switch-over has been an ongoing process for a number of years—right back to around 2005-06. It is completely finished now and the management of the end of that process was done very effectively by this government. There were lots of transitional provisions during those six or seven years and the import of much of that was: what you do in analog you must do in digital, and vice versa. Those provisions are no longer required, of course, because analog is no more, so those requirements should be deleted from the statute books.

It is good to see in this legislation that ACMA is no longer required to formally conduct reviews on the classification system. We have seen ads on TV about the television code and seeking input on the television code. There is lots of community consultation about these matters. ACMA needs to sign off on any final classification scheme and it is certainly within ACMA's rights to refuse to sign off on something if they think it is inappropriate, but they should not have to conduct formal reviews simply for the sake of doing so.

There are very strong deregulatory measures here. They take account of the changing nature of the broadcast industry and I commend these changes to the House.

Mr PITT (Hinkler) (17:48): I rise to speak on the Broadcasting and Other Legislation Amendment (Deregulation) Bill 2014. I think it is important that we look back at the journey for communications and how we got to this point. Technology is evolving at an exponentially-increasing rate. I note the minister said in his contribution that legislation is playing catch-up with technology. It is not just the legislation; it is the infrastructure that
delivers the ability to use these systems. There will be constant change and it is important that we look at things in a watershed position.

I clearly recall as a young child playing with one of my brothers at our grandmother's house with two jam tins and a piece of string. If I were to suggest that to my children at the moment, the first thing they would ask me is, 'What's a jam tin?' The second thing they might ask me is, 'Why would you do that when you could just text one another?' Quite simply, technology has moved rapidly and exponentially.

As a young student university I remember purchasing a computer, a 386SX. It cost me somewhere around $2,500, and the next level up would have cost some $4,000. We are now using devices which cost a few hundred dollars and are far better than the ones we used previously. It is important that we maintain our attachment to technology and it is important that we maintain technology so that people can access it—and not just in the cities. It is incredibly important that we provide facilities to people in regional and rural Australia because, quite simply, they have lost their other services. This is the only point of access for them for many things, including government-provided services, and they need continued access to it—never more so than in our current circumstances.

The natural events which have occurred in Queensland again this year have demonstrated just how important our communications network is. I would like to relay a couple of recollections which have been provided to me in recent weeks. In Rockhampton and Yeppoon they have an enormous amount of difficulty communicating at the moment because everyone is reliant on mobile technology. Centralised systems such as the old phone network are relatively easy to back up. It is quite easy to provide additional backup power with generators and batteries. When they do run down it is a single point to provide other emergency services to provide power to that system. In a distributed network such as the NBN, those things are individual per street and per house and it is far more difficult to look after them then. Quite simply, they have about an eight-hour run time on a loss of power. If you look at the situation in Rockhampton and Yeppoon at the moment, in most locations they will probably not have power before the end of the week and some will not have it for two, three or four weeks—which makes it incredibly difficult. As we move to digital systems through not only the Australian government but also business, you simply cannot operate without those facilities.

There has also been an exponential increase in growth around mobile devices. People simply are not tied to a desk and a PC anymore. They all have mobile devices, they like to be connected wirelessly, and you cannot do that with a cable that runs down the road for five kilometres while you drive your car.

The other thing I would like to point out—particularly as the minister is in the House—is the exceptional job that ABC regional radio did during the recent emergencies and of course during the ones in my home town of Bundaberg in 2013. Scott Lamond, Kallee Buchanan and the rest of the team at the ABC are responsible for the emergency broadcasts. They work incredibly long hours and they do a fabulous job, and we are very supportive of the work they do.

I note the bill looks at captioning reform. There have been many contributions on this through the debate and, given the time, I will keep this brief. The bill also looks at the New Eligible Drama Expenditure Scheme. But one thing I would like to discuss are the changes to ACMA. My predecessor, Mr Neville—the former member for Hinkler—has retired in the
electorate, and he is a passionate advocate for communications. However, as a well-informed and retired MP, he is an incredibly noisy constituent when it comes to ACMA, in particular. With the digital changeover that occurred recently, one of our issues was unfortunately at Mr Neville's home where he suggested the particular actions I should take as the local MP in order to fix the issue that was affecting his house and his family, and we did sort that out.

It is incredibly important that we roll the NBN infrastructure out and we roll it out successfully. It is one of the largest infrastructure projects this nation has ever undertaken. As an electrical engineer and as someone who has some project management experience, I know that it is incredibly complicated and incredibly expensive. I fully support the fibre-to-the-node network put forward by this government. It will be work; it will be far cheaper; and it will be far more successful. As we push forward in the next few years, if changes in technology continue to increase exponentially there will be other changes and other challenges. You only have to look at something like quantum computing, where Australia leads the world. It is something which could actually make this nation one of the richest in the world if they can successfully put together a quantum computing system. So it is very important that we get this right. From my point of view, rural and regional Australia is incredibly important. If we look at what the former Labor government did around satellites, we see that these systems were oversubscribed and they simply do not work. It has been of no benefit to people in my electorate.

There are further changes around media diversity and the digital switchover and restack, which of course is spectrum change. But, as was put forward by previous speakers in this debate, changing the spectrum may well not be necessary down the track because, quite simply, everything will be delivered through the NBN. We have incredibly large changes through our communications network. It is a very challenging period for our TV producers and for people who work with radio. As was stated, they are restricted by certain rules that were put in place in the nineties when the technology was incredibly different. I do not want to take up all of the time of the House, and I am sure the minister would like to get the bill on the table, so I commend the bill to the House.

Mr Turnbull (Wentworth—Minister for Communications) (17:55): I would like to thank the members who have contributed to the debate on the Broadcasting and Other Legislation Amendment (Deregulation) Bill 2014. The bill amends the Broadcasting Services Act 1992, the Radiocommunications Act 1992 and the Australian Communications and Media Authority Act 2005 to remove unnecessary provisions and reduce the regulatory burden on the broadcasting industry. The bill forms part of the communication portfolio's commitment to the Australian government's deregulation agenda. It implements a number of measures identified in the Communications portfolio: Deregulation roadmap 2014 and addresses issues that have been raised through consultation with the broadcasting industry.

The bill repeals the redundant licensing and planning provisions that regulated the digital switchover and restack processes; amends the Australian Communications and Media Authority's planning powers to implement more streamlined processes when planning broadcasting spectrum; improves administrative arrangements and provides greater flexibility for free-to-air and subscription broadcasters in relation to their captioning obligations; removes the auditing requirement for the annual returns on program expenditure that subscription broadcasters and channel providers lodge with the ACMA under the New
Eligible Drama Expenditure Scheme; and addresses anomalies in the provisions relating to overlapping licence areas for media diversity voices and commercial radio licensed areas and in the grandfathering arrangements relating to license area population determinations; removes the redundant obligation for the ACMA to review classification and time zone safeguards under section 123A and clause 29 of schedule 6 to the Broadcasting Services Act; and makes consequential amendments to schedule 4 to the Broadcasting Services Act as a result of the Acts and Instruments (Framework Reform) Bill 2014.

The government acknowledges the Senate committee's support for removing annual captioning reporting requirements on free-to-air broadcasters and remains committed to moving over time to a compliance model that does not require unnecessary reports, while taking account of feedback from hearing impaired groups. The government will continue to consult with broadcasters and media access advocates on potential reform to annual captioning reporting requirements—noting that all sides agreed that the existing reporting requirements arrangements are overly complex and onerous.

I noted that a number of honourable members have said that the government did not consult with peak bodies in the deaf community. I advise the House that, prior to the bill going into the parliament, the Department of Communications met with the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network on 15 May last year and it met with Media Access Australia, which is Australia's only independent peak organisation devoted to increasing access to media for people with a disability—and therefore is a peak body representing deafness groups. The ACMA met with Media Access Australia in April 2014 and also participated in the 4 June 2014 meeting. I myself met with the Human Rights Commission on 31 October last year and my staff met with Media Access Australia, the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network, the Deafness Forum of Australia, Deaf Australia and the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations on 21 November 2014. I recall one honourable member saying that there had been no consultation with Deaf Australia, and I am advising the House that that is not the case; they certainly were consulted. People with Disability Australia Incorporated were also invited to that consultation but did not participate. As soon as the bill was introduced into the House, we referred the bill to a Senate committee for further investigations. Public submissions were accepted, and the public hearing was held on 2 February.

The government has taken the feedback from all these discussions into account and is agreeing to the review and to consult further on the reporting compliance framework. I can foreshadow that there are a number of opposition amendments which will have the effect of maintaining the annual reporting obligation that it has been the government's view was unnecessary—it was an unnecessary expense and did not add anything to the delivery of captioning. But, in the interest of ensuring the passage of the bill, which has so many other good points, the government is happy to agree to those opposition amendments.

We have to be very clear minded in looking at a lot of regulation. There is a lot of regulation that may well be well motivated but is nonetheless not necessary in order to achieve its objectives. Any regulation that is not absolutely necessary to achieve worthwhile objectives is just imposing a cost on industry that in these challenging times, particularly in the media sector, it can ill afford. So I hope that we will be able, as I said earlier, to come
back to this in due course. But there are so many other good things in the bill that I think it is worth getting this legislation through the parliament.

I just note that the 18th report of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights suggests that the proposed automatic exemption from captioning obligations for new subscription television channels may be incompatible with the right to equality and nondiscrimination. The government takes its international obligations very seriously. However, with respect to the committee’s conclusion, we do not agree that the amendment is inconsistent with Australia’s human rights obligations.

The reality is that channels which qualify for the automatic exemption would have qualified for an exemption under existing provisions, following the completion of an intensive application, consultation and consideration process by the channel and the ACMA. All this amendment does is save the broadcaster and the regulator unnecessary compliance costs without changing the result, which is very much consistent with the government’s deregulation. What we are seeking to do here and in many other contexts is to cut back on the red tape—cut back, if you like, on excessive form—while preserving the substance of good policy.

I thank honourable members for their contribution, and I call on all members to support the bill.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Consideration in Detail

Bill—by leave—taken as a whole.

Mr CLARE (Blaxland) (18:03): by leave—I move amendments (1) to (4), as circulated in my name, together:

(1) Schedule 6, items 13 and 14, page 37 (lines 6 to 9), omit the items.
(2) Schedule 6, item 15, page 37 (lines 31 and 32), omit "the end of the financial year to which the record relates", substitute "the responsible person’s report under section 130ZZC in relation to the financial year to which the record relates is given to the ACMA".
(3) Schedule 6, item 16, page 38 (lines 13 and 14), omit the item, substitute:

16 Subsection 130ZZE(1)
Omit "2015", substitute "2016".

16A Subsection 130ZZE(3)
Omit "2016", substitute "2017".

(4) Schedule 6, item 17, page 38 (lines 32 to 34), omit subitem (5).

As I foreshadowed in my contribution to the debate, these amendments are designed to address concerns raised by deaf advocacy groups. They consist of, firstly, restoring the requirement for free-to-air broadcasters to report annually on their compliance with captioning obligations and, secondly, restoring the statutory review of captioning to occur in 2016 in order to allow a comprehensive review of all the issues that concern the deaf community as well as broadcasters.

This has been the subject of consultation by me and my office with advocacy groups as well as broadcasters, and I think this is a reasonable compromise. It has also been the subject
of discussion between me and the minister and our two offices. I would like to thank the minister and the minister's office for the work they have done on this, and I thank the government for their support.

Question agreed to.
Bill, as amended, agreed to.

Third Reading

Mr Turnbull (Wentworth—Minister for Communications) (18:04): by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2014-2015
Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2014-2015
Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 2) 2014-2015

Second Reading

Cognate debate.

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr Burke (Watson—Manager of Opposition Business) (18:06): I rise to open the debate on behalf of the opposition on the three appropriations bills which form the additional estimates for 2014 and 2015: Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2014-2015, Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2014-2015 and the Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 2) 2014-2015. In total, these three bills seek to appropriate an additional $1.7 billion for the current financial year. I am hardly breaking suspense when I say that Labor will not be blocking supply and that we will be supporting these bills.

The amounts in these bills are actually already factored into the budget bottom line as presented in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, MYEFO, which was presented last year. The three appropriations bills reflect changes in expenditure as a result of those MYEFO decisions, as well as machinery of government changes that were announced as part of the ministerial reshuffle prior to Christmas last year—and in advance of the next reshuffle, which we presume is imminent. These machinery of government changes included renaming the departments of education and industry and moving responsibility for child care to the Department of Social Services. The 2014-15 MYEFO measures that are subject to the appropriations in these bills include additional funding for Defence overseas operations; additional funding for a number of agencies, including the Federal Police, Customs and ASIO, for counterterrorism activities; and a further measure for community engagement programs as part of the Countering Violent Extremism program. I would note that there is a concern from the opposition as to how quickly the government is able to make sure that that money is in fact out and into the community. Funding for the Department of Parliamentary Services and the Australian Federal Police to enhance the security of Parliament House will,
according to MYEFO, include upgrades to CCTV and access systems, additional Parliamentary Protective Service staff and an increased AFP presence here.

Also covered here is funding for the Department of Employment in relation to the Job Seeker Compliance Framework measure; $90 million for the Department of Agriculture for concessional loans under the Drought Recovery Concessional Loans Scheme; funding for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for the establishment of a temporary embassy in Ukraine; funding for the Department of Health to provide upgrades to the Metricon Stadium facilities for the Gold Coast Suns AFL club; and—as appears in my notes, and I think my staff have put this in to make me feel bad, given the NRL Grand Final last year, but I am sure the member for Grayndler will be pleased to know that these bills include this—funding for the South Sydney Rabbitohs Community and High Performance Centre of Excellence. So $10 million is going to the club that defeated mine in the Grand Final last year. Notwithstanding that, we are still not blocking supply. There is funding for the Department of Finance in relation to the Kenbi land claim on the Cox Peninsula.

But what the MYEFO showed—which needs to be noted in the context of these bills, regardless of what we often hear from the dispatch box from those opposite—was an increase in the budget deficit in comparison to the 2014-15 budget, and a $44 billion blow-out over the forward estimates. This represents a $202 million blow-out in the budget deficit over the forward estimates by the Liberal-National government for each of the 216 days between the May 2014 budget and MYEFO last year—blowing out their budget by $202 million a day, while all the time turning up to the dispatch box each day claiming that they were doing something about debt and deficit. Blowing it out by $202 million a day does not exactly meet the criteria that the government have claimed or the spin that they have put out into the community. To put it another way, since coming into government, based on the figures in the independent PEFO document prepared by the public servants under the Charter of Budget Honesty, the budget deficit in 2014-15 has blown out by $16.4 billion—from $24 billion then to $40.4 billion now.

We heard prior to the election from the then opposition that if debt was the problem more debt was not the answer. Yet debt keeps on increasing over the forward estimates. Gross debt is $100 billion higher. Net debt is $146.3 billion higher in MYEFO than it was in the 2014-15 budget. Overall, debt is higher now than it was when the Liberal-National government took office. Gross debt in 2014-15 was forecast in the pre-election forecasts to be $330 billion. It is now $367 billion. Net debt, under the Charter of Budget Honesty, was forecast to be $212 billion. It is now $244 billion. We are aware of the falling commodity prices, particularly iron ore, and the effect that that has on the budget bottom line. However, this does not account for the majority of the deterioration in the budget bottom line.

