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FORTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—FIFTH PERIOD

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

House of Representatives Office holders
Speaker—Hon. Bronwyn Kathleen Bishop MP
Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Craig Scott MP
Second Deputy Speaker—Mr Robert George Mitchell 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

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

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

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

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

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<td>Whiteley, Mr Brett David</td>
<td>Braddon, TAS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wicks, Mrs Lucy Elizabeth</td>
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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wilkie, Mr Andrew Damien</td>
<td>Denison, TAS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Williams, Mr Matthew</td>
<td>Hindmarsh, SA</td>
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<td>Wilson, Mr Richard James</td>
<td>O'Connor, WA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wood, Mr Jason Peter</td>
<td>La Trobe, VIC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wyatt, Mr Kenneth George AM</td>
<td>Hasluck, WA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zappia, Mr Antonio</td>
<td>Makin, SA</td>
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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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<td>The Hon. Tony Abbott MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Indigenous Affairs</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Nigel Scullion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Eric Abetz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Michaelia Cash</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Charles Porter MP</td>
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<tr>
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<td>The Hon. Alan Tudge MP</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>(Deputy Prime Minister)</td>
<td>The Hon. Jamie Briggs MP</td>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Steven Ciobo MP</td>
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<tr>
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<td>The Hon. Steven Ciobo MP</td>
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<td>Senator the Hon. Eric Abetz</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Attorney-General</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon. George Brandis QC</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for the Arts</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(Vice-President of the Executive Council)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Justice</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Michael Keenan MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Treasurer</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Joe Hockey MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Small Business</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Bruce Billson MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Assistant Treasurer</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Joshua Frydenberg MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Kelly O'Dwyer</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Agriculture</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Barnaby Joyce MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Agriculture</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Richard Colbeck</td>
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<td>The Hon. Christopher Pyne MP</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Senator the Hon. Marise Payne</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Defence</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Veterans’ Affairs</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Centenary of</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Michael Ronaldson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Title</td>
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<tr>
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<td>The Hon. Stuart Robert MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence</td>
<td>The Hon. Darren Chester MP</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Communications</td>
<td>The Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Senator the Hon. Mathias Cormann</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Health</td>
<td>The Hon. Sussan Ley MP</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Fiona Nash</td>
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Each box represents a portfolio. **Cabinet Ministers are shown in bold type.** As a general rule, there is one department in each portfolio. However, there is a Department of Human Services in the Social Services portfolio and a Department of Veterans' Affairs in the Defence portfolio. The title of a department does not necessarily reflect the title of a minister in all cases.
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<td>Senator the Hon Kim Carr</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Hon Bernie Ripoll MP</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Julie Owens MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Cabinet Secretary</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Jacinta Collins</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Opposition</td>
<td>Hon Michael Danby MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs and International</td>
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<td>Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manager of Opposition Business (Senate)</td>
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<tr>
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BILLS

Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (Improving the Comcare Scheme) Bill 2015

First Reading
Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Hartsuyker.
Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper—Deputy Leader of the House and Assistant Minister for Employment) (09:01): I move:
That this bill be now read a second time.

The government is committed to ensuring that Australian workplaces are safe, flexible and productive and to reducing the risk and impact of workplace injury and disease.

It is vital that people injured in the course of their employment are given every opportunity to get better and return to work.

This requires a modern workers compensation scheme that meets the needs of today’s workforce and is sustainable into the future.

Early and effective rehabilitation, as well as appropriate financial compensation, are essential to helping people recover and get back to doing the things that are important to them, including their jobs.

The Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988—also known as the SRC Act—covers Australian and ACT government employees and the employees of 33 corporations licensed under the Comcare scheme.

In 2012, the now Leader of the Opposition, as workplace relations minister, commissioned the first comprehensive review of the scheme since its introduction in 1988. When the then Hawke government minister Brian Howe introduced the SRC Bill into parliament, he stated that the aim of the changes was to provide assistance to those employees most in need—the long-term incapacitated.

Unfortunately, since 1988 the scheme has had piecemeal amendments that have made it out of step with community standards and evidence based practices.

The 2012 review commissioned by the Gillard government found that the scheme does not give injured employees enough support and incentive to return to the workplace. In addition, the scheme allows injured employees to make claims for conditions that are unrelated to work and to undertake treatments that are not evidence based. People are not getting back to work as quickly as they should and this is causing costs to increase and creating negative perceptions of the scheme within the community.

Indeed, even the left-wing ACT Green-Labor government has criticised the Comcare scheme, saying:
The Comcare system is quite burdensome, not only for claimants but for their employers as well. The focus we want to see is recovery and rehabilitation for our staff and getting them back to the workplace. The studies show that if you get people back to work earlier, their lives are better in the long run.

Using the recommendations from the review as a starting point, building on feedback from stakeholders and also adopting some reforms that have been advanced by state Labor governments, this government is proposing a package of reforms that will rehabilitate people and get them back to work, target support and improve the scheme's integrity and viability. The reforms will also ensure that loopholes in the legislation that allow people to take advantage of the scheme are closed.

Importantly, and unlike most of the state and territory schemes, the proposed measures will ensure that the Comcare scheme continues to provide eligible injured employees with income payments until pension age and lifetime medical and rehabilitation expenses.

**Ensuring a stronger focus on rehabilitation and return to work**

With regard to ensuring a stronger focus on rehabilitation and return to work the bill includes a number of changes to assist employers to meet their rehabilitation obligations and engage more effectively with injured employees in the return-to-work process.

The amendments facilitate this cooperation by better enabling employees and employers to work together. It is important that employers are prepared to accept responsibility for managing injuries, ensuring support where injuries occur and enabling people to get back to work as soon as possible.

Employers will have an increased responsibility and greater incentives to provide alternate work or reduced hours to injured employees.

Injured employees will be encouraged to participate actively in their injury management and rehabilitation. Where they are able to do so, they will be required to seek, engage and remain in suitable employment.

The bill also strengthens an employee's access to rehabilitation and, in specific circumstances, Comcare will have the power to commence or take over rehabilitation.

A large body of evidence based research has established that many health problems can benefit from work based rehabilitation and an earlier return to work. Using this evidence as a basis for improvement, the compensation payment system has been restructured to provide targeted financial incentives to return to some form of work as soon as safely possible.

Systemic incentives to remain on workers compensation for extended periods will be removed by providing for more graduated reductions in income replacement payments and reducing compensation payable where an injured employee refuses employment while having a capacity to earn in suitable employment.

**Targeted support for injured employees**

There will be targeted support for injured employees. Many employees, when they are injured, need to take time off work to recover and will often draw on their savings or leave entitlements while their workers compensation claim is being considered. If claims are not processed quickly, leave entitlements and savings can be quickly exhausted, access to medical treatment can be delayed and this, in turn, can impede recovery and eventual return to work.
To reduce the financial stress of illness and injury, the scheme will now provide for provisional medical payments of up to $5,000 before a claim is determined. The employer will have immediate rehabilitation responsibilities.

The amendments will also ensure that the money spent on medical treatment and post-injury care and support services is better targeted and that services are provided by trained professionals.

Professional, monitored, post-injury care will be provided to employees for the first three years of their injury, with uncapped, long-term or life-long care available to the catastrophically injured after this time.

Employees who have been seriously injured will still have access to lump sum payments to help them achieve a better quality of life. Under the proposed changes, the maximum lump sum payment amount will be increased from $242,000 to $350,000.

For those with less serious injuries, these payments will be more accurately scaled to allow for higher payments for those who need more support.

More timely access to compensation payments will be achieved with the introduction of time frames for determining claims and resolving disputed claims, as well as improved information-gathering powers. Employers will also be required to lodge claims more quickly, and within specified timeframes, once they are notified of a claim.

To provide assistance to employers in meeting their obligations under the new time frames, the amendments will enable more accurate calculation of income replacement. This will better take into account today's labour market conditions and the changing industrial profile of employers in the scheme.

To ensure that there are no gaps or inequities in the payment of entitlements to workers nearing pension age, eligibility for income replacement will be linked to the national age pension age and the five per cent reduction in compensation payments for employees accessing superannuation benefits will be removed.

**Scheme integrity and viability**

With regard to maintaining scheme integrity and viability the bill also seeks to ensure that the workers compensation system deals with employment-related injury and disease.

When the government of the day introduced the SRC Act 27 years ago, it recognised the need to ensure that employers were not paying for non-work related conditions and introduced changes that required employees to show a close connection between their condition and the employment in which they were engaged.

Despite this intention, this distinction has been blurred over time through judicial interpretation of the legislative provisions and unreasonable constraints have been placed on employers' management of the workplace. This has resulted in increased premiums and pressures on scheme sustainability.

The amendments will distinguish more clearly between work and non-work related injuries and limit the payment of compensation to employees who have sustained injuries due to work or the workplace. Existing provisions will be strengthened to require a clear causal connection with work before compensation is payable.
The amendments will also clarify the matters to be taken into consideration for psychological claims and introduce new thresholds for specified pre-existing conditions such as heart, brain and spinal injuries to ensure that the scheme is accepting liability for conditions that are work-related.

As the workers' compensation system was never designed to prevent employers taking reasonable action to manage their employees, the proposed amendments will clarify the range of reasonable management actions that, when reasonably undertaken, should not give rise to compensation claims.

In order to address rapidly escalating scheme costs and ensure the long-term viability of the scheme, Comcare will be permitted to establish schedules that specify the amounts payable for medical treatment and medical reports, and legal services obtained by claimants. Currently, there are no limits on the amounts that Comcare pays for these items.

Schedules will not only reduce lengthy dispute time frames but provide greater certainty and transparency for service providers and claimants.

Scheme costs will also be reduced by excluding overtime and allowances in the calculation of compensation payments after the first two years.

The integrity of the scheme will be underpinned by a three-stage sanctions regime in which employees who do not meet their medical treatment and rehabilitation obligations will have their compensation rights suspended or cancelled.

Most people are willing and eager participants in the injury management and rehabilitation process and welcome every assistance to recover and resume their normal lives. Those who refuse to utilise the scheme's resources to get better and return to work will no longer be able to do so with impunity.

**Australian Defence Force members**

In recognition of the government's commitment to the unique nature of military service, Australian Defence Force (ADF) members with coverage under Part XI of the SRC Act will be exempted from all but two of the proposals being introduced in the bill.

These proposals relate to the calculation of permanent impairment compensation and will ensure that a member or former member of the ADF will not receive less compensation than an employee covered by the Comcare scheme with the same level of impairment. The government's agreement to these changes is a reflection of our commitment to recognising the unique nature of ADF service.

The government will also create a new act to separate ADF members and former members from the existing SRC Act.

**Conclusion**

The Comcare scheme is one of the few remaining Australian workers' compensation schemes that provides, and will continue to provide, income payments until pension age and lifetime medical and rehabilitation payments. This bill will ensure that we have a fair and sustainable long-tail scheme into the future—one of the only remaining in Australia.

A majority of these reforms have been inspired by the Review commissioned by the now Leader of the Opposition or from reforms made by state Labor governments, including from the Bracks government in Victoria.
These reforms ensure that the scheme will remain one of the most generous in Australia but the focus will shift towards getting people back to work rather than just providing compensation.

The government’s reforms will be better for workers by promoting injury prevention, but supporting those who are injured to recover and, most importantly, assisting them to get back to work.

I urge all members to support the changes in this bill and commend the bill to the House.

\(^1\) ACT Minister Mick Gentleman, 'ACT dumps Comcare', *The Canberra Times*, 26 February 2015

Debate adjourned.

**Social Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2015**

**First Reading**

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Morrison.

Bill read a first time.

**Second Reading**

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Minister for Social Services) (09:14): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill will implement a measure announced in the 2014-15 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, ceasing social security payments to certain people who are in psychiatric confinement because they have been charged with a serious offence.

The people involved are primarily those who have been charged with a serious offence and who, due to a mental impairment, are in psychiatric confinement, including those who have been not convicted or considered not fit to stand trial.

This essentially represents a return to the original policy intention for people in these circumstances—that a person cannot access social security payments while in psychiatric confinement as a result of criminal charges. The current arrangements flow from a 2002 Federal Court decision, meaning that most people confined in a psychiatric institution may be considered to be participating in a course of rehabilitation and therefore attract social security payments.

In fact, it is the relevant state or territory government that is responsible for taking care of a person's needs while in psychiatric confinement, including funding their treatment and rehabilitation.

People will be subject to this measure if the serious offence with which they have been charged is a violent one such as murder, attempted murder, manslaughter, rape or attempted rape.

Similarly, the measure will apply in relation to offences under Commonwealth, state or territory law that are punishable by imprisonment for life or a period of seven years or more, where a loss of or serious risk to life, wellbeing or safety is involved.

Payments will resume in certain circumstances to people who are integrating back into the community.
A social security payment will continue to be payable to a person who is undergoing psychiatric confinement because the person has been charged with an offence that is not a serious offence, if a person is undertaking a course of rehabilitation.

Similarly, a social security payment will also continue to be payable if the person's psychiatric confinement is for reasons unrelated to the commission of an offence.

The measure is due to be implemented from 1 July 2015, and I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.

Communications Legislation Amendment (SBS Advertising Flexibility and Other Measures) Bill 2015

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Turnbull.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr Turnbull (Wentworth—Minister for Communications) (09:18): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Introduction

The Communications Legislation Amendment (SBS Advertising Flexibility and Other Measures) Bill 2015 provides the Special Broadcasting Service with increased flexibility in the scheduling of advertising and clarifies SBS's ability to earn revenue through having product placement during programming.

The bill also makes minor technical amendments to the legislation governing SBS and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, and repeals various redundant acts and provisions from the communications portfolio legislation.

SBS advertising

SBS is Australia's multicultural broadcaster, founded, as we were discussing on Monday, by Malcolm Fraser. It operates under a mixed funding model. While the majority of SBS's operating budget is funded by the Australian government, the remainder is drawn from SBS's commercial activities including advertising and sponsorship.

In 2014 my Department of Communications conducted an efficiency study to identify savings that could be made in the back-of-house operations of the ABC and SBS—in other words, savings that could be made without reducing the resources available for programming.

This study identified an opportunity for SBS to earn additional advertising revenue without increasing the maximum amount of advertising it was permitted to show over a 24-hour period.

SBS has a strict limit of five minutes of advertising per hour, which equates to a maximum of 120 minutes of advertising shown per day. However SBS earns the majority of its advertising revenue during peak viewing times—between 6 pm and 10 o'clock at night—or when it broadcasts special events such as the FIFA World Cup.
This bill will amend the Special Broadcasting Service Act 1991 to allow for a more flexible approach enabling SBS to show up to 10 minutes of advertising per hour but within a daily overall limit of 120 minutes.

This will allow SBS to schedule up to 10 minutes of advertising during higher rating programs to increase its overall advertising revenue, while scheduling less advertising during other hours so that the 120-minute daily cap is not exceeded.

The 120-minute daily cap on advertising is still well below the 350 minutes per day the commercial broadcasters can devote to advertising.

It is important to note that SBS has many programs, particularly sporting programs, which have natural breaks that are suitable for advertising well in excess of the five-minute limitation at present.

It is also important to note that the SBS does not currently fill 100 per cent of the time it has available for advertising across all channels and markets.

This is particularly the case in regional markets where SBS is regularly unable to fill five minutes of advertising per hour per channel, even during peak evening viewing times when its higher rating programs are generally shown. In markets with insufficient demand, the additional flexibility afforded by the proposed measures is unlikely to result in significant change to the amount of advertising SBS is able to attract. So the benefit of this will really be found in the metropolitan markets.

**Product placement**

The ABC and SBS efficiency study also identified an opportunity for SBS to earn additional revenue through the use of product placement within particular types of programming, such as food programs and sporting programs.

Product placement is widely used by broadcasters to earn additional revenue and subsidise the cost of content production.

SBS currently broadcasts acquired programming which already contains product placement from agreements made to the benefit of third parties, prior to SBS's consideration of the program.

However, SBS does not use product placement in its own commissioned programs due to a lack of clarity in the SBS Act regarding its use. A significant portion of SBS's prime-time schedule, of course, does not lend itself to integrated branding such as *Insight* and other documentaries. However commissioned food and sport programming, for example, can provide opportunities for branded content.

The bill amends the SBS Act to specifically allow SBS to earn revenue through having product placement in its programming. It also requires the SBS board to develop and publicise guidelines regarding the use of product placement and report on its use and earnings in the annual report. The same requirement exists in the SBS Act for the use of advertising and sponsorship announcements.

**Financial impact of advertising changes**

In the short term, additional advertising revenue will be directed towards meeting the government's efficiency savings applied to SBS from 2015-16. If the SBS advertising measures in the bill are not passed before the end of this financial year, the SBS will need to
find other ways to achieve the necessary savings, which it has indicated may involve reductions in programming and/or services.

In the longer term, the government's intention from these changes is that SBS becomes a stronger and more sustainable broadcaster. Advertising flexibility strengthens SBS by making it less dependent on government and helps secure its future and its independence.

It is anticipated that the SBS advertising measures will result in an increase in SBS's advertising revenue of $28.5 million over four years from 2015-16. In later years, if they exceed that run rate, the additional revenues can be directed towards delivering more distinctive and innovative content and services in line with its charter responsibilities.

Additional revenue earned by SBS is highly unlikely to have a material impact on the advertising revenue of the commercial television broadcasting industry, which totalled $3.9 billion in 2013-14. SBS is, in advertising terms, a minnow in that market.

Since the introduction of in-programming advertising on SBS in 2006-07, SBS's advertising revenue has increased, peaking at $72.3 million in 2009-10 and $73.4 million in 2013-14, due to advertising associated with the 2010 and 2014 world cups. Advertising revenue, for example, in the previous year 2012-13 was $58 million.

When you compare that to the $3.9 billion earned by commercial television advertising overall, honourable members can see that an increase in SBS advertising is really of very small significance to the commercial television sector. Needless to say, they are not welcoming this change.

I have to say that the forecasts of additional advertising revenue that this change will deliver for SBS, while still very small in the context of the overall pool of commercial television advertising revenue is, in any event, unrealistic in our view and in SBS's view.

It is important to note that those two highest revenue results for SBS, that is to say in 2009-10 and 2013-14, constituted less than two per cent of the commercial television industry's revenue for the respective financial years.

The steady growth of SBS advertising revenue over this period has not historically led to a reduction in overall commercial advertising revenues for free-to-air television.

That is likely because of the continued growth of the entire television advertising spend over the period, which has significantly outstripped the growth in SBS's own advertising revenues.

I acknowledge the opposition to this bill from the commercial television networks; they are under pressure from new entrants to the advertising market that are available over the top or on the internet. This is particularly the case with reaching younger people. The median age of prime-time television viewers is considerably older than the median age of the Australian population.

The last figures that I have seen—and they are the best that we have available—showed the median age, for example, for prime-time viewers of the ABC was 61. So, half the audience of prime-time ABC viewers is over 61. The median age for viewers of, for example, the Seven and Nine networks is in the high to late 40s. The median age of the Australian population, I believe, is around 36 or 37.
The challenge for the free-to-air television industry, whether it is commercial or public broadcasters, is that younger demographics are not watching free-to-air linear television as much and they are getting access to their video content over the top, over the internet on catch-up platforms. Of course, with the entrance of new global players like Netflix that trend will continue.

So the challenges, the pressures, on the commercial television industry—for which we have great respect and regard and which I am very familiar with, as honourable members know, from my previous life—are not coming from SBS. They should not be worried about SBS. Their issues are essentially online and changes to television viewing habits and the way in which all of us consume content.

Miscellaneous legislative changes to the ABC and SBS acts

The bill also makes minor technical amendments to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983 and the principal SBS Act to provide consistency with other broadcasting legislation and to remove redundant provisions.

The amendments involve the insertion of some broadcasting definitions and terms in the SBS Act to make it consistent with the Broadcasting Services Act 1992 and the ABC Act, and to reflect SBS activities that are provided in the current converging digital environment. It also removes redundant definitions in the ABC and SBS acts about election periods.

Repealing spent provisions from communications portfolio legislation

In addition, the bill repeals a range of provisions from communications portfolio legislation which are spent or otherwise unnecessary. Repealing unnecessary legislation within the communications portfolio will ensure regulation only remains in force for as long as it is needed and that remaining legislation is easily accessible. Conclusion

The government is introducing the bill at this time to allow for any inquiry into the proposed legislation, which would involve a call for submissions and potentially a public hearing, to be completed prior to the winter sittings. As stated previously, it is important that the SBS advertising measures are passed before the end of this financial year to allow SBS to generate additional revenue to meet the required savings from 2015-16, without affecting programming and services.

The government is committed to repairing the federal budget and ensuring the public broadcasters are as efficient as possible. The government has recently reformed the procurement of and funding arrangements for transmission services for the ABC and SBS to encourage the broadcasters to adopt more efficient practices and realise savings that can be directed towards producing new content and services.

Similarly, the SBS advertising measures in this bill will allow SBS to earn additional advertising revenue which could in the future be used to fund new programming.

Government funding currently comprises around 75 per cent of SBS's operational budget. Measures in this bill will also lessen SBS's dependence on government funding in the future.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.
Tax and Superannuation Laws Amendment (Employee Share Schemes) Bill 2015

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Billson.
Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley—Minister for Small Business) (09:31): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Today, I introduce a bill that energises enterprise and makes life easier for the hard-working women and men of small business.

This bill introduces important improvements to the taxation of employee share schemes, removing key impediments introduced by the former government and creating a new 'start up' incentive to restore and rebuild employee share schemes as a key tool to support enterprise formulation.

Employee share schemes support and encourage innovation. They energise enterprise and entrepreneurs.

An effective employee share scheme can support those hard-working women and men out there having a go.

Employee share schemes can drive growth in jobs and growth in productivity—important ingredients in a healthy economy.

Employee share schemes offer employees a financial interest in the company they work for—aligning the interests of employees with the interest of their employers. This synchronicity of interests and objectives can drive innovation, entrepreneurship and enterprise success.

Both shares and options provide employees with a direct interest in the performance of the firm. They can turn out to be very lucrative for employees of successful companies.

These schemes encourage positive working relationships and reduce staff turnover.

Employee share schemes benefit employers, too.

They are a very valuable tool for employers to attract and retain talented employees.

We know small firms sometimes lack the cash flow to pay salaries that can allow them to compete internationally. Employee share schemes allow firms to be globally competitive by supplementing employees' salaries with equity in the company they work for.

Unfortunately, the potential of employee share schemes has not yet been realised in Australia. This means we are missing opportunities every single day.

Our government knows that our country's tax system should not be an impediment for innovative companies hoping to form, successfully start up and grow their business and in turn employ people and grow our economy.

In 2009, the Rudd Labor government introduced integrity measures and changed the tax treatment of employee share schemes. Labor's 2009 amendments meant that the discount component of shares or options is taxed when the employee receives those shares or options.
This often forces employees to pay tax on their options before they can take any action to realise a financial benefit from those options.

We have seen the current tax arrangements effectively halt the provision of options through employee share schemes.

These taxation arrangements, introduced by Labor, are not competitive by international standards as they generally bring forward the taxing point well in advance of any prospect for a realisable gain.

The 2009 amendments also introduced integrity measures to limit opportunities for tax avoidance by requiring the reporting of schemes and participants. These sensible measures will remain, while the government deals with the harm caused by the ill-conceived tax treatment changes.

I want to acknowledge and recognise the engagement and strong support of this initiative by the Minister for Communications and the Treasurer.

Because we are serious about getting this measure right, our government has consulted extensively on this issue, and has listened to the concerns of a range of stakeholders. I want to recognise the deep interest, the direct involvement and thank the member for Forde; the chair of the small business policy of the government, Bert Van Manen; and also the member for Casey, Tony Smith, the chair of our government’s economic policy committee for their direct involvement and commitment to this change. I also want to thank and recognise the diligence and the collaborative approach of the Treasury officials who have worked hand in hand with key stakeholders to get these measures right.

In the most recent round of consultations earlier this year, our government hosted a number of face-to-face and teleconference meetings and received over 50 written submissions.

This input revealed very strong support for the government’s announced commitment to remedy a number of problems with the current taxation of employee share schemes. There were two significant areas of concern.

Firstly, the current rules mean employees often are forced to pay tax on their options before they can even get any financial benefit from the options by converting them into shares and selling the shares. This means employees have been taxed on something that is difficult to value and may not even result in a benefit to the employee.

The 2009 changes effectively ended the provision of options under employee share schemes, particularly by start-ups. This limited the start-ups’ capacity to remunerate its employees. It put Australian firms at a disadvantage compared to those in many other countries.

In a world where employees can easily cross international borders, the 2009 changes affected the ability of our Australian firms to compete globally for the best and brightest team.

The second issue that many stakeholders were affected by was around the red tape and the compliance costs currently associated with setting up and maintaining an employee share schemes in Australia.

Let me share one example with you today—companies offering an employee share scheme in Australia are required to have a comprehensive company valuation completed.
Stakeholders revealed that this sort of valuation and the preparation of required documents can cost up to $50,000 in Australia. This is compared with a cost of around $2,000 to $5,000 in the United States.

It is a pronounced problem for start-up firms, which are poorly placed to bear the impact of these regulatory costs.

This significant red tape problem must be addressed if we are to improve the competitiveness of our nation and of our economy. This needs to be addressed if we want Australia to be the best place to start and grow a business or if we want to secure Australia's future as a preferred destination for innovative start-up companies.

Our government has listened to the concerns of stakeholders. We are committed to making it easier to do business in Australia. This bill will address the problems arising from the 2009 amendments and will make Australia's taxation of employee share schemes more competitive internationally.

Today the bill makes two main changes to the tax arrangements for employee share schemes.

First, employees issued with options under employee share schemes will generally be able to defer tax until they exercise those options. This is rather than them having to pay tax when they actually receive the options.

This will benefit employees by deferring their tax liability until they are actually able to realise a financial benefit from their options.

Our government will also extend the maximum time for tax deferral from seven years to 15 years, which will give companies more time to build their business and succeed.

The maximum individual ownership limit currently restricts employee ownership for those accessing an employee share scheme tax concession. The bill doubles this limit from five per cent it is at present to 10 per cent, which could help some founders and provide a boost for critical workplace team members.

These improvements will be available to all companies, from large biotech and mining companies listed on the stock exchange to small, unlisted businesses looking to take on their very first employee.

The amendments encourage more Australian companies to realise the potential of employee share schemes.

And those companies establishing such schemes will become more competitive in attracting talented employees in an international labour market. We are ensuring these businesses can be nimble in the global economy.

Secondly, we will provide an additional concession to start-up companies. This new incentive is unashamedly targeted at young enterprises to reactivate and energise employee share scheme arrangements for the productivity-enhancing, entrepreneurial and innovative start-up sector.

Employees of eligible start-ups can receive options or shares at a small discount, and if they hold the shares or options for at least three years, they will not be subject to up-front taxation.
For options, the discount component will be taxed when the employee is in a better position to fund the tax liability. For shares provided at a discount of up to 15 per cent, the discount component will be exempt from tax.

To qualify for this concession, companies must have been incorporated for less than 10 years, be unlisted and have turnover of no more than $50 million per year.

These eligibility criteria mean that the concession is targeted towards small and start-up firms. The innovators we are committed to encouraging are those who often face additional liquidity and valuation obstacles that larger firms do not. The eligibility criteria will also limit and manage the cost to revenue at a time of fiscal repair.

This concession will provide a significant benefit to many companies in the start-up phase. It will give them a better chance at achieving success in Australia, instead of being forced to look overseas for more favourable business conditions and a potentially more supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem.

These measures are about more than just providing a benefit to companies and employees engaged in employee share schemes. It adds to and supports our economy as a whole as we retain Australian talent and better support Australian innovation and entrepreneurship.

To address the excessive red tape burden, our government has asked the Australian Taxation Office to work with industry to develop and approve 'safe harbour' valuation methods and standard documents. This will help streamline the process of establishing and maintaining an employee share scheme, reducing costs and compliance burdens that may discourage employee share scheme engagement.

A number of integrity measures designed to limit tax avoidance opportunities, such as reporting schemes and participants and limiting the $1,000 up-front tax concession to employees who earn less than $180,000 per year, will be retained.

All of these amendments will help align the interests of employers and their employees, as everyone involved in the business will have the financial and emotional motivation to grow their company.

The amendments will help stimulate the growth of high technology start-ups in Australia. The changes make Australia a more attractive destination for innovative companies seeking to commercialise their ideas domestically.

These changes boost the competitiveness of Australian firms who are committed to attracting and retaining talented employees in the international labour market.

Our government has worked with industry to make sure that the draft legislation delivers the intended outcomes. We have listened to stakeholders and made amendments to the draft that was circulated some months ago.

In particular, we acted on stakeholder concerns regarding access to the capital gains tax concession, and eligibility for the start-up concession where certain venture capital funds are involved.

Stakeholders told us that most people convert their options into shares around the time they sell the shares. Under usual capital gains tax rules, this would mean that most employees of a start-up would not benefit from the 50 per cent capital gains tax discount because they have
not held the shares for more than 12 months. This is despite a requirement to hold the option for at least three years in order to get the additional concession for start-ups.

Today's legislation addresses this issue and has been enhanced by collaborative and constructive consultation with stakeholders.

It makes it clear that the 50 per cent capital gains tax discount will be available for options issued to beneficiaries of the start-up concession, even where the underlying shares are held for less than 12 months. This will provide a significant concession to employees who are issued with options under the start-up concession. It is a further incentive for employers hoping to offer employee share schemes to their workers.

Our government has also provided a carve-out for certain venture capital funds from the aggregated turnover and 10-year incorporation rules for the start-up concession. This will allow contributing venture capital limited partnerships, early stage venture capital limited partnerships and others to be excluded from the assessment of aggregate turnover and the period of incorporation. This will expand the number of employees eligible for the start-up concession and, according to the Australian Private Equity and Venture Capital Association Limited, make sure the additional concession gets to 'the very kind of start-ups that Australia needs to nurture.'

As a result of our extensive consultations, we have also picked up many suggested technical amendments to make sure the legislation has the desired effect. Examples include allowing the Australian Taxation Office discretion in regard to the three-year holding rule; clarifying that the refund provision applies to cancellations; and clarifying that the definition of broad availability of the scheme applies only to shares.

We understand that some think the changes do not go far enough. We have heard those thoughts.

We have heard that having a taxing point when someone leaves their job is not appropriate. The refund rules contained in this legislation should help to address some of this concern. The refund rules mean that income tax paid on options when employment ceases will be refundable if the option is subsequently not exercised and lapses, or is cancelled.

Even in the constrained fiscal environment we currently face, our government knows the benefits that can be achieved by stimulating entrepreneurship and innovation in the economy need to be supported.

These amendments will come at a cost to revenue of around $200 million over the forward estimates, but this cost will be far outweighed by the many benefits that the new arrangements will bring.

During consultations, some suggested that the start-up concession should be applicable for older, listed technology and mining start-ups. But all policy needs to be weighed against other priorities and the cost to taxpayers. So keeping this at the forefront of our mind, and on balance, we have decided to keep the additional concession focussed on genuinely early-stage firms that are more likely to have cash flow issues.

Another strong message we heard in consultations was that stakeholders want this legislation to be in effect as soon as possible. In response, our government intends to bring the amendments into effect for new shares and options issued from 1 July 2015.
These amendments go to our commitment to ensure Australia is the very best place to start and build a small business—we are committed to bolstering entrepreneurship and innovation in Australia. They provide a valuable tool that will benefit employers and employees—but importantly, they will ultimately benefit the health and vitality of our Australian economy.

These changes make Australia a more attractive destination for investment, particularly for innovative start-up firms.

They will increase the international competitiveness of Australian firms who we know need to compete with companies all over the world for talented employees.

Our government is committed to ensuring the settings are right for Australian start-ups and small businesses to grow and prosper.

Full details of the measure are contained in the explanatory memorandum.

I commend the bill to the House and encourage its early passage.

Debate adjourned.

**Australian Border Force Bill 2015**

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

**Second Reading**

Cognate debate.

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Mr IRONS** (Swan) (09:48): I rise to speak on the Australian Border Force Bill 2015 and the Customs and Other Legislation Amendment (Australian Border Force) Bill 2015.

In the past decade Australia has seen a significant increase in its border interactions from both air and sea, and with this increase comes a need to ensure that our border protection authorities remain vigilant and have the capacity to respond to the unique challenges this presents to our nation.

People often think of border interactions as those instances where a passenger gets on or off a flight at an airport or boards a vessel at one of our many ports, but this only forms part of the framework that our border protection and Customs officers operate in and protect every minute of every day and, as I said, this is only increasing.

According to statistics outlined in the Customs Annual report 2003-04 and the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service Annual report 2013-14, Australia has seen a 44.17 per cent increase in the number of international passenger and crew border interactions from air and sea; an 83.59 per cent increase in the amount of incoming air cargo; and a 40.6 per cent increase in the amount of incoming sea cargo. This is the increase Australia has already seen in the past decade, but according to a recent joint report by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection and Customs and Border Protection entitled Blueprint for integration, Australia's border interactions are not in any way slowing down.

In the globalised and digital world we live in, travel is becoming cheaper every day and communication more fast paced and dynamic than some of us could have even imagined. As a result, in the next four years the volume of people and goods crossing our borders is only set to increase further. In fact, it is projected to increase by 54 per cent for air cargo, by 23 per
cent for air and sea travellers and by 17 per cent for sea cargo. I also found it very interesting to note that it is estimated in this same time frame that an additional 16.5 per cent student visas will be granted and 23 per cent more citizenship applications will be processed. As members can imagine, this is a lot of paperwork, a lot of processing and a lot of operational activities for both our immigration and Customs services.

By assessing and processing these statistics in this context it also highlights how these two departments regularly overlap and interact, which is what takes me to the heart of the bill before the House. That is because the aim of the Australian Border Force Bill 2015 and its cognate bill, the Customs and Other Legislation (Australian Border Force) Amendment Bill 2015, responds to this concept of duplication and overlapping by creating a new framework for border protection that ensures Australia's operative and processing capabilities are of the highest calibre and that our personnel uphold the integrity afforded by these offices.

To achieve this, and to ensure our detection methods in particular are meeting their objectives, it is therefore important for the government and our border protection personnel to regularly review their practices. It is through such a review that the framework of the bill before the House was designed and a series of reform methods identified for Australia's border continuum.

Each of these reform measures were announced by the former Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, the Hon. Scott Morrison, in May 2014, and are now being implemented by the recently-appointed minister to this portfolio, the Hon. Peter Dutton—an appointment which I congratulate the minister on.

They are reforms which I fully support to ensure Australia's national security is not jeopardised onshore or offshore, in particular within our maritime sphere. I highlight Australia's maritime sphere in this context because I believe it is important to remind members that Australia is a very unique country. It includes approximately 37,000 kilometres of coastline, much of which is in remote regions, making it very difficult for our border protection officers to monitor.

The cognate bills before the House will respond to these challenges and vulnerabilities by consolidating Australia's immigration and Customs services to create a single integrated operational organisation—the Australian Border Force—within the Department of Immigration and Border Protection from 1 July. These are necessary reforms which will enhance those already passed in this place and the other, which have aimed to strengthen this government's and our law enforcement agencies' ability to safeguard Australia's national security and safeguard the lives of every individual in this place and outside it.

By integrating these agencies we will improve information sharing, remove duplication and ensure our Customs operatives are being directed as a cohesive unit under one departmental umbrella. As Minister Dutton highlighted in his speech in this place; integration is not a new concept. In fact it has been heralded by two of our western society's leading countries on national security: the United States, through the Department of Homeland Security, and in the United Kingdom with the UK Home Office.

This government has done its due diligence by taking note of how reforms have been introduced in these countries and what has and has not worked before creating a framework for our own reform measures. We have also assessed these reforms with due regard to the
differences between these countries' intelligence services compared to Australia's, as well as to the unique challenges that Australia faces—particularly, as I mentioned earlier, due to our predominantly regional, and therefore largely unmanned, coastline.

Despite this challenge, as members on this side of the House know, the coalition is a government which throughout history has been recognised for its capability in protecting our country's national security. That is the view we intend to uphold now in the face of our latest terrorist threat from Daesh, or ISIL or any threat made in the future. This has also been reflected though our strong stance on border protection with regard to those who seek to enter our country illegally, through the coalition's very effective Operation Sovereign Borders policy.

This policy is in fact a perfect example of where integration has ensured policy objectives are met, as this government believes it can and will be achieved across the Customs and immigration portfolios through the provisions outlined in the bill before the House.

Operation Sovereign Borders is a policy that has stopped the flow of illegal arrivals on our shores which, as members know, blew out by unprecedented proportions under those opposite. Members on this side of the House would also remember that this is not because they were handed a failed policy as this government was. No. Those opposite created and then mismanaged their failed policy and, if this were not bad enough, they then stood in this place, time and time again, and refused to accept that their policy had failed.

Now, those opposite stand in this place and continue to criticise Operation Sovereign Borders, despite it achieving its objective to stop the boats—which is something they could not even dream of. Yes, colleagues: their policy was a failure, and it is a failure that can simply be defined by this number—51,798.

Now, I know that those opposite seem to have short memories about their policy failures, despite this being a number that should resonate very clearly with them. So, just to be sure I have acted with due diligence, I will remind the opposition colleagues what this number actually represents. This is the number of people who arrived in Australia illegally by boat, excluding crew, under those opposite's border protection policy failure from 2008 to 2013, following the scrapping of John Howard's Pacific Solution. It is a policy that was scrapped, not because it was unsuccessful in combating people smuggling but simply because it was a policy that a coalition government implemented.

Members may ask what the impact of this policy failure was. As I said, I would like to ensure I fact checked, as I do not want my colleagues to misunderstand just how monumental this policy failure was—not just for the government but for the hip pocket of every Australian. The cost of that failed policy was $11.5 billion. That is the bill all Australian taxpayers have been forced to pay because those opposite removed an effective policy initiative and decided that billions of dollars in cost blowouts over five years was a great alternative.

Of course, this failure has not only been felt in Australia. It has also been felt by those asylum seekers who have done the right thing and applied offshore for a humanitarian visa but have been rejected. This is not because they are ineligible or because the government wants to reject their application; it is because every additional illegal arrival that is granted a visa means one less Special Humanitarian Program Visa that can be granted.
Nobody can blame asylum seekers for wanting to live in Australia. This is a great nation that affords its citizens and those who reside here with some of the best education, medical, welfare, social and economic benefits in the modern world. Australia is a nation that prides itself on multiculturalism, on standing up for those who are less fortunate and on providing significant humanitarian assistance to countries around the world. What this government and the Australian people do not appreciate, however, is those who seek to take advantage of our good will. And we do not appreciate those who work with organised crime syndicates—because that is exactly what people smugglers are—to try to circumvent our laws.

As I mentioned previously, the bill before the House is part of a series of reform measures aimed at ensuring current vulnerabilities are addressed, particularly those created by the level of increased border interactions Australia is witnessing. Integration between our Customs and immigration departments will assist in achieving this, and will ensure our departments are implementing best practice methodology as identified in our international allies' respective agencies.

By establishing the Australian Border Force as the single operational organisation within the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, the ABF will be responsible for border control and investigations, both land and maritime, and will also be responsible for compliance and enforcement across Customs and immigration, including onshore detentions and offshore processing operations. Policy support would therefore be delivered by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection. In this context, 'policy' largely refers to processing of citizenship, refugee and humanitarian visas, immigration compliance and revenue collection. The department would also be responsible for corporate and border services such as security, ICT, human resources, visa identity and offshore services.

As a result of these reforms, staff performing operational functions in the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service and the Department of Immigration and Border Protection will move into the newly-formed ABF. A couple of examples of departmental staff who would transfer include those working in immigration compliance, enforcement and detention services.

As members can see, this consolidation under one department, where all procedural actions are undertaken by one unit and all operational by another across both the Customs and immigration portfolios, will ensure intelligence sharing is maximised. It will create greater efficiencies within that portfolio and will reduce the duplication that we currently see.

As part of this integration process, the bill will also create an Australian Border Force Commissioner as a statutory officer to command and oversee this important enforcement entity. The commissioner will report directly to the minister and will also be the Comptroller-General of Customs, which, as members would know, is the person responsible for enforcing Australia's customs law and collecting border revenue. As the minister has stated:

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.

Department personnel will report to the portfolio secretary, who then reports directly to the minister.

Part of these reforms also reflects Australia's belief that our Immigration and Customs personnel should be of the highest character and integrity. A provision in the bill will
therefore allow certain workers with the ABF to make and subscribe an oath or affirmation. The commissioner will also be required to make and subscribe an oath or affirmation on commencement of his or her office.

The bill will also require all Immigration and Border Protection workers to undergo an alcohol-screening test, an alcohol breath test and an alcohol blood test or a prohibited drug test on request. If an instance of misconduct is identified, reform provisions in the bill will also establish resignation and termination measures. In these instances, if the employee tenders their resignation, the secretary of the department may opt to defer the date of that resignation by up to 90 days to ensure an APS code of conduct investigation can be appropriately carried out.

Subsequent reforms that reflect previously implemented information prohibitions in other Customs and national security bills put before the House will also be made to ensure practices are uniform across these agencies' portfolios. Such prohibitions include the unauthorised making of a record or disclosure of protected information, the breach of which would carry an imprisonment period of two years.

Consequential reforms will also be enacted under the bill's cognate legislation, the Customs and Other Legislation Amendment (Australian Border Force) Bill 2015, repealing the Customs Administration Act 1985 and amending a number of other acts, including the Customs Act 1901. These amendments are particularly important, as they will ensure associated bills that make reference to these departments are not deemed invalid. An example of a key provision in this cognate bill is in relation to the Crimes Act, which makes a number of references to officers of Customs or the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service. An example of this is Customs officers' exemption from criminal liability within the Crimes Act from a Commonwealth, state or territory offence when involved in a controlled operation, which is often in regard to those operations to stop or prevent organised crime. The bill will therefore ensure all references to these officers are maintained as part of the integration process, by substituting references to the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service with the consolidated Department of Immigration and Border Protection.

As I have previously highlighted to the House, I have witnessed firsthand on more than one occasion the integral role Australia's Customs and Border Protection officers play in meeting Australia's national security objectives. It was only recently that I welcomed the opportunity to join with the Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, the Hon. Michaelia Cash, at Perth Airport's Customs House to see how our Customs and Border Protection officers are working to keep every Australian safe and to understand the scope of prohibited items that organised crime syndicates, in particular, try to smuggle through our borders every day. As was highlighted to me that day, from January to October last year, over 12 kilograms of methamphetamine, or 'ice', 1.5 tonnes of molasses tobacco and over 2,000 prohibited weapons, including firearms, knuckledusters, automatic knives and laser pointers, were seized from air cargo by Perth's Customs officers. It is clear that, whether it is onshore or offshore, our Customs and Immigration officers are working hard to ensure every Australian is protected from the threats that face us at our borders, but, when vulnerabilities are identified, they need to be responded to swiftly and effectively.

Like my government colleagues and our international allies, I believe this is best-practice methodology and I fully endorse and support this legislation before the House.
Mr COLEMAN (Banks) (10:03): It is very good have the opportunity to speak on the Australian Border Force Bill 2015 and the Customs and Other Legislation Amendment (Australian Border Force) Bill 2015, because they are quite historic in nature, in the important organisational reforms that they will bring to the border security of our nation. We have to start from the premise of: why do we have to constantly evolve our laws and processes in immigration and border security? We have to do that because we have to competently manage our borders. That is an absolutely fundamental obligation of any sensible government. And, of course, there is a massive contrast between the success of this government in this space and the abject failure of the former government.

There are two important areas that we need to consider. One is the border security in relation to immigration and the other is the flow of goods through Customs. They are interrelated areas, and this legislation will enable a more coordinated approach in confronting both of them. But what we certainly do not want to do and must never do is revert to the days of the previous Labor government, when both of these areas were managed with a complete lack of competence. The litany of disasters in border security is well known, but it is important to never forget just how bad those disasters were. There is an economic cost, there is a very real human cost and there is also a cost in a loss of confidence of the Australian people in the security of our borders, and that is something which must be avoided, because that can then lead to a loss of confidence in our immigration policies more generally.

The budget blow-out under the previous Labor government in the area of immigration control was $11 billion. There are about nine million households in Australia. If you take that $11 billion and you apply that across nine million households, it is about $1,300 per household. It is useful to reflect and to say, 'If the government had managed the borders effectively and therefore had not had a budget blow-out of $11 billion, what might that money, the $1,300 per household, have been spent on?' That could have been provided in tax relief to families. That could have been invested in important infrastructure like WestConnex, which is so important to my electorate of Banks. There are a whole range of things that could have been done with that money, but that was not possible because $11 billion was frittered away in this extraordinarily inept prosecution of border security.

The remarkable facet of this is that, when the previous government came into power, the borders were under control. The borders were secure. Things were working very well. So there was in fact no need to do to anything. It was not a really difficult organisational or intellectual challenge. All that the previous government had to do was nothing—simply continue with successful policies of the Howard government. Of course, what they decided was that these policies, which were working extremely well, had to be completely junked and done away with. In the process, they sent a very clear message to people smugglers that Australia was open once again.

There was an enormous human cost, of course, because we saw 50,000 people come to our shores. Tragically, we saw more than 1,000 people drown at sea. As the member for Swan touched on so eloquently a few moments ago, we saw a situation where people who were waiting in refugee camps in some of the most troubled places on earth were disadvantaged by this policy. The complementary protection visa program, a program which existed to assist people who were following the right process in trying to get into Australia, was pretty much done away with under the previous government because the flow of arrivals at the borders
was so great that there were no spaces left for those people who were waiting to get a complementary protection visa in Australia. The number of those people who were allowed in under the previous government was down to about 500 per year. Under this government, because of the effective border security, the number of places under the complementary protection visa program has been increased to about 5,000 per year. That is good news because that is helping people who are in some of the most difficult situations on this planet and in search of a better life in Australia.

You would think that there could be no dispute about the success of this government's policies in this space. We have gone from a massive flow of unlawful arrivals to one boat in the last 12 months and, of course, none at all for many months—just an extraordinary turnaround. We did see in the last week or so that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition was very critical of the policy of turning boats around, but it is very clear that that policy has succeeded amongst a broad range of measures taken by both of our ministers for immigration and border protection. The policy of turning around boats clearly has played an important role in helping to secure the borders. One cannot ignore that. To suggest that that policy has failed or to suggest that that policy would not be continued with under the opposition is something that should give all Australians pause because, in telegraphing a problem with the policy of turning boats around, the Labor Party is once again telegraphing a weakness on border security, and that is something that should never be tolerated.

It was not only in the area of immigration that we saw such terrible problems under the previous government; it was also in customs. Customs is very important because, of course, we want to control the flow of goods into our nation. We want to know what is arriving, when it is arriving and under what circumstances it is arriving. We do not want illegal contraband; we do not want guns being run into our country; we do not want drugs entering our country. As a consequence, we need to have a strong hand on the wheel in the area of customs, but we saw many failures in the area of customs under the previous government. The previous government had an immense fondness for spending money and just sort of threw it around all over the place, but one of the very few places where they actually showed financial restraint, ironically, was in the customs security of Australia, where they reduced the amount of money that we were spending on customs, reduced the number of people working on customs and materially reduced the amount of goods that were being screened. This is a pretty scary statistic. Under the Labor government, we reached a situation where 0.5 per cent of sea cargo was physically examined. Basically, there was a one in 200 chance of sea cargo being examined. That sends a pretty clear message to people who would do us ill: go for it, because there is a very low chance of that sea cargo being examined. Two per cent of air cargo was examined, so there was a one in 50 chance of it being examined. And the list goes on. So they were spending money all over the place except in customs, where they cut funds, and a consequence of that was a reduction in the number of goods being screened.

In my own area of southern Sydney, just across the Georges River in the electorate of Cook, back in 2012 we saw a very concerning incident at the Sylvania Waters post office, with the discovery of various contraband. As the New South Wales police commissioner, Andrew Scipione, said at the time, this is not just a border security issue; it is a national security issue. We have to be super vigilant in protecting our borders from unlawful maritime arrivals but also from the unlawful arrival of goods. We need to ensure that the boats stop,
which we have, and we also need to ensure that, to the greatest extent possible, the flow of illegal goods stops as well.

That is where this bill comes in. This is a very, very comprehensive and thoughtful response to the area of border coordination. Historically, you have a customs service and an immigration department. There are areas where they overlap and areas where they integrate, but to a large extent they are somewhat separate. As any good executive would tell you, if you have two groups of people doing somewhat different and somewhat interrelated things, there is the potential for things to slip through the cracks and the potential for things to go wrong. So this government is creating a unified and clear-cut organisational structure under the leadership of an Australian Border Force Commissioner. That Border Force Commissioner will have broad responsibility for everything that occurs at our borders, be it related to immigration or to customs issues. It will also have the responsibility as Comptroller-General of Customs.

What this means is instead of having a somewhat disconnected structure, we have a clear operational structure with the new commissioner sitting at the top for all matters related to Australia's borders, because it does not make sense to have one organisation managing issues relating to the flow of goods and another relating to the flow of people. That means a range of roles within these various departmental areas will be moved around and will be structured under the organisational leadership of the Border Force Commissioner. In taking that decision on operational grounds to more logically structure these areas, we also generate savings to the budget because it removes current examples of duplication and inefficiency and so on in the system and has a much more orderly structure that will be in place. Those savings are quite significant—$180 million over the forward estimates and it is estimated as much as $100 million per year after that.

In bringing this force together, another thing that the government is doing is sending a very clear message to people who work within the border force, to the broader law enforcement community and to the broader Australian community that the people in our border force are people who need to be of the highest integrity. They are professional officers who are highly trained and are required to uphold the very high standards. That is entirely appropriate. We would expect nothing less.

There are some important changes in the legislation requiring certain officers to take an oath of office, really underscoring the seriousness of this area. That happens in other areas of law enforcement. It is entirely appropriate that it happens here as well. It also gives the new Australian Border Force Commissioner the power to require mandatory reporting of any serious incidents of misconduct or criminal activity. Again, as part of this focus on operational professionalism within the border force, it is absolutely critical that we have people of the very highest integrity, of the highest standards, and it is entirely appropriate that, should people breach those standards, there are serious consequences. Particularly in the area of customs, it goes without saying that there are people out there both in this nation and overseas who would seek to do ill to our community—to bring in drugs, to bring in guns and other illegal material. So we have to have at our borders the absolute best and brightest to ensure that that is stopped as much as is humanly possible, and integrity goes with that absolutely.
We have learned from all of the failures of the previous Labor government. You could do an entire university course just based on the failures of the previous Labor government in this area.

Mr Craig Kelly: It would be a six-year course!

Mr COLEMAN: It would probably be a four- or five-year course. There are a lot of failures here, but we have learnt from them.

Mr Craig Kelly interjecting—

Mr COLEMAN: We have learnt from those failures, and under the leadership of the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, we will bring together Customs and the immigration department at the border to secure our border, to ensure Customs is of the best possible quality, and to manage the borders in a way the Australian people would expect and deserve.

Mrs McNAMARA (Dobell) (10:18): I rise to support the Australian Border Force Bill 2015 and the Customs and Other Legislation Amendment (Australian Border Force) Bill 2015, which, together, continue to build upon this government's commitment to a safer and more secure Australia.

Every day the members of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection and the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service work to protect Australia and our citizens from the external threats of those who seek to do us harm.

Australia is a rich, diverse nation that has prospered from generations of successful migration. We welcome with open arms those who seek to join our great nation and contribute positively towards a stronger Australia.

We are a nation dependent upon immigration and trade. Our neighbours look to us to supply the building blocks of their economies. Our borders are a gateway for goods and services which enables the success of Australian businesses big and small. Australia's border controls also ensure a prosperous and cohesive society. Over time we have built a rich and diverse culture which thrives from the freedoms and responsibilities of Australian citizenship.

In times of growing global unrest, an ever increasing threat of terrorism, and the emergence of home grown lone wolves, I thank the hardworking dedicated men and women of our border agencies for protecting and keeping our communities safe. This government is absolutely determined to ensure our border agencies are equipped with the necessary tools and resources to keep our great nation safe.

Measures outlined in these bills continue to build upon this government's commitment to a stronger and more secure Australia. I have spoken on numerous occasions in parliament to support necessary measures to strengthen our borders and enhance national security.

The Crimes Legislation Amendment (Psychoactive Substances and Other Measures Bill) 2014, and the Australian Citizenship and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2014, have contributed to stronger borders. Through the Australian Citizenship and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2014, we have tightened eligibility for Australian citizenship and introduced tough measures to address the threat of Australians who seek to participate in foreign conflicts.
Australian citizenship is one of the greatest gifts our citizens possess. Australian citizenship represents one of the greatest freedoms in the world and, along with it, the most important of responsibilities. Therefore, it is a fundamental requirement that those who are granted Australian citizenship uphold our democratic values and beliefs, obey our laws and respect our institutions. This is the expectation of the government and the broader community and it is non-negotiable. The gift of Australian citizenship should never be abused or taken for granted.

I have also spoken in support of the government's decision to introduce offences into the criminal code to ban the importation of substances, based on their psychoactive effect, when they are presented as alternatives to illicit drugs.

The government also enhanced our nation's security by strengthening the powers available to law enforcement agencies in relation to firearm offences. The impact of the illicit firearm market is directly related to the number of illegal firearm entries across our borders entering our community. There is no denying that these firearms are being accessed and used by groups and individuals to commit serious and violent crimes—tragically, in some circumstances, resulting in death.

Building upon this legislation, this bill continues to strengthen our national security by establishing the Australian Border Force. On 9 May 2014 the government announced fundamental reform of Australia's border protection arrangements. It was determined that the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, and the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service, be amalgamated into a single department: the Australian Border Force. The Australian Border Force will serve as a single front-line operational border control and enforcement entity. This entity will be responsible for enforcing customs and immigration laws, and protecting Australia's borders.

This decision builds upon our success in securing Australia's borders from the people-smuggling trade through Operation Sovereign Borders. We said we would stop the boats and we have stopped the boats. The former government presided over the greatest breach of Australia's borders since World War II. Under Labor's watch, more than 51,000 illegal maritime arrivals, including 8,400 children, reached Australia. Two thousand children were placed in detention and more than 1,200 lives that we know of were lost at sea. The most humane thing we can do as a nation is to stop men, women and children from boarding unseaworthy boats and making a perilous trek across the seas based on false hope peddled by people smugglers. Not only have we stopped the boats; we are also getting children out of detention.

Our commitment to securing our borders does not stop with these successes. The Hon. Peter Dutton MP, Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, stated in his second reading speech:
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. The establishment of the Border Force streamlines and focuses our border protection resources, and bolsters front-line services.

This legislation also establishes the role of the Australian Border Force Commissioner, who will oversee the operations of the Australian Border Force and will be responsible
directly to the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection on all operational matters relating to the functions of the force. The commissioner, their department and staff will be able to exercise powers under the Customs Act 1901, the Migration Act 1958, the Maritime Powers Act 2013 and other Commonwealth laws in order to enforce customs and immigration laws and protect Australia's borders. The commissioner will also have a dual role as the Comptroller-General of Customs, with responsibility for enforcement of customs law and collection of border related revenue. The commissioner will be Australia's most senior border law enforcement officer and will share the same standing as other heads of key national security related agencies, such as the Commissioner of the Australian Federal Police and the Chief of the Australian Defence Force.

Resources for the Australian Border Force will be drawn from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, thereby avoiding unnecessary duplication. This will bolster the front-line services delivered by the department. The Australian Border Force will bring together the people, capability and systems of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection to protect our borders and facilitate the lawful passage of people and goods.

This legislation also enables the full integration of the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service and the Department of Immigration and Border Protection into a single Commonwealth department. The Australian Border Force will unite staff working in immigration compliance, enforcement, detention services and other operational functions. This will see staff working on the front line, including at our airports and seaports, joining with those who are involved in detection, investigations, compliance and enforcement to address the issues of illicit goods and illegal visitors.

The Australian Border Force will also include staff who serve beyond Australia's borders. This includes those working in operational roles with our regional partners to secure Australia's maritime zone, preventing and deterring illegal arrivals and combating the movement of prohibited goods. Bringing together Immigration and Customs will deliver an improved capability that is focused on border policies, strategy and operations in an integrated and holistic way. In addition, the Australian Border Force will work in close collaboration with national security, defence, law enforcement and intelligence partners domestically and abroad to deliver a secure border.

This legislation will also ensure a professional and disciplined workforce. This is essential to ensure that Australians have confidence in Australia's Immigration, Customs and border agency's personnel. Last year I was privileged to join with the men and women of the Australian Defence Force and the Customs and Border Protection Service to participate in Operation Resolute. The program provided me with a unique opportunity to obtain a practical understanding of the workings of the military, and the Customs and Border Protection Service, in the implementation of policies such as Operation Sovereign Borders. Having observed and been part of Operation Resolute, I must say I am in awe of the professionalism, commitment and dedication of the men and women tasked with protecting our borders. I thank them, and I am sure this gratitude is shared by all members of this parliament who were fortunate enough to have the opportunity to participate in the Australian Defence Force Parliamentary Program.

This legislation extends this high level of professionalism to the staff of the Australian Border Force. This bill specifically provides that certain Immigration and Border Protection
employees in the Australian Border Force be requested to make and subscribe to an oath or affirmation. This is similar to the concept of sworn officers in the Australian Federal Police and reflects the high standard of professionalism expected of the Australian Border Force officers. In addition, the commissioner will also be required to make and subscribe to an oath or affirmation.

The minister has also outlined that this bill will provide power to the secretary of the department and to the commissioner to provide written directions in connection with the administration and control of the department and the Australian Border Force respectively, and the performance of functions or exercise of powers. This may be 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 the Department of Immigration and Border Protection. This government supports high standards of operational effectiveness and professional integrity throughout the department.

During his second reading speech the minister outlined that this bill will enable all Department of Immigration and Border Protection employees to undergo an alcohol-screening test, an alcohol breath test, an alcohol blood test or a prohibited drug test. The primary focus of these tests will be on operational and high-risk areas. However, any departmental employee may be selected randomly for testing.

It is also worth noting that the Australian Federal Police, the Australian Crime Commission and the Australian Custom and Border Protection Service all apply similar drug and alcohol testing arrangements currently. The Australian Defence Force also operates a Prohibited Substance Testing Program. This legislation will also establish resignation and termination provisions for circumstances involving serious misconduct. These provisions will further strengthen the integrity of the Australian Border Force. Employees suspected of serious misconduct, such as corruption, a serious abuse of power, a serious dereliction of duty or any other serious, reprehensible act of behaviour, will be subject to a code-of-conduct investigation.

In addition to investigation under the Public Service Act 1999, an employee found guilty of serious misconduct and subsequently terminated may be excluded from a review under unfair dismissal provisions at the request of the commissioner. Our message is clear to those who are given the privilege of serving in the Australian Border Force: serious misconduct will not be tolerated.

As I mentioned previously, I have every confidence in our men and women who are on the front line protecting this nation. While these provisions will ensure inappropriate behaviour is treated appropriately, I have confidence that the vast majority of employees under the administration of the Australian Border Force will do the right thing and not be subject to such dismissal.

This legislation also seeks to amend the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 to provide additional assurance to ABF workers undertaking high-risk activities related to Australia's national security or defence. This legislation ensures that Australia continues to benefit from an open economy that welcomes trade, and from a vibrant society that welcomes migrant from around the world. We will continue to build and strengthen our position as the world's most successful immigration nation, while protecting our citizens from those who do the wrong thing.
Since this government's election 18 months ago we have set about restoring integrity and public confidence in immigration and border protection. We have done so on the overwhelming demand of the Australian people to ensure we retain sovereignty over our borders and hold the tightest possible control and grip on national security. This government has successfully secured our border from people smugglers and illegal boat arrivals. By delivering on our commitment to secure our borders, we are witnessing safer communities and a more cohesive society.

As a nation and as a parliament we face uncertain times as global security challenges threaten to impact our great nation. We remain conscious of the threats of extremists who seek to do us harm under the veil of religion. It is important that we are vigilant in our resolve to defeat these enemies. Australia's citizens can be assured that they are safer as a result of this government's achievements in relation to securing our borders and strengthening our national security. Prime Minister Tony Abbott has said to this parliament, 'Protecting our people is the first duty of government. This government will do whatever is possible to keep people safe.'

The establishment of the Australian Border Force will keep this great country and our citizens safe. I commend this bill to the House.

Mr GOODENOUGH (Moore) (10:34): There are great motivations for foreign nationals to seek to enter Australia's borders, chief among them being financial ones. Australia's GDP per capita, as reported by the World Bank in 2013, amounted to US$67,468 in nominal terms. The GDP per capita in Australia is equivalent to 297 percent of the world's average. Australians generally have a standard of living equivalent to three times higher than the world's average, making our nation a very attractive destination. That is why we need to protect our borders: to safeguard the living standards of Australian citizens.

I support the Customs and Other Legislation Amendment (Australian Border Force) Bill 2015, which repeals the Customs Administration Act 1985 and amends a number of other Commonwealth acts, including the Customs Act 1901, and the related bill.

The bill essentially provides for the integration of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection with the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service into a single department, and the establishment of the Australian Border Force. The Australian Border Force is designed to be a front line operational border control and enforcement entity that is part of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection. The proposed new arrangements are due to commence operation on 1 July 2015.

As a result of this bill, there will be a number of changes to organisational arrangements and statutory roles within the department. Most notably, the current Australian Customs and Border Protection Service will be abolished as a statutory agency when the new act commences. The statutory office of the Australian Border Force Commissioner will be created, deriving his or her official powers and functions from a number of other Commonwealth acts, including the Customs Act 1901, the Migration Act 1958 and the Maritime Powers Act 2013. The ABF commissioner will have a dual role as Comptroller-General of Customs, with responsibility for the administration and enforcement of the Customs Act 1901, including collection of border related revenue.
It is envisaged that in enforcing Customs, immigration and maritime security laws, the Australian Border Force will work in close cooperation with Commonwealth, state, territory and international law enforcement and intelligence agencies, including the Australian Defence Force and the Australian Federal Police.

Integrating the currently separate functions of immigration and Customs into one entity is expected to generate $180 million in operating efficiencies over the forward estimates, yielding future projected savings of approximately $100 million annually. By removing unnecessary duplication of staff and responsibilities, the deployment of a greater proportion of resources into the front line can be achieved. The consolidation of human resources, organisational systems and capability is designed to promote synergy based on sound principles, strategies and operations in an integrated way. This management model is based on similar best practices in the United States Department of Homeland Security and the Home Office in the United Kingdom with key elements adapted and implemented to suit Australian conditions.

This bill also contains consequential amendments to reflect new organisational arrangements and a professional integrity framework. Provisions in the bill extend the jurisdiction of the Australian law enforcement Integrity Commissioner to enable the investigation of any allegations of law enforcement corruption within the department.

The magnitude of the task of monitoring our borders on a vast geographical scale defies comprehension. Australia's extensive economic exclusion zone covers 8.1 million square kilometres. We have a sparsely populated continent with a significant number of remote towns with only basic port and airport facilities, without the advanced security found in capital cities. It is in this context that the logistics of monitoring our borders and controlling the international flow of passengers and goods represents a massive undertaking for Australian Customs and Border Protection agencies. The challenges faced by our Customs and Border Protection agencies is compounded by the vastness of the Australian continent, covering an area of more than 7.6 million square kilometres, with a total coastline length of 35,876 kilometres, an additional 23,859 kilometres of island coastlines and some 758 remote estuaries around the country at which vessels may land.

