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SITTING DAYS—2015

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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 Griffths Hall MP and Ms Joanne Catherine Ryan MP

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## Members of the House of Representatives

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<td>Denison, TAS</td>
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<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>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
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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

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Clerk of the House of Representatives—D Elder
Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—C Mills
Parliamentary Budget Officer—P Bowen
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Eric Abetz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>The Hon. Jamie Briggs MP</td>
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<td>The Hon. Julie Bishop MP</td>
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<td>The Hon. Steven Ciobo MP</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>The Hon. Joshua Frydenberg MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer</strong></td>
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<td>The Hon. Barnaby Joyce 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><strong>Minister for Sport</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Health</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Senator the Hon Jacinta Collins</td>
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<td>Hon Michael Danby MP</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Hon Matt Thistlethwaite MP</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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The SPEAKER (Hon. Bronwyn Bishop) took the chair at 10 am, made an acknowledgement of country and read prayers.

PETITIONS

Responses

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

Racial Discrimination Act 1975

Dear Dr Jensen

The Government is deeply committed to its freedom agenda, which includes advancing measures to protect freedom of speech, freedom of religion and other traditional rights and liberties.

Following consultation on the Government's proposed changes to the Act, the Government decided that the twin goals of protecting the community and social harmony, in the context of the current national security threat, should take priority over all other considerations. Therefore, the Prime Minister announced on 5 August 2014, that the Government will not be proceeding with the proposed amendments to section 18C of the Act.

The fundamental priority of every government is to keep our nation safe. The Government is working closely with the community to combat radicalisation and extremism through the promotion of acceptance, tolerance and social inclusion.

The Government believes in an Australia where everyone is free to speak their mind, where rights are accompanied by responsibilities, where there is absolutely no place for racism, and where all our citizens live in a harmonious and mutually respectful society. Our policies will always be designed to secure those objectives.

Thank you again for writing on this matter.

From the Attorney-General, Mr George Brandis

Religious Pilgrimages

Dear Dr Jensen
Thank you for your letter dated 1 December 2014 concerning a petition received by the Standing Committee on Petitions about a request regarding the Counter-Terrorism Legislation Amendment (Foreign Fighters) Act 2014 from the Panjtan Society of Victoria. The petition expresses concerns that, in the event additional areas are declared for the purposes of the new declared areas offence at section 119.2 of the Criminal Code Act 1995, individuals who travel to certain areas in Iraq to perform pilgrimages will be committing a criminal offence.

The Australian Government is firmly of the view that the new declared area offence as drafted, with an exclusive list of legitimate purposes, achieves the underlying policy intention of deterring Australians from travelling to, or remaining in, areas where terrorist organisations are engaging in hostile activities.

By prohibiting individuals travelling to areas where terrorist organisations are known to be engaging in hostile activities, this offence responds to the significant threat to Australia and our way of life from returning foreign fighters and supporters of foreign conflicts. The Australian Government also has grave
concerns for Australians who travel to these highly dangerous areas as doing so is putting themselves at serious risk.

On 4 December 2014, the Minister for Foreign Affairs declared al-Raqqa Province in Syria as an area where a listed terrorist organisation, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISM), is engaging in hostile activity. Al-Raqqa is effectively ISIL's headquarters from where it is engaging in significant hostile activities, including the murder of opponents, the rape and enslavement of women, and the intimidation and subjugation of the civilian population to their brutal control. From 5 December 2014, it became a criminal offence to intentionally enter or remain in al-Raqqa province where the person is reckless that it is a declared area. The Government is considering whether other areas meet the criteria set out in the legislation.

As the declaration imposes a significant penalty on a person who intentionally enters or remains in a declared area without a legitimate purpose, the Government will consider each proposed area carefully.

The Government is aware of Australian interests in parts of Syria and Iraq, including the significance of the Shi'a Muslim holy pilgrimage sites of Karbala, Najaf, Kazmain, Kufa and Sammara in Iraq, and will consult as necessary with the community, business and foreign governments if they are likely to be impacted by a declaration.

The Government has made the Protocol for declaring an area available on the Australian National Security website (<www.nationalsecurity.gov.au>). The Protocol provides the public with information about the process by which an area is declared including information about the legislative test for declaring an area and the non-legislative factors that may guide the selection of an area. Non-legislative factors include links to Australia and Australians, threats to Australian interests including the role of a particular area in the radicalisation of Australians and likely repercussions in Australia, and the enduring nature of the listed terrorist organisation's hostile activity in the area.

I also note that the legislation provides flexibility and allows the Attorney-General to proscribe by regulation another legitimate purpose should it ever become apparent that another purpose should be available as a defence to the declared area offence.

I hope this information is of assistance.

From the Attorney-General, Mr George Brandis

**Statements**

**Dr JENSEN (Tangney) (10:01):** As Chair of the Petitions Committee, in my last statement I discussed the role and origins of the Petitions Committee. Today, I will discuss the petitions that are considered by the Petitions Committee but, for one reason or another, are not able to be presented in the House. As you know, House standing order 204 sets out rules for the form and content of petitions. Unfortunately, not all petitions meet these requirements, and as a result some cannot be presented in the House as petitions. An important part of the committee's role is to examine petitions and certify they meet the rules for petitioning the House.

When a petition is found not to meet the requirements, it does not receive the same treatment as a petition that is found to be in order. These non-compliant petitions are not presented in the House as petitions and they are not referred to the responsible minister. This in turn means that these petitions may not be brought to the attention of the relevant decision makers and that the petitioners are unlikely to receive a ministerial response to their request.

One of the most common mistakes petitioners make relates to the way the petition is addressed. Standing order 204(a) requires petitions to be addressed to the House. Accordingly, petitions should not be addressed to a member, minister or to the Australian
government more generally. The traditional and most common form of words for the address is: 'To the honourable the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives'.

Similarly, standing order 204(a) requires that petitions make a request of the House. The most common form of words preceding requests in petitions is: 'We therefore ask the House to'. Unfortunately, some petitions instead ask the Australian government or a specific minister to take a specific action. In these cases, the petition is deemed non-compliant and cannot be presented as a petition, even if it is addressed to the House correctly.

A number of petitioners make the mistake directing their petition to the wrong legislature. Standing order 204(a) requires that all petitions to the House must be on issues which are the responsibility of the federal government rather than state or local government. The House cannot take actions outside its jurisdiction and I would advise any potential petitioners to check carefully that they are directing their petition to the correct level of government.

Another common mistake petitioners make is sending electronically gathered signatures to the committee for consideration. Standing order 205(b) requires that signatures be handwritten originals, and thus they cannot be electronic, copied, scanned or emailed. A principal petitioner must submit a hard copy with the original handwritten signatures in order to meet this requirement. When drafting their petitions, principal petitioners should also be careful that they are not promoting illegal acts and that the language used in the petition is appropriate.

The Petitions Committee provides a range of materials to help potential petitioners to effectively navigate the requirements for petitions to the House. For example, the committee's web page contains an explanation of the relevant standing orders, a template petition and copies of petitions previously presented in the House. In addition to these resources, the web page contains contact details for the committee secretariat, which can provide advice on draft petitions and the petitions process more generally. A recent addition to the committee web page is a short video on petitioning, in which I discuss the standing order requirements and provide further information on what happens to petitions once they are presented in the House.

In addition to the webpage, the committee provides pamphlets and brochures on petitioning the House. I encourage all potential petitioners to contact their local member, visit the web page or contact the committee secretariat before they commence gathering signatures. This will help to ensure that their petition attracts the full range of benefits that petitioning the House can bring.

As you can see, there are a range of resources available to the Australian public on petitioning the House. The committee works to ensure that as many Australians as possible have access to this information. Petitions are an excellent way for this House and its members to keep informed of the issues affecting the Australian community, and it is in everyone's interests that as many petitions as possible are found to meet requirements, presented in the House and referred to the relevant decision makers for consideration.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Small Business

Mr LAUDY (Reid) (10:07): I move:
That this House:

(1) acknowledges that:
   (a) small and medium businesses are the engine room of the Australian economy and employment;
   (b) an effective infrastructure network is essential for small businesses to survive and flourish; and
   (c) investment in improved infrastructure benefits small businesses through economic growth and job creation, and provides a boost to local and regional economies; and

(2) supports the Government in prioritising infrastructure investment to help small businesses grow and continue their vital contribution to the Australian economy.

The SPEAKER: Is the motion seconded?

Mr Ciobo: Yes.

The SPEAKER: I take it you are reserving your right to speak?

Mr Ciobo: I am.

Mr LAUNDY: I thank the parliamentary secretary for seconding this motion. I speak often in this place about the value and importance of small and family businesses and the role they play in our economy. Today is another example of that, with this motion. I often say that I am a proud third generation Western Sydney publican, and I will go back to being that when the people of Reid see fit. But I know the frustrations, and one of my motivations in turning my back on my career for a while and doing this—and I do not consider this a job for me; I had a job and I can go back to it at any stage; I am lucky—is the chance to make a little bit of a difference. This is one of the areas that I try to do that in whenever I can.

One of the criticisms I always had outside of this place, before election, was the fact that this chamber and this parliament do not understand small and family business well enough. This motion today is a good example. It is often said that the Liberal Party is the party of small and family business and that the Labor Party is the party of the worker. I want to try and debunk that myth a little bit today, because I know from my 23 years in my family’s business that the most valuable asset we have today is our staff—always has been, always will be. My grandfather taught my father that and my father taught me. I note that, of our five speakers following me today, Craig Kelly comes from a small and family business background; Nola Marino is a dairy farmer, a family business person; and Andrew Broad, the member for Mallee, is another farmer and family business person. Yes we are, and we should be, the party of small business but small- and medium-sized business in this country employs, as at the 2011 census, 70 per cent of the workforce. That is why it is important that we as a party and as a government not only understand small business but do all we can to foster it so that people can continue to take on bank debt, back themselves, and employ people in an environment and an economy in which they have certainty.

We talk about jobs created and jobs lost. It is important to note that if people who run a small and family business lose their job they most probably lose their home. They take on bank debt using their home as an asset to secure it—and then they employ people. One of the biggest problems we had—a hidden problem—coming out of the GFC was the casualisation of our workforce. That is not spoken about enough. Small and family business operators in that uncertain period moved permanent staff into a casual capacity, and they did it to give themselves the flexibility of reducing staff when they needed to and working more themselves. What came next was truly abhorrent—the carbon tax. This crept into every line
item in the profit and loss statement of every business in Australia, irrespective of size, but it was particularly troublesome for local small businesses in my electorate. The butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker will tell you that what happened was that the business operator either worked more hours themselves and decreased their staff numbers or reduced the hours that they operated—they closed on Saturdays, Sundays, public holidays and what have you. The spinoff of this is a decrease in casual labour opportunities. We often talk in this place about youth unemployment. Here is the kicker: casual work is where our youth most often find their start. Whilst they leave school and move into trade training or university, a casual job is what they do to keep living and getting out of the hair of their parents. As I said in my maiden speech, most people who stand up in this place who come from a family business background talk about their first job being in the family business. I am no different.

My major frustration pre-politics—I guess it continues today—is that time and time again those opposite stand up and argue to be for the worker when they quite clearly do not have an understanding that if you are for the worker you are for small and family business. In 2000 Kim Beazley famously said:

We have never pretended to be a small business party. The Labor Party has never pretended that.

In 2006 Craig Emerson said:

Labor, as a party, was born of the trade union movement. We are proud of our bonds with the trade union movement …

During the six years we had of Labor government, we had a litany of small business ministers that did not have any history in small business themselves, and it was not even a cabinet role. The first thing the Prime Minister did when we moved to the government benches was to make, as was our pre-election commitment, the Minister for Small Business, the Hon. Bruce Billson, a member of his cabinet team—as that minister should be, given the significance of the employment opportunities provided by small business. Even today the trade union movement is arguing for holiday and sick pay for casual employees. This is a false argument, and it is frustrating. I know that in hotels permanent workers earn $18.64 an hour. As casuals they earn $23.30. The holiday pay, the sick pay and the leave pay is factored into the increased casual rate. For Ged Kearney and her mates at the ACTU to argue differently is dishonest and deceitful. Any move to do this will put further pressure on local businesses in Reid, and it must be resisted—as we are resisting it—on behalf of businesses given that that is where 70 per cent of the jobs in this economy are created.

The Abbott government have already moved to do a lot, but there is a lot more to do. We made a heap of promises pre-election, which we are starting to deliver. We appointed a dedicated small business minister in cabinet, which I have already alluded to. We abolished the carbon tax, which most definitely gives the businesses in Reid a chance to be a lot more competitive and employ more people. The Hon. Josh Frydenberg, now Assistant Treasurer, in his time as Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister led the charge to reduce red and green tape—$2 billion, although our promise pre-election was $1 billion, we have delivered more than twice that in our first 16 months in government, but there is a lot more to do. If you look at the employment in this sector under the six years of the Labor government and you want to see what the impact of their policy decisions were, there were 519,000 jobs that went missing in the small business category. That is about 1,600 a week.
Minister Billson has worked hard on reforming the national franchising code. Once again, a logical place, franchising, where people make the move from employee to employer, but they need certainty in legislation and Minister Billson is delivering on this. The competition policy review: the government has taken important steps towards ensuring that the competition framework is effective for all businesses by undertaking an independent root and branch review, and there will be more announced on this as we proceed in government. The Japanese and Korean free trade agreements came into effect in December and January; China's will come into effect later in the year. These are amazing opportunities for small and family businesses to reach out to the other side of the world and deliver products and services and create jobs. We have established a $482 million Entrepreneurs' Infrastructure Program. There is the infrastructure in Western Sydney, the hard capital infrastructure, with Premier Baird; the second Sydney airport, the 35,000 jobs that this will create. The road infrastructure with WestConnex, which is the most important piece of transport infrastructure to be delivered, will make a massive difference in the lives of all within Reid and unlock Parramatta Road for them.

We can never talk in this place about the role that small and family business plays enough. We should not only do so at every opportunity but we should also understand that it is the major economic driver—always has been, always will be—of our economy. We should aim policy to help improve the lives of not only those in the business but also the lives of those that they employ. I commend this motion to the House.

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (10:18): Like the member for Reid, I would like to debunk a few myths in this House as well, particularly the one that the Liberal Party is the government of small business. If it was, I am sure the member for Reid would have spent more time talking about the actual achievements of the government in relation to small business, rather than a large amount of time on the very nice statements that we all support small business. He also spent a relatively large amount of time bagging the Labor Party, as the government seems like to do more than anything else—rather than deliver, just bag us; it seems to be the answer to everything at the moment—and he then talked about some of the promises they made. He seemed hardly able to talk about any actual policies delivered to small business, so it is not surprising that when you look at how business is actually feeling under this government, it does not match with the rhetoric of this government being a 'government for small business'.

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry recently did its major small business survey for 2014 and it found the index of expected economic performance fell markedly for the fourth consecutive quarter and has now been below a 50 reading for three quarters in a row. It also revealed that small business is expecting future decreases in profit. Again, for a government that claims to be about small business, small business is not feeling the love at the moment. When you look at the issues of concern to small business, it tells a completely different story to the one we just heard from the member for Reid. Business taxes and government charges returned to the No. 1 constraint on small business under this government. After being replaced by insufficient demand for one quarter, taxes and government charges issue is back on top. Insufficient demand has steadily gained in importance since 2012, and suggests tepid demand is limiting the ability of small businesses to grow in 2014. Import competition gained in importance as a business constraint, moving from fifth to third. Perhaps some of the free trade agreements that the government spruiks as so good, but about which we
still have not heard the detail and if they were that good I would suggest that we might know the detail—but import competition has risen up the scale from fifth to third as an issue of concern to business. Nonwage labour costs jumped from eighth to fourth place, and a federal government regulations returned to the top 10, in fifth place, despite the rhetoric that this government spruiks on a daily basis about reducing red tape costs. The way that business is experiencing this government, as demonstrated by this survey, is in complete contrast to the rhetoric of this government about what it is doing for small business.