We were told by those opposite that there would be an instantaneous adrenaline charge to our economy—an instantaneous surge of confidence—if the coalition were only voted in. But take a look at the other economic indicators. Unemployment is at 6.4 per cent, up from 5.7 per cent at the time of the last election—5.7 to 6.4 since the election. That is the highest it has been since August 2002, when the current Prime Minister was in charge of employment. Consumer confidence remains low—nine per cent lower now than it was at the time of the last election according to Westpac and the Melbourne Institute.
Anybody from the government taking heart from the last Westpac and Melbourne Institute consumer confidence figures—which did show an increase, with the index showing more optimists than pessimists for the first time since February 2014—should understand why consumer confidence increased: the Reserve Bank had cut interest rates for the first time since August 2013 as a sign of a weak economy; petrol prices had seen a 21 per cent decrease on average in the last two months; and there was a surging share market, with a 9.7 per cent increase in the share price index in the last month. These are things that were really out beyond the control of the government. Most interestingly, the leadership tension within the Liberal Party—the unrest in the government—certainly showed in a sharp fall in the confidence amongst coalition voters, but confidence of ALP supporters, third party voters and the undecided was boosted significantly, to deliver the overall positive result. Business confidence remains below long-run averages.

The 2014-15 MYEFO itself shows the impact of increased unemployment and weakness in the economy, reflected by its slower wage growth, with taxes from individuals being revised down by $8.6 billion over the forward estimates. So the economy is weak, unemployment is high and confidence has not really recovered since taking a battering after the last budget. You cannot expect confidence to increase when you are attacking the household budget.

Let us not forget that the budget bottom line, as shown in this MYEFO document, still incorporates a series of broken promises. They are factored into the budget blow-out. So those opposite cannot say, ‘Oh, the budget blow-out’s because legislation hasn’t made it through the Senate.’ These numbers presume that the government has been able to get all of its legislation through the Senate, and, notwithstanding that, we see that it is still blowing debt and deficit out. Measures such as the introduction of the GP tax, for which we saw a revision of in the 2014-15 MYEFO but around a month later in January saw another key element of the new measure in an increase to consultation times, jumped. That is not reflected in these figures.

The government is thoroughly confused on these issues. First it was a co-payment, then a price signal. We have latest heard that it is a value signal—not that the minister or anyone opposite is able to explain exactly what the difference is. The savings from this were supposed to go into the medical research future fund, which was supposed to be set up on 1 January 2015, and there are signs that the government is now wavering on this as well. We have consistently said that we support medical research, but we do not support funding medical research by putting a tax on people on the condition that they are sick.

Cuts to pension indexation lead to what the Australian Council of Social Service estimated to be an $80 per week cut to pensioners, and this cut is very clearly budgeted for. Page 203 of budget paper No. 2 shows the $449 million cut through indexing the pension and other payments by the consumer price index. The Parliamentary Budget Office has calculated the impact over the decade of the government's budget measures, including the change to indexation of the aged pension. What the Parliamentary Budget Office found was that the change to indexation would cut $23.4 billion from the aged pension over the decade 2024-2025.

Cuts to various family payments, including measures such as restricting access to family tax benefit part B to families with children aged under six, reducing family tax benefit part A and B supplements and freezing family tax benefit payment rates for two years lead NATSEM to estimate $6,000 being cut from a typical Australian family's budget per year.
There are measures here that essentially leave job seekers with nothing to live on for a period of six months. A measure we saw the other week was one of the Prime Minister’s captain’s picks. Plans for $100,000 university degrees through its plans for university deregulation and the increases in the petrol tax are here as well. These bills also deal with the cuts to the ABC and SBS, where the MYEFO saw a further $250 million cut to ABC and SBS following on from the budget measure which had already cut $43½ million from the two broadcasters. And foreign aid had a further $3.7 billion cut in MYEFO following the $7.6 billion cut in last year’s budget. That is a total of $11.3 billion cut from foreign aid. These cuts collectively have made foreign aid as a percentage of our gross national income the lowest it has been since records have been kept.

Of course, with all of that, for all that these figures represent policies that we oppose, it would be irresponsible for us to do anything other than support supply and to see these appropriation bills go through. But be in no doubt: those in the opposition will be making sure the full impact of these bills is well understood. With that in mind, I move:  

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

(1) the 2014-15 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook showed a $44 billion blow-out in the budget deficit over the forward estimates from the 2014-15 Budget, which represents a $202 million blow-out in the Budget deficit by the Government each and every day;
(2) Government debt is higher now than it was when the Government took office;
(3) the Budget bottom line in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook incorporates a series of broken promises, including: the introduction of the GP tax, increasing the petrol tax, cuts to pension indexation, $6,000 cuts to a typical Australian family, plans for $100,000 university degrees, cuts to the ABC and SBS, and a $11.3 billion cut from foreign aid;
(4) the Government continues to undermine business and consumer confidence with its unfair Budget, which are now below the levels at the 2013 Federal Election; and
(5) the Government’s failure to have a clear plan for economic and jobs growth has led to the unemployment rate increasing to its highest level since August 2002, when the current Prime Minister was the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations."

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

Mr Ripoll: It certainly is.

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (18:20): Today I would like to speak of the situation in Burma. I raise this issue on behalf of my constituents of Karen and Chin heritage and on behalf of the ethnic nationalities in Burma. It is true that many ethnic peoples of Burma have come to this country as refugees. We should understand why this has been the case and why we continue to take some 1,900 refugees a year from the camps on the Thai-Burma border. I thank my friends from the Karen and Chin communities in Perth and my friends from many ethnic groups in Burma who have provided me with the information to allow me to better understand the history of Burma and the situation that exists to this day.

There was a time when the Burmese government was the subject of sanctions. At that time, the acknowledged leader of the opposition, Aung San Suu Kyi was under house arrest, many dissenters were in jail and the leadership of Burma wore uniforms. Of course, the sanctions are now gone, and the uneducated observer would believe that Burma has made progress and is somehow worthy of our trust. However, this is, sadly, not the case. The reality is that there
is not a true democracy in Burma. My point is that the government of Burma is not worthy of this nation's trust but they are deserving of our sanctions, and I will justify that statement in this speech.

There has been a civil war in Burma for 66 years. That means 66 years of continuous fighting and 66 years where Burma has been held back, all because of the unwillingness of the regime in Burma to adopt a federal democratic system. Peace could be achieved by offering such a federation where the ethnic peoples of Burma would have the peace, freedom, self-determination and personal safety that they desire. But, despite that clear opportunity for a very easy way forward, the regime in Burma resists that chance.

Why? They do so because they know the truth about some demographic realities. They know that people of ethnic heritage actually outnumber ethnic Burmans. To conceal that fact, they try to count some Buddhists as Burmans. That of course is not true; 60 per cent of the population of the country are the so-called 'ethnics'—of non-Burmese ethnicity—and more than 60 per cent is the territory of the ethnics.

At the heart of a regime such as Burma is the first priority: self-preservation, a determination to hold onto power at all costs. Obviously that ambition is helped by ensuring that the ethnic people are prevented from ever having the opportunity to vote. They have also locked up control of the houses of parliament by having a constitution that ensures one-third of all seats in both houses go to the military. Apart from the parliament, the key positions in every part of the government and the public service are held firstly by Burmese Buddhists, then other Buddhists, then Burmese Christians and then ethnics that are Christians.

The leadership of the government is of course the same former military leadership that has controlled Burma since 1988. They just wear suits now; there is no other difference. I, therefore, say that the fact that Aung San Suu Kyi leads the National League for Democracy does not make Burma a real democracy. She cannot run for president, because she married a foreigner, and the NLD is not even eligible to run for one-third of the seats in the houses of parliament.

Leaving the obvious absence of true democracy to the side, I just want to talk about some other stark realities that we should be aware of. Although it is not well known, in every ethnic state in Burma there is fighting, and the Burmese Army is seeking to increase their troop numbers, despite there being a so-called ceasefire in some states. It must also be noted that the regime seeks to make use of the natural resources of the ethnic states for their own purposes.

Last month I visited Thailand and the border region of Burma at my own expense with my friend, and a long-term supporter of the Karen community, Scott Johnson. I went because I know many people from the Karen Welfare Association in Perth and the Tribal Refugee Welfare Association in Perth. They have told me about what was really going on inside Burma. I thank Connie and Keith Allmark for their advice and for everything they do for the Karen community, and also for the decades of support they have provided to refugees from the ethnic areas of Burma.

I also thank Paul Kyaw, the President of KWA, and his team of Richard Lwin, Charity Htoo, Joansy Pegrum. I also thank Major-General Nerdah of the Karen National Defence Organisation, and well-known Karen politician David Thackabaw for their support and hospitality during our visit.
I have heard consistent reports of brutality and atrocities, but as the source of some of my comments today I would like to pay particular tribute to an excellent organisation, the Free Burma Rangers. I encourage anyone who doubts the validity of what I say today to look at their website freeburmarangers.org. FBR is a multiethnic humanitarian service. They send teams, provided by ethnic pro-democracy groups into the areas under attack by the Burmese Army in order to provide emergency medical care, shelter, food, clothing and human rights documentation. The teams use a communication and information network inside Burma that provides real-time information from areas under attack. Primarily they are about health, and reporting the facts of what is going on.

Free Burma Rangers began as a result of the Burmese Army offensives in 1997. The establishment was a reaction to the destruction of villages, murders and over 100,000 people fleeing their homes. To this day over one million people are still displaced inside Burma. In that time over 250 multiethnic relief teams have been trained. There are now 71 full-time teams active in Arakan, Chin, Kachin, Karen, Karenni, Kayan, Lahu, Mon, Naga, Pa-Oo, Palaung and Shan areas of Burma. The teams have treated over 500,000 patients and helped over 1.1 million people.

It is an impressive organisation that has done great good, but again I know that some people think Burma is going well. For those who think that, I would like to talk about the recent Free Burma Rangers reports. On 2 December 2014, the rangers reported that there had been no reduction in violence between Burmese Army forces and ethnic groups, in spite of the international attention President Obama's visit to Burma received. The two-week period which included the president's visit was marked by 20 clashes between the Burmese Army and ethnic groups. These clashes resulted in the deaths of 24 ethnic resistance fighters, along with 28 wounded; while four Burmese Army soldiers died and one was wounded. The Burmese Army moved more than 1,508 troops, 48 supply trucks and 38 supply horses, and operated five transport and reconnaissance aircraft in northern Shan state and Kachin state. These figures reflect an active military operation, not the actions of a peacekeeping force.

On 11 December it was reported that on 19 November 2014, the Burmese Army's Light Infantry Battalion 390 fired a 105 millimetre Howitzer at the Kachin officer training school in Waingmaw in Kachin State, killing 23 trainees. That included two Free Burma Rangers that were present. Later on, the Burmese shelled villages and displaced persons camps, killing three more people. The Free Burma Rangers also reported that two Kachin girls were raped and killed on 19 January 2015 by troops of the Burmese Army. The girls were named Maran Lu Ra, age 20, and Tangbau Hkawn Nan Tsin, age 21. They were Kachin Baptist volunteer missionaries working in northern Burma along the Kachin-Shan state border. The rape occurred in the KBC church compound in northern Shan state. On the night of 19 January, Burmese Army troops came into the church ground where the girls were sleeping, raped them and then beat them to death.

At Nam Lim Pa Village in Kachin state on 30 January, the Free Burma Rangers teams found three bodies with evidence of torture. All three were killed when the Burmese Army attacked in late November 2013. A total of seven people were killed in or nearby the village. One of the victims was La Bang La Ring; he was killed by the Burmese Army in Nam Lim Pa and found with six deep knife or axe cuts on his back, as well as other signs of torture. He was a deaf-mute.
Nhkun Brang Aung was 20 years old and mentally disabled. When everyone else was fleeing the advancing Burmese Army troops, he said he was not afraid of the Burmese Army because he did not believe troops would bother someone like him.

Another unidentified body was found with rope burns; his head had been scalded with boiling water; his body bore signs of additional torture; he had been shot to death.

When Scott Johnson and I visited Mae Sot in Thailand, we met with a number of Thai, Karen and others from different ethnic groups. I even met with a mine clearer who told me how significant the Burmese Army mine threat was. He is doing a great job of recruiting and training local ethnic people to help clear the mines. For me the use of mines by the Burmese Army is a significant issue. The Burmese Army operates hundreds of outposts and camps in the territory of the ethnic peoples. They lay antipersonnel mines around these posts and when they leave, they leave the mines behind. Upon reoccupation by the local ethnic villagers, some mines get cleared but sometimes someone is killed or maimed before they clear the mines or if they trip a mine that has been missed.

When I visited the Mae Tao Clinic in Mae Sot in January, I visited the prosthetic limb workshop and saw where they assist those victims of the Burmese army's landmines. When I was at Oo Kray Kee village in Karen State, Burma, I saw some people that had lost limbs.

I believe that the Burmese regime should be held accountable for their use of landmines. I have also been told that in June 2011 in the north of Shan State, the Burmese army even used chemical weapons. I should also mention that there are consistent allegations that the Burmese have a strategy of selling drugs into the ethnic communities. These are the strategies of the Burmese regime and they should be known.

In my visit to the region and from what I have seen, I certainly found the 'ranger' reports, the stories of other people I met and some of the sights quite disturbing. I did, however, find the many ethnic leaders and the Karen people I met inspiring. I saw many young men and women carrying weapons and I saw the people living in very basic conditions, yet determined to fight on for a better future. I saw five-year-old children delighted with the new thongs they had just been given. I met two boys of eight and five years old, who had been orphaned when their parents had been shot in front of them or had disappeared. When asked what they wanted to do when they grew up, they answered, 'To be soldiers.' It was a moment I will never forget.

I also met a number of leaders of the UNFC, or the United Nationalities Federal Council. They represent the majority of the people in the ethnic nations within Burma. They have 12 member nationalities and four associate groups. The UNFC want peace and a democratic Burma, and we should listen to them.

Firstly, they want to sign a nation-wide ceasefire, but not yet. Overall they want a federated union based on the original Panglong Agreement of 1947. The union they want must be state based and the nation should be divided into states. They told me that although there would be around 20 states, only about four would be Burman-majority states. Several of the districts currently said to be Burman majority are actually more Karen majority areas. Having such a system would see federal and state parliaments. Specifically, they want constitutions for each state and a revenue base. Nationally, they of course want a real constitution and not the
current one that enshrines the military in a third of all seats, and not the 2001 constitution either.

When I asked the UNFC what they would like Australia to do, the first thing they said was that although the Australian embassy was active, it was not active enough in pursuing reform in Burma. In particular, the UNFC wants the ambassadorial-level Peace Donor Support Group to meet with them, but also to bring the Burmese government and the ethnics together for talks.

Another concern of the UNFC is how more nations and even NGOs are channelling aid through Burma itself, giving the regime the opportunity to exert more control. The position of the UNFC is therefore that it is not yet the right time to invest in Burma or even to allow aid through the central government. In some cases it is alleged that foreign aid is being used for the construction of roads for military use so they can access ethnic areas in order to repress the ethnic peoples. In any case, the border region is being increasingly starved of aid monies and this is making it very difficult to support the refugee numbers along the border. In particular, it is said that the rice and other food going to refugee camps is being reduced as foreign governments tell their NGOs to go into Burma rather than continuing their efforts along the border.

There are some places in the world where internally displaced populations are useful for political mileage, such as the camps in the Palestinian Authority controlled areas and supported by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. This is not the same at all. The refugee camps along the Burma-Thailand border are there not for cynical political advantage but because it is just not safe inside the ethnic areas in Burma.