To provide some context of the scale of operations of Australian Customs, Australian Customs have, in the seven months to 31 January 2015 in the current financial year, processed around 23.1 million passengers through Australian airports; processed over 837,000 passengers arriving at or departing from Australian ports; inspected over 1.3 million air cargo consignments; inspected over 69,000 sea container units of 20 foot equivalent; and inspected more than 38 million international mail items. This represents a significant workload.

The anticipated future increase in the flow of passengers and goods across international borders has been brought about by increased international trade with emerging economies in our region facilitated by free trade agreements with Japan, Korea and China. Trade is projected to continue expanding as a free trade agreement is expected to be reached with India. As Australia develops stronger economic partnerships with the 10 member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, ASEAN—including Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam—our Customs service must be adequately prepared and resourced to cope with future increased demands at all entry points to Australia. By improving our border protection capabilities to
intercept contraband and the smuggling of illegal cargo, such as drugs, weapons and food stuffs subject to quarantine, we are able to combat international crime, preserve the biosecurity of our agricultural sector and promote greater national security. The proposed bill proposes a range of initiatives to boost our law enforcement and national security capability to combat transnational organised crime syndicates seeking to infiltrate the Australian border.

I cite three recent cases of successful Customs interceptions as examples of the growing threat of drug smuggling. On 19 November 2014, the second largest drugs seizure in Australian history occurred, with 2.8 tonnes of methylenedioxymethamphetamine, or MDMA—commonly known as ecstasy—and other methamphetamines seized, with an estimated street value of approximately $1.5 billion, shipped from Hamburg in Germany. Similarly, in an operation which began on 8 February 2015, Australian Federal Police and Australian Customs and Border Protection officers seized more than 100 kilograms of methamphetamines with an estimated street value of approximately $65 million in a container from China declared to contain children's toys. And, at the beginning March 2015, earlier this month, six individuals were arrested and 230 kilograms of liquid methamphetamines, together with a further 250 kilograms of cocaine, was seized in two countries as a result of a major joint agency investigation into an international organised crime syndicate based in Bogota in Colombia.

Australia is an attractive destination for organised criminals and international fugitives due to our comparatively lenient judicial system. Sentences for committing serious crimes in other countries are typically much more severe than in Australia, often attracting longer terms of imprisonment and in some cases capital punishment. A report into organised crime by the Australian Crime Commission released in 2013 conservatively estimates that organised crime costs Australia $15 billion annually.

I refer to a report titled Australia’s migration trends 2012-13, published by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection. Statistics contained within the report indicate that non-compliance with visa conditions is a serious problem for the Australian Government and is part of a growing trend which appears to be increasing in frequency. In 2012-13 there were 13,486 compliance related departures, commonly known as deportations, from Australia. The department facilitated the departure of people, who had no entitlement to remain in Australia, through assisted voluntary returns, monitored departures and removal under section 198 of the Migration Act 1958. Circumstances included people who had overstayed their visas; persons who were refused a further visa or had their visa cancelled, including those whose visas were cancelled on the basis of their criminal conduct; and the crews of vessels caught illegally fishing in Australian waters.

As at 30 June 2013, it was estimated that approximately 62,700 people were in Australia unlawfully following the expiration or cancellation of their visa. These persons are classed as unlawful noncitizens and remain at large in the community, in many cases working illegally, not paying income taxes and involved in organised crime syndicates.

Furthermore, the Department of Immigration and Border Protection had justifiable cause to cancel 37,926 visas in the 2012-13 year. The government has a responsibility to the Australian community to protect our national borders and ensure the orderly assessment and screening of entrants to Australia to ensure that only authorised persons are permitted to enter our country. Prospective entrants must undergo background checks of their health, police
clearance, character and identity before being allowed to enter Australian ports and airports. The cost to the Australian taxpayer, law enforcement and the justice system is enormous when foreign nationals commit offences on the scale outlined earlier with 37,926 visa cancellations and 13,486 deportations in 2012-13. The government is being justifiably cautious and careful about who is permitted to enter and stay in Australia.

For the reasons outlined, it is important for the government to protect the Australian border and maintain effective control over the movements of authorised persons and goods. As former Prime Minister John Howard famously said in 2001:

We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come.

Maintaining effective control over our borders is essential for national security and protecting the living standards of Australian citizens. There is little point in having a planned migration program and stringent laws regulating goods, narcotics, weapons and quarantine if we cannot maintain the integrity of our borders from illegal entry.

In summary, this bill proposes a range of measures designed to facilitate the work of our border protection personnel in their detection, investigation, compliance and enforcement operations in relation to goods and persons entering Australian territory. This bill also facilitates operational cooperation with regional partners beyond our borders and in Australia's maritime zone to prevent illegal arrivals of persons and smuggling of prohibited goods. The integrated approach has proved a success with Operation Sovereign Borders in stopping the people smuggling trade.

I commend the bill to the House.

Mr WILLIAMS (Hindmarsh) (10:48): Today I rise to contribute to the debate on the Australian Border Force Bill 2015 and the Customs and Other Legislation Amendment (Australian Border Force) Bill 2015, which are part of a full suite of measures in line with the coalition government's commitment to strong border protection. Maintaining our borders as a secure platform for legitimate trade, travel and migration is a core responsibility of the Commonwealth government. We have just heard from my colleague the member for Moore, who outlined many pieces of evidence of the increase in the flow of goods arising from the FTAs we have just recently signed as well as from our other trade activities. The member for Moore also gave some great examples of Customs interceptions. These developments are a major part of the reason why these bills are so important.

In the next four years the volume of travellers and goods crossing our border is projected to increase significantly against a backdrop of more complex cargo supply chains and passenger routes, and measures such as this bill position our nation to confront the challenges posed by increased border interactions. The establishment of the Australian Border Force ensures Australia has the capability at the border to manage this growth effectively and efficiently.

The cornerstone of the Australian Border Force Bill 2015 is the creation of an operational border control and enforcement entity. The 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 is a new national security agency combining customs and immigration officers and will oversee Australia's borders as part of our sweeping new changes to how Australia's borders are managed. The Australian Border Force will begin operating in July and will act as the nation's single front-line enforcement agency. They will include airport and port staff and immigration detention centre personnel with expanded powers to use force, and officers will investigate illicit goods and illegal visitors. It will also include overseas based officers working with regional neighbours to secure Australia's maritime zone and prevent and deter illegal arrivals and the movement of prohibited goods, as we have just heard from the member for Moore.

I have had the opportunity to visit the Customs operations at Adelaide Airport in my electorate of Hindmarsh. I joined the former Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, the Hon. Scott Morrison, and met with a number of staff who will now become members of the Australian Border Force. These people do a terrific job and play an important role in keeping Australia's borders safe.

The 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. By doing this we are removing unnecessary duplication and enabling the deployment of a greater proportion of resources into the front line—something always very important for the efficient delivery of government services. The consolidation of the departments of immigration and customs and the establishment of the ABF is a once-in-a-generation reform which is expected to generate $180 million in efficiencies over the forward estimates and increase to $100 million each year after that. The combined agency will result in hundreds of millions of dollars in savings, but I must make it clear: this is a reform measure, not a savings measure.

I would like to congratulate the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, the Hon. Peter Dutton, and the former minister, the Hon. Scott Morrison, for their hard work and commitment to this very important portfolio that the government is having great success in.

Since coming to government we have acted swiftly and precisely to stop the boats, which is saving lives at sea. Children are no longer being put in detention centres. This former government's failed policies caused those problems. In addition to this, the collapse in illegal maritime arrivals is saving taxpayers billions of dollars. Those are some great outcomes on all fronts.

However, there is still the threat that boats and illegal people smugglers will come again. The member for Sydney recently told Sky News that Labor 'certainly have been opposed to turn-backs'. Clearly Labor will revert back to the failed policies which would allow the boats to start again, and would fill our detention centres with children once more. They left a legacy of 50,000 people; 800 boats that arrived on their watch. More than 8,000 children arrived illegally by boat under the Labor government, leading to record numbers of children in detention. These facts cannot be forgotten.

In July 2013 under Labor, at its peak there were close to 2,000 children held in detention. The reality is that, when Labor came to office in 2007, there were no children in detention, because the Howard government policy of stopping the boats succeeded. Labor changed the policy; the boats started coming; people were drowning at sea; and children were in detention. The way to stop children entering detention and to stop deaths at sea is to stop the boats, and
that is exactly what we are doing. The coalition government does not want to see children on boats. It does not want to see children in detention or dying at sea, and that is why we have stopped the boats and are implementing strong measures to protect our borders and reduce the number of children held in detention.

What we as a government are doing is working hard and implementing important measures to restore confidence in our migration programs, to support a strong economy by serving as a global gateway for trade, enabling business and the operation of free markets through the FTAs, and supporting strong national security by intercepting prohibited goods and the people who seek to harm us. This bill deserves support from all parties, and I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs GRIGGS (Solomon) (10:54): I rise today to give my support to the Australian Border Force Bill 2015 and the Customs and Other Legislation Amendment (Australian Border Force) Bill 2015. These bills, as we have heard from people on this side, are an important step forward in the coalition's plan to protect Australia's borders. This is particularly important to my electorate of Solomon, as we bore the brunt of boat arrivals due to the previous Labor government's failed border protection policies. During the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd era, the boats flowed in as Labor opened the flood gates to the people smugglers.

As the number of boats surged to over 800, carrying over 50,000 people, Territorians were forced to deal with Labor's complete and utter loss of control of our borders. As Labor's failure spiralled further, my electorate and its surrounding areas ended up with five immigration detention centres; putting a strain on my community's support services. As I have said in this place many times, the former Labor government was more interested in delivering detention beds than they were in delivering hospital beds. The ambulance services in my electorate were strained. The hospitals in my electorate were strained. Police services were strained. The fire services were strained. The tourism industry was definitely strained. They were all strained from a bad Labor policy which took advantage of Territorians' goodwill. Territorians have always welcomed people from a diversity of backgrounds. We have one of the most multicultural communities in Australia and we love it.

As I said before, things were so out of control that in my electorate the Department of Immigration rented a whole CBD hotel, converting it into a temporary immigration detention centre. Our Navy patrol fleet in the Top End was stretched to the brink, having to escort a constant stream of Indonesian fishing boats and their human cargo to Christmas Island.

With the changing of government, we have stopped the boats and are now in the fifth consecutive month of no successful boat arrivals. This is what good policy looks like; not the flood-gate approach that was assembled by those opposite. And still, their response to this problem was to strip $700 million from our border protection agencies, at a time when this money was needed most, after causing an $11.6 million blow-out in border protection costs.

Operation Sovereign Borders has meant that people are no longer dying at sea, unlike under Labor, who allowed at least 1,200 people. This stopping of boat arrivals through Operation Sovereign Borders has also meant savings for taxpayers through detention centres closing down. The people smugglers are now going out of business. And that is something I am really pleased about. Now it is time for the coalition to move forward and to look to the future.
With a projected growth over the period of 2013-14 to 2017-18, air cargo consignments are estimated to rise by 80 per cent, sea cargo by 20 per cent and international travel by 25 per cent. On top of this, cargo supply chains and international travel routes are set to become more complex over time. Not only is travel and trade growing at an exponential rate but we are tackling an ever-increasing threat to Australian communities posed by serious and organised crime.

While our border protection agencies are doing an exceptional job, the current operations will not be sustainable for protecting our borders beyond 2020. Clearly, something has to be done and the coalition's next step in ensuring safer waters and safer borders is the Australian Border Force, an establishment under the already consolidated border protection services which aims to give a sustainable future to border security as the growth of the management of our borders increases. This streamlined approach being put forward by the coalition ensures the future of border protection and continues to deliver on the promise we made to the people of Australia before the 2013 election. The changes made through the establishment of the Australian Border Force will ensure the correct balance between maintaining the integrity of Australia's borders and fostering legitimate trade and travel movements to and from the country.

Further, these changes will bring efficiencies and cost advantages through the coordination of investments in securing Australia's borders, saving taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars. It is expected that, over the forward estimates, the Australian Border Force will generate $100 million in savings. These savings will be able to be reinvested in helping to create an intelligence led, mobile, technology enabled force—the Australian Border Force — operating under the Strategic Border Command. This will help to facilitate trade and tourism while, at the same time, keeping importers, exporters, tourists and Australians safe from those who would do us harm.

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection and the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service have already been amalgamated into a single consolidated Department of Immigration and Border Protection. Under this department we will establish the Australian Border Force. The drawing together of the two existing agencies' functions will give the Australian Border Force the ability to undertake border operations, conduct investigations, and ensure compliance and enforcement in relation to illicit goods and illegal visitors while also managing detention facilities and removal activities. This consolidation will ensure stronger borders, increase national security and provide a much needed boost to Australia's economy.

The Australian Border Force will be the front line of our border security and most visible to the Australian public and international travellers. This task force will be unified and multidisciplinary and most visible at airports, seaports and remote regional and international locations. It will provide and perform deterrence, compliance and enforcement—and will conduct investigations—across the areas of customs and immigration, detention, removal of goods and people entering and leaving Australia illegally, offshore processing, return-to-community programs and status resolution. All of this is with the aim of protecting and securing our borders.

The Australian Border Force will also be responsible for the tactical functions of all customs and immigration border operations and control. This border control function within
the task force will include a Strategic Border Command, looking after operations on land, and a National Border Targeting Centre, looking after maritime operations. There will be a frontline immigration border function, remote area patrols and a national uniformed enforcement response effort.

The Australian Border Force will work with a range of Commonwealth, state, territory and international law enforcement and intelligence agencies in order to perform these critical functions. These will include such agencies as the Australian Defence Force and the Australian Federal Police. A portfolio secretary will have overall management responsibility for the Department of Immigration and Border Protection's operations and missions. A commissioner, who will report directly to the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection on national border operations, will command the Australian Border Force and will be appointed by the Governor-General. The appointed Australian Border Force Commissioner will have the responsibility to enforce customs law and collection of border related revenue. The commissioner and the APS employees in the Australian Border Force will be able to exercise powers under the Customs Act 1901, the Migration Act 1958, the Maritime Powers Act 2013 and other Commonwealth laws. An Australian Border Force College will also be developed to provide foundational and specialised training for those within the Australian Border Force organisation, as well as for external agencies. The policy, legislative and strategic roles of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection will establish a framework within which the Australian Border Force will operate, with corporate functions to be integrated.

These bills ensure the highest standards of integrity and professionalism through the introduction of new employment, integrity and information protection requirements for employees within the Australian Border Force. Through a professional integrity framework that has already been established in the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service, the Australian Border Force will be required to successfully complete an organisational suitability assessment and to report serious misconduct and corruption. These measures will ensure that the employees of the Australian Border Force work within the law, recognising that these are jobs that require the utmost integrity and professionalism. Moreover, these bills provide safeguards to ensure a safe working environment. Employees may be required to undergo breath or blood tests for alcohol, or urine or blood tests for prohibited drugs. The emphasis here will be on employees who are in high-risk areas. The aim is to strengthen integrity within the organisation and to ensure a safe working environment. These testing measures are in line with current policy and practice within the Australian Federal Police, the Australian Crime Commission, the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service and the Australian Defence Force.

Under the provisions of these bills, serious misconduct will not be tolerated. Where serious misconduct is suspected, the secretary of the department or the Australian Border Force Commissioner will be able to defer the date of resignation of an employee by up to 90 days—to give the department the time required to investigate any suspected breach under the APS code of conduct. If the employee is proven to be in breach, such as in the case of corruption or a serious abuse of power, a termination of employment sanction will be imposed. This type of termination under the Public Service Act 1999 would result in the ability for the secretary or the Australian Border Force Commissioner to make a serious misconduct declaration,
excluding any unfair dismissal review of termination of employment under the Fair Work Act 2009. Part of these bills also establishes information protection that prohibits any unauthorised disclosure of protected information. Any breach of this will be punishable by up to two years of imprisonment.

This Australian Border Force will provide a multidisciplinary service and a single entry point for traders and travellers, with changes to be implemented in a phased approach to allow for detailed planning and transition, not a rushed and botched job like that of the previous Labor government. These bills will help continue the good work and policies that the coalition government has been achieving and implementing. We have a plan and we made a promise to the Australian people to fix Labor's chaotic mess that it left behind after dismantling the very successful Howard government's border protection policies. We are sticking to that plan and we will continue to provide Australia with safer waters and safer borders. I would like to put on record my thanks to the current Minister for Border Protection and Immigration, Minister Peter Dutton, and to the former minister, Scott Morrison, for their very good work in this area. I commend the bills to the House.

Ms Marino (Forrest—Government Whip) (11:09): The Australian border is a strategic national asset. It is not an asset to be taken for granted by any government. The reason that this bill, the Australian Border Force Bill 2015, is before the House is to establish the role of the Australian Border Force Commissioner, to enable the operation of the Australian Border Force and to introduce provisions to support the management of a professional and disciplined workforce that exercises its powers and functions with the highest standards of integrity. The Australian Border Force will be a single integrated front-line operational border entity within the department and will be charged with enforcing customs and immigration laws, protecting Australia's borders and improving our national security.

The coalition has a very strong and historic record of protecting Australia's borders—the 37,000 kilometres of coastline, the eight major international airports, the more than 60 international seaports and the 10 million square kilometres of ocean in our offshore exclusive economic zone. In fact, border protection is one of the core reasons that I am very proud to be a member of the coalition. We are absolutely committed to protecting Australia's borders. The Australian people know that they can have confidence and certainty that, whenever there is a coalition government, border protection will be a priority. Just look at our history—it is one of our core beliefs—and look at the resolve and success of the whole-of-government approach to Operation Sovereign Borders. Compare those efforts, our efforts, to the absolute chaos of the Labor years. It was just a dreadful debacle. Labor made an absolute mockery of the responsibility that a government has of border protection in this country. It was an abrogation of the government's responsibility.

When I was first elected in 2007, I watched with horror as Labor dismantled the Howard government's very strong and successful border policies. They abandoned offshore processing and automatic detention—and didn't the people smugglers just rub their hands together in anticipation of profits; it was a green light—61 days before the first boat arrived under Minister Evans, and the people smugglers made millions out of the 50,000 people who paid them to come to Australia under Labor's open border policy. It was a licence to print money for the people smugglers. We saw 800 boats and thousands of children. What a dreadful risk
those children took, often in leaky, unseaworthy boats provided by those same people smugglers, especially when we know that, tragically, at least 1,200 people died at sea.

As, unfortunately, with most key policy areas, Labor created a very serious problem and an unmitigated mess for the coalition government to deal with. But the Australian people expected us to deal with the problem and knew that we had the policies and the genuine resolve to do exactly that. They also know that we have the policies and resolve to deal with what is a case load of problems left by Labor. We have reduced the number of children in detention from 2,000 to closer to 100—and what a turnaround that has been. All of us can be proud of the fact that we have stopped the boats and stopped people drowning at sea. It is a core government responsibility. The government has taken back control of our borders from people smugglers and destroyed their very lucrative business model.

I was really concerned, genuinely concerned, and I think the people smugglers would be again rubbing their hands together, to hear the Deputy Leader of the Opposition confirming that Labor will actually put them back into business whenever there is a Labor government in this country. I wonder what the Defence Force men and women who gave their lives protecting Australia's people and our borders would think of that abrogation of responsibly by a government--outsourcing our borders to people smugglers. I think of people like my mother's husband, who was killed in World War II, in New Guinea. He was one of the oldest Western Australians to enlist, and he was desperately worried about Australia's borders and about people who will do Australia harm, and they can come in all forms. That is why he volunteered for redeployment to New Guinea. I have spoken to many service men and women, particularly throughout the parliamentary program, and I know that they feel very strongly about this issue of border protection.

The Australian Border Force Commissioner, a statutory officer, will have control of the operations of the Australian Border Force and will be directly accountable to the minister in relation to those operations. The Australian Border Force Commissioner will have a dual role as Comptroller-General of Customs, with responsibility for enforcement of customs laws, collection of border related revenue, enforcing customs and immigration laws and protecting Australia's borders—particularly, as I said, from those who seek to do harm to Australians, in whatever form that is.

Immigration and Border Protection workers will make decisions that affect the safety, rights and freedoms of people as well as facilitate legitimate trade, commerce and travel in Australia. They will hold a privileged place at the border and in the community, with access to secure environments and law enforcement databases. They will also exercise significant powers under the Customs Act 1901 and other Commonwealth law, such as detention, arrest, boarding a vessel, entry, search, questioning, seizure, use of force and removal from Australia. The community and government trust Immigration and Border Protection workers to exercise these powers reasonably, lawfully, impartially and professionally. The people who carry out these roles at our air and sea borders, airports and ports are the people who are involved in the detection and investigation of illicit goods and illegal visitors and in compliance and enforcement.

With air cargo consignments expected to increase by 85 per cent to 2016-17, sea cargo consignments expected to increase by 20 per cent and international travellers by 25 per cent, we certainly need an efficient, effective, single border force protection capability. As the ABF
document notes, organised crime groups are growing and diversifying their interests as access to illicit markets expands and opportunities to disguise illicit movements increase.

The Australian Crime Commission notes that the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime calculates that drug trafficking and organised crime generate the equivalent of US$870 billion. The commission says that illicit drug trafficking, fraud and money laundering have become more complex and that there is an ever-expanding range of new crime markets such as new drugs and precursors, wildlife trafficking and potential vulnerabilities of visa programs. The commission says that, today, law enforcement is focused on working in partnerships both nationally and internationally, with 67 per cent of our nationally significant serious and organised crime targets linked to at least one international jurisdiction, with most focused in South-East Asia.

The ACC also notes the growing sophistication of importation methods for firearms and illicit drugs and the international reach of criminals. The effect of organised crime on Australians is unparalleled; it is pervasive; it is powerful; and it is complex. And that is why this single approach is important. In March I read that the ACC, the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service, the AFP, the New South Wales Crime Commission and the New South Wales Police Force, in a joint operation called Strike Force Nicolena, which was formed to investigate large-scale drug importation and money laundering, arrested two men and seized guns, drugs worth $4 million and $1 million in cash, as well as 10 kilograms of cocaine concealed in machinery imported from overseas.

We can only expect more sophisticated forms of people smuggling and control evasion. But I am particularly pleased to see that the prevention of movement in and out of the country by people of national security concern is a key focus of the government's border security and integrity measures. It requires an equally sophisticated and layered detection of threats—the single-agency approach that we see in this bill—to foster and share intelligence. For instance, last year 313,000 passengers were referred to immigration officers for further investigation; 2,328 of those were refused immigration clearance; and 364 were denied boarding for flights to Australia.

Organised crime has a high degree of determination and resources and uses cyber and IT in its efforts to corrupt, as we know very well. The bill contains a number of integrity provisions to increase resistance to criminal infiltration and corruption and to enhance government and public confidence in Immigration and Border Protection workers, as well as the confidence of other partners, including intelligence organisations and foreign governments, providing an integrated approach, which has been so successful in destroying the people smugglers' business model.

The Border Force Counter-Terrorism Unit will be part of the ABF once this legislation is passed. It is another example of how seriously the coalition government takes national security and border security issues. The Border Force Counter-Terrorism Unit has been working in our airports to detect potential jihadists trying to leave Australia. Eight teams conducting real-time assessments have successfully intercepted a number of people of national security concern.

I encourage all parents to be alert and aware of ISIL's online efforts that are directly targeting our vulnerable young people. When I deliver my cybersafety presentations to parents, I ask them to put their hands up if they know where their children are right at that
moment, who they are with and what they are doing at that time. Most parents put their hands up. And then I ask them whether they can answer those same questions when their children are online: where are your children, who are they with and what are they doing? Few, if any, hands go up.

We have recently seen the reports of Australian teenager Jake Bilardi, who reportedly died as a suicide bomber in Iraq. His father said he shouldered much of the blame for his son’s actions. One of his comments reported by *The Sydney Morning Herald* was:

… I would just like everyone to know that the buck stops here with me. He was my son.

Parents need to know what their children are doing online and who they are talking and interacting with. If we need another reason, we know that ISIL is targeting children as young as eight years old to be suicide bombers and 14-year-old girls to be married off to terrorist fighters. These are very good reasons for parents to be aware of what their children are doing, particularly online.

The Border Force Counter-Terrorism Unit employs 80 specialist officers with enhanced powers to intercept inbound and outbound passengers of national security interest. Another measure the government has taken is to cancel more than 100 passports.

This bill also includes provisions that enable the setting of standards for a highly trained, disciplined and flexible workforce, a legislative framework for the ABF, a single front-line operational border control and enforcement entity that will be formed within the department from 1 July 2015. It follows the government decision to integrate the department and the ACBPS into a single department of state. They are the reasons I support this bill.

Mr BUCHHOLZ (Wright—Chief Government Whip) (11:21): I acknowledge the wonderful contribution that the member for Forrest makes to this place, particularly on a debate that is so poignant to many across this nation. You do not necessarily have to have an electorate that has part of our borders in it. I know the member for Forrest does. She is a strong advocate for her community around shipping and security and has a keen interest in the area of immigration. I acknowledge her contribution to the House.

It is a great privilege to be able to speak in the House on the Australia Border Force Bill 2015 and the Customs and Other Legislation Amendment (Australian Border Force) Bill 2015 and to espouse some of the wonderful benefits and contributions that the government has made to this very important policy decision that we took to the election. As a Liberal Party we went to the election and said that we would stop the boats. We were ridiculed by some who said that we campaigned on three-word slogans. Others who commented truly believed that the boats could not be stopped—the epidemic and the influx of boats that were arriving—and that it was beyond comprehension as to how they could be stopped.

You have to remember that the previous government tried to adopt seven different positions, in vain, to stop the boats. But they were half-hearted attempts, because some on the other side genuinely wanted to stop the boats, but there were others with an alternative agenda who were quite happy to see those boats continue coming.

The Australian Border Force Bill 2015 establishes the role of the Australian Border Force Commissioner and enables the operation of the ABF within the department. This is the government delivering on its ongoing commitment to the enhanced border protection arrangements announced in this year’s budget. As I just alluded to, the government has a
strong record on border protection. This government recognises the importance of protecting our borders and the importance of national security. Our nation's borders are our defining trait, and they should be treated like a national asset. One of the strongest qualities that we have as a nation is that we are an island nation. We are so remote. When we invite colleagues in other parliaments around the world to come to Australia, they are most keen to come. However, it is normally followed up by: 'Gee, it's a long way. It is a long way to come to visit you in the parliament.' That in itself is a defence mechanism but, because Australia is such a sought-after destination, some will try to get here by whatever means possible. It is imperative that we strengthen our border security.

Our clearly defined borders have for a long time served us well in protecting our nation's security, as well as allowing us to implement trade and business to our economic advantage. However, as technology allows for national borders to be blurred and as globalisation becomes inevitable, the need for a level of focus on border protection appears vital. In the next four years, the volume of travellers and goods crossing our borders is projected to increase significantly against a backdrop of more complex cargo supply chains and passenger routes. You only need to look at the increase in exports with the amount of ship traffic. Every one of those transactions provides, in its own way, a potential security risk. This is not just about focusing on our border protection and on the very visual illegal entrants; it is also about monitoring all shipping, all transactions, all logistic movements either by air or by ship, which come with a very real biosecurity threat. The reason that we have, by all definitions, been successful in border protection policy is that we have streamlined a number of the departments which, to all intents and purposes, were working in silos. It was conducted under a relatively militant style of operation and, as result of that, the rewards of our efforts speak for themselves.

The consolidation of the department of immigration and Customs and the establishment of the ABF is a once-in-a-generation reform. It is expected to generate $180 million in efficiencies over the forward estimates, increasing to $100 million each year after that. The establishment of the ABF ensures the capability at the border to manage this growth effectively and efficiently.

It has been over 240 days since an illegal boat arrival in Australia. Operation Sovereign Borders has cut off people smugglers' ventures. The government started turning back the boats and there has only been one illegal boat arrival since last year—one boat a year, compared to 302 boats carrying over 20,000 people in 2013. We have made considerable gains in this portfolio. As a member of the government I am proud to stand and acknowledge the contributions that ministers have made in this area.

In closing I would also like to acknowledge the contributions of our border protection personnel and what they do in defending our nation's borders. I had the opportunity to spend some time with the Australian Defence Force Parliamentary Program on HMAS Anzac. It was a border security exercise. It was off the coast of Africa where Somali pirate insurgents were prevalent inside the operational theatre area. The dedication of the men and women of our armed forces emulates the same commitment and passion of our immigration department and Customs and Border personnel who are protecting our border. Our country owes each of those departments a great debt. We owe them a great debt and should never forget the silent contribution that they make to our nation. I commend this legislation to the House.
Mr NIKOLIC (Bass—Government Whip) (11:29): I acknowledge the member for Wright's contribution. He is a frequent contributor on the national security debate and he certainly spoke a lot of sense on the importance of stronger borders. Like the member for Wright, I also welcome the opportunity to make a contribution on the Australian Border Force Bill 2015, and cognate bill, which establishes the role of the Australian Border Force Commissioner and enables the operation of the Australian Border Force.

By any measure, it is an initiative that adds further lustre to the government's significant achievements when it comes to border protection policy during the last 18 months. This bill contributes to the sort of unity of purpose and unity of operational command which this House must support in what is a complex and vitally important area of public policy.

It has been almost a year since the government announced fundamental reform of Australia's border protection arrangements on 9 May 2014, in particular the intent to integrate the Department of Immigration and Border Protection and the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service into a single department and to establish the Australian Border Force from 1 July this year. It is a vital piece of legislation, because, when we refer to Australia's border, we are talking about protecting vast national assets. Australia, in simple terms, is the world's largest island—a maritime nation with an enormous challenge. Our country is roughly the size of the continental United States, with a population around the same size as that of the state of Texas. We are the only country that occupies a complete continent, the world's smallest continent, and the sixth-largest country by total area—about 7.7 million square miles. Only Russia, Canada, China, the United States and Brazil are bigger. So ensuring security on our borders is an enormous job and a vital strategic task.

By any measure, when we came to government, the coalition was confronted with an appalling mess on our borders—bad policy, disaggregated interagency responses and poor outcomes in relation to border protection. As someone who has spent over three decades involved in defence, security, international and interagency operations, what we were confronted with when we came to government after the September 2013 election just was not good enough. This bill makes a significant difference. It builds on lessons learned and ensures that Australia's border is much better protected into the years and decades ahead. The bill establishes the Australian Border Force and includes provisions to support the management of the workforce, to implement aspects of the professional integrity framework, to establish information protection requirements and to establish provisions to deal with serious misconduct.

The bill facilitates the consolidation of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection and the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service into the Australian Border Force, which is a once-in-a-generation reform. It is expected to generate $180 million in efficiencies over the forward estimates, with rolling efficiencies of around $100 million per year after that. With this reform and other measures, including the rolling of the Australian Agency for International Development into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, with the First Principles Review of the Department of Defence and with a range of other organisational efficiencies we are considering, this government is acting to ensure that we live by the smaller government and savings culture that the Australian people expect and deserve.
There is a lot more I could say to build on the case that my colleagues have made, but, in the interests of time and ensuring that others have the opportunity to speak, I will just say couple of other things before handing over.

It is, after all, in the interests of regional nations to work together to understand and cooperate more closely and consistently towards the goal of a safe and secure region. Hundreds of millions of dollars in savings and cooperating with our regional neighbours are just some of the things that will result from the creation of the Australian Border Force. All of the efficiencies that we are making are going to be reinvested to create an intelligence-led, mobile, technology-enabled force, operating under a Strategic Border Command, ensuring our assets and resources are deployed to greatest effect. This bill refocuses our border protection effort and addresses a range of highly adaptive adversaries who seek to exploit our borders. Importantly, this legislation responds to the expected substantial increase in travellers and goods crossing our borders over the next four years, against a backdrop of more complex cargo supply chains and passenger routes.

I have seen estimates of 85 per cent growth in air cargo consignments, 20 per cent growth in sea cargo and a 25 per cent lift in international travellers. At the same time, we must tackle the ever-increasing threat posed by serious and organised transnational crime. So the government is seeking to ensure that we have the capability at our borders to handle this growth effectively and efficiently. At a time when there are growing concerns about threats on our borders, the new Border Force also also helps optimise our law enforcement and national security capabilities, to help us stay ahead of the transnational and organised crime syndicates that seek to exploit any weakness in Australia's border arrangements.

I wrote about this issue last July in an article published by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute titled 'Australia and the Regional Terrorist Threat.' It was an article written in the context of regional citizens subordinating their duty to their own countries, to go to the Middle East and take up arms with one militant group or another. I spoke about the threat posed by South-East Asian fighters who go to Syria or Iraq and then return to regional transnational organisations like Jemaah Islamiah in Indonesia and the Abu Sayyaf Group in the Philippines. Given the relative weakness of institutional structures in some regional nations, the freedom of action that those committed and up-skilled fighters enjoy is reason for great concern. In Australia's case, that is because of the enormous number of Australians and other Westerners who transit and/or holiday in our region each year.

When we consider border security, there are a vast array of other threats we need to consider beyond those posed by transnational terrorists. Maintaining security on our borders for legitimate trade, travel and migration is a core responsibility of the Australian government, which we must take seriously. So I am pleased to see that this legislation responds to the growing threat on our borders, reflecting our relatively stronger institutional structures compared to those in some of our regional neighbours. It is also pleasing to see that the Australian Border Force will not operate alone. It will work in close collaboration with national security, defence, law enforcement and intelligence partners domestically and overseas to deliver a secure border. It is, after all, in the interests of regional nations to work to understand and cooperate more closely and consistently towards the goal of a safe and stable region. That is what the Australian Border Force will do. It will bring together the people, the capabilities and the systems to protect our border and facilitate the lawful passage
of people and goods. It will enhance our unity of purpose between agencies that address the threats I have mentioned, by enabling 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.

This is not a revolutionary idea, with the United States, through its Department of Homeland Security, and other reforms by the United Kingdom Home Office. We are similarly trying to ensure that our response options for a safer border are integrated and coordinated. We have considered these overseas experiences closely and have taken into account what has worked well internationally, while ensuring that we incorporate the unique challenges confronting Australia. Without this legislation, immigration and customs officers will not be able to counter the challenges and threats posed by increased volumes of travellers, traders and migrants, against the backdrop of consistent and complex security threats.

In terms of its reach, the Australian Border Force encompasses not only those who are on the front line of our air and sea borders but also those important enablers of capability—the people who detect, investigate and enforce compliance 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. It also includes overseas staff in operational roles with our regional partners to help secure Australia's maritime zone, to prevent and deter illegal arrivals, and to impede the movement of prohibited goods.

Let me conclude by saying that our Australian customs and border protection officials experience numerous challenges at our borders. This bill helps them respond to those challenges in a more integrated and coordinated way which accentuates unity of purpose and unity of command in an operational sense. I strongly commend this bill to the House.

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (11:39): It gives me great pleasure to rise to speak on the Australian Border Force Bill 2015 and the Customs and Other Legislation Amendment (Australian Border Force) Bill 2015. I also have great pleasure in following the member for Bass. To have someone of his vast hands-on experience in the military and in areas of border protection and the protection of the sovereignty of this nation does this parliament great credit.

The very first order of business for any sovereign government must be the defence of the nation and the integrity of its borders. That has always been true throughout history. If we look at the events in the world today, where there are so many people who seek to do us harm—with the problem that we have of the ice epidemic and the problem of people smugglers—probably at no time in our nation's history have the integrity and security of our nation's borders been more important. That is why I am proud to stand here and speak on this bill.

Sadly, the other side of politics in this country today simply does not take border protection seriously. We see it here today with the speakers' list. Ten of my colleagues are speaking on this bill, with not a single speaker from the other side prepared to stand up and defend their position. We saw, during the government of John Howard, that the previous Prime Minister stood up and made the simple, self-evident statement: 'We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come.' That is a simple, self-evident statement, but it was howled down with sneers of ridicule and sniggering from the left. Then we saw the previous government, with their disdain for our border protection, undo the policies we had
on boat arrivals. We saw the tragedy: 50,000 people came unlawfully to the country on 800 boats, with over 1,200 deaths at sea. There was an $11 billion blow-out in costs and thousands of children in detention. That is one area where this government has worked to address and fix the problems.

When it comes to our border protection, it is important before we start to look at the mess that was created by the Labor Party and that we have inherited and what we are doing to clean it up. I will start with some of the cuts that Labor made. It is important to note that these cuts were made at a time when the previous Labor government were throwing money around this country like confetti. They were not making cuts because they had a huge interest bill to pay on the debt that was created by the previous government; these were cuts they made at times when they had money for set-top boxes, they had $900 cheques to send out to dead people and they had billions for pink batts—this was the time they made these cuts.

I will start with the Australian Federal Police. In 2011-12, Labor made a cut of $131½ million and 72 people lost their jobs. In 2012-13, not satisfied with that previous cut, they then cut another $133 million and another 25 staff. To the Australian Crime Commission: in 2008-09 they started off with a cut of 50 staff. Not satisfied, the following year, 2009-10, they cut the budget by $2.28 million and cut 35 staff. They kept going in 2011-12, with a $7.3 million cut, and another 23 staff lost their jobs. In 2012-13, another cut was made, of $12.6 million, and another 36 staff lost their jobs.

We come to the cuts to the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service. In 2009, a cut of 220 staff was made. In 2010-11, the Labor government cut another 250 staff from our Customs and Border Protection Service. In 2011-12, there was yet another cut, of $38.2 million, and another 90 staff lost their jobs. Not finished, in 2012-13 they cut $25.9 million and another 190 staff were cut, at a time when Labor were throwing money around like confetti. For every other thing they could think of they had money to throw at it but, when it came to the important issue of the sovereignty of our borders, they were making cuts. It was an absolute disgrace. When they made these cuts it had operational effects. The operational effects occurred in the screening of goods coming into this country.

When the Howard government left office, 60 per cent of air cargo consignments coming into the nation were screened—more than one in two. So, if you are thinking of importing something illegally, some illegal contraband or firearm, if you know that more than one in two consignments are going to be screened—more than 50 per cent—you know that, more than likely, your contraband will get caught. That fact alone becomes an important deterrent.

In 2009-10 Labor cut the budget for cargo screening by $58 million, and we saw a 75 per cent reduction in screening of air cargo. Under Labor we were down to 10 per cent of consignments being screened. So you only had a one in 10 chance of being caught. What a great incentive for someone to have a go at trying to import something illegal into the country if you know that there is only a one in 10 chance of being caught—when, before, 60 per cent of those air cargo shipments were being inspected. And, as sure as night follows day, as could be expected when you make those cuts, when you open up the holes in the net, you get people going through and importing illegal contraband.

One of the most notable cases was that of the 220 Glock pistols that were imported through a post office in Sylvania Waters, just outside my borders in the neighbouring electorate of
Cook. Two hundred and twenty Glock firearms were imported into the country. At the time, the New South Wales Chief of Police, Mr Scipione said:

... these guns were being imported specifically for use by criminals, including outlaw motorcycle gang members and those Middle Eastern organised crime groups.

That was back in 2012. Thankfully, through the good work of our law enforcements agents, some of those guns are now out of circulation—out of society. I will quickly go through where a few of them were found.

In Wiley Park, back in January 2012, police recovered one of these Glock pistols imported into Sylvania Waters when they arrested a man named Khaled after he shot at his neighbour. In May 2012, at Revesby—a stone's throw from the borders of my electorate—an empty Glock magazine was found by a person walking their dog in a park. In May 2012, in the backyard of a residence in Glenfield Park another gun was found. In October 2012, this time at Merrylands, police found one of the imported Glock's hidden inside a secret compartment of a limousine.

Further, in October 2012, this time at St Mary's, a resident, an alleged member of the Lone Wolf bikie gang, was found with one of these illegally imported pistols and also drug manufacturing equipment. In December 2012, one of these guns had been fired at Greenacre and, following a raid, the police found another one of these guns at Rhodes. In February 2013, this time at World Square, another one of these guns was uncovered during a raid that also uncovered cocaine and cash. In March 2013, this time at Marrickville, another gun was found. In September 2013, this time at Westmead, one was found in the footwall of a stolen Mercedes in a garage. In December 2013, another one of these stolen import Glocks was found at Matcham on the Central Coast. Another was found in Condell Park in the drawers of a bedroom. They have also been found in Surry Hills, Punchbowl and Edensor Park.

The police have located 14 of these weapons that were imported unlawfully through Sylvania Waters at the time the previous Labor government opened the holes in our nets. There are still 106 of these firearms somewhere in our society today. Somewhere—most likely in Western Sydney, in parts of my electorate—106 of these illegally imported firearms are still in circulation. That is what happens when you do not take border protection of our nation seriously. These are the consequences.

That is what this bill is about. It establishes the statutory office of the Australian Border Force Commissioner who will command the Australian Border Force with 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 to protect Australia's border. On this side of the chamber we take border protection and our national sovereignty seriously as part of the important obligation we have to look after Australia. This bill is part of it, and I commend it to the House.

Mr DUTTON (Dickson—Minister for Immigration and Border Protection) (11:50): I thank members for their contributions—in particular, the member for Hughes, as the last speaker on this legislation—in the second reading debate on the Australian Border Force Bill 2015 and the Customs and Other Legislation Amendment (Australian Border Force) Bill 2015. These bills deliver on the government's commitment to ensure the protection of the Australian community, to enhance the integrity of Australia's border and to create efficiencies
through the reform and integration of the department and the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service.

The purpose of the Australian Border Force Bill is to establish the role of the Australian Border Force Commissioner; thereby enabling the operation of the Australian Border Force as a front-line operational border control and law enforcement entity within the Department of Immigration and Border Protection. The ABF Commissioner will have a dual role as the Comptroller-General of Customs and, in that capacity, will have responsibility for the enforcement of customs laws and the collection of border related revenue.

This is an historic occasion in the life of the departments—both Immigration and Customs and Border Protection—and I wish to put of the record my thanks to Mike Pezzullo, the secretary of the department, the former CEO of Customs and Border Protection, and also the current CEO of Customs and Border Protection, Roman Quaedvlieg.

The Australian Border Force Bill introduces provisions to support the management of a professional, disciplined and flexible workforce that exercises its powers and functions with the highest standards of integrity. This is crucial to underpin the government's and the community's confidence in our immigration, customs and border protection arrangements. The Australian Border Force Bill also enables the department to take strong action to deal with any workers who engage in serious misconduct that could undermine the good reputation of the department. Serious misconduct within the organisation has the potential to threaten the security of our borders and adversely impact the department's broader ability to carry out its law enforcement responsibilities.

The purpose of the Customs and Other Legislation Amendment (Australian Border Force) Bill is to make necessary legislative changes to accompany the passage of the Australian Border Force Bill through the parliament. The Customs and Other Legislation Amendment (Australian Border Force) Bill updates a number of Commonwealth acts to reflect the new Australian Border Force organisational arrangements. It includes provisions to abolish the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service as a statutory agency by repealing the Customs Administration Act 1985. It also amends the Customs Act 1901 and other Commonwealth acts to reflect the new arrangements and to complement provisions in the Australian Border Force Bill.

The Customs and Other Legislation Amendment (Australian Border Force) Bill provides that the integrated department will be a law enforcement agency under the Law Enforcement Integrity Commissioner Act 2006. This will ensure that the integrity commissioner will have 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.

The Customs and Other Legislation Amendment (Australian Border Force) Bill also recognises that ABF workers may be required to conduct fast-moving and inherently high-risk operations relating to Australia's national security or defence. It amends the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 to enable the ABF Commissioner to make declarations clarifying how the Work Health and Safety Act applies or is modified in relation to certain operations in these contexts.

The Australian Border Force Bill and the Customs and Other Legislation Amendment (Australian Border Force) Bill underpin the government's commitment to ensure the
protection of the Australian community and to enhance border protection integrity. The bills improve our border agencies' capacity to manage exponential growth in trade and travel, to assist and handle more complex cargo supply chains and passenger travel routes, and to bolster the ability to combat transnational crime syndicates that seek to exploit any weaknesses in our systems and so harm our community.

I thank all members who have participated in this debate and for their support of these important bills. I commend the bills to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr DUTTON (Dickson—Minister for Immigration and Border Protection) (11:55): by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

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

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 DUTTON (Dickson—Minister for Immigration and Border Protection) (11:56): by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

Omnibus Repeal Day (Spring 2014) Bill 2014

Consideration of Senate Message

Ordered that the amendments be considered immediately.

Senate’s amendments—

(1) Schedule 3, Parts 1 and 2, page 16 (line 2) to page 17 (line 19), omit the Parts.
(2) Schedule 3, items 9 to 23, page 18 (line 3) to page 20 (line 10), omit the items.
(3) Schedule 3, item 25, page 20 (line 14) to page 21 (line 2), omit subitems (1) to (4).
(4) Schedule 3, item 25, page 21 (lines 6 to 22), omit subitems (6) and (7).
(5) Schedule 3, items 28 to 37, page 22 (line 12) to page 24 (line 30), omit the items.
(6) Schedule 3, item 41, page 25 (lines 6 to 24), omit subitems (1) to (5).
(7) Page 25 (after line 29), after Schedule 3, insert:
Schedule 3A—Finance

Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013

1 At the end of Division 2 of Part 4-1A

Add:

105BA Future submarine project tender process

(1) This section applies if the Commonwealth (including a Minister on behalf of the Commonwealth) proposes to enter into a contract (a submarine design and building contract) for the design and building of a submarine, or a substantial part of a submarine, as part of the future submarine project.

Note 1: The future submarine project is designated SEA 1000 in the Defence Capability Plan as in force on 1 December 2014.

Note 2: This section does not apply to contracts for research, concept or preliminary design, planning or other preparatory work that does not involve the building of a submarine or a substantial part of a submarine.

(2) The submarine design and building contract must not be entered into other than as the result of a limited tender process conducted in accordance with the Defence Procurement Policy Manual as in force on 1 December 2014, subject to this section.

Tender process

(3) At least 4 bidders must be invited to participate in the limited tender.

(4) The future submarine project is taken not to be an exempt procurement for the purposes of the Defence Procurement Policy Manual.

(5) A request for tender must invite the bidders to give the Commonwealth a project definition study and preliminary design that meets top level requirements specified by the Commonwealth, sufficient to allow mainly fixed pricing and 10 vessel years of post-commissioning integrated logistics support.

(6) The Commonwealth must consider the Australian Industry Capability Program, the Defence and Industry Policy Statement and the impact on the strategically vital Australian submarine and shipbuilding industry when deciding whether to enter into a submarine building design and contract in relation to the future submarine project.

(7) This section ceases to have effect at the end of 30 June 2020.

Mr PORTER (Pearce—Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister) (11:58): I move:

That the amendments be considered together and one question be put on the amendments.

Question agreed to.

Mr PORTER: I move:

That the amendments be disagreed to.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I understand that you have received written reasons to the effect of establishing—

Mr Albanese interjecting—

Mr PORTER: We can negotiate reasonable things. I will just speak briefly to those reasons. Obviously, these amendments are proposed in the context of the Omnibus Repeal Day (Spring 2014) Bill. That bill delivers, or will deliver, savings to business in the vicinity of $1.43 million, as well as administrative savings. The amendments are in two broad parts. I will first consider the amendments which, at least on their face, are attempting to be constructive but which we reject for a variety of reasons which are specific to those...
amendments. The second amendments relate to submarine contracts and I will deal with those last.

The first amendments are Senate amendments (1), (2), (3) and (4). They are moved by Senator Waters. Essentially, those amendments propose retaining the Product Stewardship Advisory Group, the Oil Stewardship Advisory Council and the Fuel Standards Consultative Committee. They would also seek to disallow alternative public consultation processes that would apply with respect to the grant and variation of approvals.

By way of short explanation, a statutory process is simply not required to facilitate the necessary engagement. I would also note that in MYEFO, it was noted that the Department of the Environment would save itself internally $76,000 over six years by disbanding these groups, councils and committees, which are no longer required. That is a saving that can be pushed back into further and better work to protect the environment by the department, and that is the central reason for rejecting those Senate amendments Nos (1), (2), (3) and (4).

Senate amendment Nos (5) and (6) would seek to maintain a requirement to publish certain notices under the Fuel Quality Standards Act 2000 and the Hazardous Waste (Regulation of Exports and Imports) Act 1989 in the Commonwealth of Australia Gazette. The alternative proposal which appears in the Omnibus Repeal Day (Spring 2014) Bill is essentially that those notices, which are obviously of some importance, be published on the website rather than in the government Gazette. Senator Waters has taken a view that they should remain published in the Gazette. The government takes a very strong alternative view that the Gazette, in matters of this type, is essentially the quill-and-parchment option, that actually offering people the ability to know what is occurring at this level of government to make proper comment is far better achieved in 2015 on a website than it is on the government Gazette.

These amendments (5) and (6) would also disallow a number of measures to the Hazardous Waste (Regulation of Exports and Imports) Act. They are variously amendments that would seek to disallow what the government proposes which is the removal of the requirement to specify particulars of an application in the regulations before a permanent decision can be made. These amendments would seek to disallow the clarification of matters to be included in Basel import and export permits. They would seek to disallow the clarification of the period of appointment for members of the Hazardous Waste Technical Group. They would seek to disallow a proposal that the government has in this bill to enable the Minister for the Environment to delegate his or her functions and powers under the hazardous waste act 1989 to an APS employee who holds or is acting in an executive level 2 or equivalent position. Each of those should be uncontroversial; nevertheless they are the subject of amendments.

Again, publication requirements are not being done away with; it is simply a shift of the publication requirements to a more suitable forum, which is the website rather than the government Gazette. The requirement that a person holds an Australia OECD transit permit is purely duplicatory. The Minister for the Environment would still need to be satisfied under what we propose that the transit does not pose a significant risk of injury or damage to human beings or the environment in order to exempt any person from the requirement to hold the duplicate Australia OECD transport permit.

Further, we are looking to sensibly reduce the level of detail in Basel import and export permits so that individual companies would not have to reapply if, for instance, some minor
matter such as the port of entry changed on the application permit. Again, all of those things could be considered to go into the relevant document if the minister considered them to be important.

The Hazardous Waste Technical Group is being retained but, to make sure that the expertise is relevant, for a three-year period, which is entirely reasonable. The delegations we suggest are also entirely reasonable and conducive and consistent with other delegations.

With respect to what we say is the unreasonable amendment with respect to submarines, the Omnibus Repeal Day (Spring 2014) Bill has nothing to do with submarines. It has nothing to do with the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act. However—

Mr Butler interjecting—

Mr PORTER: The Senate says many things and not all of them are correct. What we say is that there was a six-year delay in the process of obtaining our most strategic military asset. The best advice is that the insertion of this proposed amendment into the PGPA Act would allow for a further five-year delay, and we are saving Labor from themselves by rejecting this amendment. The idea that we would put a further five-year delay in five-minutes debate on a bill which has nothing to do with submarines is patently absurd.

Mr BUTLER (Port Adelaide) (12:04): Labor are happy to back the Senate's wise views about these matters and speak in favour of the amendments and against the parliamentary secretary's proposition to defeat the will of the Senate in this important respect. I am not going to spend time on the bulk of the amendments that the parliamentary secretary spoke to. I want to talk about the submarines amendment. If the government had responded positively to the hand of bipartisanship that the Leader of the Opposition extended in Adelaide at the submarines conference and was willing to put all the silliness—and it is hard to find another word for the fiasco that is the government's dealings on this submarine project—of the last 18 months behind us and come to the bipartisan position that the Leader of the Opposition offered this morning then maybe this provision in the bill would not be necessary.

Again, we see politics being played by the defence minister, pushing the proposal aside just because it was a proposal from the Labor Party. You do have to ask yourself, and a lot of people in Adelaide are asking themselves this: how has it come to this? We had a 30-year, bipartisan national project at Osborne in Port Adelaide, supported by facilities elsewhere in the country, to build a serious submarine-building and shipbuilding capability in this country—a bipartisan national project sustained through the Howard years, sustained through the Rudd and Gillard years and something which the Prime Minister when he was Leader of the Opposition reluctantly signed up to before the election. He sent his defence minister, the shadow spokesperson at the time, to Osborne in South Australia and committed that the Liberal Party, if elected to government, would build 12 submarines in South Australia.

Since then, we have seen a dramatic unravelling: the sacking of a defence minister because of his ridiculous comments about the extraordinary skills and capabilities of our shipbuilding and submarine-building workforce in Australia; the apparent captain's pick by the Prime Minister to award this incredibly important nation-building project, and all of the economic activity that goes with it, to Japan; and seeking to cover-up the media releases that we understood were being prepared in the ministerial wing to announce that. We saw this become
a part of the leadership spill in the Liberal Party over the last several weeks. It is extraordinary for this to become a plaything of the Liberal Party's leadership spill.

And we saw the charade of this thing called a competitive evaluation process. The shadow parliamentary secretary, who will be speaking on this debate, and her colleagues in the Defence portfolio leafed through the Defence Procurement Policy Manual to find this competitive evaluation process, but no-one had heard of it before. All this provision does is seek to return the government to the usual way in which these procurement decisions are made, and that is by way of a competitive tender. It is what the Howard government did with the air warfare destroyer project. There was a competitive tender along the lines that the Leader of the Opposition outlined in Adelaide this morning, along the lines contemplated by the amendment to this bill approved by the Senate. And this also requires that the competitive tender includes as a condition—as the air warfare destroyer tender did—that the vessels be built in Australia.

Now, an extraordinary amount of evidence has been canvassed in the Senate inquiry and in various other pieces of commentary around this debunking of a whole lot of the mythology that unfortunately became a part of this debate, such as that to build these submarines in Australia would cost up to $80 billion—a myth that I hope has now been completely debunked by expert after expert, company after company lining up to this Senate inquiry and saying that these submarines can be built at a competitive cost of around $20 billion here in Australia, reinforcing the national security reasons for doing that, reinforcing the important reasons to sustain a strong industrial and engineering skills base in Adelaide and elsewhere in Australia because of that, reinforcing the important economic benefits that come from such an important, enormous expenditure of taxpayers funds, sustaining and driving economic activity in our economy rather than an economy overseas. There should be no problem with this government finally swallowing its pride, recognising that the Prime Minister got it wrong on this—he just got it wrong—and climbing down and getting onboard with the process that the Leader of the Opposition outlined this morning.

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (12:09): I support the comments of the member for Port Adelaide on the Omnibus Repeal Day (Spring 2014) Bill 2014, and I support them most strongly. What has become absolutely clear is that the Prime Minister was prepared to do a deal with Japan for the purchase of the submarines without any due process, without any competitive tender process, with no transparency and with no national interest test having ever been applied. You would think that for a purchase of this type—the largest procurement of our time—that would have been a fundamental requirement of any government and that indeed it would be a requirement in the purchase of any other product. But here we are about to go into a commitment of this type and none of that has been done. This is a commitment that not only runs into tens of billions of dollars but spans decades to come, has national security consequences and has defence capability consequences for our nation. And I would have thought that any responsible government would have done the right thing and gone through the due process, but not in this case.

To try to justify the decision the Prime Minister was about to enter into, the government firstly went about—as the member for Port Adelaide quite rightly pointed out—trashing the reputation of the Australian Submarine Corporation and, just as bad, trashing the reputation of Sweden and, by extension, one of the companies that is based in Australia and has been
supporting our defence industries for years and years—and I refer to Saab Systems, which has an interest in this project. And then we see that, in desperation to save his job, the Prime Minister starts twisting and weaving in respect of his commitment. He did not care about the jobs of the people in Australia—the 3,000 people who work in Adelaide and the hundreds more who work in the other yards around Australia. But when it came to saving his job, he was prepared to twist and weave and comes back with the competitive evaluation process, which, again, as the member for Port Adelaide has quite rightly pointed out, no-one had ever heard of.

This is a commitment that, to my knowledge, no defence expert, no sector expert, no industry expert in this country, including industry broadly, has come out in support of. It has been made purely on the whim of a Prime Minister for his personal reasons. And I do not know what they are, but there has been no justification whatsoever for them. What has been even more interesting is that it seems that, even within his own party, people do not know what is going on. Only weeks ago the member for Boothby issued a newsletter to his constituents in which he said, ‘whether the submarines are designed in partnership with Germany, France, Sweden or Japan’. Sweden was ruled out by his very Prime Minister in this chamber only weeks ago. Yet the member for Boothby does not seem to understand that. And, in fairness, I do not blame him, because I do not think anybody understands what is going on. Then we come to the opposition leader in state parliament in South Australia. It has taken him a year and a half to work out that he needs to stand up for South Australia and stand up for the building of the submarines in South Australia. He finally did that yesterday, when The Advertiser put together a screed and a whole series of articles in respect of the submarines. I applaud him for doing so, but I ask the question, where have you been, Mr Marshall, for the last 18 months or so?

Today the Leader of the Opposition, speaking in Adelaide, has put on the table a bipartisanship proposal, which the member for Port Adelaide, again, has referred to. It is a two-stage proposal whereby we go into a competitive tender process and a funded definition study. All of those four countries that we know have an interest in building the submarines will be allowed to put in their submissions and be part of the proposal. But the bottom line to it all is this: the submarines have to be built in Australia and maintained in Australia. Yes, we were prepared to go into a partnership with other countries and other industries from overseas, but the work has to be done here in Australia, because ultimately it is in our nation's interest to not only keep the jobs here but, just as importantly, have the capability here and ensure that in the future we have the ability to defend ourselves and have the capability that our defence department requires if and when the time comes.

**Ms BRODTMANN** (Canberra) (12:14): I rise today speak on this amendment to the Omnibus Repeal Bill. This amendment will make changes to the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act to ensure that the government holds an open and accountable competitive tender process for the Future Submarine project. This amendment will ensure a comprehensive project definition study is undertaken for our Future Submarine project. It also ensures that at least four bidders must be invited to take part in the limited tender.

There is nothing more important than protecting our nation. The Future Submarine project will deliver one of our most strategically significant defence capabilities at a cost of more
than $20 billion. Given its scale, I cannot think of a project that is more in need of proper governance and accountability than this one. Labor understands that we need to acquire the best capabilities for the future protection of Australia while providing value for money to taxpayers. Labor also keenly understands the need to support Australian jobs—the need to support an Australian shipbuilding industry that deserves the right to compete for our future submarines.

I am standing here today supporting this amendment because Australia cannot risk a 'captain's call' when it comes to the Future Submarine project. This government has shown nothing but contempt for Defence since it came into office. It cut the real wages of our ADF personnel, the former minister claimed he did not trust ASC to build a canoe and we have seen secret deals with Japan leaked through the media. This government cannot be trusted when it comes to one of Australia's most strategically significant defence capabilities. That is why we need certainty. That is why we need a bipartisan approach. That is why we need an open and transparent process and to listen to expert advice.

I would like to briefly touch on what the experts are saying. During Senate estimates last year ASC revealed it can build submarines meeting Australia's requirements, on Australian soil and using Australian workers, for between $18 billion and $24 billion. So why not include ASC in the competitive tender process? This would cancel out a whole range of technical, commercial and capability gap risks that come with committing to an overseas supplier. It would also avoid widespread job losses across the Australian shipbuilding industry—an industry that is already struggling. In Victoria, BAE shipyards has already laid off workers, with up to a further 1,400 jobs in the industry set to go. The further loss of vital skills in shipbuilding would be devastating for workers and their families but also for Australia's sovereign submarine capabilities.

Before the election, both the Liberal and Labor governments had promised to build our future submarines in Australia. The Abbott government promised Australia's 12 new submarines would be built in South Australia. But now the government has invited Germany, France and Japan to compete for the project. This represents yet another broken promise. By contrast, when we were in government we saw the need for the future submarine and worked to address it. We allocated $214 million to studies and analysis on what our needs were and what technologies were available. We selected the US AN/BYG-1 combat system and the Mark 48 torpedos. We began working towards establishing a land based test facility to be centred in Adelaide. We established the Future Submarine Industry Skills Plan. We did this because we knew that, in order to avoid a submarine capability gap, we needed to work calmly and methodically to understand what capability the ADF needs and how we can acquire it at the best possible price. That is why the Leader of the Opposition today announced Labor's policy that Australia's future submarines will be built, maintained and sustained in Australia.

Australia's future submarines are one of the most strategically important defence assets and should not be used for political point scoring. The Prime Minister should not be constantly changing his position—as he has on so many policy issues—on our future submarines, as he did in the lead-up to the spill motion, to keep his South Australian colleagues happy. Instead, the government needs to hold an open and accountable competitive tender process for the Future Submarine project. The government needs to listen to the experts and build our future
submarines in Australia. It is time the government followed Labor's policy, set out in this amendment, and put in place a proper competitive tender for this multibillion dollar project that is so critical to Australia's future security.

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (12:19): I bow to no-one in this chamber in being interested in Japanese culture and a supporter of the Japanese nation. I was very proud of the fact that, when Prime Minister Abe was here, I was mentioned in dispatches by him as one of the members of the opposition who were supporters of Japan. But can you think of a project that is as big as the Future Submarine project that ought not to be seen by the Australian public as something they support because they can understand it clearly and openly as the defence of Australia being done at the best price and the best value to achieve the best result?

Collins class submarines are often denigrated around this country. But that was not the opinion I got from the admiral in charge of CINCPAC when he received a picture of an American aircraft carrier that had been taken from the periscope of a Collins class submarine. To say Adelaide should not be involved in building submarine capability in the defence of Australia's future is a patently ridiculous idea. We have a strategic problem, which is that Australia is very far from other places and we need conventionally powered submarines which can travel very long distances. The idea that existing Japanese or German submarines of even the most advanced variety can do the distances from Western Australia to North Asia without surfacing and can be rolled off a Japanese assembly line without complications is patently ridiculous.

Even the great Soryu class submarine, which is named after the aircraft carrier that was sunk at the Battle of Midway, cannot do it; it would have to be substantially modified. What better way is there than to have an open process, as suggested by this Labor amendment, so the Australian people can understand whether these suggestions from various countries have the capability to do what they need to do for the defence of Australia. I strongly support this amendment and I think it is a very important suggestion from the Senate that should be followed.

Mr PORTER (Pearce—Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister) (12:22): Just by way of summing up this debate, I will do my best to ensure that everyone present knows exactly what is being proposed here by virtue of Senator Conroy's amendments. We have before us the Omnibus Repeal Day (Spring 2014) Bill 2014. This bill, as its title suggests, was introduced last spring and deals with a range of rather modest matters but matters nevertheless which have the cumulative effect of reducing compliance costs for a range of businesses by $1.4 million. It has nothing to do with submarines and nothing to do with the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act. It has no connection whatsoever with either of those two issues or that piece of legislation at all.

Senator Conroy has used this vehicle, the Omnibus Repeal Day (Spring 2014) Bill 2014, to propose amendments to the omnibus bill which would insert an entirely new provision into the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act—the PGPA Act. The PGPA Act is, as its name suggests, an act which deals with the proper and consistent procedures for a range of public governance, performance and accountability issues—and, of course, amongst those, it deals with proper consistent procedures for the acquisition of military equipment through procurement. The PGPA Act does not have specific provisions for specific equipment. Nor does it have specific provisions that apply even to specific procurement
processes that apply in individual departments. That is because the principle behind the PGPA, set out in section 5 of that act, is that the act’s purpose is to ‘establish a coherent system of governance and accountability across all Commonwealth entities’. So not merely does it not deal with any specific processes for specific Commonwealth entities, portfolio areas or departments, but it certainly does not in any way contemplate that you would have specific legislated processes in this act for a single particular piece of procurement of a single particular piece of military equipment, no matter how important you might think that that is.