Let us have a look at why small business might not be feeling the love from this government. Let us look at what they have done for small business—and I use the word 'done' rather than 'achieved' because most of it is not positive. One of the first things they did was to abolish the instant asset write-off, along with a number of other tax benefits they abolished. There was a tax hike for small business of over $4 billion delivered in the first year of this government. The largest chunk of that came from the repeal of the instant tax write-off, which was $2.9 billion in assistance to small business—$2.9 billion gone in that first year. Not only was it gone, but it was gone in the most incompetent of ways. On 31 December 2013, when the government was planning on abolishing this from 1 July 2013—so it was within the term of the last government; they were introducing retrospective legislation that reached back into a previous term of government—the tax office website still said it was there. It still said that the instant tax write-off was available on 31 December. Businesses found out more than halfway through a financial year that the tax law that they thought applied actually did not. There were many businesses in my area caught unawares and that found themselves with a tax liability they were not expecting—$2.9 billion across the sector.

The government also repealed the loss carry-back. Again, on 31 December 2013 the tax office said it was still there and it was actually going to be increased for the next financial year, but in fact the legislation was before the parliament to abolish it from 1 July the preceding year. So, again, businesses not only lost $950 million through this tax hike but many of them also did not even know it was coming. They made business decisions throughout the 2013-14 year based on the perfectly good assumption that the tax law would apply, because it was there, up on the tax office website, only to find that this government had reached back into the term of the preceding government and abolished it.

There was $445 million over the forward estimates in assistance for small business through the special depreciation rules for motor vehicles that was also abolished. The Abbott government slashed the previous Labor government's $1 billion investment in innovation to $342 million. So $650-odd million in innovation and research programs was slashed by this government, despite 21,000 small- to medium-sized enterprises around Australia benefitting from that program. The Labor government had introduced quarterly payments for R&D, and this government also abolished those retrospectively. Again, companies that thought they would be receiving their R&D benefits on a quarterly basis suddenly found they had reverted back to annual payments—an incredible difficulty for the cash flow of small business.

This is from a government that claims to be in favour of small business; it claims to be the government for small business. All of the speakers on that side have proudly said today that they all come from small businesses. If they come from small businesses, then you would expect them to understand the importance of certainty. They certainly talk about certainty, but they certainly do not deliver it. There were $4 billion in tax hikes for small business in the
first year of this government, but done with absolutely incompetent implementation so that businesses did not even know that the decisions they were making today would be made invalid tomorrow through changes to the tax law. It is really quite extraordinary.

Then, of course, let's look at what the government has done to the NBN. We had a plan in place to deliver high-speed broadband across Australia. I was in a small town called Bemboka a couple of years ago, trying to buy some beautiful coffee cups from an art gallery there. The poor business owner. I say 'the poor business owner' because I could not believe what he was going through. He was using dial-up. He took half an hour to take my credit card transaction because it kept cutting out, and eventually he went and stood in the middle of a field where he knew he could get a signal in order to take my money. If I had not understood that this appalling circumstance of keeping your customer waiting for half an hour just to take their money was absolutely not his fault, if I were not feeling really sorry for him at that time, I probably would have walked out. I doubt that I would stand in a city business and wait half an hour to pay, but in this case I did.

What is the government doing for this business—laying fibre to up the road and copper to his gallery, a kilometre from the main road? How on earth can we expect Australian businesses to thrive with the third-rate 'fraudband' that this government is delivering? My electorate of Parramatta is the second CBD. Western Sydney is the fourth largest economy in Australia and Parramatta is the capital of it. It is considered to be the second CBD. We have a government that is committed to delivering 25 megabits per second by the end of its first term, which is a year and a half away, but Parramatta is not even on the list at the moment. It was on the list. There were supposed to be 62,000 houses receiving fibre to the home during this term of government. It has been removed. Parramatta has been moved down the list or it is not on the list at all. So nothing is going to happen in Parramatta between now and the next election.

I can tell you, because I have surveyed my electorate, that the average speed in Westmead, for example, is 8.5 megabits per second on download and less than one on upload. In Northmead, which is a 10 minute drive from the CBD, the average is 10.5. In Carlingford it is 10.2. The fastest is in Parramatta, which is the second CBD, at 20. How on earth can this government even deliver its second-rate 'fraudband' before the next election, in the timetable it promised, if it is not even coming into areas like Parramatta and delivering high-speed broadband for the second CBD? How does this government expect small business in Parramatta to flourish in an international economy, with all of the opportunities for delivering services across our region to the north, if it cannot even keep its promise for a second-rate 'fraudband' of 25 megabits? Is this for small business? I do not think so.

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (10:28): It gives me great pleasure to rise to speak on the motion moved by my good friend the member for Reid on small business. But before I do I would like to pick up on a few points the member for Parramatta mentioned. She talked about how Labor was 'feeling the love' for small business. Let's go through how the previous Labor government shared the love with small business. We had no fewer than six separate ministers for small business—a revolving rotisserie. We had the good Dr Emerson, the good Senator Sherry, the good Senator Arbib and current members of the opposition: the members for Gorton, McMahon and Brand. All had their turn at being small business minister, and what did they achieve by 'sharing the love'?
Let's just have a look at their record over the six years. Despite the population growing and the economy growing, under those six small business ministers we had 3,000 fewer small businesses employing people. If we look at the number of people that small business employed under the previous Labor regime, there were 420,000 fewer. That is over 420,000 people who were previously employed in small business. Under the 'shared love' of the previous Labor government, there were 420,000 fewer.

In fact, I am sure many of these small business ministers misunderstood what their job was, because they achieved making the small business sector of our society smaller. Before they came to office the small business sector represented 53 per cent of the economy. After six years of disastrous policy, that number decreased from 53 per cent to 45 per cent. There are 420,000 fewer people employed. There are 3,000 fewer small businesses employing people. What a tragic, disastrous and appalling record.

The reason is that, unfortunately, the Labor Party simply do not get it. They simply do not understand small business because they have never been involved in it or worked in it themselves. It is small business that is the true driver of the economy. It is small business that creates the innovation. It is small business that is the job creator of this nation. That is why governments must get off the back of small business. We must reduce the amount of red tape, which is exactly what we are doing. It is the only way that we are going to get out of the mess that we have inherited, the legacy of the six years of the Labor government, the current reason we are spending 10 per cent more than what we are getting in income. The only way we are going to get out of that mess is through innovation and investment by small business. That is the only way.

That brings me onto the second point of the motion moved by the member for Reid where he talks about improved infrastructure. That is one of the things this government is doing. I look at my city and what we have already seen—the doubling and widening of the M5 through the East Hills and Bankstown area. That makes moving and delivering goods through south-west Sydney so much quicker for small business. We have seen, if re-elected, the New South Wales government's infrastructure plans to greatly improve New South Wales. There is the WestConnex project which is so vital to our small business community to enable small business to get around Sydney.

But what do we have promised from the Labor Party? We know that if a New South Wales Labor government ever came into existence their promise is to tear up, scrap and cancel those infrastructure projects so desperately needed for Western Sydney. Imagine a government having an election campaign promising to cancel infrastructure projects. That is what we have with New South Wales Labor. They plan to cancel parts of the WestConnex project. This would be an absolute disaster if it were ever allowed to happen. It would be a disaster for small business.

This government is getting on with making it easier for small business to get on with work and get on with employing people. It is not an easy task after the legacy of mess, debt and deficit that we have inherited, but we are getting on with the job. The most important thing we can do is in the area of competition policy and price discrimination. I look forward to our root-and-branch review being tabled— *(Time expired)*

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (10:33): I look curiously at these motions put up by the Liberal Party and I wonder why it is they need to remind themselves that small businesses and
medium businesses are the engine room of the economy. Then when Liberal Party members get a chance to speak, they come in here and double their attack on the Labor budget rather than talk about what they have actually done for small business, which of course is very, very little. The only great big thing they have done for small business is take away, cut, defund and remove assistance programs, tax assistance, asset-building assistance and depreciation pools. That is what they have done for small business. If you listen carefully to what the Liberal Party members say on small business, they say, 'Let's attack Labor and that'll be enough.' The best thing the Liberals think they can do for small business is double the attack on Labor's budget. I think there is a little bit more to it than that. I think you have to deliver something concrete and real. You have to deliver it with funding. You have to do anything with real numbers.

Also, I am very interested in the way the Liberal Party always says that there were these hundreds of thousands of jobs lost in small business at the same time that unemployment under Labor was going up. But now under their watch unemployment has gone to a record of 6.4 per cent, a devastatingly high number. It is much, much higher for young people. Under their watch, they claim somehow they are doing more for small business, but unemployment is getting higher. Those are the real numbers. The last time unemployment was this high was 2002, and guess who was the employment minister. You bet you know it: Tony Abbott.

But, if there is one overarching responsibility that any government has towards small business, the economy and ordinary Australians, it is to at least keep confidence neutral. I would say their job is actually to lift the confidence of consumers and small business so that businesses can get on with the job they are doing, which is to employ people, to innovate, to do things, to invest in their own businesses.

But not only do they take away the physical means by which small business can do that, by taking away billions of dollars of direct assistance to small business; they then have a Treasurer who thinks the best way to increase confidence in Australia is to continually tell everyone that our economy is stuffed and that we are going to be like Greece very shortly. That has to instil a lot of confidence in small business! As I talk to small business, as I know the Liberal Party do, I listen to them, and what do they say to me? They say: 'Gee, our confidence is low. I was thinking about putting someone on, but I'm really scared.' What are they scared of? They are scared of us somehow turning into Greece, because the Treasurer of the country keeps telling them that is going to be the case.

So, when it comes to real investment, it ain't there. If they had just frozen the money, I would have a complaint about it. I reckon that would be bad enough. But they took the money away—billions of dollars. They took away the direct assistance. They smashed confidence.

There was a poll just recently, a really important one on the government. Consumer polls, as we know—the regular Newspolls that you get and all the rest of it—give a clear indication that the community does not like this government. They do not like the Liberal government. They do not like Tony Abbott. They just do not like this government. I think that polling has been consistent and clear for a while. But then there was another regular poll of business in this country, and business confidence is at a smashing all-time low. There has just never been this little confidence. I remember prior to the election Tony Abbott made a solemn promise, hand on heart: there would be a shot in the arm for confidence in our economy. What has
happened since is that every measure of confidence has fallen off the table. It is one thing to say you are going to boost confidence, but you actually have to do something about it.

But there was an even more interesting poll taken very recently—one inside the Liberal Party, in the dark rooms of the Liberal Party itself, all the guys and girls sitting over there. They had a little poll in their caucus room. They excluded half their caucus from having a vote to start with, but of the half that were allowed a vote—the backbench—60 per cent voted against their leader, Tony Abbott, the Prime Minister, because they have no confidence either. They have lost hope. When you lose hope in your leader, things do not look too good.

So when I see this motion here before us, which talks about the engine room of the economy and employing people, I think: ‘What a lot of pollywaffle from these guys.’ Do something about the confidence in your own party room, for a start. Do something about the confidence of big business and small business. Do something about confidence in the economy. Start putting some real funds back into small business to help them make employment choices, to help them buy equipment and assets. Actually do something, like Labor did. We did it through the toughest economic times, through a global financial crisis, because that was the right thing to do by the economy—to make sure that small business kept employing people. The best thing you can ever do for the economy is make sure people have a job. *(Time expired)*

**Mrs McNAMARA (Dobell) (10:38):** The member for Reid is absolutely correct in saying that small and medium businesses are the engine room of the Australian economy and employment. Since my election I have worked hard to represent the 8,500 businesses in Dobell who each employ between one and 20 people. Many of our local businesses are family operated and are looking for opportunities to grow and generate further employment. Collectively, these businesses are Dobell’s largest employer and are crucial to the livelihood of our local residents.

This government understands that small businesses must be supported by an effective infrastructure network. Without this support, businesses become uncompetitive, stagnate and lack opportunity to increase the number of jobs they provide to the local community. Investing in productivity-boosting infrastructure delivers many benefits to small businesses, which in turn boost economic growth and job creation.

In regions such as the Central Coast, this is the main driver of economic growth and the development of a stronger job market. The Central Coast is attractive to businesses seeking a location that offers available greenfield employment land, lower costs of doing business, affordable commercial rent relative to Sydney, and ideal logistical access, located midway between Sydney and Newcastle.

My focus, as the member for Dobell, is to deliver productivity boosting infrastructure to the Central Coast. This is why I have advocated for business priority access to the National Broadband Network. The former Labor government’s lack of consideration of Central Coast business needs in the original NBN rollout was inexcusable, particularly in regions such as the Central Coast, where infrastructure struggles to keep pace with a rapidly growing population. By delivering infrastructure, such as high speed broadband, local businesses will have the capacity to increase their productivity, grow and, in turn, create more jobs.
There should be no doubt whatsoever that this government is committed to delivering better infrastructure, and, in turn, creating more jobs for the Central Coast. Last month I welcomed the Hon. Jamie Briggs MP, the Assistant Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development, to announce the commencement of the construction on the $3 billion NorthConnex—the long-awaited missing link between the M1 Pacific Motorway and the M2 motorway. NorthConnex will offer opportunities for local businesses and will engage with them throughout construction. A local business register will be established to advertise the 7,500 jobs that will be created during the construction phase alone, with another 1,200 jobs directly created by this project. These jobs will be a huge boost for our local economy, which has seen significant change over recent years.

The Central Coast evolved from a quiet weekend getaway destination for Sydneysiders into one of Australia's fastest growing regions. In Dobell, close to 1,000 businesses specialise in retail and hospitality. These businesses are highly dependent on the summer holiday period as, during that period, they do much of their trade. Our challenge is to expand tourism across the year by offering opportunities to encourage more people to visit the Central Coast and, in turn, support our local economy. Projects such as the Tuggerah sports precinct will have significant benefits for local small businesses within the tourism, hospitality and retail sectors. My vision for the Central Coast to become the sports tourism capital of New South Wales extends well beyond the playing fields. This government's investment of $1 million to commence the necessary studies to develop this $30 million facility signals our commitment to delivering infrastructure that will produce economic benefits. In addition to boosting sports tourism by enabling the Central Coast to host regional, state, national and international sporting events, the development of this venue will boost our local hospitality and retail sectors.

This government is further boosting local tourism by delivering funds to upgrade the Norah Head boat ramp. Again, this is a vital piece of economic infrastructure. It is the only sea access boat ramp in Dobell and essential to encouraging tourists to visit our magnificent coastline. Sadly, the ramp had fallen into disrepair, meaning that locals and tourists alike were unable to take advantage of some of our best natural assets. This project is now close to completion with funding from this government. Projects such as the NBN, NorthConnex, the Tuggerah sports precinct and Norah Head boat ramp are examples of this government getting on and delivering world-class infrastructure to grow regional economies, such as the Central Coast's.

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (10:43): Like many on this side of the chamber, I am scratching my head about the member for Reid's motion. I am pleased to speak about the benefits of investing in infrastructure for small and medium businesses and I thank, in a way, the member for Reid for his motion. I agree with him, as we all do on this side of the House, about the critical role small to medium businesses play in Australia's economy and the critical role of investment in infrastructure to achieving success for those small to medium businesses.

I understand the challenges that small businesses face as I ran my own microbusiness for 10 years. Since entering parliament, I have established the Parliamentary Friends for Small Business and microbusiness. I am acutely aware of the key role small and medium businesses play in the Australian economy, and the support and recognition needed from government and
from parliament. Small businesses employ more than five million Australians and contribute almost 50 per cent of private sector employment. At a time when unemployment is substantially increasing, it is critical that this House acknowledges the important role small to medium businesses can play in turning this trend.

In January, the national unemployment rate hit 6.4 per cent, which is the highest rate the country has seen since 2002. Nationally, 800,000 people have been left out of work, the highest number since 1994. The numbers are no better here in the ACT, where federal government funding cuts have driven unemployment to its highest rate since 2001. That has had a huge knock-on effect on small and medium businesses. We have essentially 50 per cent public sector employment in this town and 50 per cent private sector employment. The public and private sectors are interdependent, so if you get rid of 16,500 public servants—8,500 here in Canberra—that is going to have a huge effect on small and medium businesses in this city. I know from my business 'walkarounds' and talking to businesses that they are doing it tough. They are expecting that these tough times are going to last for some time. It has essentially been since the Abbott government was elected that small and medium businesses in Canberra have been doing it very, very tough.