As I have said already. The unscrupulous use of landmines, torture, murder and rape by the Burmese military show exactly what sort of threat the people face. The situation is just not safe for the mass movement of refugees back inside the borders of Burma. The trouble is that through the premature diplomatic embracement of Burma, Western nations, China and others in the region are providing tacit consent, whereas we must hold the regime in Burma to account.

To conclude, I say that I have great respect for the ethnic peoples of Burma. They are long suffering, and the privation and challenges I saw in January and at the start of this month are a day-to-day existence for them. Support from Australia and internationally can be achieved. I have laid out what they want and we should act to assist them. If we do not, then the fighting will continue. If we do not, the maiming, the torture and the rape will continue. If we do not, then people will continue to die at the hands of the regime.

As I saw in Oo Kray Kee in Burma, the Karen and many of the other ethnic nations have been involved in 66 years of civil war to defend themselves and their culture. They have the materiel capacity to maintain their resistance and they have the will to maintain their resistance. The only way that this war, the killing, the maiming and the rape will stop will be through international pressure. All can be resolved with a true democracy of federated states. It is time to act.

Mr HUTCHINSON (Lyons) (18:34): It is a pleasure indeed to rise and speak on the Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2014-2015. It gives me an opportunity in the context of this bill to
discuss what has been for me a privilege to be part of a team here in Canberra and more recently working with my state colleagues, with the single focus of delivering for Tasmanians and for the wonderful state that I come from—particularly for my electorate of Lyons.

The people in my electorate and the people of Tasmania are focused on seeing us as representatives in this place talking about job creation, a stronger economy and opportunities for young people. Over the past 18 months we have seen a government—and I am very proud to be part of that government—that has focused on commitments that we made prior to being elected in 2013, particularly in relation to infrastructure that we have been able to deliver. These are starting to deliver the shoots, if you will, of opportunity. We are seeing that reflected in business confidence surveys. Tasmania is leading the nation. Small and medium enterprises are looking again to reinvest, and there are even signs—and I am so pleased to see this—that businesses are once again willing to take on employees, and particularly younger employees.

In terms of infrastructure it has been a year of delivery. Anybody who comes to our beautiful state and drives down the Midland Highway that goes from Launceston to Hobart will not be able to do it at the moment as quickly as they will be able to in 12 or 18 months time. There is a lot of work going on there. It is so pleasing to see local civil engineering businesses out there improving the road, in some cases looking at duplication of the highway, in other cases widening the highway and putting additional lanes in but particularly focused on bringing that road up to being a much safer road than it currently is. With $400 million committed to the Midland Highway from the Commonwealth government and $100 million committed from the state government, Tasmanians are starting to see the work that is happening on the highway.

It has been a year of delivery for road infrastructure and for black spots. My electorate being a large, rambling rural electorate has had its share of black spot funding, which has added to making our roads safer as people travel around Tasmania. Again, there is an additional $350 million committed across the nation for Roads to Recovery. The 13 municipalities in the electorate of Lyons will share greatly in that additional money for regional infrastructure. I am looking forward to announcements around the Bridges Renewal Program. We have many councils that have put in applications. I hope that some of those so successful. I know that the amount of money that is allocated surely will not fix all of the bridges that are required to be repaired and renewed around Australia, but I look forward to a successful application in my electorate.

Outside of roads, the government gave a significant $38-million commitment to upgrade the Hobart airport, to put the 'international' back into the Hobart airport. I was pleased to join Senator Abetz, Senator Parry and Senator Bushby recently at the Hobart airport with Rod Parry, the CEO, and Mel Percival from Hobart Airport Corporation to announce the first tranche of funding for planning. This will open up so many opportunities for our state. As some would understand, that investment was principally based on the expansion of the Antarctic program, making Hobart a step off point for Antarctic endeavours. Large aircraft were unable to take off with the fuel that was required to do those journeys. By extending the runway at the Hobart international airport, we will be able to compete and attract, one would hope, missions from other countries that will use Hobart as a step-off point. All the benefits
will then flow to other businesses in the area in addition to those that are used to provision research in the Antarctic.

Demonstrating this government's commitment to infrastructure that will allow the private sector to have the confidence to invest could be demonstrated no better than through the $60 million that was announced only last week by the Prime Minister when he visited my electorate at the beautiful town of Evandale just south of Launceston. There are five schemes around the state: Circular Head on the north-west coast in my colleague the member for Braddon's electorate; the Scottsdale scheme up in the north-east in my colleague the member for Bass's electorate; and there are three schemes in the electorate of Lyons.

The Southern Highlands scheme in the town of Bothwell, an area of this state that has been drought declared more than any other region in Tasmania over the last 15 years, will at last build an irrigation scheme. Winter take and flood take out of the Shannon will be put into a turkey's nest dam that will deliver to farmers between Bothwell and all the way down to Hamilton. It is significant. The town of Bothwell, over the last 15 years, has run out of water on a number of occasions. This is not only for the farmers in the area but also for access to reliable water for the town. It will truly be a game changer. It will allow businesses in that area to diversify. We will see dry land becoming dairy farms. We will see the ability to properly finish livestock that have traditionally been produced only for breeding stock. We will see more reliable poppy crops. We will see a whole range of other things being grown in that area.

Over on the East Coast, the Swan River scheme is a very high-value scheme where the focus will be on viticulture and horticulture. The towns of Swansea, Triabunna and Bicheno will benefit from the jobs that will flow and the investment that will come from private owners in those areas that will invest as a result of this infrastructure being put in place.

After much procrastination, it has been the job of this government to finally commit to replacing the *Aurora Australis*. I do not know how much it is going to cost. It will cost a substantial amount of money. Thanks to the good work of Minister Hunt, there is now a commitment to replace the very ageing *Aurora Australis* to enable Australian researchers, many of whom come from Hobart and from my state of Tasmania more broadly, to continue their good work of researching the Southern Ocean and the Antarctic.

The government has delivered over the last 12 months as part of an election commitment the Solar Towns project for the communities of New Norfolk, Gagebrook, Bagdad and Nubeena, down on the Tasman Peninsular, which recently had Minister Hunt at the Sorrell RSL. I just received notification from the Bicheno golf club on the East Coast that it has received nearly $20,000 for the installation of solar panels. All around the state we have been able to support those community and sporting organisations to be more self-sustaining through the Solar Towns funding. Almost $300,000 has been rolled out in the electorate of Lyons.

In addition, within the Minister for the Environment's portfolio, four new Green Army projects have just been announced in the second tranche of funding—three in the municipality of the Break O'Day and a project which crosses over into the member for Franklin's electorate as well as into the member for Denison's electorate in the southern part of Lyons. We already have projects in the north-west, particularly in the Rubicon Estuary looking to remove the curse of the rice grass that has infested that estuary for many years. There is great work going
on in the electorate around the Green Army projects. I encourage further applications from community groups and councils for appropriate opportunities to clean up waterways and to stop erosion—a whole range of opportunities.

I was very pleased that also last year we were able to continue the funding, again through the Department of the Environment, of a really important project being undertaken by the Inland Fisheries Service. There is $800,000 for the work they are doing to eradicate carp. Many mainlanders may not appreciate that Tasmania is effectively free from carp except in two locations: Lake Crescent and Lake Sorell. About two years ago the Inland Fisheries Service were successful in removing carp from Lake Crescent. The challenge still remains in Lake Sorell. These are dedicated professionals. I was so pleased to be able to support them with funding.

Indeed, confidence is returning. I was very pleased with the ASBAS funding. There were very high-quality applications. I know firsthand the work that the Break O'Day Business Enterprise Centre do and the passion they have for their work. ASBAS small business funding was received by the Break O'Day Business Enterprise Centre at St Helens in the north-east of my electorate. Nick Crawford and his team do truly wonderful work. He is committed. Apart from being a very good fisherman, he does wonderful work with the community there. It is all part of the confidence we are seeing coming back.

For the first time in many years the unemployment numbers in Tasmania have started to turn the corner and are again heading south. I really do believe that that is an illustration that there is renewed confidence coming back into our communities, particularly regional communities. I am looking forward to the Innovation and Investment Fund, which was well oversubscribed. I am aware that the amount of money we had for dollar-for-dollar business investment was oversubscribed to a great degree. There were 137 applications with a commitment of private capital of $85 million across a wide range of sectors and industries. Again this illustrates absolutely that there is confidence in the business sector to invest and start to create jobs again in Tasmania.

I was very pleased to have Senator Abetz with me at two Work for the Dole programs last week that are going particularly well. At Woolmers Estate young people are learning and gaining new skills—in this case for the management of the kitchen garden and some of the heritage work that needs ongoing and regular maintenance. The skills and discipline they are provided with are wonderful for them. I have no doubt that some of those young people will very soon end up in work.

I guess the highlight for me of the past 12 months has been the work that has been done by the Minister for Trade and Investment, Minister Robb, in delivering the three free trade agreements—with South Korea firstly, Japan and more recently China. These are game-changing opportunities for our state. When the minister visited my electorate a couple of weeks ago I did say that, instead of the KAFTA, it could well have been the TAFTA, the Tasmanian free trade agreement. It has been so good for Tim Reid and cherry exporters in our state. As a result of the 24 per cent tariff being reduced, he has been able to increase his exports of cherries from five tonnes last year to 190 tonnes this year. This is jobs, wealth creation and the private sector in Tasmania finally, after many years of Labor and the Greens hurting our state so badly, starting to find its feet again. I look forward to continuing doing good work.
Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (18:50): In 2010 I visited Queensland on several occasions to give speeches about rapid population growth—in Brisbane, on the Sunshine Coast and at the Woodford Folk Festival. I encountered great unhappiness at the impact that rapid population growth was having in Brisbane and South-East Queensland and was not surprised when the Queensland Labor government was defeated in 2012, although the scale of the defeat was remarkable. In many respects the Queensland government had fallen victim to the same problems that had beset the Victorian Labor government which was defeated in 2010. The Queensland Labor Party has now pulled off an astonishing turnaround, regaining office in a single term and toppling an elected Premier in the process. In Victoria Ted Baillieu was replaced by his own party and did not get to contest the election; in Queensland Campbell Newman lost his seat.

Political commentators are astonished at this growing political volatility. Kevin Rudd was elected as Prime Minister and replaced by Julia Gillard before the 2010 election. She in turn was replaced by Kevin Rudd before the 2013 election. It is now widely speculated that Tony Abbott too will not get to seek re-election as Prime Minister. So what is going on? No doubt factors like broken election promises, the 24/7 media cycle, the global financial crisis and voters choosing state and federal governments of different complexions are having an impact, but one feature of the past decade is regularly overlooked.

In 2004 Australia had a net migration program of 100,000. Then, in the space of three years, it ratcheted up to well over 200,000, where it has stayed. This doubling has given Australia rapid population growth for the past decade. We now have an extra million people every three years. Prime Minister Howard, who introduced this rapid increase, lost his seat at the 2007 election. I have become convinced that rapid population growth and political instability go hand in hand. I think of this as the witches' hats theory of government. Think about those advanced driving courses that require drivers to drive in slalom fashion through a set of plastic or rubber orange cones, which are commonly called witches hats. The driver's mission is to avoid the hats. If they hit a certain number, they fail the test.

I think the re-election task of the government has some similarities. If you think of each hat as an area of public policy—education, health, housing, transport, aged care et cetera—if a government mucks up an area of public policy, it is akin to hitting one of the hats. And if a government hits a number of hats—that is, fails a number of public policy tasks—it is likely to be voted out, just as the driver who hits the hats will not get their advanced driving qualification. It seems pretty obvious that, if you are a driver, you are much more likely to avoid the hats if you are travelling at 50 kilometres an hour whereas if you are driving at 100 kilometres an hour you are pretty likely to hit some hats. And if you are a government, you are much more likely to solve people's problems if you have a population that is growing slowly rather than one that is growing rapidly.

The Queensland and Victorian Liberal governments were elected on the back of public discontent with issues such as planning, public transport, cost of living, housing unaffordability and job insecurity. But as these things had been caused by rapid population growth—and the growth continued—they did not solve those problems and they paid a massive electoral price for it. For example, governments get punished for trying to sell off public assets. They do it to raise money to build new infrastructure or to pay down debts incurred as a result of past infrastructure building. But they would not need so much money,
or so much infrastructure, if the population was not growing so fast. Queensland academic Jane O'Sullivan says population growth of two per cent doubles the infrastructure task compared with that in a stable population.

It is not only in Australia that rapid population growth drives political instability. It happens right around the world. Governments in the Scandinavian countries, with slow population growth, are able to solve people's problems and enjoy considerable political life expectancy. Countries which have high birth rates—such as Egypt, Nigeria and the Philippines—have chaos. In the Pacific Islands, Samoa has had a relatively stable population and stable government for decades whereas Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands have had neither.

I know it is not fashionable to focus on our past decade of rapid population growth as a cause of Australia's political instability and volatility. Some are happier focussing on the alleged personal qualities of our leaders—they have heaped praise, or derision, on Anna Bligh, Tony Abbott or Campbell Newman—when the fact is that a different leader with the same policies would have led to the same result. Others want to interpret election results through a highly ideological prism, and come unstuck as a consequence of believing too much of their own propaganda.

It is probably too late for this Prime Minister. But perhaps his successor, or successors, and other political leaders around Australia might want to ask themselves: 'Do I want to be yet another casualty of our equivalent of the Colosseum, or do I want a respectable time in office as prime ministers and premiers had as recently as the eighties and nineties?'—and, if so, isn't the way to improve their political life expectancy to slow the 'population car' down and focus on solving people's real life problems?

There is a clear correlation between population growth and social upheaval and unrest. The Arab Spring in Tunisia started when rising food prices, high unemployment and a widening gap between rich and poor triggered riots which led to the flight of Tunisia's autocratic ruler, Zine Ben Ali. Before he left, he vowed to reduce the price of sugar, milk and bread—too little too late. Protests began in Egypt, which led to a change of government there, and in Libya, which led to a change of government there too. The backdrop to this unrest was a rise in global wheat prices of the order of 70 per cent between June and December 2010. People simply could not afford the bread they needed to live. Egypt's population had grown from 22 million in 1952 to 81 million in 2010, nearly a fourfold increase in 60 years. Rapid population growth means lots of high-testosterone young males, who are prepared to risk bullets and oust dictators. After decades of exporting oil to pay for grain, Egypt now needs to import both oil and grain to meet the needs of a population that doubled under Mubarak and did not thank him for it.

But the link between rapid population growth and social unrest is not confined to the Middle East. On 12 August 2011, BBC Radio 4's More or Less program quoted US sociologist Professor Jack Goldstone, who said that, throughout history, there was a clear link between rapid population growth and social unrest as seen in events like the French and Russian revolutions and now in pockets of society that have seen rapid population growth and immigration.

The continent of Africa contains many examples of rapid population growth fuelling political instability. Africa's most populous country is Nigeria. In the 50 years between its
independence in 1960 and 2010, Nigeria's population rose from 45 million to 158 million, a more than threefold increase. Accompanying this rapid increase have been economic booms and busts, military coups, widespread corruption and ethnic and religious divisions—and now we have Boko Haram. The population of Ghana quadrupled over 50 years—from six million at the time of independence in 1960 to over 24 million by 2010. From 1960 to 1992, Ghana was marred by military coups. Although rich in natural resources, Ghana is a heavily indebted country, with land disputes in the north erupting into ethnic violence. Kenya had a population of fewer than nine million when it gained independence in 1963. It now has a population of 40 million, a fourfold increase, and is currently growing at a brisk 2.8 per cent per year. In 1982 it became a one-party state and has been beset by mismanagement and corruption.