When you actually have a look at the history of this act, it is instructive. The Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act had absolute bipartisan support at the time it came into being. Both sides of this House thought it was incredibly important in matters of public governance, performance, accountability extending to procurement processes, that there be coherence and consistency and that the principles be known in advance of any major process of procurement. That concept was absolutely bipartisan at the time the PGPA Act was passed. By necessary inference, that bipartisanship also meant quite clearly that there was agreement in this place on both sides of the chamber as to what would be terribly unwise in an act of this nature. What that agreement must be inferred to be is that it would be terribly unwise to insert into act an like this, which is meant to promote absolute openness, transparency, consistency and coherence across all levels of Commonwealth government, a particular process for a particular single piece of equipment. To do that, just as a matter of good process, is absurd.

In rejecting this, as I say, we are saving Labor from themselves. They seek to make a political point. But just take a quiet moment to think about this: if these amendments were actually passed, it would fundamentally shatter the most important piece of public governance for processes of this type, just to make a rather absurd political point—and that is highly unwise. The PGPA Act clearly establishes that there is a proper process. The process which we have nominated is consistent with the PGPA Act, specifically the Commonwealth Procurement Rules issued under section 101 and the Defence Procurement Policy Manual.

But what is even worse and more substantive in this debate is that we heard the wonderful announcement that Labor today announced their policy with respect to the submarines. What a shame they did not bother to do that during six years in government. It is little bit late in the piece. They govern amazingly boldly from opposition but with the timidity of a lamb when they are actually in government. We are advised that the process that you are suggesting would add five years delay to your already existing six years delay.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Vasta):** The question is that the amendments be disagreed to.

The House divided. [12:31]

(The Deputy Speaker—Mr Vasta)

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**CHAMBER**
Question agreed to.

Mr PORTER (Pearce—Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister) (12:38): I present the reasons for the House of Representatives disagreeing to the amendments of the Senate and I move:

That the reasons be adopted.

Question agreed to.

The statement read as follows—

Senate Amendment Numbers (1), (2), (3) and (4)

These amendments would propose retaining the Product Stewardship Advisory Group (PSAG), the Oil Stewardship Advisory Council (OSAC) and the Fuel Standards Consultative Committee (FSCC) and disallowed an alternative public consultation process that applied with respect to the grant and variation of approvals.

The repeal of these bodies would not prevent the Department of the Environment from consulting and engaging with industry experts on an as-needs basis without the need for costly permanent structures. The proposed abolitions would not preclude the Department of the Environment from seeking views from a broader range of organisations, experts and the community in a more flexible and targeted way. A statutory process is not required to facilitate this engagement.

Accordingly, the House of Representatives does not accept these Amendments.

Senate Amendment Numbers (5) and (6)

These amendments would disallow the removal of the requirement to publish certain notices under the Fuel Quality Standards Act 2000 and the Hazardous Waste (Regulation of Exports and Imports) Act 1989 in the Commonwealth Government Gazette and instead allow the publication of the same information on the Department of the Environment’s website.

These measures do not remove the publication requirements from those Acts; rather they require the information to be published in a more accessible location (on the Department of Environment website, rather than the Commonwealth Government Gazette). As a result, the measures enhance transparency and community participation in the policy development and decision-making process.

These amendments would also disallow a number of measures to the Hazardous Waste (Regulation of Exports and Imports) Act 1989 (HW Act) including:

- the removal of requirement to specify particulars of an application in the Regulations before a permit decision can be made;
the clarification of requirement to hold an Australian Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) transit permit. Currently, a person proposing to transit hazardous waste through Australia is required to hold an Australian-OECD transit permit. When deciding to grant a transit permit, the Minister must be satisfied that carrying out the transit proposal will not pose a significant risk of injury or damage to human beings or the environment (amongst other things). The requirement to hold an Australian-OECD permit is additional to the requirement that Australia provide consent to the exporting country for the movement to transit through Australia. There is also a requirement for the person proposing to carry out the transit to hold an import and export permit issued by the importing and exporting countries;

- the clarification of matters to be included in Basel import and export permits;
- the clarification of the period of appointment for members of the Hazardous Waste Technical Working Group; and
- to enable the Minister for the Environment to delegate his or her functions and powers under the Hazardous Waste (Regulation of Exports and Imports) Act 1989 to an APS employee who holds, or is acting in, an Executive Level 2 (or equivalent) position.

Publication requirements for regulations have not been removed; rather they require the information to be published in a more accessible location (on the Department of Environment website, rather than the Commonwealth Government Gazette). As a result, the measures enhance transparency and community participation in the policy development and decision-making process.

The requirement that a person hold an Australian-OECD transit permit, where the transit is from one OECD country to another and the Minister is satisfied that the transit proposal does not pose a significant risk of injury or damage to human beings or the environment is unnecessarily duplicative. The current requirement to hold an Australian transit permit is effectively duplicative of the requirement that Australia provide consent (as required by the relevant OECD Decision) to the exporting country for the movement to transit through Australia. The measures would not lessen the environmental protections as the Minister for the Environment would need to be satisfied that the transit does not pose a significant risk of injury or damage to human beings or the environment in order to exempt a person from a requirement to hold an Australian-OECD transit permit.

The requirement to specify the level of detail in Basel import and export permits currently required by the HW Act has resulted in situations where permit holders are required to apply for a variation to their permit as a result of changes that occur after the permit is issued that do not substantially change the nature of the proposal. For example, because the HW Act currently requires the place of import/export to be specified, a change in the port to which the hazardous waste is to be shipped due to changes in shipping routes would require a variation to the permit. Clarifying these matters will reduce the cost to business arising from the need to apply for a permit variation when details of a movement change. The environmental protections are not lessened by these measures as:

- the matters that the decision-maker must have regard to when deciding whether to grant the permit are not changed; and
- the HW Act will still enable the Minister for the Environment to include such other information in the permit as the Minister considers appropriate. For example, if the method of transport is a material factor in the decision to grant a permit, the Minister is not prevented from including particulars of this in the permit.

The Hazardous Waste Technical Working Group is being retained as it advises the Minister on technical matters that have commercial implications (for example, whether a particular type of waste is hazardous and therefore subject to the hazardous waste regime). The measure clarifies the maximum period of a member's appointment to the Working Group is three years. As members are appointed based on their expertise on matters relating to the management of hazardous waste, clarifying the period
of appointment ensures that the members' expertise and experience remains current. The Minister would not be prevented from reappointing a member for a further period of three years if the Minister is satisfied that the member's expertise remains current.

The measure to enable the Minister for the Environment to delegate his or her functions and powers under the HW Act to an APS employee who holds, or is acting in, an Executive Level 2 (or equivalent) position will enable Executive Level 2 officers to exercise the Minister's functions and powers where administrative necessity dictates that decisions be made at this level. This may include:

- providing notifications and acknowledgements under the HW Act where response times are short (i.e. 3 days following receipt of an application) and do not require decisions to be made; and
- the making of non-controversial permit decisions where the application is of a routine nature and the applicant has an established history under the HW Act.

Delegating functions and powers to Executive Level 2 officers is consistent with other legislation which contain permit regimes, including the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 which enables the Minister to delegate any or all of his or her powers and functions to an officer or employee in the Department. The Australian Administrative Law Guide also provides that it may be appropriate for junior officers to make decisions involving a limited exercise of discretion, or under provisions which will give rise to a high volume of decisions. The delegation of these powers to an Executive Level 2 employee would not prevent significant decisions being made by more senior officers or the Minister for the Environment personally.

Accordingly, the House of Representatives does not accept these Amendments.

**Senate Amendment Number (7)**

The amendment proposes amendments to the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act (PGPA Act). These amendments would prescribe the process for entering into a contract for the design and building of a submarine, or a substantial part of a submarine, as part of the future submarine project (SEA 1000 in the Defence Capability Plan as in force on 1 December 2014).

In-line with advice from the Department of Defence, the Government is pursuing a competitive evaluation process as part of the acquisition strategy for the Future Submarine programme. This process is consistent with the PGPA Act (specifically the Commonwealth Procurement Rules issued under Section 101) and the Defence Procurement Policy Manual.

Accordingly, the House of Representatives does not accept these Amendments.

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**Enhancing Online Safety for Children Bill 2014**

**Enhancing Online Safety for Children (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2014**

**Assent**

Message from the Governor-General reported informing the House of assent to the bills.

**Private Health Insurance Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2014**

**Second Reading**

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

to which the following amendment was moved:

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 calls on the government to reinstate the:
(1) provision for the subject of a complaint to ask the Ombudsman for additional time to respond to a complaint;
(2) provision for the Minister for Health to intervene where the Ombudsman decides not to investigate a complaint;
(3) provision enabling the Minister for Health to request the Ombudsman to undertake investigations;
(4) capacity of the Ombudsman to investigate complaints, produce high quality reports, and protect the rights of private health insurance consumers; and
(5) penalty for failing to participate in mediation."

Ms KING (Ballarat) (12:39): It is a pleasure to continue in this debate on the Private Health Insurance Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2014. As I was saying when I was last speaking, it is abundantly clear that a single organisation trying to cover all of the bases with fewer resources cannot be as effective a voice as an organisation solely dedicated to looking after the rights of health insurance fund members, because, quite unlike this government, the Private Health Insurance Ombudsman exists to protect the interests of Australia's private health insurance consumers.

Specifically, the Private Health Insurance Ombudsman assists health fund members to resolve disputes through an independent complaints-handling mechanism; identifies underlying problems in the practices of private health funds, or health care providers, in relation to the administration of private health insurance; provides advice to government and industry about issues affecting consumers in relation to private health insurance; and provides advice and recommendations to government and industry about private health insurance, specifically the performance of the sector and the nature of complaints. It is not as if the services of the Private Health Insurance Ombudsman have not been in demand, or that they have been ineffective or unable to deliver for consumers. With only 12 full-time-equivalent staff, the Private Health Insurance Ombudsman has handled 3,427 complaints in the 2013-14 year. That is around 65 complaints every week and it is growing. This represents a significant 16 per cent increase on the previous year, up from 2,955. Complaints made, no doubt, in part because of the former minister's decision to wave through the biggest average premium increase in a decade. One can only wonder how many more complaints will be generated by his successor, matching that with the near identical decade-high increase last month. I will come back to that shortly.

The increase in overall complaint numbers flowed through into the number of higher level or serious complaints requiring investigation by the Ombudsman. In 2013-14 the Ombudsman received 580 higher-level complaints, which represented a 28 per cent increase on the 450 received in the previous year. The Private Health Insurance Ombudsman also reported a 45 per cent increase on a number of unique visits to privatehealth.gov.au, a resource consumers can use to compare policies and obtain information about private health insurance products. Despite the strong growth in traffic to the web site and strong growth in complaints, the dedicated Private Health Insurance Ombudsman was able to report an increase in the level of consumer satisfaction, with 85 per cent of those surveyed reporting that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the service they received after making a complaint.

It does raise the question, therefore, as to why the government wants to merge the Private Health Insurance Ombudsman with the Commonwealth Ombudsman. It is also worth looking at the type of complaints the Private Health Insurance Ombudsman actually investigates. The
annual report reveals that in 2013-14 the issues causing higher numbers of complaints to the Private Health Insurance Ombudsman were oral information, hospital exclusions and restrictions, the pre-existing condition waiting period, cancellation and general service issues.

To look at one of those areas in detail, complaints about hospital exclusions and restrictions came from members who discovered that their treatment was only partially covered, or excluded under their policy. In some cases this was after their health insurer had added new restrictions or exclusions to existing policies. I stress again that we make no criticism of the Commonwealth Ombudsman. But just to highlight this one issue, hospital exclusions and restrictions is a pretty specialised area. It is hard to see how an office that is not dedicated specifically to private health insurance could handle issues like this in such an efficient fashion. Then again, of course, that may well be the whole point of this exercise, because, as we have seen repeatedly since the election, the government is not interested in being scrutinised on these issues. As it has shown again with health cuts across the portfolio and GP tax versions 1, 2, 3 and now 4, this government has repeatedly proven itself to be completely incapable—if not outwardly opposed—to standing up for patients when it comes to health care.

Of course, nowhere has this been more apparent than in this government's handling of the two private health insurance premium rises that have occurred on its watch. We saw this especially with the Minister for Health's announcement late on the afternoon of 27 February that the government would wave through the second-highest increase in private health insurance premiums in a decade. 'Taking out the trash' is how journalists refer to announcements like this, late on a Friday afternoon, as governments try to bury the bad news. Not only was this late on a Friday, it was about the last possible time the minister could make this announcement and still allow health funds the one-month notice they are required to give their members—a month's notice of premium rises. It is fair to say, then, that this was not an announcement that was ever likely to be accompanied by a large number of flags and a television camera.

As I mentioned, this was the second-highest increase in a decade—"second-highest" because that average rise of 6.18 per cent was beaten, by the barest margin, by the 6.2 per cent rise announced by her predecessor just weeks after his election. Whereas the current minister tried to hide her announcement with a Friday afternoon drop, her predecessor tried an entirely different tactic, rushing out his announcement of the biggest rise in a decade months ahead of schedule, just three days before Christmas.

So, 18 months in power and two private health insurance premium rises—both the biggest in a decade, both bigger than any announced under Labor, both around triple the inflation rate and both the biggest since the Minister for Health was the current Prime Minister. So, the current and former ministers can still argue that there was at least one former minister with a worse record when it comes to them and that, of course, is the member for Warringah, the Prime Minister, who routinely approved increases exceeding seven per cent.

When family budgets are under such pressure, when unemployment is rising and when people are watching every single dollar, it is crucial that the government do everything possible to keep private health insurance costs down. That means not just waving through every premium rise that comes across your desk; it means, as happened under Labor, ensuring that every cent of these rises can be justified.
In government, Labor did moderate these increases in the interests of consumers and because we do care about the cost-of-living pressures on Australians—just as we care about the rising out-of-pocket costs that occur in health care. By contrast, both of these rises approved since the coalition returned to power exceeded any of the six annual increases approved under the Australian Labor Party. And this did not occur by accident. In the 2012-13 budget, as a government Labor provided an additional $1.4 million over four years to increase the Private Health Insurance Ombudsman's capacity to manage complaints and to respond to consumer inquiries. In fact, in that budget Labor also provided $2.3 million over four years to the Private Health Insurance Administration Council in order to establish the Private Health Insurance Premiums and Competition Unit. This unit improved the advice provided to government on private health insurance industry pricing, industry cost drivers and insurance premiums. It is a very important mechanism for government to be able to seek advice from and to ensure that it is able to go back to private health insurance companies to say, 'We don't think this rise is justified,' and to ask them to justify that increase on every product.

Unfortunately, we have had the current Prime Minister say that his view in terms of private health insurance premiums is that they should be left entirely up to the market, clearly signalling that the government intends to withdraw from this space entirely. Again, we see this bill and the context of the bill in the context of those comments.

So, frankly, Labor's record, when it comes to standing up for private health insurance consumers every year, is very clear, and it is very different to the government's record from its 18 months in office. The government always likes to talk competition but, unfortunately, it is not delivering in this space. Labor, by contrast, not only backed a competitive private health insurance sector we backed those words with action, and we gave the ombudsman the tools to deliver for consumers. That was proven by the big increase in the number of people using the ombudsman's website to help them get the best information about their health insurance and, where necessary, to get the ombudsman to use its specialist knowledge to act for them when they believed the fund had fallen short of their expectations and their clear understanding.

So, Labor stands for private health insurance members having access to the best information and the best resources to get the best possible outcome from their health insurance at the lowest possible price—just as we stand, always, for patients having access to the best-quality and most efficient health system in the world.

Which is why this government's attack on Australia's health system is as pervasive as it is troubling. Private or public, it makes no difference; the government wants you, as a consumer, to pay more and to get less—high premiums, up-front payments, longer hospitals queues and more expensive medicines. It does not matter what area of health, the government's diagnosis is always the same: you should pay more.

It is also worth looking briefly at the profile of the private health insurance industry. The former Minister for Health, of course, predicted catastrophic consequences when Labor made the decision to means test the private health insurance rebate. And—we have this on record—it still remains the now-government's policy to abolish that private health insurance means test. I look forward to the government bringing that legislation forward. This was, of course, a very prudent budget measure which has resulted in substantial savings to the budget that have been able to be reinvested in health.
The government, or the opposition as they were then—prone to exaggeration and utterly incapable of working in a bipartisan manner—said that means testing the private health insurance rebate would see droves of people abandon their cover. Well, in fact, quite the opposite has been true. Indeed, over recent years we have seen the number of Australians with some private health insurance actually increase. In June 2008 more than 9.5 million people, or 44.9 per cent of the population, had some form of hospital treatment cover. In June 2014 this had risen to more than 11 million people, or 47.2 per cent of the population. And when it comes to general treatment, in June 2008 more than 10.6 million people had private health insurance, representing 50.1 per cent of the population, and in June 2014, 55.3 per cent of the population, or more than 12.9 million Australians, had some form of general treatment cover.

In fact, what we have also seen is an increase in the number of people using the privatehealth.gov website, which has been an important thing for people to do—for people to become much more aware of the type of cover they have and to take the opportunity to ensure they are getting the best cover to meet their needs at their particular time in life and review their cover more regularly. I encourage people to look at the privatehealth.gov website, which provides all of the information for all of the products right the way across the sector, as opposed to some of the more commercial products that only provide information for those products and those funds that provide a fee to participate in that commercial service. It is a very important government service and one that I hope is continued to be supported and expanded where possible, or where it needs to be, by this government.

Labor believes in a competitive private health insurance industry, which is why we opposed the government’s decision to sell off Medibank Private; the proceeds of which are not going back into health—a huge missed opportunity—but back into infrastructure, but not infrastructure across the country. It is infrastructure in a particular area in the community—well deserved, I am sure, and well needed. But, given that it is the government’s decision to sell Medibank Private, it does seem to have been an opportunity that perhaps the health sector will tell them they have missed.

We know one of the real winners from the sale of Medibank was Australia’s spin doctors, with the government having awarded a $2,000 a day contract to sell the sale of Medibank in January 2014. Despite this, the government was not able to explain how the sale of Medibank Private would increase competition in the sector, be in the best interests of health consumers or actually keep downward pressure on premiums. In fact, the opposite has been the case. If this move was going to increase competition, it certainly has not been demonstrated through the second highest private health insurance premiums in the past decade—something waved through by the Minister for Health earlier this month and announced late on a Friday afternoon.

As to some of the substantive elements of the bill, the opposition—as you would indicate from this speech—does have some reservations about the merger between the Private Health Insurance Ombudsman and the Commonwealth Ombudsman. We are worried that it will diminish the capacity of the Commonwealth Ombudsman in terms of where its resourcing is at the moment. Again, I reiterate that it is a very important and excellent organisation, but it is one that is about to take on a very significant and important role in relation to metadata and we are concerned about its capacity to fulfil the work that it has. We are also concerned about the capacity of an organisation to specialise in this area of private health insurance.
Specifically, we are concerned that at present the subject of a complaint may request additional time to report to the Private Health Insurance Ombudsman. This ability is not being transferred ostensibly to provide consistency with the Commonwealth Ombudsman's existing powers, and we are concerned about that. I will be moving some second reading amendments shortly to that affect. We will not be—I will relieve some pressure off the minister's staff members here—opposing the bill in this House outright. We will, however, be moving some second reading amendments that seek to reinstate the powers that the current Private Health Insurance Ombudsman has that are not being transferred to the Commonwealth Ombudsman. We want a very clear explanation, when the minister comes into the House to sum up this bill, as to why they have not been included—and I will detail each one of those. We have also asked that this bill be referred for committee inquiry in the Senate. We will be asking for that to occur, because we think it is really important that there is proper scrutiny of this bill in relation to those powers. We will be reserving our position in the Senate, in relation to the voting on the bill, depending on what that inquiry comes up with.

As to those measures, as I said, one of the measures that is not in there is the capacity for the subject of a complaint to request additional time to report to the insurance ombudsman and that is not being transferred. Similarly, there is a current provision for the minister to intervene where the Private Health Insurance Ombudsman decides not to investigate a complaint. There is the capacity for the minister to intervene and say, 'I actually think this complaint does need to be investigated.' I think that is important. As shadow health minister, I get emails on a weekly basis—as I am sure is the case for many members in this place—from people who have a complaint about their experience of private health insurance. The capacity for a minister to be able to respond to those inquiries from backbenchers to say, 'Actually, I think this probably is worthy of further investigation'—to have that power to be able to say that—has been removed in the transfer from the Private Health Insurance Ombudsman over to the Commonwealth Ombudsman. Again, I think that is an important component to have, and it is unfortunate that has not reached its way into this bill.

Also omitted is the provision for the minister to request the Private Health Insurance Ombudsman to undertake an investigation. Again, that is not being transferred over. I am making an assumption that that has happened because that is not currently within the existing powers under the Commonwealth Ombudsman. But with this specific area, private health insurance, it is a measure that is important.

Likewise, at present, the Private Health Insurance Ombudsman is not able to request information about the complainant's dealings with the subject of a complaint without the complainant's consent. This also applies when undertaking an own-motion investigation. These limits on information-gathering powers are not retained by the move. Whilst the Commonwealth Ombudsman will retain the Private Health Insurance Ombudsman's power to undertake voluntary or compulsory mediation, the penalty for failing to participate in that mediation will be reduced from 30 penalty units to 10 penalty units. Whilst that might be welcomed by some in the sector, the incentive that the penalty units power has is not explained by that change. The penalty for failing or for refusing to provide information to the Private Health Insurance Ombudsman is a maximum of 30 penalty units and is a strict liability offence. The bill proposes to rely on section 36 of the Ombudsman Act, with a maximum penalty of $1,000 and/or three months imprisonment. Section 36 is not an offence
of strict liability, although the evidentiary burden will be upon the defendant to prove that they had a reasonable excuse for failing to comply. Again, in terms of the powers currently utilised by the Private Health Insurance Ombudsman, we think there needs to be further investigation of the decision to not move that over.

So, whilst not opposing the Bill outright in this chamber—and again I stress 'in this chamber'—I do want to flag the opposition's concerns about these omissions as well as, more significantly, the opposition's concerns that the capacity of the Private Health Insurance Ombudsman to pursue complaints; provide advice to government and industry about issues affecting consumers in relation to private health insurance; and provide advice and recommendations to government and industry about private health insurance—specifically the performance of the sector and the nature of complaints—will be diminished.

With this in mind I can express the opposition's intention that this bill should be referred outside of this chamber for inquiry so that these issues can be investigated at some depth to inform the debate about this proposal.

We do not think the government has made the case for these changes either in announcing the proposed merger or subsequently, and the opposition therefore is right to hold these concerns. Again this appears as though it has been a line coming out of the Commission of Audit or the budget about something that looks like a good idea without proper and thorough investigation and explanation of why it is actually occurring.

And it is especially, obviously, the case when taking into consideration the context in which this decision is being taken: more than $5.9 billion in cuts already realised in the health portfolio and billions of dollars still to be considered.

The government of course still intends to pursue its freeze on the indexation of Medicare benefits services, effectively cutting the income of general practice by $1.3 billion. The government obviously still has on the table. It is increasing by $1.3 billion the cost of medicines—a measure that includes significant changes to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme safety net too. The government not only intends to merge the Private Health Insurance Ombudsman with the Commonwealth Ombudsman but also wants to cease the Private Health Insurance Administration Council as a separate body, instead planning to merge it into the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission and the merger of health fund prudential regulation functions to the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority.

Private health insurance is a very specialised area. I know from having worked with the people in the department in that space before how specialised that particular area is, and frankly it would be a damning indictment on the government if we were to lose that area of specialty and the level of scrutiny that is on a product that several million Australians rely on.

Again, in our view the government has not made the case for change. It may well be that the opposition can support these changes, but such is the dysfunction of the government in the way it conducts itself that it does not consulted the sector over this. It genuinely has not. The sector has been in to see me about it. It came as a bit of a surprise to them. They are not sure about some of the details of it. It did not consult the crossbench—I have certainly talked to them as well—and it certainly did not consult the opposition. I do acknowledge a briefing was offered, but we had already well and truly formulated our position by then.
So I do think it is important that there be some proper scrutiny on the bill. We will reserve our position in relation to that for the other chamber once that scrutiny has occurred, but I particularly want the government to explain very clearly why it is of the view that those important measures are not in there. I move:

"whilst not declining to give the bill a second reading the House calls on the government to reinstate the:

(1) provision for the subject of a complaint to ask the Ombudsman for additional time to respond to a complaint;
(2) provision for the Minister for Health to intervene where the Ombudsman decides not to investigate a complaint;
(3) provision enabling the Minister for Health to request the Ombudsman to undertake investigations;
(4) capacity of the Ombudsman to investigate complaints, produce high quality reports, and protect the rights of private health insurance consumers; and
(5) penalty for failing to participate in mediation."

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

Mr Danby: I second the amendment and reserve my right to speak.

Dr GILLESPIE (Lyne) (13:04): The Private Health Insurance Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2014 is very much part of our efficiency agenda and measures. It overall reduces the number of additional government bodies in keeping with our red tape reduction program. There are also some housekeeping measures included in this bill. Essentially, it transfers the function of the Private Health Insurance Ombudsman into the Commonwealth Ombudsman's office. The Private Health Insurance Ombudsman assists health fund consumers. It also advises government. It also informs consumers through written, verbal or digital information. This function will continue.

Previous speakers have talked about the abolition of it. It is just rolling the responsibilities into an existing federal government department, and those functions will continue. As we have a very talented Australian Public Service, I am sure they will be able to cope with the responsibilities so given, but it will reduce costs significantly—at minimum at least $600,000 a year and perhaps a whole lot more. Think about a separate body requiring separate premises, a separate secretariat support, all these dollars and cents multiplied across the whole public service. If we can make it more efficient, well and good.

Not only do we have the Intergenerational report on one hand outlining the increasing responsibilities in a fiscal sense that the Commonwealth will have as a result of the ageing demographic; in the electorate of Lyne we have been coping with that demographic for 15 or more years. Not only is all of Australia looking at increased costs because of the ageing phenomenon; we are hoping that lots of people like I have in my electorate will maintain their activity and engagement through voluntary or part-time work But, unfortunately, it is a fact of human nature that there are increasing health costs in the ageing population. So we have had to cope with twice the number of 65-year-olds, which has placed a very large burden on the public hospital system and the private hospital system, as well as on medical practitioners in their private rooms. Somewhere along the line, the Commonwealth has to pay. That is why we need to reduce red tape; because red tape induces cost.
In the electorate of Lyne, we have two major private health institutions that rely on a robust private health insurance industry to deliver their services to the electorate of Lyne. In the town of Taree we have the Mayo Private Hospital, which has been successfully operating since 1922, serving the people of the Manning, from a cottage hospital through to its now state-of-the-art facilities. It is an 81-bed hospital with three theatres and multiple imaging labs—including a cardiac intervention imaging lab. It has new pathology services. It has new radiology services associated with it, including an MRI.

In the first year since the Healthe Care group took over the Mayo Private Hospital in the Manning, over $10 million of capital upgrades have been committed and spent. So there are general medical and surgical services there. There is a large mental health capability and service that the Mayo delivers well outside the Manning, north into the Hastings and south and east into the Forster catchment area. They run a five-chair dialysis unit, which delivers state-of-the-art care for those with renal failure. There are rehabilitation services and a full allied health service. Over 230 staff are employed, with 100 or so credentialed doctors. This is a major asset to the people of the Manning and the surrounding areas.

In Port Macquarie we have a longstanding private hospital, now run by Ramsay Health Care, called Port Macquarie Private Hospital. In the suite of private hospital facilities, they also have the Coolenberg Day Surgery and the Hastings Day Surgery. Within the private hospital, they have 80-plus beds, depending on how many are in the day unit. They have invested heavily in the rehabilitation area, which is very critical in our area because we have larger than average numbers of elderly people, who take a while to rehabilitate after hip surgery or knee surgery or after a cerebrovascular event or a stroke.

We have a state-of-the-art facilities now being provided for people in Port Macquarie. This takes enormous pressure off the public hospital system, where I worked for many years. There is the full range of medical and surgical facilities, short of neurosurgery and cardiothoracic surgery. Services like orthopaedics have been there since inception, and the services for respiratory, cardiology, gastroenterology, oncology, palliative care, urology and vascular are all second to none.

The people in the Lyne electorate are very well served by health facilities now. The Manning Base Hospital has just had a $20 million upgrade announced by my state colleague the member for Myall Lakes, Steve Bromhead. What a fantastic job he has been doing for people in the Manning. I am sure that in this weekend’s state election he will be rewarded for the tireless efforts he has undertaken for the people in Taree, Forster and the area of Myall Lakes. It is hard to get care if you do not have hospital facilities—compared to some of the electorates in the rest of the country, we are very blessed—but as I have mentioned, both Manning Base Hospital and Port Macquarie Base Hospital would be overflowing if we did not have these two private hospital institutions in both the major towns of the electorate.

So, getting back to this legislation, the Private Health Insurance Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2014 tidies up, as I mentioned, some housekeeping matters. It removes references to the base premium measures—without any financial impact, it makes it workable. There was a lot of toing and froing about this when it was first mooted and then there was delay in royal assent, so a lot of these measures have been implemented but this is legislatively tidying it all up.

So I commend the red tape reduction program that this government has undertaken. We have reduced red tape that people like the private health industry have to put with, and many
other industries. Government regulation and red tape does lead to a dollar cost for many industries. The private health industry was paying for the ombudsman on a cost-recovery basis. If we can reduce the costs, it means lower premiums. We all depend on the private health insurance system in one way or another—whether you are premium payer and a self-insurer or not, everyone relies on the health system sometime or other. If we do not have a viable private health industry, the public health system will fall over.

So I commend this bill to the House and I recommend all its features.

Mr CHAMPION (Wakefield) (13:13): It is a great pleasure to speak on the Private Health Insurance Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2014. This bill seeks to do a number of things, but mainly it seeks to transfer the function of the Private Health Insurance Ombudsman to the office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman and to align those two offices as part of the government’s commitment—I guess, as the previous speaker would say—to reduce red tape and regulatory oversight.

There are some concerning changes in this bill and ones that the government will have to endeavour to explain to the public. At the present, the subject of a complaint may request additional time to report to the PHI Ombudsman. It would seem to me that that is not an onerous thing. In fact it is of benefit to the subject of the complaint, which would no doubt be a private health insurance fund. This ability to ask for extra time is not transferred in this bill—ostensibly to provide consistency with the Commonwealth Ombudsman’s existing powers.

There is currently a provision for the minister to intervene where the PHI Ombudsman decides not to investigate a complaint. This bill has no equivalent provision for the minister to intervene where the Commonwealth Ombudsman decides not to investigate a complaint. Similarly, there is currently a provision for the minister to request the PHI Ombudsman to undertake investigations, but this bill has no equivalent provision for the minister to make such a request of the Commonwealth Ombudsman. There are a number of other issues—for example, the penalty for failing to participate in mediation is being reduced from 30 penalty units to 10 penalty units and there are some limits on the information powers of the ombudsman.

This is one of those bills that will give those opposite the opportunity to decry regulation and they will suggest that there will be some great effect on fees from this relatively minor reform. But the complexity of the modern world is always with us and it is not just government that is responsible for that. The member for Hindmarsh, in an earlier debate, pointed out that much of the red tape that people find frustrating is the result of private sector endeavours. This is one of those areas. We are dealing with private insurers and their regulation.

The shadow minister, the member for Ballarat, pointed out that the ombudsman has been busy, handling 3,427 complaints in 2013–14, or around 65 complaints per week. That is up 16 per cent on the previous year. The ombudsman has not been sitting idle but has, rather, been quite busy. That activity is of course of benefit to consumers. It is consumers who approach the ombudsman with issues relating to private health. One person’s regulatory burden is another person’s consumer protection. I think the government, and indeed the parliament, needs to be careful when looking at these things. We need to make sure that the necessary protections for consumers are there.
This government’s record on health is not great—$50 billion worth of cuts to public health in this country, to public hospitals, to state health budgets. We know that hospital budgets are under increasing pressure—from the march of time, the march of demographics, the march of medical technology and from healthcare inflation. Healthcare costs are rising much more steeply than is ordinary inflation. There is massive pressure on state health budgets, so $50 billion worth of cuts to states is a serious problem. In Deputy Speaker Hawke’s own state, Premier Baird has called on the federal government to look again at those cuts. Premiers of all persuasions are grappling with how to deal with those cuts. It is a very serious issue.

This government also shut down some 61 Medicare Locals, even those that were working very well. I know that in South Australia my own Medicare Local and the Medicare Locals in country areas were working very well. You can make always make some sort of argument about the efficiency of such a program across the nation, but I think that members of both parties would agree that the ones in my state were working pretty well. With Medicare Locals the government has thrown the baby out with the bathwater—shutting down 61 of them at enormous cost to the taxpayer, only to reinvent the wheel with primary healthcare networks. People will scratch their heads if they look closely at that. They will wonder what great gain to public health was achieved out of that whole episode.

This government has even considered the privatisation of Australian Hearing. I certainly hope the member for Boothby is weighing in on behalf of an institution that has been around since 1947. It was formed as a result of a decision of the Chifley government to protect war veterans and the victims of a rubella outbreak, but it has become a very important institution. It had the support of the Menzies government and has had the support of all governments since then. It was even expanded quite a bit under Prime Minister Howard. It is an important national institution that both parties should be proud of. It should not be subjected to the vagaries of the private sector. We know that its current service provision—in particular the good research of the National Acoustic Laboratories—would not be replicated under a private model. It is an important public institution that has put Australia at the forefront worldwide of advanced manufacturing in hearing technology. We should be proud of that—and we should certainly not be putting it at risk.

Then of course we have seen the GP tax. I think we are up to mark 4 now. The latest cuts to rebates equate to an $8 GP tax. That is what the effect of them would be—forcing every GP clinic across the nation to be a tax collector. The original $7 GP co-payment was a tax not just on every doctor’s visit but on every scan and every blood test. We know that the senior figures in this government who have been trying to put this in place for a very long time will not give up. They will return to it. That first iteration of the GP tax gives you some idea of where, given the slightest opportunity, they will try to go. Mark 2 and mark 3, which occurred around Christmas, I think—it is hard to remember—not only had cuts to rebates but also insane time lines for GP surgeries. I know the member for Boothby was visited by many GPs. I think we are on to our second health minister now, and I know he has been lobbying away very carefully. He knows just the sort of chaos that was inserted into these very hardworking small businesses, particularly around Christmas time. You would not have wanted to be a practice manager around Christmas time. You would not have had much time with your family, because you would have been too busy trying to completely overhaul billing operations in
your small practice and trying to work out how you were going to restructure your business. So we know why the government has had to raise the white flag of retreat on these things.

We know they have got a very spotty record on health. In their Our plan—Real solutions for all Australians there were not many mentions about health and certainly no mention of any of the matters that I have talked about. It was all pretty flossy stuff, but they did say a few things about private health insurance. They have on occasion said that they would bring it back when fiscal circumstances allowed, and the Treasurer, the member for North Sydney, was making promises that they would be in surplus in year one. That would have given people the impression that the means testing of the private health care rebates—something that has saved the budget $20 billion—was something that the government was going to pursue. But we now know that they have absolutely no intention of turning back Labor’s very sensible means testing—its very sensible saving of $20 billion to the budget—because they have not included it in the Treasurer’s intergenerational review.

We know that they are full of hypocrisy and chicanery on this. That is their MO. We know this from the fact that they have increased private health insurance premiums by an average of 6.18 per cent—and that is from an ABC news report on 3 March this year. What we get is this rather limp urging by the health minister for consumers to shop around, and yet here we have a measure in this bill to help them deal with complaints with private health insurers and they are shifting that into the Commonwealth Ombudsman’s portfolio of responsibility. Even though the Private Health Insurance Ombudsman is a very busy ombudsman, they are shifting that to the Commonwealth Ombudsman, who is busy with a range of other matters.

So there are some concerns here. While the government talks a terrific game on private health insurance—saying that they are all for supporting it and that it suits their ideological dispositions towards health—we know that from Fraser onwards they have been constantly trying to reinsert the profit motive and dismantle universality in this regard because it is just part of their DNA. It is just part of the thing that they want to do. We have to be cognisant of this hypocrisy. We have to be as cognisant of their hypocrisy on private health insurance as we should be cognisant of their hostility to universal health care.

We know their agenda in government. It is a chaotic moving feast of hypocrisy on the one hand—this commitment to the marketplace on one hand—and, on the other hand, this deep ingrained hostility and commitment to things like co-payments and market signals. You can go back to Fightback and the Fraser years and you can go back to Prime Minister Howard. He wanted to tear Medicare apart. That is what he promised to do. They have this ingrained tendency when in public office, in government, when they are on the treasury bench, to absolutely make a mess out of health and not build on it, as the public would want them to do. Rather, they show chicanery, hypocrisy and hostility toward universal health care, to Medicare—one of the finest healthcare systems in the world; a mixed model of private and public insurance providers; a universal insurer. It is a very important system which has given Australia not only good coverage but also a healthcare system that keeps costs down.

I implore the government and those who are party to it to remember the political consequences of their actions in this place, particularly with regard to health care, and I would urge them to pursue a more moderate course, if only in their own interest but especially in Australia’s interest.
Dr SOUTHCOTT (Boothby) (13:28): I am pleased to rise on the Private Health Insurance Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2014. This is a fairly minor change. It involves the Private Health Insurance Ombudsman being abolished and its functions being taken over by the Commonwealth Ombudsman. It is estimated that there will be savings of about $600,000 per year, which will be a reduction in the levy that is paid for by private health insurance funds, and it will have a small impact on reducing the cost of premiums.

This is an important issue in my electorate. More than three-quarters of voters in the electorate of Boothby hold private health insurance. Two-thirds of them hold hospital insurance and more than three-quarters hold general treatment insurance. My constituents have always been very concerned about issues related to private health insurance and have been dismayed by the continual attacks that were made by the Labor Party on private health insurance. Before the 2007 election, we saw Kevin Rudd say that there would be no changes to private health insurance, and then, in each subsequent budget, attacks were made on private health insurance and its holders.

I seek leave to continue my remarks at a later stage.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott): The debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 43, and the member will have leave to continue his remarks when the debate is resumed.

STATMENTS BY MEMBERS

Israel: Elections

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (13:30): I would like to record my concern at the victory of Prime Minister Netanyahu and his Likud Party in Israel's recent elections, which appears to be attributable to extreme pre-election rhetoric and racism from Netanyahu, including statements that there will be no Palestinian state and there will be increased settlements and his warnings to beware 'Arabs voting in droves'.

This election outcome puts the Israeli leadership on a collision course with the United States, the EU and the 135 countries that already recognise Palestine as a state, and it does not augur well for Israel's own future. The White House Chief of Staff, Denis McDonough, said: 'We cannot simply pretend that these comments were never made …

The headlines yesterday from one of Israel's main English language newspapers, Haaretz, say it all: 'On the unavoidable path to Israel's nightmarish future', 'Netanyahu's successful campaign may prove destructive for Israel' and 'Israel chooses the path to apartheid'.

Israel's freezing of 60 per cent of Palestinian tax revenue for more than three months has been condemned by the UN, the US and Israel's President and, according to the US Department of State, could lead to the collapse of the Palestinian Authority. To my knowledge, there has been no comment from Australia. A UN Security Council resolution in December last year to set a deadline to end Israel's decades-long occupation of Palestinian territories was opposed only by two countries: Australia and the US.

Given the failure of US sponsored peace talks, it is essential that Palestinians now have access to international bodies to assist in ending the occupation, the Gaza blockade and the illegal settlement building. It is now time for the Australian government to show genuine support for the two-state solution and recognise the state of Palestine.
National Schools Constitutional Convention

Mrs WICKS (Robertson) (13:31): I am pleased to say that the Central Coast is really well represented in this year's National Schools Constitutional Convention, being held here in Canberra. Yesterday at Parliament House, I had the privilege of speaking with Caleb Ferry, from Gosford High School, and I also met with Liam Loader, from Central Coast Grammar School, in Erina Heights.

This is the 20th edition of the convention, which started as an initiative of the Constitutional Centenary Fund. The three-day event features more than 120 students representing schools from all across Australia. They are discussing and debating various topics, such as proposals for a bill of rights, and looking at the Magna Carta on its 800th anniversary. The itinerary for the convention also includes working groups, soapbox sessions and a dinner with a judge from the High Court.

Caleb was telling me about how delegates will be investigating the roles of elected governments and parliaments and the responsibilities of leaders on issues such as safer streets and national security, which I know are key issues in my electorate of Robertson. He also said he is looking forward to tackling case studies from around the world, including Canada and New Zealand, and how these countries approach constitutional issues. Caleb is a 17-year-old who is passionate about politics and the law, and it was terrific to hear him talk about the benefits of interacting with other like-minded people in a place such as this one.

It is my hope that more young people from the Central Coast will also be selected as future representatives in future years and continue to inspire our young Central Coast leaders of the next generation.

Telecommunications

Mr HUSIC (Chifley) (13:33): I just want to express my outright astonishment that the Abbott government has been completely unable to give any assurance to the telecommunications industry about the extent to which the government will help provide funds to aid the sector in transitioning to the new metadata laws that are being debated in the other place right now. The scale of the costs established by PwC is between roughly $190 million and just over $300 million, and yet to date our telecommunications sector is none the wiser as to what the capital contribution by the government will be. It is completely stunning. What the Abbott government is suggesting is that the sector must wait until the budget to find out what the support will be.

Ms Ryan interjecting—

Mr HUSIC: Another surprise indeed, member for Lalor. I cannot believe that people of the calibre of the member for Bradfield, who knows full well the cost pressures on the sector, and the Minister for Communications are unable to secure through the government some sort of information or indication for the sector about what is going on. No other sector would be treated so shabbily as it has been by the Abbott government, and they should be stamping up and letting the sector know what the costs will be and how much will be supported by the Abbott government.
Mr WHITELEY (Braddon) (13:34): When I was elected in 2013, there was no greater issue on the electorate's mind than fixing Tasmania's shipping and helping our businesses compete on a level playing field with mainland businesses when it comes to exports. I committed to fixing the Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme and I have delivered: $203 million over four years to expand the scheme to include going to markets not currently covered by the TFES.

This government is doing everything it can to enable Tasmanian businesses to grow, to create employment and to capitalise on the three landmark free trade agreements finalised under its watch. While this government is enabling business in Tasmania, those opposite were economic vandals in Tasmania, and they continue to be economic vandals even in opposition.

After six years of trashing the joint, there was nothing quite so loud, two Fridays ago, as the sounds of silence from those opposite. There was not a peep out of the ALP, not a statement from the Leader of the Opposition and not a peep out of my tagger, Senator Anne Urquhart, or her colleagues. They have no ticker. They had no willingness to fight for the Tasmanian people or business, and now in opposition they are just as weak and just as silent. Where was the shadow minister for regional development? Where was the shadow minister for transport? Where was Senator Urquhart? The silence was deafening.

If this is the response of those opposite to an economic game-changing policy like the TFES, I cannot even begin to imagine what it would be like with them back in government.

Ms RYAN (Lalor—Opposition Whip) (13:36): On Sunday I had a great opportunity to celebrate Harmony Day at the Wyndham Multicultural Fiesta, at the beautiful Werribee Park. It was a great setting for what was a fabulous day. I joined my state colleague Tim Pallas MP, Victoria's Treasurer; Councillor Gupta and Councillor Fairclough, from Wyndham City Council; and representatives from various community groups, including AMES, the Bendigo Bank and Parks Victoria.

The Wyndham Multicultural Fiesta is a day to celebrate diversity and inclusivity and to share our different cultures through music, dance and food. We enjoyed great performances from 19 different groups who participated in this wonderful event from all four corners of the globe—if you will forgive that expression.

My local community is incredibly diverse and the day showed that off beautifully. I would like to congratulate the organisers, Jennie Barrera of the Wyndham Community and Education Centre and Richard Dove from Victoria Police; and the Wyndham Humanitarian Network for making this fantastic celebration possible. Our cultural diversity is one of our greatest strengths and is at the heart of who we are. It was wonderful to see toddlers through to octogenarians enjoying the perfect weather and a wonderful day. I would also like to thank Kathy Brunton and to make special mention of her and her fabulous team who, as always, organised a wonderful event.

Mr WYATT (Hasluck) (13:37): I wish to update the House on a variety of goings on in my electorate of Hasluck. Last week I had the great opportunity to welcome three ministers to
my electorate. Minister for Health Sussan Ley attended a roundtable of my local GPs and visited both the public and private hospitals in the suburban precinct of Midland. The roundtable involved valuable discussion on patient volume, oral health, Medicare and private health insurance. I was delighted to show Minister Ley, who is also the Minister for Sport, the reinvigorated baseball facilities of Barbagallo Park. Thank you to Perth Heat for giving Minister Ley and me the opportunity to take a swing in the batting cage.

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment, Bob Baldwin, was a welcome guest at our Green Army project sites. Minister Baldwin and I had a discussion with Kalamunda Shire executives and even pulled out a few weeds along the way. Nevertheless, Bob was happy to move along to the next meeting when the dirt digging started.

Minister for Justice, Michael Keenan, also visited my electorate of Hasluck to announce funding for local schools as part of the coalition's $18 million Schools Security Program. Minister Keenan and I then participated in a roundtable on crime prevention awareness attended by, amongst others, Forrestfield police and Neighbourhood Watch. The visit finished with the announcement of CCTV funding for the City of Swan. This is a proactive crime prevention initiative to keep our streets safer and a welcome addition for Hasluck. These are just a few of the significant events that happened in the suburbs of Hasluck.

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (13:39): Today many members of Australia's South Sudanese communities, together with the Reverend Tim Costello, have travelled to parliament in Canberra to brief all of us on the humanitarian crisis and conflicts in South Sudan.

Like many others, I felt enormous joy when people were getting ready for a referendum to create the world's newest nation. The desire of Australia's South Sudanese communities to vote was overflowing. I remember very distinctly in December 2010 working with local communities, the federal government and organisations like Diaspora Action Australia to get buses for thousands of South Sudanese in Australia to get to the polling booths in Melbourne to cast their votes. The overwhelming result in January 2011 created the world's newest nation and heralded a time of healing and building, of ending child soldiers and lost boys and creating a new government. However, since 2013 we have seen repeated outbreaks of violence, which continue today. There are now over two million people displaced internally or in neighbouring countries.

The promise of 2011 is under threat, but here in Australia the communities have taken the decision to fight for peace. The South Sudan Australia Peace Initiative has taken the bold but important step of bringing together the various South Sudanese communities to stop the conflicts in South Sudan being replicated here in Australia, to push for peace in South Sudan and to demand urgent action on this massive humanitarian crisis. Using Australia as a crucible to nurture and then spread the values of peace and non-violence across the world is exactly what parliament should be encouraging all of our communities to do. I applaud you. South Sudan Oyee!

Hindmarsh Electorate: Clean Up Australia Day

Mr WILLIAMS (Hindmarsh) (13:41): Earlier this month I joined over half a million Australians and rolled up my sleeves and took part in Clean Up Australia Day in my electorate of Hindmarsh. I love getting involved in the Clean Up Australia Day initiative, and
this year I joined Immanuel College students to help pick up roadside rubbish at West Beach Skate Park and along Tapleys Hill Road. It was great to see school students out there taking pride in their surroundings. I then joined members of the Grange Baptist Church cleaning up Kirkcaldy Park. I had a great time with the parents and children in Grange. We even pulled an old bike out of the creek.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the organisers of both sites, Jude Thorpe and Jill Hinton, and the large number of volunteers who took part for their commitment and enthusiasm. I would also like to acknowledge the efforts at West Beach of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association, which the member for Chifley, Ed Husic, should be proud of. It was fantastic to see them out in large numbers again.

What Clean Up Australia Day really highlights is the need for each of us to look after our environment. This year Clean Up Australia Day celebrated its 25th anniversary. In that time volunteers have removed over 300,000 tonnes of rubbish from our parks, beaches, roads and green spaces—a terrific achievement. On a larger scale, the federal government is improving the environment through the National Landcare Program and the Green Army initiative. In South Australia this includes $1 million of funding to improve the health of the River Torrens, which runs through my electorate. I look forward to seeing the positive impact on this important waterway. I congratulate everyone who participated in Clean Up Australia Day.

Workplace Relations

Mr GILES (Scullin) (13:42): Reports today in an article in The Australian Financial Review by Ewin Hannan that Australia's largest carpet manufacturer is seeking to use the Abbott government's proposed national construction code to cut the workplace conditions of low-paid textile workers can leave Australians in no doubt about this government's true intentions when it comes to industrial relations. I echo the comments made in that article by Michele O'Neil, Secretary of the Textile, Clothing & Footwear Union, who noted the company's tactics showed the code's impact was wider than the government's stated intentions and its injudicious, unhelpful and inflammatory rhetoric. Michele said:

This is not just about how a union official behaves on a construction site … It's about a textile worker not being able to have an agreement that protects their job.

This is true. But of course it is about more than this. Australian workers should be subject to one set of workplace laws that secure fairness, fundamental rights and safety at work. This should not be too much to ask in any democracy, but it is clearly too much to expect from this mean and tricky government, which is wilfully, ideologically blind to the realities of Australian workplaces and which is, more so, heedless of the human consequences of this ideological agenda.

Page Electorate: Road Safety

Mr HOGAN (Page) (13:43): My entire community was shocked and deeply saddened by the horrific crash at Dyraaba that took the lives of Shaun, Kaleb and Zara Zagar in June 2013. Shaun, 28, and his children Kaleb, 6, and Zara, 5, were killed on a Tuesday morning when another car crashed into their car as they waited by the side of the road for the school bus. I have met with Andrew Zagar, who is the father of Shaun and grandfather of Kaleb and Zara, to express my and the community's sadness about what was such a needless tragedy. The grief
experienced by this family is immeasurable. It is always very upsetting when lives so young are cut so short.

I want to acknowledge the more than 1,500 people in my community who have signed a petition calling for harsher sentencing for repeat offenders, particularly those offenders under the influence of alcohol and drugs. I share their concerns. This accident was a tragedy that need not have occurred. The petition asks for the New South Wales Legislative Assembly to consider harsher penalties for repeat offenders, particularly those under the influence of drugs and alcohol. It asks that repeat offenders who seriously injure or kill another member of society while under the influence or while disqualified from driving be given a minimum 15-year sentence with structured rehabilitation programs of consequence put in place. The driver of the car that crashed into Andrews Zagar's car will face court later next month.

**Makin Electorate: Kurdish Newroz Festival**

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (13:45): Last Friday evening, along with my colleagues the member for Adelaide, the Hon. Kate Ellis, and state Labor MPs Michael Atkinson and Leesa Vlahos, I attended the Kurdish Newroz Festival at Bonython Park in Adelaide. Newroz is a cultural celebration of the start of the new year and the beginning of spring for the Kurdish people. The evening commenced with the symbolic lighting of a fire. Most of the Kurdish people in Adelaide came to Australia in more recent decades, having fled the instability of their homeland. The instability continues, and they all have stories to tell about the ongoing suffering and hardships their people back home continue to endure. One person I spoke with had only just returned from his home town and told me about 17 of his townspeople who had been taken hostage by ISIS and were awaiting a horrific execution. That same day, news reports came through that three Kurdish prisoners had been executed. The hostage taking and executions have made the Kurdish people even more determined to celebrate Newroz. Whilst they clearly grieve for those killed, their message to all is that their culture will not be destroyed and that they will not submit to the demands or brutality of ISIS. Any attempts to dissuade Kurdish people from celebrating Newroz only strengthen their resolve to do so. I extend to the Kurdish people my support and my admiration for their courage and determination in the face of terrible adversity.

**New South Wales State Election**

Mrs SUDMALIS (Gilmore) (13:46): I would like to take this opportunity today to compliment my two state Liberal colleagues Shelley Hancock, member for South Coast, and Gareth Ward, member for Kiama. The work they have done in the last four years is to be applauded. Their commitment to our community, with the next Baird Liberal government, will continue the foundations they have established. For 16 years the investment by New South Wales state Labor in our South Coast was almost nil. We had schools in desperate need of repair, hospitals needing critical upgrades and the Princes Highway suffering from years of neglect. In her first four years, Shelley worked tirelessly with the previous federal member for Gilmore, Jo Gash, and between them they managed some great improvements for our region. But, as every resident knows, since the change to a Liberal government came, with the help of Shelley Hancock for South Coast and Gareth Ward for Kiama, the rate of upgrades, improvement and infrastructure investment has been fantastic. These two Liberal MPs have worked constantly and consistently for our community, and our whole local area benefits. Our schools are improved, our hospital facilities are much better and the Princes Highway from
Kiama to Berry will be brilliant, not to mention the work already done on the South Nowra section. The New South Wales Liberal government had to make tough decisions in the beginning, with a bad debt legacy from Labor, but the strategy has worked. New South Wales is moving ahead, and I look forward to working with these great elected members. Hopefully, they are very successful this Saturday and Baird is returned to government.

**Dementia**

Ms CLAYDON (Newcastle) (13:48): At present there is no cure for Alzheimer's disease or other types of dementia. However, research over the last decade has provided new hope for dementia prevention. In particular, a growing body of evidence suggests that a number of lifestyle and health factors may help to reduce one's risk of dementia. In addition to tackling risk before the development of dementia, there is also evidence that lifestyle factors such as physical activity, cognitive stimulation and nutrition can improve cognition, mood, behaviour and related outcomes for people living with dementia. With this evidence at hand, Alzheimer's Australia launched its flagship dementia program, Your Brain Matters, in September 2012. Funded through the Chronic Disease Prevention and Service Improvement Fund over a two-year period, it was the world's first publicly funded dementia risk reduction program. Alzheimer's Australia is to be congratulated for this initiative. Unfortunately, there has been no opportunity for it to reapply for continued funding for this program. The contract ceases in June 2015—that is in 2½ months time—meaning the program will cease this year. I call on the Abbott Liberal government to consider giving this program the priority it deserves in their funding considerations for the next budget. Your Brain Matters and programs like the national lifestyle project deserve support from this government. (Time expired)

**New South Wales State Election**

Mr COLEMAN (Banks) (13:50): This Saturday the people of south-western Sydney and indeed of New South Wales have a very clear choice: to support the pro-jobs, pro-infrastructure Baird government or to return to the incompetence of the New South Wales Labor Party, which of course was writ large for all to see over 16 sorry years, and nowhere more so than in the area of infrastructure, where, over a 16-year period, the Labor Party did one of two things: (a) nothing—and that is what happened most of the time—and (b) incompetent construction. What about the M5 East tunnels, built under the previous Labor government? It was entirely foreseeable that this would be a very, very busy road. It is just near the airport. It was built with only two lanes each way. It should have been three or four lanes each way. Under the WestConnex project, of course, it goes from four lanes to 10. The opposition in New South Wales do not support the WestConnex project. They do not want to support that infrastructure growth. They should do so, because it is great for New South Wales. The member for Oatley, Mark Coure, and the member for East Hills, Glenn Brookes, are passionate advocates of these important infrastructure projects, and I certainly believe deserve the support of their electorates this Saturday. I look forward to continuing to work with those tremendous representatives.

**Kingsford Smith Electorate: Women in Policing**

Mr THISTLETHWAITE (Kingsford Smith) (13:51): On the weekend, the Eastern Beaches and Botany Bay police local area commands in our community celebrated 100 years of women in policing, at Coogee Beach and Mutch Park in Pagewood. I was fortunate to join...
community members and representatives in thanking and paying tribute to all those female members of our community who have proudly and diligently kept our community safe over the last century. Both events involved a baton relay in which local Nippers and schoolchildren participated with local female police officers. Members of the community had an opportunity to view displays of uniforms and advances in policing over the last century.

At Coogee, local crime commander Stacey Maloney paid tribute to the first female police officers in New South Wales, Maude Rhodes and Lillian Armfield, who were sworn in in 1915. Interestingly, when they were sworn in they were required to sign an indemnity releasing the police department from any responsibility for their safety and wore civilian clothes because they were not issued with uniforms. Lillian Armfield served 33 years in the New South Wales police force and was awarded the King's Police and Fire Service Medal for distinguished service, the first woman in the British Empire to receive such a distinction.

I pay tribute to all the members of the eastern beaches and Botany Bay local area commands, in particular Karen McCarthy and Gavin Dengate, who do our community very proud.

**Bennelong Electorate: Road Infrastructure**

Mr ALEXANDER (Bennelong) (13:53): Bennelong contains five of the state's most congested roads. We have seen huge levels of development and population growth, which is putting even more pressure on our overstretched public transport and road infrastructure. Years of neglect under Labor leaders, who promised but never delivered, left Bennelong, and Sydney at large, with a massive infrastructure deficit. That is why I support the Liberal government in New South Wales. Their manifesto puts our state's infrastructure front and centre, devoting millions of dollars to our roads, railways and rivers, allowing Sydney and New South Wales to finally realise their full potential.

NorthConnex, on my northern fringe, is a great example of this. Although it only borders Bennelong, it will massively relieve the pressure on our overly congested roads, bring economic uplift to the region and improve travel times across the north of Sydney. Funded jointly by the state government and the other great champion of our growth, the federal government, this local project is characteristic of the dozens of costed infrastructure projects planned across the state. Bennelong has been calling out for this for decades, and only if Mike Baird's Liberal government is returned on Saturday will we see this vital investment continue.

The four state members of parliament whose electorates fall within Bennelong are some of the most deserving politicians I have had the pleasure to know. Victor Dominello, Anthony Roberts, Geoff Lee and the aspiring successor to Greg Smith, Damien Tudehope, are all stalwarts of the community, standing up for their local constituents and working hard for the region. *(Time expired)*

**Harris, Aunty Judy**

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (13:54): I rise today to pay tribute to the Winnunga health clinic's former long-serving chairperson and lifelong fighter for Aboriginal advancement, Aunty Judy Harris. Aunty Judy Harris, sadly, passed away earlier this month, following failing health in recent years. Over the past 25 years, Aunty Judy was fundamental to Winnunga's progress and growth. She helped the centre transition from a relatively small
service to one that currently has an annual budget of more than $8 million and employs over 60 staff.

Winnunga is one of the only Aboriginal community controlled health services in south-east New South Wales and it services clients from Wollongong to Wodonga, from Wagga Wagga to Bateman's Bay, and here in Canberra. It does not just service the Canberra community; it services, as I say, the Canberra region right down to the border. It is located just down the road from here in Narrabundah in a building that was opened by the late Gough Whitlam.

Aunty Judy Harris dedicated much of her life to improving health outcomes for Aboriginal Australians throughout the ACT and surrounding region. She never wavered from her goal to make sure the ACT had one of the very best community controlled Aboriginal health services in Australia. She was a dear friend to many and will be missed. She will be remembered as a champion of Indigenous health in the ACT. I offer my deep condolences to her family and friends. Vale, Aunty Jude.

Macarthur Electorate: Road Infrastructure

Mr MATHESON (Macarthur) (13:56): I rise today to highlight the fantastic work of the Abbott and Baird governments in implementing one of the largest infrastructure investments in Australia's history. Thanks to this partnership, the people of Macarthur, Western Sydney and south-western Sydney will benefit from the delivery of a record $3.5 billion roads package over 10 years that will create over 4,000 local jobs, provide a dramatic economic boost for the region as well as slash drive time for local residents. Further to this infrastructure plan, the Abbott and Baird governments are investing $114 million in upgrading Narellan Road, $280 million on Camden Valley Way, $500 million on Bringelly Road, $1.25 billion on a new motorway along Elizabeth Drive and $1.6 billion upgrading the Northern Road in my electorate.

In addition to this $3.5 billion Western Sydney Infrastructure Plan, the Baird and Abbott governments have also committed over $3 billion to build WestConnex, which is the largest integrated transport and urban revitalisation project in Australia's history. This includes a widening of the M4 and a duplication of the M5 East, which together form a vital link in Sydney's Orbital Network that will ease congestion, generate 10,000 jobs and connect communities throughout Sydney—something Labor could not do. In addition, the Abbott-Baird partnership has ensured the $300 million redevelopment of Campbelltown Hospital, the investment in new schools in Oran Park and Wilton and the preservation of a rail corridor for the extension of the south-west rail link—money after money.

Together, we are cracking down on crime by increasing the numbers of police on the street and investing in CCTV and other anti-crime measures. I could go on and on, but the message would be the same: the Abbott and Baird governments are finally providing for the people of New South Wales after years of neglect at a state and federal level under Labor. In the Baird and Abbott governments the people of New South Wales can trust.

New South Wales State Election

Ms CHESTERS (Bendigo) (13:57): I have to say: what a wonderful display of solidarity from the New South Wales Liberal MPs in this parliament—standing up and trying to convince people to vote for them. But let me tell you this—and this is what I know about New South Wales people, because it is a similar story in Victoria and a similar story in
Queensland. New South Wales people know that this government is not supporting them. New South Wales people know, despite the rhetoric of the people in this parliament, that they have a clear choice to make this weekend, and they are going to make it. Particularly in the bush, people are going to reject this government and this government's policies. This government talks about jobs, yet we do not have a jobs plan from this government, not just for the people of New South Wales but for the people in regional Victoria and regional Queensland. This government has cut money from health and cut money from education. This government has no plan.

You can stand up here and rant all you want to people who do not have a vote, but the people of New South Wales are going to do one thing and one thing only on Saturday, and that is send a strong message to this Prime Minister and a strong message to this government about the upcoming budget: reverse your cuts that attack New South Wales. Reverse your cuts that attack Victoria. Reverse your cuts that attack Australian people. This government needs to know that people in— (Time expired)

Eden-Monaro Electorate: Bombala RSL

Dr HENDY (Eden-Monaro) (13:59): On the evening of Saturday, 14 March, I had the honour and great pleasure to attend an Anzac Centenary memorial dinner in Bombala in my electorate of Eden-Monaro. I was invited to the dinner by the president, Commodore Robert Letts, and the members of the Bombala RSL sub-branch. Grace was led by Revered Judy Holdsworth, whilst the toast was given by Bombala sub-branch Vice President, Roger Moulds.

The popular member for the New South Wales seat of Monaro, John Barilaro, was also on hand. John has a very strong sense of community and is a tireless, effective representative, not only for Bombala but right throughout the Monaro region. Charlie and Ann Maslin were amongst the many locals who attended what was a very enjoyable evening.

That next day I took the opportunity to inspect the new Bombala war memorial with Mayor Bob Stewart. The memorial will receive a significant makeover with the help of federal funding. Events such as Bombala RSL memorial dinner are an important way to honour the service and sacrifice of the men and women who have answered the nation's call. (Time expired)

The SPEAKER (14:00): In accordance with standing order 43, the time for members' statements has concluded.

CONDOLENCES

Mr Lee Kuan Yew GCMG, CH

Report from Federation Chamber

Order of the day returned from Federation Chamber for further consideration; certified copy of the motion presented.