Labor have a proven record of maintaining strong levels of employment. In the midst of the biggest financial crisis since the great depression, we created almost one million jobs, an increase of 10 per cent in total jobs. We know that the best way to keep up a strong economy is to keep people working. Keeping people in jobs is one of our core values.

Labor also acknowledge the key role investment in infrastructure can play in encouraging growth and prosperity amongst small and medium businesses. That is why in 2008 we created Infrastructure Australia, the first attempt in this nation to apply an evidence based approach to infrastructure. Infrastructure Australia's job is to advise the government about infrastructure projects competing for public funding. It aims to give a long-term approach to infrastructure funding, looking past the short-term political cycle.

We lifted annual per capita spending on infrastructure from $132 per person a year in 2007 to $225 in 2013. The results speak for themselves. When we won the election, Australia was 20th in the OECD for infrastructure investment as a proportion of GDP. When we lost in 2013, Australia was No. 1. We are now seeing the fruits of some of the former Labor government's infrastructure funding here in Canberra with the near completion of the Majura Parkway. The highway will allow tens of thousands of trucks to avoid the city of Canberra and it will link up both sides of the city. As a result, those trucks will be able to travel on the new parkway to the east of the city. These types of investments are crucial in providing small and medium businesses with the roads, railways, ports, electricity generators and water supplies needed to promote growth and prosperity.

Despite the Prime Minister describing himself as the 'infrastructure Prime Minister', the government is moving away from the Infrastructure Australia model. Doing that is just madness. Labor is serious about providing investment in infrastructure support to small and medium businesses. We understand the vital importance of having the right infrastructure in place to ensure success for small and medium businesses. Without that, it is not possible. We have heard from my colleague here about the challenges of that poor soul running a business with no decent telecommunications connection. It is vital— *(Time expired)*
Ms MARINO (Forrest—Government Whip) (10:48): I commend the member for Reid for this motion. I think there are no truer words than the first line in his motion that 'small and medium businesses are the engine room of the Australian economy and employment'. We in rural and regional Australia understand this particularly well given that so many small businesses are the ones that keep our small rural and regional communities operating. They are also the businesses that support local community service organisations, emergency service organisations and sporting clubs. They are the people who contribute prizes, donations or in-kind support. It is always our small businesses that are the ones providing an enormous amount of support. They are the heart and soul of the Australian economy.

Of the over two million actively trading businesses in Australia, almost 96 per cent are small businesses and 3.8 per cent are medium businesses. Small and medium businesses combined employ 70 per cent of the nation's private sector workers or 59 per cent of all Australian workers. Small businesses alone—those with fewer than 20 employees—account for 46 per cent of all Australia's workers in the private sector. That is close to half of all the workers in Australia. This is why small business is so important to the coalition government and why we have made many moves to make life easier for small business.

I also want to use my time to recognise the absolute passion that the member for Dunkley, the Minister for Small Business in cabinet, has for this particular portfolio. He has been consistent in this role, starting as the shadow minister, and has taken on some very tough issues for small business in Australia. I commend him for his efforts. From our point of view, taking such a serious approach to small business as having a small business minister in cabinet shows the dedication we have. That was after a succession of small business ministers in the previous government—I cannot recall whether it was five or six.

But we do have an enthusiastic and very dedicated small business minister and he is delivering a new way for small business to interact with the Commonwealth, transitioning the Small Business Commissioner into the Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman, with real powers. The minister has set up a new unit to provide specialist advice on contracts and to ensure small businesses are not at a disadvantage in Commonwealth departments' tendering and procurement processes. These are practical outcomes. Of course, the government has allocated $2.8 million over four years to deliver on this important commitment, which will help small businesses access Commonwealth contracts.

The government has also reduced the compliance burden that employers face—one of the real issues we hear constantly from small businesses when they are making superannuation contributions for their workers—by having the Australian Taxation Office take over the running of the Small Business Superannuation Clearing House. Another step has been to ensure small business people who call the Fair Work Ombudsman receive priority service, with reduced waiting times.

We will undertake the first comprehensive review of competition laws and policy in more than 20 years. I spoke about the commitment of the small business minister taking on the tough issues, and this is one of them. There is always more to do and we need to build a platform small businesses can use to succeed. Of course, that is based around infrastructure. This government is the infrastructure government, and small business needs us to successfully deliver. Small businesses need to be able to get their raw materials or inputs to their premises in a fast and efficient manner and they need to be able to get their final product out equally
efficiently. Good transport infrastructure is vital, especially for small businesses whose products are exported, and there are many of those, particularly in Western Australia.

They also need access to secure power supplies at a reasonable and competitive cost. For Australian businesses to compete in the future, our focus is definitely on competitive power prices. We need IT infrastructure, and this government's plan for broadband has a strong focus on regional internet access for small businesses. The hollow internet promises of Labor have been exposed and we now have a realistic proposal for broadband into the future.

Ms O’NEIL (Hotham) (10:53): Like much of what the member for Reid says, there is actually very little in the motion today that I can stand to disagree with. Essentially what we have here is a series of statements of fact about how important small businesses are and how important infrastructure is to them. I think the open question for us today is the extent to which the Abbott government is living up to the high standards that the member for Reid has set for it, and I will go into some of the detail there.

But can I start by saying that of course Labor shares the belief that small businesses are the engine room of the Australian economy. All of us in this House have thousands and thousands of small businesses operating in our electorates. In my electorate of Hotham, we have more than 5,000 businesses operating, from accountants to grocery stores, online retailers to small manufacturers. These are the people who keep our local community in Hotham humming.

At a national level, we are all familiar with the statistics. We know that there are more than two million small and medium enterprises that are actively trading today. Those organisations employ more than half of the people of Australia who work today. These numbers are definitely worth celebrating. They are an indicator of the inventiveness and the creativity of Australians out there. Small business is about people in Australia, normal people, who have a great idea and have some get up and go and it is about ordinary working people owning capital. There is nothing that is more consistent with Labor’s vision for the Australian economy than supporting these small businesses and helping them to be as large and as successful as they can be.

Critically, we do not just talk the talk on small business; we walk the walk. We have a very proud record specifically in this area of small business policy. I will go through some of those key reforms but I want to leave those remarks to the end, because the central thrust of the discussion that the member for Reid has instigated today is about infrastructure. I say with great respect to my good friend the member for Reid that, if he is wanting to go after Labor in a policy, then he is barking up the wrong tree by picking infrastructure. We are so proud of our record on infrastructure under the Rudd and Gillard government, and we are happy to defend that record in this parliament or in any forum that the member for Reid may choose.

When we look at the plethora of policy issues on which there is a gaping chasm between the rhetoric of the Abbott government and the action of the Abbott government, it is infrastructure where we see one of the really good examples of this. Since becoming Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, the Prime Minister, has told us many times that he wants to be known as the infrastructure Prime Minister. But the simple reality is that, when Labor came to power, against every OECD country, we were ranked 20th in the per cent of our GDP that was being spent on these crucial infrastructure investments and, when Labor left office in 2013, we were ranked first out of every OECD country. In the 2010-11 budget, Labor invested $51 billion in infrastructure projects, and the crystal clear message that I want those in the gallery and those
at home to take away today is that there is not one additional dollar going towards infrastructure investment that has been committed by this Abbott government.

Recently, the Prime Minister conducted this charade tour around Australia where he set about reannouncing a series of projects that Labor announced and Labor planned and Labor funded. Our guy, the member for Grayndler—who many in this country would say is the best infrastructure minister we have ever had in Australia—has called this the ‘magical infrastructure reannouncement tour’. And it is not just Labor people who are pointing out this big chasm between the rhetoric and the reality. I will not go through the quotes but there is a terrific article in the *Australian* by Peter Van Onselen, who is of course a Liberal Party commentator. He says that really this is an area where the coalition has neglected infrastructure government after government and it has been Labor that have been the ones to invest in this important area.

What we did on infrastructure was not just about dollars; it was also about the way that we put really good, robust parameters around infrastructure investment. Under Labor, no more did these infrastructure projects get funded based on what was most politically expedient. Under Labor, it was about what fitted the policy objectives and what was going to deliver the best for the Australian economy.

Labor is not just the party for infrastructure; we are also the party of small business. Some of the highlights of the things that we did when we were in government included the fact that we were the first Australian government, I think, to bring small business into the cabinet—what an obvious move; to get that voice around the cabinet table. We brought small business onto the COAG agenda, and there were some significant changes to the tax system which saw small businesses benefit in particular. I am very proud to speak on this motion and to say that we are there for small business, we are there for infrastructure, and we are proud of that record.

Mr BROAD (Mallee) (10:58): Small business is not for the faint-hearted. You cannot understand small business unless you have actually run one. Whilst I have heard lots of rhetoric and words coming from the other side about how they understand small business, I wonder how many people have actually run a small business. Innovation is driven by small businesses. Small businesses take ideas and, because of their flexibility, they can take those ideas into reality. If we are going to turn innovation into productivity, we need to have a strong and robust small business sector.

My question, though: does risk equal the reward for small business anymore in the Australian economy? Roy Orbison used to sing *Working for the Man*. The end of it was: ‘I'm gonna be the man; I'm gonna be the boss.’ But I wonder now whether we in the Australian economy have got that much aspiration and whether it is actually better to be the employee than the boss. Better outcomes can be achieved by employees than bosses in a lot of cases. We really need to consider the aspiration of people who want to go into small business and whether it is worthwhile and ensure that we create the economic framework for that to happen.

The real workers are actually our small business owners and operators. Having run a small business from when I was aged 22 and self-employed I know what it is like to have sleepless nights. I know what it is like to have to fill in BASs to ensure that your workers are well catered for.
I employed a number of people and I thought, 'This is good; I can walk around and be the
boss and take things easy,' only to realise that one of my employees was not able to turn up
one day, so I got on the job and worked myself, shoring 120 sheep. It was pretty hard work,
but I was making sure that my workers also knew that as the owner of a small business I am
also a worker.

This issue is around infrastructure. I recently heard from a member opposite that the
previous government had delivered all this wonderful infrastructure and now our government
are not. But that is not true in my electorate. I look at the Sunraysia modernisation project in
Mildura. The previous minister for water, Penny Wong, was buying water out of that
irrigation community and shutting them down. They actually had to pull up all piping work,
completely shut those blocks down for five years and give water back to the government. In
contrast, our government have said that we believe in building infrastructure and in putting in
security for small business to function. We have committed $103 million and the
infrastructure is now getting built. You can come to my electorate and see the pipes. You can
actually walk down the pipes. This is real infrastructure; it is the real stuff happening. It is
saying to the community that we think there is a future for your small business, for your
irrigated agriculture in this community and that we are prepared to build the infrastructure so
your business can have the certainty to go forward.

We have to close the gap between what a small business owner can make and what an
employee can make. The gap at the moment is so much that sometimes it is easier to be the
worker than it is to be the small business owner. We need to ensure that those who take risks
are those who have personal endeavours and who can receive the financial rewards from small
business. There is too much administration burden on small business at the moment. There is
an inability to dismiss employees. Ambulance-chasing lawyers are creating sleepless nights
for small business owners, wondering whether they would lose their house, when they are
doing their best to create a safe workplace. There is financial and regulation insecurity. We
also need to ensure that there is payment security for small businesses. It is still a good time to
be in small business. I still run a small business as well as sit in this chamber here. Interest
rates are low. Currencies favour Australian businesses at the moment. Sea freight rates are
low.

Finally, I believe we have a government in power which has many people who both run
and have run small businesses and, as I end with the beginning, 'You cannot understand small
business unless you have run one,' no matter what I hear from the opposition. The coalition,
made up of the Liberal Party and the National Party, is full of people who both understand
and have a passion to see Australian small businesses prosper.

Mr THISTLETHWAITE (Kingsford Smith) (11:03): I am proud to support this motion
from the member for Reid regarding small business and the importance of infrastructure. But
forgive me for expressing some cynicism in the irony contained in this motion, particularly
given the fact that many of the government's policies have made it harder for small
businesses. They have cut back on expenditure for infrastructure that supports small
businesses. They have cut back on expenditure for infrastructure that supports small
businesses.

In summation, the Abbott government have made it harder for many Australian small
businesses. Take, for instance, their repeal of loss carry-back measures introduced by the
former Labor government. This measure allowed businesses to carry back a loss of up to $1
million to one of the two preceding years in which they paid tax. This was a helpful and practical leg up for small businesses and its removal has created a red-tape nightmare for businesses in my community.

Or we can look at the instant asset write-off. Labor increased the asset write-off value to $6,500, a threshold that was in line with the cost of doing business. We now see that the Abbott government has slashed it back down to $1,000. That is hardly practical in today's increasingly competitive market. And, worse still, small businesses that submitted their tax documents under the previous regime have had to adjust them, creating another headache for business owners, who are stuck in the back office instead of being with their customers.

The Abbott government has repealed special depreciation rules for motor vehicles, which were introduced under Labor. This reform allowed small business people to write off a value of their car for doing business—another practical step that was put forward and developed in consultation with small business that this government has wiped out.

But the most disappointing aspect of this sorry state of affairs is that, while the government is making it harder for small businesses, it continues to deliver tax concessions to some of the richest Australian corporations. We have seen this government back away from its rhetoric on making multinational corporations pay their fair share of tax in Australia.

I had to laugh when I read the context of this motion about the importance of infrastructure and how an effective infrastructure network is essential for small businesses to survive and flourish. The Abbott federal government and the Baird government in New South Wales are proposing one of Sydney's biggest ever infrastructure projects. In fact, I understand it will be Australia's largest ever road infrastructure project in the WestConnex. That project will run past two of the big economic powerhouses in Sydney, located in my electorate—that is, Kingsford Smith Airport and Port Botany. But, amazingly, this wonderful new infrastructure will not connect up with Port Botany. So, here you have all of these small businesses that operate around the port in Botany—all of the logistics companies in Mascot, Banksmeadow and Botany—that are looking forward to that connectivity with important infrastructure in our community. But—what do you know?—the Abbott government has fluffed it again because the WestConnex will not connect up with the largest port in Australia. What a wasted opportunity from this government!

Electricity has been a big issue for small business, as is the way the regulation in the market works and the role of the Australia Energy Regulator in supporting transmission and distribution companies' capital increases, which have put pressure on electricity prices. What has the Baird government done in New South Wales? The Australia Energy Regulator recommended a reduction in electricity prices, and here we have the Baird government opposing a reduction to electricity prices. They come into this place and talk about supporting small businesses. One of the key price signals and one of the key costs for small business is electricity.
Baird government is proposing. That says everything about the Liberal Party's philosophy when it comes to supporting small business in this country and about the irony that is contained in this motion moved by the member for Reid.

Debate adjourned.

**New South Wales Seniors Week**

**Ms HALL** (Shortland—Opposition Whip) (11:09): I move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) 14 to 22 March is New South Wales Seniors Week, a week that acknowledges their contribution to the community;

(b) older Australians make an enormous contribution to our communities;

(c) all older Australians deserve to live in dignity; and

(d) the Government is attacking the standard of living of seniors and pensioners by undermining the pension, benefits to seniors, Medicare and support services for older Australians; and

(2) calls on the Government to reverse its anti-seniors ageist approach to government and service delivery.

This is New South Wales Seniors Week. It is the largest festival in the Southern Hemisphere, and it is an opportunity to say thank you to seniors for the many and varied roles they play in our communities across New South Wales, both past and present. The contribution of seniors is enormous, and quite often it flies under the radar. Listening to the Abbott government, and in particular to the Treasurer, Australians could be forgiven for thinking that pensioners were nothing more than a burden, responsible for an enormous budget expenditure and, in fact, a major contributor to the budget deficit. This is a short-sighted, erroneous and quite fallacious proposition that has been put forward by the Abbott government. All the Abbott government can do is look at one side of the equation—the side that says this is how much money we spend on pensions, this is how much money we spend on health—instead of looking at the whole picture and understanding and recognising that seniors' contribution to our society is very varied.