There is little doubt in my mind that rapid population growth and political instability go hand in hand. While often the instability is attributed to ethnic or religious differences, I believe these are merely symptoms of the underlying problem—too many people for the available resources of land, food, water, fuel, housing and jobs. A scarcity of resources leads to conflict. When that conflict occurs, people may well band together, or divide, along religious or ethnic lines—indeed, that is human nature—but whether we have that conflict in the first place, or whether people of different ethnicities and religions can live harmoniously together, often comes back to whether there are enough resources for all or simply too many people for the available resources. But there is the larger truth that rapid population growth is likely to undermine support for governments irrespective of the prevailing political system and culture.

Let me return to Australia. In 1945 Australia's population was seven million; today it is over 23 million. There is nothing inevitable about this growth. Back in 1945, Sweden's population was also seven million; today their population is nine million. Are we outperforming Sweden as a result? No. Do we have a better relationship with our landscape and environment? No. Does the evidence suggest we are better off as a society for this rapid population growth? No.

Let us go back to the Whitlam years—1974 and 1975. It has become folklore that the Whitlam Labor government were terrible economic managers and that subsequent governments have done a much better job of running the economy. Yet unemployment even in Whitlam's worst year, post-OPEC oil shock, averaged less than five per cent and has never been as low since. The Whitlam government was supposed to be a high-taxing government, but taxation as a percentage of GDP never reached 20 per cent; since then it has climbed above 20 per cent, rising to 24 per cent under John Howard and Peter Costello. And back then your taxes went a lot further. All the roads were free—no tolls; all the universities were free—no fees; and few parents sent their kids to non-government schools, so they did not have to fork out for school fees either. Net migration at that time was much less than 100,000 per annum compared with the over 200,000 it has been in recent years.

Or we could consider the 1960s. Then we had a population of around 12 million. There was no such thing as GST. Homes and rental properties were in good supply and inexpensive, compared with today, when Sydney and Melbourne have some of the most unaffordable housing markets in the world. There were jobs for everyone who wanted one. People did not have to work long hours; in fact, there was talk of a 35-hour week. Government employees did not have to sign work contracts. There were two mail deliveries each weekday and one on
Saturday. There was no real waiting time for hospitals, and trains and buses were inexpensive and uncrowded. You could drive across cities in no time at all. Beaches and other public facilities were uncrowded; electricity and gas were cheap and we did not have water shortages. Working people could afford beachside suburbs or a holiday house. Crime rates were low. Many people did not lock their windows or doors. We did not have home invasions and children wandered city streets freely and without fear. We grew our produce instead of concreting our market gardens and then importing it. Prewar, according to the urban historian Patrick Troy, Melbourne grew a third of its own food in backyards—not because it needed to, and not because the country was not eager to supply produce, but because labour and space were available.

I want to spend a little time outlining particular areas where I believe that increasing population causes governments to grow out of touch with their communities and voters and therefore to lose support. Planning is a key area. In order to house a growing population, particularly in big cities, governments end up taking away citizens' right to a say in what their street, their neighbourhood and their suburb look like. Governments appeal to us to accept high-rise—we should become more European, they say—but many people do not want it. They like their backyard and they like their open space, and that is a witch's hat bowled over. In relation to prices, from 2007, electricity price inflation accelerated sharply. A rapid increase in electricity prices is definitely another witch's hat down. Regulators allowed double-digit price increases to fund infrastructure investment, which was needed to meet population growth. A country with a rapidly-growing population needs to devote more resources to building roads, schools, shops, houses, factories and so on than does a country with a low rate of population growth. This makes it harder to achieve the per capita income gains people aspire to.

Unskilled workers suffer from migration, skilled or otherwise. There is a huge amount of evidence that any increase in the number of unskilled workers lowers unskilled wages and increases the unskilled unemployment rate. Employers gain from unskilled immigration; the unskilled do not. There goes another witch's hat. So when you think about the adverse impacts on people that a rising population produces it is not really surprising that governments, in times of rapid population growth, tend to knock over plenty of witch's hats and lose public support. We are seeing this yet again in the trials and tribulations of this government.

Mr RAMSEY (Grey) (19:04): I rise to speak on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2014-2015 and cognate bills. In an electorate like Grey there is always plenty to talk about—lots of worthy projects and lots of opportunities. While we never move as fast as we would perhaps quite like to, there have been a number of successfully concluded projects that were recipients of federal government assistance in the last 12 months. I would like to just to touch on a few of them.

The three major airports in Grey, at Port Lincoln, Whyalla and Port Augusta, have all seen major new works to their terminals completed or opened in the last 12 months. These airports are all owned by the local councils and this has made a significant difference. Port Lincoln Airport is the second busiest airport in South Australia, and all of them now present a very fine entrance to their cities. There have been major new works in aged care at the Yeltana Nursing Home run by Whyalla Aged Care, with $2 million in capital grants announced and a further $2 million in interest-free loans. $1.4 million has been announced for the Mary
MacKillop Wing at Star of the Sea Aged Care Home in Wallaroo and well over $2 million each for the Barunga Village in Port Broughton and the Helping Hand Aged Care centre in Port Pirie. There has also been $900,000 allocated to Coober Pedy council for a new pipeline, and $5 million has gone to the Port Augusta regional community sports hub, which I will have the great honour of opening in a couple of weeks time. There is a raft of support for community organisations, right across the electorate and too numerous to mention.

Certainly some of this money was committed under the previous government, but whenever money is committed it must be delivered. I support those commitments and it is a good thing that we can support our regional communities.

But the nation has huge economic challenges and we must fairly inform the people of the challenges ahead. Some—even some in this chamber—say that debt does not matter; that Australia's debts are low compared with Italy, Spain or Greece. And that is the case, but those countries deal with 20 per cent-plus unemployment figures. They have rates of youth unemployment that top 50 per cent. You imagine what a scrap heap it is for young people to spend the first 10 years of their working life in an unemployment queue. It is paramount that we get the finances of Australia back under control so we do not end up like those European economies, in which I have no faith at all—I have very little faith that they will ever be able to get their debts under control.

A stitch in time, and that is the challenge facing this government. At the moment, we are borrowing a $100 million a day, and more than 30 per cent of that $100 million goes directly to pay the interest on our borrowings.

Mr Champion interjecting—

Mr RAMSEY: While I am facing interjections from the member for Wakefield—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Craig Kelly): It is coming from both sides to be honest.

Mr RAMSEY: I might say that it was his government that set up this the incredible debt that Australia is facing.

At the moment, we have a net debt of around $250 billion—that is $250 thousand million, without changes to policy—that we were left by the previous government, heading for over $600 thousand million debt and we are paying interest rates that are at an historical low. The RBA current base rate is 2.25 per cent, and we can imagine how Australia would deal with paying the interest on those debts should interest rates go back to a more normal level of, say, four, five or six per cent.

It is no secret that the South Australian economy in particular is struggling. We have low population growth, high public debt, the second-highest unemployment rate after Tasmania—but only just—and the effect of the closure of the car manufacturing business is yet to come. Recent news from the resources sector has been fairly grim, particularly from my electorate. RM's decision to mothball its Southern Iron mine with the loss of 600 jobs will impact right across my electorate and the state generally as will the continuing downsizing of Santos's workforce in the Cooper Basin. Certainly not all of these job losses are in the Grey electorate but they will have a significant impact, and I cannot go past the personal impact on the individuals concerned.

I say have faith, because I believe that all of the industries will bounce back in the not-too-distant future. There are a number of reasons for saying that. For instance, in the last 12
months the Australian dollar has devalued by 25 per cent, which is providing some relief for exporters and those who are in export-competing industries. It is making previously unviable export industries competitive once again. The free trade agreements—and they were mentioned by previous speakers—with Japan, South Korea and China are unprecedented. This has been a golden era of trade negotiations by the very capable trade minister, Andrew Robb.

Some have been under negotiation for more than a decade and, as the member for Wakefield would know—

*Mr Champion interjecting—*

**Mr RAMSEY:** absolutely jack got done in that six years that they were in office. They left the same pile of negotiations on the table. They had not even lifted the top page off them, but the member for Wakefield still interjects. He should hang his head in shame. But Andrew Robb has picked up the pace and got the negotiations moving.

Those three trade agreements will benefit this country—this government provides much more than just talk; it provides action. I expect many of my industries, particularly the meat producers, the barley and pulse growers, the wine industry, aquaculture and marine fisheries, and our service industries to be enormous beneficiaries of those free trade agreements.

While we might face some very serious budgetary challenges at the federal level, we have every reason to be optimistic about our future as a nation. One of the reasons that I am optimistic is that this government and Minister Malcolm Turnbull have managed to get the NBN back on track—if indeed it was ever on any kind of track at all except the track to disaster left to us as a stinking carcass by the Labor Party and Senator Conroy. It was a field of failed dreams—and never more apparent than in my city of Port Augusta where the good people there were promised fibre-to-the premise to be completed by September 2013.

The opposition is very keen to point the finger at this government and say: 'You're not getting the NBN; you're holding up the NBN.' In fact, Port Augusta was supposed to be finished by September 2013, exactly at the time of the last election, so there should not have been anything for the coalition government to do. It should have been all finished and switched on. In fact the contractor has collapsed. They do not exist anymore as far as I know, and that was the contractor for Western Australia and they had already ceded their contracts to the Northern Territory.

Since that time, the minister has appointed a new NBN board—a board that has experience in rolling out communications systems. Port Augusta, I am very pleased to announce, will still be wired fibre to the premise. This is largely because it is one of 126 centres around Australia that are central hubs. It was important to keep the work going to the local contractors, and so the NBN board and the minister made the decision that Port Augusta would be wired fibre to the premise. As such, it is broken into three areas: central Port Augusta with 2400 connection points—the physical build commenced on January 15 and will be completed by October 15; the Port Augusta east connection will have 1800 consumers, and the physical build has commenced and will be finished by November 15—Port Augusta east includes Stirling North; and Port Augusta West will have 520 consumers and the preparatory work is underway—that is, getting the pipes, boxes and everything ready to feed the cable in.
This is great progress and shows how well the NBN rollout is tracking. The biggest changes will be noticed where the NBN fixed-wireless network is being rolled out. It is going into areas of high need that have very, very poor broadband at the moment and do not have access to things like ADSL. There are six live sites in Grey that have fixed radio networks at the moment—Arno Bay, Balgowan, Cleve, Port Neill, Port Rickaby and Port Victoria—and we expect another 22 sites to be live by June 2015. That is providing a great benefit to regional Australia.

I want to raise another issue that I have spoken about in this chamber before, and that is a commercial fish-unloading facility for Ceduna. Ceduna is in the far west of my electorate. There is a port at Thevenard and it is the second-busiest port in the state. Almost three million tonnes a year are shipped through Thevenard—mainly gypsum but also salt, grain and mineral sands from Iluka and the Jacinth-Ambrosia project out to the west of Ceduna. It has also been a significant fishing port in the past. There is one company still operating at Ceduna—two of the Great Australian Bight trawlers unload there—Raptis. The port is so busy that it has become very difficult to unload and the Ceduna council has been pushing for a new fish-unloading spur on the main wharf, which will cost $9 million. There have been a number of times in the past under RDA when we thought that this might get up, that it was over the line and that we had some support, but it always proved to be ephemeral. There is no light at the end of the tunnel yet but they have put in an application under the National Stronger Regions program. They are looking for around $4.5 million. Hopefully part of the other $4.5 million will come from the state government. I am speaking to some of the state government ministers and trying to push them along that road slightly. The Ceduna council is certainly behind the project and we now have a major private investor who is willing to put their money on the table as well. Encouragingly, we believe that if we can get the unloading wharf in place there may be up to 10 berths occupied and that some more trawlers and some of the fin fishermen will come and unload in Thevenard. It is a real economic boon for that part of the state. It is sometimes difficult to find industries that we can really support in regional areas and that can support these regional populations. This I think is a great opportunity. It is a very good project. It has passed all the trip-wires a number of times before but it just did not make the funding cut at the end, because funds were diverted somewhere else or did not arrive at all.

I will be giving my absolute backing to this project and hoping that we can get Stronger Regions to see its benefit. It certainly has the backing of the Eyre Peninsula Local Government Association and the RDA-Whyalla. I look forward to that project coming on stream as soon as possible. I certainly will be pushing this government to make sure that it receives a priority.

**Mr STEPHEN JONES** (Throsby) (19:18): Sometime this year, good government is going to start—and, by the gods of mercy, it cannot come too soon. Wherever you look, from hospitals to GP surgeries, from preschools to universities, from pensioners to families, and to communication services like the National Broadband Network, what this government have not cut they have broken. Then there is the rest of the economy, which has absolutely ground to a halt by the decision-making paralysis of those who sit opposite. So obsessed are they with who on the front bench is going to be the next Prime Minister of Australia that the basic business of government is just not happening. There would not be a member of parliament
who has not had a conga line of community organisations camped on their doorstep, plaintively begging them to try to get the government to make a decision on their next funding round. There would not be an area of the economy that has not had the absolute policy paralysis of this government affecting them in their everyday decisions.

I was expecting in this debate an opportunity to hear from members of the other side of the House about what they were going to do to stand up for their electorates on the things that really matter. Appropriation bills are an important opportunity for the parliament. They are an opportunity for the government to release additional money to advance its economic and social programs. They are also an opportunity to see the government reallocate money within the budget to projects or purposes that have been either neglected in the months prior to the appropriations debate or absolutely unforeseen—things that have turned up post-budget day that could not have been contemplated and that any party committed to good government would have included in the appropriations bills so that we could deal with those issues. Have heard from any them about those things? No, we absolutely have not.

I want to focus on the issue that matters most to people on this side of the House, and that is the issue of employment and unemployment—a matter which is No. 1 for people who vote for me to come here into parliament and represent their interests. I see the member for Wakefield in the House today and I know that every day that he comes into parliament he is fighting for jobs and opportunities for the people he represents in parliament—particularly those who are working in the manufacturing sector. I have never seen a more passionate member of parliament when it comes to talking to the interests of manufacturing workers.

A government that was focused on employment and unemployment and not on the intrigues of their own party room would know that they are in strife. In the month that they took office, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the unemployment level in this country was 6.1 per cent. This is a government that promised jobs growth, a government that promised a million new jobs in its first term of government. What do we see? We see unemployment going up to 6.4 per cent. Under this Prime Minister and this government, we are going to see the highest rate of unemployment that we have seen in the last decade—even through the global financial crisis. We will not have seen unemployment figure at the rate that we are seeing under this government and on their watch. And is it any wonder?

I am glad the member for Wakefield is in the chamber, because I saw one of the most passionate speeches that I have heard from a member of parliament in this place the very day that we saw the Treasurer, supported by the Prime Minister, chase an iconic car manufacturer, an iconic Australian brand, out of the country. They virtually begged them—and I am talking about Holden—to close the doors and leave the country. Is it any wonder that we see a complete misunderstanding of the need of ordinary workers in this country and is it any wonder that we see the unemployment rate going from 6.1 per cent to 6.4 per cent in the first 12 months? I expected to see some passionate contributions from members opposite about what the government was going to do to address the scourge of unemployment, but we have not heard anything about that. In fact, what we have seen is a cheer squad for the cruel, harsh cuts that this government is visiting upon the Australian people.

One member of parliament that I would have expected to come in here and have something to say about employment in her electorate is the member for Gilmore, because, in the last 24 hours, her electorate has been shocked by some terrible news, with the closure of Australian
Paper mills. This is a very important employer and a very important contractor in the Bomaderry and Nowra districts. It has been producing quality paper for over 65 years. It has been producing some of the highest quality paper. Indeed, it is the only facility within Australia that can produce the sort of security paper that is used in things like cheques and bank cheques. The closure of this plant means that every bank and even the Australian government will be importing that sort of paper. Quite typically, over 75 people are going to lose their jobs as a result of this, and my heart goes out to them.