Debate resumed on the motion:

That the House record its deep regret at the death on 23 March 2015 of Lee Kuan Yew GCMG CH, former Prime Minister of Singapore, and place on record its acknowledgement of his role as the founding father of the modern Singapore and tender its profound sympathy to his family in their bereavement.
The SPEAKER (14:01): The question is that the motion be agreed to. I ask all honourable members to signify their approval by rising in their places.

Question agreed to, honourable members standing in their places.

STATEMENTS ON INDULGENCE

France: Air Disaster

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (14:01): The Australian government extends its deepest condolences to those people who have lost family or friends on Germanwings flight 4U9525 that crashed overnight in the French Alps.

Tragically, French authorities have confirmed that none of the 150 people on board have survived. Two Australians, Carol Friday and her son Greig Friday, residents of Victoria, were on board the flight. Consular officials have been in contact with the Friday family and are providing all possible consular assistance. Our thoughts and prayers are with them at this unimaginably difficult time.

The family are issuing a statement, at this moment, through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and have asked me to read part of it to the parliament:

Our family is in deep disbelief and crippled with sadness and would like to ask for privacy. Carol was a loving Mother of two, a devoted wife to her husband Dave and a sister to three brothers. She celebrated her 68th birthday on March 23rd.

... ... ...

Greig was to turn 30 on 23rd April. He was a loving son to Carol and Dave and an exceptional brother to his sister Alex. He was adored by all of his family and friends.

... ... ...

Carol and Greig were enjoying a few weeks holiday together at the start of his European stay—where Greig was to teach English this year—

They were both extraordinary and exceptional people who were loved by many, who they loved in return. They will forever be with us in our hearts, memories and dreams.

We are checking passenger information to determine whether any other Australian citizens, dual national or permanent residents may have been on board. The French recovery operation is underway, but it will be a challenging task given the remote location seven kilometres from the nearest road and at 1,600 metres altitude. They are currently deploying over 600 gendarmes.

Our consular officials will set up a mobile office nearby where they will liaise with French authorities on the recovery effort. It is premature to speculate on what may have caused this terrible incident. Relevant authorities will undertake a thorough investigation. The parent company, Lufthansa, is working on the assumption of an accident, while French Prime Minister Valls has said that no hypothesis can be ruled out. When the black box is analysed this will hopefully provide more answers.

Australia will, of course, assist in any way possible.

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (14:04): We are all deeply saddened at this terrible news of this tragic loss of so many lives. Australians are great travellers and we have to be because of our distance from the rest of the world. And so, air disasters very often touch our nation, even when they occur in the other side of the world. So
it is with this case, with the distressing news that two Australians, Carol Friday and her son Greig Friday from Victoria, were on board Germanwings flight 9525.

We have all farewelled friends and family on their way to a holiday overseas confidently expecting them to return safely with stories of their adventures. All of us, and all Australians, feel deep sympathy for the family of these two citizens who we are now mourning after such a senseless and tragic loss. Across Europe there are other families, including the parents of the students from Joseph-Koenig Gymnasium returning from a school exchange, who are also experiencing this devastating grief and loss.

We understand that the conditions around the crash site are making the work of recovery and investigation very difficult. We thank the government of France, emergency workers and officials for their efforts. Our thoughts are with the family and friends of all of those on board, as well as the people of Germany, Spain and France.

STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Incident in the Federation Chamber

The SPEAKER (14:05): The member for Corangamite has reported to me an incident that occurred in the Federation Chamber last evening, when she was presiding as Deputy Speaker, involving the member for Bowman. As I understand it, towards the end of his speech on his motion on the cruise liner industry, the member for Bowman picked up one of two bottles he had brought into the chamber purporting to contain bunker fuel. He then proceeded to pour some of the contents of the thick black fuel onto his hand, spilling onto the desk and floor of the Federation Chamber.

In his remarks, the member himself acknowledged the dangerous nature of the material. Setting aside the member's offence in making use of props, it is highly disorderly to bring dangerous and flammable substances into either of the chambers. I consider the member's actions to be totally disorderly, disrespectful of the House and the Federation Chamber, and potentially dangerous to the health and safety of members and staff of the Federation Chamber. I understand that there has been damage to the Federation Chamber which we are endeavouring to repair.

Standing order 187 provides that action pursuant to standing order 94 can only be taken against a member in the House. This includes provisions under 94(a) and 94(b). Accordingly, I ask the member to apologise to the House for his reckless and highly disorderly actions. I give the member the opportunity now.

Mr LAMING (Bowman) (14:07): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I do apologise.

The SPEAKER: I thank the member for that apology, but nonetheless I consider the offence to be so serious and of such a disorderly nature that I name the member for Bowman.

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House and Minister for Education and Training) (14:08): I move:

That the member for Bowman be suspended from the service of the House.

Question agreed to.

The SPEAKER: The member for Bowman is now suspended from the service of the House for a period of 24 hours.

The member for Bowman then left the chamber.
MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:08): I inform the House that the Minister for Agriculture has personal leave and will be absent from question time today and tomorrow. The Deputy Prime Minister will answer questions on his behalf.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Defence Procurement

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:08): My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the government join with Labor and commit to building, maintaining and sustaining our next fleet of submarines in Australia? After all, that was your election promise.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:08): This government has put in place a competitive evaluation process which will ensure that a decision is made about the future submarine fleet by the end of the year. We certainly want to maximise the work in Adelaide. We are absolutely confident that, because there will be more submarines, there will be more jobs in Adelaide—at least 500 more jobs in Adelaide on a long-term basis. But the important thing is that we have the best possible submarines at the best possible price, as well as that we maximise the work here in Australia.

Mr Conroy interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Charlton will desist!

Mr ABBOTT: I should point out that members opposite had six years in which to make a decision about the future submarines. What they did was they sat on their hands for six long years. The process that the Leader of the Opposition announced today would just mean further delay and the consequence of further delay would be that Australia would have no operational submarines towards the end of the next decade, when the Collins class submarines go out of service.

Let me point out more of the record of members opposite when it comes to defence procurement. In six years, not a single naval order was placed by Labor with an Australian shipyard. Not one single naval order was placed by Labor with an Australian shipyard, but three orders went overseas.

Mr Champion interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Wakefield will desist!

Mr ABBOTT: They also cut $16 billion from defence and they reduced defence spending to the lowest level since 1938, despite the difficult and challenging international environment in which Australia operates.

I say this: the defence of Australia is in good hands with this government. We will ensure that the next generation of submarines are built and we will ensure that there are more jobs in South Australia.

Asylum Seekers

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (14:11): My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister update the House on the action the government is taking to ensure that Australia's borders are safe and secure?
Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:11): I thank the member for his question and I thank him for his concerns to ensure that our country remains safe. I can inform him that today, together with the minister for border protection and the Minister for Justice, I visited Strategic Border Command to thank all the personnel there from all the many agencies involved for their work to keep our country safe. The men and women of Strategic Border Command are the people who are stopping the boats, who are stopping the guns, who are stopping the drugs and who, very importantly, are stopping the potential terrorists as well.

Importantly, this government has restored $700 million that Labor cut from our Customs and Border Protection Service, including $88 million that Labor cut from screening. That meant that there was 25 per cent less screening of sea cargoes and 75 per cent less screening of air cargoes.

I want to thank all the personnel of Strategic Border Command and our other arms and agencies for the work they have done to stop the boats. Between 2008 and the election there were almost 1,000 illegal boats. There were more than 50,000 illegal arrivals by sea. Tragically, there were more than 1,000 deaths and there were $11 billion in border protection cost blow-outs. But since the turn-back policy was put in place in December 2013, just one illegal boat has arrived on our shores. There are, I regret to say, despite the best efforts of our border forces, too many illegal firearms here in this country. That is why this government wants to introduce mandatory five-year minimum sentences for people who traffic in illegal firearms and I do invite members opposite to join us in supporting this legislation.

The drug ice is an absolutely dreadful scourge—a dreadful and growing scourge, as all members of this parliament know. It ruins lives, it destroys families, it hurts communities and I am particularly concerned about its impact on regional communities. I am pleased to say that our agencies are seizing more of it. In the first seven months of this year some 5.7 tonnes of illegal drugs, much of it ice, was seized. I particularly want to acknowledge the work of our counterterrorist units at our international airports. So far they have spoken to some 86,000 individuals and they have taken some 230 individuals off planes bound for the Middle East.

I have a simple message to anyone thinking of joining the death cult: do not do it. It is dangerous for you and it is dangerous for others. We will stop you for your own good and for ours.

**Defence Procurement**

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (14:15): My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister join with Labor and commit to conducting a competitive tender process for building, maintaining and sustaining future submarines in Australia, including a funded definition study and commencing with the world's most prominent and relevant submarine designers from Germany, France, Japan and Sweden?

Mr ANDREWS (Menzies—Minister for Defence) (14:15): The reality is that Labor has a complete fantasy in relation to defence. For six long years, they sat on this side of the House as the government of Australia and did absolutely nothing! Absolutely nothing!

And on top of that, what does the Leader of the Opposition now propose? The Leader of the Opposition proposes a tender which, on the advice of Defence, would take four to five years. So what they are saying—what the Labor Party is saying—is that they will risk the security and the defence of this country—
Mr Burke: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. In the question, the Prime Minister—now, the defence minister—was asked to refer to the government's policy. That is what the question was about—

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Mr ANDREWS: The member for Watson did not even hear the question that was asked, and he was sitting next to the questioner!

The reality is that if we were to adopt what the Leader of the Opposition is proposing, we would risk the future security and defence of this country in a decade's time. That is what we would do. We are not prepared to do that. We are not going to engage in their fantasy!

Illicit Drugs

Mrs McNAMARA (Dobell) (14:17): My question is to the Minister for Justice. Will the minister inform the House of action the government is taking to disrupt organised crime and to stop the ice epidemic afflicting our communities?

Mr KEENAN (Stirling—Minister for Justice) (14:17): I thank the member for Dobell for that question. Today I joined with the CEO of the Australian Crime Commission in releasing Australia's first unclassified picture of the illicit market in methylamphetamine—or ice—in Australia. This personality-distorting, life-ending drug is paying enormous dividends for organised criminal syndicates that continue to profit from its misery.

This report highlights that the creep of ice across the nation is actually impacting on all levels of Australian society. It also highlights the role that organised crime has in the distribution, supply and use of ice. It says that more than 60 per cent of Australia's highest-profile organised crime targets—those who are on the National Criminal Target List—are actually involved in the distribution of ice—60 per cent. And the high price of ice here in Australia is attracting organised crime groups from literally all points of the globe, including China, Mexico, West Africa, the Middle East, Vietnam, the United States and others.

What the report also highlights is that law enforcement is seizing an unprecedented amount of this drug. As the Prime Minister has just said in his answer, the AFP seized seven tonnes—seven tonnes!—of methamphetamine over the past two years. In November last year the AFP and their law enforcement partners seized $1½ billion dollars' worth of this drug—the second-largest seizure of drugs in Australian history.

Now, the government is responding to do all we can to attack the supply side. We have fast tracked the National Anti-Gang Squad. This squad sends AFP officers out to work directly with their state and territory counterparts in tackling organised criminal groups, particularly bikie gangs, who are instrumental in peddling this drug. They work in conjunction with the Australian Gangs Intelligence Coordination Centre. And, very importantly, we restored and enhanced the funding cuts that Labor made to Customs when they were in office, when we invested $88 million to increase cargo screening when we came to office.

But, despite these efforts, the lucrative nature of this drug has seen mounting harm and havoc inflicted on our communities, including particularly in rural and regional communities. There is no question that ice now poses the greatest threat of any of the illicit drugs in Australia. Every day we hear new stories emerge of the damage that it does to individuals, to families and to communities. I visited a hospital with the Minister for Health that services the
needs of my electorate. They told us that their greatest challenge now is violence against their staff, which they relate directly back to the increased use of ice.

This ACC report is a very important report that highlights the damage that ice is doing to our country. It highlights the profits that organised crime is making and it will be a very useful and valuable tool to inform this government's response.

**Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank**

**Mr SHORTEN** (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:20): My question is to the Prime Minister. Given Labor's stated support in October last year for Australia's participation in the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank, has the government finally come to the table, or is a decision yet to be made? Or, put another way: is the finance minister right or is the foreign minister correct? Or is this just another cabinet leak from a chaotic and incompetent government?

**The SPEAKER:** I call the honourable Prime Minister, and he will ignore the debate that was couched in the terms of the last part of the question.

**Mr ABBOTT** (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:21): I do thank the Leader of the Opposition for this question, because the decision whether or not to enter into formal negotiations for the possible formation of an Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank is an important one. It is an important issue. It should be taken seriously by this government and, frankly, it is right and proper that we should not rush into a decision. We should carefully weigh up the arguments for and against.

But I do say that we already have the Asia Development Bank and we already have the World Bank—important multinational and multilateral entities which are doing good work in our region and around the world. And if we can have a further international entity to work on the infrastructure deficit, which is very strong in our region, that would be a good thing.

We have been talking to the Chinese, who are the proponents of this bank, to try to ensure that it is in fact a genuinely multilateral institution, that it is run in all important respects by a board, that its processes are transparent, that it is genuinely accountable and that it is not controlled by any one entity. Under those circumstances, we would certainly be prepared to join. I imagine that, under those circumstances all nations, including the United States and Japan, would be prepared to join. But these are the questions that we are considering. We will continue to consider these questions, and in the next few days an appropriate announcement will be made.

**Preferential Voting**

**Mr PALMER** (Fairfax) (14:23): My question is to the Prime Minister. Does the government plan to introduce optional preferential voting in the Senate elections, which will guarantee 38 senators and eliminate most of the crossbench, so the government can require the crossbench to pass all government legislation or threaten them with an early election? Will this mean the government, with crossbench support, can introduce optional preferential voting in the House of Representatives?

**Mr ABBOTT** (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:23): I dare say that this coalition government that I lead, under whatever voting system we have, now and into the future will continue to talk respectfully to the crossbench and will continue to appeal to the crossbench on the basis of the self-evident merits of our case and on the basis of the self-evident merits of
the legislation that we put before the parliament. I look forward to many cordial and warm consultations with all members of the crossbench, including the member for Fairfax. I daresay that one of the subjects that we will talk about collegially and consultatively in the months and years to come is the report of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters—that excellent report from the committee that was so well chaired by my friend and colleague. I look forward to considering its recommendations and to acting upon them in due course.

**Foreign Aid**

**Mr HAWKE** (Mitchell) (14:25): My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Will the minister advise the House of steps the government has taken to ensure Australia has a more sustainable, effective and efficient aid program?

**Ms JULIE BISHOP** (Curtin—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (14:25): I thank the member for Mitchell for his question. I can assure him that the Australian government is delivering a more effective, more efficient and sustainable aid budget and one that is affordable—one that the Australian taxpayers can afford. Our focus, of course, is on improving lives of the people in our region, and we need to broaden and deepen the impact of our aid spend.

On Monday, I launched innovationXchange, which is a new idea for bringing together entrepreneurs, businesses, creative thinkers and aid organisations to develop and scale up practical solutions to some of the most intractable aid problems facing our region. Our partnership that we announced with Bloomberg Philanthropies is a great example. We will be using the latest technologies to gather vital health data on births and deaths and causes of death, so that we can have evidence based health outcomes. This is how we can make our aid dollar go further.

While we are thinking of smarter and more creative ways to deliver aid, Labor is doing the exact opposite. Labor's typical approach is to take taxpayers' money—billions of it—throw it at a problem and cross their fingers. Yesterday, the shadow minister for foreign affairs asked me a question on aid, and I have to admire her chutzpah for asking us a question about aid given the state of the budget that we inherited. Nevertheless, this question gave me an opportunity to remind the Australian people that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition has committed Labor to increasing the aid budget by $11 billion. Colleagues are shocked and appalled that she would recklessly commit Labor to increasing the aid budget by $18 billion. Here it is—there times in the one media release, $18 billion.

I believe that the shadow minister owes it to the Australian people to say where in the budget she is going to find $18 billion. Is it a cut to pensions? Is it a cut to infrastructure, to health, to education of $18 billion? I suspect that what will happen is that Labor will once more just add to the record debt—they will just borrow more. What Labor does is they borrow overseas to send back overseas. If they had not squandered billions of dollars on pink batts and school halls they would have some credibility. It is time they took responsibility for their fabulous failure in aid.
Mining

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (14:28): My question is to the Foreign Minister. Early today, the minister said that the capping of iron ore production was ‘an idea worth considering’. Hours later, does the minister still hold this view?

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (14:28): At a doorstop interview this morning, I was asked about a comment that Andrew Forrest had allegedly made about iron ore prices. I said I was not an expert in the area. I said that the—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: There will be silence—

Ms JULIE BISHOP: I am sorry, I did not realise the shadow minister was now an expert on commodity prices—is she?

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: There will be silence on my left and right. The minister has the call.

Ms JULIE BISHOP: We certainly know she is not an expert on Africa. Africa is not a country, Shadow Minister. You have said it so many times now and—

Mr Butler interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Port Adelaide will desist. The minister has the call.

Ms JULIE BISHOP: I will just remind her again that Africa is a continent. I was asked about the comments and I made the quite obvious observation that the commodity price decrease is having an impact on our economy, that iron ore prices infiltrate our entire economy. But any ideas to assist would be worth considering. I do not know the detail of Andrew Forrest's proposal, but I have since been discussing the matter with the Treasurer, and the Treasurer says the specifics of Mr Forrest's proposal would not be acceptable. Of course I support the Treasurer on that basis.

Budget

Mrs WICKS (Robertson) (14:30): My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer outline the importance of putting the budget on a sustainable footing? How will a strong budget help my constituents in Robertson?

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney—The Treasurer) (14:30): I thank the honourable member for Robertson for the question and recognise that through her effort and also the effort of the member for Dobell, who is right here, they have been able to secure a significant increase in the number of real jobs on the Central Coast. In fact, 600 new Commonwealth jobs will be located in Gosford, which is a great outcome. And I am pleased to advise the House that if Mike Baird is re-elected on Saturday he has pledged a further 300 jobs to the Central Coast, which means nearly 1,000 jobs on the Central Coast as a result of the efforts of the coalition at both a Commonwealth and a state level, because we are the parties that want to see more jobs.

We want to see more jobs and greater prosperity, and it is one of the reasons why we have seen a nearly threefold increase in the number of jobs created every single day by Australians since the coalition was elected. Under Labor, of course, in their last year in office around 200 jobs were created every day. Under the coalition, that is closer to 600 jobs every day. And, of
course, if people have jobs, they have an opportunity to build prosperity. They have an opportunity to build financial security. And, importantly, if you have money coming in and you live within your means, you get greater choices. Just as that applies to individuals, it applies to a country as well. If a country lives within its means as we aspire for Australia to do then we have greater choices as a nation. We can have greater control over our destiny. We can choose to invest more in education or in health or in national security. We can choose to do that. But, at the moment, the Australian government has to borrow $100 million every day just to meet our day-to-day bills. That is the legacy of Labor: $100 million a day just to pay the daily bills. And of course it is totally unsustainable to continue with that. You cannot keep living on a credit card; sooner or later the money is called in.

That is why we want to get the budget onto a sustainable basis. We want to get to the point where we live within our means, and the budget to be delivered in just under seven weeks time will be responsible. It will be measured and it will be fair, and it will focus on jobs, growth and opportunity, because Australia's days—Australia's very best days—are ahead of us but as a nation we need to control our destiny. Living within our means, making sure that our expenditure is sustainable, starting to pay down the burden of government debt—that gives us greater control of our destiny and in turn gives every Australian greater control of their lives.

Budget

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:33): My question is to the Prime Minister. Today the Chief Scientist has said that physics, chemistry, maths and earth science alone contribute $145 billion to the Australian economy, so why is the Prime Minister cutting $115 million from the CSIRO, which will result in 161 job losses in New South Wales in this year alone? In fact, given that government MPs have now taken to doing science experiments in parliament, shouldn't the government actually be listening to the experts?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:34): This is a government which spends some $9 billion a year on research. The CSIRO, the Australian Research Council, the National Health and Medical Research Council—about $9 billion a year we spend on research. In the years and decades to come we want to spend more and we certainly want to see more of our best people going into teaching and more of our best teachers going into science, maths, technology and engineering because these STEM subjects are very important.

I have been asked about cuts to the CSIRO's budget. Labor cut $63 million from the CSIRO. What outrageous hypocrisy. What absolutely outrageous hypocrisy. This is a government which takes science seriously, but this is also a government which takes budget responsibility seriously, and the best thing we can do for all of our great institutions is to be in a position to make them sustainable, to give them sustainable, long-term funding for the years and decades ahead, and that is why above all else this is a government which is absolutely committed to budget responsibility.

Infrastructure

Mr COULTON (Parkes—The Nationals Chief Whip) (14:36): My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development. Will the Minister update the House on how regional and rural New South Wales is benefiting from the government's actions to improve infrastructure across the state?
Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development) (14:36): I thank the honourable member for his question. Over recent days I have been talking about some of the major projects that are occurring in our capital cities which are really building the infrastructure that they will need for the century ahead, but there is also critical work being undertaken on regional roads. Certainly our $50 billion program for infrastructure across the nation embraces projects in country Australia and on our major regional highways. For instance, the Roads to Recovery Program, the Black Spot Program, the Heavy Vehicle Safety Productivity package, the National Highway Upgrade Program and the Bridges Renewal Program are all delivering very worthwhile projects in the honourable member's electorate and right across the country.

The Commonwealth is providing $120 million in conjunction with New South Wales for 27 new road projects under the Heavy Vehicle Safety Program; and $26 million of that amount is being spent in the honourable member's electorate on very important projects to enable heavy transport to move more freely around our country.

New South Wales is receiving $25 million under the first round of the Bridges Renewal Program, with 28 new bridges to be provided across the state. Many of them are on small country roads, delivering that last mile of infrastructure that is so important to the system. Under the Roads to Recovery Program, councils in New South Wales will receive $71 million—

Mr Fitzgibbon interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Member for Hunter!

Mr TRUSS: That amount will be doubled in 2015-16; $142 million for councils to spend on local roads of their choice, which will make a significant difference again to the quality of their road network. Under the National Highway Upgrade Program, $61 million is being provided for heavy duty pavement on the Newell Highway; and $21 million will be provided for Black Spot projects in New South Wales. Those are the kinds of things that this government has been able to do by working in partnership with the Baird-Grant government in New South Wales to ensure that New South Wales gets the infrastructure that it needs.

Of course there are really big projects as well, like the 2,000 workers currently engaged in upgrading the Pacific Highway so we will finally achieve the objective of having a four-lane connection between Sydney and Brisbane. There is work going on also on the New England Highway, the Tenterfield bypass, Bolivia Hill, the Moree bypass, The Great Western Highway and the Barton Highway. There will be a number of safety works projects being undertaken at Kennedy Drive in Tweed Heads and of course at Riverside Drive near Nambucca Heads. These are all examples of this government getting on with the job of providing roads in capital cities and in regional New South Wales, which will make such a difference to our nation.

Infrastructure

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler) (14:39): My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister. Why has the Commonwealth government reduced its funding for the Pacific Highway upgrade by 65 per cent this year from $1.023 billion last financial year under Labor to $357 million this financial year?
Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development) (14:40): If the honourable member chose to visit the Pacific Highway, he would notice that the level of road construction on that road is beyond all previous precedent. We are delivering projects and we will complete the four-lanes of the highway before the end of this decade, something that would never have been achieved under Labor. Firstly, Labor did not provide sufficient funding to enable that to happen. On top of that, they were insisting that—

The SPEAKER: The minister will resume his seat. The member for Grayndler will get the call for a point of order, but it had better be a proper one, not just repeating the question.

Mr Albanese: It certainly is, Madam Speaker. It goes to relevance. It was a very specific question with the budget figures in it—

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order. The minister has the call.

Mr Albanese: One billion dollars—

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

Mr TRUSS: If I may take the interjection: yes, I am sure the honourable member is jealous and, of course, embarrassed, because under his stewardship as minister the Pacific Highway would never have been completed. He had already abandoned the timetable. The commitment that we had made in government to complete the job by 2016 became impossible because Labor simply did not allocate the funding. But, on top of that, they were insisting that every dollar that they put in should be matched 50-50 by the New South Wales government. They did not require that when the Labor Party was in government in New South Wales. That was a new rule that was introduced when Labor was defeated in the state. They required a 50-50 contribution.

The honourable member knew that the New South Wales government was never capable of providing that level of funding. The previous New South Wales government left the state financially destitute, so the new government has had to restore the New South Wales economy so that it can get on with providing the kind of infrastructure that the state needs. The simple facts are that under Labor the proposed completion date for the highway had been abandoned. We have picked up the pace. There is more construction occurring now on the Pacific Highway than at any other time, and we have fully funded the project to completion; that is something Labor would never have done.

Workplace Relations

Mr LAUNDY (Reid) (14:43): My question is to the Minister for Education and Training representing the Minister for Employment. Will the minister update the House on the action the government is taking to remove the threat of thuggery in our workplaces? What support is there for the government's approach?

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House and Minister for Education and Training) (14:43): I thank the member for Reid for his question. He knows a thing or two about dealing with thuggery, having run pubs for 23 years before he came into this place. He did a very good job. He was very successful. He knows a thing or two about dealing with thuggery and bad behaviour—

Honourable members interjecting—

CHAMBER
Mr PYNE: He is not the only one, Madam Speaker, who knows a bit about dealing with thuggery in this place—former members and current members—

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: There will be silence for the answer.

Mr Brendan O'Connor interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Gorton!

Mr PYNE: 'The CFMEU needs to be brought to heel over the way it conducts itself in this country.' They are not my words; they are the words of Martin Ferguson, a very distinguished former member of this House, and a very distinguished former resources minister in this place—

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: There is far too much noise.

Mr PYNE: In fact, his distinguished brother still sits here and, I am sure, agrees with Martin's assessment of the CFMEU. He said, in fact, very recently: 'The manner in which the BLF conducted themselves is now rife within branches of the CFMEU. The CFMEU should be brought to heel and required to conduct themselves in a fair and reasonable way.'

Martin Ferguson is absolutely right. He went on to say: … for the sake of the industry and the need to attract investment in Australia, especially in this very challenging economic time, we need a policeman on the beat to bring a sense of stability and decency to the building industry.

Martin Ferguson is absolutely right. That is exactly what this government is trying to do by re-establishing the Australian Building and Construction Commission.

The obstacle that stands in the way of doing that is the Labor Party and the Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition is coming perilously close to the way Luke Foley has conducted himself as the Leader of the Opposition in New South Wales. Martin Ferguson had some things to say about Mr Foley as well, quite recently. He said: Luke Foley's campaign has been tarnished by rank opportunism and blatant scaremongering … Luke Foley is sending a very clear message that he doesn't care about jobs or energy security for NSW.

Martin Ferguson is talking there about Labor's extremely opportunist campaign on poles and wires in New South Wales. But it applies equally to the Leader of the Opposition's approach to bringing back the Australian Building and Construction Commission. Any serious political party that opposes that bill has no interest in sovereign risk and no interest in investment confidence in Australia. What they are saying is that they believe the building and construction industry in Australia does not need the kind of oversight that the ABCC brought to building and construction in Australia. I urge the Leader of the Opposition to get out of the way and get on the program with Martin Ferguson.

Budget

Mr BOWEN (McMahon) (14:46): My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, would net debt of 50 to 60 per cent of GDP jeopardise the Australian government's AAA credit ratings?

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney—The Treasurer) (14:46): Of course it would. That is why the credit rating was lost twice under Labor governments. Twice Labor governments lost the
AAA. Twice Australia was downgraded under Labor. The only two times Australia has been downgraded in its credit rating has been under Labor governments—and both times it has been the coalition that has won back the AAA rating.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr HOCKEY: We absolutely won it back—damn right! I was there. I was in a government that claimed back the AAA rating for Australia. Hang on, the member for McMahon is pointing to Swanny. Is he your reference material?

Mr Perrett: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: the Treasurer has used an incorrect title to refer to the member for Lilley. I ask that he use the correct title.

The SPEAKER: I ask the Treasurer to refer to members by their correct title.

Mr HOCKEY: I am sorry; I should have called him ‘the world's greatest Treasurer’! Your talent is wasted back there, Swanny. We all need binoculars to see where Swanny is these days, although there seems to be a bit of a glow about him. He has been under the lamp. Have you been under the lamp, Swanny?

Mr Burke: On a point of order, Madame Speaker: it is the same one you ruled on a moment ago. He has done it again.

The SPEAKER: I ask the Treasurer to refer to members by their correct titles.

Mr HOCKEY: I am going to let you in on a secret. I have to share a secret with the parliament. To assist the honourable member for Watson, I have heard recently about ‘the Swan dream team’—the member for Lilley coming back and forming a partnership with the member for Watson and sidelining the member for McMahon. We have heard all about it. He is up the back there, waiting. We all know that his talents are wasted on the backbench.

The member for Lilley stood at this dispatch box on budget night—what year was it now? 2012?—and started with:

The four years of budget surpluses I announce tonight …

What a proud moment that must have been for the member for Lilley—he was only about $200 billion out! What happened? I will tell you what happened: Labor left a mess. They left a level of debt that was unsustainable for Australia's future. They left every single young Australian to be born in a decade's time with $25,000 of debt in their birthing suite.

We have come in and we have started to fix the mess. We have made significant strides. Whatever it is, we want to get rid of the net debt and we want to get Australia back to where it was.

National Disability Insurance Scheme

Ms SCOTT (Lindsay) (14:50): My question is to the Minister for Social Services. Will the minister update the House on the work the government is doing to give young people in Greater Western Sydney access to the benefits of the National Disability Insurance Scheme?

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Minister for Social Services) (14:50): I thank the member for Lindsay for her question. I am sure the member for Macquarie will be equally interested in the answer because, in more good news from both the Abbott government and the Baird government—these two governments together—we are bringing forward $23½ million in NDIS funding and services for Greater Western Sydney. This will ensure that 2,000 young...
people will be able to start accessing services from July—bringing that forward one year ahead of schedule—which is excellent news for the people of Western Sydney. It means that children and families will be able to begin receiving individual packages from September of this year, September 2015.

We know that this program, which enjoys bipartisan support, is already making a difference to 3½ thousand Australians in the Hunter—and to their families and their carers. Our decision, with the Baird government in New South Wales, to bring this forward is a further demonstration of the Abbott government's commitment to the NDIS. We know that it is not good enough just to support an idea; you have to be able to implement that idea. This government is doing the hard work of making the NDIS affordable so that we can absorb it into the budget. As we know, only 40 per cent of the NDIS at full implementation is funded by the levy. So room has to be made in the budget to ensure that we can absorb this very important program which everyone in this House supports.

It is also a further demonstration of the initiative of the Baird government in New South Wales and it is a further reason that the people of New South Wales should be supporting the Baird government this Saturday as they go to the polls right across New South Wales. This is an important election not just for the New South Wales economy—where New South Wales is now No. 1 again, as the Baird government and the O'Farrell government promised they would achieve in the course of one term—but also for the national economy.

What the Baird government has to confront at the moment is a campaign of dishonesty from the Labor Party of New South Wales—a shameless campaign, shown clearly by Martin Ferguson, an esteemed former member of this place and member of the Labor Party, who has called out the untruths of the Labor Party in New South Wales. We have the absurd position of the Labor Party in New South Wales running around saying, 'New South Wales is not for sale.' Well, they didn't tell Eddie Obeid that, did they? They didn't tell Ian Macdonald that New South Wales was not for sale.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr MORRISON: They have got their mates on that side. They did not get that message to Eddie Obeid and Ian Macdonald. They thought it was theirs for sale. They thought they owned it personally and that they could appropriate it for their own benefit. So I am not surprised that, on Sunday, Mike Baird, in response to Labor saying that they have changed in New South Wales, made the very good comment: 'Yeah, right!'—no more changed than those opposite have changed their ways. The Leader of the Opposition's 'planet of ideas' is an absolute wasteland. We have sent the probe out, and there is no life on 'planet ideas'. (Time expired)

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (14:54): I wish to advise the House that we have with us in the Speaker's gallery members of the Australian political exchange, which is hosting the ninth delegation from the Philippines. The delegation is led by the Hon. Humerlito Dolor. We make you most welcome.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Economy

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:54): My question is to the Prime Minister. Today's *The Australian Financial Review* says that respected business leader David Murray said that 'the outlook for government deficits was unclear and poorly communicated'. In fact, he went on to say that it leaves our AAA rating vulnerable because 'everyone is left guessing'. Does the chaos and incompetence of this government mean that Australia will lose its AAA credit rating, which was secured under Labor?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:55): What fantasy land do members opposite live in? The last time Labor delivered a budget surplus was in 1989. It is more than a quarter century since Labor has delivered a surplus.

Mr Conroy: When have you actually delivered a budget?

The SPEAKER: The member for Charlton is warned.

Mr ABBOTT: This government inherited a mess. There is more to go, but we have made a very good start. I am very happy to refer members opposite to the *Intergenerational report*, which shows exactly where things were going under Labor—worse than Greece. That is where things were going under Labor—worse than Greece—because members opposite were absolutely and chronically incapable of delivering a surplus. As the Treasurer reminded the House so effectively just a few moments ago, the 'world's greatest Treasurer', the member for Lilley, stood at this dispatch box so proudly in 2012 and said 'the four years of surpluses I announce tonight'. What did he deliver instead? He delivered $200 billion worth of deficits.

This government has halved Labor's debt and deficit going forward. Members opposite went into the 2013 election promising an $18 billion deficit, and in fact the deficit that they knew about and covered up was $48 billion. That is what it was—a $30 billion black hole that members opposite covered up. But, because of the strong economic management of this government, confidence is already returning to our economy. Growth is 25 per cent more in our first year than it was in Labor's last year. Jobs growth is three times higher in our first year than it was in Labor's last year. Export volumes are up seven per cent, housing approvals are up nine per cent and the retail trade is up four per cent. This is what happens when Australia has a government which is open for business and respects the wealth creators of this country.

Environment: Malabar Headland

Mr VARVARIS (Barton) (14:58): My question is to the Minister for the Environment. Will the minister update the House on the government's commitment to return the Malabar Headland to the people of New South Wales?

Mr HUNT (Flinders—Minister for the Environment) (14:58): I want to thank the member for Barton, who, along with the member for Hughes, the member for Cook and the member for Banks, was one of the co-architects of the Georges River recovery plan. In fact, we have just finished two Green Army projects in the lower Georges River and the mid Georges River—already done and completed on his watch, in his time. He has also been a great advocate for the return of public lands to the people of New South Wales. In that respect, this is one of the achievements in the environment which we have managed in just the last few weeks, let alone in the last 18 months. Over the last few weeks we have banned the practice
inherited from Labor of dredging on the Great Barrier Reef and dumping in the marine park. We have put in place the Reef 2050 long-term sustainability plan, which includes $100 million for improved water quality. We have banned the importation of lion products from canned hunting. We have taken real steps to achieve reductions in emissions. What is it that you want this time, mate?

Mr HUNT: Come on.

Mr Dreyfus: I listened carefully to the question, Madam Speaker. It was about Malabar headland. We have yet to hear a word about that.

The SPEAKER: What is the point of order that the member is raising?

Mr Dreyfus: Direct relevance, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr HUNT: And the other thing that we have done that makes me extremely pleased is that we have returned Malabar headland to the people of New South Wales. And do you know what? Your mob promised to do it but never did it. But what has happened is that, with the Baird government, we reached agreement. We met on New South Wales territory recently. We finalised the handover. Most significantly, what we see is that the New South Wales government will now create one of Australia's great urban public parks. They will create one of Australia's great coastal public walking tracks.

This never happened on Labor's watch. The other thing that has happened—and listen to this—is that we have provided money to improve safety on the Anzac Rifle Range and $2 million to return the disabled riding school that they turfed off Malabar headland. Does the member for Kingsford Smith support that? They turfed disabled riders from Malabar headland. Here is what Donna Wright, the president of the South East Equestrian Club, said about that action of the Labor Party. She said:

They're still crying …
… There's nowhere else they can go. It's just not possible.

She went on to say: 'It was our home. We lost our home and it was devastating.' We have returned the land to New South Wales.

Mr Thistlethwaite interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Kingsford Smith will desist.

Mr HUNT: We are creating with the New South Wales government one of the great coastal public parks and walkways. Perhaps most satisfyingly and most decently, we are doing what Labor did not do. We are reversing what Labor did. We are returning the disabled riders to that land to give the chance for young people to have a special place for themselves.

Economy

Mr BOWEN (McMahone) (15:02): My question is to the Prime Minister. Earlier in question time, the Treasurer confirmed that a debt level of 50 to 60 per cent of GDP would
see Australia lose its AAA credit ratings. Does the Prime Minister stand by his statement that such a level would be 'a pretty good result'?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (15:02): Madam Speaker, I never said that. I never said that. Debt as a percentage of GDP, which would have been 120 per cent under the policies of the former government, is about 60 per cent under the policies of this government. Now, that is too high. We want to get it in a much, much better situation than that. That is what I said. That is what I said, and the shadow Treasurer should not set out to mislead.

The SPEAKER: The honourable Manager of Opposition Business on a point of order?

Mr Burke: Thanks, Madam Speaker. I seek leave to table a transcript which includes the quote from the Prime Minister, a ratio of debt to—

The SPEAKER: This is not the correct time to deal with this. The member will resume his seat.

Mr Burke interjecting—

The SPEAKER: You are attempting to have argument in question time. That is what you are doing.

Mobile Phone Services

Mr TAYLOR (Hume) (15:03): My question is to the Minister for Communications. Will the minister update the House on the government's plans to improve mobile coverage in regional and remote Australia?

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Minister for Communications) (15:03): I thank the honourable member for his question. I know that the honourable member has been a very powerful advocate for fixing mobile phone black spots in his electorate of Hume. In his electorate, there are a total of 139 nominations from the community in that area of black spots which need to be fixed and which are seeking funding from the government's $100 million Mobile Black Spot Program, which my colleague the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Communications has been administering. They have had public meetings there, as they have around the country.

The big development that occurred just last weekend was that the Baird Liberal-National government in New South Wales committed another $25 million to go together with the $100 million committed by the Abbott Liberal-National government to fix black spots. That $25 million will obviously be devoted to New South Wales, where there are nominated 1,822 mobile phone black spots.

This is consistent with the great performance of coalition governments. The Howard government committed money to fix mobile phone black spots when we were in government. Over six years of Labor, not one cent was spent to address mobile phone black spots. And yet every member who represents a regional electorate in this House and any member who spends any time in regional Australia would know that the single biggest telecommunications concern is mobile phones not working. The Labor government committed tens of billions of dollars to deliver fixed-line broadband and fixed wireless broadband through the bush without spending one cent on the single biggest telecommunications concern—extraordinary oversight, extraordinary neglect, extraordinary lack of awareness of what was really going on in regional Australia.
In terms of the work that we are doing in the honourable member's electorate of Hume with the NBN, that too is moving apace. The fixed wireless network has already covered 3,600 premises in his electorate, with towers activated in Cowra, Monteagle, Mount Weetalion and Murringo and around Young. Work is beginning on more fixed wireless towers covering an additional 1,500 premises over the next 18 months, and there are 27,000 premises in the larger towns where work will begin on the fixed-line deployment.

So we are working on both fronts. We are getting the NBN built sooner, cheaper and more affordably, but we are also addressing the single biggest concern in rural and regional Australia, which is mobile phone black spots. Isn't it great that we have a Liberal-National government in New South Wales that is lending its shoulder to the wheel too? (Time expired)

**Budget**

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (15:07): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer to the fact that the Prime Minister confirmed, on 16 September 2013, that the budget he inherited was not markedly different from the Pre-Election Economic Fiscal Outlook. Is it not the case that since the election the budget deficit has increased by $80 billion and net debt has blown out by $200 billion?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (15:07): I am very happy to have a contest on economic management with this Leader of the Opposition, because Labor governments destroy our budget; coalition governments restore our budget. That is the way it always is. Members opposite would not recognise a surplus if they fell over one. Members opposite have not seen a surplus since 1989. But we have surpluses in our DNA. We have surpluses in the marrow of our bones and we are working to deliver them. Every year, as the Mid-year Economic and Fiscal Outlook shows, we are marching closer towards the surplus that our country needs. Every year we are improving. Every year we are fixing the budgetary mess that we inherited.

What are the Leader of the Opposition's ideas for fixing the budget deficit? The last idea that the Leader of the Opposition came up with was robbing widows' bank accounts. It was the Leader of the Opposition, as the minister for financial services, who brought in the policy to confiscate inactive bank accounts. This is someone who took $550 million off the Australian people. He did not just close down 156,000 bank accounts; he pocketed the proceeds. He trousered the proceeds. Then, when he was asked about it—listen to this, Madam Speaker—he tried to explain that he was protecting people. He said:

This is about protecting people's savings to ensure it's not eroded by bank fees and changes.'

To stop the banks taking a little bit of money, he took all the money. He raided the cookie jar. He smashed the piggy bank. The one thing that we can be absolutely sure of is if you want to see a surplus in this country, never, ever change government.

**Food Labelling**

Dr GILLESPIE (Lyne) (15:10): My question is to the Minister for Industry and Science. Will the minister outline to the House the government's approach to country-of-origin food labelling? Will the minister outline what community support exists for this approach and is the minister aware of alternative policies?

Mr IAN MACFARLANE (Groom—Minister for Industry and Science) (15:11): I thank the member for Lyne for his question. I know that his constituents, like constituents right
across Australia, are talking to their local members about this issue. We as a government are committed to it, but I know that the constituents of each of our electorates are very keen to see a resolution to an issue that has been around for 30 years.

We have been hard at work on this issue and, at the same time, meeting with stakeholders groups right across consumers, industry and agriculture sectors. The level of support for this measure is overwhelming. Yes, there are concerns. Yes, they are seeing that we are addressing them. Yes, they are reassured that we will be going out and having stakeholder workshops right across Australia to give all of the aspects of consumer and production the opportunity to have their say and have it taken into consideration. We know that consumers want a labelling system implemented that they can actually understand. 'Made in Australia from local and imported goods' means absolutely nothing on a label. To see exactly what they do need, we will be conducting extensive market research.

Whenever there is a problem, always look to science for a solution. I said this in a speech last night. I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his bipartisan approach in terms of supporting science last night—short lived, but it was bipartisan last night. When you have a problem, you turn to science. As part of the solution to this, we will also be investigating technology where we can use either existing bar codes or a modified coding system, where an app on your mobile phone will not only tell you where the product is made and how much Australian produce is in it but actually give you an extensive story about the product itself that you would never be able to fit on the label of a can or a bottle.

What we are going to be doing over the ensuing months is making sure that we can bring this all together. It is not a simple process. If it were simple, someone would have fixed it already. The member for Lyne asked me about alternative proposals. There was nothing in the preceding six years—not a thing. Not even a try. And how common is that across the board on so many issues?

We know we also must comply with WTO and international trade rules. Again, there is going to have to be some hard work involved in that. That is why there is a ministerial working group on this. We know that after 30 years we can fix this for consumers.

Mr Abbott: I ask that further questions be placed on the Notice Paper.

PRIVILEGE

Mr BURKE (Watson—Manager of Opposition Business) (15:14): Madam Speaker, I wish to raise a matter of privilege. I refer to the unanimous support from the House for the actions that you took at the beginning of question time today relating to the member for Bowman. Since that time, while he has been expelled, and having apologised to the House, a statement has been reported that the member for Bowman is not backing down on the actions for which he apologised. I ask, in the context of disorderly conduct, privilege and contempt of the parliament, that you investigate these matters and report back to the House.

The SPEAKER (15:14): I will look at the matters that you have referred to and come back to the House.
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DOCUMENTS
Presentation

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

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Budget

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

The impact of the Government’s chaotic and incompetent Budget strategy.

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 BOWEN (McMahon) (15:15): One thing is very clear: the government that brought down the wrong plan at budget time have no plan for their next budget. They brought down the wrong plan in their last budget, but they have no plan for their next budget, and the Australian economy is paying a price for that. It is an extraordinary situation that the parliament will rise tomorrow and the next time we sit will be budget week and yet we still have a Prime Minister and a Treasurer and an entire government at sixes and sevens over the last budget, let alone the next budget. We have a Treasurer who has shown, so close to budget time, that there is a cost to be paid for this level of dysfunction. It is a cost to be paid by the Australian economy. We have got a government, a Treasury and a nation that are dealing with this Treasurer's inability to deal with the basic tasks involved in being Treasurer of this nation.

We all know there was a big cost to be paid for the last budget. It was paid by pensioners and paid by families. But there is a cost also for the economy. That cost is borne by people right across the country—people who want a job, people who are looking for work, people who are joining the growing unemployment lines around this country. There is a cost to be paid by Australian businesses—not businesses with large margins but small businesses who are struggling to get by and who need consumer and business confidence to do so. They are paying the price for this Treasurer's incompetence as well, because we are seeing a situation where this government's actions are impacting on economic growth. We are seeing a real impact on economic growth in the country. I must say, in fairness to the government, they have come up with a rather unique strategy to deal with this. It has been tried by the Minister for Finance. He said on ABC News Breakfast earlier in the week, 'Economic growth has been strengthening all throughout 2014.'

Mr Burke: He turned the graph upside down!

Mr BOWEN: I would hate to see economic growth if it were collapsing! Perhaps the finance minister had the graph upside down, as the member for Watson helpfully points out. But redefining what is going on in the Australian economy does not fix what is going on in the Australian economy. There is one thing that would fix what is going on in the Australian economy, and that is a competent Treasurer of Australia. That is what would fix the
Australian economy. That is what would see things improved. Remember we were promised an adrenaline rush to confidence on the election of the Prime Minister and the Treasurer? There has been a rush all right. There has been a rush when it comes to business and consumer confidence. When the government was elected, NAB business confidence was at 12. Today it is at zero. We see business confidence at zero. We see consumer confidence 10 per cent lower than it was at the election. We see this Treasurer's words and his actions impacting on business and consumer confidence. The finance minister likes graphs. Here we have consumer confidence and its impact from the budget. Of course, it started to decline when the Treasurer started talking.

The SPEAKER: No props, and you know it.

Mr BOWEN: It started to decline when the Treasurer opened his mouth and revealed to the Australian people, in little bits, his budget strategy, which was to cut payments, which was to embark on cuts to Australian families and pensioners, and also, importantly, when he engaged in his rhetorical flourishes about the future of Australia. Madam Speaker, I say to you very clearly, it is irresponsible for the Treasurer of Australia to compare our nation to the economy of Greece. It is simply irresponsible to do so, because what a Treasurer says matters. What a Treasurer says matters just as much as what he does. When the Treasurer talks about Australia going down the path of debt towards Greece, is it any wonder we see consumer and business confidence so heavily impacted and therefore heavily impacting on those Australians who are looking for work, those Australians who are running small businesses, those Australians who are looking for growth in the Australian economy? This Treasurer damages those people every time he opens his mouth. Every time, we see a mixed message from the government. Every time, we see a change in the story. We remember the changing alibis on the surplus. We were told there would be a surplus in the first year and every year of an Abbott government. Then at the campaign launch we were told we would have a surplus within 10 years. Then we were told last week we would have broad balance in five years—then surpluses disappearing and deficits for 40 years after that.

Then we saw a new focus earlier in the week. The Treasurer gave a PowerPoint presentation to the party room. There are a few things here. We were told that all new spending will be offset by savings that are responsible and fair. That is a novel approach compared to the last budget. That is a change of approach. But then we come to the surplus, and a very definitive statement was made to the party room, a clear statement of intent from the Treasurer. We have even got a slide: 'We will get the budget back to surplus as soon as possible,' he told the party room, in a great statement. We have the ASAP strategy now when it comes to the surplus! Is it any wonder that the Australian people look at the government and say: 'If they can't get their story straight, how can they get the economy right? If they can't get their story on their own budget right, how can they understand the impact of their own decisions?'

This is what we are seeing day after day: chaos when it comes to the last budget and chaos when it comes to the next budget as well.

We have seen extraordinary leaks from the Treasury, a fine institution and a Treasury which is in despair at this Treasurer's management. We saw a report just recently saying: There is growing concern in the upper ranks of the federal bureaucracy that the budget process is adrift, with just two months to go before it is delivered.
We saw senior officials say, 'It is five minutes to midnight,' and that time is running out for ministers to set a clear direction. The report went on to say:

The confusion in the bureaucratic ranks is a product of the mixed messages being sent by both the Prime Minister and Treasurer: that hard choices have to be made to repair the nation's finances; and that much of the work is already done.

Is it any wonder that even the Treasury is confused by this Treasurer's remarks? Even the Treasury is confused by this Treasurer's direction because he has none. He has no direction and no budget strategy. He does not know what to do with the budget, a budget which will be delivered at that dispatch box in just a few weeks time. We are seeing that impacting on the Australian economy every day. We have seen the impact of the last budget on consumer confidence, we have seen the impact of the last budget on business confidence and we see the continuing impact of this Treasurer's incompetence.

We see it in the unemployment figures. I talked before about those Australians who are looking for work, joining the lines of the unemployed. We see the Treasurer getting up to the dispatch box and boasting about what is up. How about talking about unemployment being up? How about talking about unemployment being 6.3 per cent and the fact that 80,000 more people cannot find a job, many of them young people? I do not use the term 'crisis' loosely. It is not a term that I use easily or often, but I say to the Treasurer: there is a youth unemployment crisis in Australia and he should be dealing with it. I say to the Treasurer: there is a youth unemployment crisis in Australia and he can deal with it by instilling more confidence in the Australian economy, not less.

The Treasurer has to come to terms with one simple fact: he no longer has my job—he is now the Treasurer of Australia, not the shadow Treasurer of Australia, and it is his responsibility to talk about the Australian economy in its proper context. It is no longer his responsibility to talk the Australian economy down, if it ever was down, which it was not. It is his responsibility as the custodian of the nation's finances and its economy to be responsible in his commentary—to drop the rhetoric about Greece, to drop the rhetoric about Australia's path in the future and to start levelling with the Australian people about his plans and his budget strategy. But he is not capable of doing so. He has been Treasurer now for long enough to know what needs to be done in his budget, but he cannot settle on one strategy or one coherent approach.

We know the Prime Minister will say anything that comes into his head. We see it at the dispatch box day after day, in question time after question time. You never know who he is going to insult next. You never know what statement he is going to make on the run next.

Mr Burke: He doesn't know either.

Mr BOWEN: And the Treasurer does not know either. We see this Prime Minister, who has been uncharitably called the 'Kirribilli hillbilly', wandering around saying whatever springs into his mouth next. It is actually more important than that when you are the Prime Minister or the Treasurer of Australia, because you have a responsibility. You have a responsibility to care about what you say and what you do. That responsibility, when it comes to the Prime Minister and the Treasurer, should be carried out with the hopes and aspirations of Australians for a strong economy in mind, one with reducing unemployment, not increasing unemployment. We see nothing like that from this Prime Minister or this Treasurer.
Mr FRYDENBERG (Kooyong—Assistant Treasurer) (15:26): What an embarrassment question time was today. You had the member for McMahon ask a question about the AAA credit rating. Clearly, those opposite have economic amnesia, because back in 1986, during the years of the Hawke and Keating governments, Labor lost our credit rating, it having been downgraded both in 1986 and again in 1989. It took the Howard-Costello government and the prudent economic management that they brought to Australia's fiscal situation to see an upgrade, in both 2002 and 2003, when both Moody's and Standard & Poor's gave Australia the triple-A credit rating that we now cherish. But who put that triple-A credit rating in danger? It was those opposite. When we bequeathed them a pristine balance sheet with zero government debt, having paid back your $96 billion of debt—

Mr Bowen interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for McMahon will desist.

Mr FRYDENBERG: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As a result of the economic mess that they created, we were left a trajectory of $667 billion worth of debt and a bill of more than $1 billion a month that was just going to pay interest on Labor's debt. That interest bill would have actually headed to $3 billion a month. The trajectory of spending growth under those opposite was at 3.7 per cent. As a result of our measures, in just 18 months we have reduced that 3.7 per cent to one per cent. We were given the six biggest budget deficits in Australia's history. Twenty one thousand cheques were given to dead people. We were given 21,000 additional regulations. We were given a carbon tax which was ahead of the world and suffocated big and small business alike in this country. We were given a mining tax, which we were told would produce $26½ billion worth of revenue and only produced a bit more than $300 million worth of revenue, at the same time introducing the dangerous notion of sovereign risk and putting at risk significant investments in this country from foreign investors.

That was no laughing matter; that was extremely serious. As a result, we saw more than 400,000 jobs go in small business, as Labor rotated small business ministers like it was a game of pass the parcel. We had an NBN which was over budget and behind schedule. Their NBN started as just a spending program of a few billion dollars; it ended up being a spending program of massively more, but it was not rolled out according to their plan. We had 96 announced but unenacted tax and superannuation measures. We had $9 billion worth of additional taxation on superannuation alone. We had the famous cash for clunkers. We had Fuelwatch. We had GroceryWatch. We had the $100,000 that was spent on fake kitchens for the carbon tax ad. We had $75,000 which was spent on coffee machines. We had waste and mismanagement the like of which this country has never seen. All this time as they were running up debt, they were also given the best terms of trade in 140 years; the best export prices to import prices that this country has seen in more than a century. As a result, under the member for Lilley's watch when he the Treasurer of this nation, revenue went up 22 per cent, but they still gave us additional spending.

Since we have come to government, in just 18 months, we have proceeded on a much more careful and sensible path of economic reform. As the Intergenerational report clearly shows, under us, the debt and deficit legacy that we were left has been more than halved. It has gone from 122 per cent of net debt to GDP—which is the Greek-like proportions that the Prime Minister talks about—to under half of that. But there is still such a long way to go. We are
creating jobs at the rate of 600 a day. Economic growth was 2.7 per cent in 2014 compared to under two per cent in 2013. We are building the roads of the 21st century in every state except Victoria, because the Labor government there wants to rip up the East West Link contract again, introducing sovereign risk and costing over 7,000 jobs. We have stopped the boats, which is not only saving more than $10 billion but also saving lives at sea and closing many, many detention centres. We have been successful in abolishing the carbon tax and putting in place a Direct Action program. We have been successful in abolishing the mining tax as well as entering into the free trade agreements with the major economies of China, Japan and Korea.

To understand the significance of the FTA with China: negotiations first started in 2005, the same year that negotiations started between New Zealand and China, and in 2008 China and New Zealand concluded their free trade agreement. It took a coalition government to come to power to actually conclude Australia's FTA with China. It will produce thousands and thousands of jobs, particularly in the service sector, which is 70 per cent of Australia's economy but only 17 per cent of our exports. So too, with Japan and Korea, we are going to create the jobs of the 21st century. We are doing infrastructure programs; we are doing a streamlined tax system; we are doing free trade agreements; and we are paying back Labor's debt.

The other thing is that, right across the economy, we are starting to see the green shoots. Jobs growth is three times faster than it was under Labor. We are now seeing the highest level of job advertisements in 28 months. We have seen eight consecutive months of strong retail figures. As the Prime Minister talked about in question time today, housing starts are up nine per cent, and right across the economy we are starting to see a more confident consumer and a more confident investor—not because of anything that those opposite do, because they in fact talk down the economy, but as a result of our important reforms.

Over the next few weeks you will see us talk a lot more about small business, families and child care. Then, of course, in seven weeks time we will have our budget. Small business is the engine room of the economy. Labor destroyed 400,000 jobs in small business. What the IGR said to us is that the future of living standards in this country is about productivity and workforce participation. There are more than 160,000 parents in this country with children under the age of 13 who cannot go to work because they cannot get an affordable and accessible place of child care. That is why we are caring about that with our families package. Small business is too much overlooked by those opposite because none of them have actually had the experience of working in a small business, unlike those on our side. We care about small business, and we will be giving them the tax cut and the other benefits to get them back into work.

We have a very proud record in just 18 months. It is not because of anything that those opposite have done—because, in fact, we have savings measures worth over $30 billion that are now stuck in the Senate, including $5 billion worth of savings that they took to the last election that they are now blocking. We on this side of the House are determined to push through those obstacles, to announce and promote good economic policy and to explain to the Australian people why we are the better economic managers.

We have seen interest rates come down by 25 basis points; we have seen the Australian dollar come down from parity with the US dollar to now being just above 75c; and we have
also seen petrol prices drop by nearly 50 per cent. As a result, that is putting money into the pockets of Australian families. That increased disposable income can actually help stimulate the economy. Economic growth is much stronger than it was under Labor. Jobs growth is stronger than it was under Labor. Housing starts are up. Consumer confidence is building. Of course, with interest rates coming down and petrol prices coming down, we are seeing money in the pockets of Australian families.

Look at Labor's record. It was a fiscal mess that they bequeathed to us. Look what we have done in 18 months. We are not only creating the jobs of today but also the jobs of the future. Australia's balance sheet will always be stronger under a coalition government.

Mr Husic (Chifley) (15:36): I have to let you know that I do not mind reading The Financial Review. It is a source of good information from time to time. I was reading a very good article the other week by Tony Boyd.

Mr Taylor: You do not learn much!

Mr Husic: You should talk—I have been in interviews with you! Tony Boyd wrote on 13 March a very interesting profile piece on Brian Hartzer, who is now the new CEO of Westpac. He is a very impressive person; I have met with him. He was talking about the things that he is worried about in corporations, and he said:

I think one of the dangers in large companies is that people start to think that their job is to create PowerPoints … to make decisions and improve things for customers.

Anyway, apropos of nothing, Joe Hockey gave a PowerPoint presentation yesterday to their party room. While the rest of corporate Australia realises that that their life is not about PowerPoints, the Treasurer thinks his time is to work out how to make the smiley face on the slide. He thinks that that is the way the Australian economy will be saved. So he and the 'Cormannator,' the Minister for Finance, have put together this slide pack that they took to the party room yesterday. The Treasurer had heaps of time to do it, because he does not sit in ERC anymore—he sits in courts! He thinks that the way forward for the economy is for him to defend himself against Fairfax rather than actually putting in the hard yards in ERC.

Talking about rubbish, did you sleep through the media coverage and not see, every single day, the Treasurer out in a court? Sure, he is absolutely entitled to defend himself, but he is supposed to actually put a budget together. The last budget was crackerjack. Did they actually get it through? They did not even get it through. The Assistant Treasurer did today what he did last week: he goes through a number of stats and he talks about how things are getting better. He reckons that job ads are going up, yet unemployment is now higher than during the GFC. He talks about how economic growth is stronger under the government. Let's look at that. Here is the graph: GDP growth annually—March quarter, under three per cent; June quarter, under 2.7 per cent. It is going down. On the PowerPoint slide you would do a slide downwards. That would be a downward arrow. Not up; it is going down. Growth is going down.

Maybe if the Assistant Treasurer holds that graph in a mirror and sees it going another way, he can say it is going up. Joblessness is going up; economic growth is going down. If the economy is going so well, Assistant Treasurer and Member for Kooyong, why did the Reserve Bank decide to cut interest rates? Why did they cut interest rates? Because when they looked into the future and saw where growth was going, it was going down.
He talks about housing starts and about job ads going up. These people could not hit the side of a barn, and they are claiming credit for all these stats. They cannot even get the stats right. They cannot even get their budget through, and they are claiming that in some way all these great things that are happening are because of them. That is a laugh. You would expect that they would be able to defend themselves. Here we are saying that there are all these contradictions in the way they have run budget strategy. And what do they do? They just dredge up the old talking points from when they were in opposition.

The country demands that they fix on the problems of the future and all they can do is the old talking points. They keep bringing up the old talking points.

Mr Taylor interjecting—

Mr HUSIC: If you look at where growth was under us, Member for Hume, in the face of some of the worst economic conditions in 75 years, we had joblessness lower than you. People could actually pay the bills; people could actually have a pay packet. What was the answer of those opposite when they were in opposition? We should be spending less; we should be spending less; we should do what New Zealand did. That is what their argument was. That is what the argument of the then opposition leader, now Prime Minister, was: do what New Zealand did. They had people stuck in joblessness for ages, stuck without work, seeing an economy performing less. That is what their prescription was.

This is the problem with the coalition in government now. Because all they did was oppose and they had no firm ideas of their own, they dig up the old talking points and they have not got a way for the future. They are busy creating PowerPoints; they are not busy building a budget and building a fair budget at that. That is absolutely why they stand condemned and why we expect that the next budget will just be one of cuts and chaos.

Mr COULTON (Parkes—The Nationals Chief Whip) (15:41): It seems that the member for Chifley is a little obsessed with what goes on in the coalition party room. Perhaps he could enlighten us on some of the PowerPoint presentations they may have had in the Labor Party—for example, Craig Thomson’s PowerPoint display on how to run an efficient union; Bill Shorten’s PowerPoint on how to be loyal to your leader. You could watch the reruns a couple of months later. Watching a PowerPoint display in the Labor Party would be like watching an episode of Australia’s Most Wanted.

But I digress. This is a serious MPI and I thank the member for Chifley, who just left. He could have done one on how to be a snappy dresser, but we will not go there. I like blue suits. This is a serious topic. I would like in my contribution to talk about what it is like being a regional member of this place, representing a third of New South Wales, when you have a coalition government in Canberra and a coalition government in Sydney.

How about we start with infrastructure? This is the largest infrastructure spend in this country’s history, having a minister for infrastructure come to your electorate and allocate funds for safety on the Newell Highway. That highway runs the backbone of New South Wales, it carries more freight than any other highway and it has been neglected for the last six years. Funding has been allocated for heavy vehicle safety programs on the Gil Gil road at Pallamallawa. The Labor Party would not know where Pallamallawa is, but I can tell you that it is an important part of regional New South Wales and residents deserve to have safe roads that can also provide road train access.
We could talk about the NBN—the NBN that promised nothing but debt under the Labor Party. But it is now delivering real services to the people of New South Wales. We could talk about mobile phones. I sat in this place in 2008 and watched the Labor Party raid the $2½ billion from the Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund and not for six years did we see one cent going into mobile coverage in New South Wales. Not one cent! So how about we talk about some financial responsibility and what mobile phone coverage does to the productivity of New South Wales and Australia?

We could talk about schools funding and how, under this government, schools funding to the states is going up by eight per cent, nine per cent, six per cent every year. We can talk about the BER program that still leaves one of my contractors in Moree owed $642,000 due to the mismanagement of it.

We could talk about droughts, where the member for Watson stood in here and said, 'We don't talk about drought anymore—we have dryness.' So we removed the drought policy. So now, in the worst drought in living memory in my electorate, we have had to reconstruct a drought policy, where now over 4,000 family households in farms are getting some support. We have more to do that as this drought deepens; but we were left with nothing from that side.

How about we talk about financial responsibility, with $900 cash payments? If you are wondering where the $2½ billion went from the Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund, in 2008, it went into $900 cash payments that led to an increase in domestic violence and record takings in some of the poker machines in the pubs in my electorate. Compare that to Work for the Dole, the Green Army, responsibility for mutual obligation for people who are receiving government funds and getting some safety into families. Talk about putting money into organisations such as Clontarf.