They contribute in many ways, including volunteerism and child care. We have a situation in Australia where the cost of child care and availability of child care is being constantly debated, and seniors make an enormous contribution in providing child care. Rather than being a negative for the economy, seniors contribute in many and varied ways such as the grey nomads and travel. Their lifestyle generates income for the economy. They have enormous knowledge, and that knowledge they share with those around them. The arts and their contribution in that area is many and varied. These are just a couple of samples that I have added to this debate.

Unfortunately, Prime Minister Abbott and Treasurer Hockey seem unable to recognise this. Instead, they continue to promote negative stereotypes of senior Australians, equating ageing with sickness, disability and dementia. Two out of three people over the age of 65 have excellent health and lead a very active lifestyle. It is a myth that they are a burden on our society. Eighty per cent of people over 70 live independently and care for themselves. It is a myth that an ageing population is a looming crisis. People are living longer and enjoying life more. None of this is put forward by the Abbott government.
Instead, what they do is wage an attack on senior Australians. All you need to do is go to last year's budget to understand the contempt they have for seniors and pensioners in Australia. The PBS increased the price of medications, and then there is their GP tax—or what they like to call a Medicare surcharge. I held a rally in my electorate and I had people 90 years of age coming out and opposing the GP tax. Finally, kicking and screaming, they have put it on hold for a while. Increasing the eligibility for pensioners to 70 years of age is fine if you have got a white collar job. But if you are out there working as a labourer each and every day, putting your body on the line, it is going to be absolutely catastrophic. By changing the way the pension is indexed, pensioners will receive less money. There is a plan to cut the seniors supplement. Thankfully, the Senate has not passed that. But, once again, it is an attack on seniors by the Abbott government. Centrelink is anything but user friendly for our pensioners and seniors that visit there. There are cuts to organisations supporting seniors, and in New South Wales the privatisation of electricity will increase the cost of electricity. It will also mean less dollars for services for Seniors Australia, and the Baird government's opposition to the price cut of electricity is on the record.

My message to senior Australians that are celebrating Seniors Week this week is that you know you have the support of us in the opposition. You know that we value each of you and everything that you do. We know that you make a valuable contribution to not only New South Wales but Australia, unlike those on the other side of this House who do not value your contributions.

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

**Mr Conroy:** I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

**Mrs SUDMALIS (Gilmore) (11:14):** Gilmore has many seniors, who I refer to as the wise ones in our region. It is their wisdom, their selflessness and their impact on the social and economic wellbeing of our community that we value the most. They are an important part of the CWA, the Men's Sheds, the workers at Vinnies, the team who volunteer for Meals on Wheels and the members of Rotary and Lions. Many of these people would be termed 'seniors' by younger whippersnappers, but none sees themselves as old. We recognise they are a major asset. You need only look at the website for NSW Seniors Week to see the change in attitude to those who used to be the 'old ones' in our community. There it is, heading the web: 'Be inspired, be active'—accompanied by photos of a dancing couple and a bushwalker ready to hike. There are invitations to start canoeing, to learn to ride a trike, to have a weekend in Jindabyne and to take part in other more traditional activities such as trivia nights and safe scooter travel.

Way back in biblical times, getting to the ripe old age of three score years and 10—for the whippersnappers, a score of years is 20 years—was almost a miracle; you were viewed as a 'venerable elder'. But that is not so much the case now. If you were to call someone in their 70s a venerable elder now, they would most likely chase you around the golf course or chuck you in the surf! Times have changed. In the township of Milton we have a resident named Mrs Maisie Evans who lives independently in her own residence. The Illawarra Retirement Trust helps her with chores and shopping. In January the remarkable Maisie reached her 103rd birthday. This year about 4,000 people in Australia will turn 100. In 2025 there will be about 10,000 people turning 100. And 40 years from now there are likely to be 40,000 celebrating their 100th birthday. Every single one of them deserves to live with dignity.
It is all very well for Labor to squawk about changing the pension age from 67 to 70, but who introduced 67 years as the age eligibility in the first place? Labor did. One could ask: why did they do that? If they were being honest instead of political, they know that in 10 to 20 years time it is unlikely that our great pension system will be available. There simply will not be any money left on the money tree—because we have borrowed too much already. We absolutely must have money set aside. We must stop the increasing flow of debt growth if we are going to help our pensioners of the future. The pensioners of the future have the right to expect us to take care of their senior years, as do the pensioners of today. It is our responsibility to make sure they all live with the dignity they so rightly deserve.

The Labor party overspent in their time of government, causing grief and financial discomfort not only for the pensioners of today but also for the pensioners of tomorrow, next week and 40 years from now. Why? I ask them sincerely: is being in government such a critical ambition that you would compromise the financial dignity of our fellow Australians? It is about time the previous government actually put their politics aside and worked for the dignity of not just our wonderful seniors but all those who need income support. In 2015, only 4.5 out of every 10 persons aged between 15 and 64 years are working; in 2055, only 2.7 out of every 10 persons aged between 15 and 64 years will be working. Do the maths! This is completely unsustainable. The current investment in the age pension is approximately $42 billion; in 2017-18 we will need to invest almost $50 billion. We are living healthier and longer; three score years and 10 is no longer considered to be old.

The coalition government is keeping the commitment not to change pensions. There are proposed changes but they will not come into effect until after the next election; and these changes may need to be modified, as has been indicated in recent discussions with Minister Morrison. Also, there is a possibility that pensions may be reviewed every three years so that an appropriate safety net is kept. Frankly I despise the untruths that are being peddled. The pension will continue to rise every six months as it always has done. We kept the much needed energy supplement, originally paid as compensation for damage done by the electricity hike of the carbon tax. We have reduced out-of-pocket medical expenses by lowering the Medicare safety net threshold. These all add to extra money for our pensioners; and it is not borrowed, so we will not have a million dollar daily debt to pay back.

Last Tuesday I spoke to the Association of Independent Retirees. They understand the need for debt reduction. They have worked incredibly hard throughout their working life and are now active and vital members of our community. We really do value our older citizens. With the Restart Wage Subsidy, we are trying to encourage them to stay in the workforce. We look after our older people. We have a duty to make sure we provide for them all. (Time expired)

Mr CONROY (Charlton) (11:19): I am proud to speak on this motion about National Seniors Week and honouring the contribution of seniors. I will start by making a simple point about the contribution from the member for Gilmore: we on this side support the pension; those on the other side would rather give tax cuts to multinational corporations than support the pension, and that is demonstrated by their motions in this parliament. I will get onto broken promises later. First, I want to honour the contribution of seniors in Australia and in my area in particular. In the seat of Charlton 22,000 people are over the age of 65. That is 17.1 per cent of the population, which ranks us 30th highest in the country. I am proud of the fact that so many people over the age of 65 choose to live in the seat of Charlton.
I see this when I run my regular seniors expos, which are really well attended. The most interesting thing about these seniors expos is the volunteerism demonstrated by the seniors themselves. They organise and staff the stalls that are a key part of the expo—people from the University of the Third Age, from Men's Sheds, from the great institution of the Toronto Croquet Club, from the Lions Club, from Alzheimer's Australia, from the Westlakes Seniors Computer Club and from Meals on Wheels. All of these great stalls are staffed by people aged over 65 and predominantly provide services to seniors. That is a great achievement and it is something I am intensely proud of in my area. I am also intensely proud that the member for Shortland moved this motion. She has a similar population in her electorate. The members for Richmond and Newcastle will be speaking later, and they are all very proud of seniors and support them greatly.

The truth is that, while those on this side support seniors greatly, the government does not. The government, through broken promises and untruths and fictions, is attacking seniors as we speak. The member for Gilmore said the 'no changes to pensions' promise is not a broken promise because the changes do not come in until 2017. Well, first off, she is factually incorrect. We have already seen a massive cut in concession payments from the federal government—a $1.4 billion cut in concession cuts to pensioners has already started. In some states we have seen a short-term commitment to bridge the gap, but I have very serious reservations about whether that will continue. We have seen cuts to the pensioner education supplement. We have seen the abolition of the seniors supplement. We have seen cuts to the deeming threshold. We have seen an increase to the pension age. Most of these—the ones that pertain to pensioners—are a direct broken promise of the infamous statement by Mr Abbott, made before the last election, that there would be no cut to the pension. And the greatest crime of all is the change in pension indexation. A change that, according to the independent Parliamentary Budget Office, will result in a $23 billion cut to pension payments in this country. Let me repeat that: a $23 billion cut. Those on the other side can say that it is a change in indexation. They can edge around it, but if it is booked into the budget over the future years as a $23 billion cut, then it is a cut. To put this in context, if this change in indexation had occurred four years ago this would have resulted in the pension now being $1,500 lower than it is today—a significant impact on pensioners.

But pensioners, and seniors more broadly, are not just concerned about the impact on themselves. They are concerned about the impact on their kids and their grandkids. I have many seniors coming up to me and talking about the higher education reforms, which they are afraid will stop their grandkids going to uni. They are worried about the $30 billion cuts to schools, which mean that their grandkids and great grandkids cannot get the best start in life. They are worried about the $50 billion cuts to hospitals, which are already having an impact in my area, where we have the John Hunter Hospital. It is of great concern to seniors, not just when they present themselves to the emergency ward but when their kids do. Seniors are very concerned about jobs. They are concerned about the ability of their families—their kids and grandkids—to find well-paying jobs in the economy.

I stand up here proudly, like everyone on this side, honouring the contribution of seniors. I honour their volunteerism. I honour their decades of contribution to Australian society. I call on the government, I call on those opposite, to stop just talking and to match their rhetoric with real action and reverse their changes to the pension; reverse their changes to the seniors
supplement; reverse their changes to higher education; reverse their changes to Newstart; and reverse their $80 billion cuts to schools and education. That is the best way they can honour the seniors of this country.

Mr VAN MANEN (Forde) (11:24): I hate to say it at the outset, but it would be highly unlikely that I would agree with the entirety of the motion. But I do concur with the member who proposed the motion in relation to her comments about older Australians and the wonderful contribution they make to our communities. Certainly, we can all support the desire for them to live in dignity.

However, it was interesting to listen for a minute to the contribution from the member for Charlton and the litany he carried on with. The member for Charlton was not in this House during the previous government, and, as usual for those opposite, he has failed to acknowledge the failures of the previous government that have led the budget to be in the parlous situation that it is, and it is interesting to reflect on the fact that his now backbench colleague the member for Lilley made the promise some 500-odd times over the six years of the previous government that they would achieve a budget surplus. That never, ever occurred.

Mr Perrett interjecting—

Mr VAN MANEN: It is good to see my good friend the member for Moreton at the table contributing to this debate in his usual constructive manner!

I would like to reflect on some of the wonderful contributions that seniors make in my community of Forde. As other members have already touched on, they volunteer and are the key reason that our service clubs still survive and operate today—service clubs like the Twin Rivers Lions Club, the Ormeau Lions Club, the Rotary Club of Beenleigh, the Rotary Club of Loganholme and many other wonderful community organisations.

We also take the opportunity to regularly go and meet with our seniors and speak to them at various events—not just at our annual seniors forum. We also put on morning teas for our seniors at our various retirement villages. That is a good opportunity to go and speak with our seniors face to face, and talk to them about their concerns.

It is interesting to listen to the member for Charlton's comments around pension cuts, but what he fails to articulate is that the pension rises during the past 12 months—namely, March and September last year—were all based on CPI. I wonder if the member for Charlton would care to explain why those pension increases were based on CPI? But they do not have the intellectual honesty on that side of the chamber to acknowledge the fact that the increases were based on CPI, because the rate of wages growth over that period has fallen to below the rate of CPI. Therefore, CPI is now providing the highest level of pension increase. I would suggest that the increase due in the next week or so may also be linked to CPI rather than wages growth. So, in effect, CPI increases to pensions are benefiting pensioners, at this point in time, over and above wages growth. I think that is a very important aspect of this discussion.

We, as a government, recognise the invaluable contribution of older Australians to our economy and to the growth of this country over the last 50, 60, 70 years—because Australia would not be what it is today without their contributions. But we also need to recognise that Australians are living healthier and longer lives than ever before, and this provides us with some challenges in terms of an ageing population and this change in our demographic. Part of
our discussion about this challenge should be with the business community. How do we encourage the business community to engage with older Australians who are still more than capable of working and have tremendous knowledge and skills, particularly in mentoring for younger employers? How do we encourage businesses to include those people in their workforces and allow them to contribute those wonderful skills and talents that they have accumulated from a lifetime of working?

Mrs ELLIOT (Richmond) (11:29): I rise to support the motion by the member for Shortland and note that New South Wales Seniors Week runs from 14 to 22 March, with a focus on older Australians and the enormous contribution they make to our communities. It is of course a very festive occasion, with many areas rightly celebrating with many activities and events. And I acknowledge all those wonderful seniors in my electorate of Richmond who contribute so much to our community.

The theme for New South Wales Seniors Week is 'Be inspired'. It is about encouraging greater effort, enthusiasm, and creativity. Whilst this is a time for celebration, it is also a time that highlights just how much this government has abandoned our seniors—those very people who built our nation with their hard work and commitment. Instead of honouring that commitment, the government is attacking the living standards of our seniors and pensioners. The fact is that since the Liberal-National Party's unfair budget last year our seniors have had to deal with many cruel measures, including cuts to pensions, cuts to health services, cuts to aged-care services and cuts to support services for older Australians as well as being told that they will have to work longer, with an increase in the age pension eligibility age from 67 to 70. But probably the cruellest measure is the cuts to the age pensions. At the last election the Prime Minister said there would be no changes to pensions and no cuts to pensions. All his candidates ran around saying, 'No cuts'—and in my area that was all the National Party candidates. Well, they all broke that promise, and that is why the National Party cannot be trusted.

In the last budget we saw the government introduce huge changes in relation to their cuts to pensions. And over the weekend we saw some more changes. What they are saying now is that they want to index the pension by only the consumer price index. The fact is that under Labor the pension was indexed by whichever was the higher of male wages, the consumer price index and the pensioner index, which Labor actually introduced. This was to make sure that pensions kept up with the general standard of living of all Australians.

The government's latest idea is just a mean trick—trying to say to pensioners that they might get a change over three years. It is quite cruel and mean. Labor will not support any cut to pension indexation, because that would in fact leave pensioners worse off. The Australian Council of Social Service has already worked out that if the government gets its way pensioners will be $80 a week worse off over the next decade. Research from ANU shows that the pension would drop from 28 per cent of average weekly earnings today to just 16 per cent by 2055.

In 2009 Labor reviewed the adequacy of the pension and delivered the largest increase in the pension in 100 years. Labor also improved pension indexation with a new pensioner index and increased the wages benchmark for the pension from 25 per cent of male total weekly earnings to 27.7 per cent. The Liberal-National government's cuts will reverse these historic increases, and they risk creating an underclass of pensioners in Australia. There are also many
other cruel measures that have really had an impact on our pensioners right throughout the country, and indeed many in my electorate tell me all the time how it has affecting their cost of living. An estimated 500,000 or more seniors across the country will now have a reduction in their pensions due to the lowering of the deeming thresholds. The Seniors Health Card will be harder to qualify for. The government has also slashed federal funding to the states and territories for very important concessions to pensioners and seniors card holders. The government also stripped away the seniors supplement from Commonwealth Seniors Health Card holders. It is quite a long list of cruel cuts.

But the pain does not stop there. The government's petrol tax—or the Nationals petrol tax, as we call it—will make it harder for many in regional areas. The Pension Education Supplement and the Housing Help for Seniors program will also be abolished. Local seniors in my area also know that you just cannot trust the National Party when it comes to health care and hospitals. Regardless of what the Prime Minister or health minister have announced, we know that the GP tax will be back. Make no mistake; it is not finished. The Prime Minister has said that he is committed to it, that he remains committed to it. This is all about the Liberal-Nationals party destroying Medicare and destroying bulk-billing, because this is their agenda. Part of their attack includes the $50 billion that will be slashed from hospital funding agreements. Also for our seniors there will be increased costs due to the privatisation of Australian Hearing. We know that is what they intend to do. This will really hurt seniors, as pensioners are Australian Hearing's largest customer group.