In my own electorate I lived through the bitter months of the downturn in the steel industry and the closure of a BlueScope blast furnace. I contrast what the Illawarra based MPs did at that time—rallying around the workers and the town and putting in place a rescue plan for the workers and to support the business through that difficult time—with the inaction from those opposite. Not a word has been offered in this place in the interests of those workers in the member for Gilmore's electorate. I certainly hope that some action is going on somewhere that I have not heard about. I certainly hope that something is going on—and I know I am not alone. I think of the circumstances of Jono Clack. Many people, as I have said, have been working there for over 20 years—but not Jono. He is a young apprentice who thought his future was set. He is a talented young bloke. In fact, he is so talented that this year he won an award for excellence in electrotechnology at the New South Wales Training Awards—a man with a future. He thought he was going to be able to complete his apprenticeship at Australian Paper mills but, regrettably, that is not going to occur.

There is an urgent need for the government to address the serious policy issues confronting the people of the Illawarra and the Shoalhaven. Employment is the first, second and third priority. I said that unemployment nationally was 6.4 per cent. That is an absolute tragedy but, when you look at the unemployment rate in the district where Australian Paper mills operates, it is a full one per cent higher than that. It is 7.2 per cent—nearly a full one per cent higher than the national average. If ever there was a need to do something about this, this is the time.

I see the member for Gilmore has entered the chamber now. I hope she will have the opportunity to say what she is going to do to defend the interests of manufacturing in her electorate.

Right around the country we saw members opposite saying to electorates that if they elected them they would see jobs growth, opportunities and members standing up for opportunities in their electorate. Instead, we are seeing a cheer squad for this budget, reinforced by the appropriation bills here today. What we are looking for from those opposite is some leadership. When they went to the election they promised that they were going to stand up for their local electorates. When their electors returned them as the successful members for their electorate, they expected somebody to come to Canberra to fight for their local interests—but they are still waiting. Right around regional Australia they are still waiting. They were expecting somebody to come here and fight for their interests and they are still waiting. All we see are cheer squads for the Prime Minister—however long he is the Prime Minister—and cheer squads for the cuts of this Treasurer, instead of doing something for their local communities.

I saw those opposite criticise the previous government when we were out there fighting for jobs. We used to have a local employment coordinator whose job it was to connect people in circumstances like this—people who had just lost their jobs—with new job opportunities. We
used to have one. They sacked her. They sacked the local employment coordinator whose job it was to look after people in circumstances like this.

Is the member for Gilmore going to stand here now and say, 'I will work day in, day out, to ensure that we have this position reinstated to help the local workers, where we have 7.2 per cent unemployment'? I bet we do not hear a peep of it, because the people living in regional Australia, who elected members to come in here and be regional champions, are still waiting for their regional champions. And the fact is that each and every one of the members opposite is going to vote in favour of these appropriations bills. This is their opportunity to say, 'The budget was wrong, and we're going to vote against it,' because this is a revisitation of the budget. This is their opportunity—

Debate interrupted.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott) (19:30): Order! It being 7.30 pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

**Pensions and Benefits**

Ms KATE ELLIS (Adelaide) (19:30): I rise tonight to address a very serious issue of concern in the electorate that I am lucky enough to represent in this place, as well as right around Australia, and that is the Abbott government's decision to make cuts to the age pension and the decision to axe funding for concession card holders, which was announced in last year's budget. Of course we know the promises that the Prime Minister made before the last election. We know that he specifically promised that there would be no cuts and no changes to the pension. But instead they are slashing the current indexation system that helps the pension keep pace with the actual cost of living.

There are very few more disgraceful attacks that can be made than attacks on the people who have worked hard for decades to build this country to be the place that it is today and who have relied upon good faith from this parliament to look after them in their retirement years and when they are vulnerable. We know that, as a result of the indexation cuts that this government has announced, every pensioner in Australia will be worse off under a Liberal government by as much as $80 a week within a decade. This is yet another broken promise by the government, again punishing those who can least afford it.

We know that in last year's budget the government also axed the National Partnership Agreement on Certain Concessions for Pensioner Concession Card and Seniors Card Holders, and I want to talk specifically about the impact that this will have on South Australian pensioners and on the many, many pensioners who I have heard from in my office, who are outraged, upset and shocked at this measure. We know that, as a result, approximately $30 million will be ripped from my home state of South Australia annually for concessions relief funding, $123 million over the next four years. And we know that as a result of this cut, from July this year, concession card holders in South Australia will lose up to $190 per annum. I am deeply concerned about the impacts of these cuts, and I am really appalled by the attack on our community's most vulnerable.

These cuts have placed all sorts of pressures on the South Australian government and also on local governments, and the South Australian Liberals have shown once again that they do
not have the backbone to stand up to their federal colleagues to demand that these cuts be reversed and to stand up for the local communities who are set to pay the price for this. We know that, without ongoing funding, the councils of South Australia will no longer be able to provide concessions on council rates, as reported by the Local Government Association of South Australia. We know that, whilst the state government stepped in for a year to fill the gap and to pick up the shortfall of the federal government's cuts, unfortunately pensioners are going to feel the impact of the Abbott government's cuts, and they are going to feel it all too harshly. Ninety-six per cent of the total cost of providing concessions on council rates will be cut as a result of this broken promise.

There was a longstanding agreement with state governments that this funding would continue to June 2016. So, when Liberal members finger-point and blame the state Labor government and local governments for these cuts, as they are doing right across South Australia at the moment, trying desperately to point the blame anywhere else, in reality they have no-one else to blame except the Abbott government and the harsh and cruel budget that they handed down. We know that, when it comes to South Australia, this is a weak and spineless bunch of state and federal Liberal members. We know that, whether it is on Holden—and I know my colleague here knows that only too well—on submarines or now on pensioner concessions, they will not stand up to their federal colleagues. It is time that they started putting South Australia first, as indeed they were elected to do.

My electorate office has been inundated with calls, with emails and with letters expressing people's outrage at these concession cuts. For example, Alexander, who wrote to me from Brompton, said, 'This government continues to look for savings to the budget by penalising those who can least afford it.' Adalbert from Northfield said, 'These concessions are important to pensioners who are already battling against higher costs; many of us are on fixed incomes.' We know that Labor understand the importance of giving dignity to a secure retirement. I understand that pensioners have worked hard all of their lives. They do not deserve this betrayal, and I will continue to stand up for them.

**Nuclear Power**

**Dr JENSEN** (Tangney) (19:35): Big ideas require bravery. I am calling on my colleagues across the chamber to demonstrate that bravery with respect to nuclear energy. Australia needs a bipartisan and objective approach to the question of nuclear energy. Should it be in our energy mix? If not, why not? I have long been of the opinion that, under any cost-benefits or impacts analysis test, nuclear is a winner. It is safe, clean and economic. However, the debate surrounding nuclear technology and power generation is anything but clean, often overflowing with fear and hyperbole.

Nuclear presents a new and exciting frontier for Australia. In nuclear there is hope, reward and opportunity: hope for good, sustainable, high-paying jobs, exciting new technologies and clean, cheap, sustainable energy. Nuclear fission using thorium is easily within our reach, and, compared with conventional nuclear energy, the risks are even lower. In Australia, we have the world's largest known reserves of thorium.

Opponents of nuclear power often jump on tragedies such as Chernobyl or Fukushima to terrify and to terminate debate. An important side effect of the Japanese government's decision to give in to fear and to not be ruled by reason was a 40 per cent jump in electricity...
prices. On top of that, Japan's CO₂ emissions went from 1.33 to 1.5 billion metric tonnes in subsequent years.

With the announcement of a royal commission in South Australia, now is the time to address this at a federal level. Storing nuclear waste is something that former Prime Minister Bob Hawke has been a champion of and that I too believe in. President Obama describes the questions over the need for nuclear as a 'stale debate'. At a 2010 meeting in Lanham, Maryland, when he announced an $8 billion loan to build the first new reactor in the United States in 30 years, Obama argued:

On an issue that affects our economy, our security, and the future of our planet, we can't keep on being mired in the same old stale debates between the left and the right, between environmentalists and entrepreneurs.

The cleanest and safest energy, statistically, is nuclear energy. The danger of nuclear power is conjectural and the pollution potential, compared with the known pollution potential of burning coal and oil, is minute. Australia needs to play to our strengths. We need to exploit the resources we have in the ground and the bounty in our heads. Allowing a nuclear industry to take hold is in line with the 'fair go, have a go' attitude our country was built on.

Educating more nuclear scientists is good for the nuclear industry, the future graduates and the university sector. Imagine how exciting it would be to unleash this unrealised potential—education, training, jobs. The future is clear; it is nuclear—zero carbon dioxide, sulphur dioxide and mercury emissions et cetera. Nuclear is the pollution solution. I have led the debate, with a speech to parliament in March 2005. McNair Ingenuity research between 1979 and 2009 shows support for nuclear power growing from 34 to 49 per cent in favour of the construction of nuclear power stations, with around 10 per cent undecided.

On renewables, the reality is that at present they do not stack up. RET schemes should be dropped, and all methods of generating power should be subject to the level playing field of competition. The subsidy for wind is more than 100 per cent. CSIRO estimate the levelised cost of wind power to be $168 per megawatt hour. Coal is about $80 a megawatt hour. These figures are generous in terms of the load factor, and they do not expect wind to be any more competitive by 2030.

According to CSIRO, nuclear is the cheapest method of generating electricity now, and this will still be the case in 2030. Wind power is simply a feel-good option for electricity. It is inefficient and costly. What parliament needs to consider is whether to legislate to allow nuclear power generation to compete. Economics should be left to power utilities to choose whether to use it or not, not government. It is imperative that Labor put aside petty ideology in the national interest.

**Nikolopoulos, Mr Kostas**

Ms VAMVAKINOU (Calwell) (19:40): Today I would like to pay tribute to the passing of a great journalist, a community leader and a very dear friend of mine, Kon Nikolopoulos, who passed away on 16 January after a brave fight with a long illness. It is difficult to express the depth of the loss a community feels when it loses one of its most influential, respected and significant voices. The passing of Kon Nikolopoulos leaves a void in the Australian Greek community that will be near impossible to fill, because he was definitely one of a kind.
Kon migrated from Patra, Greece to Australia in July 1971, settling and raising his young family, like so many other migrants who came to make Australia home. Kon led a full and productive life. He was a powerful activist for social justice causes in the broader Australian community, especially on issues pertaining to multiculturalism, migration and settlement, access and equity, and ethnic media. A strong voice and advocate for education and the teaching of languages other than English, he was passionate for the promotion of Greek language and culture. He was a strong voice for the return of the Parthenon Marbles, he advocated for Justice for Cyprus, and for years he organised the celebration of the Greek national day on 25 March, which involved a wreath-laying ceremony and a parade of thousands of schoolchildren and community participants at Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance.

Kon, however, was first and foremost a journalist—and an old-school one at that. With his astute political acumen and unyielding code of ethics, his primary concern was to get to the truth and communicate it. He worked at SBS and the Hellenic Herald, and for the last 20 years, until his passing, he was deputy editor-in-chief at Australia's largest circulating Greek newspaper, Neos Kosmos. He was highly regarded for his honest, pragmatic and audacious no-nonsense approach. To pigeonhole him as just another ethnic journalist would be to have never understood the magnitude of his influence and professionalism. I want to thank Kon for the support he gave to me. I could always rely on his sharp mind, objectivity and thorough investigations. His criticisms were always constructive and, if ever harsh, they were certainly fair.

He played a leading role in the petition to have the Modern Greek language included in Australia's national languages curriculum. The petition was tabled in the House of Representatives in June 2010, signed by a record 24,000 people. ACARA's decision to include Modern Greek in the national languages curriculum was a result of a tremendous collective effort spearheaded by Kon Nikolopoulos as the petition's principal signatory.

Kon was a loving husband to his life's partner, Effie, and father to Bill and Nick. His son Nick remembers his enduring love for family and his good sense of fairness and social justice. Nick remembers how dedicated he was to everything that he did, especially the time he had for those around him. Nick fondly recollects:

Dad was dearly loved and will be greatly missed. As high profile as he was, he was very low key. He never trumpeted his achievements. My dad felt no need for that. It wasn't about knowing the right people and shaking the right hands it was about doing the right thing.

Nick also remembers growing up with a father who spent many long hours working in both paid and voluntary capacities. He says:

Journalism is hard work. Dad spent hours doing what he did. [His] favorite things however were going to the park or doing the things we did when he was home. Knowing he was home was the best part of our day. He was very proud of my late brother Bill and I. He loved hanging the term "my boy" at the end of people's names … so it was always "Billy my boy, Nick my boy".

Kon Nikolopoulos was a formidable journalist with an impressive track record. He knew the Australian political landscape intimately. He interviewed many a Prime Minister and Premier and, indeed, many political leaders both here and abroad. He was widely known and respected in Canberra, and I know for a fact that many leaders of the opposition and prime ministers took a keen interest in what Kon wrote in his weekly political column.
Above all he was highly respected by the Greek community in Australia and Greece. This respect was most evident even as recently as last week, when the Leader of the Opposition paid tribute to him at the annual Lonsdale Street Antipodes Festival. Thousands of people applauded in appreciation at the mention of Kon Nikolopoulos's name. This showed the high level of recognition and affection that Nikolopoulos had. He was a household name. The wider community has lost a significant presence.

My condolences to his family, his colleagues at Neos Kosmos, his friends and the neighbourhoods of Oakleigh where he lived.

**Green Army Program**

**Work for the Dole Program**

Mr COULTON (Parkes—The Nationals Chief Whip) (19:45): I would like to speak this evening about the Green Army projects, Work for the Dole and the concept of mutual obligation for employment in our communities.

In the Parkes electorate the Green Army projects are just getting underway, and the first cab off the ranks, so to speak, was the Green Army project that was sponsored by the Macquarie Riversmart Project. A couple of weeks ago I had the privilege of going to speak with these young people who are working in a range of activities along the Macquarie River, whether it be weed control, helping with access or fencing. The day that I was there they were actually putting up interpretive signage at the Narromine Wetlands, which is a project that has been sponsored by the Narromine Rotary Club. I had an opportunity, along with the Mayor of Narromine and members of the Narromine Rotary Club, to speak to these young workers. Despite what people might think—that there would be a reluctance to have to work on a Green Army project—there was actually a great amount of pride and gratitude from these people that they had the opportunity to get involved in something worthwhile, learn some skills and, hopefully, come to the attention of a future employer who might be able to offer permanent employment.

The other election commitment we made for a Green Army project that is just about to hit the ground is one that I am very proud of. This is the Green Army project for the communities of Boggabilla and Toomelah. I am very thankful to Kylie Benge and Debby Baxter-Tomkins from the Moree Plains Shire Council, who have been instrumental in bringing this project along. This project is very important for the Gomeroi people in that broader river region because a lot of the work will be centred around the Boobera Lagoon. As you know, Deputy Speaker Scott, the Boobera Lagoon is where the electorate of Parkes meets the electorate of Maranoa, and it is also the resting place of the rainbow serpent. It is one of the most special places for the Gomeroi people, and those young people are involved with projects in weed control, fencing, cleaning up the surrounds there and making the Boobera Lagoon and the surrounding areas much more amenable for the local people to be involved in.