If we want to talk about the environment, why don't we talk about the carbon tax versus the Direct Action Plan. Pensioners in my electorate could not turn on their air conditioners and sweltered in the heat and froze in the winter, because they were scared witless about the carbon tax. Compare that to actually paying people who can reduce their emissions, something that can be measured, paid for and reduced. If the Labor Party were so insistent on helping the environment, how about they get in with us now and put some certainty around the renewable energy target, something that they actually agree with us on but will not vote for due to their political ends. There is uncertainty in the whole sector because of that. Being lectured by the Labor Party on budget responsibility is a ridiculous scenario and they should be treated with the contempt they deserve.

Mr MITCHELL (McEwen—Second Deputy Speaker) (15:46): The only drought the electorate of Parkes has is the intellectual drought from their member. I have never before seen five minutes of such absolute rubbish—

Mr McCormack: You're a disgrace. What a disgraceful thing to say about the member for Parkes.

Mr MITCHELL: There he is—Geppetto himself, the little Pinocchio.

Mr McCormack: You're a disgrace.

Mr MITCHELL: You're a goose. You know why they sit you over there? They don't want you near the front bench.
He did nothing for five minutes but talk rubbish. When you have a debate on economics, you usually put your lead person up. The worst thing that they could do was to put up Little Sloppy—I will call him that—the member for Kooyong. He was on the television last night saying that petrol prices had gone down because of this government. Somehow, the Abbott government, which has done nothing but break every single promise it made to the electorate, has made APEC drop their prices. But of course petrol prices have gone up 37c since Christmas.

Ms Butler: Must have shirt-fronted them.

Mr MITCHELL: Must have shirt-fronted them. The 'plastic Putin', Tony Abbott, has got in there and got APEC to lower their prices. But the member for Kooyong says the reason petrol prices are down is 'all because of us'. But now prices have gone up 37c, including the 1.7c a litre fuel tax that they put on, despite saying to the electorate before the last election, 'There will be no new taxes under this government.' Just another broken promise by a broken government that is chaotic and shambolic at the very best.

Mr Howarth interjecting—

Mr MITCHELL: Don't let me get stuck into you, please—the only bloke I know who thinks that he is better than the rest of the world. He got out there and talked about the Moreton rail, saying, 'It's been delivered by the coalition government.' It did not.

Mr Howarth: That's rubbish.

Mr MITCHELL: You silly fool, it was delivered by us. We built it and we funded it, and that is why your own electorate attacked you for not telling the truth.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Broadbent): Order! Members could temper their language in regard to other members.

Mr MITCHELL: Certainly. Thank you, Acting Deputy Speaker. I am happy to do that.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Would you like to withdraw the remark 'silly fool'?

Mr MITCHELL: Which one?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Which one?

Wyatt Roy interjecting—

Mr MITCHELL: Come on, back in your highchair, Bugaboo. I am happy to withdraw that remark, acting Deputy Speaker.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Would the member for McEwen just say he withdraws?

Mr MITCHELL: I have said I withdraw. I am more than happy to. In 2002, this Prime Minister, the Prime Minister for broken promises, promised a surplus from his government each and every year. Well, we are into the second year of this government, and guess what? They cannot even get their budget through. It is that bad that their magic pudding has gone flat. They promised to deliver a surplus and they cannot even deliver a budget. You only have to look at the opening remarks by the lead speaker for the government, whose first comments were, 'Back in 1986.'

Whenever the government talk about economics in this place, the first thing they do is go back and talk about last century. No-one has told them that we are now in the 21st century. That could explain a lot of the ideas that they bring forward all the time. Peter Costello, the
man they usually bow and scrape to, described this Prime Minister perfectly when it comes to
talking about economics and budgets. He said he is 'an economic illiterate'. That explains
what the Prime Minister does. That is why he attacks pensions. That is why he attacks
schools. That is why he attacks health.

An opposition member: And universities.

Mr MITCHELL: And universities. They attack them to make sure that our kids are going
to paying a lot more to go to school and get a degree. But the one thing they did not do, the
one thing they ran away from so quickly, scurrying like little crickets in the headlights, when
there was talk about taxing multinational companies for the profits that they make here in
Australia and then they offshore, was support taxing large companies. These guys, every
single one of them, sat there and went quiet. But they are more than happy to rip every red
cent they can off a pensioner or off a young person. That is why their budget has failed.

This is a government that sit there and say, 'Well, if you get unemployed for some reason,
not your own fault'—if one of the industries that the government have been very proud to
close shuts down—'you can go without unemployment benefits for six months if you are
under the age of 30.' In McEwen, we have a high rate of under-35s—young people starting
families and buying houses. This government say to them, 'If you lose your job, stiff'—no
support, no income support, no help. But they will jump on a plane and fly down to a birthday
party and sing happy birthday at the taxpayer's expense, but they will not attack
multinational— (Time expired)

Ms MARINO (Forrest—Government Whip) (15:51): At the commencement, I have to say
I was really disappointed to hear the very personal attacks by the member for McEwen,
particularly on the member for Parkes. I am one of the few farmers in the place. I saw the
disrespect and the sniggering at the member for Parkes. It was appalling. That unfortunately
reflects the view that Labor have about rural and regional Australia and our farmers. As a
farmer in this place I would put on record that I have enormous respect for every person who
represents rural and regional Australia and for those who actually get out on the land and do
the hard yards. As one of them, let me reassure you that on this side of the House we have
enormous respect for what you do, and please, do not be offended by what you just heard.
And as for the words 'chaos' and 'incompetence', they belong only in one place, and that is
with Labor.

It is a sick joke, this MPI, just a sick joke. When Australians sit back and look at where
they are at and they see that we were heading to $667 billion worth of debt, they know where
the responsibility lies, irrespective of what was said on the other side. We do have a very
sound budget strategy, and we are working every single day to undo the damage of six years
of Labor in charge of Treasury. And Labor is a repeat offender in the place of debt and deficit.
I do not know if there is anyone on that side who is still here who was around 25 years ago
when the last Labor surplus was delivered—a quarter of a century, and you have the absolute
gall to come into this place and talk about economic management when you have not
delivered a surplus anywhere near it in over a quarter of a century. If that is not an offence—
25 years—it is just dreadful.

Mr Mitchell: You haven't seen a dollar you wouldn't spend.
Ms MARINO: The member for McEwen, after some of the comments you made I think it would be good if you did not make any further comments. I have really had enough of those sorts of comments directed to individuals and particularly those who represent farmers and rural communities.

Ms Butler: Take it up with Costello; he's the one who said it.

Ms MARINO: And as we know, member for Griffith, this is a historic effort by you. John Howard inherited a deficit of $14 billion and a net debt of $83 billion when he came into government in 1996. Eleven years of coalition budget control turned this nation's budget position around completely and got Australia's finances back on track, so much so that the next, Labor, Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, inherited a surplus of $19.8 billion and net assets of $29 billion. And what did Labor do with that wonderful financial position?

Opposition members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Broadbent): Order! It is one thing to have robust discussion, which I am very keen on, but to badger the other side is inappropriate.

Ms MARINO: What we saw was $191 billion worth of cumulative deficits, with a further $123 billion ahead. And let's just talk about the $14 billion worth of interest each year that we now look at. That is $1.167 billion a month, $269 million per week, $38 million a day and $1.6 million an hour, and in my five minutes that is $133,000 we are borrowing to pay Labor's interest. That is exactly what we are doing. In my five minutes, for those Australians who are watching, we have to borrow from overseas $133,000 to pay for Labor's debt and deficit. There is never a better reason for us to live within our means than that one. And I would say to members opposite, when they talk about debt and deficit, that their record is so poor and will go down in infamy in the history of this nation. I would say to them as well that thanks to Labor spending over $100 million more a day than what we collect is $40 billion a year more than we are actually taking in. (Time expired)

Mr GILES (Scullin) (15:56): At the heart of this debate on the budget is a big question, and it is a question for members opposite: when does good government begin? And there is a subsidiary question, for people who get the first answer right—and I am looking forward to any answers, really; Malcolm has one, I understand. Whatever happened to the budget emergency? Do you remember the budget emergency? Whatever happened to the budget emergency?—the key to the pre-election economic narrative but missing from or an occasional visitor to the narrative in government.

Mr Watts: I didn't see that in Joe's PowerPoint.

Mr GILES: No. Perhaps we may be enlightened by the next government contribution in that regard. It is really interesting that in the contributions from government members there has I think been only one comment that went to the heart of this debate, and that was when the Assistant Treasurer said, 'Look what we've done in 18 months.' Thank you Assistant Treasurer! I am not sure, if it was on the PowerPoint, whether it was upside down in the graphs or not, but you have made so eloquently and so succinctly the point that Labor members have been setting out through this debate: we are asking—in fact, we are saying—look what you have done in 18 months. What an extraordinary contribution! This government in 18 months has made one very significant contribution. It has delivered more leadership challenges than past budgets. It is extraordinary. McMahon would be proud.
Mr Watts: He would be relieved.

Mr GILES: The member for Gellibrand hits the nail on the head. Eleven months on—

Government members interjecting—

Mr GILES: We are very happy to talk about leadership—39 votes for a blank space. That is another succinct statement on the quality of this government and its economic agenda. Eleven months on from last month's budget, one thing is clear: the budget is in a worse position than when this government came to power. And I am indebted, like my friend the member for Chifley, to the Australian Financial Review and a terrific comment piece by Laura Tingle, who said:

We are being governed by fools and it is not funny.

This is a piece worth reading in detail, but perhaps I will just go to what I think is the critical comment. When she goes through the shocking deterioration in the budget positioning and the series of humiliating backflips this government has had to endure, she comes to this point:

… the government's utter failure to prosecute either the policy arguments or political strategies to get voters to countenance its signature policies, is a responsibility that rests squarely with the government of the day.

And that is the proposition that this debate seeks to illuminate. And what light has been shed on it by government members? The chaos that is at the heart of the government, the chaos that no doubt was at the core of the Treasurer's PowerPoint presentation to the party room, the chaos that is the Prime Minister's ever utterance on matters of economic policy is something that is not shared only by the members of the executive of this government; it clearly goes right through the members of it. The shadow Treasurer, on the other hand, set out very clearly the consequences and costs of this incompetence—the two sets of costs. We know here, from the people we represent, the direct costs of this failure. We see the victims of austerity, the victims of the cuts—the sick, those on fixed incomes and students, who are Australia's future.

We should also focus in this debate on the indirect costs, the costs to the wider economy of keeping unemployment at unrealistic, unnecessary and tragically high levels, particularly for young people.

This chaos, this confusion which carries such severe consequences, was there at the start. We on this side know that this government came into power talking down the Australian economy at home while talking it up abroad. The Treasurer went to London to deliver a keynote speech attacking 'the age of entitlement'. He set out his agenda for austerity overseas because he knew it would not be accepted at home. Perhaps there is an intuitive understanding among government members that it is not just the incompetence of their economic agenda but its unacceptable nature that means they are incapable of prosecuting this agenda. Five minutes is not nearly enough to canvass the litany of sins from the Prime Minister; the Treasurer, the Minister for Communications and all government members which has led to this incompetent, chaotic approach to economic management. But I go back to where I began: when does good government start? (Time expired)

Mr PITT (Hinkler) (16:01): Before I commence I would like to congratulate the parliamentary secretary at the table, who was honoured today by the Institution of Engineers. There will actually be a tree planted here in Canberra for those in the House of
Representatives and those in the Senate who are former engineers. I congratulate the parliamentary secretary.

I had the great misfortune to sit through the contribution from the member for McMahon. As much as I hate to admit it, there is something on which we agree, and that is that small business is incredibly important to employment in Australia. It is the backbone of employment in my state of Queensland. Over 90 per cent of all employment in Queensland is through small business. It is incredibly important. As someone who actually came from 'the world' before I came in here—I owned a small business, employed people and paid bills; I had a consulting firm, a training business and a farm—I can tell you that the destroyers of small business are those opposite. The federal Labor Party and the state Labor Party—it does not matter which one—destroy employment in small business. When they brought in the carbon tax, the mining tax, the red tape, the deal with the Greens, my business, which used to average over 65 miners trained every month, went from 65 to three in a week. They absolutely destroyed the mining industry in Queensland. There are over 10,000 of these people, skilled and trained, sitting around at home with no work because of the deal that was done between those opposite and the Greens. They are the great destroyers of industry in this country. It is absolutely unacceptable.

And what have we got now? Unfortunately in Queensland we now have a Labor state government. And what have they announced? Two days before the election, in a very sneaky press release, they announced that they would close all of the net fishing areas in Mackay, Townsville and Cairns. There are only 220 net fishing licences left in Queensland. These are the hardworking people of Australia. They go out and do their job. They know how to manage their catch and they have been doing it for generations. What is the solution of state Labor? They will close the lot! If you live in Queensland and you want to eat fresh fish, that is very unfortunate because you will not be able to access it. My electorate is a very low socioeconomic area and I represent a lot of people who are actually poor. If you want to eat healthy in Queensland you eat fish. What sort of fish do you eat? I am sure that the shadow minister for agriculture would know. You eat mullet. How do you get mullet? Mullet is the cheapest fish available because it is plentiful and it replenishes very quickly. But it comes from net fishermen. If it is not available, people will eat imported product—in particular, from Vietnam. It is an absolute disgrace for the member for McMahon to come in here and talk about small business. It is quite incredible.

The member for McEwen, who has just left the chamber, talked about fuel prices. Well, I can tell you that the Minister for Small Business stood up and got the ACCC to investigate fuel pricing after complaints from me and a number of other regional members because when the wholesale price of oil fell substantially to under $50 a barrel we were very concerned that the price in the regions would not drop proportionately, which it did not. In the city it got to under $1. I am sure that those members here who live in the city were quite appreciative of the price of 99c for a litre of petrol. However, in the regions we were still paying $1.30, $1.40 or $1.50. It was quite incredible. Imagine my surprise when the report was completed and, lo and behold, it turned out that we were paying more for petrol than the others. The proportional drop in regional centres was not as much as it should have been. There was a difference of greater than 10c. I knew people were being robbed. I am sure the member for Riverina knew they were being robbed. The ACCC knew they were being robbed. Everybody
now knows they were being robbed. As a result, guess what has happened? I filled my car up with diesel last week. Once again, imagine my surprise to find that, for the first time in many years, the price of retail diesel in regional Australia is less than the price of unleaded petrol. It was an absolute surprise to me because it has been a long way up. So we are taking action and we have made a difference on fuel prices, particularly in the regions. But what have those opposite done? All they have done is left us with hand grenades, booby traps and hollow logs—and they have back-ended the budget. We will get a bill. Everybody has a bill—a bill from Bill Shorten. It is absolutely stunning to me that that is the case.

To wrap up I will borrow something from the Queensland Treasurer, Tim Nicholls. We all recall the world's greatest Treasurer, the member for Lilley. Bruce Springsteen was his economic idol! Unfortunately 'The Boss', in the Queensland media, cautioned Mr Swan against relying too heavily on him, saying he was not too good with his own money. And the former Queensland Treasurer said, 'While the member for Lilley might think he was born to run, the truth is the was blinded by the light and he and his leaders Julia Gillard and Kevin Rudd were simply dancing in the dark!'

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (16:06): It is no wonder that the government's approach to this year's budget is chaotic, when you consider that last year's budget remains unsolved, the government's leadership remains unresolved and the government's policy agenda has consisted of nothing but the ideological destruction of forward-looking and necessary Labor reforms. The government's short-term ideas have been unacceptable to the Australian community and it does not seem to have a plan for the long term. Money has poured out in tax relief to big business, to be made up by harsh cuts to the most vulnerable—pensioners, the unemployed, students, low-income families and the poorest people in our region.

The deepest cuts of all have been made to Australia's international aid budget—some $11 billion—reducing our overseas development assistance to its lowest proportion of GNI in 40 years. The foreign minister has presided over the dissolution of AusAID and the decimation of Australia's aid budget. Make no mistake: this will mean more people living in desperate poverty; it will mean fewer lives saved; and it will mean less economic development and greater regional instability. For a government that is obsessed with appearing tough on terrorism and refugees, it would appear counterproductive in the extreme to be gutting Australia's world-renowned aid program which has worked to address some of the root causes—namely, disadvantage, discrimination and despair.

As if further evidence were required that this government just does not understand the concepts of fairness or social justice, we now learn that this government, which claims to care about ending family violence, is cutting funding around the country to community legal centres and emergency services for women and children fleeing family violence. This government, led by the self-described Prime Minister for Indigenous affairs, is cutting $500 million from Indigenous services, including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service, or ATSILS, and the peak body, NATSILS, as well as legal aid. The Abbott government's withdrawal of funding for remote Aboriginal communities—who are, after all, according to the Prime Minister, only maintaining a 'lifestyle choice'—has led the WA government to propose the closure of something like 150 communities in WA. Again, it is hard to think of a more damaging cut to the fabric of fairness and justice in this country than to take away community services and legal advice from those who cannot afford to pay for it,
especially when Indigenous Australians are massively overrepresented in the criminal justice system, and to force the removal of Aboriginal people from their traditional lands. Way to close the gap, Prime Minister!

This is the 'infrastructure Prime Minister' who does not believe in trains, Australian manufacturing or the renewable energy sector, who thinks that climate change is 'crap' and whose government has sacked 1,200 CSIRO scientists and threatened the jobs of 1,700 more researchers in order to bully its way towards a deregulated university system where degrees could cost $100,000 and young people's opportunities are dictated by their family's wealth. This is a government that has signed a uranium sale treaty with India that significantly lowers nuclear safeguards and is negotiating free-trade agreements and the Trans-Pacific Partnership that will put Australian jobs at risk and threaten our sovereignty. This is a government that is dramatically expanding live export markets into places that do not respect human rights let alone animal welfare and is doing so in the face of gross violations of animal welfare standards that continue to go unchecked and unpunished.

We all remember the Prime Minister saying before the election that there will be no cuts to health or education, pensions, the ABC or SBS. But, apparently, broken promises do not matter when this Prime Minister and this Treasurer do it. In any case, if you are going to keep helping your mates at the big end of town with tax breaks and by ending the mining tax and the carbon price, and if you want to keep torturing refugees in expensive offshore detention centres, you have to get the money from somewhere, right?

Tony Abbott may or may not survive as Prime Minister but, in any case, these policies belong to all of the members of the so-called Liberal Party. Whoever is their leader, we need to look at their policies and their budget priorities. Do they still intend to ignore the existential crisis of global warming? Are they still trying to dismantle the world's largest network of marine sanctuaries established by the former Labor government? Are they still banging the drum of national security and border protection as a cover to deny accountability in government, to persecute vulnerable people and to take away more of our rights and freedoms? Will public health and education, science, the ABC and SBS, pensioners, students, the unemployed, low-income earners, people with disabilities, Indigenous Australians, refugees, the global poor, people with mental health issues, animal welfare, respect for the UN and the environment—these important issues—remain expendable under this government? Those are the important questions. Unfortunately, with this chaotic and dishonest government, we are unlikely to get any reliable answers.

Mr HOWARTH (Petrie) (16:11): It is a privilege today to talk about this MPI. I do reject the opposition's assertions that are part of this MPI. I did note and listen to what the member for Fremantle had to say, and I appreciate her passion for what she believes in. I, too, want to see foreign aid increase in the future. But I would say to the member for Fremantle that you cannot run a foreign aid budget on the credit card—you really cannot. Unfortunately, the opposition are not supporting the $5 billion worth of budget saving measures that they took to the last election. I call upon the member for Fremantle and others to talk to their leader and to talk to their frontbench and ask them to support that. Quite frankly, foreign aid is one of the few areas that this government can reduce without going through the Senate. If you had supported the $5 billion that you promised, as well as other things, then we would not have to
look at foreign aid. On that, though, foreign aid is being spent extremely well. We are making sure that we are getting good value for money with our foreign aid.

This government has a plan to return to surplus. We really do have a plan to return to surplus, and we are not going to abandon that plan. We believe it is important to return to surplus. We know that households cannot continually spend more than what they earn. They cannot continue to rack up bills on the credit card. The people in the gallery cannot continue to spend more than what they earn every year. I say to the students looking down from the gallery today—how are you going, guys?—when you grow up and get a part-time job or are working full-time, you cannot spend more than what you earn day in and day out. But, federally, this is what the Australian government has done for the last seven years—the last 12 months under our government and the last six years under Labor. What I am saying to you, as young people, and to those other people in the gallery today, is that we are committed to returning to surplus. We believe it is important.

I notice the member for Fairfax is here today. He is a very well-known figure in Australia and a very competent businessman. Member for Fairfax and others, I really believe it is important that we return to surplus. I know that our GDP is lower than other countries—and the member for Fairfax has written to me on this. I do know that. But, just because every other country, and those in Europe, have a much higher debt level, does that mean that Australia should do that as well? I say no. I say that we do need to return to surplus, and I believe that. Let us look at what Labor Treasurers have had to say. What do former Labor Treasurers have to say about returning the budget to surplus? Wayne Swan said in 2011:

It's important we bring the Budget back to the black in 2012-13 when we said we would because we've got this strength in the economy coming down the track and we don't want to exacerbate price pressures in the economy during that period.

In May 2011 he also said:

Making savings is important because we bring the Budget back to surplus in 2012-13, build surpluses after that and in so doing that we make sure we don't add cost of living pressures on Australian families.

He also said in 2012 that the budget's return to surplus is helping deliver. Well, we never actually got back to surplus. The member for McMahon said in 2012:

… the surplus and our fiscal management has been important in putting downward pressure on interest rates.

He also said in 2012:

The Government needed to make responsible spending cuts to put downward pressure on inflation and therefore interest rates.

I say to the Labor Party: your former Treasurers believe it is important to come back to surplus. We do. We know the Australian public wants us to be bipartisan and work together on different issues, and I would ask members opposite to support some of our budget savings. It is important because if you get back into government or we are in government it is important to make sure that we can return to surplus for the children and the people up there in the gallery and for all Australians.

We have delivered a lot in that last 18 months. The member for McMahon mentioned youth unemployment, and I am concerned about that too. We have 83 per cent youth unemployment in Petrie and 17 per cent unemployment. We have got the Green Army
happening. We have the Army gap year. We have got the Colombo Plan. The member for
Wentworth is rolling out the NBN, which is creating more jobs, particularly with the
downturn of the mining boom, and we are making sure, most importantly that we are getting
good value for taxpayers.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott):** The discussion is now concluded.

**COMMITTEES**

**Public Works Committee**

Reference

Mr McCORMACK (Riverina—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance) (16:17): I move:

That, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, the following
proposed work be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for consideration
and report: 17th Construction Squadron Relocation Infrastructure Project.

It is proposed that the Department of Defence will provide new, fit for purpose facilities to
support the relocation of the 17th Construction Squadron from Holsworthy Barracks, Sydney,
New South Wales, to Royal Australian Air Force Base Amberley, Queensland. The proposed
project will provide new working accommodation, vehicle and equipment shelters,
quartermaster stores, workshops for the Army and a new fire training area for Royal
Australian Air Force fire services. Relocating the 17th Construction Squadron to join its
parent unit, the 6th Engineer Support Regiment at RAAF Base Amberley, will improve
efficiencies in management, logistics support and operations. The construction is estimated to
cost $71.8 million, excluding GST, which includes provision for management and design,
facility construction, furniture, fittings and equipment, contingencies and escalation. Subject
to parliamentary approval, construction is expected to begin in late 2015 and should be
completed by late 2016. I am sure the committee will undertake a robust inquiry into the
project and I look forward to its report. I commend the motion to the House.

Question agreed to.

**BILLS**

**Migration Amendment (Protection and Other Measures) Bill 2014**

Consideration of Senate Message

Bill returned from the Senate with amendments.

Ordered that the amendments be considered immediately.

*Senate’s amendments—*

(1) Clause 2, page 2 (table items 5 to 8), omit the table items.

(2) Clause 2, page 3 (at the end of the table), add:

11. Schedule 5 The day after this Act receives the Royal
Assent.

(3) Schedule 2, page 10 (line 1) to page 15 (line 9), omit the Schedule.

(4) Schedule 3, item 1, page 16 (lines 7 to 10), omit paragraph (b), substitute:

(b) either:

(i) is an unlawful non-citizen; or
(ii) holds a bridging visa or a temporary protection visa, or a temporary visa of a kind (however described) prescribed for the purposes of this subparagraph.

Note: Temporary protection visas are provided for by subsection 35A(3).

(5) Schedule 3, item 6, page 17 (lines 11 to 14), omit paragraph (b), substitute:

(b) either:

(i) is an unlawful non-citizen; or

(ii) holds a bridging visa or a temporary protection visa, or a temporary visa of a kind (however described) prescribed for the purposes of this subparagraph.

Note: Temporary protection visas are provided for by subsection 35A(3).

(6) Schedule 3, item 15, page 19 (line 23), omit "class", substitute "kind".

(7) Schedule 3, item 15, page 19 (line 29), at the end of paragraph (3)(c), add "granted before 2 December 2013".

(8) Schedule 3, item 16, page 20 (line 13), omit "class", substitute "kind".

(9) Schedule 3, item 16, page 20 (line 19), at the end of paragraph (3)(c), add "granted before 2 December 2013".

(10) Schedule 4, item 11, page 23 (line 30), omit "7 days", substitute "14 days".

(11) Schedule 4, item 11, page 24 (lines 20 and 21), omit "7-day period", substitute "14-day period".

(12) Schedule 4, item 26, page 32 (line 3), omit "7 days", substitute "14 days".

(13) Schedule 4, item 26, page 32 (lines 24 and 25), omit "7-day period", substitute "14-day period".

(14) Page 38 (after line 32), at the end of the bill, add:

Schedule 5—Technical corrections

Counter-Terrorism Legislation Amendment (Foreign Fighters) Act 2014

1 Subsection 2(1) (table items 6, 7, 9, 11 and 12)

Omit "Migration Amendment (Protection and Other Measures) Act 2014", substitute "Migration Amendment (Protection and Other Measures) Act 2015".

Migration and Maritime Powers Legislation Amendment (Resolving the Asylum Legacy Caseload) Act 2014

2 Subsection 2(1) (table items 4A, 13 and 15)

Omit "Migration Amendment (Protection and Other Measures) Act 2014", substitute "Migration Amendment (Protection and Other Measures) Act 2015".

3 Division 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 5 (heading)

Repeal the heading, substitute:

Division 2—Amendments if this Act commences after the Migration Amendment (Protection and Other Measures) Act 2015

4 Division 1 of Part 3 of Schedule 5 (heading)

Repeal the heading, substitute:

Division 1—Amendments if this Act commences before the Migration Amendment (Protection and Other Measures) Act 2015

Mr McCormack (Riverina—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance) (16:19): I move:
That the amendments be agreed to.
Question agreed to.

Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Deregulation) Bill 2014
Telecommunications (Industry Levy) Amendment Bill 2014
Returned from Senate

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

CONDOLENCES

Fraser, Rt Hon. John Malcolm, AC CH

Debate resumed on the motion:

That the House record its deep regret at the death on 20 March 2015 of the Right Honourable John Malcolm Fraser AC CH, former Member for Wannon and Prime Minister, and place on record its appreciation of his long and highly distinguished service to our nation and tender its profound sympathy to his family in their bereavement.

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari) (16:20): It gives me great pleasure to participate in this condolence motion for the Rt. Hon. Malcolm Fraser. He was one of the old regime. We do not have them anymore, thank goodness—not the old regime, but the old practice. I come at this discussion around Mr Fraser's life from the perspective of someone who first met him in 1971 or 1972, I cannot be precise, when I was driving cabs here in Canberra. I picked him up one day at the back of Parliament House and dropped him off somewhere. I am not sure who he was with or why he was going there or any of that sort of stuff, but that was my first interaction with him. Then, of course, I was to observe his role in the nefarious dismissal and he became a bete noire for people like me and those of the left and those in the progressive side of politics for all of his then political life.

But it is not about that that I want to talk. I really want to talk about his life after politics and reflect principally on his role with Care Australia. I did have some interaction with him in later years, most recently at the 100th birthday celebration for Simon Crean's mum, Mrs Crean, in their home in Melbourne. He and Mrs Fraser were present and it was very clear that not only were they well received and well respected by those who were there, but they were treated with the sort of respect you would expect for someone who has led quite a significant public life and done a great deal for this country.

Prior to that I was involved with him as he was a commissioner, along with Bob Hawke, the National President of the RSL, Rear Admiral Ken Doolan (Retired), Peacekeeper Major Matina Jewell (Retired), veterans advocate Kylie Russell and cartoonist and journalist Warren Brown on the National Commission on the Commemoration of the Anzac Centenary. They were appointed by then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, on 25 April 2010, and reported in 2011. Six hundred submissions were received, along with 1,500 suggestions from Australia and overseas, on how we might best commemorate the Anzac Centenary. So they were very much part of the architecture that led us to the development of the processes and commemorative events around the Anzac Centenary. I want to thank all of those people but most particularly acknowledge the roles of former prime ministers Bob Hawke and Malcolm Fraser. One of the meetings we had that I was present at was at the war cabinet room at Victoria Barracks, in Melbourne. There was a very interesting interaction between all of the members of the...
committee, and I have to say that it was a great opportunity for me to see first-hand the way in which Mr Fraser worked.

I do not want to dwell on whatever sins I might have seen committed during 1975, and subsequently while Mr Fraser was Prime Minister and a member of parliament. I want to talk about his post-parliamentary career, and most importantly his single-minded dedication to issues to do with human rights. We have heard others talk about his role in advancing the arguments against apartheid, and the very strong actions he took to ensure that the Australian government took when he was Prime Minister, which sent a very strong message to South Africa about the unacceptable nature of the apartheid regime. We know that. It was a very strong and personal commitment of Mr Fraser's.

He also had a belief, which I think was lifelong, that Australia should play an active role on the international stage on human rights issues. That may have stemmed from his very progressive liberal views about the rights of individuals being protected, and protected in this context in terms of their human rights. It is evidenced not only by his own actions but also by the criticisms and admonitions he received from others on human rights issues. It was evidenced by the way in which they behaved or misbehaved. But I do not think it is properly understood in this place that he played a significant role in issues to do with human rights and international aid, in the period post-1987, when he became involved with CARE Australia. He was chair of CARE Australia from 1987 until 2002, which is twice as long as the period for which he was Prime Minister. Also, he was president of CARE International between 1990 and 1995. Mr Fraser committed himself wholeheartedly to this role. I had some engagement with him whilst he was in that role, principally because a former workmate of mine, Brian Doolan—a person who worked with me while I was a member of parliament and a member of the executive in the Hawke government—who became an employee of CARE Australia and worked very closely with Mr Fraser over a number of years. He made a very strong impression upon Brian, and subsequently Brian transmitted that impression to me. It was very clear that he earned the respect, because Brian was a person of the Left. He was not someone who came from the conservative side of politics. He and Mr Fraser got on extremely well. Mr Fraser used his considerable experience, presence and skill to advance CARE's work. He was fearless in advocating for the rights and welfare of CARE employees. It was in that context that his presence, his energy and his commitment was evidence to his work for the release, in 1999, of Steve Pratt and Peter Wallace, and, later, Branko Jelen, who were employees of CARE Australia when imprisoned by the Milosevic regime in Yugoslavia. Mr Fraser was not a hands-off person in this context. He made five visits to Belgrade over the period and was very active in progressing the issues to do with the release. He very much had hands-on participation in the negotiations with the Milosevic regime. He was involved in the politics of the United Nations and its relationship to Yugoslavia, and at one point in the discussions acted as a representative in part for the Australian government.

It needs to be understood here that this was a man who had spent his time as Prime Minister and had now decided to devote his time to human rights issues and advancing the interests of others through his role in CARE Australia. He needs to be congratulated. We need to acknowledge his role and, in his passing, acknowledge that that role made a significant contribution to the role that CARE Australia plays across the world stage. He obviously became very attuned to the politics of international aid, of international aid organisations, of
the role of the Department of Foreign Affairs here in Australia, of Australia's role in the world of human rights and international aid, and of the role the United Nations played.

I rang Brian the other day. He now happens to be the CEO of the Fred Hollows Foundation, and he is currently in Rwanda. I spoke to him by phone and asked, 'What should I be saying about Mr Fraser?' He gave me some insights about his relationship with him, which was a very strong relationship, but he said that one of the things I needed to refer to most strongly—and this was emphasised to me as well by Simon Crean—was the role that Mrs Fraser played and how close she was to Mr Fraser in supporting him in his work both in Australia and internationally.

Brian regaled this story from during the Yugoslav crisis. They were at the London high commission and Mr Fraser was away in the corner on the phone having a yarn, with his hand cupped over the mouthpiece, to Mrs Fraser. He yelled out across the room, 'Tamie wants to know how you are, Brian?' And Brian said, 'I'm okay, but I haven't eaten for 12 hours.' That was relayed to Mrs Fraser. It was not much later that Mrs Fraser emerged with some refreshments for Brian. She was that sort of person, and I think we need to acknowledge in Mr Fraser's passing the magnificent contribution she has made to Australian public life and to her reputation in terms of her role as a partner, wife, mother to Mr Fraser's children and grandmother to the grandchildren. But most importantly there was the support she provided for Mr Fraser.

I just want to refer to Malcolm Fraser: the political memoirs, which I commend to those who have not had the opportunity to read it. I have not read all of it myself, but chapter 21 deals with his time with CARE Australia and I have to say that it is worth a read. At the end of it, given the time and effort that he put into this exercise in working for CARE Australia and trying to work for the interests of others across the world who were far less fortunate than ourselves, it says on page 711:

'There is no doubt', Fraser says, 'that helping to found it was one of the very best things that I have done.' Fraser believes the great strength of CARE is that it is non-political and non-religious, giving help where it is needed, as and when it can. And what about the politics, the disappointments and the betrayals? He shrugs. 'Well, that's people. We are imperfect creatures.'

And we are imperfect creatures. I am sure that Mr Fraser, in acknowledging that we are imperfect creatures recognised his own imperfections.

But one of the things that he was not was stale. I know that there are those opposite who would not be too enamoured with his behaviour of latter years in walking away from the Liberal Party. But do not worry: he was on the path again. I thought I might have a copy of this today, but I have not been able to procure it. But he had been actively canvassing setting up another political party prior to his death. As recently as only a few weeks ago he had communications with some very close friends of mine who were friends of his, about the need to set up another political party in this country which might reflect the best, I suspect, of what he would have thought of as the liberal movement, as well as what came out of Labor. The people he was speaking to were otherwise Labor supporters. Indeed, they were members of the Labor Party.

This was very recent. This was not something which was old; it was not something which he did 15 years ago. This was something he was doing prior to his death. He was in his 80s. There was this active man being involved—as he had been for a long time—in prosecuting
issues to do with human rights. His attitude towards people wanting to come to this country—refugees and refugee settlement—is well known. It is something which he needs to be acknowledged for, that he did not have the attitudes that were reflected in the conservative side of politics on those issues. He did not have those attitudes.

I remember when the Vietnamese came here in the seventies. Those who say that there were no boat people need to think again, because Vietnamese boat people arrived in Darwin Harbour and effectively presented themselves to the police—they landed. But he had a great role in making sure that we dealt with that huge crisis sensitively, appropriately and securely. Now we have a thriving population of Vietnamese people in this country and their families and descendants, and we can be happy that Mr Fraser had a very great role in developing the multicultural ethic that is now at the centre of what we do in this country. But, as I said, his views are not the ones which are currently reflected on the conservative side of politics.

I do want to finish by saying—as I said at the beginning of my contribution—that he was a bete noir for me during that period while he was in government, at the time of the dismissal. But subsequently, he certainly redeemed himself in my eyes because of his public role in advocating for human rights, for his role in the international community, in giving agency for change and in addressing the needs of those most in need. I think that however he is judged into the future, that his life's work is an extremely significant body of work. But to me, the most important things that he has done related to the period after he was prime minister.

Mr HUNT (Flinders—Minister for the Environment) (16:36): It is a great honour to speak on the condolence motion for Malcolm Fraser—a former prime minister, a humanitarian and a person who was engaged in the absolute central issues of the last half century in Australia, but also a constituent of the electorate of Flinders—somebody I knew and would regard as a friend—and a great family man. I have had the honour and the pleasure of knowing Tamie and Malcolm Fraser. Also, curiously, his granddaughter Storm is the teacher for my five-year-old son. Malcolm's engagement with the electorate of Flinders and the people of Flinders not just as a former Prime Minister of this country but also as a constituent, as a resident and as the senior of a truly great family is very deep.

Against that background, let me begin by acknowledging his life and his family—Tamie Fraser; his four children, including Phoebe, whom I have met along the way; and his grandchildren, including Storm—and acknowledging their loss. Of course, his network of friends was dramatically wider, as somebody in such a prominent and unique role in Australia's life gathers and accumulates quite a network of friends over the course of 84 years. My father also knew Malcolm Fraser very well. They were at school together—I think they were a couple of years apart—and they had a longstanding relationship. Indeed, through the work of the constitutional conventions in the 1970s, they worked together on constructive issues in relation to multicultural affairs and in relation to making the Federation a more effective unit.

There are three things which most distinguished Malcolm Fraser: his courage, his conviction and his compassion. His courage was undoubted. At a time of immense instability and uncertainty in Australia in the 1970s he stepped forward, and there can be no doubt as to the degree of controversy and the strength of feelings that were present in the nation. The night after the Australia Day riot of 2012—where then Prime Minister Gillard was swept away by the Australian Federal Police and lost her shoe in the process and this was a major
public issue—I happened to be at a very small dinner with Malcolm and Tamie Fraser and a few other people. Mr Fraser remarked that it had not really been that large a fracas or incident and was perhaps surprised at the way in which the threat had been perceived to the then Prime Minister. This was no reflection on the Prime Minister but more to the fact that, in his view, the media and some security forces had perhaps overreacted—not that I necessarily share that view. Tamie Fraser replied, 'That wasn't a riot. In our day, we saw real riots and they really wanted to kill Malcolm.' There was that sense of good humour about the past but also that recognition that, whatever tensions we feel in domestic Australian politics today, they do tend to pale against the enormity of events and the extraordinary pressures of 1975 and the years that followed.

Without trying to re-litigate history, I think the best way to understand that history is to return to the judgement of the people at the time. In 1975, following the events of the dismissal, the Australian people gave Malcolm Fraser and the coalition government the largest majority, the greatest victory and the most significant win of any federal election since Federation. Only two and a bit years later, in 1977, there was a second election victory which was the second largest since Federation. So, whilst historians may debate, the people of Australia decided in their way, at the ballot box, not just once but twice. And, of course, Malcolm Fraser went on to win a third election in 1980.

But it is more than just that; it is the measure of what you do with your time. In particular, given my current role—and the member for Wentworth, a former environment minister, is at the table—I want to acknowledge Malcolm Fraser's environmental achievements. He established the Kakadu National Park, he banned drilling on the Great Barrier Reef, he proclaimed the Great Barrier Reef as a marine park, he oversaw the inscription of the Great Barrier Reef on the World Heritage List and he ended the practice of whaling in Australia with the enactment of the Whale Protection Act.

Only this week I met with the cetacean working group, which is a group of NGO leaders who are involved in whale and dolphin protection. They asked specifically if I could acknowledge their thanks for Mr Fraser's work in helping to end the practice of whaling in Australia. Project Jonah and so many other groups regard this as a wonderful Australian environmental achievement which bespoke a great deal of humanity.

Beyond the courage and the achievements in the environment was the conviction. His conviction in human rights was clear and undoubted. He championed the Aboriginal land rights movement. He enacted the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act. He established the Human Rights Commission and established the Australian Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council. He reversed the position in relation to Vietnamese refugees inherited from previous governments. He oversaw the enactment of Australia's first Freedom of Information Act. And, internationally, there was no doubt he played a fundamental role in arguing the case against apartheid. In particular, through the Gleneagles Agreement, he helped to end racial discrimination in sport.

Then there was his compassion. After retiring from politics in 1983 he served for 15 years as chair of CARE Australia. In that role, he oversaw its place in the world, and this included a five year stint as President of CARE International. This was simply about assisting those who were the least fortunate, the worst off and in the most need. He did not have to do that; it was something which he chose, which he sought, to which he committed himself and through
which he delivered real and lasting human and humanitarian outcomes for those that were assisted by CARE Australia and CARE International.

And then against all of that I want to acknowledge the time that I had spent with him as a Liberal member for a seat in which there was a former Prime Minister of my own party, the third longest serving Liberal Prime Minister, the fourth longest serving Australian Prime Minister. I felt it was a duty, a responsibility and an honour to work with him. From time to time I sought his advice on different matters. We may not have always agreed, but I always respected the integrity of his views, and he was always immensely gracious with me. I appreciated that. I remember visiting his house, seeing him in Melbourne, seeing him in the office and at events, and his focus was crystal clear. It was always crystal clear.

And so I want to say to Tamie: I thank you for Malcolm's guidance to me personally and his service to the nation. I acknowledge the immense loss that as a family, Tamie, you, your children and your grandchildren have. He served our country at the highest level. He left an indelible mark. He was one of the giants of Australian politics. Vale Malcolm Fraser.

Mr PALMER (Fairfax) (16:46): Before the last election Malcolm Fraser and I had lunch in Melbourne. When I met him on that cold Melbourne morning he was in high spirits and eager to engage in debate about important issues affecting Australia's future. High on his mind on that cold Melbourne morning and over lunch was the threat to the world and Australia of war. He stated that the world had been at war for over 50 years in different parts of the globe and he wondered when it would all end, when it would all stop. He was a strong supporter of development and sustainable growth and said as Prime Minister:

Development requires modification and transformation of the environment … The planet's capacity to support its people is being irreversibly reduced by the destruction and degradation of the biosphere and the need to understand the problem and take corrective action is becoming urgent.

He saw the dangers to our planet far before others had and thought about the issue. In his travels around Australia as Prime Minister he touched the people and they touched him. He valued our democracy and reminded us in 1980 as Prime Minister that secrecy is completely inadequate for a democracy but totally appropriate for tyranny.

As Malcolm Fraser once said when referring to Nelson Mandela:

If there were six Mandelas around today, a couple in Europe, one in America and in a couple of other places, there wouldn't be any wars.

The truth is that, if today there were six Malcolm Frasers around—a couple in Europe, one in America and a couple in other places, there would not be any wars. Like many world leaders, he helped Nelson Mandela on his long walk to freedom. He supported the South African people in their struggle for human rights and self-determination.

No greater accolade, no greater title or acknowledgement can be given to any man than that of peacemaker. Malcolm Fraser believed in the reconciliation of man. He sought refuge for the stateless. He saw injustice and he tried to stop it. He saw division in this country and he tried to heal it. He devoted his life to those less fortunate than himself. Gifted and intelligent, he perceived and saw what others could not see. He saw an Australia where all Australian children could join hands and take a long walk together into the future. He saw an Australia where all cultures of the world could be united in one country, valuing their heritage and embracing each other in one nation.
His words in 1981 during his inaugural address to the Institute of Multicultural Affairs are equally true today. He said:

… multiculturalism speaks to us forcefully and directly … It is not an abstract or alien notion, not a blueprint holding out utopian promises, but a set of guidelines for action which grows directly out of our society's aspirations and experiences.

While understated and modest in his manner, he was strong on courage and commitment. One of the rarest commodities in political life is courage—political courage, the ability to do what is right regardless of the cost, regardless of admonishment by your peers, to go forward where others would not go. He showed us the way, and we must follow his example and cherish the gifts that he has left for us as citizens of this great country.

I remember back in the early 1980s when no state in the Commonwealth was interested in hosting Expo. It was Malcolm Fraser who had the persistence to stay with it, to go the course, to continue the fight for Expo to be held in Australia. And then the Queensland Premier, Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, agreed with the Prime Minister to hold Expo in Queensland. Without Malcolm Fraser's persistence the people of Brisbane would not have Brisbane's Southbank today and Australians would not have enjoyed Expo 88.

I remember another time when Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen's staff flew back to Queensland after a premiers' conference and left the Queensland Premier asleep in the Lakeside Hotel. They go to the Queensland border when they remembered that they had left the Premier in Canberra and they contacted the Prime Minister, who never hesitated in offering the Queensland Premier the hospitality of the Lodge. As Sir Joh told me, when he arrived at the Lodge the Prime Minister even offered him his pair of pyjamas. Malcolm Fraser was quite a bit taller than Sir Joh, and Sir Joh said that as he walked around he had to hold up his pyjama pants so they would not fall off and his feet only went down to where Malcolm's knees were. During the night, Sir John went to the kitchen to get a drink and opened the fridge. The light came on, at which time security challenged him. He held up his arms and remarked to me that security got quite a surprise! Sir Joh Remarked to me that there were not many people that would give their own pyjamas in a time of need for a friend, but Malcolm Fraser would.

For Malcolm Fraser life was not meant to be easy, but for Malcolm Fraser it could have been. He chose his own way freely. He chose a life of service. He chose the hard way, the more difficult road. He should not become greater at this time than he was in life—an Australian that was prepared to give all in the service of his country, to weather the storm no matter how difficult, no matter how hard, without complaint. His integrity was beyond question and, as he said himself:

Flexibility in pursuit of the nation's interests must never be allowed to degenerate into expediency.

His humility moved those who came to know him in his life. He believed in our people and all the people of the region and the world. He brought peace and fought for those who have suffered under the yoke of racism.

In my discussion with him it was clear he had a pure mind, but more importantly he had a pure heart. I extend my sincere condolences to his family. The world is so much better because of Malcolm Fraser. He was a citizen of the world who cared. As it has been said: 'He will stand to those of us who are left as an incarnation of the spirit of the land he loved'. One of the people I discussed Malcolm Fraser with in the last couple of days said he was a big man—with his six-foot-plus frame—for people who had never met him before. He was a big
man, bigger than many realised. All of our lives are enriched for having lived on this earth in the time of Malcolm Fraser.

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (16:53): I am indebted to the late Wally Brown, a remarkable doyen of the press gallery, who made the following observation about Malcolm Fraser. He said in his book *Ten Prime Ministers*, which I note with interest was checked by Niki Savva:

He had many positive achievements, which gave the lie to recent observations by people surprised about how much he had changed, how much more liberal, socialist even, he has become since he left office. The basic fact is, he has not changed. The new Malcolm Fraser is the old Fraser.

An important aspect of Wally Brown's work is that it highlights many of Malcolm Fraser's achievements, achievements too often ignored because of the circumstances of his election to power. There were those so outraged by the dismissal of the Whitlam government that they were wilfully blind to the very real achievements of the Fraser government.

My very clear recollection of that campaign was of the growing and overwhelming support for a change from the Whitlam government debacles. Even in the toughest of electorates there would be cheers for coalition campaigners from pub verandas, notably missing from the election some three years earlier. So effective was the subsequent disinformation campaign against Malcolm Fraser and his government that many Australians remain unaware of his remarkable achievements.

As Wallace Brown set out: 'It was Fraser who extended land rights for aborigines to the states. It was Fraser who appointed Fred Chaney, Ian Viner and Peter Baume as ministers for aboriginal affairs. It was Fraser, under Petro Georgiou's influence, who did so much for multicultural affairs, who supported black Africans in South Africa and Zimbabwe, who stopped sandmining on Fraser Island and protected the Great Barrier Reef from mining and petroleum exploration.' No recent convert on these critical issues. He also was a pragmatic politician.

Paul Kelly, in his book *The Unmaking of Gough*, said:

Fraser was not terribly concerned about repudiating a key section of his policy platform if other factors came into play. He believed that the government was elected by the people in an act of trust to make the best decision possible at any given time, rather than be tied to a specific set of promises. He claimed that dogmatism would lead to bad government. 'Measures which seem appropriate at one stage can sometimes, indeed must, be superseded by new knowledge, new events.'

I did not know Malcolm Fraser well but I first met him as a Young Liberal and then as a staffer for his Minister for Education, the remarkable Senator Sir John Carrick. As a fierce a public persona he appeared and as aloof as he sometimes appeared, he at times also appeared to be shy and reserved. I can remember him outside the meeting rooms of Federal Council clearly hesitant about engaging with delegates he did not know.

He was encouraging and tolerant of Young Liberals. I recall him accepting our right to move a motion to Federal Council to abolish the two-airline agreement, contrary to government policy at the time. He and Tamie hosted the Young Liberal Presidents for dinner at the Lodge, and were clearly relaxed and enjoyed the debate and company.

I last spoke to Malcolm at the time of my swearing in to this place in October 2010 when my husband and I took the new member for Longman for a celebratory drink. We happened upon Malcolm and Tamie having dinner. Malcolm had in the week before the election raised
the issue of the capacity of a young member to have the necessary life experience to undertake our work. Malcolm and Tamie joined us for after-dinner drinks and over the next hour or so we saw what a remarkable couple they made. Tamie had no hesitation in chiding Malcolm and pointing out that he was endorsed and elected in his twenties and perhaps should not have been so critical of the member for Longman. We had a pleasant and convivial evening in which I believe we saw another side to this remarkable Australian.

Malcolm Fraser was a good man. He acted in accordance with his principles. He was steadfast in prosecuting a cause. Not a politician that could be labelled as left, right or even Callithumpian. Not a member who would take easily to today's politics of vitriol and slander. There are things that he has raised in recent times with which I do not agree. Sometimes I have thought he was just plain wrong, but that does not detract from the man. Perhaps he could have done more with his great majority. Perhaps some of his more recent comments are more from the heart than from the pragmatic Malcolm Fraser in power. But who can complain about that? Indeed, it highlights his strength of character, his principles and his humanity.

Finally, let me also take this opportunity to pay tribute to Tamie Fraser. She brought a great sense of humour, of laughter and of common sense to this wonderful partnership. She took the rough edges off Malcolm Fraser's gruff exterior and contributed so much to this remarkable man. We thank her for her enormous contribution as a wife, a mother and as a real partner of a magnificent team. I pass my condolences to Tamie and to the extended Fraser family. We have lost a great Australian.

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (16:58): It is a privilege to pay respect to the life and work of Malcolm Fraser, and by participating in this motion to have heard so many thoughtful and heartfelt reflections from those who knew him well and who felt his influence, which is many of us, in different ways.

I too am fortunate to have met Malcolm Fraser on many occasions and to have joined with him in particular causes: on the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers, on Palestine, on the call for an inquiry into Australia's participation in the Iraq war, on Australia's international relations, on a nuclear weapons free future, on good governance and on the debased state of modern politics, among other matters. And, like others, I have been the recipient of phone calls and emails out of the blue from Malcolm both offering and seeking advice on a myriad of subjects. Not one for small talk, Malcolm was a true public intellectual, who never stopped turning his mind to the big issues confronting the nation.

There is an inescapable feeling, as we chart Malcolm Fraser's long-arching star across Australian public life, that the bright constellations we have relied upon for the last 40 years are changing and that the lights we have navigated by for so long—Whitlam, Uren, Fraser—have now slipped together below the horizon with the same turn of the earth. The loss collectively is at the same time magnified and softened. Fraser and Whitlam in particular, who played mortal enemies in the greatest drama and tragedy of Australian political life, were twinned from that point forward and later became close friends. They have left the stage, one after another, and that is cause for us to acknowledge and be uplifted by the characteristics they shared: their courage and compassion, their leadership by principle and convictions, their spirit of reconciliation.

As a star in his own right—perhaps, at least for the Labor side, playing the villain early on, but then consistently in character as a figure of contrarian heroism—Malcolm Fraser needs to
be remembered for his leadership and advocacy on a number of issues that he helped turn for the greater good. Every contribution to this motion has a theme of some kind, and I think mine must be on the great value of Malcolm Fraser as a singular voice in support of humanitarian principle. As Prime Minister, he was a supporter of Indigenous reconciliation and of an open-armed, multicultural Australia. He gave us the Special Broadcasting Service as a comprehensive cross-platform multicultural broadcaster following the initiative that began with Whitlam. He rejected the politics of fear, the xenophobia that is often cloaked as a concern for security and that in our time has been attached to Tamils from Sri Lanka or to people of the Muslim faith, just as it once attached to people fleeing persecution in Vietnam or fascism in Europe or deprivation and colonial brutality in Ireland. As Malcom Fraser said:

If you embrace a positive view and embrace the courage of the people who are prepared to try and get a better life for themselves and their families, I think the political pressure starts to diminish.

I think he is right, and I wish that his remarkable leadership on this issue nearly 40 years ago in ultimately providing refuge for tens of thousands of Indochinese asylum seekers—and, in so doing, enriching the cultural, social and economic life of a modern Australia—had not been so thoroughly forgotten or ignored or put aside as anomaly to the prevailing climate of misrepresentation, distortion and fear. And I have not heard the heart of the issue better expressed than Malcom Fraser's words when he said:

If they are genuine refugees, there is no deterrent that we can create which is going to be severe enough, cruel enough to stop them fleeing the terror in their own lands.

In assessing our current approach he was unflinching:

THE asylum-seeker debate in Australia is demeaning and miserable. The politicians who participate in it have contempt for the Australian people. They believe, despite all the evidence to the contrary, that if they appeal to the fearful and mean sides of our nature, they will win support. They are showing that they believe we won't know enough about the world to know that for the most part what they are saying is plainly false.

In relation to Indigenous affairs, Malcom Fraser rejected the false dichotomy between symbolic and practical achievements, arguing:

Reconciliation requires changes of heart and spirit, as well as social and economic change.

He was a man who sat side-by-side with Aboriginal people and listened. As Prime Minister he took steps to advance the cause of Aboriginal land rights, and he joined three other former prime ministers—Gough Whitlam, Bob Hawke and Paul Keating—on the occasion of the apology to the stolen generations.

As Prime Minister, Malcom Fraser also made significant contributions to protecting the environment on such matters as banning sandmining on Fraser Island, ending commercial whaling in Australia, declaring the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and Kakadu National Park, and signing the international conventions on the conservation of Antarctic seals, on the importance of wetlands and against the international trade in endangered species.

Following his parliamentary career, Malcolm Fraser was the founding chair of CARE Australia and he played a leadership role in CARE's work in a number of roles right through until the turn of the century. I know from my own international humanitarian experience what a wonderful organisation CARE Australia is. Malcolm Fraser brought his stature and intellectual force to the advocacy needed to ensure Australia took its place in delivering crisis aid and humanitarian assistance.
Malcom Fraser also played a key part in the campaign to see a nuclear weapons-free world. He was a founding patron of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons—also known as ICAN—and in 2012 led an ICAN appeal for Order of Australia recipients to join a call for the Australian government to support a ban on nuclear weapons and for a nuclear weapons-free defence policy. The appeal was signed by over 800 prominent Australians, including: former Prime Ministers Fraser, Hawke and Keating; former chiefs of the Defence Force; and former defence and foreign affairs ministers, as well as scientists and community leaders. The federal parliament subsequently unanimously passed a motion for a world free of nuclear weapons, cosponsored by then Prime Minister Gillard and opposition leader Abbott. Just one month ago, Malcom Fraser co-authored with Dr Tilman Ruff an article in The Age titled '2015 is the year to ban nuclear weapons'. In it they noted that 2015 is the seventieth anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and they observed:

The Australian government faces a moment of truth—will we continue to hide behind the myth of "extended nuclear deterrence", willing to risk our true security and the incineration of millions in our name, or will we finally step up and get on the right side of history?

I have the highest regard for Malcom Fraser's approach as an internationalist, especially for the perspective and wisdom he acquired through the 1970s—learning, I think, from the realities he encountered in relation to the Vietnam War and East Timor, as he became a vigorous and decisive opponent of apartheid in South Africa and white minority rule in Zimbabwe; as he became an advocate for refugees and their contribution to a multicultural Australia; and as a searing critic of various ill-considered military adventures, including the current engagement in Iraq. For some years, he and I have been part of the Campaign for an Iraq War Inquiry, now renamed Australians for War Powers Reform, that has called for an inquiry into the circumstances of Australia's participation in the Iraq war in 2003 and for parliament to have a role in deciding whether Australian troops should go to war in future.

Australians for Palestine have this week paid tribute to Malcom Fraser, in which they note that in 2009 he condemned 'paying lip service to even-handedness' and warned that 'Australia must not be cowed into an uncritical view of Israel's action'. Following the Israeli bombing of Gaza in 2014, some 80 Australian MPs and former MPs came together to issue the Canberra Declaration on Gaza calling for support for an immediate ceasefire, an end to Israel's occupation and an end to the Gaza blockade. Malcolm Fraser was one of those signatories, and I note that he was also a signatory to the recent letter from former Australian prime ministers to the Indonesian President, calling for clemency for the two Australians facing the death penalty in Indonesia, Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran.

Malcolm Fraser could be relied upon to support the voiceless and those deserving of mercy and justice, as well as to champion the rule of law, whether in relation to David Hicks, children in detention or the overreach of national security legislation. As Prime Minister, he established the Human Rights Commission in 1981 and has defended the organisation ever since, most recently criticising the government's 'bully-boy' response to the Human Rights Commission's report on the forgotten children as 'an absolute disgrace'. This week, Commission President, Gillian Triggs, said of Malcom Fraser, 'He tried to make Australia a better and fairer place.'

Malcolm Fraser, for many decades and right till the very end, has been outspoken, principled and brave on so many issues that resonate with me and that define Australia's role...
in the world, and on the critical question of Australia's independence when it comes to international affairs, especially in our relationship with the United States, a friend that deserves our honesty and best advice, even where it means taking a contrary view. This view was eloquently expressed in his most recent book, Dangerous Allies, a copy of which he presented me with last June. He had inscribed a note to me inside the cover and I treasure that.

Malcolm Fraser lived a life defined by his commitment to public service and by his wholehearted engagement in the discussion of big ideas that must be contested and resolved. I offer my sincere condolences to Malcolm Fraser's wife, Tamie, and his family, friends, colleagues and staff. We have lost an Australian who shaped our country and who expressed its best values in wielding his significant influence on our behalf across the wider world.

Mr FLETCHER (Bradfield—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Communications) (17:09): I am pleased to rise to speak on this condolence motion for former Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Malcolm Fraser. Mr Fraser was a dominant figure in national politics in the 1970s and the early 1980s, a period that stands out in my mind because by the late seventies and early eighties I was in high school and was starting to become very interested in politics. As the Prime Minister of the day, Mr Fraser was a towering figure, both literally and metaphorically, and as I joined the Young Liberal movement in 1981 I became much more interested in him and his government and the policies that they were pursuing. I had the opportunity to meet Mr Fraser only once, at a Liberal Party function which would have been in around 1981 or 1982, and the memory is strong and it made an impact on me.

In the time that I have available I would like to observe that as a nation we should be profoundly grateful to Fraser for his actions in restoring order at a time of chaos in 1975. I would also like to acknowledge the way that he demonstrated, through his career and through the things that he did while he was Prime Minister and the leading member of a centre-right political party, that moral and ethical principles are not the province of one side of politics. I also want to reflect briefly on the question of economic policy in the Fraser years.

When Malcolm Fraser led the Liberal and National parties to power in 1975 he did so at a time when many Australians were increasingly alarmed about the chaos, disorder and mismanagement into which our nation was descending thanks to the economic ineptitude of the Whitlam government. I want to quote from an article in The Sydney Morning Herald by Ross Gittins in which he assessed the economic performance of Gough Whitlam. He cited a chapter by John O'Mahony of Deloitte Access Economics, in a book, The Whitlam Legacy, edited by Troy Bramston. Gittins notes that O'Mahony's review of the economic statistics had this to say:

... the years of the Whitlam government saw the economic growth rate halve, unemployment double and inflation triple.

As Gittins notes, by mid-1975, inflation was at 17.6 per cent, wage rises had hit 32.9 per cent and, after a boom in 1973 and the first half of 1974, the country was facing a severe recession.

There were two particular actions that the Whitlam government took which made the economic situation particularly precarious. He hugely increased government spending and the size of government. Indeed, government spending as a ratio of gross domestic product rose by a remarkable six percentage points in a mere three years. The second action of the Whitlam government that Ross Gittins makes some observations about in this article is that, while inflation was already running very high, the Whitlam government introduced a series of
measures which sharply increased pay levels: the introduction of equal pay, a fourth week of annual leave and a 17.5 per cent annual leave loading. Gittins had this to say, a rather tart observation:

Clyde Cameron, Whitlam's minister for labour, simply refused to accept that the cost of labour could possibly influence employers' decisions about how much labour they used.

Ross Gittins went on to say this, I think a fair and measured observation:

From today's perspective, there's nothing radical about equal pay or four weeks leave. But to do it all so quickly and in such an inflationary environment was disastrous.

We should remember that this gross economic mismanagement, this very high, troublingly high, level of inflation came at the same time that many ministers were behaving in demonstrably self-indulgent ways. In particular, there was the alarming discovery that a minister of the Crown was seeking on behalf of the Australian government to borrow billions of dollars from an extremely shady figure and to do so while skirting around the normal processes and safeguards of government. It is no exaggeration to say that the economic situation that Australia faced was chaotic and precarious.

When you look at the experiences of countries around the world that have tipped into galloping inflation, you cannot help but be struck by how profoundly socially damaging that can be. Perhaps the textbook example is Germany, the Weimar Republic, where there was an enormous rate of inflation; the savings of middle-class people were essentially destroyed; and the degree of social dislocation that resulted is cited by many historians as being one of the causal factors of the Nazis coming to power. I simply make the point that the consequences of chaotic inflation and economic mismanagement have been seen in a number of nations around the world over a number of years. Argentina is another country that could be cited, as is Zimbabwe. And the social consequences are always extremely severe.

Our country—it is no exaggeration to say—was facing a material threat at the time that Fraser took the bold and decisive action that he did to bring the Whitlam government's time to an end and to have an election, at which there was an overwhelming vote for the coalition because the large majority of Australians were extremely anxious about the dangerous economic territory into which the Whitlam government had navigated the country. They were very eager indeed to see economic management back in the hands of people with a proven competence at doing that.

And, of course, the record shows that, once the Fraser government came to power, having won that landslide election, it did chart a vastly more economically responsible course. It took some time to retrieve the situation, given the mismanagement that it had inherited, but it navigated in a prudent and responsible fashion, and the dangers that Australia was facing as a result of the economic chaos under the Whitlam government were, thankfully, avoided. I think Australians have every reason to be very grateful to Malcolm Fraser for his tough-minded and strategic approach to ending the Whitlam government as early as possible, to bringing on an election and to getting into power, which then resulted in being able to pursue a much more sensible and prudent course of economic management, which was very much in the national interest.

I think another thing that we can reflect upon as we look at Malcolm Fraser's career is that he demonstrated that he was certainly a man of high principle. He was prepared in government as Prime Minister, as the leader of a centre-right party, to act upon those
principles and give effect to them. He opened the door to Vietnamese refugees in a way that markedly transformed and made more diverse the character of our country and of course was in many ways a precursor of subsequent stages of immigration from the many nations of Asia, which has contributed enormously to the diversity and richness of the modern Australia. He was a leader in the fight against apartheid and in bringing together international action designed to bring to an end the regime which supported apartheid. He introduced many path-breaking environmental reforms.

I think one of the lessons we can draw from Malcolm Fraser's actions as Prime Minister is that it is quite wrong to assume that one side of politics or the other has any particular mortgage on moral authority. He acted in many ways, on many issues, from a classical liberal perspective, a perspective which attaches great weight to the rights of the individual, an important moral and ethical tradition and one which is embodied in the modern Liberal Party.