Our seniors have every right to feel betrayed by this government, and in regional areas that betrayal is particularly felt by the National Party. The fact is that the Abbott Liberal-Nationals government treats our senior Australians disrespectfully. They treat them like a burden. They continue to relentlessly attack the standard of living of seniors and pensioners by cutting the pension, by slashing services and by increasing taxes. Before the election they promised that there would be no changes to pensions, no changes to health care, no GP tax, no petrol tax. Yet what has happened? That is what we saw. After the election they broke these promises with an unprecedented attack on Australia's pension and healthcare system and the millions of older Australians who rely on it. Every day I hear firsthand from older Australians in my electorate how they are feeling the impact of this government's cruel and unfair cuts.

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (11:34): I would like to make a bit of an analogy not only about this debate on News South Wales Senior Week but about many things in society today. Imagine that a rogue tenant moves into a house. The house is neatly maintained, the gardens are nicely kept, the kitchen is clean and the house is tidy. The rogue tenant spends six years there and absolutely trashes the place. After six years of trashing the place he sets fire to it, barricades the door and goes and sits in the gutter on the other side of the road, where he watches on as the fire brigade turns up. As the fire brigade goes in and knocks the door down and goes in to try to put the fire out, the rogue tenant stands there and harps and criticises and nags from the sidelines, complaining about the damage that is being done to the carpet, the water damage, the damage they are doing with their muddy boots.

Well, that analogy is exactly what is happening in this debate. The Labor Party of this country trashed this nation's finances, and the greatest expenditure that the government now has—the fastest-rising expenditure—is interest on government debt: $13.5 billion needs to be found from the taxes raised from the citizens of this country simply to pay the interest on the...
debt. The nation is currently spending 10 per cent more than we are raising. That is completely unsustainable, because it means that every dollar of deficit is a dollar that we steal from future generations of this country, and it is currently 10 per cent. It simply means that young people, children who are yet to be born, will have a higher tax burden and a lower standard of living unless we get that budget back into balance and then slowly pay off this debt. Yet every time we put forward a sensible measure to try to bring the budget back into balance we hear this narking, whining and harping from the opposition with absolutely no alternate policies.

There is also the hypocrisy of this motion from the people on the other side of this chamber who came in here and held up the repeal of the carbon tax for over nine months. After we saw that repeal we saw the largest fall in electricity prices in our nation's history. They not only introduced the carbon tax, but they also voted against its repeal twice. We know as sure as night follows day that they will bring it back. Should they ever get the chance, they will bring it back. They will give it another name, and they will slug pensioners, older Australians and all Australians with higher electricity prices.

We should look at what their previous policies did in increasing electricity prices for the most hard-up in this country. In New South Wales alone, between 2009 and 2013, there was a doubling of the number of households that had their electricity cut off. In fact, in the last year of the carbon tax there were 33,000 households that had their electricity cut off, and yet the members on the other side voted to continue with that carbon tax.

Ms Claydon: What about the seniors? Do you care about them?

Mr CRAIG KELLY: I hear the member for Newcastle interjecting. How many people in your electorate, Member for Newcastle, had their electricity cut off? Did you go around and knock on the doors of those seniors and ask how many of them had had their electricity cut off because of the policies of the Labor Party? What a disgrace!

Then in this motion we had the shameful comments of the member for Shortland associating herself with the most dishonest scare campaign being run by New South Wales Labor and their union mates about the privatisation of electricity in New South Wales. They used this scare campaign, this false campaign, that the privatisation will increase electricity prices, when the exact opposite is true. Even the chairman of the ACCC has said that 'electricity prices will be lower with this privatisation,' and the member for Shortland comes in here and tries to beef up this scare campaign.

I will leave you with a quote. This is the quote from former Labor minister Mr Martin Ferguson. He said about this dishonest scare campaign:

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. That is not Craig Kelly speaking, that is not the Prime Minister, that is not a conservative commentator. The words 'I am ashamed of the Labor Party' are the words of a former member of the Labor government.

Ms CLAYDON (Newcastle) (11:40): I am very happy to rise in support of the motion before the House today moved by the member for Shortland, who has been a longstanding advocate both in her electorate and in this parliament for senior Australians, and I thank her for putting this motion today.
It is interesting to follow the member for Hughes. I feel very sorry for those constituents of Hughes whose member stood here with an opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate the contribution of older Australians in his electorate that are making a difference. But all he can do is look back, blame Labor and talk about the ills and myths and use the rhetoric that this government spins out time and time again. Not once did he acknowledge the enormous contribution that older Australians in the seat of Hughes make to this community. So I acknowledge them in my speech now.

I would also like to say that Seniors Week is a wonderful opportunity for all of us, including the member for Hughes, to stop and reflect on the immense and invaluable work of older Australians in our communities and to say thank you for their ongoing contribution. The theme for this year's New South Seniors Week is 'Be Inspired,' which is said to be about encouraging greater effort, enthusiasm and creativity with a focus on activities that celebrate self-expression. While I always encourage seniors to be actively engaged and involved in our community, I do challenge the assertion that seniors need to be encouraged to put in a greater effort. The data at hand certainly suggests otherwise.

In Australia, senior Australians contribute the highest number of volunteer hours of any group. This is truly remarkable when we consider that as a group senior Australians do not make up the largest demographic of volunteers. There are fewer of them, yet they work harder and longer than anyone else. Today, overall, more than six million Australians, including some 17,000 Novocastrians, volunteer each year to help make a difference in our communities. In the Newcastle and Hunter regions the monetary value of volunteer work is estimated at about $60 million in unpaid wages each year, with some 235,000 volunteer hours worked annually. As a community we are deeply indebted to the volunteers for the selfless work that they do to strengthen and build a more cohesive and inclusive society.

In Newcastle, senior volunteers tell the story of our cities rich history through their work at Fort Scratchley, the Newcastle Art Gallery, the Newcastle Museum and the Maritime Centre and, indeed, through their engagement with a number of historical societies across the region. Major events in Newcastle, like the recent AFC Asian Cup, would not have been so successful without the contribution of senior volunteers. I would like to pay tribute here to just one of the hundreds of senior volunteers from the Asian Cup, Dorene Schafferius, a constituent of mine from Adamstown Heights. Dorene first volunteered at the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games, nearly 60 years ago, and she has never stopped. So I think it is fair to say that volunteering is very much in Dorene's blood. Upon reflection, Dorene said back in 1956 her volunteering was 'all about the boys and adventure' but now she enjoys 'the sense of community that volunteering brings'. I thank Dorene Schafferius for her longstanding commitment to the wellbeing of our community. It is very much appreciated.

I would also like to acknowledge the important work of a terrific team of volunteers that collectively manage and maintain the Hunter Region Botanic Gardens in Heatherbrae. Last Saturday, I was fortunate to visit the gardens in Heatherbrae along with a fantastic Labor candidate for Port Stephens, Kate Washington, to lend our support to the giant garage sale which helps raise much needed funds for the gardens. The extraordinary team of senior volunteers was in full swing, and they will be backing up again tomorrow when the gardens host the mental health forum for seniors. This is a forum where visitors can learn from senior psychologists about the importance of practising techniques that lead to positive mental
health, such as mindfulness and meditation, and ways to handle anxiety and depression. The contribution of volunteers is extraordinary both in a social sense and an economic sense.

What we do know about the Abbott Liberal government's proposed changes to the indexation of pensions—in spite of pre-election commitments not to do so—is that they will drive pensioners into poverty over the coming years. Recent research by ANU Economist Peter Whiteford shows the pension would drop from 28 per cent of average weekly earnings, today, to just under 16 per cent by 2055. It is little wonder that older Australians feel betrayed by the Abbott Liberal government. We can and must do better to ensure the dignity of older Australians in retirement. *(Time expired)*

**Mr Laming** (Bowman) (11:45): You can understand if people in the gallery today think, with a contribution like that from the Labor Party and the Speaker wearing a red jacket, that there is virtually nothing to talk about among pensioners and aged Australians of significant financial import, because we can talk about mindfulness in the contributions of volunteers. It is always a very safe topic when you can point over in that direction and hope they do not notice the obvious.

What is the obvious that brings us here today, when talking about financial pressures on senior Australians? Let us go through the devastating chronology of the last six years. No. 1 is inventing a carbon tax and insisting that pensioners pay it. That is the history. No. 2 is bringing in an unclaimed money bill so that pensioners who had their money in a bank account could be swept by the Labor Party and kept by the government, without the seniors knowing. I bet that is not raised when you have your cups of tea and coffee with pensioners in your electorate. Absolutely not.

The most grievous sin of all, perpetrated on seniors, was six years—as the member for Hughes pointed out in such voluminous tones that even his own electorate in Hughes could hear it, without the benefit of broadcasting—of uncontrolled spending, leading to what? It led to no interest bill each month, to us paying $1 billion every week in interest that should be paid to pensioners. The money that should be helping the most needy is paid mostly to foreign entities, two-thirds of whom have the privilege of going into debt. We could not run the books. 'We never saw a good idea we could not fund in government,' said the Labor Party, leaving us with a billion-dollar-a-week debt. Where do we find the billion dollars if we do not take it from the aged pension? It is a Labor government that ran out of ideas. They simply refused to fund anything long-term and left it to the coalition to sort out the mess, as the member for Hughes pointed out.

Let us rewrite a little bit of history here, for a minute, before I talk about pensions. Back in 2009 we were all concerned about a GFC. What we did know at the time was there was plenty of money in the bank—thank you to John Howard. We had the four major banks all triple-A rated and strong enough to resist the threats of a GFC. Lastly, we had strong exports, in the form of mining. That is the triple inoculation that would get us through a GFC.

I do not blame people, at the end of 2008, in the panic of Lehman saying that maybe we need to tighten our belts and stimulate the economy. The payments to pensioners that occurred late that year were supported by both sides. But as early as 2009, the TRIM modelling from Treasury showed something very embarrassing for the Labor Party: there would be no fall in GDP, we would not go behind and we would not fall into deficit.
In early 2009, given the option—now realising there was going to be no GFC recession in Australia—what did they do? They kept spending. It was not just for another quarter or another year, it was for four years of continuous spending. They wonder in the end when, after the US, Australia was the largest spender, why it is that we are in debt now. The simple answer to seniors in this country is: six years of uncontrolled spending puts us in this invidious situation, where we have to look at ways of addressing social spending.

The age pension moving to $50 billion a year is an important issue, and this is a government that has watched on as two pension indexations are all based on CPI. The third one this week will also be based on CPI. But I would be lying if I did not say there is concern amongst pensioners about whether we are simply switching from one indexation formula to another. That is why, intrinsically, all Australians out there would support the possibility that we have an adequacy review of the age pension every three years. We would take it out of the hands of the mob that cannot run the economy and the mob that are trying to repair the economy and we would say, independently: 'Can we look at the level of indexation? It is appropriate to make sure that the age pension keeps up with what we think is a basic expectation.'

Let us be honest. Why do we discuss the age pension? Like almost every other form of welfare, age pensioners have almost no alternative to earn an income. They are at the age when they are living on their savings and are utterly reliant on them. That is why—and I can see the member of the Labor Party on the other side who spent us into oblivion in the first place—we must find a way to examine the adequacy of these pension increases and make sure that they meet community expectation. That is where our minister is. That is why many social groups support where we are going.

We can find a way that will raise pensions every year, twice a year. We do it not because we want to, we do it because Labor's spending has given us no option but to take these tough choices.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (11:50): I thank the member for Shortland, who has a tremendous commitment to the seniors not just in her electorate but nationally. She is one of the fiercest advocates for seniors in this place. This gives me an opportunity in this particular debate, as shadow minister for Indigenous affairs and shadow minister for ageing, to mention a couple of events I went to recently.

I was very pleased to attend an event at Cherbourg, the Ny-Ku Byun residential aged care facility, to have some discussions with local people in South-East Queensland in the Aboriginal settlement up there about the challenges of consumer directed care, residential aged care and the failure to take up the aged-care packages amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

It also gave me the opportunity last Thursday to be in Glebe with the member for Sydney, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, to speak to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people about the challenges they particularly face, and Indigenous seniors face, in an urban setting. I thank those people who were there, particularly Annecto, Kinchela Boys Home and Babana Aboriginal Men's Group, such adamant advocates for their area.
I also had the privilege of attending an area nearby the member for Shortland's electorate. I went to Shoal Bay, where I joined Labor's New South Wales candidate for Port Stephens, Kate Washington, for a seniors forum at Harbourside Haven, which features retirement living and nursing care. The residents there made it very clear. They are not happy with Liberal governments, both New South Wales and federal.

While this week we celebrate Seniors Week in New South Wales, seniors are not happy about cuts to the pension. The Abbott government's changes to indexation of the age pension will result in a real loss for pensioners over time. It is a $23 billion cut over time to the pension. Pensioners will be $80 a week worse off within 10 years. If in the last few years a pensioner had been on this form of indexation, they would be $1,500 worse off. If people do not believe this is a cut then look at the budget papers. In the May 2014 budget papers, under 'savings', hundreds of millions of dollars were cut and saved there by the Abbott government. This change is unfair, and pensioners, whether they are in Sydney, Cherbourg or Shoal Bay, know it.

The previous Labor government addressed this issue and changed the indexation rate to make sure it was 27.7 per cent of MTAWE, male total average weekly earnings, the Pensioner and Beneficiary Living Cost Index or CPI—whichever was the higher. What this government is proposing to do is get rid of those other two and do it on the basis of the CPI, which, generally speaking, is much lower. It would not be a savings if it were not a cut. The budget papers reveal the platitudes and nonsense said by members opposite about this issue, because seniors are getting cuts—that is what is happening.

The Abbott government have form in this area. They have made cuts in a whole range of areas of ageing with respect to the workforce supplement, the dementia supplement and the payroll tax supplement. These are all supplements which help residential aged care providers and those people who provide home care residential services for Australian seniors. These areas were cut in the budget—before the budget and subsequent to the budget. The government is not tackling the issues which Australian seniors need help with, whether it is dementia or in a whole range of other areas.

New South Wales seniors should know how unfair that government is as well. Seniors are ready to vote. They are sick of Liberal government cuts to pensions, aged care, health and public transport. They know about it. In fact, Mike Baird's Smart and Skilled training policy really could be called 'dumb and dumber', because it puts jobs in the aged care sector at risk. A community college in Port Stephens is no longer funded to provide aged care and early childcare training—two areas of skills shortage in the local area. So what is happening there in the aged care sector? What is happening for seniors in New South Wales? They have got a great option. They have got an option to vote Labor at the next election, because there is unfairness whether it is in Port Stephens or in Sydney. It is unfair to seniors to lose these young people who are training and living in their community. What New South Wales needs now is a Labor government with heart and vision. What they need now is a government which will invest in aged care—a government which will make a difference for seniors. (Time expired)

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Broadbent):** I thank the member for Blair. As I expected, it was a quiet, reasonable and balanced contribution.

Debate adjourned.
**BILLS**

Acts and Instruments (Framework Reform) Bill 2014  
Environment Legislation Amendment Bill 2013  
Crimes Legislation Amendment (Psychoactive Substances and Other Measures) Bill 2014  
Tax Laws Amendment (Research and Development) Bill 2013

**Assent**

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

**COMMITTEES**

**Public Works Committee**

**Report**

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (11:56): On behalf of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works I present report No. 2 of 2015 entitled *Referrals made December 2014*, and I ask leave of the House to make a short statement in connection with the report.

Leave granted.

Mr PERRETT: This report deals with two matters: the fit-out of new lease premises for the Department of Finance here in the ACT, and the Hamilton Island Replacement Fire Station Project. Sadly, I missed the inspection of the new Department of Finance building, but even more sadly I missed out on going to Hamilton Island to look at the replacement fire station project. Some committee members were able to make it along but I went up to Cairns with another committee to deal with another cyclone. The inspection was ably handled by Mr Goodenough, the member for Moore, and was oversighted by the former chair of the committee Mrs Karen Andrews, the member for McPherson.