There are a range of other projects to be rolled out. With the Work for the Dole projects that will start on 1 July there is a great expectation from a lot of my communities that at last there will be something to get the young people engaged in meaningful work.

But there is something I would like to touch on in conclusion. It was obvious when chatting to those nine young men and women working at Narromine that none of those people had a driver's licence. While we focus on environmental certificates and OH&S qualifications with
these projects, I think we need to put a little bit more thought to it. The provision of drivers' licences is a state responsibility; but, if we are seriously going to provide a program that will engage young people and enable them to go into permanent work, I strongly believe in the provision of training, whether or not that is an intensive driving course to obtain a driver's licence, because many of these people do not live in a household that has a registered motor vehicle. If it does, they certainly do not live in a house that has the finances to put petrol in a vehicle for the required number of hours to obtain that driver's licence.

I mentioned this briefly to the New South Wales Minister for Roads and Freight, Duncan Gay, a few weeks ago, and he was also quite supportive of looking at some way that we could maybe combine the resources of the states and federal government to include, maybe not in Green Army but possibly in Work for the Dole, the provision of getting people a driver's licence because, in regional Australia, if you do not have a licence, most of the work is out of town. (Time expired)

**Infrastructure Australia**

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler) (19:50): I was surprised last December when in a media release from the Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development, Warren Truss, and his assistant, Mr Briggs, they stated, along with their magical infrastructure reannouncement tour trying to claim a range of projects that were funded by the former Labor government, that Infrastructure Australia had appointed a new CEO. I was surprised by that because no announcement had previously been made of who that was, and in fact that was not the case. Michael Deegan, the infrastructure coordinator, left Infrastructure Australia on 7 February 2014. More than a year later there has been no-one in charge of Infrastructure Australia. There have been three acting CEOs or coordinators, but no-one in charge. It is no wonder that the infrastructure process has been abandoned that was established and supported by the business community and by all who are concerned with infrastructure development in this country.

Indeed, we have seen in two examples the consequences of a lack of proper process from this government. One of those is now subject to an Australian National Audit Office inquiry into the approval and administration of the Commonwealth grant funding for the East West Link project in Victoria. We now know this has a cost-benefit analysis of 0.45, or 45c of benefit for every dollar that would be invested—and not just $3 billion allocated by the government, but $1.5 billion paid in the last financial year. This was for a project that was not due to commence for some period of time, in contravention of the government's policies that it would make milestone payments—upon actual construction. And, secondly, there would be an Infrastructure Australia assessment and a cost-benefit analysis published for all projects above $100 million. Both of those have been breached.

In New South Wales, the WestConnex project has had $2 billion made available through a loan concession to New South Wales. During the last financial year—for a project, again, where a hole has not been dug—$500 million has been paid into the bank account of New South Wales. And that is before the proper process has happened. Indeed, the New South Wales Auditor-General said this in his report, *WestConnex assurance to the Government*, released at the end of last year:

The preliminary business case … had many deficiencies and fell well short of the standard required for such a document.
That was on page 3. And:

... we have seen no evidence of an independent, arm's length review of the traffic analysis used for the final business case, by someone technically qualified to do so, before the business case was presented to the Government.

We did not find peer review outputs for land use, urban planning or transport planning.

That was on page 26 of the New South Wales Auditor-General's report. That is of great concern for those who want to ensure that there is proper value for taxpayers' money and that infrastructure of projects achieve their objectives. In this case the objective is allowing access to the city for people who live in Western Sydney and allowing freight to get to the port for the important freight task that will grow at Port Botany. Those are the objectives and it needs to be outlined how they will occur.

The minister himself on last night's Channel 7 News was interviewed by Lee Jeloscek, and he was asked this: 'How many at the moment use the M4 and the M5?' His answer was: 'Um, sorry, I haven't got those numbers with me.' The next question was: 'So, how many tunnel stacks will there be for stages 1, 2 and 3 of the WestConnex?' Mr Gay's answer was: 'Look, I couldn't tell you the exact number.' Another question was: 'How many drivers a day are expected to use the WestConnex when it's operational?' Duncan Gay: silence, laughs.

But it is no joke. Infrastructure development must be done properly—not just rhetoric and handing over money for projects that are not ready to commence, that have not been through proper processes, that do not achieve the outcomes they were intended to reach. This government needs to get its act together on infrastructure development, and these projects show exactly why.

Mr EWEN JONES (Herbert) (19:55): My wife is not a great fan of the national curriculum. It is not that she does not appreciate that we have to have some sort of framework; it is just that as a prep teacher it is overcrowded and she finds it difficult to teach geography to a child that still needs to be taken to the toilet.

Clayton Cannes is the principal at Hermit Park State School. He argues with my wife on this. He says the national curriculum is the 'what' that you teach. How you teach it is the important thing. That is where the teacher expresses their skill, their art—much like a drummer in a band. Their job is to keep time. The cymbals across the top and so on—that is their art. That is what a great teacher does.

Hermit Park State School, where Clayton Cannes is the principal, is one of this government's independent public schools. We have three in Townsville: Hermit Park State School, Kirwan State High School and Pimlico State High School. I would also like to use this opportunity to say, 'get well very soon', to the principal of Kirwan State High School, John Livingston, a truly great educator in this country. He has been principal at that school for well and truly over 25 years. He is quite ill at the moment but he is getting better, and you cannot keep a good man down. So I wish him very well.

Recently I had the Assistant Minister for Education Senator Simon Birmingham from South Australia in Townsville. Whilst his portfolio concentrates pretty much on vocational education and training. I could not resist the opportunity of taking him to Hermit Park State School to see what Clayton does with his teachers; raising the levels of all his children,
making sure their individual needs are taken care of; and the role the independent public school plays in that.

Clayton is a great educator. He is on the board of Microsoft and he travels the world. He loves our system, because it gives him the autonomy to do what he wants to do. If you watch his mapping, as he goes through NAPLAN, you can see how his school has improved year on year because they are able to properly target and properly use the resources.

They have a school board which understands the need for decisions to be made close to the school and for the benefit of the school. For example, regarding things like the allocation of resources, the state system may say that he has 16 hours of aid time to go across this number of classes. One student in one class may need more time. So, with agreement among the teachers and agreement amongst the school board and agreement amongst the school parents, for the benefit of the school, they are able to allocate those aid hours to that one particular student to get the better outcome for the student—to raise everybody.

Some public schools in this country are starting to exclude kids in order to raise their NAPLAN scores and that sort of thing. That is very wrong. What we must do is what Hermit Park State School, Kirwan State High School and Pimlico State High School are doing—raise the level of all the children in their care.

When I was an auctioneer working for the Pickles organisation, we found that, whilst the Pickles organisation head office in Belmore would set the framework around which we worked, they left it up to the individual manager of the place to make sure that their operation ran well. That was because: I knew what my people were capable of; I knew the talents and the skills of what my people had; and I knew how best to allocate them. The independent public school model gives the principal the impetus and the ownership of that school.

There is talk about the new Queensland state government—and congratulations to them on their win—pulling the funding for the independent public school model. I urge the new Queensland government, the new Minister for Education to sit down and talk to the educators and parents in those schools about the benefits of the independent public school model and about the way they are raising the standards of their children and about how they are giving their kids the best opportunity to get great results.

That is what we must do as an organisation and that is what we must do as people who believe in education; empower decision-makers at that local level. Senator Birmingham was so impressed with what we saw at that school. And the kids love going to school. One of my neighbours’ kids goes to that school. My kids do not go to that school. It is a great organisation. It is a great thing to do for your children. I thank the House.

House adjourned at 20:00

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Mr Truss to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Limitation of Liability for Maritime Claims Act 1989, and for related purposes.

Mr Macfarlane to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Customs Act 1901, and for related purposes.
Mr Macfarlane to present a Bill for an Act to amend the *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006*, and for other purposes.

Mr Hartsuyker to present a Bill for an Act to amend the *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988*, and for other purposes.

Mr Hartsuyker to present a Bill for an Act to amend the *Seafarers Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1992*, and for related purposes.

Mr McCormack to present a Bill for an Act to deal with matters relating to Australian River Co. Limited, and for related purposes.

Mr K. J. Andrews to present a Bill for an Act to amend the *Defence Trade Controls Act 2012*, and for related purposes.

Ms McGowan to move:
That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) it is important:

(i) for community trust in our institutions and participatory democracy, that public office holders and institutions established by parliament be allowed to work with independence and impartiality; and

(ii) that the executive of government respects the work of independent public office holders particularly when there is disagreement with specific findings; and

(b) public criticism of independent public office holders by the executive undermines the trust in the executive; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

(a) respect the independence of public office holders; and

(b) allow public office holders to investigate complaints and report findings to the executive according to law, without political interference.

Ms Hall to move:
That this House:

(1) acknowledges that:

(a) Purple Day will be held this year on 26 March to recognise and promote the awareness campaign around epilepsy;

(b) 1 in 26 Australians will develop epilepsy during some stage of their lives;

(c) the current level of epilepsy treatment is significantly under resourced, and includes an estimated 10 per cent of all patients having poor control over their seizures; and

(d) rural communities and especially Indigenous communities, are particularly vulnerable to some of the risks associated with having epilepsy because of the danger of driving and travelling long distances; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

(a) recognise the danger and threat presented by the maltreatment of epilepsy;

(b) advocate strongly in rural Australia, and in particular, Indigenous communities, about the risks associated with having epilepsy;

(c) develop a national public education program on epilepsy with the help of the Joint Epilepsy Council of Australia; and
(d) develop programs to help epilepsy sufferers, such as epilepsy friendly workplace environments similar to those provided in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands.

**Ms Hall** to move:
That this House:

(1) recognises:
   (a) that Brain Injury Awareness Week will be held from 9 to 15 March 2015;
   (b) that over 700,000 Australians live with a brain injury; and
   (c) the work done by the Bouverie Centre in conjunction with the Victorian Department of Human Services to improve services provided to people with acquired brain injury; and

(2) calls on the Government to:
   (a) provide more services to accommodate people with a brain injury; and
   (b) develop a national scale partnership similar to the partnership seen in Victoria which helps people with a brain injury, and their family members.
CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Mr THISTLETHWAITE (Kingsford Smith) (09:29): I would like to acknowledge the heroism of two young men from Coogee in our community. On Sunday, 22 February, James and Josh Beard, like so many others from our area, were enjoying a game of golf. They were on the 10th tee of The Coast Golf Club in Little Bay with their father, Malcom, when the 18-year-old and 21-year-old heard a desperate cry for help coming from the ocean below. Instantly the pair tore down the hill, threw off their clothes, emptied their pockets and dove in, quickly reaching the distressed spearfisherman, who had become panicked after being caught in a powerful rip. The pair dragged him back to shore safely. So cool were the boys that, after the episode, they put their shirts back on, caught up with the group and only missed one hole. An incredible act of selflessness by any means, made even more astonishing by the fact Josh was in recovery after a knee reconstruction just four weeks earlier.

Speaking to The Daily Telegraph after the episode, James said that, while eager to get on with the game, he first had to dive back in to rescue his dad's scorecard. His father went on to record an outstanding score, perhaps inspired by his sons' great efforts. An incredible act of bravery by any means, the rescue serves to highlight the dangers associated with fishing or swimming in coastal regions.

Kingsford Smith is a renowned treacherous stretch of ocean, with treacherous beach conditions and big wave surfing and with rock-fishing black spots dotted along the coast. Between 2004 and 2012, according to Surf Life Saving New South Wales, there were 15 rock-fishing deaths along the Kingsford Smith coast. In 2011, our area represented one-third of all rock-fishing fatalities in New South Wales.

Throughout my time in this place, I have sought to raise awareness of the risks inherent in coastal activities, particularly when those involved are ill-prepared for the conditions and ignore the safety precautions. Unfortunately, rock fishermen remain notoriously lax when it comes to wearing the proper safety gear, including protective and non-slip footwear and, most importantly, a life vest. While many Australians are well aware of the importance of swimming where it is safe, many continue to risk their lives by swimming outside the red and yellow flags on our beaches. I implore those planning to visit Australia's coast to stay safe, to listen to the experts and to take proper precautions. And once again, I pay tribute to young James and Josh Beard for their outstanding act of heroism.

Veterans

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper—Deputy Leader of the House and Assistant Minister for Employment) (09:32): I rise to take this opportunity to congratulate the veteran community in Cowper on receiving funding from the Department of Veterans' Affairs to improve the health and wellbeing of local veterans.
In Cowper we have a significant number of Australian Defence Force veterans, and community groups such as the RAAF Association Coffs Harbour and District Branch and the Veterans Centre Mid North Coast, who proactively work towards providing assistance, support and social opportunities not only for veterans and their families but also for current ADF and essential services personnel.

With the Centenary of Anzac being a significant milestone for our country and the Defence Force in particular, it is fitting that we acknowledge and applaud these two community groups, whose sole focus is to enhance the lives of people who have served their country. The two grants provided by Department of Veterans' Affairs at $9,280 each will assist the Coffs Harbour and District Branch of the RAAF and the veterans centre to run a series of day trips aimed at reducing the social isolation experienced by some veterans after leaving the Defence Force. These trips not only promote friendship and camaraderie but also foster the discussion of experiences which veterans usually keep to themselves. These are very healthy and positive outcomes which would be lacking if these two organisations were not part of our community.

In addition to the role these groups have in reducing social isolation, there will be a new veterans drop-in centre, which is getting close to being completed. The centre will be available not only for the veteran community but also for emergency services personnel. The veterans centre's founding partners—the Bellinger River, Coffs Harbour, Dorrigo, Sawtell, Urunga and Woolgoolga RSL sub-branches; the Coffs Harbour and District Branch of the RAAF Association; and the mid-North Coast ex-service young veterans group—have worked tirelessly to get the drop-in centre up and running. It will be a very important and much-needed facility. This centre will be a one-stop place for veterans, their families and current ADF and emergency services personnel not only to receive assistance in their interactions with DVA; it will also be a place where counselling and support will be offered. Again, there is a significant focus on creating an area where there can be social interaction, where people can share experiences in a non-judgemental and positive manner. I commend these groups on their great work in providing this important new service.

Biosecurity

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (09:35): The recent outbreak of hepatitis A, suspected of being linked to mixed berries imported from China, highlights both our vulnerability to the risks associated with food imports and the need for improvements in how those risks are managed. By comparison with other countries, Australia has a very good biosecurity system in place. But we would be naive to believe that our system is adequate or that it could not be improved.

Hepatitis A is a serious health issue. It could easily have been an even more serious health risk or a much wider break-out than the 18 cases already identified. Nor should we pretend that we were caught by surprise or that the outbreak was an isolated unforeseen incident. Questions about Australia's biosecurity system have been raised frequently over the past decade, leading to Beale review in 2008. In recent years, the increased flow of goods, including foods, across the world has significantly elevated the biosecurity risks to Australia, threatening our health, our economy and our environment.

The costs to an affected individual and to the nation in responding to an outbreak of a disease are significant. If an outbreak occurs within the agricultural sector, the losses can run into the hundreds of millions of dollars and ruin Australian farmers, whose marketing advantage to date has been their clean, green image. Parallel with biosecurity arrangements is
the right of consumers to protect themselves by having clear information about the country of origin of goods. Again, food labelling has been a longstanding matter of public debate. Nor are concerns about labelling confined to food products, as recently exposed by the importation of products containing asbestos.