The third area I want to reflect on briefly is the question of the process and progress of economic reform in the Fraser years. In reflecting on that question briefly, it is noteworthy that we have seen, within days of the death of Mr Fraser, the death of another very significant statesman in our region, Lee Kuan Yew. He is remembered for many, many things but also for one very pithy, rather harsh but extremely powerful observation about Australia—that we were at risk of becoming the 'poor white trash of Asia'. That was something that he said in 1980, when Australia's economy was very much more closed and fixed than it became in the subsequent quarter century.

At the time that those comments were made, we did not have a floating exchange rate. It was, in the main, not possible for foreign banks to operate in Australia. The government was the owner of corporations in many sectors of the economy. Both one of the two domestic airlines and the international airline, TAA and Qantas, were owned by the government. The Commonwealth Bank was owned by the government. Many other corporations were owned by government. Within a few short years, there would be a dramatic reversal in the economic policy orthodoxy and a sustained process of liberalising the Australian economy with a view to making it more flexible and competitive.

The question for Liberals is whether it is a matter for regret that more could not have been achieved in that liberalising direction in the years between 1975 and 1983. I found it instructive to listen to the observations of other speakers on this condolence motion over the past few days. The member for Berowra, who served with Malcolm Fraser in the parliament for many years and who came into the parliament in 1973, spoke about the divisiveness in Australian society that emerged from the circumstances of the 1975 election, the Dismissal and the election which followed it, and made the point that this acted as something of a brake on the vigour with which the Fraser government felt it could pursue economic reform. This was because of a concern to not worsen divisions which were seen to be very substantial as a result of bitterness which emerged from the Dismissal and the subsequent election result. I acknowledge that argument; I respect that argument.

However, it is interesting to look at the fact that the intellectual case for economic reform was being made with considerable vigour in the Fraser government years. The Campbell report was a major piece of work looking at changes to the structure of the economy. When the Hawke government came to power in 1983 another report, the Martin report, was
commissioned, which essentially revisited and drew on much of the substantive work of the Campbell report.

There was certainly intellectual effort within the government, as well as outside it, going into the question of whether it was time to change Australia's economic model to liberalise the economy. In the field of telecommunications there was another major report, the Davidson report of 1982, which was another example of exploring deregulatory and liberalising directions. Ultimately, these directions were not taken up with any vigour under the Fraser government and it was some time before the directions that were pointed to were given effect to.

These questions can be debated at length. Ultimately, we are considering whether a particular path the country took over a number of years was the right one or whether another path could have been taken. Fundamentally, there is no answer to that question, but it is interesting that, in the observations and reflections that have been made about the Fraser government over the past few days following the death of Malcolm Fraser, a number of observers have mused on that question.

Let me close by acknowledging the extraordinary contribution made by Malcolm Fraser in the political life and the history of our nation. He was a member of the parliament for many years. He was, as I observed at the outset, the dominant figure in Australian politics for much of the seventies and the early eighties. Many decisions that his government took are reflected in features and characteristics of modern Australia. It is appropriate that we should acknowledge his contribution, mourn his passing and express condolences to his widow, his family and his friends. And I do that.

Ms McGOWAN (Indi) (17:26): I would also like to associate my comments with those of the member for Bradfield. I rise today to acknowledge Malcolm Fraser's role as a statesman, his contribution to regional Victoria and Australia, his courage in addressing controversial issues, his personal support for me and for engaging young people in politics. In this brief speech I would like to share a few recollections of my personal relationship with Mr Fraser and thank him for his encouragement and support.

I began work in Old Parliament House in 1980. Mr Fraser was Prime Minister; Mr Howard was Treasurer. They were heady days. I worked for Mr Ewen Cameron, the then federal member for Indi, as his legislative research officer. We were in government; we took action. In Old Parliament House we crossed paths with many people who were or became famous. We shared our corridor with the already famous Ros Kelly, the Labor member for the ACT; the soon to be very famous Bob Hawke; and regional MPs such as Steve Lusher, a National Party MP from New South Wales.

Actors such as Mungo MacCallum held sway in the non-members bar most evenings and we very hungry staffers paid homage to the already very famous media icons such as Laurie Oakes, Michelle Grattan and Alan Ramsey. It was a good time to be a young person, to be working in Canberra and to be part of politics. At that time I was very interested in women in politics. Senator Dame Margaret Guilfoyle was the then only female member of cabinet and, at that time, only the third ever female cabinet minister. Previous cabinet ministers were Dame Enid Lyons and Dame Annabelle Rankin. Dame Margaret Guilfoyle was the first Victorian female minister. She was a strong role model for us and a great supporter of women in politics.
It would not be true to say that I knew Mr Fraser well, but he would certainly acknowledge me, smile and say hello. He knew who I was, who I worked for, where I was from—that I was from country Victoria. For me, that was enough to know that I was connected.

As I said, it was an interesting time in politics. Mr Fraser was supporting the building of the new Parliament House. Some of us younger staffers wondered: would there be toilets and showers for women staffers? They were in short supply in the old place.

Child care was another issue in the electorate. We were growing in our understanding of how important accessible and affordable childcare was for women if they were to enter the workforce. Some of the staffers were concerned that the design of the new Parliament House did not include any childcare facilities. I can remember convincing Mr Cameron that this was a really important issue and that we needed to take action. We got permission from the then Speaker for a survey to gauge demand and to gauge what the potential usage would be. That felt like a great victory. However, we were extraordinarily disappointed and very frustrated when we staffers were told that only members of parliament would be able to fill out the survey and, as most of them were male—and older—few saw the need for child care. This led to us, as a small group, wanting to take the issue to Senator Guilfoyle and to the Prime Minister. We were persuaded not to do that. The new Parliament House was duly built, and only much later was the childcare centre added, taking over from where the nonmembers' bar had been. In retrospect, I wonder what would have happened if we younger staffers had pushed the issue.

The second story I would like to share regarding Malcolm Fraser happened much more recently. On the Sunday after the 2013 election, he rang me at home. While the vote was very close and still undecided, he congratulated me, as it looked like I might win the seat. He acknowledged what we were trying to do in Indi—our work in community engagement and our efforts to address the widespread sense of disillusionment, disengagement and disappointment that many in our regional communities felt about our current state of political discourse. He had been following my career. He approved of our work with young people, saying that, if there was going to be any change in our nation, it would be because the young people wanted something more. He approved of our work in encouraging the community to participate in politics, knowing that community engagement and participation are the bedrock of an effective democracy. He saw our efforts for what they were: humble yet transparent, open, honourable, courageous and, from his perspective, absolutely necessary. I think he saw in the 'Voice for Indi' movement something of the old-fashioned liberalism and he saw me as a more traditional 'rural community' candidate. He was delighted at the result in Indi and offered me his support. And, on a number of other occasions since then, he offered—as he has to many other people in the House—his advice.

We shared much, including our belief in the need for participation to underpin the democratic process and the need to make sure young people are engaged in and understand politics. And, on issues such as treatment of asylum seekers, we both felt that the political system was letting our country down. Remembering his actions following the Vietnam War and how his government welcomed the refugees into the country and resourced NGOs and community groups to facilitate the assimilation—kids into schools, language classes, volunteer and settlement coordinators—it was a generous investment at the front end and it
has paid enormous dividends. Today we can learn so much from his generous, inclusive policies.

In closing, I would like to say publicly: thank you, Mr Fraser. Goodbye and God bless you. May you rest in peace. Thank you for your belief that we as a nation are a generous, caring, practical people. We can both stop the boats and look after people. We can honour diversity. Thank you, Mr Fraser, for your trust and belief that Australia can be better than this.

Mr FRYDENBERG (Kooyong—Assistant Treasurer) (17:32): I join with colleagues on both sides of this House in celebrating the life of a great Australian and a great Liberal, Malcolm Fraser. Some time ago, the phone rang. It was Malcolm Fraser. 'Josh,' he said, 'I've been reading what you have written and I would like to take you to lunch to discuss foreign policy.' There began a fascinating conversation with Australia's 22nd Prime Minister about our nation's relationship with China, our alliance with the United States and politics in the Middle East. At all times, he was passionate, forthright and extremely knowledgeable about international relations today as well as those of yesteryear. Even though we strongly disagreed about the primacy of the ANZUS alliance and Australia's current strategic direction, he was at all times polite and heard out my arguments. I must say I left lunch with an even greater respect for the man.

Since that time, and particularly over recent days, I have been thinking about how to evaluate the contribution to public life of this towering figure in the Liberal Party, knowing that, after he left office, he resigned his party membership and, at times, espoused views that were diametrically opposed to the policies of the coalition government. The answer, though, for me is clear. His achievements in and out of office are many and significant and should be lauded as such. The Labor Party has made an art form of eulogising its prime ministers, no matter their faults, whereas we as Liberals are at times ambivalent about our past, focusing on what might have gone wrong instead of celebrating what went right.

Indeed, with Fraser a lot went right. First and foremost he saved the country from the economic excesses of the Whitlam government. In 1975 he inherited an economy facing stagflation. Inflation was at 17 per cent, unemployment was rising from 4½ per cent and the world economy had slowed after the oil crisis of 1974. But with cautious economic policy—albeit not with the reformist zeal of Thatcher and Reagan which was to later take hold—Fraser brought stability and certainty back into Australia's financial markets. He also commissioned the important Campbell inquiry, which was to lay the foundation for the floating of the dollar and the deregulation of the financial system.

In foreign affairs, he was strongly pro-American and staunchly anticommunist, supporting the Vietnam War, which helped stem communism's advance through Asia. Fraser's apartheid stand was consistent, forceful and based on the best of human values. He opened Australia to more than 60,000 Indochinese and Vietnamese refugees, giving real effect to the end of the White Australia policy. The significance of this achievement should not be underestimated, as Fraser did not act with bipartisan support as these refugees were the very people Whitlam did not want coming to Australia. So to on Aboriginal land rights—Fraser passed significant federal legislation while also staying true to his federalist instincts, giving self-government to the Northern Territory.

Many of the federal institutions that we enjoy today—the Federal Court, the Australian Federal Police, the Commonwealth Ombudsman, the SBS and freedom of information laws—
all have their origins with the Fraser government. When one adds together all these achievements, it is a significant and a lasting legacy fully befitting his three election wins, including two of the largest election mandates ever in Australia, which saw him become Australia's fourth longest serving Prime Minister. And, yes, while in his later years Fraser may have formally left the party like John Gorton, one of his predecessors as Prime Minister, this should not be allowed to overshadow his success in office. Malcolm Fraser will and must always be remembered as a Liberal giant.

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (17:39): Malcolm Fraser was once asked how he would like people to look back on his legacy. 'I'd like,' he responded, 'for them to really look at what I've done, rather than to read contemporary novels purporting to describe what I've done.' We do not need to look very far to find Malcolm Fraser's legacy; it is all around us, embedded in our modern multicultural identity. As he once remarked:

… those who are against multiculturalism have already lost. Taking the word out of government policy won't change the result. We are a multicultural nation. Anyone who looks at the faces in the street knows that, if they think about it.

How true that is. It is there in the form of everyday citizens that I meet in my electorate, at train stations, shopping centres and the like, and on my travels right around this country. I have seen it in the Vietnamese Australians, who fled a nation ravaged by war and found salvation in a welcoming land which Mr Fraser labelled 'a dream of freedom and opportunity'.

I have heard and seen it through the SBS, which uniquely showcases and celebrates our diversity, delivering news and programs in more languages than any other broadcaster in the world, and in turn educates all Australians on the myriad of cultures that bless our shores.

And I have read it in the words of those who, whilst suffering under the scourge of apartheid, found strength in Malcolm Fraser's unequivocal commitment 'to exert pressure in relation to South Africa; to overthrow something that is repugnant to the whole human race'.

In these past few days, thousands of people who came to our shores from right around the globe have mourned the death of Malcolm Fraser as they would mourn the death of a friend or relative. Indeed, to so many ethnic communities, Mr Fraser was revered as a father figure. It is an attachment born from the depth of Mr Fraser's empathy and understanding to their needs and aspirations, embodied by the multicultural policies he implemented with such drive and dedication. His government served to actively banish the stain of inequality from our laws and institutions and to cement our tenets as a truly egalitarian nation. In establishing the Institute of Multicultural Affairs, migrant resource centres, the Human Rights Commission, SBS and a comprehensive refugee policy, as well as expanding on translation services for migrants, the Fraser government gave voice to the fundamental principle that governments exist not for the mere benefit of a privileged few but for the welfare of all people, irrespective of their background. As Mr Fraser noted in 2012:

… political conflict can live alongside the sustaining of a shared, deep respect for people regardless of colour, race or religion, a belief that people should be respected for who they are.

Through his career, Mr Fraser experienced both landslide victory and crushing defeat; yet his commitment to multiculturalism was always there. Indeed, in his first parliamentary speech, in 1956, he spoke of the need to expand Australia's migration program, noting that 'the challenge that faces us is the challenge to develop Australia'. And, some 27 years later, in his last election campaign launch, he noted:
We are a nation built by people from every land. We will keep working to improve the quality of Australian multiculturalism and a fair go for all Australians.

In recent times, I have seen a lot of references to descriptions of the electorate as now much more volatile than it was in the past. We can see experiences in Victoria and Queensland as examples of first-term governments, rapidly changing public opinions, a decline in the level of 'rusted-on-ness' in our political discourse, and political activism more focused on issues than necessarily parties. I would contend that this is in fact a very similar, if not the same, world that Malcolm Fraser had to deal with. When you look at the scale of his seat numbers as a result of the 1975 and 1977 elections, you see that he won 91 and 86 seats respectively compared to Labor's 36 and 38 seats. Compare those to the 1980 and 1983 results, where, in 1980, 74 coalition seats were won compared to 51 for Labor. It was then reversed in 1983—75 seats were won by Labor and 50 seats were won by the coalition. Some of this can, of course, be explained by the rise of Bob Hawke as Labor leader, but I would contend that Mr Fraser faced factors just as volatile as we experience today.

As an elder statesmen, he held a deep and abiding commitment to human rights, which included serving as the founding chairman of CARE Australia and reminded us all of the power of his moral authority. We are forever grateful to Malcolm Fraser for shaping and illuminating our Australian identity. His unyielding commitment to fostering an inclusive society allows us today to revel in a nation bound by our many cultures which values multiculturalism and social cohesion above politics or ideology.

Mr Fraser once said:
Together in freedom, we can build an Australia of which we can be proud, an Australia for our children and our grandchildren.

The passing of Malcolm Fraser serves as a challenge to us all to continue the work to which he dedicated his life. May he rest in peace.

Dr Hendy (Eden-Monaro) (17:44): I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak on this condolence motion for the Right Honourable John Malcolm Fraser AC CH, the 22nd Prime Minister of Australia. He was a giant of Australian politics. I did not agree with him on all matters, especially some of his more controversial positions in later life, but I note that he had a great sense of noblesse oblige, with a great many humanitarian works to his credit. To me, he was a man who put his views with great conviction, marshalling his arguments to put a rational and reasoned argument.

Beyond that, I note that he was the principal person who saved Australia in 1975. He saved the country from economic disaster. As the Treasurer has said, he was the right man at the right time for the nation. It was his strength of character above the slings and arrows of his critics that saw the demise of a disastrous Whitlam government. Young Australians misled by so-called history lessons in our schools have no real conception of the critical importance of Malcolm Fraser's role in saving Australia and beginning the repair job that was to become the bedrock of Australian prosperity over the last four decades. If he had not dealt with the uncontrolled spending of the Whitlam government, Australia's future would have been in doubt. According to the journalist Paul Kelly, federal spending as a share of GDP had massively increased from 24 per cent to 30 per cent in just three years. Inflation had skyrocketed from 4.5 per cent to 19 per cent and then back to 13 per cent. Unemployment had more than doubled from a decades-long average of two per cent to just under five per cent.
It should not be forgotten that Malcolm Fraser won the largest parliamentary majority in Australian history—in fact, twice—in 1975 and 1977. His work in environmental protection, national heritage, Indigenous rights, care for refugees and wider multicultural issues when he was in government honour the man. These achievements, of course, make a lie of counterclaims that Liberal governments ignore these vital issues. He was instrumental in creating the SBS television network. He oversaw the creation of the Australian Federal Police and the Office of National Assessments, thus strengthening Australia's long-term security infrastructure. In 1980, his government established the Australian Maritime College in Launceston; also, self-government was conferred on the Northern Territory; the Commonwealth Ombudsman was established; the first freedom of information laws were enacted; and his government introduced legislation to establish a Crimes Commission following the Costigan Royal Commission.

Significantly, he commissioned the Campbell report of 1981 which laid the foundations for the eventual reforms of our financial system that were carried out by the subsequent Hawke, Keating and Howard governments. As a result, he directly contributed to laying the framework that allowed Australia to weather the subsequent Global Financial Crisis of 2008. Ironically, for a man who supported industry protection, his government negotiated Australia's first free trade agreement and a closer economic relationship with New Zealand, which was to be fully implemented by subsequent governments.

Malcolm Fraser's government was an unwavering opponent of apartheid. He introduced the Aboriginal Land Rights Act in 1976; the first Australian sites were placed on the World Heritage List under his government; and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park was established. I note that he took great pride in the resettlement of tens of thousands of Vietnamese people in Australia. As The Sun-Herald reported last Sunday, Vietnamese refugee and now proud Australian Dr Tien Manh Nguyen stated:

To us he is a true hero. He set a shining example …

Some of these refugees were boat people, but the vast majority came through the organised refugee camps in an orderly fashion that ensured domestic political support for what could otherwise have been a highly contentious policy. In that way, Australia benefitted enormously from this generosity as it still does from our humanitarian immigration program today.

Malcolm Fraser was a man with a genuine literary style. I was delighted to read in his political memoirs published in 2010 his description of living in the bush when he was a young man. As he reprinted from a personal journal that he wrote as a young man before heading off to study at Oxford:

All my life I will have memories of calm nights beneath the sky, of waking before dawn to see the sun rise in the east and of driving over the lonely bush roads with dust eddying all round. The deformed Mallee scrub and the ghost farms, the great plains and the endless sand hills, the majestic mountains, the beautiful valleys and pleasant hills. All these are part of Australia and part of my memories. Among them I will find my home.

Indeed, Malcolm Fraser also believed in the importance of rural Australia in terms of the national psyche. It is what I have talked about as the country-city compact. This compact supported a legitimate call on the nation on behalf of country people. From the time of Federation, our nation's founders recognised that the country needed to have a fair share of attention and resources. The country-city compact formed an integral part of the nation's
economic and social fabric. It recognised the interdependence of the country and the city that was so crucial to the tremendous success of modern Australia. It recognised the mutual obligation to share the burden of the costs of living in the country. It also recognised that the country formed a critical part of our nation's character, producing much of our national narrative, collective memory, and many of our heroes. Malcolm Fraser inherently knew this and understood the national psyche in this regard.

In a wider context, this understanding that Malcolm Fraser had is part of what I called in my maiden speech to parliament the importance of pragmatic politics—that is, pragmatic politics while still maintaining the best traditions of liberalism. Indeed, the best, most concise articulation of what I was trying to say in my maiden speech was written by Malcolm Fraser in his 2002 book Common Ground. I would like to quote the relevant passage. It is a long quote but one worth hearing. He said:

Those who look for a perfect system of government are unlikely to find it. Those who look to general rules that can apply in all circumstances will be misled. Good government is essentially pragmatic. Decisions need to be guided by philosophy but based on empirical evidence. Government is not about a deductive system, it is inductive, based on circumstances and facts as they emerge. There are no formulas that can make government easy. Such conclusions, drawn from the great philosophers, provide a strong underpinning of the liberal philosophy. They also demonstrate why totalitarian regimes are generally arbitrary and brutal and why political theories of communism and socialism have so patently failed. In those theories, general rules are drawn and are sought to be applied for all circumstances. That is the antithesis of reason, of common sense, of judging circumstances as they are and making decisions accordingly. If we accept that liberalism must judge circumstances as they occur, that it must be pragmatic in its conclusions, we must also accept that liberalism has to be progressive, it has to evolve. Society cannot stand in one place.

I only had one chance of meeting Malcolm Fraser. It was in 2008, and I was chief of staff of the then federal Liberal Party leader and opposition leader, Brendan Nelson. Brendan was meeting with Malcolm Fraser at the Commonwealth offices at Treasury Place, in the centre of Melbourne. It was a friendly and constructive meeting. Despite his differences with the party overall, Malcolm Fraser remained supportive of many prominent Liberals and many of the various positions of the party. I particularly recall that, as I led Mr Fraser out of the building, I said to him that the opposition had been instructed that we could not use the front entrance of the building but had to use the back door for our guests.

In a forthright manner he simply said that, as a former Prime Minister, he could depart from whichever exit he chose. He then proceeded to stride, with the aid of a walking stick, out the front entrance. He was the sort of man who did not often brook opposition and, unsurprisingly, the security guards did not raise a murmur.

Finally, I end focusing on the quote for which he is famous. While he had been repeating the quote for years, he got to national attention when it was included in his Alfred Deakin lecture speech on 20 July 1971. He noted that George Bernard Shaw, in his play Back to Methuselah, had stated:

Life is not meant to be easy, my child; but take courage: it can be delightful.

In fact, it was in the very same play, in 1921, that Shaw wrote the other memorable lines:

I hear you say “Why?” Always "Why?" You see things; and you say "Why?" But I dream things that never were; and I say "Why not?"
Malcolm Fraser was one of those who said, 'Why not?' and lived his life to the full. What a fitting tribute to a great Australian. We pray for his family. Vale Malcolm Fraser.

Mr WATTS (Gellibrand) (17:55): I rise too today to pay tribute to a former Prime Minister who changed the face of my electorate through a principled stand of compassion, racial equality and multiculturalism.

My electorate is home to thousands of Australians of Vietnamese heritage. Put simply, they would not be a part of our community today were it not for Malcolm Fraser. The journey from the Pulau Bidong refugee camp in Malaysia to the Midway Hostel in Footscray could not have happened for many Australians and their descendants without his leadership.

He was a strong believer in a big and prosperous multicultural Australia—a commitment to multiculturalism that went past the mere mouthing of slogans and into the substance of the policy initiatives required to make this commitment real, initiatives like the establishment of the Special Broadcasting Service and his advocacy of the interests of asylum seekers.

Malcolm Fraser, against the wishes of many around him at the time, oversaw the first mass resettlement of Vietnamese refugees fleeing at the end of the Vietnam War. Over 300,000 people from refugee camps in Indochina fled at this time. More than 56,000 came to Australia, as pointed out by the member for Eden-Monaro, under a system of offshore processing for a regional resettlement arrangement.

In an often hostile political environment, Malcolm Fraser tore down the remaining relics of the White Australia policy, and over his prime ministership welcomed a stream of refugees through an offshore processing and regional resettlement agreement. It should not be forgotten that the Vietnamese were the first wave of immigration to be derogatorily labelled as 'boat people'. During a period of retrospection years later, he said, 'If we had take polls, I think people would have voted 80-90 per cent against us, but we explained the reasons for it.' We are all the better for it today as a result. People were fearful of Vietnamese resettlement in Australia, a notion that may sound ridiculous today, but it is something that we can take some lessons from today.

Over the weekend the Vietnamese community in my electorate, and others around Australia, were mourning the loss of Malcolm Fraser. The Vietnamese community in Australia is undertaking extensive celebrations this year to mark the 40th anniversary of the arrival of the Vietnamese community in Australia. The slogan for these celebrations is: 'Thank you, Australia'. Particular thanks must go to Malcolm Fraser in this respect.

Phong Nguyen, a Vietnamese refugee and prominent member of the Victorian Vietnamese community in Australia, and indeed a friend of mine, said of his passing:
The news of his death is not just a national mourning for Australia, but for us.

... ... ...

For every one of us, he is more precious and more respected than our own parents and great-grandparents.

... ... ...

If not for his leadership, tenacity and standing up for us, we would not be here.
I echo these sentiments. In this year, the 40th anniversary of Vietnamese migration to Australia, the Vietnamese community in Australia is the fifth largest migrant community in
our country and the third largest from a non-English-speaking country. Articles in newspapers thanking Malcolm Fraser for the chance to contribute to the welfare of this country and referring to him as the second father of the Vietnamese community in Australia, tell only a fraction of this story.

Through his political retirement Malcolm Fraser never left the national political stage. In many ways he was one of our best former prime ministers. I did not agree with him always, nor did all members of this House, but it was difficult not to respect the principled stand that he took. We are in no doubt that he held the views that he was expressing very deeply. He often took part in the national political debate knowing that his opinion would not be popular, not only with his erstwhile political opponents but with friends as well. His courage in standing resolute on matters of principle would surely have lost him even the best of friends along the way. However, the admirers he gained and the respect he earned in doing so will be one of the defining characteristics of his legacy.

Malcolm Fraser will be sorely missed. He will be missed by the people who knew him best, by the people he served, by his former colleagues and by those who value the spirit of independence, moral conviction and intellectual courage in this country.

Malcolm Fraser was, above all else, a man who took the risk of thinking for himself—thinking for himself on issues like apartheid, on Indigenous issues and on the fate of asylum seekers. He was a man who dictated party lines, not obeyed them; a man who took moral stances despite the fact they cost him calumny.

His stance on refugees was a testament to his vision for a multicultural Australia and his moral courage. He invited us to take time for introspection and to show empathy. He noted later in life that we should also ask ourselves what we as Australians need to do so that politicians will learn to appeal to the best of our natures and cease playing politics with the lives of vulnerable people.

Saul Bellow said:

Death is the dark backing that a mirror needs if we are to see anything.

When giant figures of their time leave us, it forces those of us left to reassess ourselves, our society and our future. Fraser's emphasis on ideas, the power of moral courage and the nobility of intellectual honesty should be a guiding principle for all of us who value truth and decency in this place.

All of us who work in politics will know that sometimes the way that quotes and the words that we use are truncated and used to define us unfairly. This was a situation that certainly befell Malcolm Fraser. In my family—a good Labor family—he was well remembered for his phrase, 'Life wasn't meant to be easy.' Certainly, for my parents that was a marker of Mr Fraser as an uncaring and harsh figure. It was only later in my life that, as pointed out by the member for Eden-Monaro earlier, I came to realise that it was only a part of George Bernard Shaw's full quote in this respect and that the full impetus of Mr Fraser's message was a far better one for us, and one that I think is best for all of us to remember when thinking on Malcolm Fraser's legacy. George Bernard Shaw told us:

Life wasn't meant to be easy, my child, but take courage: it can be delightful.
Malcolm Fraser gave much to like to many in Australia—as I said, particularly to the Vietnamese community in my electorate.

So, I pay tribute to his contribution to Australia and thank him for the sacrifices that he made in our name.

Ms O’DWYER (Higgins—Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer) (18:02): I join with so many in this House, on both sides, to rise today to mark the passing of our 22nd Prime Minister, the Right Hon. Malcolm Fraser AC, CH, GCL.

At this time our thoughts are with his family: his children, Mark, Angela, Hugh and Phoebe; his grandchildren; and, in particular, his widow, Tamie. It is very important that we acknowledge their private loss and recognise that it is they who ably supported him during his 27 years in public life and, in particular, during his time as opposition leader and later as Prime Minister from 1975 to 1983.

Much has been discussed and debated about Malcolm Fraser, his service to our nation, his government's legacy and his continued engagement in public discourse—at times at odds with subsequent Liberal administrations. Upon reflecting on his life I suspect that Malcolm Fraser was in fact a great idealist.

In coming into parliament in 1956 at the age of only 25, Malcolm Fraser was the youngest federal parliamentarian at that time. From his first speech it is clear that he had great ambitions for our country and its place in the world. He had the foresight to predict that our population would grow exponentially from around nine million people to around 25 million people in his lifetime. He understood both the opportunities and the challenges for such a young country, sparsely populated and internationally remote. He was not afraid for the future but alive to the part that Australia could, and indeed would, play in improving the lot of both its own citizenry and those of the world.

He advocated strongly for economic development as a means of expanding our population and maintaining our standard of living. As a liberal he placed great faith in the power and importance of the individual, who he said would ‘always reign supreme’.

A man of the land and a true conservationist, he was intent on leaving the world a better place than he found it. He placed value on our natural environment both as a productive asset and for its own innate worth to our planet and its inhabitants. He declared 36,000 kilometres of the Great Barrier Reef as a marine park; he placed five properties on the World Heritage List—the Great Barrier Reef, Kakadu, Willandra Lakes, Lord Howe Island and South-West Tasmania; he ended the mining of mineral sands from Fraser Island; and he banned whaling in Australian waters during his time as minister. Concurrently, he also introduced a policy of uranium development—with safeguards—encouraged resource development and introduced world-parity pricing for local oil.

His government set about restoring prudent government and economic stability. In particular, he curtailed the rapid growth in government expenditure under the Whitlam government, addressed inflation and reduced tariffs. He did this in a difficult economic climate of unsettled world markets and the aftermath of the world oil shocks.

He had a strong sense of our place in the world as a nation, both now and into the future, as evidenced by his strong support of multiculturalism, Australia's migration program and acceptance of Vietnam refugees, who had been denied by the previous Labor government. His
ambitions for Australia to be a respected voice internationally manifested in his using international platforms to argue ardently against apartheid in South Africa.

It is an unfortunate truth that the turbulent years of the Whitlam government, and the division that followed its removal, are to an extent, in current Australian popular understanding, synonymous with the prime ministership of Malcolm Fraser and his government. As they say, context is everything, and Malcolm Fraser's legacy has been mired in the context of this time.

There is a good deal of irony that a leader with strong ideals was forced to confront the reality of the chaotic Whitlam government. In this, perhaps his idealism was matched only by his resolve to serve the country for the nation's best interest and by his fortitude to take action where lesser souls would have wavered.

He said of the Whitlam government's removal:

There was one sort of trauma in having an election forced. There would have been another sort of trauma in having that government stay in power another six or seven months.

Indeed, while for some it was clear that there was a massive agenda of legislative change under the Whitlam government, it did in some respects overshadow the immense economic mismanagement that occurred at that time too, which saw spending increases of 40 per cent, soaring tax rates and a doubling of unemployment in only one year.

In my recent condolence speech for former Prime Minister Whitlam, I noted that Alan Mitchell of the *AFR* said it took '20 years and four prime ministers to get the budget back under control.' While there have been, and will be, many attempts to rewrite history, the fact remains that Fraser's decision to block supply was entirely endorsed by the people of Australia when they delivered to him the greatest electoral landslide victory in our nation's history.

Much has also been said of whether Malcolm Fraser's political views changed or whether the Liberal Party has changed since his time as leader. Whatever is the case, Malcolm Fraser was certainly forward thinking and dreamed large for our country and for the world. From outside the Liberal Party, much is made of the differences of opinion. However, this is mostly met with sanguine bemusement from those of us within. As a party, we understand that difference should be applauded. Difference challenges us to understand. It can innovate us and stimulate us. As a party, we understand that difference is not synonymous with lack of unity any more than same necessarily equals fair. Difference does not represent weakness, but compels us to test and argue our views and values on their merits, as we should.

I am proud that my local party within Higgins invited Malcolm Fraser as the guest speaker, not all that long ago. Over 250 party members attended the debate and, as always, it was informed and it was robust. While, in the end, our broad church has lost a great parishioner, we as Liberals and parliamentarians commend Malcolm on his unyielding service to our nation; his steely resolve to do what he believed to be in our nation's interest in spite of personal ramifications; his innate understanding that we must strive to leave to our children a better world than the one that we inherited; his commitment to people, their strengths and aspirations, both here and around our globe; and his ambition for a strong, prosperous and respected Australia.
After nearly 60 years engaged in the big debates still much of the 25-year-old new member remained. Ever thinking to the future he said of politics, 'You have to be an optimist. Why involve yourself in issues of public policy unless you are?' Vale Malcolm Fraser.

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (18:10): I too welcome the opportunity to briefly speak about the Right Honourable Malcolm Fraser. I have listened to the speeches of others in this contribution and I have done so with interest. There have been some very good speeches in respect of Malcolm Fraser. For many people, the passing of Malcolm Fraser brings to a close the Whitlam dismissal era. In my lifetime, it was the most turbulent period in Australian politics that I can recall. It was also, in my view, a low point in political ethics and indeed caused a major test to our Australian Constitution—a test that, to this day, I do not believe has been properly resolved, and there are still differences of opinion as to what was right and what was wrong at the time.

It is an era that I can well recall. Immediately after the dismissal, I was working for Senator Jim Cavanagh, a member of the Senate, and I was working for him for most of the time that Malcolm Fraser was Prime Minister of Australia. I recall in those years the deep passions of the people on both sides of politics and the hostility Labor supporters had towards Malcolm Fraser. Malcolm Fraser, along with John Kerr, became the focus of Labor supporters' rancour.

I therefore begin my brief contribution by putting the 1975 dismissal in context as I saw it at the time, because it was indeed the 1975 dismissal that Malcolm Fraser is most identified with. The dismissal came after a series of attempts by the coalition to disrupt the Whitlam government. Coalition governments had dominated both state and federal politics for decades in the lead up to 1975. It was clear to me that conservatives around the country simply could not accept a Labor government being in office in Canberra. So they attempted all they could possibly do to disrupt the government of the day.

We had the Vince Gair affair, otherwise known by many as the Night of the Long Prawns. Then came the replacement of Lionel Murphy, on his appointment to the High Court, with an independent Cleaver Bunton, by then Liberal New South Wales Premier Tom Lewis. Next came the appointment of Albert Field, a non-Labor nominee, by the Bjelke-Petersen government to replace Labor Senator Bert Milliner, who had died. It had always been the convention to replace senators with nominees from their own party, but that was not the case when it came to replacing Labor senators during the Whitlam era by conservative state governments. Finally, when there was a High Court challenge to Field’s appointment, and Field had to take leave from the parliament as from 1 October, the Liberal opposition refused to grant him a pair—again, quite different to what I expect would happen in any other parliament.

These were deliberate Liberal Party tactics clearly intended to enable the opposition to control the Senate and to block supply, thereby setting the groundwork for the dismissal. I can only presume that Malcolm Fraser, as the leader of the Liberals from 21 March 1975 onwards, was complicit in the breaking of those conventions by not replacing senators with nominations from their respective parties, by not agreeing to pair an absent member and by threatening to block supply—with the sole motive being that of bringing down the duly elected government. Even worse for Malcolm Fraser at the time was that he was portrayed as a puppet of the Queen and perhaps the USA. Indeed, his foreign affairs policies of the time provided further grounds for that portrayal.
I make those recollections because the Malcolm Fraser I saw in the years subsequent to the Dismissal and particularly subsequent to Malcolm Fraser's retirement from parliament I believe would not have acted or condoned the very actions that he was a party to in the lead-up to the dismissal. Of course, I will never know whether that would have been the case, but I do know that years later Malcolm Fraser and Gough Whitlam not only reconciled; but Malcolm Fraser became a champion of policies and views that Gough had also subscribed to and in many cases had initiated. The Malcolm Fraser I saw post federal politics was an honourable person committed to fairness and natural justice.

Other members have spoken about Malcolm Fraser's commitment to Indigenous equality, and I will make a comment about that in just a moment, but also his support for environmental protection, his universal defence of human rights and, very notably, his stand against apartheid and support of Nelson Mandela. That is all true, and I am not going to cover ground that has already been covered by other speakers in this contribution. I do want to make the point about the land rights legislation. The land rights legislation at the time that was introduced by the Fraser government was almost identical to the draft legislation that the Whitlam government had in place—I cannot recall if it was before the parliament or ready to go to the parliament—at the time of the Dismissal. And so I commend the Fraser government for carrying on with that, but I want to make the point very strongly that it was almost identical legislation that Gough Whitlam had brought into the parliament before he was dismissed. I know that because Senator Jim Cavanagh, who I worked for, was in fact responsible for that legislation being introduced into the Whitlam-era parliament, and his first job as shadow spokesman for Indigenous affairs whilst he was in the Senate was to in fact analyse the new legislation. I have to tell you that, having been given the task of trying to find out if there was any difference between the two, I found it incredibly difficult to find a spot of difference between the two versions of the legislation.

I also noted, in more recent times, the position of Malcolm Fraser on the Palestinian issue and on Australia becoming a republic, again positions he took that went generally against what I would refer to as conservative politics in this country. Indeed, many of his views did not sit comfortably with those on the conservative side of politics, and ultimately Malcolm Fraser ended his membership of the Liberal Party. Of course, Malcolm Fraser's views on refugees were very much at odds with those of his contemporary Liberal colleagues. He not only opened the doors to Vietnamese refugees 40 years ago; but he was openly critical of the harsh refugee policies of recent years.

I will always be critical of Malcolm Fraser in that he was complicit in the dismissal of Gough Whitlam, robbing Gough Whitlam of another two years in office and, with that, the reforms that the Whitlam government would undoubtedly have brought in, but I nevertheless have the utmost respect for the Malcolm Fraser I saw in more recent years: a man who publicly stood for the values that I hold dearly, who devoted his later years in life fighting for those values and who had the courage to do so. His contribution to Australia has been well articulated by other speakers. Every person in a major leadership role, I believe, can claim some level of achievements during the term of that role. Australia is today the proud nation it is because of the collective achievements of many since Federation. Malcolm Fraser can rightfully take his place amongst the names of those Australians who have significantly
changed our nation. For that I thank and pay tribute to him. It is for those public achievements that I hope that Malcolm Fraser is best remembered.

To Tamie and Malcolm's family I offer my sincere condolences. May he rest in peace.

Ms GAMBARO (Brisbane) (18:19): I rise on this condolence motion for the Hon. John Malcolm Fraser, a statesman of my party, a statesman of this country and our 22nd Prime Minister. To my regret, I did not know Malcolm Fraser well. During his life I met him in passing on a handful of occasions, but despite this I have never been under any illusions as to the enormity of his legacy and the contribution to the Liberal Party and to Australia.

As I said late last year in my condolence speech for Malcolm's great rival and ultimately his great friend the Hon Gough Whitlam—and I note that these two were the giants of Australian political life—I want to make special mention of Malcolm's wife, Tamie, their four children Phoebe, Mark, Angela and Hugh, and their grandchildren. I extended my deepest sympathy to them all. Our families are often the forgotten people in our political lives. They are asked to give up so much and they have so many intrusions into their lives, and often it is many more times than anyone has a right to ask of them or to expect. To Malcolm's family I want to say that your service has been no less distinguished. Thank you so much.

Malcolm Fraser is without doubt one of the major figures in Australia's political history. He was Prime Minister from November 1975 to March 1983, making him the third longest-serving Liberal PM after Robert Menzies and John Howard. He will also forever be known, along with Gough Whitlam and Sir John Kerr, as one of the three main figures of the Dismissal in 1975. But, like Gough, Malcolm Fraser's contribution to Australian political life extends far beyond the Dismissal.

He has been recognised for many achievements in his time as Prime Minister, and I want to highlight some of the most important—though not exclusive—achievements. He established the Human Rights Commission. He established freedom of information legislation. He created many of the bodies that work effectively today such as the Administrative Appeals Tribunal and the Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman. I pay tribute to him. He also did some groundbreaking work in many, many areas, including the banning of sand mining on Fraser Island and the banning of drilling on the Great Barrier Reef. Malcolm Fraser helped to set up the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and ensured that it was World Heritage listed, and we are forever grateful for that particular initiation.

He established the Special Broadcasting Service. He began large-scale Asian immigration to Australia, particularly of Vietnamese refugees fleeing communism. And they have been wonderful contributors to Australian life and have contributed enormously to the wonderful nation that we are today. I also want to pay tribute to Malcolm Fraser for his work in Indigenous equality.

For me, however, it was his enduring commitment to human rights that set him apart as a great statesman. He commissioned the 1978 Galbally report, which identified a need to provide special services and programs for all migrants, to ensure equal opportunity of access to government funded programs and services with a view to helping migrants become self-reliant. Many of the settlement programs and immigration policies that we have today are because of the great work that was done in that report—ensuring that the needs of migrants and refugees were taken into account. I consider these sentiments as being an extension of the
Menzies philosophy that we need to be a nation of lifters not leaners. And when we look at
the great success that multiculturalism has brought to Australia, I think we must all
acknowledge that Malcolm Fraser was right.

I see Malcolm Fraser's role in Australian political history as that of transition. For the
Liberal Party he was very much a transitional figure, emerging from the Menzies era into the
mid-1980s where economic realities were changing. We were transitioning from being an
insulated economy of tariff protections to confront the international realities of competition
and the need for structural reform, less regulation and increased productivity.

In my mind his role as a transitional man never changed throughout his life. He remained
active in political discourse to the end, often changing his views as his perspective on issues
changed and expanded. It is a way of thinking that I feel can and should be accommodated in
what John Howard referred to as the 'broad church of the Liberal Party'. His transition from
being the political enemy of Gough Whitlam to becoming a close friend was a great credit to
them both, and is a transformational lesson for all of us.

Malcolm spoke of his political philosophy as being based on the need for representative
democracy, where it is incumbent on political figures to be properly informed, to exercise
their own judgement, to learn about an issue and then to make up their own minds as to how
best to represent their constituents. As such, he was not enamoured of focus group or poll
driven politics, which I imagine he would have viewed as being the equivalent of having lock-
jaw of the brain. He relished the challenge of debate, and that is something that as a party and
a nation we should never be afraid of.

I pay tribute to the former member for Wannon, our 22nd Prime Minister. I would like to
conclude by paraphrasing his own words when he left the parliament in 1983. I am confident
that he did hand over an Australia 'in as good or better condition than any other Western
country in the world'. Malcolm Fraser, Australia is indeed a better place thanks to your lasting
legacy.

Mr THISTLETHWAITE (Kingsford Smith) (18:26): On behalf of the people of
Kingsford Smith, I would like to pay tribute and offer my respects to the family of Australia's
22nd Prime Minister, John Malcolm Fraser. Malcolm Fraser entered federal parliament at the
ripe age of 25 in 1955. He was the youngest member of parliament when he was elected to the
House of Representatives, but also the tallest. Over time, he left an enduring legacy in more
ways than one on Australian politics.

I certainly did not agree with most of the Fraser government's policies—in particular, the
government's approach to economics. During the Fraser years, Australia suffered shockingly
high unemployment. The periods of wages freezes left a lot of Australian workers in very
difficult circumstances. In my view, the blocking of supply was an unconscionable and
destructive manipulation of Australian political processes. However, there were redeeming
features of the Fraser government, and certainly in the wake of Malcolm Fraser's
parliamentary career he became a great leader of our nation; an advocate for multiculturalism
and for respect; and a fierce campaigner against racism. For that, we pay tribute to him.

Malcolm Fraser's commitment and leadership of Australia regarding multiculturalism was
admirable and deserves praise and respect. His policy of welcoming boat people who were
fleeing the Indochina conflict of the 1970s and 80s really established a new bar for
immigration policy and multiculturalism within Australia. The foundations of that approach were certainly laid by the Whitlam government but they were built on and raised by the Fraser government and that provided a foundation for the Hawke and Keating governments to extend Australia's welcome to Asia and to firmly position Australia within the Asia-Pacific region, economically, strategically and socially. That is a shift in policy that has paid dividends for our nation. Indeed, his advocacy for multiculturalism, his acceptance of Vietnamese boat people, is something he described by saying: 'I believe we have a moral and ethical obligation'. Those were admirable words.

Malcolm Fraser also deserves respect and tribute for his support of Aboriginal land rights and continuation of the very good work of the Whitlam government, despite some opposition within conservative ranks of the Liberal and National parties. His opposition and advocacy against apartheid is one of his finest moments. The work that he pursued within the Commonwealth to advocate for the end of apartheid, particularly going against the wishes of that shockingly racist British prime minister Margaret Thatcher, is a very admirable quality. His advocacy for an independent Zimbabwe and the fact that he stood up to racism not only in Australia but also internationally deserves Australia's respect.

Another very admirable quality of former Prime Minister Fraser is, of course, his support of constitutional reform in Australia and his fierce advocacy for Australia becoming a republic. His vocal campaigning in 1999, as a part of that campaign, was something that earned him much respect in the Australian community. I think that this stems from his clear understanding and his belief in the value of multiculturalism to Australia not only socially but also, importantly, economically. His vision for Australia as a nation that is integrated as part of Asia, that finds its security within Asia, not apart from Asia, I believe led to and provided the foundations for his very solid advocacy for Australia becoming a republic. He was a person who saw that Australia's future would benefit from a change in our Constitution and sending a clear message to our neighbours in the Asia Pacific that Australia is no longer just a colony of the United Kingdom; we are an independent nation, with our own identity—one that is truly placed in multiculturalism, and with the ability to achieve great things domestically and internationally within our region.

The final point I would like to make about Malcolm Fraser is his quite touching, at times, relationship with his former adversary, Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, in later years. Their work together on campaigning for an Australian republic, their advocacy for multiculturalism and, in particular, the touching moment of them sitting together in this parliament when Prime Minister Kevin Rudd delivered the apology to Australia's stolen generation were great moments in Australian political history. I can understand, having seen that vision, having felt the presence of those two giants of Australian politics in this parliament, why many in our community long for that sort of leadership in our nation once again.

On behalf of the people of Kingsford Smith, I pay tribute to Malcolm Fraser. I offer my sincerest condolences, thoughts and prayers to Tamie and his family. May he rest in peace.
minister and then as a prime minister—and all have touched on his service in so many ways beyond the parliament in all of the years since 1983—giving his view in the arena, arguing for what he stood for, often a position people disagreed with but a position that he would consistently hold to.

During the tumultuous Dismissal, which, naturally, most members have commentated on, he showed his strength and determination, the very attributes that would drive him in all of his conduct and the way in which he held to his views on other subjects, both during his prime ministership and in the years after it. Many have spoken about what was achieved in a policy sense during the Fraser government, and it was substantial. Some speakers have spoken about the time he came to office in terms of economic reform. His former senior adviser David Kemp summed this up very well in the weekend papers. He said:

Malcolm Fraser once reflected with me that his had been a "transitional" prime ministership, in terms of the historic development of public policy in Australia.

That is true. He successfully reigned in runaway spending. He believed in smaller government. He introduced sections 45D and E of the Trade Practices Act, something that endures today and was a critical reform at the time.

It is true that he did not believe in the free market as the solution to every problem. Like all leaders, he was a product of his time. He came ahead of the Thatcher years, ahead of the Reagan years and ahead of the 1980s debate, and it is worth pointing out, as David Kemp did in that very well written article, that many of the issues that we were coming onto the agenda during his prime ministership picked up full steam in the years after it. Another former staff member of his and a friend of mine and many in this chamber, Petro Georgiou, wrote on the weekend about his principles. He wrote about the issue of South Africa and about a party room debate, and I will quote from the article:

The gist of their remarks was, 'why aren't we supporting our white cousins in South Africa? I will not read all of the quote, for reasons of time, other than to say:

That debate ended somewhat abruptly after I advised my colleagues of the realities of the Fraser Government. If they wanted an Australian government that would support a small white minority in South Africa determined to keep the overwhelming black majority in a state of perpetual subjection, they would have to get another government.

That summed up his dedication to principle and that same steely resolve that was so often on display. I know we are not allowed to hold up props in this parliament—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Ewen Jones): That is right.

Mr TONY SMITH: but I will, since we are not in question time, refer to one front-page newspaper. It is a picture that appeared on Saturday morning of last week. I raise that because it is of Malcolm Fraser at a campaign rally in 1975 in the electorate of Casey. I will correct myself: it was in the electorate of Casey then, but it is now just in the electorate of Deakin. He was at the Croydon Football Club with a campaign rally on the ground. He is speaking from the grandstand to a couple of thousand people. Next to him is a friend of mine, who was a few short weeks later to become the member for Casey, and that is Peter Falconer. In the background there is a sign that says, 'Casey is Falconer-Liberal country'. Peter Falconer was elected the member for Casey on 13 December, and his political career spanned the Fraser
government. He was easily elected in 1975 and 1977 and, like the Fraser government, he scraped back in 1980, and in 1983 the tide went out.

I spoke to Peter this week and asked him for some recollections and he gave me many. I will read some of them into Hansard. The first is about that rally. He said:

My abiding memory of the 1975 campaign is of a combined Liberal Party Rally at Croydon Park for both Casey & La Trobe … where Malcolm Fraser addressed a noisy and enthusiastic crowd of 2,000 plus from the Grandstand … It was there that you could sense that the tide had turned from resentment and anger at the blocking of supply—and the dismissal of the Whitlam Government—to a rolling bandwagon support for a new Government.

He had many other observations about campaigning with Malcolm Fraser in both that election and in the 1977 election but, as many speakers have pointed out, as acrimonious as 1975 was, Malcolm Fraser and Gough Whitlam became close friends and, according to Peter Falconer, on his observations as a backbencher, maintained a very civil and professional relationship.

He says:

I remember being in the PM's office talking about a constituency matter when Malcolm stopped me, picked up a letter and said 'Excuse me, I've got to talk to Gough about something'. He pressed the button on the direct line to Gough's office and simply said 'Gough, I've got something to show you.' Whitlam arrived within 60 seconds, apologised for interrupting me. Malcolm handed him a letter, Gough looked at it and said 'I'll talk to my lot and get back to you shortly.'

Peter said:

I was struck by the easy rapport and understanding between them. It was reassuring to me that the two political giants in the Parliament had such an easy modus operandi when it came to national security matters and other bipartisan issues.

I met Malcolm Fraser a number of times over the years, but I was not someone who met with him frequently in an organised way.

During my earliest days in the Liberal Party—and my friend on the other side walking in will remember some of this—I was president of the Melbourne University Liberal Club. He spoke at the Alfred Deakin Lecture in 1971. He regularly attended these lectures, and as club president I met him there in 1988. Later that year or the next year I invited him to address a Liberal students' dinner, which he happily did. This was five or six years after he had left office. I met him during the republic referendum campaign, at airports and at various other functions and occasionally when he was with his friends, Petro Georgiou and other former staff, who regularly caught up to mull over the old times and no doubt the modern day.

He was active, as everyone has said, right until the very end. He expressed his view. He wrote books. He was unceasing in his commentary. He became a prolific user of Twitter, which only would have made his ex-staff feel relief that, in their time working for him, mobile phones did not exist, because he was an incredibly hard worker. Indeed, late last year, just before Christmas, I wrote an opinion piece about the centenary of women getting the vote in Australia. I had it published in The Age. My staff pointed out to me that one of the first people to tweet this article was Malcolm Fraser himself. He was still following the debate at every level.

Dr David Kemp wrote of his policy achievements in a difficult time following the Dismissal. Petro Georgiou wrote of his character and his principle. He also wrote:
Fraser, on hearing of Gough Whitlam's passing observed, "The line's broken. In this world, anyway, it's broken forever."

And it is true that we have waved goodbye to a generation who served this nation.

Mr Marles (Corio) (18:47): Today is an occasion of sadness, but it is also an occasion of honour to be able to speak on the condolence motion to celebrate the life of the Rt Hon. Malcolm Fraser. As I was the Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs in the last Labor government, having spent at the end of that time some considerable attention on Africa, it would be appropriate for me to focus on Malcolm Fraser's enormous contribution to the cause of ending apartheid in South Africa and indeed the cause of the pursuit of human rights in Southern Africa. His contribution to that honours our country as a whole.

As I was the Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs in the last Labor government, spending a considerable amount on PNG, again it would be remiss of me not to mention the significant contribution that Malcolm Fraser made to the beginnings of the independent state of Papua New Guinea, supporting PNG, as he did, in the early days of that sovereign state after independence, which occurred in September 1975, just a month or two before Malcolm Fraser became the Prime Minister of Australia. Indeed, his efforts to ensure that there was significant support for that country in its early days were absolutely fundamental to the growth and survival of PNG. It led in 2011 to Malcolm Fraser being awarded the Grand Companion of the Order of Logohu, which gives him the entitlement to be called Chief Malcolm Fraser. I was the parliamentary secretary at that time. PNG, I have often felt, ought to be seen as utterly central to Australian foreign policy. I think that is a point which needs to be emphasised as often as possible, but Malcolm Fraser as Prime Minister saw the centrality of our relationship with PNG in our world view as a lesson for every practitioner of foreign affairs about the significance of that bilateral relationship.

And now, as I am the shadow minister for immigration, it would also be remiss of me not to mention the enormous contribution that Malcolm Fraser made in this area, ushering as he did the wave of Vietnamese and Indochinese immigration in the aftermath of the Vietnam War to our country, which has completely changed the face of modern Australia and is an enormous contribution to who we are as a society today. We have heard in other contributions the fact that Malcolm Fraser was the first person in this place to use the word 'multiculturalism' as a descriptor for Australia. John Menadue, who has had an esteemed career as a public servant in Canberra and was the Secretary of the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs during much of the time that Malcolm Fraser was Prime Minister, regards that as the most exciting opportunity that he had in his career of public service to Australia and absolutely believes that it has profoundly changed who we are as a nation. It is appropriate also to mention in that context Mick Young, who was the shadow minister for immigration at the time, who very much offered bipartisan support on the part of the Labor opposition.

But really the contribution that I want to make this evening is more of a personal reflection in respect of Malcolm Fraser. I did not know Malcolm Fraser, but as a child of Victoria's south-west I certainly knew members of Malcolm Fraser's extended family and saw the personal side, if I can put it that way, of Malcolm Fraser. I attended school with two—one, actually, but I had two friends particularly who were Malcolm Fraser's nephews, Dan Ritchie and David Beggs. Phoebe Fraser was also at school with me. She was a little bit older than
me, and I did not know Phoebe, but Dan and David were good friends of mine while I was at school.

I remember very clearly when I was probably about 12 years old, being more precocious than I should—clearly, I am sure, speaking from a place of ignorance—railing against the then Fraser government. I was unreasonably politicised at the age of 12, which probably demonstrates the sad specimen of a human being that I am—that that is what I was thinking about at that age—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Ewen Jones): Order! Leave that to the government, please!

Mr MARLES: I was in a circle of discussion which Dan was in, and I was talking about how terrible Malcolm Fraser was. At the end of it, Dan, to my great discredit, left that gathering crying. It taught me a couple of lessons. The first is that I did not feel good about the fact that, as result of a political discussion, I had put somebody in a state of tears and they had ended up leaving. It did not make me feel good at all. It has been a lesson that has stuck with me to this day, that politics ought to be discussed vigorously, but it ought never to be a cause of creating a personal difference between two people. I apologised to Dan at the time—I hope I did. I certainly do now. Of course, the great exponent of that philosophy was Malcolm Fraser himself.

The relationship that Malcolm Fraser subsequently had with Gough Whitlam is the greatest example in our history of how personal friendships can traverse whatever political differences we have in this place. It is an enormous credit to both Malcolm Fraser and Gough Whitlam that they were able to have that relationship. It has to stand as an example for all of us in this place at this point that, in the place of personal friendships and in the place of collegiality across the aisle, so many good things can be achieved and so many good things can be done. This is not to belittle the need to argue our points of view as vigorously as we can and to pursue politics in that way, but it is to say that there is an important space that can be created in which great things can occur if we can ensure that the relationships and the personal rapport that come from that are able to be maintained. The friendship between Gough Whitlam and Malcolm Fraser was not that important, but together they did really significant things post their political lives.

The second point that came out of that moment with Dan was to discover that Malcolm Fraser—somebody who I had seen on the TV and in newspapers—was actually a real person. He was Dan's uncle, not a distant uncle but an uncle whom he loved and who loved him such that, when a brat like me was saying what I was saying, it really hurt him. It is a reminder, again, that everyone in public life is a real person. Also, the most significant thing that any of us do in this place is never as significant as the role that we play in our lives as the loved ones of those who love us. I remember being at David's 21st birthday, out in the Western District, and Malcolm Fraser was there. I was very keen to see a former Prime Minister, as he was at that point, so a friend of mine and I sidled up to him in the ice-cream queue and I think I met the shyness of Malcolm Fraser at that moment as we tried to get a conversation going in relation to footy.

Later, on the day of the national apology in precisely this space, I had the opportunity to have a conversation with Malcolm and Tamie Fraser, and indicated my friendship with both Dan and David Beggs. It was a moment of animation in Malcolm Fraser's eyes as I spoke to
him about his nephews. That obviously had nothing to do with me; it had everything to do with what those two people meant to Malcolm Fraser. I think it is a really poignant lesson that he as the Prime Minister of Australia, achieving the highest office in this land, could still see how important it was that family came first.

I was reminded, and want to remind people today, of an interview that he conducted in the lead-up to the 1983 election. I think the question was asked of him about what he had learnt and what was important to him as the Prime Minister of Australia. The very first comment he made was about the importance of family and how, no matter what the meeting was and no matter how busy he was, whenever there was a call made to him from one of his children, that is what came first. That was the priority in his life as Prime Minister and that was the call that he answered immediately. That is a mantra which I have tried to maintain, probably not as well as he did, in my life in this place as well.

Whilst there are enormous public policy legacies that are rightly celebrated in the speeches that are being made here in this condolence debate, it is really those personal reflections of Malcolm Fraser's life which have had the biggest impact on me as a person and also as a parliamentarian. My thoughts right now are very much with Dan Ritchie, David Beggs and the extended family of Malcolm Fraser, as they are with his immediate family: his wife Tamie and his children Mark, Angela, Hugh and Phoebe. They are the family of a remarkable Australian and my thoughts are very much with them at this time.

Mrs GRIGGS (Solomon) (18:57): I rise to speak on this condolence motion to acknowledge the passing of Australia's 22nd Prime Minister, the Right Hon. Malcolm Fraser. It is important that his contribution, especially to the Northern Territory, is acknowledged. As many have offered, Mr Fraser was indeed a great friend of the Northern Territory and a great friend of Indigenous Australians.

As a primary school student I remember very clearly, as if it were yesterday, when Malcolm Fraser visited the Northern Territory in 1978. It was a significant milestone in the Territory's history as he addressed the first sittings of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory. Under Malcolm Fraser's leadership, self-government was conferred on the Northern Territory. I think this is one of the many reasons Territorians have a fondness for our former Prime Minister.

At the opening of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory he said to the people of the Northern Territory:
You are embarking on one of the noblest adventures open to any people—democratic self-government. It is one of the hardest systems in the world to run, but it is also certainly the best.

He was so right. History shows us that Malcolm Fraser was committed to providing the best outcome for the Territory. He maintained a hands-on approach when tackling the difficult and unique issues we Territorians faced. He gave the following advice:
But democratic self-government is much more than just a method of exacting responsibility from government, it is of the most fundamental importance to peoples’ development, to allowing people to realise their potential through political participation, to enhancing their initiative, enterprise and responsibility.

Malcolm Fraser also recognised the need for the Territory to have independence and autonomy. During his address to the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly he commented:

CHAMBER
For decades ultimate authority for the administration of the laws governing the Territory's day to day affairs was held by people thousands of miles away. People who did not always comprehend the Territory's special needs.

I could not have said that better myself. As a lifetime Territorian, I am very well aware of our unique requirements, how important we are and, particularly, the important role that we have played in Australia's history. I have to say, Mr Deputy Speaker, those comments from Malcolm Fraser are as relevant today as they were in 1978, and I can assure you that nothing annoys Territorians more than being told by southerners what we should do. It is clear that Malcolm Fraser not only recognised this but he respected it. He valued us. It is a message that is very clearly still relevant, as I said, for Territorians today.

I think you will have to agree, Mr Deputy Speaker, there is no doubt that the Territory has come a long way. It has come leaps and bounds since the monumental day of 8 September 1978, when we received self-government. There is no denying that Malcolm Fraser's focus was never too far from the Territory and, indeed, Australia's first people. Throughout his time as Prime Minister of Australia, he made a number of visits to remote Indigenous communities around the country, but specifically in the Northern Territory. I understand that he did this so he could hear firsthand how the government could provide a hand up, not a handout, to the Australians who had sadly become our most disadvantaged. Malcolm and his wife, Tamie, visited the most remote parts of the Territory together. They toured Arnhem Land. They visited communities outside of Alice Springs, where I grew up—places like Papunya. They rode camels, sat talking with the locals in the Todd River and went fishing with local Indigenous leaders—but not in the Todd River, because that is a dry river.

He was an advocate of self-determination and autonomy, and it is a great disappointment that he did not live long enough to see the Northern Territory achieve statehood. While he was an active player in seeing the Northern Territory achieve self-government, it was always Malcolm's wish that we would become the seventh state of Australia—something that I hope is not too far in the future. I have been trying to encourage some of my colleagues that this is the future—

Wyatt Roy: Become part of Queensland!

Mrs GRIGGS: I am not going to become part of Queensland. I think perhaps the state of North Australia might have some appeal to some of my colleagues.

I will always remember Malcolm for his fierce advocacy and deep respect for the Territory. These thoughts were echoed within my electorate last week. I would like to share with the House words from local City of Darwin alderman Helen Galton, who said to me:

My Dad was Malcolm's campaign manager when he stood and was elected to the seat of Wannon in 1955. I have vivid memories of the campaign, even though I was only five years old. Dad went on to represent the Victorian state seat of Portland—he was elected in 1967—which was entirely within Wannon. They were a great Liberal team. My thoughts are with the Fraser family at this sad time. Rest in peace, Malcolm Fraser.

Territorians will always be grateful for his leadership, respect and confidence in us to manage ourselves and our future. A life well lived. This political giant Malcolm Fraser—may he rest in peace. On behalf of all Territorians, I offer condolences to his family and friends. Rest in peace.
WYATT ROY (Longman) (19:04): It is with a heavy heart that I rise to talk on the condolence motion for our former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser. I had the great pleasure of meeting Malcolm Fraser once and having quite a long conversation with him, in one of the first sitting weeks after both you and I were elected in 2010. He was staying in the same hotel as me, and the member for Ryan and I spotted him in the hotel bar. I said to Jane, ‘Malcolm Fraser’s been saying some unkind things on TV about young people being elected to parliament, and I wouldn’t mind having a chat to him.’ But I was too nervous to go and talk to this person who I had only seen on TV, and I said, ‘Can you introduce me?’ She said, ‘Of course,’ and Jane and I went over and we sat down and started having a few drinks with Malcolm Fraser and Tamie Fraser.

It was one of the most amazing conversations I have had in my political career. I might come back to a bit of it, but the piece of that conversation that stuck with me was this. I said to him, ‘Mr Fraser, what’s your biggest regret?’ He thought about it, and Tamie cut him off and put her arm across his chest and said, ‘He was the sod that turned the sod on that building.’ Of course, they were referring to the building of this building, the new Parliament House. I said, ‘What do you mean? That building is lacking soul,’ is what he said. Of course, in old Parliament House all the members of parliament had to work together; they had to sit together; they were in the same room together. While politics was fought in a very aggressive way, they were able to leave that at the door and still have a drink in the bar in the old building. And, as we all know, Gough Whitlam and Malcolm Fraser later on in life became great friends. It was a better type of politics, a better discussion. I think that is really the legacy that he leaves us here in his place: how can we breathe a soul into our political discussion; how can we have some civility in our political discourse? This building, while it is completely beautiful, in many ways takes that away. The legacy that I think Malcolm Fraser leaves so many of us is that our politics can always be better. To have a soul in this discussion—to have a sense of purpose in the discussion about what our country can be—surely must be the lasting legacy of Malcolm Fraser.