I want to make a few comments about her role as chair, because, whilst she has been promoted, she is sorely missed by the committee. We wish her all the best in her new endeavours. She was a wonderful chair and will be missed by the Public Works Committee—and that is not taking away from Senator Dean Smith, who will be taking over as chair. On behalf of the committee, I wish her all the best.

In accordance with standing order 39(e) the report was made a Parliamentary Paper.

**COMMITTEES**

**Economics Committee**

Mr ALEXANDER (Bennelong) (11:58): On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economics I present the committee's report entitled *Review of the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority annual report 2014 (first report)*, together with the minutes of proceedings, and I ask leave of the House to make a short statement in connection with the report.

Leave granted.

Mr ALEXANDER: This report follows a hearing that took place in Canberra on the 28 November 2014, with the Chairman and other officials of APRA, the Australian Prudential
Regulation Authority. The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics is continuing its important inquiry into Australia's prudential standards for the banking, insurance and superannuation sectors through this review of APRA.

It was pleasing to hear APRA's view at the public hearing last November that the Australian financial sector is demonstrating stability. APRA has reported that the authorised deposit-taking institutions—ADIs—are largely in good health and remain profitable.

Residential property lending has steadily increased, and APRA has informed the committee that it is monitoring lending standards to ensure residential mortgages remain a source of growth and profitability for ADIs.

The committee also notes APRA's view that the superannuation industry has made reasonable progress implementing the new prudential standards through the Stronger Super reforms.

APRA has stated that it has a particular focus on reviewing the efforts of this sector to strengthen governance and risk management practices. This is appropriate and should continue to be a priority for APRA.

APRA has also commented that further improvements to the management of conflicts of interest in the superannuation industry are required to meet the heightened expectations of the new prudential standards. Such improvements are to be welcomed and should remain an important part of APRA's future oversight of this industry.

Some of my committee colleagues expressed strong concerns on the slow pace of reform in this area, and we will continue to monitor these developments with interest. APRA also commented that progress is being made to improve the disclosure of information around investment risks for superannuation fund members. The committee again welcomes this but we are enthusiastic about wanting to see continued improvements in this area.

The committee understands that much of APRA's policy agenda in 2015 will be significantly influenced by the government's response to the Financial System Inquiry, FSI, final report. The committee looks forward to exploring the potential impact of the reforms suggested by this inquiry on APRA's future activities.

On behalf of the committee, I thank the Chairman of APRA, Mr Wayne Byres, and his colleagues for appearing at the public hearing on 28 November 2014. The committee looks forward to further discussions on the issues raised in this report at its next hearing with APRA this coming Friday 20 March in Canberra.

I also thank my committee colleagues, them member for Higgins in her former role as committee chair, and the secretariat for their tireless work. I commend the report to the House.

Mr HUSIC (Chifley) (12:02): by leave—I would like to speak to this report and welcome the member for Bennelong who has now become the chair of the economics committee. I look forward to a productive and solid working relationship with him. While his predecessor, the member for Higgins, and I may have had differences of opinions on a whole variety of issues, I believe that one of the good longstanding recommendations that the member for Higgins put forward is to bring the review of APRA's work into the purview of the committee. I think it does important work and reflects the significance of APRA within the broader financial services industry. APRA has been around since 1998 and has a wide breadth of power to
regulate banks, credit unions, life and general insurance, and also, obviously, the growth of our superannuation sector—a sector that has a national savings pool of $1.9 trillion that is growing at 10 per cent a year. It is very significant and demands a lot of attention.

While our dealings with the previous chair John Laker were limited, largely because he was coming to the end of his time, and the committee had only just commenced its work in reviewing APRA's role, I have to say—and I note the expression given by the chair of the helpful nature of Wayne Byres—Chairman Byres is someone who, in his short time in the role, has impressed me deeply with his very straightforward but considered views. We look forward to seeing his continued role in APRA and the way that it will evolve accordingly.

In terms of this report, it covered a lot of things that the chair touched on—not just superannuation but the impact of Basel III; changes in property lending; the capital requirements that are a subject of considerable debate within the banking sector; and the FSI recommendations.

Having said that and having looked at the breadth of the work that we covered off in this last report, the last hearing, I have to say, was completely overwhelmed by indulging in a bit of a coalition obsession with superannuation governance. The chair touched on this briefly but, when you look at the report and how much time was dedicated to it at the hearing and in the report, it is completely disproportionate.

When you consider, for example, what this government has done in terms of superannuation and the coalition historically and its position on superannuation—the fact that it opposed it from the outset, that it wanted to always keep it as something that was more within the realms of high-income earners rather than having a broad application to the entire workforce—and some of the things they have done in recent times in terms of the abolition of low-income superannuation contribution affecting nearly four million people and, for example, the fact that they have cruelled or put the handbrake on increasing the superannuation guarantee contribution, which would have added to the pool of savings at hand, you would see that these steps have not helped the superannuation industry. They have probably had longer term detriment.

What was the big focus of coalition members of this committee? The big focus was an ideological pursuit of whether union representatives should be sitting on the boards of superannuation funds and then trying to have a bigger argument about industry super funds versus retail funds.

I cannot fathom why there would be so much focus on this when there have been bigger issues that warrant attention. If there is a concern about governance, it does not seem to fit some of the moves that have been undertaken by the coalition in recent times—most notably, the repeated calls when it comes to governance of the type of quality of information and advice provided in financial planning.

We have had repeated calls for a royal commission into the practices of some in this space that have been rejected by the coalition. So, if they are not interested in pursuing proper governance practices within the broader sector as we and others have demanded—in particular, some of the colleague of the parliamentary secretary at the table—it beggars belief that we would waste the bulk the committee's time pursuing an ideological obsession about
whether there should be union representatives on super boards having an impact on the quality of investment decisions that cover their members.

Let me be clear: I have no problem whatsoever in looking at improved governance arrangements that result in better investment outcomes; but in the way that it has been managed here, and in this process within the committee, I am genuinely concerned about it wasting the committee's time and wasting the time of APRA, when we do have other significant issues at play. For example, there is great concern, as I expressed earlier, about what impact the change in capital requirements on banks might have. Obviously, banks have a very big concern about that, but we should be following that matter further and with greater attention.

The other area that is gaining accelerated attention is the whole issue of macroprudential tools being used to calm down the residential real estate investment market. When you consider that nearly 12 months ago the RBA was pouring cold water on the notion of macroprudential tools being used in this way, and now we have the Council of Financial Regulators, the RBA and APRA actively considering what macroprudential tools they will use after what appears to be a growing impatience with industry-led responses to this issue, this is certainly something that warrants further attention and demands further detail from the regulators about where they see things headed.

We cannot afford to have a narrowcast ideological focus on some matters to the extent that they obliterate or diminish proper focus on other key issues that have a greater economic impact. I look forward to the meeting with APRA this Friday, 20 March, and I think that a number of us will certainly pursue some of those broader issues that impact on the financial sector in terms of not just capital requirements and macroprudential tools but also a whole range of other issues that go beyond the pursuit of ideology and the pursuit of proper policy.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Broadbent): Does the member for Bennelong wish to move a motion in connection with the report to enable it to be debated on a future occasion?

Mr ALEXANDER (Bennelong) (12:09): I move:

That the House take note of the report.

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

Reference to Federation Chamber

Mr ALEXANDER (Bennelong) (12:09): I move:

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

Question agreed to.

BILLS

Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2014-2015
Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2014-2015
Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 2) 2014-2015

Second Reading

Cognate debate.

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

to which the following amendment was moved:

That all the 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 notes that:

(1) the 2014-15 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook showed a $44 billion blow-out in the budget deficit over the forward estimates from the 2014-15 Budget, which represents a $202 million blow-out in the Budget deficit by the Government each and every day;

(2) Government debt is higher now than it was when the Government took office;

(3) the Budget bottom line in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook incorporates a series of broken promises, including: the introduction of the GP tax, increasing the petrol tax, cuts to pension indexation, $6,000 cuts to a typical Australian family, plans for $100,000 university degrees, cuts to the ABC and SBS, and a $11.3 billion cut from foreign aid;

(4) the Government continues to undermine business and consumer confidence with its unfair Budget, which are now below the levels at the 2013 Federal Election; and

(5) the Government's failure to have a clear plan for economic and jobs growth has led to the unemployment rate increasing to its highest level since August 2002, when the current Prime Minister was the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations."

Dr JENSEN (Tangney) (12:10): Five per cent is low compared with the return that the Future Fund presently enjoys of approximately 13 per cent for the previous financial year. The static wage growth one sees today is because Labor never encouraged or supported these bold but better investments. Investing in science and technology will be the rock star performer for our economy.

It is true to say today that I am concerned. I am concerned today that business and consumers are losing confidence. I am concerned that they are becoming less optimistic. But I am not concerned in any way with the knowledge the coalition has a better plan for Australia. This government is listening to small business, families, and first home buyers. It is not only listening but also delivering real solutions: a childcare package, a small business package and a policy to assist first home buyers. This is on top of delivering three free trade agreements with our biggest trading partners and biggest world markets.

The surest sign of confidence is the ability to recognise that there are better approaches and ideas elsewhere. Ours is a confident, mature nation. We should embed this notion of benchmarking in all our policy discussions. This coalition government has created the first one-stop shop for environmental approvals. In the coming times, I hope that the same accessibility and simplicity is applied to enterprise supports and job creation. Australia, and Western Australia, would stand to benefit from a one-stop shop on job creation. In the UK and Ireland there are websites where those seeking to employ workers or start a business can access from one place all the government support and regulation applicable to them. This is what the public expects of a modern government. This is what the business community are asking of us.

Innovation and invention need to be the watchwords of government. When people are asked on the street what the Liberals stand for and what the Abbott government stands for, let it be innovation and invention—because there is nothing so wrong with Australia that it cannot be fixed by what is right with Australia. We have the cream of the crop here in Australia and vast resources of every kind to turn idea into reality.
Confidence can be an ephemeral thing. It builds slowly. Confidence, like trust, takes time—it goes up the stairs. Hopelessness happens in an instant—it jumps out the window. One starts to get a sense of the confidence of the nation and the hopefulness of the nation when looking at the savings rates. The current trend we observe of an uptick in the savings rate, each time testing a new relative high, is indicative of a nation with money but unsure and uneasy of what lies ahead. It is the job of government to assuage those fears and to point the way ahead. After all, is that not at the heart of leadership? A leader sees what lies ahead and presents this vision to his or her people, and we all get in the same boat.

I believe the pivot of this debate is where we are going as a nation. The question is the bread and butter of any politician. However, to answer it we need to know where we have come from and have a debate about priorities and importance. In getting the budget to surplus, there are two models of growth for Australia to pursue: the high-immigration, relatively low productivity pathway, or a lower immigration and higher productivity, higher value path. High-migration models put huge pressures on central government to provide services and infrastructure. This low-hanging fruit approach to growth is not ideal if the objective is to get back to a no-debt position as soon as possible. Indeed, this is why the Labor years were so criminal and so terrible. Labor, then as now, lacked a border protection plan. Its approach is more ham-fisted than iron-fisted. It cost us then and costs us now in debt and interest repayments.

The coalition plan is clear and consistent—one message; one story; one plan. Our government is taking tough decisions to protect our nation and secure a prosperous future. This includes asking questions of foreign investment. Everyone on the coalition side knows that foreign investment is absolutely essential to Australia. It has been in the past and will be in the future. There are questions, though, about why we allow speculative investment by foreigners in residential housing markets. Australia's foreign investment policy for residential real estate is designed to increase Australia's housing stock. More efficacious would be to address the issue of land supply and release. Foreign capital would be better spent investing in wealth-creating infrastructure or research, or even industrial real estate. Our government will ask the hard questions because it is the right thing to do by the Australian people.

Innovative low-cost solutions are all around, and one such road is our national R&D spend. Again, using benchmarking we should acknowledge efforts elsewhere in the R&D space, such as the EU Lisbon agenda—a treaty to become the world's most innovative and dynamic area by committing governments to spending at minimum three per cent of GDP on R&D—and try to better that. Setting aspirational national goals is the low-hanging fruit of leadership. It costs nothing and should be done more often. Paint the picture. Point the way.

Another low-hanging fruit is getting more women back into the workforce. Increasing the overall participation rate, especially increasing the female participation rates, will help grow the economy. However, only this government is serious about taking real action on child care. Labor offered a 50 per cent rebate with no average fee guidance. Lo and behold, today we observe that average fees for child care have increased by 50 per cent. This sort of half-hearted, careless policymaking is over. The coalition government understands that accessibility and affordability of child care is one of the biggest issues facing families across Australia. Supporting families to stay in work and get back to work when they have children enables them to create more economic opportunities for their own families and for the nation.

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CHAMBER
This is why one of the first actions taken by the coalition government was to ask the Productivity Commission to inquire into future options for child care and early childhood learning.

It is not in child care alone that the Abbott government is being brave. The government is carefully considering every recommendation of Professor Ian Chubb’s 2014 landmark report, *STEM: Australia’s future*, which called for a national strategy to align research, education, international engagement and innovation to boost the country’s competitiveness. I welcome this and look forward to concrete announcements in this space soon. Productivity improves through innovation, and the country needs engineers, scientists and technologists to innovate. We need to have an improved level of STEM to ensure we are competing at the knowledge end of the economy. Currently, we are the 19th largest economy in the world; a PwC report, *The world in 2050*, has predicted that, without investment in skills and a move away from resources, Australia could slip to 29th position by 2050. Only this coalition government has a plan to secure our long-term competitiveness and standard of living. The challenge ahead is the question of how to become more competitive without becoming more unequal, and STEM has a part to play in this equation.

I see that my time is short, so I would say that the way that government makes a profit to square off this equation has not been rapidly increasing. In the final analysis, our place in the world and our quality of life need to be earned every day.

Mr MITCHELL (McEwen—Second Deputy Speaker) (12:20): The bills before us today total some $1.7 billion in additional funding proposed to be appropriated. This is $1.7 billion that has already been incorporated into the budget bottom line and was presented at the last MYEFO. What did the last MYEFO show? It pointed to a $44 billion blow-out in the budget deficit over the forward estimates compared to the 2014-15 budget—$44 billion from the self-professed party of adults. Really, so much for a government of no surprises. The $44 billion was a surprise to me and it would certainly be a surprise to those struggling to make ends meet in my community.

Let us just pause for a moment and reflect on some of the public statements of this Treasurer. The member for North Sydney, the now flailing Treasurer, told the National Press Club in 2012:

… we will achieve a surplus in our first year in office and we will achieve a surplus for every year of our first term.

In 2013, the same member said he had not retreated from that pledge:

Our commitment is emphatic—

he told the ABC’s *AM* program—

… we will deliver a surplus in our first year and every year after that.

Instead of that, the government of no surprises and no changes, the so-called adults, have doubled the debt.

We need to look at this $44 billion figure in the context of the overall economic environment. Debt is higher in the MYEFO than it was in the budget. Gross debt, over the forward estimates, is increasing by $100 billion, and net debt is increasing by $146.3 billion over the same period. Unemployment is currently the highest that it has been since August 2002. In 2002, who was the minister for employment?—Tony Abbott. Consumer confidence
is still low—nine per cent lower now than it was at the 2013 federal election. Business confidence is still below long-run averages.

The additional $1.7 billion in appropriations does not tell the full story. What we do not see are the cuts that are being made. A wise man said to me last week, 'Mr Abbott is like a little dog chasing a bus. Now that the dog has caught the bus, he doesn't know what to do with it.' That pretty much sums up how this government has been since it has been in government. They do not understand how cruel these deliberate, savage cuts are to people out there, who are working just to make ends meet. Their actions give you a true insight into the minds and ideology behind this right-wing, out-of-touch, arrogant government.