Biosecurity and labelling concerns are not new and the public's patience in the failure of successive governments to act is wearing thin. Firstly, Australia's labelling laws should be made clearer. Secondly, country of origin labelling laws should fall within the jurisdiction of the ACCC as recommended in the Blewett review on food labelling. The origin of a product, including food, is a separate matter and has nothing to do with the nutritional and health information for which FSANZ is responsible.

The FSANZ process is cumbersome, requiring the approval of the Commonwealth, each of the states and territories and New Zealand. Thirdly, the biosecurity obligations placed on Australian food exporters, requiring product testing and certification should at the very least be applied equally to imported food products. It is not sufficient to simply hold food importers responsible for the quality of the food imported. It will be of little comfort for affected Australians to know they can take civil action against a food importer or retailer when a situation arises. Lastly, we need to ensure that our biosecurity agencies are adequately resourced and staffed. With cost recovery fee scales now in place there is no excuse for not carrying out more testing.

Sugar Industry

Mr CHRISTENSEN (Dawson—The Nationals Deputy Whip) (09:38): I rise to update the chamber on the sugar marketing code of conduct task force, which I have been asked by the Minister for Small Business and the Minister for Agriculture to chair. As a quick background to the situation, three milling companies—namely, Wilmar, MSF Sugar and COFCO—announced last year that they will cease sugar marketing arrangements with Queensland Sugar Limited, or QSL, from 2017. There is concern amongst canegrowers that this will deny growers the choice to market their grower economic interest, sugar, through their industry owned and not-for-profit marketing body, QSL. We have set up this task force, and I have to give high praise to the Minister for Small Business and the Minister for Agriculture for allowing this to happen and taking an active interest in it.

To date, I have gone and personally talked to a number of different canegrower groups. We have established the committee, set a terms of reference and set a process in place. We are on the verge of publicly advertising for submissions from the industry about what should be in a possible sugar marketing code of conduct. We are asking that people make particular reference to the concept that growers have an economic interest in the sugar they supply to the mill, growers' ability to choose a marketing entity for their economic interest, transparency of sugar marketing activities, the mill supply contract negotiation process and protecting growers from discrimination by millers, amongst other things.

I actually got a note saying that the shadow minister has expressed an interest in having Labor Party members on the committee. It is a government task force, but I do extend an invitation to the Labor Party. If they want to have input into that process, I am more than happy to meet with interested members and the shadow minister about that. I have already extended that invitation to the member for Kennedy as well, who has an interest in sugar.
Where to from here? We will have briefings with peak bodies, the ACCC, growers groups, QSL and the millers. The outcome will be to deliver stability and security for can growers, millers, sugar marketing entities and the entire sugar industry. We hope to report back to the Minister for Small Business in May.

This is a matter of urgency, and one thing that members of the Labor Party can do, especially those from Queensland—and I note one is here in the chamber—is to impress upon the new Queensland Labor government the urgency of this issue. The fact is that they could make changes to Queensland's Sugar Industry Act which would address this situation and provide some stability for the industry.

Melbourne Electorate: Chinese and Vietnamese Australian Communities

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (09:41): Chuc mung nam moi. Kung hei fat choy. Xin nian kuai le. To all members of the Melbourne and Australian community: happy lunar new year. Last week, Vietnamese, Chinese and other communities in my electorate of Melbourne welcomed the Year of the Goat, and I wish my constituents a happy and prosperous new year.

I want to take this opportunity, in Australia's parliament, to say to the Vietnamese and Chinese communities in Melbourne and Australia: thank you. Thank you for making Melbourne such a great place to live. People come from around Australia to visit vibrant, multicultural Melbourne, and I say to all of you: you are a big reason for this. It has been my privilege to meet with and represent Chinese and Vietnamese community groups around my electorate, including in Fitzroy, Richmond, Collingwood, Flemington, the CBD and other places. I cannot imagine Melbourne without your contribution. And I know that we can all learn much from you. You show us the importance of looking after each other, especially the older members of our community. You have been great role models for all of us, including for more recently arrived waves of migrants.

It has been my honour to be invited to lunar new year celebrations in my electorate of Melbourne. I would like to acknowledge the outstanding organisation of the Atherton Gardens Residents Association of North Yarra Community Health; Vietnamese Community In Australia, Victorian Chapter; and Indochinese Elderly Refugees Association of Victoria. I want to pay special tribute to RABA, the Richmond Asian Business Association—in particular, Ms Dieu Nguyen, Mr Toan Pham, Mr Meca Ho and the RABA committee—for organising the wildly successful Victoria Street Lunar New Year Festival, which is attended by thousands and which goes from strength to strength.

This year also marks the 40th anniversary of the Vietnamese community in Australia, and it is with respect and admiration that I note that they have committed to using this 40th anniversary to say thank you to Australia. In 2009, the Vietnamese community in Victoria came together to raise over $1 million for the victims of the Black Saturday bushfires. This year, the community will be raising funds for the Royal Children's Hospital Good Friday Appeal. Members of the community have also launched an initiative to serve Vietnamese food to people experiencing homelessness, through Melbourne soup vans.

The success of the Vietnamese community is also a reminder to the rest of us that, when Australia extends a welcome to people who are coming here seeking a better life, we all benefit. People who are pillars of the community now are people that we would once have called 'boat people'. They are now occupying very senior positions within the community, and...
we can all learn a lot from them. It may come as a bit of a shock to the Australian community to know—and we should pause to reflect—that hundreds of Vietnamese asylum seekers currently remain in detention or community detention, and we must work to release them.

To everyone in the Chinese and Vietnamese Australian communities: thank you for being so inspirational; thank you for your contribution. I wish you a happy and successful Year of the Goat. You always have a friend in the Greens.

**Asylum Seekers**

**Mr HOWARTH** (Petrie) (09:44): At the last federal election the coalition promised to stop the boats. That was one of our core election commitments—to stop the boats, and bring an end to the failure of the Labor-Greens policy of opening up our borders to people smugglers. In 2007, the Labor Party came in and immediately reversed the strong Pacific Solution laws that the Howard government had put in place—and why did they do that? Because they thought, 'Oh, it cannot be good for Australia; it is not the right thing to do'. But we saw an absolute disaster on our borders for the next six years, with over 50,000 people arriving—500 boats, 1,200 deaths at sea, and 8,000 children put into detention. In the seat of Petrie it was very clear that one of the most important issues for my constituents, besides jobs and roads, was to stop the boats. I am pleased to say that, less than 18 months into our term, we have effectively done that. It was not a three-word slogan, 'stop the boats'; it was actually delivered and it is continually working under Operation Sovereign Borders.

In the last few weeks I have met an Iranian man. He came to this country: he was a Christian man, and he was being persecuted in Iran. I said to him, 'How did you come to be in Australia?' And he said: 'Well, I went to Saudi Arabia. I went there, and then I went to Indonesia'. And I said, 'How did you get from there to here?'. And he said, 'Well, then I actually paid to come here'. I said, 'How much did you pay?'. He said, 'I paid 5½ thousand to come here'. And I said, 'Why did you not stop at Saudi Arabia? Or why did you not stop at Indonesia?' And he said, 'because I wanted to come to Australia'. And I say to the Labor Party, and I say to the Greens, that it is illegal to come to Australia by boat. It is not illegal to seek asylum, but when you travel from Saudi Arabia to Indonesia and then to Australia, that is breaking Australian law. It is the wrong thing to do. And we know that those members opposite who are in the chamber today will immediately reverse this, if they get back into government.

I am very proud of the fact that the coalition have delivered on this policy, that we are saving lives, and that we are down from something like 2,000 children in detention, when we took government less than 18 months ago, to 136 children last week. That is a fantastic achievement. And we want Australia to be a strong multicultural country, with our borders open to new immigrants. But there is a right way to come. It is illegal under Australian law to pay a people smuggler to come to this country by boat. We will continue, along with Operation Sovereign Borders, to ensure that Australia's sovereignty is protected.

**Anzac Centenary**

**Mr NEUMANN** (Blair) (09:47): On 25 April this year, Australia will mark the centenary event of the Anzac landings at Gallipoli. Our nation's identity was shaped by the service and sacrifice of Australian men and women at Gallipoli and on other battlefields of that war. The former federal Labor government established the Anzac Centenary Local Grants Program,
and I commend the current government for continuing that program. I want to thank the local committee, which I established, chaired by Jim Runham OAM, with members Jim Madden MP, Councillor Andrew Antoniolli, Beryce Nelson, Elizabeth DeLacy, Phil Gilbert, Bruce Saxby, Brian Hall, and committee secretary and my electorate officer, Kylie Stoneman, for the work they have done. I am delighted to congratulate the 12 applicants across the Blair electorate who have so far have received funding. The Esk RSL Sub Branch received $11,990 to erect a memorial at the main cenotaph in Ipswich Street, Esk, depicting the 100th anniversary of the Gallipoli landings. The Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce received $20,000 to establish First World War memorial structures and a memorial wall as part of the Anzac memorial under construction at the Robelle Domain Parklands, Springfield. St Brigid's Catholic Primary School—where I will be on Friday—received $10,000 to construct an Anzac memorial garden in the school grounds. The Bundamba Anzac Observance Committee received $6,539 to create a living memorial to the 12 men from Bundamba who gave their lives in the First World War. The Ipswich Adventist School received $5,447 to update and relocate the school's memorial stone and flagpole to provide more room for the increased number of attendees at the school's Anzac Day dawn service. Brisbane Valley Heritage Trails received $2,633 to produce a book entitled The Colinton Boys—the boys from the Brisbane Valley who took their horses overseas and fought in the First World War.

The St Edmund's Christian Brothers College Old Boys Association received $1,921 to publish a book about the 72 men listed on the Woodend honour stone, commemorating those from Woodend, a suburb in Ipswich, who died in the First World War. Brisbane Valley Uniting Church received $2,168 to refurbish its First World War Honour Board and produce a related booklet. The Ipswich City Council received $14,808 to assist with stage 1 of the Ipswich Memorial Garden redevelopment. The Pine Mountain and District Historical Society received $10,000 as a contribution toward the Pine Mountain honour stone memorial project. The Eastern Suburbs Anzac Day Commemoration Committee received $2,860 for the design, production and dedication of a marble Anzac Centenary stone at Cameron Park in Booval. The Military Brotherhood received $250 for a plaque to commemorate the Dungaree's Recruitment March Centenary Ride 2015, which retraces the original 1915 recruitment march. I congratulate all those diverse projects and all the people associated with those applications.

Petition: Temporary Retirement Visas

Mr GOODENOUGH (Moore) (09:51): I present a petition from Monica Parker as the principal petitioner on behalf of holders of temporary retirement visas subclass 410 requesting a pathway to become permanent residents and citizens. The petitioners cite the following reasons in support of favourable consideration. They have resided in Australia continuously for at least 10 years, are home owners, are self-funded retirees with overseas sourced pensions, are law abiding, contribute significantly and voluntarily to the community, have private health insurance, have injected millions of dollars into the Australian economy and would, as permanent residents, pay income tax in Australia on overseas income.

In 2007 the government commissioned a report into the potential direct costs to the Commonwealth of granting permanent residency to this group of visa holders. The modelling was prepared by the Australian Government Actuary and finalised based on the population of
visa holders as at 30 June 2010. It included seven alternative scenarios with slightly different assumptions in relation to health costs, inflation and mortality rates. The cost projections of health care, aged care and income support under these scenarios ranged from $815 million to $1.42 billion.

I have met with a number of representatives, including Mike Goodall and David Humphries, advocating on behalf of 410 visa holders who have articulated that a number of pertinent factors were omitted from the actuarial modelling contained in the 38-page report. These factors include: the economic benefit of assets and foreign income brought into Australia; the projected increase in taxation revenue that will be generated from investments and superannuation brought onshore; and the contribution to Australian society through volunteering and family support such as child care. The number of visa holders has progressively declined over the past five years. As at 30 June 2013, there were an estimated 5,572 individuals on category 410 visas. Of these, only 3,323 were resident onshore. By comparison, the 2010 report was based on 7,215 cases.

Based on the abovementioned factors, I make the case for the government to commission a fresh review into the costs and benefits of granting permanent residency to holders of 410 visas with more robust terms of reference and comprehensive actuarial modelling to reflect changes in the circumstances.

The petition read as follows—
To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives
This petition of 410 Visa holders residents in Australia draws to the attention of the House:
That 3000 self-funded individuals that call Australia home are currently prevented from becoming Australian citizens. A motion proposed by Senator Chris Ellison and agreed by the Senate on 28 June 2008 should be upheld by the government to 'enable temporary resident retirement 410 visa holders to apply for permanent residency'. Also in 2008 Senator Chris Evans then Minister for Immigration, declared that 'if people choose to make their lives in Australia they should have a pathway to citizenship open to them'.
Surely 3000 retirement visa holders of whom we estimate no more than 2000 would take up Permanent Residence if offered deserve security in the knowledge that they have certainty, particularly all who:
• have lived here for at least ten years
• are home owners
• are self-funded from overseas-sourced pensions
• are law abiding
• contribute significantly and voluntarily to the community
• are privately health insured
• have introduced hundreds of millions of dollars into Australia at no cost to taxpayers
• would, as permanent residents, then pay income tax in Australia on overseas income
We therefore ask the House to:
Allow all holders of the Temporary Retirement Visa (sub-class 410) who have resided in Australia for a continuous period of 10 years or more the right to become Permanent Residents and Citizens.

Petition received.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The document will be forwarded to the Standing Committee on Petitions for its consideration and it will be accepted subject to confirmation by the committee that it conforms to the standing orders.

Vietnamese Australians

Ms O’NEIL (Hotham) (09:54): I rise to pay tribute to the contributions that Vietnamese Australians make to our country and, in particular, my community of Hotham. This year, in 2015, we celebrate the 40th anniversary of the arrival of Vietnamese refugees to Australia. After Saigon fell in 1975, tens of thousands of Vietnamese people made their way to Australia, fleeing persecution after the war. Many thousands arrived by boat. They gathered their families, taking all they had in the world and set sail on rickety, crowded vessels. They were desperate. I believe it was one of the great and noble acts of Australian history that we welcomed them. It is Australia that has been the great beneficiary, because we know that these migrants wasted no time rebuilding their lives in Australia.

My electorate of Hotham has played a particularly significant role in welcoming these Vietnamese migrants. The Enterprise Migrant Hostel in Springvale opened in 1970 and it provided thousands of Vietnamese migrants their first Australian home. They took English classes, were helped to find employment and were supported while they found their feet in a new country. On moving out of the hostel, many located themselves nearby in Springvale and surrounds. Today, 40 years on, more than 7000 people living in my electorate of Hotham were born in Vietnam and many thousands more are descended from Vietnamese migrants. We benefit so much from the contribution that this community makes. The shopping strip in Springvale Road offers the tastes and smells of Vietnam; we are blessed with Vietnamese markets, temples, films and art. We have learnt so much from the values that are held dear by this community—things like the primacy of family, the importance of spirituality and, of course, of achievement. We see lots of Vietnamese names among the high achievers in schools right around Hotham.

The Vietnamese have built incredible community groups and have invested hugely in the development of Springvale, in particular. I want to mention the Springvale Asian Business Association and the Springvale Indonesia-Chinese Mutual Assistance Association as two such groups where Vietnamese Australians have played an important leadership role. The lunar new year is one of the biggest festivals held in our area; we see 80,000 people come every year to Springvale. The Tet Festival is another fantastic event, which is held just outside my electorate and which showcases Vietnamese culture to the rest of the community.