Of course, as has been mentioned in a few of the speeches in this place, the other thing that we discussed was young people going into politics. Malcolm Fraser in the TV interview I was referring to said some unkind things about young people going into politics—he said they should not be doing it—but, of course, as Tamie pointed out that conversation, Malcolm was 25 when he was elected. He was the youngest member of the parliament and, as has been pointed out, the tallest. I am happy to admit that I am the youngest and the shortest, but he was a young person coming into this place, which presents many unique challenges.

In having that discussion with him and pushing this a little further, I said to him, ‘Why do you think it is a bad thing that young people come into politics? What is the reason that this isn’t okay?’ The point that he was making, which is a point I completely, 100 per cent agree with, is that, when we are elected to parliament, we have to be here for a reason. We have to have a purpose for being in political life. To have a political career that is founded purely on being here for the sake of being here has no reason to it. It has no ability to change the country; it is just self-preservation. Malcolm Fraser pointed out, ‘Of course, I could have always gone back to the farm and had a job.’ I said, ‘Well, I actually come from the farm too, and in every conversation I have with Dad he says, “Come back to the farm and get out of politics.”’ But what is so important for us in this place, regardless of our background,
regardless of our age and regardless of our gender, ethnicity or professional background, is that when we serve in public life we are trying to change the country for the better—that we are serving a purpose in our representation of the people who elect us. That is, again, the legacy that Malcolm Fraser leaves behind.

I would say to all students of history but, I think more importantly, to Tamie and the Fraser family: they should be incredibly proud of what their father achieved—because, love him or hate him, he changed this country. The one thing that Malcolm Fraser always wanted us to be as a nation is proud and independent. That is such a lasting legacy. There is something in the Australian psyche where we almost like to knock ourselves down and say that we cannot be this great nation, but he was an absolutely true patriot in the sense that he believed incredibly strongly that we should be proud of the fact that we are Australians; that we should be an independent nation capable of making its own decisions and planning its own course in the modern world. I think that is something we should be proud of. That is a patriotic position to take. He is somebody who understood also that our country is stronger when we have diversity. Diversity is something that should be celebrated and embraced and that contributes to our society rather than takes away from our society and our culture.

So I would say, when history writes the story of Malcolm Fraser, I think it will be far kinder than many of his critics today on both sides of the political aisle. We should all be proud of the contribution that he has made. As he goes off to another place, his family, and particularly Tamie, can rest easy knowing that they were part of something that changed this country for the better. With those words, may he rest in peace.

Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (19:11): I am probably one of the few people left in here who actually worked with Malcolm Fraser—although I think, being in the Country/National party in those days, it would be more accurate to say we worked against him! When you write a history book, you do not have any control over the story; you just have to start writing and then follow where the biro leads you. I was very surprised after I completed my history of Australia—which was a moderate bestseller, if I could say so.

A government member: I bought a copy!

Mr KATTER: Thank you! We sold about 22,000 copies, which was the top-selling nonfiction work in that year. The book starts off with Ted Theodore, and it is a very sad reflection upon Australia history that, while he is easily the most important person in Australian history, I would say that less than 0.01 per cent of the population knows who he is. If you say, 'Who was Ted Theodore?'—and I have done it again and again—they say, 'He was an American president, wasn't he?'

You could not get three more unlike people on the planet than Malcolm Fraser, Paul Keating and Bob Katter. They are great men, prime ministers of Australia, and I am nobody, but you could not get three more unlike people than those three people. Malcolm Fraser was asked who his heroes were. He said the American Franklin Roosevelt and the Australian Edward Theodore. That was a big thing coming from a person who was talking about the founder of the labour movement in Australia. Paul Keating was asked the same question and he said JT Lang and Ted Theodore. Bob Katter, if you walk into his office, sits under a big picture of 'Jack' McEwen, of course, and beside his photo is Ted Theodore. So I always thought that was very much to Malcolm Fraser's credit, and it also told you a lot about him in that he was not bound to the hidebound thinking of the traditional 'Liberal.'
To give you a picture of the man, I think one of the best portraits I heard was from Lee McNicholl, a very good, close friend of mine, who was a vet with a big company. He said, 'We had Fraser out there because he was a shareholder in the company.' I said, 'What's he like?' He said: 'He's really weird. He never spoke to any of us. We talked over lunch, and he just sat there saying nothing.' He said, 'We went back down to the yards working the cattle, and he just came down with us, and he stood there all day in the dust and dirt and worked the gate in the yards,' which is a very dangerous job. You have wild cattle coming through. They can decide to attack you instead of going through the gate. He said: 'He just worked there all day long. People yelled at him, "Do this," and he did it. Then, when he was finished, he just walked up to the homestead, but he still hadn't spoken to anyone.' I think that portrait would tell you a lot about the man.

Malcolm Fraser had a very good intellect. He wrote an article on the sugar industry. This is the thing. You would think, 'Well, what would a grazier from outside of Melbourne know about the sugar industry of North Queensland?' He said that free trade is an appallingly stupid concept in a country where one of the top 10 export industries for its entire history has been the sugar industry. He said the situation is that the Europeans subsidise their sugar, and they are the biggest sugar-producing nation in the world—bigger than Brazil and bigger than India in sugar. They subsidise their product to the tune of around 700 per cent. He said, 'So, if you're talking about free trade, how do you free trade?' This is one of the most important products in Australian history. It saved us and rescued the country in the Great Depression, for example. It is the mainstay of the Queensland economy—that and coal, even to this very day. It is still the biggest employer in the state of Queensland. He said, 'The Americans subsidise it at 300 per cent, and the Brazilians cross-subsidise from ethanol to the tune of about 100 per cent.' Sorry, I will correct that: 'to the tune of about 40 per cent' is what he said.

Now, to give an adequate portrait, I cannot help but tell this story. I was a bit confused as to whether it made the final cut in my history book or it did not. A member of parliament in Queensland tells the story that, when he was a young Liberal, Malcolm came up and had them all in a circle, and he said, 'Now, we've got to decide upon a leader for our party.' This Liberal bloke said, 'Well, haven't we got a leader—Bill Snedden?' 'No, no, no, he's only a stopgap.' They said, 'Well, what about Peacock?' 'Oh, no, we couldn't possibly have him,' and he gave the reasons why. Then they said, 'Well, what about Howard?' Then he gave reasons why it would be impossible to have Howard. After about 15 minutes of going through all the options, someone said, 'What about you, Malcolm?' He said, 'Yes, I suppose I must shoulder my responsibilities.' I thought it was a very funny story, but it also told you a bit about him.

I cannot help but tell one other story about his notorious arrogance. A friend of mine who was very drunk at a function said, 'I'm going to talk to him about roads.' I said: 'Roads are a state matter. You don't talk to the Prime Minister about roads.' Anyway, he elbowed his way up—Malcolm was looking at a point in the ceiling—and he explained to him about roads, and Malcolm completely ignored him. No-one was talking, so I then explained to him about the great Bradfield scheme. Malcolm was still looking at the point in the ceiling, and whilst I was talking to him he just turned around and walked off—whilst I was talking to him!

Having said that: some four or five years later, Bjerke-Petersen announced the building of the great Bradfield scheme, which I had spent 20 years of my life advocating. Within two months Malcolm Fraser came out, completely unapproached by anyone, including the state
government, announcing that the federal government would also participate in the building of the great Bradfield scheme. Our wonderful Dr Bradfield, who built the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the underground railway system, which won the international prize for engineering in the year it was built, is probably most famous for what he did not build, which was the Bradfield scheme to take a small proportion of the massive floodwaters from the mountains of Far North Queensland and turn it back through the ranges onto the inland plains of Australia. But it demonstrated (a) that the man had a great vision for his country, (b) that he could translate that vision into real action for the people of Australia, and (c) that he fearlessly went out there to advocate something which may not necessarily have been popular in the southern cities of Australia, nor would it have been understood in the southern cities of Australia.

Ernie Bridge's scheme for Western Australia, which was a similar scheme, cost one of the Liberal aspirants for the premiership of that state an election, it was said, because Perth said, 'Why should we spend any money on that sort of thing?' One should have reminded Perth about O'Connor's pipeline. Having said that: the great tragedy was that Bjelke-Petersen was gone some four months later, and Malcolm was gone some five months after that. The great aspirations of the great Ted Theodore got blown away by the Great Depression, and the winds of politics blew away two very great Australians, I think, in the form of Bjelke-Petersen and Malcolm Fraser.

Malcolm was fearless in advocating a bit of good sense about the economy of Australia. You ask one of your sixth or seventh major export items to work in a corrupted world market and then preach to us about a level playing field. He had the fearless courage to stand up to his Liberal colleagues and write what I thought was a brilliant article in The Financial Review. He was a person that, as I say, could see the bigger picture and the bigger vision. He went for the Bradfield scheme.

But his was the last government in Australian history that defended the little Australian—the ordinary Australian—against the big oil companies and against the Woolworths and Coles. They fearlessly went in with the sites act, confining the ownership of the service stations in Australia to 400 sites. There were 26,000 service stations in Australia at that time, and the oil companies could own no more than 400 sites. So 90 per cent of the throughput belonged to the owner operators, the service station owners of Australia—of whom, I might add, John Howard's father was one.

I have not seen in politics anyone courageously stand up to the oil companies in the 25 years since Malcolm Fraser left the prime ministership of Australia. That is all the more credit to him. He makes his name in the history books as the person who fought tenaciously for the owner-operator, the little bloke, in Australian society. So whilst he may have been tall and yes, he most certainly was arrogant and a most unfriendly person, whilst he may have been all of those things, history will judge you on what happened whilst you were in this place. And history judges him very, very kindly.

The bane of the exporters of Australia, whether they be mining exporters, agricultural exporters or the motor vehicle industry battling for survival against imports, was when the dollar was allowed to free float under Paul Keating. And I, believe it or not, was on record praising Paul Keating. That is something I hate to own up to, but I was. When the dollar was allowed to free fall, it came down where it should be, to 49c—and praise him I should. But
then, for reasons inexplicable to me, he propped it up. I spent a day with Doug Anthony, trying to have it explained to me why Keating would prop up the dollar. Doug Anthony said to me, 'We as the Country Party do not worry about subsidies or tariffs; what we are about is the value of the currency.' Three times the Country Party walked out of coalition; once was under Menzies, leaving Menzies out in the cold for eight years. The first battle they had when they went back into government was when Menzies announced a revaluation of the dollar. Two days later McEwen announced that there would be a devaluation. Needless to say, it was devalued.

Similarly, Billy McMahon announced a revaluation and Doug Anthony, a week later, announced that there would be a devaluation. It was devalued and I got 30 per cent more for my cattle that year. So that is why I loved Doug Anthony!

When Peter Costello came in he, like Keating, initially did the right thing. Heaven forbid that I should be on record as praising Peter Costello but, once again, I was. We get preached to about free trade, but that is all we have ever asked for. You allow the dollar to free fall and it will find its level. Its level, quite clearly, was the level that it hit with Peter Costello, which was 51c. When it was allowed to free fall under Keating it went to 49c and when it was allowed to free fall under Peter Costello it went to 51c.

For reasons that I cannot explain to anyone, the governments of Australia have decided to have a high currency policy. America and China almost came to firing bullets at each other because both of them accused each other of artificially holding down their currency, which of course they are both doing, along with Japan and Europe and every other country on earth. But this is the only country where, whoever is the government, they actually skite about the dollar going up. 'It demonstrates what a brilliant Treasurer I am,' to quote Mr Keating. Mr Costello said constantly in this place, 'The dollar is going through the roof; it reflects glory upon this government.' He would say it humorously, but he said it. I am not actually skiting about putting the dollar up. Once upon a time there was a political party in this place that would have brought the government down for even thinking that way.

Malcolm Fraser brought the currency down 30 per cent when he was in office. So God bless Malcolm Fraser! He saw the bigger vision for his country in things like the Bradfield Scheme. He fearlessly wrote articles pointing out the stupidity of the free trade regime when no-one else on earth was free trading and he aggressively implemented that philosophy for the greater good of all of Australia. That 30 per cent reduction in the value of the currency enabled our car industry and sugar industry to prosper. It was the fathering of mining in this country and it brought prosperity and riches to every aspect of our lives in Australia. So, for all of his arrogance and shortcomings, God bless Malcolm Fraser.

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (19:27): I am pleased to rise to speak on this condolence motion for our 22nd Prime Minister, the Hon. Malcolm Fraser. Malcolm Fraser was first elected to parliament back in 1955. After 11 years, he served in cabinet in 1966. He became our 22nd Prime Minister in 1975, going on to win elections in 1977 and 1980. He finally lost office in 1983. He died earlier this week, on 20 March, aged 84.

I would like to add my words to the many wonderful condolence speeches that have been said in this chamber. I would like to highlight a few great achievements of Malcolm Fraser and how history has proven that the decisions that he made at the time showed that he was on the right side of history.
I would first like to speak about the work that Fraser did in removing the Whitlam government. I know it is often a bane to the Left side of politics, but history records the absolute ruinous record of the Whitlam government. We saw that in 1974-75, in one year, government spending actually increased an incredible 40 per cent. At the same time, taxes were whacked up by 30 per cent. That caused massive dislocations to the economy. Inflation hit above 20 per cent and we saw a massive increase in unemployment, rising to the highest level since the Great Depression. We also saw the chaos of the Khemlani affair—the Khemlani loans affair—an economic disaster that ruined Australia's reputation.

But if you look at perhaps what was the worst part, and the reason it was so essential that Malcolm Fraser won that 1975 election, it was the way that the then government—the Labor Party—went about funding themselves. This is an unbelievable part of our Australian history—the Labor government actually sought $2 million in secret election funding from the Iraqi Baathist Socialist Party. The then previous PM actually sent an envoy to meet with Saddam Hussein, the then Vice-President of Iraq. As Greg Sheridan says of this sordid period in our history:

... on any measure for an Australian political leader to seek secret—

Debate interrupted.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The **SPEAKER** (19:30): I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

**Early Childhood Education**

**Child Care**

**Ms RYAN** (Lalor—Opposition Whip) (19:30): I rise this evening to speak on two issues, both of which come within the purview of Minister Morrison in his new portfolio, being funding for kindergartens and out-of-school-hours care. Interestingly, these issues reflect the contrast that you find in the electorate of Lalor.

People here have often heard me speak of Lalor as home to 20,000 young families. We average 70 to 80 babies being born each week, and have rapidly-expanding schools. Four new schools opened this year, and it is not uncommon for schools to have up to 12 new prep classes each year.

Many of those families are newly-arrived migrants and lower-middle-income families looking for an affordable lifestyle. Children of these families are the demographic that is shown to benefit the most from early childhood education. These children are less likely to have English as a first language, tertiary educated parents, homes full of books, pencils or paint or a regular bedtime story. That is why access to kindergarten is so vital in my community.

The local council has indicated that only around 80 per cent of local children attend kindergarten in the year before they go to school. This is something that the local community has been working to lift for some time. But it means that many children start formal schooling without that solid early childhood background that would give them a leg up.

My community needs more early childhood education access, not less, and the Abbott government is keeping our kinders on a knife edge about future provision. They gave a 12-
month extension—before the Victorian state election—and so we have 15 hours running this year in the local kindergartens. But we need to know and have surety for our planning for what is going to happen next year.

My community wants to know: will the government commit to the ongoing funding of universal access to kindergarten for 15 hours a week? Will the almost-30 local kindergartens be able to continue next year as they are this year? Will the provision of kindergarten services be expanded to cope with our growing population?

This is critical for our community and it is critical for the broader community. Early education for the children of Lalor will impact on the economy over time. The Productivity Commission, as those in the chamber would be aware, has recommended that the federal government continue the national partnership funding. So I call on the government to make that commitment.

In contrast, an area in my electorate called Little River has a very small school of only 100 children. Little River is a small rural community; it has a shop, a pub, a kindergarten, a school and a community hall. No-one would call it a major city, and yet it has been classified as a major city and, as a consequence, Little River Primary School has had its out-of-school-hours care cut because of that classification. After lobbying last year on the grounds that it met the criteria for a waiver, then Minister Ley gave the school an extension to the end of this term. Now, clearly, that means the school met the criteria for the waiver. I am standing tonight to ask the new minister if he would relook at this decision.

There were some at the beginning of this process who wanted to call for a reclassification. Given that we met the criteria for a waiver, I thought that would be the more sensible route and would more likely get us a positive outcome—given that a reclassification was much more complicated. But now, given that the term is nearly over, I call on the minister to relook at Little River and its classification with regard to out-of-school-hours care; to reclassify Little River and to put this issue beyond doubt for that very small community—for that school of 100 students—which is at risk without that out-of-school-hours program. It is at risk that families will move their children to Werribee, to Lara or to Geelong and take their children to a before-school-hours program on their way to work, kilometres away from their homes.

Little River needs its school. It is a school that has been rebuilt in recent years, and I ask the minister to look at this issue.

Barton Electorate: St George Hospital

Mr VARVARIS (Barton) (19:35): This Saturday is an important date for the people of NSW. It is a day in which the good people of the St George area are faced with two stark options: choosing an effective Liberal government, which is getting things done, or returning to the days of Labor's dysfunction and achieving nothing.

When the people go to the polling booths this Saturday, the two options presented to them will be in stark contrast to one another. As the representative for the Barton area, which comprises the beautiful St George region, I know firsthand the challenges that face my constituents and residents. I have grown up in this area, where I am now raising a family of my own with my wife.

I can say, with hand on heart, that health care in our area is the most talked about topic whether we doorknock, phone canvass or receive feedback from our community surveys.
When the good people of the St George area go to the polls this Saturday, I would like to remind them of the following.

For 16 years residents in St George watched the area languish, despite having a state representative who promised them the world and delivered nothing. During that time, St George Hospital repeatedly asked for assistance with funding to renovate and build new facilities to accommodate the increasing number of people it was servicing. Let me provide a snapshot of how vital St George Hospital is. St George Hospital's emergency department is one of the busiest in New South Wales. It takes in more than 68,000 people each year—about 25,000 of whom are admitted. Over the years, it has quickly developed into other medical departments drawing specialists and patients from all around Australia. As the population expands, especially in the St George region, it puts a strain on the hospital when there are not enough resources to support the level of care required for its patients.

Despite the outstanding reputation of the hospital's dedicated health professionals, people consistently lamented the poor state of St George Hospital itself. Up until recently, it was difficult to believe that St George Hospital could be considered world-class. The staff had always been exceptional in their treatment and care of their patients, but the conditions in which they worked in—given Australia is a First World economy with a world-class healthcare system—was questionable at best and appalling at worst. Years of continuous neglect by the previous Labor government has taken its toll on the facilities and infrastructure of the hospital. The hospital had been rated 'poor' and in a state of 'code red'. What I saw on our detailed tour of the hospital were cramped and outdated facilities with some departments operating solely out of demountables and patients suffering from toilet shortages.

I cannot begin to fathom the kind of effect it had on the morale of those being admitted for serious illnesses, as well as the hardworking doctors, surgeons and nurses that face this each and every day whilst saving lives. The New South Wales Labor Party did nothing. The member for Kogarah, Cherie Burton, simply sat in her office—at least I would like to think she did, but most likely she was probably in her residence in Kurnell for the past seven years, and recently Nowra, as far away as possible from the seat that she was elected to represent—and squandered the opportunities that she had to represent her constituents. But the New South Wales Liberal government, led by Mike Baird with the Minister for Health, Jillian Skinner, committed and delivered the much needed $307 million in funding for construction within their first term of government.

What does $307 million mean for St George Hospital? A new seven-storey acute services building that will include intensive care, high dependency and cardiac intensive care departments and 18 operating theatres, which is double the current number. In addition, there will be acute inpatient beds and a new sterilising services department. Furthermore, another $39 million grant was delivered—again within a four-year Liberal tenure—for a new emergency department, which I had the pleasure of attending on its opening day. The new emergency department includes: five resuscitation bays; an acute hall with 34 treatment spaces; two designated fast-track zones—one for adults and one for children; an emergency medical unit; relocation of the psychiatric emergency care centre; satellite imaging; and an eight-space, off-street ambulance drop-off zone. The old emergency department will be replaced by 52 car spots, which is much needed in the area. Finally, another $8 million has been delivered to redevelop the St George Mental Health Service.
These are wonderful examples of the Baird Liberal government responding to community needs that should not require 16 years of lobbying. New South Wales Labor had their chance and did nothing. I know St George residents will be thinking of this when they vote, and I urge them to support the Liberal candidates Nick Aroney, John Flowers and Mark Coure this Saturday.

**Democracy**

**Mr GILES** (Scullin) (19:40): In yesterday's *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Peter Hartcher writes about how 'democracy is letting us down'. The context of this piece was the passing of Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's first Prime Minister, who has been remembered in this place this week. I am inclined to agree with many aspects of Mr Hartcher's article. In the Western democratic world there has been a crisis of confidence in democracy. The global financial crisis amplified cynicism people had with governments in the US and Europe in particular. The European consensus in this regard was to impose harsh austerity and to funnel taxpayer money into propping up banks. This had the effect of crippling communities and pushing economies into recession, but also confirming people's worst fears about government and politics.

In the US, the Obama administration sought to stimulate the US economy, but faced gridlock and harsh spending cuts from a Republican controlled congress. The political class in the US focused on itself instead of the people it should have been representing. The American public now seems irrecoverably split and disillusioned with the political process and politics more generally. In this context, I was very interested to see President Obama discuss compulsory voting as a possible solution, or perhaps a restorative solution, for America's democratic malady. If the President's hypothesis is correct—namely, that if the people who do not usually did vote—then outcomes on equality and livings standards would better serve those constituents.

Australia is, of course, one of the countries that does have compulsory voting and this, in my view, is a good thing for the quality of our democracy but it is no panacea. In Australia, we also have rising inequality and there is broad disengagement from political parties. The Lowy Institute poll last year found only 60 per cent of Australian adults and 42 per cent of those aged between 18 to 29 say that, 'democracy is preferable to any other kind of government'. At the last federal election, the total rate of informal votes—5.91 per cent for the House of Representatives—was the largest in Australia since 1984.

In Australia, I believe that the public's disaffection with this government and indeed politics more generally stems from the limited opportunities for meaningful engagement and a sense that political outcomes often have no relevance to people's lives or, when they do, they may well be deleterious—just look at the current budget. All of us involved in formal politics should think seriously about this—how we conduct our roles and how our parties work. But I think these issues go beyond the political debate here. Our society has changed dramatically over the last 40 years. People now have a different relationship with politics, with each other and with themselves.

I read with interest the recent report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *Landscapes of helping: Kindliness in neighbourhoods and communities*. It discusses aspects of 'informal helping', which they term 'kindliness' and looks at an example of this in Hebden in South Yorkshire in the UK. This language, 'kindliness', is very novel in a political and even in a
policy making context, but it seems to resonate with communities and the relationship that sustains successful communities. In my role, I was particularly interested in the section in this report on so-called 'third spaces', which states:

Third spaces—a conscious attempt to create public spaces where people could come into daily informal contact was key in promoting sociability and trust. Public space has long been an essential feature of urban housing design, yet it is not always 'owned' by people locally. It was important that the development of space tapped into the emotional connections people had with their neighbourhood.

I believe that governments of all levels can help to facilitate this with the design of our cities and suburbs, and it is critical in doing this to bring the community along. I believe there is an appetite for this in Australia and that this is vital if we wish to arrest this sense that democracy is letting us down. If we are doing so, we must take people with us. There are many examples that we can look to and learn from, and I note but one: last year in Paris they launched a participatory budget whereby money was set aside in the budget for projects imagined and chosen by the public. In 2014 this was a sum of 65 million euros. By 2020 it is anticipated this will come to a total of 500 million euros. Surely it is not beyond us to imagine something comparable in Australia.

While I do not pretend that initiatives of this type will solve every instance of discontent with our political system, I think it would go some way to addressing the genuine community concerns about our society and elevate our politics in a practical and symbolic way. As well as the initiatives, I believe the language of politics and the way we conduct ourselves and our role is vital. We should not neglect kindness or generosity as we speak of the work we do.

### Agriculture

**Mr PITT** (Hinkler) (19:45): I rise to speak about a situation that is all too common in the horticulture sector. The supermarket giant demands to pay a lower price, but the farmer's input costs continue to rise. Reliant on a large seasonal workforce, he turns to a contract labour hire company to hopefully save himself a few dollars. He suspects the contractor may be breaching immigration, taxation or industrial relations law but turns a blind eye for the sake of his family's livelihood. The farmer's use of a contractor in no way diminishes his responsibility to those workers. Under Australian law he is equally liable, and in most cases he is easier for the authorities to pursue. Not only has he put his business at risk; but his actions also disadvantage those Australian farmers and contractors who do the right thing.

I would like to make it clear: the majority of farmers and contractors act lawfully. They do a remarkable job producing some of the best produce in the world, often in very challenging conditions. My speech here today is not about vilifying farmers, labour hire companies or foreign workers. Labour hire contractors and seasonal workers are vital to the horticulture sector. I am speaking today about rogue operators and the impact they have on regional Australia.

Make no mistake; sham contracting affects more than just the horticulture sector. Tourism operators have complained for years that the poor treatment of backpackers damages Australia's reputation abroad. Contractors are today employing fewer European backpackers and Australian workers because most know their rights. Instead they are recruiting Asian students. This discrimination has distorted regional labour markets, where unemployment is already high, and fostered a deeply disturbing yet widely accepted culture of serious exploitation. Apathy is rife. Some people even try to justify preying on vulnerable workers
from developing countries by saying, 'They're getting paid more than they would back home' and 'The workers are complicit too.' The workers' unwillingness to speak out only protects the sham contractor and makes it more difficult for authorities to protect others.

Having so many unlawful non-citizens in Australia raises serious national security issues. Media reports suggest one sham contractor from PNG had ties to a Gold Coast bikie gang. A Malaysian man who had been working illegally on a farm for three months was deported in December for violating his tourist visa. ABC reports that he was later arrested by Malaysia's counterterrorism special branch on suspicion of running a transit cell for the Islamic State terrorist group. The complicated cross-jurisdiction structure of the offending and the evidential burden make it very difficult for authorities to act.

The Hon. Philip Ruddock announced a review into illegal work in 1999, resulting in a range of measures to improve compliance. A 2010 report by Stephen Howells found it was 'the most significant problem facing Australian migration authorities'. Regional media reports and anecdotal evidence presented to my office suggests the problem has worsened. That is why Nationals Senator Barry O'Sullivan and I brought stakeholders together in Brisbane early last year.

One suggestion to prevent sexual exploitation was for working holiday makers to attach payslips to their second year visa applications as proof they have completed the 88 days of specified work. They said passport photo ID should be added to Visa Entitlement Verification Online—VEVO—tool to make it harder for illegal workers to share the same visa number and there should be closer monitoring of the people registering to become migration agents or ABN holders. While I would welcome the introduction of measures such as these, they would only address very specific aspects of what is a very large problem.

Stakeholders said creating more hoops for farmers to jump through would only make the problem worse and called for greater enforcement of existing laws. I am pleased my ministerial colleagues are listening. Under the Coalition, in 2013-14 the number of illegal worker warning notices issued increased 201 per cent compared to the previous year and the number of illegal workers located increased 18 per cent. So far this financial year six employers have been fined a combined total of more than $32,000 for employing illegal workers. Last week, an employer sanction infringement notice of $15,300 was issued to a labour hire contractor involved in the employment of 37 illegal workers on a farm near Hillston in southern New South Wales. Last month, eight illegal non-citizens were detained in my home town of Bundaberg: three Koreans, three Thais, a Malaysian national and an Indian. The National Party has supported my call for a multijurisdictional taskforce. I would like to see some of the funds we have saved with the closure of immigration detention facilities spent on an undercover operation to shine the light on this seedy underbelly once and for all.

Putting an end to this scourge is everyone's responsibility—starting with the people that set the farm gate price. The questionable conduct of our major supermarkets has a significant impact on how Australian farmers operate their businesses. Farmers' share of the selling price has declined from almost 90 per cent in 1900 to less than 10 per cent today. This fact alone, taken from the agriculture competitiveness green paper, paints a very clear picture. It is a picture that is nothing short of heartbreaking. Australian consumers should be disgusted.
Petition: Holroyd Community Aid

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (19:50): I rise to speak on the devastating closure of Holroyd Community Aid, a well-known and respected organisation in our community. I am proud to be presenting this petition approved by the Petitions Committee on behalf of the team at Holroyd Community Aid and would like to thank all the volunteers and local community members who have signed this petition.

The petition read as follows—

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

This petition of Holroyd Community Aid Inc. draws to the attention of the House of Representatives Parliament House CANBERRA ACT 2600

We therefore ask the House to: have Holroyd Community Aid Inc's Emergency Relief grant under the Families and Communities Programme reinstated.

from 1,422 citizens

Petition received.

Ms OWENS: by leave—I also have an extra 135 signatures gathered online and in person which I table as a document. That is 1,557 members of our community who have said they want Holroyd Community Aid to stay. That is 1,557 people who support and know the good work that Holroyd Community Aid do with some of the most disadvantaged in our community.

They have been open for almost 50 years providing emergency relief to almost one million locals who have experienced times of hardship. They are there for those who need a little bit of help to get by until their next pay cheque or while they are getting back on their feet after illness or being out of work. Just before Christmas a letter was sent from the Department of Social Services, advising Holroyd Community Aid that they had lost their funding from the Department of Social Services discretionary grants program. I cannot express the anger and disappointment Holroyd Community Aid felt when they received notice of the cut after they returned from the Christmas holiday break. Narelle Morris, the Holroyd Community Aid manager, told me that it was a rude shock to return from a holiday to find out that they had mere months—until the end of March—to close up shop.

It is only around $186,000 to run this service, yet they are able to help thousands. They run exclusively with the assistance of a network of volunteers, and their only admin costs are the costs of their annual audit. Holroyd Community Aid provides a range of essential emergency relief services that many locals rely on, including: food and electricity vouchers, nappies, money for medication and transport tickets. They provide these little things that take the pressure off in the hardest of times.

Over the years Holroyd Community Aid has done its best to serve our community, and they have shared some extraordinary stories with me. A homeless woman who was a victim of domestic violence was referred to the service, Holroyd Community Aid was able to help her with the purchase of a washing machine and a fridge. Two local refugees were sharing a flat and one of them had their payments cut. Holroyd Community Aid was there to help them with their electricity and water bills when they received the final notices. These are just two of the stories that show the real and tangible effect Holroyd Community Aid has on our community.
What is troubling is that now the service has nowhere to send their clients. After months of secrecy, we finally found out who won the grants; sadly, our service providers have been given no information on how to refer their clients on. Remember that Holroyd Community Aid shuts its doors on 31 March. People in our community trying to get by day by day cannot wait around to find out where they will be able to get the help they need on 1 April.

The list came from the department without addresses, contact details, referral information or information about the services each new organisation will provide. On top of this, only two of the six organisations awarded funding are locally based organisations. Holroyd Community Aid had to phone the state organisations and were unable to find out who or where or when these organisations would be providing services in the Parramatta region. And yet our current emergency relief providers shut their doors in around seven days time.

The community has spoken. They have said that Holroyd Community Aid deserves to stay. Without their government grant, they will be unable to stay open. I would like to thank Narelle Morris for her years of work with Holroyd Community Aid. I would also like to thank Selina for her hard work with the organisation and the many volunteers who spend their afternoons in the op-shop or speaking with clients.

I would also like to acknowledge the support of the local council, Holroyd Council, and its mayor, Councillor Greg Cummings, in supporting the organisation. I would like to acknowledge a good friend of mine, Ken Wildy, for his extraordinary help in putting the petition together.

This is a cruel cut that will hit the poor and disadvantaged in our community the hardest. I would ask the government to listen to our community and reverse their cuts to emergency relief services.

Prevention of Violence Against Women

Mr SUKKAR (Deakin) (19:55): I rise this evening to discuss what is probably the most important issue to me and my community at the moment and that is the prevention of violence against women.

Just last week, my community—and I think all Australians—were horrified at the brutal stabbing of a Melbourne schoolgirl. She was killed as she walked in her local park, very near the electorate of Deakin. Events like this sting all of us and they sit in our memories. And they follow other horrific crimes in similar circumstances, such as the murder of Jill Meagher and Sarah Cafferkey. Both perpetrators in those crimes were very well known to police and had extraordinarily long rap sheets.

This issue became even more important in my mind following a conversation I had with my wife Anna on the weekend, where I asked her whether she would catch the bus home from the station rather than walk home through a local park. I thought: how extraordinarily sad that I would ask her to do that and that she was quite nervous about the prospect of walking home. Needless to say, she has not caught the bus; she is walking home. But the mere fact that we had to have that conversation placed with me an obligation and I think an obligation on this House to actually do something about violence against women and stop just talking about it, stop the grandiose weasel words and actually do something about it.
It is not just violent crime against women in a setting like what I have described, but domestic violence against women is also a scourge on our society. In fact 24 women so far this women have died as a result of violence. We must do something about it.

Again, the frustration in my community is that politicians forever have said the right things—speeches like mine tonight—making very supportive statements, but nothing actually happens. I think this must stop. Enough is enough. We must have a conversation throughout our policy at a federal and state level to deal with these issues. I have three issues that I want to throw out there tonight for discussion. I do not profess to have the answers in respect of each but these three issues must be dealt with.

Firstly, the whole system of apprehended violence orders must be dealt with. Too often I read in the newspapers that perpetrators—men—have breached apprehended violence orders, 10, 15, 20 times. It is extraordinary to me that that could happen without our state intervening at a point before what often occurs, which is a very violent situation at the end.

Secondly, I propose that we have a discussion around mandatory minimum sentences for violent crimes against women and children. As a former lawyer, it is not something that is natural for me to be suggesting. But the reason I am suggesting minimum sentences is because we have lost all faith in the judiciary to actually sentence violent criminals in a way that is consistent with community values. If the judiciary are not willing to reflect the community's values in respect of violent crime, particularly against women and children, mandatory minimum sentences can take that discretion away from the judges and we can ensure that the community feels as though those violent criminals are put behind bars for as long as they need to be and in accordance with the values of our society.

Lastly—this is controversial—but we must develop a process where there are consequences for judges and other decision-making bodies, like parole boards, who make grievous decisions to not sentence somebody or to release somebody on parole who then commits an extraordinarily violent crime. We must have accountability in our system or else all else fails. At the moment in my community of Deakin, people do not trust that there is that accountability, and more importantly women are not feeling safe. I think we must do something about it and it must start now.

House adjourned at 20:00

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Mr K. J. Andrews to present a Bill for an Act to amend legislation relating to defence, and for other purposes.

Mr Keenan to present a Bill for an Act to amend various Acts relating to the criminal law or law enforcement, and for related purposes.

Mr Briggs to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Norfolk Island Act 1979, and for other purposes.

Mr Turnbull to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Copyright Act 1968, and for related purposes.
Wednesday, 25 March 2015

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott) took the chair at 09:30.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Calwell Electorate: Centenary of Anzac Local Grants Program

Ms VAMVAKINOU (Calwell) (09:30): On Saturday I had the great privilege of attending the Keilor Historical Society's book launch of a book Keilor's Anzac Memory. This very important book has come about as a result of the previous federal Labor government's initiative to allocate $125,000 per electorate under the Anzac Centenary Local Grants Program in order to help fund local projects that aim to commemorate the Anzac Centenary. The Keilor Historical Society's book and DVD, I am proud to say, are the first of the overall 10 projects that were allocated funding under this program.

On Saturday I was very pleased to attend the official launch of the book. The Keilor Historical Society received $25,000 to produce this book, as well as the DVD, which was aimed at raising awareness about the names of the individuals on the World War I honour roll in Keilor. The book and the DVD were launched over two consecutive days and both, as I said, are dedicated to the memory of the soldiers and the nurses from our local Keilor community who served on active service overseas in the Great War of 1914-1918. The aim of the book reflects the individual stories and the communities that these individuals came from, set against the backdrop of the rural lifestyle of Australia in the early 20th century. This book and the DVD are a legacy and a permanent record of our local people's history. It is a symbol of the eternal spirit of a community and their participation during what was a most turbulent and difficult time—a nation-building time—in Australia's history.

The society's project, as I said, is one of 10 local projects and I would like to very quickly mention some of the other groups that have received funding under the Anzac Centenary Local Grants program. I would like to say, in advance, that I look forward to participating in the launches of the Australian Chaldean Federation of Victoria, which represents the local Iraqi community in my electorate. They have received $28,500 to produce their own booklet and DVD, which are aimed at promoting the Anzac Centenary among their community. This particular project is very important, because it does pertain to the newest emerging community in my electorate. Thousands of people have settled there from Iraq under the Humanitarian Program and, as part of the overall integration process, it is very important that those communities understand the history of Australia.

Mitchell Electorate: Infrastructure

Mr HAWKE (Mitchell) (09:33): This Saturday, on 28 March, residents in Western Sydney and Sydney will have the opportunity to re-elect the Baird Liberal government, a government which is delivering infrastructure for western and north-western Sydney. If you live in north-western Sydney, you know that the North West Rail Link project, with one of the biggest rail tunnels in the Southern Hemisphere, is underway and is being constructed on time and under budget—that is, ahead of schedule and under budget. A state government that is inherently competent at delivering major infrastructure projects deserves to be re-elected.

But it is not just the infrastructure that is already underway on the ground at the moment; it is also the plan that Mike Baird and the Liberal team have for New South Wales and western
Sydney for the next few years. My electorate, which has been Sydney's biggest growth corridor over the last decade, will receive a fully funded public hospital at Rouse Hill. There is no government, there is no administration, that will build a fully funded public hospital at Rouse Hill except for the Baird Liberal government. If it is not done in this generation it will never be done, because there will be no money and there will be no capacity to build it. So there is much at stake for people in Rouse Hill and western Sydney.

In Seven Hills, the critical new electorate that is coming up where Mark Taylor is running, you will see infrastructure such as the WestConnex program funded by the federal government in addition to the state government's significant contribution. It is a road and rail plan for Sydney that will unlock the productivity and infrastructure capacity that our city needs. We all know that Sydney was not started with a plan, it was never built to a plan and that in terms of infrastructure it has always suffered. But a Mike Baird Liberal government and the plan that it has put forward will ensure that we are able to unlock that productivity and infrastructure capacity to ensure this city's future. That includes WestConnex, the light rail program from Parramatta. All of the plans that the Baird Liberal government has are not just plans. It is not just a government that is promising things; it has already proven in the first four years of this administration that it does deliver those infrastructure projects. Not only are they projects that get started and delivered but they are delivered ahead of schedule and under budget. That is something that people in New South Wales never thought was possible from a state government. They could never believe a state government would deliver a project ahead of schedule and under budget. Yet one of the biggest rail tunnels in the Southern Hemisphere is being delivered ahead of schedule and under budget.

The people in Sydney and western Sydney face perhaps the most important choice this Saturday of their generation—that is, great-scale public schools, and there is a public school proposed for Bella Vista in my electorate, which will never be built unless this government is elected; and a public hospital at Rouse Hill, which will never be built unless this government is re-elected on Saturday. There is so much at stake for our state and for our future and the Baird Liberal government's plans for the whole state are fully funded, deliverable and will be delivered if this government is re-elected on Saturday.

Lakeside Drive Landcare

Ms HALL (Shortland—Opposition Whip) (09:36): On Saturday I attended a bush tucker day with Lakeside Drive Landcare, in Swansea. The Lakeside Drive Landcare site is located on the eastern side of Lake Macquarie. It was previously a rich source of food for the Awabakal people and later attracted Chinese fishermen to the area.

Unfortunately, over a period of time the area became overgrown and it became an eyesore within the community. Then along came the Lakeside Drive Landcare group. It was formed in 2006. Garry Stewart is the team leader and he was joined by John Adams. They were soon followed by many other members who have been involved in working on that site, totally rehabilitating it and putting in place a fantastic walk through the area. The land carers have been involved in weeding, regenerating, planting sections of the reserve in mosaics, constructing informal access paths and erecting nest boxes for birds and possums. You are able to peep through the trees and actually look at the birds when they go into the nesting boxes. It really is a credit to everybody who has been involved.
The Landcare group lists their greatest achievement as controlling lantana and morning glory. Bitou bush, american pennywort, madeira vine, asparagus fern, cassia, mickey mouse plant, glory lily, wild tobacco trees and camphor laurel are also present on the Lakeside Drive site.

These volunteers work for hours on this site. They work approximately 90 hours per week. They work every Friday between nine and three and at other times when it is organised. The group are absolutely dedicated to making this area probably one of the most beautiful areas in Lake Macquarie, making it the jewel in the crown! They are friendly to people who visit the area. The group are very proud of their achievements, making such incredible improvements to the site since 2006.

I planted a tree on that site when the group first started out. That tree is now growing and looking very healthy. I am sure that has a lot to do with the fact that the group is so dedicated and looks after not only that tree but the whole site. I congratulate the Lakeside Drive Landcare group.

Willcox, Mr Jacob

Ms MARINO (Forrest—Government Whip) (09:39): Jacob Willcox is a young surfer from Margaret River in my electorate of Forrest who is making headlines all around the world. At the same time, he has been pursuing his surfing career ambitions. Last year Jacob completed his ATAR year 12 education at Margaret River Senior High School, thus giving himself a number of options for his future. This is exactly what his parents wanted him to do, and Jacob knows the need for a good education as well as his surfing career.

He has been very successful in junior surfing competitions and won a gold medal at the ISA Juniors. After his wild card entry into the 2013 Rip Curl Pro in Portugal, Jacob shot to Australian and international prominence when, in a memorable performance, he beat 11-time world champion Kelly Slater in the first round of the Moche Rip Curl Pro at Supertubos in Portugal late last year. Jacob rode the wave of that success into 2014, winning a pair of junior tour events in Sydney and New Zealand as well as adding two quarter-final appearances to his long list of achievements.

At Australia's biggest grassroots boardriders event series, the Original Source Australian Boardriders Battle, Jacob helped push the Margaret River Boardriders Club to victory in the Yallingup leg of the national series in November, posting the two highest individual scores in the skins division of the contest. Jacob made history by becoming the first athlete to take out dual, back-to-back South West Academy of Sport's sports star of the year and individual male athlete awards for the past two years. Jacob said: 'I focused on surfing a lot more at the start of the year and that is when I got the majority of good results. The end half of the year I really had to knuckle down at school but I learned a lot from having to balance both scenes.' Jacob said the opportunity to surf in two world championship tour events was the highlight of his year and that he was looking forward to dedicating more time to his sport after completing year 12 earlier this month. He said his dream is to get onto the world tour. He wants to take a couple of gap years and focus on getting his weight up so that he is on an even playing field when the waves start getting big. Jacob is determined to make the world qualifying series this year and eventually make the Association of Surfing Professionals world tour. In his first event for 2015, Jacob was successful in Sydney, just about taking the title for the second time in the pro junior men's category in the Australian championships.
Even with the recognition that comes with his success, Jacob has kept in touch with his home town, Margaret River, and enjoys coming back to enjoy the magnificent beaches and to pass on tips to avid younger surfers. Although surfing is his foremost career choice, Jacob intends to study sports science externally over the next couple of years. The south-west of WA has nurtured many amazing young rising sports stars, as has the South West Academy of Sport. Jacob is a very sound role model for other aspiring athletes as he balances his sporting and future working careers. Jacob's motto is 'Live life to the fullest.' I wish him every success and happiness in his endeavours and thank his parents and everyone who has supported him in his efforts.

_National Rugby League_

Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (09:42): I want to read into Hansard a letter I have written to the NRL judiciary, NRL management and to the Minister for Sport:

As Federal Member for Kennedy, I represent vast areas of North and North West Queensland. In the National Rugby League … Kennedy, along with the rest of North Queensland, is proudly represented by the Townsville based North Queensland Cowboys.

One tenth of the greater Townsville region regularly attends Cowboys matches and half a million watch the NRL on the television every week. Rugby League attracts and involves some half a million Australians every weekend and Rugby League has done more for social cohesion—

and I think you would agree with me on this, Mr Acting Deputy Speaker—

and a fair go for First Australians than any other social mechanism in this country. In other words the game is of great significance particularly to the people of North Queensland.

I write to you today to express my concerns over the refereeing during the Knights and Cowboys game over the weekend.

During the match a Knights player (and you can watch it clearly on the replay) smashes his hand into the face of Jonathan Thurston, bashing his head upon the ground, with the net result that he was knocked semi-conscious and could not see out of his left eye for the rest of the game. It was clearly visible on the television, but no substantive action taken.

Jonathan Thurston was later tackled with what I would interpret as a shoulder charge, a good second and a half after the ball had left his hands. Again he was knocked semi-conscious and no substantive action taken.

The third incident is what has prompted this letter. A Newcastle Knights player holds Jonathan Thurston's leg up in the air so that his body is pointing to the ground. His foot is at least six and a half feet off the ground whilst his head is only a couple of feet off the ground. A second player puts his right arm under Jonathan Thurston's chest and his left hand behind Jonathan Thurston's head so that it will be the head that takes the full impact of his body in the spear tackle. This is extremely dangerous and should warrant at least a year on the sideline. Many players have copped a year for much less than this.

I think, but I'm not certain, it was the same player from the Knights on all three occasions. Most certainly the commentators attributed it to the same player in the Knights. The player was not sent off the field, he was allowed to continue with his efforts clearly aimed to maim Thurston at least temporarily.

To subject the greatest player in the Rugby League to this sort of treatment will see the game reduced to who's got the most brutal, violent thugs. The numerous other attributes of our wonderful game will be lost as people walk away as the Jonathan Thurston's—

our greatest drawcard in rugby league—
are replaced with the likes of the Knights player. Brutal violence will replace the brilliance, courageous, big-hearted intelligence that is the centre of our wonderful game.

(Time expired)

Bradfield Electorate: Centenary of Anzac

Mr FLETCHER (Bradfield—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Communications) (09:46): I am pleased to rise to speak about the activities planned in Bradfield to commemorate the Centenary of Anzac, which is a very important occasion for our nation as we work to perpetuate the memory of so many Australians who served our nation a century ago.

More than $120,000 has been awarded by the federal government to support 11 local projects commemorating the Centenary of Anzac in my electorate of Bradfield. I am very pleased by the range, diversity and quality of the projects that have been chosen, which in turn reflects the range, diversity and quality of the projects which were proposed by many community organisations.

The projects that will be funded include a series of publications from the Ku-ring-gai Historical Society called Ku-ring-gai soldiers of the great war, volumes 1 to 3; an annual memories and mementos event, as part of Seniors Week, coordinated by the Ku-ring-gai Historical Society; the installation of a commemorative sandstone plinth and plaque at Loreto Normanhurst; the installation of a commemorative sandstone plinth and plaque at Loreto Normanhurst; the construction of an old girls' memorial at Ravenswood School for Girls in Gordon; the erection of a stone memorial dedicated to local Volunteer Defence Corps members from the Roseville area by the Roseville RSL sub branch; the Lights of our Lives community event to be organised by Ku-ring-gai Council; an exhibition at Abbotsleigh in Wahroonga, which will allow local families to share First World War memorabilia in the gallery at that school; a commemorative project at Killara High School; participation, along with a number of other electorates, in the funding of the commemorative service and photographic exhibition at the Sydney Jewish Museum, recognising the contribution of Jews to the war effort in World War I; and War Letters, which is a musical project coordinated by the University of Western Sydney, in which letters from World War I are set to music, with that performance to occur in the electorate. These projects will complement a wider series of commemorative activities that have been developed throughout our electorate.

I want to thank the members of the working party that I established to help develop our approach for commemorating the Centenary of Anzac in Bradfield, particularly Chairman Major Rod White (Ret'd), and Mr Ken Broadhead, Lieutenant Colonel (Ret’d) who was our deputy chair and secretary. Their hard work, and the work of all on the working group, has been critical in reaching this point. I am confident that the range of activities which is planned will be an appropriate commemoration of this very important Centenary of Anzac, so that our local activities complement the national effort in this regard.

Schools

Ms MacTIERNAN (Perth) (09:49): Last week I had the opportunity to visit the Aboriginal communities of Jigalong and Punmu to see how the introduction of the instructional technique known as direct instruction or DI was working. I am pleased to report that it is working a treat. The teachers and aides tell us that the level of engagement by the
majority of children is well beyond what they have experienced in the past. They were concerned at the outset that they might not even get the kids to sit on their chairs long enough, but the kids have embraced this structured teaching and, after just seven weeks, are making real progress.

I have the honour to chair the Martu Education Advisory Committee, which has been set up by the Western Desert Lands Aboriginal Corporation, WDLAC, under the leadership of Brian Samson, to advise on how educational outcomes can be improved. The Martu leadership had been very concerned that their kids were not getting a decent education and were missing out on the opportunity to participate in the broader economy. Brian Samson, in an inspiring speech at Jigalong, said that he had actually not even been into the school in his community for 20 years, so angered was he by the failure of the system to educate their children. But we are turning this about.

We started by looking at what was happening at Challis Community Primary School in Perth. We took the WDLAC board along there. They saw that a highly structured and systematic style of teaching called 'explicit instruction' or 'direct instruction' was really turning around the educational outcomes for these kids. We then went on to see this at work in remote Aboriginal communities on Cape York; under the inspired leadership of Noel Pearson, they, too, have transformed the educational outcomes for their children.

We have been very pleased to have been incorporated into the larger Good to Great Schools family that has been established under Noel Pearson and funded by the federal government. And I want to particularly congratulate the federal government for being prepared to invest in this particular program; the previous Labor government supported Noel Pearson in its establishment, and this government has continued that work.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the teachers and the aides who are putting 100 per cent into this program and their kids. DI is not magic; it is hard work. The leadership of Rawa Principal Lorraine Sligar across Martu schools has been exceptional, and Shane Wilson and his team at Jigalong have been just as good. (Time expired)

Environment

Mr CHRISTENSEN (Dawson—The Nationals Deputy Whip) (09:52): On Saturday, I stood with the Prime Minister, the Hon. Tony Abbott, with the environment minister, and with Queensland's minister for the Great Barrier Reef, Steven Miles, on Hamilton Island in my electorate to launch the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan. The Reef 2050 plan is a blueprint for the management and protection of the reef over the next 35 years. It is a blueprint based on years of scientific research and analysis, because our Great Barrier Reef is the best researched World Heritage area on earth. It is also a blueprint detailing actions taken and actions to be taken that will ensure the health of the Great Barrier Reef and ensure that the reef is not listed as 'in danger' by the World Heritage Committee.

Despite the great work which is being done to map out a plan for protecting the Great Barrier Reef, there is a band of extreme greens who still want to complain. They belong to groups such as Greenpeace, the Australian Marine Conservation Society, Friends of the Earth, Get Up, and the Environmental Defenders Office. Although their names spruik concepts such as conservation, they are really about destruction, because they want to destroy our way of life and our biggest industry.
These extreme greens complained about the disposal of dredge spoil in reef waters, and the Reef 2050 plan spells out now that there are no major projects proposing to dump capital dredge spoil in the reef World Heritage area. In fact, that practice is now being banned altogether. The extreme greens complained that the government was not investing enough money in the reef. Well, on Saturday, the Prime Minister announced that a further $100 million would be invested into the Reef Trust which will fund activities that improve water quality in the Great Barrier Reef.

The extreme greens complained that there was going to be dredge spoil dumped in the Caley Valley wetlands. Well, the Reef 2050 plan now spells out that there are no plans to dump capital dredge spoil on the Caley Valley wetlands or any dredge spoil on the Caley Valley wetlands.

Despite having got what they want, and despite the Reef 2050 plan being an exemplary document showing the way forward for the reef and the best chance that the reef has had in a long time, these extreme greens act like Wormtongue from The Lord of the Rings, flying overseas and whispering in the ears of the decision-makers and diplomats who have anything to do with UNESCO and the World Heritage Committee, poisoning their minds on the state of the reef. What treachery, to go against the interests of your own nation and your own people for no sound reason at all! That is treason, and these people are nothing more than the eco traitors. What these eco traitors really want to do is to shut down the coal industry completely, and they do not care if it takes a World Heritage Committee label of ‘in danger’ to do it. They do not care about what that would mean for communities in my electorate and the country as a whole. They do not care that it would do enormous damage to the brand of the reef, which allows this country to reap millions of tourism dollars, or that it would threaten major investments. The eco traitors are holding the reef to ransom. The eco traitors are holding industry to ransom. The eco traitors are holding jobs to ransom. If they have their way and the reef is listed as ‘in danger’, it will have devastating effects on industries other than mining that sustain my electorate, such as tourism and farming, and the jobs those industries create. If these eco traitors want to show that they really do care, they will support— (Time expired)

Fowler Electorate: Courage to Care Exhibition

Mr HAYES (Fowler—Chief Opposition Whip) (09:55): Last week I attended the launch of the Courage to Care exhibition and education program conducted at Liverpool Library. Courage to Care is a community outreach initiative aimed at educating students from year 5 through to high school about the importance of standing up to discrimination and bullying. This is a most thought-provoking program that encourages young people to identify things that matter in our community—things such as harmony, tolerance and social inclusion. More importantly, the program demonstrates that these values should never, ever be taken for granted. Young people are encouraged to make a stand against injustice and be part of shaping our community for the future. The program draws on the experience of Holocaust survivors to inspire courage in young people to stand up for victims, and to show that injustice—particularly prejudice and intolerance—can flourish where people do nothing.

At the launch, I was asked to speak about the harmony and humanity of the Courage to Care, particularly based on my experience representing the most multicultural community in the country. Mine is a very vibrant community. It has become defined by its diversity in
culture, traditions and religion, and stands, I believe, as an example to the nation of the virtues of multiculturalism. I believe that multiculturalism is one of the greatest strengths that we have in this country, and we are a very fortunate nation because we can actually learn from many different cultures.

But, with the many benefits that diversity can bring, I know and acknowledge that it has challenges. Blending people from different cultural backgrounds can sometimes open the door to ignorance and a lack of understanding. We know the impact that racism can have on people. It is certainly hurtful. It is shameful. It undermines our sense of personal security and safety, and it alienates people from our broader community.

Every child deserves the right to be accepted, to be proud of their cultural background and to be encouraged to reach their full potential. We all need to have the courage to question beliefs and attitudes that allow for ignorance and discrimination, even if they are confined to small pockets of our society. Courage to Care aims to instil these important values and qualities in the youngest members of our community. I congratulate Andrew Havas, Chairman of Courage to Care New South Wales, and his team on this important and creative initiative. I believe it will do wonders in encouraging young minds to understand that we do have a responsibility to stand against injustice in our community.

Hughes Electorate: New South Wales State Election

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (09:58): In my home state of New South Wales, between 2009 and 2013, there was a 100 per cent increase in the number of households that had their electricity cut off—disconnected. In fact, last financial year 33,000 households were cut off—just in New South Wales.

This brings me to the current New South Wales election campaign. Currently, we are seeing the most dishonest, the most deceitful and the most hypocritical election campaign, run by the New South Wales Labor Party, in our nation's history. It is all based on a big lie—a big lie that the supposed sale of poles and wires will increase electricity prices. They repeat this lie over and over, hoping that the public will believe it. But the public is waking up to this. Firstly, people are realising that it is not a sale; it is a lease—a lease of just 49 per cent. That money from the lease enables the state government to invest more in schools, hospitals, roads and education—not only throughout New South Wales, but also in my electorate of Hughes.

But the good news is that other people are speaking out about this complete and utter deception. We have the Chair of the ACCC saying electricity prices will be lower if this privatisation is allowed to go ahead. We have also heard from prominent Labor members. The former Treasurer Michael Egan, said in 1997:

I am pressing on with electricity privatisation because as I have pointed out on numerous occasions, I think it is the best course for NSW, for the people of NSW, job creation in NSW and every community throughout … NSW.

Mark Latham, a former Labor leader, someone who the Labor Party wanted to have as Prime Minister of this country, said:

The only conclusion any sensible person can draw is that electricity privatisation is overwhelmingly good for NSW. What I'm worried about with Luke Foley is the denial of facts.

Then you have Michael Costa, who called the campaign 'lie after desperate lie'. He said the failure to proceed with the electricity privatisation in the past:

FEDERATION CHAMBER
… has resulted in a small, privileged special interest group, the electricity unions, maintaining their advantages at the expense of the general good.

Finally, there is Martin Ferguson, the former Labor minister in this government. He said:

It's just deliberately misleading the public, creating unnecessary fear and trying to scare people into voting for Labor not on merit but on misinformation. In many ways I am ashamed of the Party.

There is a simple test. Federal members of the Labor Party from New South Wales should be standing up and exposing this campaign of deception, lies and hypocrisy.

Iraq and Syria

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (10:01): I commend the Victorian Minister for Education, James Merlino, who has criticised comments by a school principal in Melbourne that Daesh, the Islamic State, is a Western plot. Minister Merlino described these comments as 'incredibly reckless and dangerous'. They were made to 2,000 students at a large Victorian school, the Al-Taqwa College, telling students not to join IS because it is a scheme devised by some Western countries.

I have a message for the principal of that school. The reasons people should not join IS are its barbaric behaviour and ideology—having young children, including Australians, holding up severed heads; the murder of large numbers of Christian and minority people, the Yazidis, across northern Iraq; and the destruction of ancient civilisations and culture. These are the reasons, Principal Hallak, that no Australians should be involved in these kinds of schemes. You ought to be educating your students in a way that fits in with the broad mainstream of Australian public life. As James Merlino said:

We have a multicultural and harmonious society. The best way to tackle radicalisation is through the education of our young people. The worst way is to put reckless and dangerous ideas into their heads.

I have written to the Victorian minister congratulating him on his stance, and I have written to the federal minister saying that they need to take this up with Victorian principals. Any organisation which is publicly funded, either by the Victorian or the federal government, needs to take responsibility for these things.

This is not just a matter of aesthetics. This is a matter of danger to Australian society. We have a number of young Victorians who have gone off and fought with this barbaric group in the Middle East. They pose a threat and a danger to Australian citizens if they return to this country. For the principal of their school to be telling them that it is a Western plot and that is the reason they should not be involved with Daesh is an absolute disgrace.

I want to commend the Islamic community. The Islamic Council of Victoria, for instance, said they do not support Mr Hallak's views and that he might 'muddy' the message that Islam is peaceful, positive and non-violent. Keysar Trad, a person I do not normally agree with or cite, also said that this was a mistaken strategy for them to be involved in and that the Islamic State has 'done unprecedented damage to the image of Islam'.

The principals of Victorian schools are regularly asked about the challenge of radicalisation of students and parents at their schools. One Melbourne principal told The Age that two children in his government primary school had parents fighting for the Islamic State in Syria. This is a very serious situation. I am pleased that the Victorian state minister has addressed this so frontally, and I am sure that Minister Pyne will do the same thing.
Ms O'DWYER (Higgins—Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer) (10:05): I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate a number of residents within the Higgins electorate who received honours and recognition on Australia Day of their service to our country and to our community.

Marc Besen was made a Companion of the Order of Australia for his eminent service to visual and performing arts. Marc is also recognised for his philanthropic contributions to a range of social welfare, community, health, educational and youth initiatives.

Professor Brendan Crabb was also made a Companion of the Order of Australia for his service to medicine, particularly in the area of organ donation and transplantation and the work that he does at the Burnet Institute, which I have had the good fortune to visit and to see firsthand.

Professor John Mills was awarded Officer of the Order of Australia for his distinguished service as a researcher and physician in infectious diseases medicine, particularly in recognition of his work in the area of HIV-AIDS and the development of Australia's biotechnology industry.

Dr Alexander Gosling and Lady Anna Cowen were both made Members of the Order of Australia for their significant service to youth, medical research, educational, historical and cultural organisations. They were also honoured for their service to the people of Australia through their vice-regal patronage and support roles.

William Cowan was also made a Member of the Order of Australia for significant service to the community through educational, medical research, arts organisations and business.

I would also like to congratulate those in the Higgins electorate who received the Medal of the Order of Australia including Allan Paull for his charitable and social welfare work; the late Lorraine Topol for her social welfare, religious and charitable work; Timothy Gurry for his educational and community work; Esther Wood for her service to education and hockey; Dr Serge Liberman for his service as an author, historian and scholar; Emeritus Professor Peter Juliff for his work as a pioneer educator in information technology; Guang Lu for his service to performing arts as a performer, director and designer; and Adjunct Professor Jennifer Searcy for her service to education in the fields of science and mathematics. Congratulations also go to Peter de Natris for receiving the Public Service Medal for his service to people with disabilities and young people, and congratulations to Professor Stephen Bernard and Michael Stephenson for receiving the Ambulance Service Medal.

These people are all very worthy Australians who have made important and valuable contributions to our community. I am very fortunate to represent in this place a community with many kind-hearted and generous people. I pay tribute to all of those who give up their time to continue the tradition of community service in Higgins. Not all are recognised in the Australia Day honours, so I want to take the opportunity to recognise their contribution today. I also host regular morning teas to recognise those people in our community who work so hard for us and I want to place on record our thanks.

Broadband

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (10:08): Over the last couple of months I have been receiving a number of phone calls and emails from Canberrans wanting to know what is going
on with the NBN. Under the previous Labor government Canberrans, in fact all Australians, could go to the NBN's website, look up their address and find out when the NBN rollout would begin in their suburb. For many Canberra suburbs that was supposed to have already happened. Under Labor's rollout plan, fibre to the premises was supposed to have been rolled out over 2014, 2015 and 2016. But now, under the Abbott government, we have radio silence. Immediately after the election, Canberra was taken off the rollout map and we are still not on it. Canberra has, quite literally, disappeared off the map. If you go to the NBN rollout map now, other than two new suburbs in the west of my electorate, there is no rollout scheduled for any Canberra suburb. Last week, ACT Liberal Senator Zed Seselja, announced that Canberrans were ‘a step closer to getting access to the NBN,’ but the details simply are not there. The people of Canberra still have no idea when they will get the NBN and what type of NBN they will get. One of my constituents has written to me from the south Canberra suburb of Calwell. He wrote:

Our internet is slow in Calwell, the maximum speed is 4.6 megabits per second and it's been like that for more than 10 years. The suburb was on the old [NBN role out] map from Labor to get fibre to premises in 2016—but right now we don't have anything or any news about what people will get in this suburb!

What does this mean for Canberrans? It means that they are missing out on the many opportunities provided by the NBN. They are countless: opportunities to work and study from home; opportunities for telehealth, for people to actually be away from their doctor and for them to be diagnosed by their doctor; and, naturally, for better communication.

It also means that we will have a digital divide in Canberra, because there are some lucky Canberrans in the north of Canberra who, under the Labor government, already had fibre-to-the-premises rolled out to their suburbs.

Before the election, the Prime Minister said:

Under the Coalition by 2016 … there will be minimum download speeds of 25 megabits … we will deliver a minimum of 25 megabits … by the end of our first term.

But, like so many of the Prime Minister's pre-election promises, this promise was all too easily broken. The fact is that, under Labor, all of Canberra was scheduled to get the world-class fibre-to-the-premises NBN, delivering superfast internet speeds using fibre optic cable. Now, Canberrans do not know what type of NBN they will get or when they will get it—and Canberrans are not happy about it.

Cowan Electorate: The Kids' Cancer Project

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (10:11): I take this opportunity to speak about an amazing and inspiring charity, The Kids' Cancer Project. This morning I attended a breakfast held by the charity, where I had the opportunity to hear from the founder, Mr Col Reynolds OAM; Paediatric Oncologist Dr Luciano Dalla-Pozza; and the father, the brother and the sister of Nicholas Forwood, a child coping with cancer. It was heartbreakingly to hear of the impact of the disease, but inspiring to hear of the efforts to provide Nicholas with support and also to raise money for research.