The papers show that this budget is not one which cuts debt or curtails spending; it is one that systematically attacks and tries to breakdown the Australian way of life. It has attacked the sick, the poor, the young and the elderly. It savages universal health care. It robs young people of educational opportunities and causes great anxiety to the elderly about their future. It is a budget which has rewarded the rich at the expense of the poor. It delivers for the millionaires at the cost of the disadvantaged. Never before has a government concentrated so hard on destroying the Australian way of life. Of course, it must be remembered that the budget bottom line, as stated in the last MYEFO, still incorporates the harsh and unfair measures that were introduced in this government's cruel budget. Even with all these savings, the deficit still blew out by $44 billion.

The effects of this budget are very clear in my community. These systematic attacks on universal healthcare in Australia are a direct attack on the most vulnerable people in McEwen. The on-again, off-again, on-again, off-again GP tax means that the electorate of McEwen will be taxed almost $8 million a year just for being sick. Families in our community should not have to decide whether they take their sick child to the doctor or put food on the table. That is not to mention the $270 million cut from the current provisions Medicare offers. Prime Minister Abbott, instead, wants to throw that burden onto the backs of struggling, hardworking families. The budget is about forcing our sick and vulnerable out of the health system entirely.

On the night before the election, Tony Abbott promised there would be no changes to pensions. The budget has confirmed that this promise has been broken. Pensioners are quite rightly now saying that they have been Abbotted. These vicious cuts to pensions will have a severe effect on the lives of 24,600 pensioners in McEwen. The government is slashing the current system that makes sure the pension keeps pace with the cost of living, and is instead going to index the pensions by CPI. The CPI does not even come close to reflecting the cost of living, which shows just how out of touch the Prime Minister and this chaotic Liberal-National government is.

This has been confirmed by the government's Intergenerational report. The savage cuts are ensuring that our pensioners will not be able to make ends meet, especially when they are living off $20,000 a year—$384 a week. And this government is also hurting those who have worked hard for their retirement. The Abbott government has targeted low paid workers and their families by cutting the low-income superannuation contribution. Working mums, and those living in rural and regional areas, are the hardest hit amongst the 3.6 million Australians who have been affected by this cruel cut. The changes mean that low-paid workers lose a yearly tax refund of up to $500. These cuts particularly affect workers in the retail and
hospitality sectors who now have to pay an additional $500 tax per year. At the same time as this was being done, the government gave 16,000 of Australia's wealthiest people a tax break on their superannuation earnings.

This budget is slashing millions of dollars from local councils, which hits regional areas of Victoria particularly hard. Over four years from the 2014-15 to the 2017-18 financial years, the estimated loss to local councils in McEwen is very clear: Nillumbik Shire will lose $1.3 million; Macedon Ranges Shire will lose $2.7 million; Hume Shire will lose $5.2 million; Mitchell Shire will lose $2.6 million; and Whittlesea Shire will lose $5 million. That is almost $17 million dollars lost in these areas alone—$17 million of services and assistance that the people of our communities will have to go without, thanks to a heartless government. This is going to wreak havoc on the community in flow-on effects, especially since it means that councils will be forced to put up rates or cut services because of this government's cruel and heartless attacks.

McEwen has the largest population of children aged between zero and five years. We are one of the biggest users of child care in this country. We have 16,139 families receiving family tax benefit A, and we have 13,856 families receiving the important assistance of family tax benefit B, so 30,000 families in my electorate are going to be worse-off because of the money-grabbing antics of this government. The Abbott government has cut millions of dollars in preschool funding, childcare services, accessibility programs, outside-school-hour care, along with freezing the childcare rebate. This is a government that is punishing you for wanting to bring up your child and raise your family the best way you can.

I would like to discuss how cruel this budget is in ruining the futures of young people in McEwen. Over $1 billion of assistance and support to apprentices and trade training centres in my electorate has been cut. Labor's program of trade training centres has been integral to building the skills and expertise of young people. Following Mr Abbott's $950 million cut, eight schools in the electorate will not have an opportunity to apply for a trade training centre, and they need it—places like Sunbury College, Gisborne Secondary College, Salesian College, Sunbury Downs Secondary College, Candlebark, Hume Anglican Grammar, Plenty Valley Christian College and The Kilmore International School.

Before the election, Mr Abbott promised Australia's 400,000 apprentices more financial assistance to help them learn a trade and find a good job. He has cut the assistance through the Tools For Your Trade program. Hundreds of apprentices are now out of pocket since these cuts came into effect on 1 July 2014. He now has his eyes firmly set on workplace relations—and you know what that means!

With regard to penalty rates, the Prime Minister himself said, 'If you don't want to work weekends, don't.' It came as a great surprise to the thousands of people who work in industries and jobs that are needed around the clock—people such as nurses, ambos, police and defence personnel, just to name a few.

When it comes to workplace relations, as a matter of common intelligence, you have to ask yourself: how can anyone believe these dogmatists opposite who, at every opportunity, have fought to cut the wages and conditions of working Australians? Of course they will, because it is in their DNA.
I would like to highlight the significance of the heartless cuts to youth programs. We have several community organisations who work hard to ensure our youth remain either in school and complete year 12 or, at least, engage in some form of training, such as in the trade training centres that I mentioned earlier.

The Abbott government has stripped away funding for these essential programs, where only $130 million was needed to keep them going until 2015. Cobaw Community Health and Kildonan UnitingCare are two organisations involved in delivering the Youth Connections program in the McEwen electorate, which may now have to close their doors.

In some parts of McEwen, we have a 20 per cent youth unemployment rate, which is among the highest in Australia. These young adults will be completely at a loose end, with Newstart payments not kicking in for six months. So they have no job, no money and, to add insult to injury, the government wants them to now completely upend and move away from their families and support networks to find jobs—that are probably in a certain person's mind! Heaven forbid if they want to study in order to forge out a better life and career for themselves!

Prime Minister Abbott's deregulation of university fees is another matter that has caused great angst to many families in rural and regional areas. He wants to deregulate the system so that universities can 'name their price'. Experts all agree that, if universities get the chance to increase fees, of course they will.

I want to remind the House of Mr Stuart Edwards, from Riddells Creek in my electorate. He is a single dad of four kids, who works full time, while studying part time. Stuart says, and I quote:

I don't want to live in a nation where uni places are given to the rich. I don't know how I could afford to send my four kids to uni if these changes happen. Certainly nobody is offering my kids a free education, Mr Abbott!

When I asked the failing Treasurer a question in question time, I brought this specific example to his attention: what is he supposed to do now that he is losing $6,000 worth of support from the government? The Treasurer's response was breathtaking. He said, 'Maybe he needs to get a job.' Mr Edwards is working full time, he is studying and bringing up his kids. What more do you want him to do? He works full time but, because the Treasurer is so out of touch, he just says, 'Tell him to go get a job.' It is just so easy—just go out and get a job anywhere you want! It just shows how out of touch the government are, when they sit there and say: 'If you don't want to work weekends, don't. If you want to get a job, go get a job.'

Across my electorate of McEwen the local government areas of Macedon, Mitchell, Whittlesea and Hume have about 40 to 48 per cent people attending universities. These students are now weighing up that option, whether they can afford to, because they will be dealt a lifetime debt sentence.

At least nine schools in my electorate are losing funding because they hired student welfare officers instead of religious chaplains: Beveridge Primary School; Broadford Primary School; Broadford Secondary College; Mount Ridley P-12 College; Panton Hill Primary School; Seymour College; Seymour College—Special Campus; The Lakes South Morgan P-9 School; and Wandong Primary School. These are all schools that have employed welfare officers. But they lose them because they are not religious based, which means that the networks and the effort that has gone in over the years to build them and to get the trust of the...
kids now goes away. Unless they complete a religious doctrine, they will not be able to work in our schools. It is absolutely appalling.

In a recent study, Canberra's National Centre for Social And Economic Modelling reported that McEwen townships are going to be some of the hardest hit across Australia because of this budget. Families in suburbs such as Craigieburn will be out of pocket by $800 a year; Sunbury, $614; Wallan, $600; Whittlesea, $525; South Morang, $508; Kilmore and Broadford, $481; and Romsey, $410. Compare that to the figures of the Prime Minister's electorate of Warringah, one of the wealthiest areas in Australia, where they will be worse off by only $125.

This budget is a disaster for the nation and a disaster for the people of McEwen. Never before has a government failed this nation so quickly and put so many people at risk. I will continue to fight this government to ensure that our communities are looked after and I look forward to seeing the back of the worst government this country has ever had.

Mr FLETCHER (Bradfield—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Communications) (12:35): I am pleased to speak on the Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2014-2015 and cognate bills. In the time available to me today, I want to argue three propositions.

Firstly, that Australia's economy is facing some significant challenges both structural and cyclical, which we need to respond to.

Secondly, the coalition has an economic plan for Australia, which will let us rise to the challenge and seize on the opportunities in front of us.

Thirdly, the Labor Party needs to stop denying reality and begin engaging on these issues, as a serious political party should.

We do face a combination of cyclical and structural challenges. As resources investment falls and key commodity prices drop that, in turn, feeds through to tax revenues growing much more slowly which, in turn, creates severe budgetary pressures.

We have inherited a huge budgetary mess from the previous Labor government, which delivered almost $240 billion worth of deficits between 2008-09 and 2013-14. This year we are paying around $14.2 billion in gross interest costs, which works out to be an average of $40 million every single day. So even if Australia's economic conditions meant that we could continue to expect very strong growth in tax revenues, we would face a big budgetary challenge. However, because of the end of the investment phase of the resources boom we cannot expect such continued strong growth in our tax revenues.

What we saw between the fiscal year 2003 and fiscal year 2008 was that, every year, revenue significantly exceeded what was budgeted—so-called parameter changes, in the jargon of Treasury, which, in some years, were as high as $30 billion, approaching two per cent of GDP. But with the resources investment boom having ended, there is no longer a huge boost to investment as resources companies rush to build new mines and plants and the prices of key commodities like coal and iron ore are down 50 per cent or more from their peak. All of this means that the budget repair task must be faced when revenues keep undershooting expectations rather than giving us pleasing and unexpected windfalls.

Then, our economy faces a number of significant structural issues. The first is our ageing population, which, as the recently issued 2015 Intergenerational report shows, involves a growing proportion of the population being aged 65 or over. Indeed, the number of
Australians in this age group is projected to double in the next 40 years. The ratio of people of traditional working age to the very young and to the very elderly is falling. For every person aged 65 and over, today there are currently around four people aged between 15 and 64, which, incidentally, is down from around seven, I think, in the 1970s. In 40 years' time, that number will nearly halve.

Australians are living longer, and we have one of the longest life expectancies in the world. It is worth making the point that for all of us, as individuals, that is great news. Not only are we living longer but our so-called quality adjusted life years are also increasing. That is to say, we can expect a higher proportion of our life span to be years of quality living in which we can very much enjoy the opportunities of being alive. But this does have fiscal consequences, with important implications in growing demand for services like health and aged care, which fall very heavily on the Commonwealth budget, and, indeed, for the provision of retirement incomes—the aged pension.

Another important structural issue we are facing as a nation is the rise of Asia. This presents many opportunities, but it also presents some competitive challenges, and some of these were highlighted in the Innovation and Competitiveness Agenda issued by the government last year, which made the point that economies like China, India, Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines have grown dramatically over the past 30 years, and this is projected to continue. It is expected that by 2025 China will be the largest economy in the world. In 1985, so-called emerging Asia represented around nine per cent of the global economy. By 2025 it will be around 40 per cent. Emerging Asia has also seen its share of global manufacturing output increase from around six per cent in 1982 to 29 per cent in 2012. At the same time, its share of services exports has also grown from six per cent in 2003 to 11 per cent last year, and the important point is this in terms of the competitive pressures that face the Australian economy. As the economies of Asia invest in education, increase the skill levels of their population and move up the value chain, they are producing ever more advanced goods and services. I saw this myself over a number of years as an executive in the telecommunications sector, where the percentage of telecommunications equipment coming, particularly from Chinese vendors, started to grow and grow, and the statistics bear this out. In 2000, China produced around six per cent of the world’s communication equipment. By 2010 this had increased to 26 per cent, and that is coming from brands which have rapidly become very well known globally like Huawei and ZTE.

That brings me to another structural issue that our economy is facing, which is the relentless march of technology, which is intensifying competition and fundamentally transforming the global economy. According to a 2011 report from well-known consultancy McKinsey, around a fifth of GDP growth in advanced economies over the previous five years had come from the internet and associated technologies, and, interestingly, 75 per cent of that was in sectors not traditionally seen as technology industries. Indeed, the disruption of industry after industry by a better, internet based offering is one of the great constants of modern economics. Ask Kodak about digital photography, Fairfax about SEEK or Drive.com.au, the free-to-air TV networks about Apple TV or YouTube, Angus & Robertson about Amazon, Blockbuster about Netflix, or Taxis Combined about Uber.

This transformation is having a profound industry-by-industry effect. It is also, increasingly, having a profound national impact. Some nations are doing well out of this
massive economic transformation; some are facing grave threats. Certainly, we can expect a 
continued growth in the internet economy in Australia. In fact, according to Deloitte Access 
Economics, it will grow twice as fast as GDP and reach $70 billion by 2016. But, clearly, in 
the face of digital disruption, the first question we need to ask as policy makers is: where does 
a nation like Australia have a competitive advantage? We need to recognise that competition 
is affecting sector after sector, including in the domestic economy, in sectors which used to be 
protected by barriers to entry such as high costs of transport to get goods into the Australian 
market.

If those are some of the challenges and opportunities facing the Australian economy, it is 
very important that the government has an economic plan, and the coalition certainly does. It 
is our duty, as a government, to develop and implement a plan to respond as the global 
economy is changing so quickly. We have a number of strands to that economic plan. Firstly, 
we need to get debt and deficit under control. We cannot continue to finance spending 
through increased debt. Clearly, as your debt grows you become more vulnerable as a nation. 
With Australia, in particular, having relatively high levels of private indebtedness, it is 
particularly important to have a strong public sector balance sheet. To protect yourself as a 
nation and to avoid that vulnerability, what you want to see is a government contributing to 
national savings and reducing debt through budget surpluses, not adding to debt through 
budget deficits. We also need to address the underlying issue of rising Commonwealth 
spending, which, in real terms, since 2007-08, has grown by an annual average of more than 
four per cent, compared to three per cent during the 1980s and 1990s. Here is a little legacy of 
Julia Gillard, Kevin Rudd and Wayne Swan, who still is the member for Lilley. In just six 
years to 2013-14, government spending as a percentage of GDP has risen by around 2.5 
percentage points. That is an extraordinary leap in a short period of time.

So, if our first priority is getting debt and deficit under control, the next priority is to really 
get our university system firing because we face, as a nation, the imperative of capturing 
technology driven economic growth for the reasons I spoke about earlier. It is, therefore, vital 
that our university system is able to perform to its full potential. In the 21st century our 
universities must be engine rooms of innovation and discovery, and it this reality which 
underpins the government's plan to give universities the freedom to set their own fees, student 
numbers and strategic direction. And it is fascinating to see a growing number of Labor 
luminaries, no longer constrained by caucus discipline, coming out in support of the sorts of 
changes that we are advocating to the university system.

Another priority for the coalition government in responding to economic challenges is to 
capture as a nation the trade opportunities in Asia in both services and products. We have a 
set of policies that look to the future and capture the opportunities available to Australia 
thanks to our geography, our endowments of natural and economic resources and the talent 
and creativity of our people. In just one year Trade Minister Andrew Robb has secured new 
free trade agreements with Korea, Japan and China which not only offer significant 
opportunities for our agricultural and resources exporters but also reduce barriers that until 
now have held back Australian services exports in these markets.

Another priority is supporting Australian business in this new, intensely competitive world. 
Industry Minister Macfarlane has recently updated industry policy to recognise the new 
imperatives of competition. He has reprioritised funding, putting money towards building
better linkages between industry on the one hand and researchers in universities and institutes on the other, with the aim of leveraging Australia's considerable research strengths into new business opportunities.