As a sign of the Vietnamese community's affection for Australia, plans are afoot to build a memorial for Australian soldiers who died in the Vietnam War. The community is also developing a soup kitchen and donating $½ million to the Royal Children's Hospital. (Time expired)

South Australian Government

Mr WILLIAMS (Hindmarsh) (09:57): I rise this morning to set the record straight. The Local Government Association of South Australia and the state Labor government have been running a misinformation campaign in South Australia. They are trying to shift the blame for state government cuts. I want to be put on the record as voicing my strong objection to the Weatherill government's decision to hit pensioners and to state the facts. As many voters
know, the provision of concessional payments, whether they be water or utilities, for pensioners to assist with council rates is the responsibility of state governments. However, the South Australian Labor government has decided to walk away from pensioners and it will no longer honour that responsibility.

Here are the facts. Under the terms of the National Partnerships Agreement, the federal government only contributes 10 per cent of the funding for the state governments' pensioner concessions—yes, 10 per cent. That means the Weatherill Labor government is responsible for 90 per cent of the funding concessions—I repeat, 90 per cent. This equates to $171 out of $190 for state government concessions. While it is true that 10 per cent will no longer be funded by the federal government, the federal coalition government has increased funding to South Australia by 23 per cent, or $1.8 billion over the forward estimates. Let me repeat that: a 23 per cent or $1.8 billion increase over the forward estimates. South Australia's GST funding will increase to almost $5 billion in 2014-15. From the increased funding from the federal government, the Weatherill Labor government could have chosen to continue to pay for the concessions, but they have chosen to blame someone else—as they do with so many other things—and instead they have pocketed $98 million of budget funding.

Every other state government, except South Australia, has agreed to fund the full concession. In speaking to the member for Moore earlier, he confirmed that the Western Australian government had funded 100 per cent of council concessions. So every other state government has funded these concessions. The South Australian Labor government has a poor track record when it comes to budget management; its decision to remove funding for council rate concessions reflects its inability to balance the budget. It is not the federal government's fault that the Weatherill government has delivered the highest deficit and recorded the highest debt in South Australia's history.

The Weatherill Labor government's decision to cut pensioner concessions will have a significant impact on approximately 160,000 pensioner-owned properties in South Australia that receive up to $190 per year to help reduce their council costs. The Weatherill Labor government have chosen to attack some of the most vulnerable in our community, who are already facing increased emergency services bills, higher water rates and higher electricity rates due to solar feed-in tariffs. They have got their priorities wrong. They are closing hospitals, they are hitting the vulnerable and they are using taxpayers' money to fund PR campaigns. They need to stop blaming everyone else and start taking responsibility for South Australia's woeful financial performance.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Ewen Jones): In accordance with standing order 193, the time for constituency statements has concluded.

COMMITTEES
Standing Committee on the Environment
Report

Debate resumed on the motion:
That the House take note of the report.

Mr GILES (Scullin) (10:00): I rise to speak to the report of the Standing Committee on the Environment, Streamlining environmental legislation: inquiry into streamlining environmental regulation, 'green tape', and one stop shops. I start by thanking the chair of the
committee, the deputy chair and indeed the secretariat for their hard work over the course of this inquiry. I also acknowledge all of those who made submissions and gave evidence before the inquiry.

In speaking to this report, I want to make clear the reason Labor members of the committee felt compelled to author the dissenting report, which forms part of the report I am now addressing. This is due to the report of the majority not fairly reflecting the divergent submissions presented in the course of the inquiry in two critical respects. Firstly, and at a general level, it does not reflect a due appreciation of the value of the environment to the Australian community today and, importantly, into the future. Secondly, and more specifically, on any fair reading of the evidence presented in the course of the inquiry, the case for the one-stop shop has simply not been made out, so we reject paragraph 4.70.

Labor members believe that any changes to environmental regulation that simplify assessment processes, reduce time and costs and create uniformity across all jurisdictions should always be balanced against the importance of maintaining sound environmental protections. It is this concern that has not been satisfied in relation to that proposal. While the report makes a positive mention of the balance between environmental and regulatory concerns, it evidences no consideration of potential benefits arising from delaying projects— for example, to delay the proper and thorough consideration of applications that may cause permanent harm to matters of national environmental significance. I note that there has already been a report into so-called green tape, which found no empirical evidence to support the argument that Commonwealth involvement has been impeding environmental assessment. In our view, nothing has changed since that report.

As mentioned in the dissenting report, the OECD released a very important report of its own in December last year entitled Do environmental policies matter for productivity growth? This report makes for compelling reading. This report found:

… the strictness of environmental policies has "increased significantly"—
in all OECD countries—
over the past two decades. But that increased stringency has not harmed productivity growth or productivity levels. In fact, new green regulations "may translate into a permanent increase in productivity levels in some industries."
The OECD further found:

… new regulations have pushed firms to operate more efficiently than would otherwise have been case— the green tape has encouraged innovation and investment that has allowed firms to do things better. The improvements triggered by stricter environmental rules have more than offset the costs.

In other words, green tape is not necessarily detrimental to productivity if the regulations are well-designed.

That is, if:

stringent environmental policies can be implemented while promoting strong competition.
The report stated that market-based environmental policies, like the one this government dumped last year, 'tend to have a more robust positive effect on productivity growth'. I would urge members to consider this report in having regard to the matters traversed in the report we are discussing today.
In concluding my very brief remarks on the report before us, I acknowledge that it contains many valuable recommendations, but Labor members are seriously concerned that, in key respects, the majority report prefers ideology to evidence, and this places our precious natural environment at risk. We cannot support such a recommendation.

Ms MARINO (Forrest—Government Whip) (10:04): I am pleased to rise to support the recommendations—

A division having been called in the House of Representatives—

Sitting suspended from 10:05 to 10:26

Ms MARINO: As I was saying, I rise to support the recommendations made in this report by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Environment. Like the previous speakers, I want to acknowledge the work of the chair and thank the secretariat, who, as we all know in this place, do an extraordinary amount of work. I also want to thank the witnesses who came along and gave evidence.

The holy grail of environmental management is to make good decisions about environmental approvals efficiently and effectively. We want to protect the environment and stimulate development in the economy to create jobs and support communities, particularly those in rural, regional and remote areas. It might be considered by some that to be able to achieve both in a timely manner is impossible. But that is the ideal that we should always be aiming for, and streamlining the environmental legislation is part of that process.

In hearings, the Department of the Environment stated:

The Commonwealth has national standards to be considered prior to entering into an agreement. The standards are based on the requirements of Commonwealth law and facilitate the maintenance of strong environmental outcomes through the one stop shop … The reform will maintain high environmental standards while delivering an improved means to achieve better outcomes for business.

The environmental approval system being rolled out by the Commonwealth in the form of the one-stop shop program also recognises that the states and territories are land managers as defined in our Commonwealth Constitution. It recognises that it is those states and territories that have the actual knowledge, the skills and the on-the-ground experience—something that is often overlooked—to make good decisions for local ecosystems and local communities. In particular, they have the expertise that the Commonwealth Department of the Environment does not. It makes no sense to have the Commonwealth Department of the Environment trying to replicate that knowledge and expertise in replicating an environmental assessment process. The Commonwealth, as we know, simply does not have the capacity to do so—unless it invests billions in replicating state and territory environment departments. So an eminently sensible outcome is for the states and territories to do what they do best already, to conduct those on-the-ground environmental assessments as part of this.

There remains an important role for the Commonwealth, that of oversight. But only where it is empowered by Commonwealth legislation to do so. As a committed federalist, I understand the importance of the division of powers in relation to the roles and responsibilities of the states. There are times and conditions, however, where circumstances demand a federal response. Under the system proposed by the Minister for the Environment in legislation, there is ample opportunity for the Commonwealth to engage with state environment departments throughout the assessment process. Nothing in the government...
proposal prevents this. The Commonwealth is not abandoning its responsibilities for environmental management. It is simply defining them and cooperating to deliver the outcomes.

We heard consistently throughout the hearings about the costs, delays, frustration and inefficiency associated with the duplication of the requirements and processes of the current system. We also heard about projects in Australia that take 3.1 years for approval and about projects of a similar nature in other countries that take 1.8 years for approval. We heard about delays of seven months for environmental approvals in 2002 and of 18 to 36 months in 2012. We heard that the LNG industry has to comply with 150 statues and 50 government agencies—that has particular interest for those of us from Western Australia. Of particular importance was the evidence from the Department of the Environment, which commented:

The reform will maintain the high environmental standards of the EPBC Act. The Australian Government is committed to improving environmental standards over time cooperatively with the states and territories. To ensure this outcome continuous improvement will be a key feature of agreements with State and Territory governments.

That outlines what the Commonwealth is intending. I note that the Australian Network of Environmental Defenders Offices said in their evidence:

ANEDO supports efficient and effective environmental regulation. We do not support unnecessary or duplicative laws. … We do not believe in regulation for regulation's sake but in using the appropriate regulatory tools to ensure ecologically-sustainable development and the protection of the Australian environment.

On that basis, I commend the recommendations and the report to the parliament.

Mr McCORMACK (Riverina—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance) (10:31): It is always a pleasure to follow the member for Forrest because she, as a farmer, understands the importance of preserving the environment but at the same time ensuring that social and economic implications are always considered. I rise to speak on the report of the Standing Committee on Environment Streamlining environmental legislation: Inquiry into streamlining environmental regulation, 'green tape', and one stop shops. In doing so, I acknowledge the fine work done by the chair of that committee and the work that went into compiling the report.

I note from the report that quite a bit of logistics went into preparing this report. The inquiry received 83 submissions, 13 supplementary submissions and 29 exhibits. The committee held six public hearings here in Canberra and also in Sydney and Melbourne. I do note with some disappointment that there were no regional hearings. I appreciate the fact that it is logistically very hard to get some of the committee hearings into regional areas, but I would say that for many of the reports of this and many of the other inquiries conducted by the parliament it is a shame that we do not get into regional areas more often to hear the words of wisdom of those people who have very much a stake in these matters. It is not always easy for those people to get to the capital cities, but it would be good to hear from those people in regional areas their input, discussions and concerns about these sorts of things. I note that the member for Mitchell in his speech to the parliament on 23 February said:

… throughout this inquiry, the committee was presented with numerous examples of environmental regulation that is duplicative, ineffective, confusing, impractical, contradictory or otherwise inefficient. We—
that is, the committee—
saw that some environmental laws were creating delays and significant compliance costs for business without actually delivering any environmental benefit at all.

That is why this inquiry was conducted. That is why it has produced a very good report. It is a shame that it did not receive the unanimous approval of the committee. I note the Deputy Chair, the member for Makin, in his contribution on the same day as the Chair's speech on the report, said that Labor members reject paragraph 4.70 on page 49 of the committee report. This is the paragraph that refers to the one-stop shop policy. Labor does not support the one-stop shop policy of the government. Labor members also note that the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Bilateral Agreement Implementation) Bill 2014 has not passed the Senate, leaving bilateral agreements with states and territories in limbo. I would urge Labor members to just sometimes end your relentless negativity and get on board with some of the programs and some of the policies—not all; I appreciate there are divergent views between the two sides of the parliament—of the government. I would urge them to work through the committee chairs, to work through the committee process and to just sometimes get on board with what this government is trying to do to build prosperity and wealth and to pay down a lot of the debt and deficit that we have inherited.

I hark back to the committee that I was on, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia Committee, headed by the former Independent member for New England, Tony Windsor, when we conducted an inquiry into the Murray-Darling Basin. I note that there were very similar sorts of arrangements to this report—environmental concerns. The Water Act 2007 is unfortunately an environmental document. We should note that and also remember there is a triple bottom line approach with economic and social concerns that very much need to be at the forefront of anything to do with the Murray-Darling Basin. Sure, we had some very interesting discussions. We went very extensively into regional areas right throughout Australia to hear from key stakeholders. Even though there were very different opinions held by members on that committee—we had Labor members, an Independent, Liberal members and me as a National Party member, and obviously Mr Windsor was holding a very controversial government in place with his important number in the House of Representatives—we actually reached a unanimous verdict on the *Of drought and flooding rains* report. There were 21 recommendations, which, had the parliament adopted, I think we would be in a much better position than we are now with the Murray-Darling Basin. Of course, we all need to ensure that the Murray-Darling Basin remains environmentally secure but, at the same time, we need to protect those farmers and those river communities along the way. I am pleased that we will be getting a water buyback cap and legislate for it, hopefully with the support of the Labor members and particularly those in the Senate, to ensure that the cap on buyback of 1,500 gigalitres is passed.

Getting back to this report, I think it is interesting to note that Labor members of the committee prepared a dissenting report. Although there were areas of agreement—which is good, and I acknowledge that—Labor members of the committee did not believe that the committee report fairly reflected the divergent submissions presented in the course of the inquiry. Labor does not support the government's one-stop shop policy, and that is a shame. The majority of the committee's recommendations—that is, those endorsed by the
government members—propose to task the Department of the Environment with further reviews or inquiries to try to further streamline processes. That is essential.

I note that, since coming to government, the coalition has been working hard to resolve a large number of important environmental decisions. We have been getting on with the task of cleaning up the mess left by Labor. To 14 January 2015, 355 referral decisions and 145 final approval decisions have been made under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. You ask me: what might that present, what might that produce for the nation as a whole? The 145 approvals decisions represent greater than—wait for it—$1 trillion of economic value. That is crucial in getting this country ticking again. That is crucial in creating jobs, in creating opportunity and in creating wealth. Those 145 projects include many of the things that had remained mired in the stalling process that Labor so eagerly embraced, because they were in partnership with the Greens to keep government under the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd era. Last October in my electorate of Riverina I announced, in conjunction with the state member for Wagga Wagga, Daryl Maguire, a Liberal, funding of $27½ million each—that is, $55 million of federal and state money—going to a very important project to replace the very old Kapooka Bridge: a pinch point in the Olympic Highway, and a road which stopped so much of the very valuable freight transport getting from Victoria to New South Wales. I note that the project has been delayed by months—just getting the excavators into operation and just getting the whole project underway has been delayed—through environmental concerns. Now, we all need to preserve and protect the environment. From the National Party perspective, I appreciate that. I represent a lot of farmers and they are the best environmentalists. Make no mistake. They have to be—because if they ruin their rivers, or if they ruin their soil, they are not going to have a future. Far too often, we see farmers maligned in this place, and maligned in the media, for the jobs that they do. They are not environmental vandals; they are the people who are environmental protectors.

Ms Marino: On the ground!

Mr McCormack: On the ground; absolutely, the member for Forrest. Getting back to the Kapooka Bridge, it has been delayed for months. They are busy building nesting boxes and doing all those sorts of things to protect wildlife, which is important. But why does it take months? This is a project which has been decades in the making, absolute decades, and it is being held up through, I would argue, unnecessary environmental concerns. And it is an important project, because that new bridge will save lives. It will save lives, and it will improve and protect the livelihoods of those people who use that road as a freight corridor.

This is a very good report. I commend the committee for its diligent work. I commend the one-stop-shop process. I think that was an excellent decision by the coalition government, and an excellent decision by the Minister for the Environment, who understands the need to preserve and protect our environment whilst at the same time ensuring that we have the economic growth to make this country not just great but even greater; indeed, the greatest country on earth.

Debate adjourned.

Federation Chamber adjourned at 10:42
QUESTIONS IN WRITING
Department of the Treasury: Consultants
(Question No. 527 Revised)

Mr Conroy asked the Treasurer, in writing, on 21 October 2014:
Since 7 September 2013 can the Minister provide details as to the use of all consultants within
his/her department, including reasons for engaging their services, and the costs involved.

Mr Hockey: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
Information is published on: www.tenders.gov.au.