I pay tribute to the strength of character from all those whose families face such challenges. It is also good to know that there are driven and dedicated people who are working so fiercely to raise money for research and cures. In this case, some $24 million has been raised since
1993, when Col Reynolds founded the charity. That makes The Kids' Cancer Project the third biggest donor of research funds for childhood cancers, behind the federal and state governments.

It should be known that childhood cancer is the leading cause of death from disease of Australian children and that we have one of the highest incidences in the world. On average, four children are diagnosed with cancer each day, while approximately three children die from cancer each week. Childhood cancers cannot be prevented; they can only be treated. Of those who survive, 98 per cent will develop chronic medical conditions. It is very scary to hear the stories of the pain and suffering, together with the always present fear of losing their child or sibling. It bought home to me and my colleagues who attended the breakfast the need to raise awareness and funds for research. I have not had such a challenge myself, because in my family the incidences of cancer have all been adult types, but it is through being an MP that I hear of these realities—realities that confront families in Cowan and elsewhere around the country.

The Kids' Cancer Project supports a key project in Western Australia, which benefits families in the Cowan electorate. I speak of the work of Professor Ursula Kees at the Telethon Kids Institute in Perth. Professor Kees is undertaking a world first large-scale drug testing into infant leukaemia. This will help combat the survival rates, which are currently around only 30 per cent.

I also take this opportunity to thank my constituents for raising with me the challenges that they face and continue to face, and in particular Rhiannon Williams and Donna Field. I wish them and their families all the best for the challenges that they will continue to face into the future. I also want to place on record my admiration and thanks to Col Reynolds, a man who, in 1993, stepped forward to make a difference; to Dr Dalla-Pozza; and to everyone who is involved in The Kids' Cancer Project. I also wish the new CEO, Owen Finegan, the former Wallaby, all the best for his efforts in the future. Once again, I thank The Kids Cancer Project for their excellent work, and I endorse them as a great charity as they work to combat the scourge of childhood cancers.

Wills Electorate: Multiculturalism

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (10:14): I rise to endorse the Harmony Day celebrations which occurred on 21 March—an annual celebration of Australia's cultural diversity which is about inclusiveness, respect and a sense of belonging for everyone. Harmony Day coincides with the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. This year we celebrate 15 years of Harmony Day.

Last year, on Saturday, 18 October, it was my pleasure to have organised and invited members of our local community to the One Goal, One Community Day, the World Game comes to Fawkner—Celebrating Multiculturalism and Diversity through Football event. As of June 2013, the city of Moreland had a population of over 160,000 people. Over one-third of our residents were born overseas and, of those born overseas, 86 per cent come from non-English-speaking backgrounds. The day brought together former Socceroos Craig Foster, David Zdrilic, Alan Davidson, Simon Colosimo; SBS talent and 'Mr Football' Les Murray; John Fawkner Secondary College; Melbourne City College of Football; and the wider local community to celebrate our proudly diverse community through the unifying message of world football.
The day saw the former Socceroos and SBS All Stars take on the John Fawkner College and the Melbourne City Football Academy for the One Goal, One Community Cup, which was kindly donated by Pascoe Vale Soccer Store. The game was played in great spirit. The SBS All Stars took out the cup in a tight-fought 3-2 contest, with the young John Fawkner side relishing the experience to play against the former top flight players, as well as my own staffer Anthony Cianflone, who, despite much talk, could not keep a clean sheet in goals for the SBS All Stars.

The game was followed by a junior football clinic hosted by the Futsal Oz centre in Brunswick, with star futsal V-League players hosting the clinic. The day was an outstanding success, with over 200 residents attending and with many official partners and supporters, whom I would like to thank, in particular, SBS; John Fawkner Secondary College and Principal Gus Napoli; Melbourne City Football Club; Moreland City Council; Moreland Youth Services; oxYgen project; AFC Asian Cup; Football Federation Victoria; Victoria Police; The Big Issue's Community Street Soccer Program; Futsal Oz, the Human Rights Commission; referee Leo Manca; Pascoe Vale Soccer Store; Zaatar restaurant; and Joe's Pizza in Coburg.

Football can play an important role to help build community, cultural understanding, inclusion, respect and resilience. I hope to be able to host the One Goal, One Community Cup day again in 2015, ideally in the newly built state-of-the-art football facilities at CB Smith Reserve in Fawkner, the opening of which I attended earlier this month.

Indigenous Affairs

Mr BROUGH (Fisher) (10:17): I rise today to support the comments by Adam Giles, the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory. He was speaking in the Northern Territory parliament about the alleged despicable act of a crime against a seven-year-old in the town camp of Hidden Valley in Alice Springs where it is alleged that this seven-year-old was taken away and raped. The Chief Minister made the comment that he felt that if this had been a blue-eyed, blond-haired child that there would be much greater outrage in the Australian community. And I could not agree with him more.

Can I take you back to my time as Indigenous affairs minister, when the then federal local member up there Dave Tollner took me to a home in a suburb of Darwin where we met with an Aboriginal woman. At the same time as the incident that I am about to relay occurred there was a child left on a church step in Melbourne, which made international news. She lamented and she was confused as to why when she had had a baby brought to her wrapped in black plastic by other Aboriginal men to be buried—and I will not go into all the details, but it involved the police et cetera—that this did not make the news. She said, 'I don't understand why we value one child differently to another.' Why is it? How many people of the 150 MPs who sit across this chamber recognise that 13 adult males—I will not name the town—in a remote Western Australian town have all, in a similar period of time, been charged and convicted with crimes against children who have been—and here are those words—'sexually penetrated against their will'? I have looked into the eyes of these young children and it is something that deeply disturbs you forever. And yet I stand by what Adam Giles has said: if these were children in the suburbs of Mooloolaba, Alexandra Headland, Maroochydore or any of the electorates of the members who sit before me in this chamber right now there would be outrage. It would be on the front pages of every paper. So instead of now picking holes in
what clearly has deeply affected the Northern Territory Chief Minister, let us look at ourselves. Let us value every child. Let us recognise that, even though you live in a remote part of Australia, your life is just as important. Our duty to them is equally significant as our duty to those children who live in our suburbs. I do not throw spears here at the media or the police; I do it at us, as a community as a whole. What is it that we are afraid of that we do not lift the ugly scab of these awful crimes and deal with them equally, no matter where the sin and the crime are committed?

Grayndler Electorate: Multiculturalism

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler) (10:20): I am pleased that the community-based Red Rattler Theatre in Marrickville, in my electorate, has apologised for refusing to allow the Jewish student group Hillel to use its space on the basis that it was pro-Israel. I was disturbed to read newspaper reports about this earlier this week. They said that after Hillel sought permission to use the space for a cultural event the Red Rattler had informed Hillel via email:

Our policy does not support colonialism/Zionism. Therefore we do not host groups that support the colonisation and occupation of Palestine.

Australia is a multicultural community. Multiculturalism is our strength. In the inner-west of Sydney, we live in harmony. Different people of different beliefs live side by side. We are enriched by our diversity. Many people came to Australia from strife-torn regions where people do not enjoy the same level of safety and harmony that we enjoy in this country. There is no place, in Australia, for the lack of tolerance shown by that email to this Jewish student group. This should not be confused with a proper debate about solutions for the Middle East. Like many people, I was deeply concerned by television images of Israeli bombs levelling schools on the Gaza Strip last July and August, in the latest manifestation of this conflict. I stated then that that was wrong. I believe that is the case today. I believe there needs to a Palestinian state, but I also believe that Israel has a right to exist in peace and security. A two-state solution is the way forward.

From what I can see, the Hillel group is an international organisation that seeks to bring together Jewish university students for social events, leadership training and cultural events. From what I can see, it is a group promoting friendship and celebrating cultural traditions. The Red Rattler is a community-based theatre in my electorate. It has been used by a range of communities and some political parties. It is important that tolerance be celebrated, and that where intolerance is shown people are prepared to speak out about it. I am pleased that the statement from Red Rattler's directors says that they welcome organisations from all cultures, and they have invited Hillel to hold a forum there. Former US President John F Kennedy once made a critical point about tolerance that is worth reflecting on today. He said:

Tolerance implies no lack of commitment to one's own beliefs. Rather it condemns the oppression or persecution of others.

Page Electorate: Northern Co-operative Meat Company Ltd

Mr HOGAN (Page) (10:23): I want to talk today about a very important institution in my local community, the Northern Co-operative Meat Company. It is based in Casino and it is recognised as one of Australia's leading red meat food processors. It has more than 1,500 livestock producer shareholders, who provide great produce and have their produce processed at the cooperative's processing facilities at either Casino or Booyong. It also has over 1,000...
employers, which is very important to my community. Two of them, David Forrester and Ray McMahon, retired from the Northern Co-operative Meat Company earlier this year after a combined 99 years of service. David worked in the boning room for 54 years, and Ray worked for the local co-op for 45 years. I would like to congratulate both men and thank them for their contribution—they should be proud of that contribution. The meatworks is a great institution in our community. As I said, it is one of our region's largest employers. It employs over 1,000 people directly and is responsible for many more indirect jobs. It ships locally produced meat around the country and, indeed, around the world. Nearly 70 per cent of its product is exported, providing great wealth to not only our local community but our country.

In 2013, Casino teenager Erin Riggall won ABC's Heywire with her entry entitled Our meatworks is something we should be proud of, not ridicule. She said that some in our community have a stigma about working at the meatworks. Neither Erin nor I think that stigma is justified. Both of Erin's parents work at the meatworks and her sister works there part time to finance her studies. Erin said:

I see the meatworks as a provider of jobs and money for the people and farmers in Casino and the surrounding towns.

You are expected to know hundreds of cuts of meat from memory, lift from 18 kilograms up to 30 kilograms of meat repeatedly resulting in lifting up to 2 tonnes of meat during one day of work and cope with the endless red sea of meat heading towards you.

So, as you can see, it is a job of skill and importance to our community and the product provides much wealth not only to our community but also to our country. The beef producers who provide the great product, the shareholders of the co-op and the staff who work there can all walk tall, knowing the importance of the role they play and the benefits the organisation brings our community.

Temporary Work Visa

Ms CHESTERS (Bendigo) (10:25): Today I rise to welcome the Senate's announcement yesterday that they will hold an inquiry into the temporary work visa programs that we have in this country. There are more than 1.1 million people here in this country on temporary work visa arrangements. That is not just the 417 visa system that we have heard repeatedly about, including concerns from workers that they are being exploited by the Australian employers; it also includes international students who are here to study and who have temporary work arrangements. It includes the backpacker visa: the 417 visa and the 462 visa. These are for people who are working here whilst backpacking and on holidays.

What has been discovered and exposed through recent media reports, as well as through work that our trade union movement is doing with industry and with senators, is that there is now an organised way in which some industries and some employers are bringing in cheap overseas labour to undercut current Australian workplace jobs and arrangements. That is simply not fair. It is not fair that Australians who want to work, say, in meatworks or in construction, are having their wages and conditions undercut by foreign workers who are being brought into this country and, in some cases, who are being exploited.

 Constituents in my own electorate have raised this issue with me. One employer, KR Castlemaine, have not hid that they are using 417 visa workers in their establishment. Prior to
Christmas, they announced they would have 100 Taiwanese backpackers working in their establishment. They were quite open and up-front about why they are having these visa holders work at KR Castlemaine. They say, purely and simply, they are cheaper. They work for an agency that pays them the award and that undercuts the wages and conditions that have been agreed to by KR Castlemaine and their workers through their collective agreement.

It is not fair that Australian workers can have their wages and conditions undercut in this way. I hope the Senate inquiry not only looks at the employment conditions but also looks at the living conditions that a number of these temporary workers are being forced to live under. Again, locally, at KR Castlemaine, some of the examples of living conditions are six people per room and quite a number of people being forced into a house to live in appalling living conditions. I welcome the Senate inquiry into this area and encourage people in my electorate, constituents and others, with concerns to raise these issues.

**Hindmarsh Electorate: Surf Life Saving Clubs**

Mr WILLIAMS (Hindmarsh) (10:29): I rise today to acknowledge the great work of the numerous surf life saving clubs in my electorate of Hindmarsh. Hindmarsh has the best metropolitan beaches Adelaide has to offer—from Somerton Park through to Semaphore. Visitors flock to my electorate to enjoy the beach and escape the hot South Australian summer days. Hindmarsh is also home to six of the 19 surf life saving clubs in South Australia—West Beach, Somerton, Semaphore, Henley, Grange and Glenelg—all of which are dedicated to providing a service to the community and to all who use the beach.

Last weekend, my family and I enjoyed watching my daughter and our future stars compete in the Surf Life Saving SA Junior State Championships 2015 at Port Elliot. It was great to see so many kids from across South Australia take part in the state championships and even better to see four of the clubs in my electorate take out the top four spots. Congratulations go to the Grange Surf Life Saving Club, who took out the championship. I would also like to congratulate all the competitors, supporters, volunteers, lifeguards, mums and dads and the organisers for a terrific event. As many would know, local clubs—whether they be local football, tennis or netball clubs—do not survive without fundraising.

However, surf lifesaving clubs are at a different level—they need to fundraise to provide services and patrols, or the safety of our beachgoers will decline. One club in Hindmarsh has its own unique major fundraising event, with all funds raised going towards the club's surf lifesaving activities. Since 2007, Henley Surf Life Saving Club members have participated in the Big Row, where members row a surf boat across the Gulf St Vincent, from Stansbury on the Yorke Peninsula to Henley Beach, covering around 68 kilometres of open sea.

On Saturday at the state championships I spoke with Henley President Phil Hogan, who explained to me that each year the club must raise $40,000 to provide patrols on the beach. I am pleased to note, in this place, that the Henley Surf Life Saving Club this year raised $83,000—one of the highest amounts in the nine years the event has been running, and a truly significant achievement. I was pleased to donate to their Big Row last year.

The coalition government recognises the importance of surf lifesaving clubs and the service they provide in Australia. I am pleased that the government announced in late 2014 that we will provide $8 million over five years to the nation's surf lifesaving clubs to help prevent drowning deaths at our beaches. About $25,000 over five years will be provided to...
each of the surf lifesaving clubs so they can purchase essential rescue equipment and first aid and medical supplies. This commitment will go a long way to assist our dedicated lifesavers, who perform rescues and first aid treatments each year. It is essential that clubs like the six in my electorate have the best equipment so they can continue to save lives and reduce the tragedy of drowning. As we know from recent reports like the *National coastal safety report*, there is a significant lack of awareness among the general public about the hazards posed by the beach. This is something that we discussed on the weekend with surf lifesaving clubs in the nearby area. I would like to personally thank the surf lifesaving clubs in my electorate.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Wicks): In accordance with standing order 193, the time for constituency statements has concluded.

**BUSINESS**

**Rearrangement**

Mr HOGAN (Page) (10:32): by leave—I move:

That order of the day No. 1, committee and delegation reports, be postponed until a later hour this day.

Question agreed to.

**COMMITTEES**

**Economics Committee**

Report

Debate resumed on the motion:

That the House take note of the document.

Mr HUSIC (Chifley) (10:33): I rise to speak in relation to the latest report by the House of Representatives Economics Committee, its Review of the Reserve Bank of Australia Annual Report 2014. I wish to thank the new chair, the member for Bennelong, and the committee secretariat. I note the presence today of a number of my colleagues on the committee, notably the member for Charlton and the member for Page, who, I understand, will be speaking to the report.

The backdrop to the report was the significant move by the RBA away from a position that it had stated for some time—in fact, since about August 2013—that it would apply a period of stability to interest rates. It decided in February, all of a sudden, that it would move away from that period of stability and move to lower interest rates, which obviously raised eyebrows across the community for a host of reasons. When you look at the economic factors that are in play, you would believe that those economic factors, in any other given period of time, would be enormously beneficial to an economy. Chiefly, when you look at the drop in oil prices which flowed through to fuel prices, and the CPI flow-through effect of that, you would think that there would be benefits straight away in that avenue, particularly in terms of potentially building consumer confidence and possibly leading to people spending a bit more in the economy and recognising the beneficial impact of that.

You would also look at something that, from an economic perspective, has been of great concern to us for some time. That is the strength of the Australian dollar. In fact, the RBA noted that since the last time it issued its statement the Australian dollar had fallen something like nine per cent relative to the US dollar and about seven per cent in the trade weighted...
index against other currencies. You would imagine that that would be a fairly significant event in itself. Off the top of my head, the Australian dollar is trading at about 76c, give or take, which is down from the highs well above $1 some time ago.

You would think those two factors would be enough. But what was surprising—and the report carries this quote—was when the governor stated:

When we reviewed our forecasts in late January, we did not feel that growth thus far had been weaker than we had expected three or six months ago, but, when we looked forward, as hard as that is to do, we felt that there were fewer signs of a further pick-up in non-mining activity than we had hoped to see by now.

This is a fairly significant warning about the health of the Australian economy. What they are saying is they are not just looking at the short term; they are looking down the track as to where they think the economy is headed and they have made this call to reduce interest rates. The RBA governor has previously said words to the effect of, 'You should not see monetary policy as a silver bullet.' But at the same time, too, the Reserve Bank recognised there were very few other levers to be able to pull to try to lift growth in the economy.

How is the government receiving this type of news? The government has been working flat out. I am surprised to hear senior ministerial figures in this government try to tout a number of things as signs of great movement in the economy. Just the other week, I was listening to some of the stats that were being put forward. The coalition was spruiking economic growth as rising. That just flies in the face of what the RBA is saying—that growth in the economy will remain below trend for some time. You hear the coalition spruik the growth in job ads, yet unemployment is higher now than what it was during the GFC. The RBA is actually concerned, as outlined in this report, about where unemployment will peak and the fact that the economy is not growing at a rate high enough to see unemployment decline.

The government talk about housing stats. In actual fact, one of the concerns that exists and is touched on in this report is the growth in investor lending, which I want to come to later, and the fact that that growth is patchy. Other than in Sydney, growth in housing markets is roughly at five per cent. We have put a lot of store in the notion that in the non-mining sector dwelling activity should be stronger, but it is patchy, at best. We have strong growth in Sydney and Melbourne, but that is not necessarily being replicated elsewhere.

The coalition talks about infrastructure spending, yet the RBA continues to point to the fact that, if you are serious about tackling housing affordability, you have to make sure supply is connected up with infrastructure, particularly transport infrastructure. This government is making calls on infrastructure that defy the normal, usual process that people can support, which is to have infrastructure decisions—say, for example, from Infrastructure Australia—made independently, made with some rigour and a clear cost-benefit analysis. That is not happening. What we are seeing in infrastructure spend is basically a coalition federal government working in lockstep with coalition state governments because it suits political priorities rather than the needed infrastructure priorities that are out there, the types of infrastructure priorities that the RBA keeps signalling are important if you want cities to work better, if you want to see productivity, if you want to respond better and if you want to deal with the type of concerns that exist about house prices. People will move to areas where they know there is good infrastructure. The strength of that demand will drive up housing prices. They are just making it harder in terms of the way the economy and cities work.
The other element that surprises me about the way the government is going is that they seem to be claiming credit for all these other stats. They cannot even get their budget through the parliament, yet they believe that they have been the main driver behind the economy in the stats that they quote.

The report also made reference to the work of APRA in developing a suite of macroprudential tools to address the serious growth in investor lending in the residential real estate market. We have had APRA before us a number of times and, besides this report, APRA appeared before the committee last week, giving a bit more insight into its thinking about what it will do on macroprudential tools. I have expressed support previously for Chairman Byres. I am particularly impressed by his approach and I know that the financial sector is as well. But I am not entirely sold on an approach that he outlined on dealing with investor lending via macroprudential tools where APRA is, understandably, looking at increased capital requirements on banks, because they are losing patience with the bank’s response to the growth in investor lending. You can understand why they would want to do it: it gives them more bang for their buck. But they are talking about increasing capital requirements at a time when we are looking at increasing capital requirements through the work of Basel III and when we are also looking at the FSI recommendation on cap requirements. So you can certainly understand why they are going down that path, but the issue I am concerned about is transparency.

APRA are flagging that, when it applies this macroprudential tool of increased capital requirements on banks, they believe that this will be done behind closed doors. A number of us, regardless of your politics, expressed mild surprise—that is how I would put it—on Friday when we were told that this would happen in this way. We certainly believed that, on a public policy issue as big as the growth of investor lending in residential real estate, this stuff would be done in the open.

APRA are saying they will not require banks to report, that this would not be a reportable matter to the share market and that this would be done behind closed doors. It flies in the face of the spirit of banking deregulation that has been unveiled in this country over decades, which was to take away the back-room approach, the cosy approach, to the way that mortgage lending was extended and decisions were made. It opens it up and we are getting rid of those cosy arrangements. But for APRA to now say this would actually be done with individual banks—which I support; you need to do it with individual banks—and done behind closed doors, I think, raises concerns about transparency.

Investor-lending growth is a big deal. It grew double the rate of owner-occupier lending in 2014, at about 11 per cent. I am yet to be convinced that applying a regulatory tool of this magnitude in private, not being open to the market and lenders about it, and requiring us to get post-event details through committees or the tabling of reports is an approach that should be adopted. We will be testing APRA on this. I think that APRA will need to consider a variety of elements in the application of this macroprudential tool, if it is applied. I look forward to hearing further about the development of their thinking. Obviously, they have not detailed exactly how they are going to go on this front at this stage. But, when they do, I think they will need to provide more information to the public about how they intend to proceed.

Mr HOGAN (Page) (10:43): I also acknowledge our new chair of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, the member for Bennelong. He is doing
a great job. I also acknowledge our previous chair, the member for Higgins, for the wonderful job she did before being promoted. I also acknowledge my fellow committee members, the members for Charlton and Chifley, and the member for Chifley’s comments.

I will pick up some of the points that were raised, but I want to look at the report first. This is an overview. Two points were made in the chair’s remarks. The first point was that productivity growth has begun to improve in this country, which is fantastic and very necessary. The second point was that public sector debt needs to be kept low, due to the fact that if something goes wrong the government needs to be able to expand fiscal policy, much like it did in 2009. You need to have the scope to do that.

The member for Chifley mentioned that some things have happened, sometimes outside the control of the government, that have been good in the last 12 months or so and some things that have been unfortunate. We have had falling petrol prices, which is obviously wonderful for our economy and the normal household budget, and, as mentioned, interest rates have been lowered just recently. That is obviously good for mortgage holders. The dollar, from memory, peaked at about $1.10 and is now down to 75c or 76c so that is a 35 per cent fall in the currency over the previous 12 months or so. So for our exporters that is absolutely fantastic and it is going to give some positives to different sectors of the economy, and it has not had an inflationary impact, either, which has been quite fortunate.

But we know, and the Reserve Bank report says, as to growth in the mining sector, that the mining sector has now gone from the developmental phase to the production phase. When you are developing a mine there is a lot of activity; there is a lot of employment created in getting a mine set up and going. Once you move into the production phase, which is where we are in the cycle, there are not as many direct jobs necessary in running it as there were in getting it set up. But obviously income begins to flow to the companies involved in that.

This country has been most fortunate over the last 10 to 15 years in that the growth in the mining sector and the terms of trade that this country has had for such a prolonged period have never been seen before. So we have been in a most fortunate window in the last 10 or so years in terms of this country’s finances and the money that has been flowing to it.

We are now entering a new phase. For example, we have seen the price of iron ore fall from over $100 a tonne to around $50 a tonne now. That has had dramatic effects on the country’s finances. We do need to see growth, and we are doing what we can as a government to encourage growth, in the non-mining sector. In fact, while much was made just then of the unemployment rate, jobs growth right now is higher than it was two years ago. So, while the unemployment rate has edged up slightly, it would have edged up even more if we had not done what we have done to encourage jobs growth to be higher, and that is happening.

Another thing that will hopefully help this growth in the non-mining sector is this. We can never overestimate the importance of what we have done with the free trade agreements. In our trading accounts, we now need to see an uptick in things like agriculture and the services sector to offset the fall that we have seen in the mining sector. Indeed, the agriculture sector—speaking from personal experience within my own electorate—has seen some great success stories that will be helped and will continue because of the free trade agreements, including fresh milk sales to China from a cooperative in my electorate, and also a meat cooperative that is now exporting a lot of boxed, chilled and frozen beef to China, which was not even on their sales sheet to any extent a few years ago. So that is very positive.
There are lots of other examples as well, including some in manufacturing. I have a high-end, expensive manufacturing plant for high-end caravans, Acting Deputy Speaker. You would like them, and I am sure you would be very impressed if you saw one. They are exporting now to China, and that has also been helped by the free trade agreements. So we need to encourage growth in the non-mining sector, with the terms of trade that we are seeing change.

Infrastructure spending, which was also mentioned by the member for Chifley, plays an important part. We went to the election wanting to be an infrastructure government, and we are continuing that. The processes and the infrastructure projects that we are choosing to run out are important. They are creating real, direct jobs. They are going to improve transport efficiency, business and everything else. There is certainly a large one happening in my electorate, with the dual carriage upgrade of the Pacific Highway which is a very important project in my community.

At any stage in a country's history there are positives. There is sunshine that we can see ahead. But there are always storm clouds ahead as well. Governments and countries can never stand still. The world is a competitive place. We continually have to be a reformist government. We continually have to make sure that our businesses are encouraged to be competitive and helped to be competitive so that we as a government set the ground rules and the goalposts in the way we help every sector. Especially as the mining sector is coming off the boil, it is important that we help every sector in our economy maintain its competitive edge and advantage so that it can thrive. As I have said, we have seen jobs growth improve in the last two years; that has to improve to offset the falling jobs that are available in the mining sector. We have to continue to be a reformist government to make sure that we remain competitive. I thank the governor for his report.

Mr CONROY (Charlton) (10:50): I congratulate the members for Chifley and Page for their contributions; I applaud the secretariat's work on this report; and I welcome the appointment of the member for Bennelong as our chair after the well-deserved promotion of the previous chair, the member for Higgins.

This is a very important report on the Reserve Bank. The member for Chifley set the scene for our hearings. It is worth going over that one more time. The key environment this annual report is being heard in is at an environment where we have emergency level interest rates. With an official interest rate of 2.25 per cent, we have the lowest interest rate in nearly 50 years. The Reserve Bank has not set the interest rate at that level because they think the economy is going well; they have set the interest rate at that level because they know the economy is in serious trouble.

We had the last speaker, like many government members, cherry-picking individual statistics around monthly employment growth to try and defend the government's appalling record on employment. So, rather than cherry-picking, I am going to look at the six central actual indicators of employment and labour force in the Australian economy.

We start with the headline 'trend unemployment rate'. The trend unemployment rate is at a 12-year high. Not since 2002 have we seen an unemployment rate this high. The youth unemployment rate is very high as well. We have aggregate hours worked in the economy that is sluggish at best, with only a growth of one per cent since the election in 2013. And we have average hours worked actually falling.
We have a labour force underutilisation rate of 15.1 per cent, which is the highest underutilisation rate since 1995 when we were coming out of the 1990s recession. Perhaps worst of all, we have the highest underemployment rate ever recorded: 8.7 per cent. Statistics on underemployment began to be collected in 1978 and they have never exceeded the level we have now of 8.7 per cent. Not even during the depths of the 1980s recession or the 1990s recession have we seen an underemployment rate this high. This all points to a very weak economy with insufficient jobs growth to absorb the labour force increase, and what we are looking at is a jobs crisis. This government is asleep at the wheel of this jobs crisis.

In previous testimony by the Reserve Bank, we heard them repeatedly state their concerns around the need for non-mining capital investment to pick up the slack as the mining boom comes off the boil. Unfortunately, that is not happening. The Reserve Bank in their statements talk about the need for 'animal spirits' to catch on in the economy and grow, so that we see non-mining capital investment pick up. But this is not occurring, so we are seeing a significant gap in capital investment in our economy, which is leading to low jobs growth and increasing unemployment.

We are also seeing stagnant or falling real wages matched by increased productivity in the labour sector. So there can be no doubt that you cannot blame this jobs crisis on our industrial relations system. We have increasing productivity. We have wage rates reflecting a slow economy, so the industrial relations system is working exactly as it should be to provide the necessary flexibility for increased jobs growth, but it is not happening, because we are not getting capital investment and we have a government working against the Reserve Bank's loosening of the economy through their fiscal actions.

As we have said, we have slow growth. We have very low confidence. We see the Treasurer, the member for North Sydney, grabbing hold of any transitory reporting of confidence to try and say that we have increasing levels of confidence in the economy. That is completely untrue. We have confidence levels well below the period we saw in the last government.

Throughout all of this, we have a government that is completely out of touch with the crisis developing. In my region of the Hunter, we have an unemployment rate around 10 per cent. We have a youth unemployment rate exceeding 20 per cent. Let me repeat that: one in five young people in my area who are looking for a job cannot find a job. That is very distressing. If it continues, that will possibly lead to a generation that is incredibly scarred. We have an increase in long-term unemployment, so people who are out of work are finding it much harder to find work. All this points to a jobs crisis that this government is not taking seriously.

It is not just about rhetoric; it is about actions. Their actions demonstrate that they are not taking it seriously. We have seen them destroy the automotive sector by withdrawing $500 million of support. This was a move signalled before the last election, one of the few election promises they actually honoured. The head of Holden made it very clear that, if they withdrew that $500 million of government funding, Holden would leave the country. They left the country and they took Toyota with them. So that is 50,000 direct jobs gone and another 200,000 well and truly imperilled.

We have seen their complete back of regard for the naval shipbuilding and submarine construction industry. We only have to look at the fiasco around the submarine contract to see that. The Prime Minister was only concerned about saving one job, and that was his own,
when he made very ill-defined promises to Senator Edwards, from South Australia. In passing, I am proud to acknowledge the very strong announcement from opposition leader Bill Shorten today that our policy is to build the submarines in Adelaide and to open up a proper competitive tender process inviting four foreign submarine builders to bid in a most appropriate way.

We have seen $900 million in cuts to science and research under this government, and we cannot have an innovative economy if we are stripping support out of this area. We have seen a cut from the $500 million precincts program to their $188 million growth centres program, which is essentially the same program designed to improve applied research and the links between industry and research but with $300 million less. We have also seen their abandonment of the Australian Jobs Act, which, through the Australian industry participation plans, meant that Australian companies and workers would have the first go on projects worth over $500 million.

The report by the Reserve Bank is an important report. It signals concern about a slowing economy. It signals concern about a jobs crisis with high unemployment, high underutilisation of the labour force, high underemployment and distressing youth unemployment levels. We have seen the result of this, which is that interest rates are at emergency lows. There is only limited room for manoeuvre for the Reserve Bank, but I fear they may need to do that if this government does not get off its hands and start taking concrete action, because the result of all of this will be a generation of people who cannot find work and all the social and economic turmoil that goes with that. I commend the report to the House, and I thank the House for this time.

Debate adjourned.

### CONDOLENCES

**Mr Lee Kuan Yew GCMG, CH**

Debate resumed on the motion:

That the House record its deep regret at the death on 23 March 2015 of Lee Kuan Yew GCMG CH, former Prime Minister of Singapore, and place on record its acknowledgement of his role as the founding father of the modern Singapore and tender its profound sympathy to his family in their bereavement.

**Mr WATTS** (Gellibrand) (10:58): I rise today to acknowledge the passing of Singapore's first Prime Minister and founding father, Lee Kuan Yew. Lee Kuan Yew was one of the great nation builders of the 21st century. He took Singapore from a port city with significant ethnic tensions, poor standards of living and little industry and turned it into an astonishingly affluent society. Singapore's people are now some of the most prosperous in the world, due in no small part to his leadership. In 2010, Henry Kissinger said of Lee Kuan Yew:

The mark of a great leader is to take his society from where it is to where it has never been.

Kissinger went on to say that 'there is no better strategic thinker in the world today' than Lee Kuan Yew. By all measures, we should say that that was true for the better part of his life.

Lee Kuan Yew oversaw his country's independence from British rule and merger with the Malaysian Federation, only to see the relationship between these countries fracture. Lee Kuan Yew envisioned a meritocratic society, and, fearing that ethnic tensions between the Chinese, Malay and Indian groups within his society would cause division and violence, he chose to
make English Singapore's main language—to ensure equality between the ethnicities but also so that Singapore would be able to tap into business and structure the Singaporean economy to provide international services.

Under his leadership, Singapore moved from a Third World country devoid of natural resources to one of the world's wealthiest nations. The scale of its rise is unparalleled anywhere else in the world. Within the first 20 years of his prime ministership, Singapore's gross national income increased by 1,500 per cent. Lee also realised that Singapore could only have, at best, moderate success without opening up to the world through trade and investment. Singapore is now the world's 14th largest exporter and 15th largest importer. Singapore's gross GDP per capita has increased from under $500 in 1959 to $46,000 in 2014. Singapore is one of the safest and least corrupt places to do business, and it is the major banking and trade centre of the region.

All of Singapore's achievements are intrinsically linked to Lee Kuan Yew and his leadership. However, Lee's influence has been felt well beyond his country's boundaries. As Australians, we appreciate Lee Kuan Yew's achievements because Singapore's strategic interests are so similar to our own. As a smaller nation, with an interest in a stable, rules based international order with liberal cross-border trade and investment arrangements, we see his achievements and greatly admire them.

In this regard, Lee's role as a principal architect of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations is a particularly astonishing achievement. ASEAN was formed in 1967, at the height of Cold War tensions in the region and in the shadows of two earlier failed attempts to establish a similar regional body. ASEAN fostered economic cooperation and integration between its members, lowering trade and investment barriers in the region. It also gave South-East Asia a collective voice that ensured that the strategic interests of the region were more clearly heard by the world's great powers. While Australia is not a member of ASEAN, we have benefited greatly from these achievements. Similarly, Lee Kuan Yew played a crucial role in helping the Five Power Defence Arrangements between Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, New Zealand and the UK endure and evolve through a dramatically changing strategic environment and play a major role in contributing to the stability of South-East Asia that we enjoy today.

Lee Kuan Yew was a pragmatist and took little interest in political ideology. Explaining his guiding ideals, Lee said:

I always tried to be correct, not politically correct.

Australians have benefited directly from this direct approach. Thanks to Lee Kuan Yew, the Australian-Singapore relationship is not only strong; it is substantial. Generations of Australian policymakers have benefited from the wake-up call he gave our nation when he joltingly warned us that our nation was in danger of being 'the poor white trash of Asia'. The major economic reforms delivered by the Hawke-Keating government in the wake of this warning have delivered decades of prosperity for our nation. Lee Kuan Yew's passing has left a gigantic hole in Singaporean society, and we stand with them in celebrating his life today. He has been a uniquely influential figure—a titan in Singapore, in our region and in our world.

Ms O'DWYER (Higgins—Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer) (11:03): When we reflect on the passing of Lee Kuan Yew, the modern father of Singapore, we cannot help but
reflect on Singapore itself. There can be no doubt that modern Singapore is Lee Kuan Yew's legacy, and in that legacy there is much to admire. Singapore currently has a population of just 4.2 million people and limited natural resources and is situated on just 710 square kilometres—roughly one-third the size of the Australian Capital Territory, or less than 10 per cent of greater Melbourne. Singapore is located at the tip of the Malay Peninsula and on the natural sea routes that serve trade between South-East Asia, China, India and Australia. Indeed, since its earliest history, trade has been Singapore's raison d'être.

Under Lee Kuan Yew's direction, as Prime Minister from 1959 to 1990, Singapore was transformed from a Third World economy to a wealthy and economically competitive nation. With the establishment of a free trade staging post in 1819 by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles from the East India Company, entrepot trade flourished. Immigrants flocked to Singapore, with the population growing from just 150 people in 1819 to over 80,000 people in 1860.

The relative peace of British rule of Singapore was shattered during World War II when Singapore fell to the Japanese on 15 February 1942, just 70 days after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The strategic and psychological impact on the loss of Singapore for the Allies, and not least for Australia, was profound. However, the invasion was, of course, most keenly felt by the Singaporeans. The Japanese occupation of 3½ years was a period of great suffering for the people of Singapore. Ethnic diversity had largely prospered peacefully under the British. However, under Japanese occupation Japanese culture and language were strictly imposed and food shortages were common.

Born in 1923, this period of Singapore's history would no doubt have had a formative effect upon Lee Kuan Yew's character and his aspirations for the tiny island nation. Following the surrender of the Japanese, Singapore became a crown colony. However, by 1959, the growth of nationalism led to self-government and Lee Kuan Yew became its first Prime Minister.

1960s Singapore faced many challenges including political and economic uncertainty, with a gross national product per capita of less than $US320. A true political pragmatist, Lee Kuan Yew said:

We knew that if we were just like our neighbours, we would die. Because we've got nothing to offer against what they have to offer. So we had to produce something which is different and better than what they have. It's incorrupt. It's efficient. It's meritocratic. It works.

We are pragmatists ... Does it work? Let's try it and if it does work, fine, let's continue it. If it doesn't work, toss it out, try another one. We are not enamoured with any ideology.

Lee Kuan Yew drove Singapore's political stability and economic prosperity. Lee and his People's Action Party established various economic agencies to spearhead economic development. From 1960 to 1974, the manufacturing sector grew from 11 per cent of GDP to 24 per cent. Unemployment fell from around 10 per cent in 1965 to 3.5 per cent in 1978. Today, Singapore is an economic powerhouse with a strong service and high-tech manufacturing sector and is one of the most developed trade and finance economies in Asia. In fact, Singaporeans have the third highest per capita GDP in the world, 50 per cent higher than Switzerland and almost double that of Australia.

From our nation's perspective, Singapore is Australia's largest trade and investment partner in ASEAN and our fifth largest trading partner overall. Singapore is currently the third highest investor in Australian residential and commercial real estate, with investments of over
$4 billion over the last financial year. In 2003 the Howard government delivered the Singapore-Australia Free Trade Agreement, further cementing the economic ties between our two countries. While our political cultures share marked differences, it must be noted that the Singapore of Lee Kuan Yew had no tolerance for economic corruption and set itself on a path of modernity in order to benefit its citizenry. Lee Kuan Yew held high aspirations for Singapore and his leadership covered all aspects of government and business activity.

It is all the more poignant that Lee Kuan Yew's passing coincides with the 50th anniversary of Singapore as an independent nation later this year. This year also marks the 50th anniversary of the Australia-Singapore bilateral relationship. Singapore remains a significant strategic and economic partner for Australia. As one of our most important trading partners, we share longstanding links in politics, defence and education, and strong people-to-people ties.

Widely reported to be the world's longest serving Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew made close relationships with many of our Prime Ministers and worked to strengthen our bilateral relationships. Indeed, upon his 90th birthday the Australian high commissioner in Singapore presented Lee with an album of signed historical photographs with him greeting every Australian Prime Minister from Gough Whitlam to Kevin Rudd. It did not stop him from providing full and frank feedback to Australian Prime Ministers, with his comments in the 1980s that Australia was at risk of becoming 'the poor white trash of Asia'. Those comments hit us hard.

Lee Kuan Yew is survived by three children, including Lee Hsien Loong, the current Prime Minister of Singapore, whom I had the great honour of meeting many years ago when Singapore hosted the IMF World Bank Meetings in 2006. Sadly, I did not get a chance to meet the father of Singapore—Minister Mentor, as he was then known—but instead saw firsthand the dynamic nation he helped create and shape.

He is also survived by his seven grandchildren, to whom we send our sincere condolences.

At his passing, we marvel at his legacy, the transformation of modern Singapore, and wish its citizenry continued peace and prosperity for the many decades to come.

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (11:10): Lee Kuan Yew was often and rightly described as 'the father of modern Singapore'. He led his nation to independence through its evolution into an economic powerhouse with a vision of a strong community of independent Asian nations. He served as Prime Minister from 1959, when Singapore gained full internal self-government from Britain, until he stepped down in 1990.

'To understand Singapore, and why it is what it is, you've got to start off with the fact that it's not supposed to exist and cannot exist,' he said in a 2007 interview. He continued:

To begin with, we don't have the ingredients of a nation, the elementary factors: a homogeneous population, common language, common culture and common destiny. So, history is a long time. I've done my bit.

In facing the challenge of Singapore's ethnically diverse citizens, Mr Lee wisely did not aim for homogeneity. Singapore's constitution recognises four official languages: English, Malay, Mandarin and Tamil.

Mr Lee understood that Singapore, without significant land or natural resources, needed to pursue an economic model different to its neighbours. He placed a priority on education and
on investment in Singapore's people. His achievements in helping to build great education and healthcare systems are recognised around the world. Ninety-four per cent of Singaporeans go on to postsecondary education. Singapore raised living standards and extended social mobility at a remarkable rate. Singapore is also one of the least corrupt countries in the world, consistently ranking near the top of the international tables.

Under Mr Lee's leadership, Singapore was transformed from a small British colonial outpost to an affluent global city. Singapore is now Australia's fifth largest trading partner and a leader in our region. Mr Lee's emphasis on multilateral institutions, such as ASEAN, played a key role in the development of the diplomatic and economic dynamics that continue to shape our region today.

Despite the considerable authority he exercised, he also made sure through Singapore's strong institutions of governance that he was not indispensable to Singapore's progress. He was committed to his country until his death, advising his successors long after he retired from official roles.

As well as being one of the 20th century's most dominant statesmen, Lee Kuan Yew was a devoted husband to his wife of 63 years, Kwa Geok Choo. I have always liked the story he tells in his memoirs that he first really took notice of her when she soundly beat him into second place in economics and English exams when they were both students. And I was very moved to read that, in the last years of her life, Mr Lee applied his characteristic systemic approach to creating and maintaining a spreadsheet of all the books he read to her so that he would neither miss her favourites nor bore her with repetition.

He finished his memoirs by reminding readers of the basic principles underpinning Singapore's success:

… social cohesion through sharing the benefits of progress, equal opportunities for all, and meritocracy, with the best man or woman for the job, especially as leaders in government.

Our thoughts are with Mr Lee's family and friends and the people of Singapore.

Mr TONY SMITH (Casey) (11:13): I rise to join fellow members in paying tribute to Lee Kuan Yew and to speak on the condolence motion moved by the Prime Minister yesterday. As the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition pointed out, Lee Kuan Yew was one out of a box. For a nation the size of Singapore, as previous speakers have said, a very small nation in a very unstable area, at the time of independence there was no reason to expect it would survive as a nation, let alone thrive in the way it has.

The economic figures tell the success story, as the Prime Minister said yesterday. In 1965, Singapore's gross domestic product per head was about a third of Australia's, and today it is almost double Australia's. It has been a stunning success as a society and as an economic powerhouse in the region. As speakers have pointed out, through his leadership, Lee Kuan Yew set Singapore on an individual path. He did so by maintaining a British based common-law legal system and ran an utterly clean and corruption-free administration. He was also very flexible in his approach to Singapore's future economic development. We look at Singapore today as the world's fifth busiest port, the world's fourth largest financial centre and one of the best places to do business and to start a company.

Australia's ties with Singapore have always been strong, and they have grown stronger over the years. This is epitomised by the member for Moore, born in Singapore and now sitting in...
this parliament. Lee Kuan Yew was a towering figure and, as all significant leaders are, he was, as an editorial pointed out today, a product of his time. And his time was the experience of British colonialism, Japanese occupation, postwar Cambridge and the London School of Economics. As I said, he was flexible. He had, as we are reminded in an editorial today, the flexibility of mind to abandon his early socialism when free-market capitalism seemed to offer a better future for Singapore.

His biography is a very telling book. It tells the story of Singapore's success. It tells of the great historical decisions that were made in those early days. It is not a universally held view—and I know my friend and colleague the member for Kooyong, who follows foreign affairs very closely, will understand why I make this point with respect to the Vietnam War, a very controversial war—but Lee Kuan Yew made the point in his autobiography that the US and Australian involvement in that war, while controversial and difficult, bought Singapore time and breathing space. He also made it to countless world leaders in the decades ahead. When you think of the fragility of Singapore at its formation, that decade or so of breathing space where so much of the development occurred was a point that Lee Kuan Yew felt free to make at every opportunity because, as we have heard, in so many ways he was prepared to call things as he saw them and to do so in a very straightforward and blunt fashion.

Singaporeans are mourning the loss of their most significant leader, but they can look back over 50 years on the success that they have become. They can look ahead 50 years to all that they can achieve because of the foundation that Lee Kuan Yew laid.

Mr FRYDENBERG (Kooyong—Assistant Treasurer) (11:19): With the passing of Lee Kuan Yew, aged 91, the world has lost one of its most enduring leaders and Australia has lost a good friend. Lee Kuan Yew was Prime Minister from 1959 to 1990. He was the father of modern Singapore. He took an island state of 710 square kilometres, with a population of 5.4 million people, with no natural resources, no natural allies and a diverse ethnic population, and turned it into one of the most prosperous and dynamic countries in the world—and, in his words, 'Singapore went from third world to first'. To illustrate this point, as the Prime Minister told the House, in 1965 the GDP per head in Singapore was one-third of that in Australia. Today, the GDP per head in Singapore is twice that of Australia.

Today Singapore, under Lee Kuan Yew's son, Lee Hsien Loong, is one of Australia's closest partners. The two-way trade is $30 billion, and Singapore is the fourth-largest source of investment in our country. Three hundred thousand Singaporeans visit Australian shores each year, and an equivalent number of Australians visit Singapore each year as well. One hundred thousand Singaporeans have studied in our universities; and, together with Malaysia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, Singapore partners with Australia in the Five Power Defence Arrangements.

It is also true that Australia, over the years, has had its disagreements with Singapore and Lee Kuan Yew, preferring that its government exercised less control—or, as The Australian recently described it, Lee Kuan Yew's 'stern but benevolent leadership'. We also did not quite appreciate at the time the description of Australia as potentially becoming 'the poor white trash of Asia'. But, in the end, Lee Kuan Yew's record of leadership clearly spoke for itself. With his guiding hand, Singapore has bloomed and provided an important road map for a number of other tiger economies in our region.
It is important today that we thank Lee Kuan Yew for his strong leadership. We honour his memory and we celebrate the important strategic partnership and friendship Australia enjoys with modern Singapore.

Mr IRONS (Swan) (11:23): I, too, rise to join with my colleagues in paying tribute to Singapore's founding Prime Minister and father of independence Lee Kuan Yew.

He was a man who arguably built South-East Asia's most modern city and pioneered what were often considered far-reaching economic policies, and he is now renowned for cementing this physically small country's economy as the powerhouse it is today.

Although I never had the opportunity to meet Lee Kuan Yew, he was a man who I personally admired for his ability to make tough decisions on behalf of his people. He was a man of action who, as the Singaporeans say, ruled with an iron fist. He may have ruled with an iron fist, but the prosperity his people enjoyed throughout his reign as Prime Minister from 1959 to 1990, and under his guidance as a senior minister until 2011, is largely unrivalled.

I know with being in Western Australia which is very close to Singapore many Singaporeans call Perth their second home. We often spend time in Singapore. I spent my honeymoon in Singapore and the company I worked for for many years had a manufacturing plant in Singapore and the island was considered to be one of the most crime-free places in South-East Asia. This was all done by Lee Kuan Yew's reign.

One of the things during his reign that have always stayed with me, with his ability to make decisions to assist the economy, was when he made the decision to reduce employer contributions to the country's compulsory savings scheme—which is similar to Australia's superannuation scheme—to counter economic downturns in the mid-1980s and in 1999, during the Asian financial crisis. During the 1980s the employer contribution was 25 per cent, but he saw that under that economy this was creating real distress for business, so he reduced it to 15 per cent. As a result of that decision, Singapore's international competitiveness soared and its people continued to prosper from a sustainable economy, with the country now having one of the world's highest per-capita incomes and its people enjoying first class infrastructure.

It is policy decisions such as this which will now shape the history books of Singapore and which largely speak for themselves in terms of economic strategy and policy but, interestingly, would be largely rebuked here in Australia. Despite this, Singapore is Australia's largest trade and investment partner in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, and our fifth largest trading partner overall. Each of the two nations has benefited greatly from our strong economic partnership, which was largely founded in the Singapore-Australia Free Trade Agreement and is a relationship our country will continue to build on now and in the future.

In 2011, I was part of the ASEAN delegation that went to Vietnam, Bangkok and Singapore. During that time, we met with many of the Singaporean officials and with the Singaporean finance corporation, which is like their development bank. It was an interesting conversation that we had. Some members of the Labor Party who were with us asked them about their financing of alternative energies or renewable energies, and their response was, 'We won't fund anything that's not sustainable,' so there was a clear message from the Singaporeans in regard to renewable energies.
Lee Kuan Yew remained an influential figure internally with the People's Action Party, which has ruled Singapore since its founding, and across the political spectrum until his death on Monday at age 91 from severe pneumonia. At this time, his son the current Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong, declared a seven-day period of national mourning until 29 March, when Lee Kuan Yew's funeral will be held. My thoughts are with his family and the people of Singapore as they mourn this great loss, for he truly was Singapore's pioneer and will always be admired and respected. I am sure members would agree, no matter where they stand on Lee Kuan Yew's social or political policies, that he was a man who led his country to prosperity and created the great nation Singapore is today. I believe all members will also agree that we too have to finish our time in this place and be able to share the same sentiment that he stated in his last book, *One Man's View of the World*, which was published in 2013:

As for me, I have done what I had wanted to do, to the best of my ability. I am satisfied.

With this in mind, I pay tribute to Singapore's pioneer, Lee Kuan Yew, and express my deepest condolences to his family. He will be mourned and he will be missed, but he will also be remembered in the hearts and minds of Singaporeans and people across the world for his service to his country and its people, a legacy that many hope for but few can claim. Rest in peace.

**Mr GOODENOUGH (Moore)** (11:28): I wish to associate myself with the remarks made by the Prime Minister in moving this condolence motion in parliament yesterday and those of my colleagues who have contributed to this debate. I wish to pay tribute to a great statesman in the late Lee Kuan Yew. Yesterday afternoon, the Prime Minister and I drove to the Singaporean high commission in Yarralumla to personally express our condolences and to sign the official condolence book.

I was born in Singapore in 1975 and lived there for the first nine years of my life before emigrating to Australia with my parents in 1984. Lee Kuan Yew was the Prime Minister for the duration of my formative years in Singapore. He was a great visionary leader who shaped the development of modern Singapore. Growing up in the Singapore of the late 1970s and early 1980s, I witnessed firsthand some of the transformative reforms and economic development measures implemented by the government led by Lee Kuan Yew.

Back then, Singapore was still in the latter stages of recovery from the effects of the Second World War and 3½ years of Japanese occupation that left the country and the economy in ruins. I recall living in parts of Singapore with unsealed roads, a lack of basic infrastructure such as sewerage and drainage, and ramshackle housing.

Over the years these conditions were systematically improved, resulting in the high standard of living that Singaporeans now enjoy.

My early understanding of political events in Singapore was influenced by my grandparents. My maternal grandfather, Titus Bertram Smith, often recounted historical events, such as when Singapore joined the Malaysian federation in 1963, only to break away two years later on 9 August 1965, highlighting Lee Kuan Yew's role in the process of creating independent statehood for Singapore.

I also recall my paternal grandmother, Sybil Irene Goodenough, bitterly protesting at the compulsory acquisition of her beloved home by Lee Kuan Yew's government to make way for...
public housing development. I still remember the address: No. 9B Lorong Jerneh. That was my earliest recollection of government intervention and part of my early political education. It could be said that my grandmother's sacrifice made way for the betterment of the nation.

So today, on behalf of the Australian community, I pay tribute to a remarkable leader who devoted six decades to public life, serving for 31 years as Prime Minister. He was a visionary who transformed an island nation with limited natural resources into a vibrant centre of commerce and trade through the turbulent postwar era. He oversaw the development of an acclaimed education system and advances in health care. He built an efficient public transport system via the MRT, mass rapid transit network, and implemented a universal superannuation scheme, the Central Provident Fund, to provide for citizens in their retirement. Today, Singapore is a modern metropolis, a strong economy, and a financial capital with more than 130 international banks represented.

By combining Western systems with Eastern philosophies—the British Westminster system of governance with Confucian values—a strong prosperous nation was built. Self-discipline, a strong work ethic, and strict adherence to law and order are hallmarks of contemporary Singaporean society. Singapore is a truly international nation, an active participant in the global arena with an engaging foreign policy, and strong strategic defence alliances with neighbouring nations such as Australia.

In his time, Lee Kuan Yew overcame significant challenges and managed to unite the diverse ethnic groups in Singapore—the Chinese, Malays, Indians and Eurasians—to form a harmonious and cohesive society, which is best reflected in the National pledge: 'We, the citizens of Singapore, pledge ourselves as one united people, regardless of race, language or religion, to build a democratic society based on justice and equality so as to achieve happiness, prosperity and progress for our nation'.

My sincere condolences go to the Lee family and the Singaporean people. May Lee Kuan Yew's lasting legacy result in stronger relations between Singapore and Australia into the future.

Mr WYATT (Hasluck) (11:34): This has been an interesting week of condolences for me. It is interesting in that when we pass away we are survived by the legacies that we leave behind. Singapore's founder and master builder Lee Kuan Yew ran the island state of Singapore with a fierce pragmatism that made it matchless. In the wake of Lee's passing on Monday I want to remind the chamber that indeed the beat of Lee's drum will be heard for generations. Asia will forever feel the ripple effects of this significant leader in history, and one only has to visit Singapore to see not only the structure of its society but the way in which people interact with each other with dignity and respect.

Today I want to speak about this leader who broke the mould, a revolutionary who once defied fierce communism and believed in a strong work ethic. The world, and especially Australia, will remember Lee not only because his legacy will not just be left behind within the history pages but because he has strengthened the friendship between us and Asia. Many of our former Prime Ministers can thank Lee for his assistance, including the late Malcolm Fraser, who also has sadly passed away. Lee was a man of strong convictions, and his pragmatism was driven by expert consultations with world leaders, rightfully earning him the accolade of being a 'one-man intelligence agency'. Indeed, he truly distinguished his doctrine.
We will not forget him, because he was a spot-on leader. Lee was one of Asia's great architects, a remarkable statesman and a much-revered thinker on politics, society and state-building. With China accelerating its military modernisation, Russia continuing its slow-drip incursion into Ukraine, and an expanding section of the Middle East devolving into chaos, it has become fashionable again to argue that the West is in decline. One of the most vigorous dissenters from this pessimism was Lee. He believed our future to be a bright one.

I extend my sympathies to Lee Kuan Yew's family and to the nation of Singapore. Today we have farewelled a world-recognised leader, a figurehead for modern democracy in Asia, and a friend of Australia. May we remember the pursuit of a strong work ethic in our nation, and may it live on within all of us as it did in him.

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney—The Treasurer) (11:39): As Australians pass through Changi international airport, they most probably do not realise that what is around them is largely the creation of a single man. How a tiny place, a fraction of the geographic size of Tasmania and devoid of natural resources, including limited water, could become one of the world's most powerful and dynamic economies yet one of the world's most stable nations is, in itself something of a miracle. The man—the miracle worker—who made all this happen was unquestionably Lee Kuan Yew.

For the originator of the term and practice of 'Asian values', Lee Kuan Yew was a remarkably Western man—so much so that former British foreign secretary George Brown cheekily referred to him as 'the best bloody Englishman east of the Suez'. Studying at the London School of Economics, he became imbued with the spirit of anticolonialism and an increasing scepticism of the principle of the empire. After returning to Singapore in 1950, he became its first Prime Minister in 1959, a position he held unchallenged for the next 31 years. After that, he assumed the role of Minister Mentor right up until his final illness. With his son as his successor, he maintained a commanding influence over the destiny of his nation. From 1963 until 1965, he led his country as part of the Federation of Malaysia. Although a man with a reputation of being as tough as nails, he broke down and cried when announcing the dissolution of the federation. His toughness was legendary, and he had no qualms about describing himself as a knuckleduster street-brawling statesman.

The Singapore model has, in fact, become the template for much of the development of modern Asia as we know it. It is little wonder that Deng Xiaoping, in his transformation of China, found Singapore a model to follow. Lee was, of course, one of the founders of ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, one of the pillars of stability underpinning the diplomatic architecture of this region and an important partner for Australia as a bridge to over half the world's population. Lee Kuan Yew created and articulated a vision for what Singapore could be like and then set about finding the best minds, adopting the best technologies and insisting on the right policies to get there.

I have always been a great admirer of Lee Kuan Yew—an admirer of his intellect, his values and his generosity. In 2012, I travelled to Singapore as the 37th Lee Kuan Yew exchange fellow to speak and meet with senior members of the Singaporean government. It was after that trip that I came to understand fully the impact of Lee Kuan Yew on modern Singapore. It is an honour given to very few around the world to be recognised universally as the creator of a modern state which is enormously prosperous, at the cutting edge of technology, the home of great international companies and, in large part, free and democratic.
Lee Kuan Yew is one of the few that can rightly lay claim to that incredible recognition. I thank the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I understand it is the wish of honourable members to signify at this stage their respect and sympathy by rising in their places.

Honourable members having stood in their places—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I thank the Federation Chamber.

Mr GOODENOUGH (Moore) (11:43): by leave—I move:
That further proceedings be conducted in the House.
Question agreed to.

Federation Chamber adjourned at 11:43
QUESTIONS IN WRITING

Australian Water Holdings Pty Ltd
(Question No. 153)

Mr Danby asked the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, in writing, on 13 May 2014:

Since 7 September 2013, on (a) how many occasions, and (b) what date(s), has the Minister met with Australian Water Holdings Pty Ltd chief executive Mr Nick Di Girolamo, and can the Minister provide the nature of each meeting.

Mr Dutton: The answer to the honourable member's question is:

(a) Nil.
(b) Not applicable.

Early Childhood Education
(Question No. 681)

Mr Katter asked the Minister for Education and Training, in writing, on 4 December 2014:

Does the Government support the retention of the Universal Access to Early Childhood Education funding which is relied upon by many kindergartens and is critical to maintaining a quality education program for children in the year before they start school.

Mr Pyne: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

This Government supports quality early learning and is committed to an early learning sector that delivers flexible, accessible and affordable quality education.

In September 2014, the Government announced $406 million for an extension of the National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education. All states and territories have signed the extension of the national partnership to continue universal access to quality preschool programmes for children in the year before full-time school in 2015.


Tender: Hotel Grand Chancellor
(Question No. 746)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister representing the Minister for Employment, in writing, on 5 March 2015:

In respect of the $26,000 tender to the Hotel Grand Chancellor (CN2841372), (a) what event is to be conducted at this hotel, (b) when and where will this event take place, and (c) what is the full itinerary for the event.

Mr Pyne: The Minister for Employment has provided the following answer to the honourable Member's question:

The event at the Hotel Grand Chancellor is the Joint Commonwealth, Tasmanian State Government and Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development Workshop on Job Creation and Local Economic Development—An International Perspective.
This event took place in Launceston, Tasmania on 12–13 March 2015. The outline attached provides a full itinerary for the event.

**Joint Commonwealth, Tasmanian State Government and OECD Workshop on Job Creation and Local Economic Development – An International Perspective**
**12 - 13 March 2015, Launceston, Tasmania**

Supporting the creation of more and better quality jobs is a key priority for Tasmania. Collaboration between Commonwealth, State and local governments, the education and training sector, employers and the academic community is crucial to achieve this goal.

International experiences can provide important lessons for developing stronger approaches. This event will highlight key findings from the OECD's flagship publication on Job Creation and Local Economic Development as well as the G20 policy priorities on local job creation and consider their application in the Tasmanian context.

This event is a unique opportunity for policy makers and key stakeholders to learn from both international experiences as well as from local perspectives. It will also provide an interactive forum to discuss the policy priorities of supporting job creation, increasing workforce participation, skills utilisation and reducing youth unemployment.

**AGENDA**

**Wednesday, 11 March 2015**
18.00 - 20.00 WELCOME FUNCTION AND PRE-REGISTRATION

**Thursday, 12 March 2015**
08.30 - 09.00 Registration of participants
09.00 - 09.05 WELCOME
09.05 - 09.15 OPENING REMARKS

Employment and Skills Strategies: Context and Opportunities

09.15 - 12.30 SESSION I: EFFECTIVE LOCAL STRATEGIES TO BOOST QUALITY JOB CREATION, EMPLOYMENT AND PARTICIPATION

This session will begin with an overview of the current labour market and skills challenges facing Australia and Tasmania in order to set the context for the workshop. The OECD will then present the results from a cross-comparative series of 12 country reviews looking at effective local employment and skills policies. Special attention will be paid to results from Australia. Following these presentations, various prominent speakers will provide their views, from a local perspective before the discussion is opened up.

09.15 - 09.45 Tasmanian Labour Market and Policy Strategies
09.45 -10.15 Findings from OECD LEED's Job Creation and Local Economic Development
10.15 - 10.45 Coffee break
10.45 - 11.15 Comments and reactions

Facilitated group discussion (45 minutes)

12.00 - 13.00 Lunch

13.00 - 15.00 SESSION II: SECTORAL APPROACHES AND SKILLS UTILISATION

Enhancing industry capability to innovate and manage workforce change is critical in developing strong and sustainable local sectors which underpin economic growth. Local regions may benefit from place-based initiatives to promote sectors in which they have a comparative advantage. It is important that policy makers and stakeholders work together to maximize skills utilisation and support job creation. This session will also look at the role the public sector can play in supporting sectoral strategies that better utilise the skills of the current
workforce, as well as connecting the local labour force with local employers. This session will also examine the role that entrepreneurship and innovation can play in stimulating economic development and employment opportunities.

Australian experience and International example

15.00 - 15.30 Coffee break
15.30 - 17.30 SESSION III: CONNECTING JOBSEEKERS WITH CURRENT AND FUTURE DEMANDS OF THE WORKFORCE

Workforce skills are increasingly important within the knowledge economy, but many localities and regions continue to report mismatches between jobseekers' skills and the needs of business. This session will focus on building flexible and adaptable employment services and training systems which are responsive to individual, employer and industry needs. The role the public sector can play in conjunction with employers to better align the training system to their needs through greater work-based and apprenticeship strategies will be discussed as will the issue of regional accessibility of services.

Australian experience
International examples
Facilitated group discussion (45 minutes)

Friday, 13 March 2015

09.00 - 11.00 SESSION IV: CONNECTING YOUTH WITH THE WORKFORCE

The youth unemployment rate in Tasmania increased marginally over the year to stand at 17.4 per cent in January 2015, well above the national rate (of 14.2 per cent). That is, 7,700 young people in Tasmania were denied the benefits of meaningful engagement. Early engagement of young people with the workforce minimises the risk of them dropping out of the labour force and becoming disillusioned. To strengthen these transitions, clear pathways between school, training and work are critical to help focus and prepare young people for the workforce. Entrepreneurship also provides new opportunities for young people to connect with the workforce. This session will look at various approaches to strengthening school-to-work transitions, including the role of local partnerships as well as what can be done to stimulate entrepreneurship among youth.

Australian experience
Facilitated group discussion (45 minutes)

11:00 - 11.30 Coffee break
11.30 - 12.30 CONCLUSION: WHAT WILL WE TAKE FROM THIS EVENT?

A concluding session will identify the key emerging themes and action points from the conference. What are the key findings?
Facilitated group discussion (30 minutes)

12.30 - 13.00 Lunch