Another part of the coalition's economic plan to respond to the challenges and opportunities we face is to enhance our national infrastructure to increase our productivity. From Infrastructure Minister Truss and Communications Minister Turnbull, we are seeing billions of dollars going into enabling infrastructure to make our economy more competitive and productive: a second Sydney airport; expressways to move people and freight more quickly around our major cities; and the National Broadband Network to make high-speed connections available to all Australians.

Let me turn to the third proposition that I wish to put to the House this afternoon. At a time of challenge for the Australian economy, it is incumbent upon the Labor Party to stop denying reality and begin engaging seriously on these issues—just as happened 30 years ago when Australia faced serious challenges as our heavily protected and regulated economic model left us increasingly uncompetitive. The Labor Party of today seems miles away from the Labor Party of that day, which engaged seriously with those issues. There is a challenge to our political system in 2015 to come together to address these strategic issues that we face as a nation. I quote from what respected economist Warwick McKibbin had to say in the Financial Review today:

"Labor appears to cling to the fallacy that adroit fiscal policy explains Australia's success .... The continued belief in Labor's fiscal miracle appears to underlie the reluctance of current Labor leaders to acknowledge the extent of the multiple problems Australia faces. Australia can't continue to attempt to keep the economic structures of the previous century when resources—human and physical—need to be channelled into new industries."

Those are some comments by a very respected economist about the challenges our nation faces and the importance of the Labor Party engaging seriously with policy responses. Instead, I am disappointed to say, so far we have only seen some fairly silly political game playing. According to the Leader of the Opposition we do not have a serious budget problem, we simply have 'a budget task'—those were his words in the budget in reply speech last year. The shadow Treasurer dismisses Australia's federal debt challenges as mere rhetoric. He is quoted as saying: 'Debt is expected to peak at 17 per cent of GDP. Compare that to Canada—a well-run, resource-based economy, conservatively administered with debt more than double that ... or Germany at 52 per cent. We're not talking about Greece or Portugal or Ireland here.' So the shadow Treasurer seeks to dismiss the issue of government debt. He mentions Ireland, and it is instructive to look at what actually happened in Ireland. In 2007 Ireland had a debt to GDP ratio of only 11.1 per cent. But the Irish economy then fell into deep recession. Banks needed to be recapitalised with public money. The net debt to GDP ratio exploded. Six years later in Ireland, net debt as a percentage of GDP is well over 90 per cent. And here is the social consequence of that: unemployment in Ireland today, at 10.5 per cent, is more than double the rate it stood at prior to the GFC.

So despite these claims from the Labor Party that we do not need to worry about the debt to GDP ratio, if we look at Ireland and other examples around the world, ongoing budgetary mismanagement of a sort the Labor Party continues to advocate has serious social consequences, including savagely high unemployment rates—and that is an outcome the
coalition is working very hard to make sure we do not face in Australia. Australia faces both cyclical and structural challenges, but our fast-changing economic circumstances also offer rich opportunities. The coalition has an economic plan for Australia which will let us rise to the challenge and seize on the opportunities. I would like to see the Labor Party join in a serious engagement with these issues in the national interest.

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga) (12:50): I am pleased to be speaking today on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2014-2015, Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2014-2015 and Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 2) 2014-2015. A few weeks ago I was at a street stall in the suburb of Greensborough in the heart of my electorate. Extraordinarily, some 10 months after the government's flawed budget was handed down, people are still talking about it. Many people stopped me to raise their concerns over the GP tax and the government's plan to deregulate the higher education system, which is currently being debated in the parliament. The level of outrage in the community over this government's budget is unprecedented in my time in politics. In a little over an hour, around 200 people signed a petition against this government's plans for universities. It did not matter whether they were young or old, everybody I spoke to that day was very concerned about the affordability of higher education. People who had never set foot on a university campus in their lives were adamant that young Australians should have the chance to go to university if that is what they want to do.

So the message I received very clearly that day was that Australians should not be priced out of a university education. Make no mistake: that is exactly what this Liberal government wants to do to Australia's higher education system. It will see a reduction in participation by young Australians in higher education. How on earth does that serve the national interest? How does making it harder for young people to go to university improve the employment prospects of our young people? How is it good for generating economic growth and innovation in our economy? These are the questions which the previous speaker, and in fact the whole of the Abbott government, simply have been unable to answer. It is why we on this side of the parliament, and so many Australians, oppose the government's higher education changes. We will continue to fight for a fair higher education system no matter how hard the government tries to destroy it.

The other big issue that people in my electorate raised with me is jobs, particularly for young people. Of course, many local people are worried about their own jobs. They are worried that if they lose their job there will not be enough new jobs created to help them find employment. Unemployment is still at 6.3 per cent, and, significantly, youth unemployment remains at a stubbornly high 13.9 per cent. The proportion of young people, 15 to 19 years of age, who are looking for work and cannot find it is now almost 4½ times the general unemployment rate—only just off record highs. The Brotherhood of St Laurence recently released its analysis of unemployment data, revealing the scale of the problem. The impact of the global financial crisis on employment has lasted far longer than the impact of the last recession in the early 1990s. It has been more than six years since the global financial crisis, and unemployment remains high.

What is this Liberal government's response to the problem of unemployment rising on their watch? The response is not a jobs plan, as we might have hoped for. In fact, in the budget that was brought down 10 months ago, the government wants to cut young people off from Newstart for six months at a time. I have argued that this is the harshest measure of all in the
government's budget. Young people looking for a job will be forced to wait six months before receiving any income support, and in some cases they might cycle through this six months of no income support for many months longer. The government is saying to these young people who lose their jobs or cannot find a job, 'You're on your own.' If, after six months without income support, that young person has not yet found work this measure will require them to take part in Work for the Dole. After the period on Work for the Dole, if they still cannot find work they will lose their unemployment benefit for another six months.

I have been at many pensioner forums around the country recently, and older Australians have expressed to me the concern they have for young people who will find themselves with absolutely nothing to live on—no income support at all. These older Australians really understand that young unemployed people need help to find work, not the sort of punishment that this government wants to deliver. I have never, ever seen a government in Australia abandon its young people in the manner of this Liberal government. Leaving young job seekers with nothing to live on for six months is simply cruel. The government's policy risks confining young Australians to an endless cycle of poverty and despair. It will see young job seekers pushed into crisis and homelessness. In fact, the Department of Social Services last year admitted that they anticipate around 500,000 new claims for emergency assistance as a result of this measure alone.

People are very worried about work, and especially the government's response to rising unemployment. They are worried about the kind of Australia that this government wants to leave for our children: a harder, colder Australia, where it is much more difficult to get ahead; an Australia where it is harder to get an education and harder to find a job, and where the government abandons you when things turn bad. It is not the kind of country that most people want to live in.

Rising unemployment is also, of course, a threat to families—particularly to single-income families already being targeted by this government's cuts to family payments. The government is cutting family payments by $5.5 billion. Of course, that $5.5 billion that the government wants to cut out of family payments will all come out of the pockets of Australian families. The government plans to throw families off family tax benefit part B when their youngest child turns six. As a result of this government's budget, some single-income families on an income of around $65,000 a year will be around $6,000 a year worse off. The Prime Minister has said that he wants to make the government's families package front and centre of the political agenda in 2015. These huge cuts to family payments are front and centre right now, and the government should get rid of them. This is a serious attack on the living standards of Australian families.

On top of all of this, we have seen the government axe $270 million from the Department of Social Services discretionary grants program. This is the money that goes to community organisations that help so many vulnerable Australians, such as people who get help battling homelessness and mental illness, and those recovering from the devastation of bushfires. These organisations were informed via email on the eve of Christmas that they would be losing funding. In my electorate alone, community organisations like Diamond Valley Community Support, Banyule Housing, Banyule Support and Information Centre and Volunteers of Banyule face an uncertain future as result of this government's funding cuts. These organisations provide front-line services to some of the most vulnerable people in my
local community. It is just impossible to understand the government's logic behind the callous cuts to these community organisations. It is also impossible to understand why the government decided it would cut funding to disability advocacy groups—groups like the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations, Autism Asperger's Advocacy Australia, Blind Citizens Australia, Deaf Australia, Down Syndrome Australia, and the National Council on Intellectual Disability.

There has been some good news—that the government has decided to grant some transition funding to eight disability organisations. This is a victory for the disability sector, but this funding needs to be made permanent. You only have to look at the government's plan for Australia's retirement system to see this government's appalling policy making. The proposed changes to pension indexation are of course a blatant broken promise. The pension has been benchmarked to wages for 40 years—and for a reason: so that pensioners' standard of living keeps pace with the standard of living of the working population more broadly. John Howard, when he was Prime Minister, knew that. That is why he said:

… enshrining of pension entitlements at 25 per cent of male total average weekly earnings is an important safeguard.

Well, this safeguard is about to be broken by this government, if they get their way.

Pensions should be indexed by whichever is the higher—the consumer price index, male total average weekly earnings or the pensioner index that Labor introduced to provide additional protection to Australian pensioners. The new minister now has had plenty of time to come and explain to pensioners why they deserve to have their pension indexation cut. We have seen the new minister, Minister Morrison, spending a lot of time parading himself around as a contender for the Liberal leadership. I would have thought he should be getting out there to explain to pensioners why he thinks it is okay to take $23 billion out of the pockets of pensioners by 2023-24—$23 billion less will be spent by this government if they get their way in cutting pension indexation. Labor of course will vehemently oppose these cuts.

The former minister, Minister Andrews, despite all his flaws, did explain to the House in 2011 how the wages benchmark 'enabled pensioners to keep ahead of cost of living increases'. So, I call on the new Minister for Social Services to explain why he thinks the current indexation arrangements linking pensions to wage increases are too generous. Why does he think Australian pensioners deserve to have their pensions cut by $80 a week within the next decade? These are figures from the Australian Council of Social Service, who have made clear what will happen to pensions: an $80-a-week cut for pensioners over the next decade if this government gets its way. So many pensioners feel absolutely betrayed by this government. Of course, Labor delivered the biggest increase to the base rate of the pension in the pension's 100-year history.

And that is not all this government wants to do to older Australians. The government wants to increase the pension age to 70, and they have also decided to delay the increase in superannuation that Labor had proposed to see the superannuation guarantee go from nine per cent to 12 per cent. So, this is really what the Liberal Party is saying to Australians: they want you to work longer, and when you finally do get to retire the pension will be worth less, and along the way they are going to deny you the opportunity to save for your retirement during your working life by slowing down the increase in the superannuation guarantee. This is the
sort of poor public policy that this Liberal government has become renowned for. Of course, poor public policy is not the only reason the Australian people have lost faith in this government. This Prime Minister promised he would not do so many of these things that are prominent in the budget. The Prime Minister said before the election: ‘No cuts to pensions, no cuts to health or education, no cuts to the ABC or SBS, no adverse changes to superannuation and no new taxes.’ On every single one of these he has broken his promise to the Australian people, and he will never be believed again.

Dr HENDY (Eden-Monaro) (13:05): I rise to speak on the most recent appropriation bills. It gives me an opportunity to speak more widely about my electorate and the government's policies. I note that a large part of my electorate, and half of its name, is titled 'the Monaro'. The great Australian historian Keith Hancock wrote the history of the region in his 1972 book Discovering Monaro. Apart from the history of the most beautiful region in the nation, Hancock also wrote one of the most influential accounts of Australia written in the 20th century. This book was appropriately entitled Australia. In this book he challenged the three core pillars of what would later be referred to as the Australian settlement: the policies of industry protection, state socialism and the White Australia policy. These three pillars, argued Hancock, worked together towards stagnation.

Much of the Australian settlement has been dismantled in the decades subsequent—and rightly so. However, not all parts of the settlement were bad. Another element of the Australian settlement was what I have labelled the country-city compact. It has now mainly disappeared. 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.

For many decades, Australia, so the saying went, 'rode on the sheep's back.' Indeed, my electorate covers a region with one of the highest concentrations of sheep in the entire country. However, Australia no longer rides on the sheep's back—this much is true—but country regions like ours remain vital to Australia. Around 93 per cent of the food consumed in Australia is grown in Australia. Almost a third of Australians live outside of our major cities. Sadly, however, there is significant social and economic inequality between country and city. This is unacceptable, and we need to do better. We need to focus our efforts on nation building, we need to focus on building capacity and we need to ensure the infrastructure and services that have been neglected in the country are rebuilt.

When I came into parliament, I dedicated myself to making the argument for a reinvigoration of the country-city compact. It is at the forefront of my mind when I talk to people about their lives all throughout Eden-Monaro. It is at the forefront of my mind when I bring those concerns here to Canberra. It is at the forefront of my mind when I make the case for this project or that. It is why I used to think differently about securing projects for Eden-Monaro. Four weeks ago, I had the pleasure of attending and representing the federal government at the community open day of the South East Regional Hospital in Bega. I was
joined by the Governor of New South Wales, General David Hurley, and the New South Wales Treasurer and state member for Bega, Andrew Constance. This is a project that I am very happy to say was made possible by the federal government contributing $160.1 million. The New South Wales government contributed a further $27 million. But the project should not be thought of as something necessarily special given to the Bega Valley by benevolent politicians in state and federal capitals. It is a project that should be obvious under a country-city compact.

But why should the Commonwealth spend $160 million in an area like Bega? Let us look at rural and regional health outcomes. Life expectancy can be significantly lower in remote areas, but this inequality is reflected across a range of data. Our friends and neighbours living in rural, regional and remote areas have 20 per cent higher reported rates of ‘only fair’ or ‘poor’ health. They have 10 per cent higher mortality rates. They have 24 per cent higher rates of smoking. They have 32 per cent higher rates of risky alcohol consumption. They have 20 per cent higher rates of injury and disability. The incidents of reported injury is 33 per cent higher outside major cities. Studies reported in the Medical Journal of Australia show that people diagnosed with cancer in regional areas were 35 per cent more likely to die within five years of diagnosis than patients in cities. Tragically, the further a cancer patient lives from a metropolitan centre the more likely that patient is to die within five years.

Living in the country is different. Most of us living in rural and regional areas do so for a reason. We not only understand the critical part country Australia plays in our national economy but we also enjoy the way of life. But that contribution and that freedom to live a good and productive life— or, as Thomas Jefferson famously said, ‘the pursuit of happiness’— should not come at the excessive cost that it does. People in rural and regional Australia deserve the quality of life and the opportunity to pursue their goals just the same as urban Australians do. They do not just deserve that chance, they are owed it under a country-city compact.

This compact is not just the heavy hand of government bestowing bounty from above. It should be about communities and all levels of government working collaboratively to achieve optimal outcomes. It is about communities and government working collaboratively to achieve an equality of opportunity, because it is an equality of opportunity rather than an equality of outcome that country people desire. Country people do not sit back and demand the same outcomes in their lives as city people achieve. This is not the country way. What they deserve and are owed are the same opportunities to achieve. They deserve the opportunities to convert their resources, their capital and their enterprise into a meaningful and secure life for themselves and their families.

Of course, the federal government is already working collaboratively with local communities, and across all levels of government, to provide better outcomes. In Queanbeyan, the council compiled and assessed a number of road project priorities. These were large projects that would require significant support of both the federal and New South Wales governments. As a result, the $50 million Queanbeyan bypass project is now a reality. The community articulated their priorities through council and the federal and state governments allocated funding in accordance with those priorities. This is the collaboration required under a country-city compact.
Similarly, the federal government provides funding to local governments through the Financial Assistance Grants program. In Eden-Monaro, local governments will receive a total of over $32 million in untied funding to support communities to deliver the services and facilities they need. The grants are untied, so councils can spend the money according to local priorities. This is the collaboration required under a country-city compact. Likewise, the Roads to Recovery program allows councils across Eden-Monaro to direct local road funding to where it is needed most—$23 million of which is allocated to Eden-Monaro. For instance, the Cooma-Monaro Shire Council will receive $3 million over the next four years, the Eurobodalla Shire Council will be allocated $4.4 million and so on for the seven shires. Again, these payments allow councils to direct local road funding to where it is needed most. This is the collaboration required under a country-city compact.

We can point to bridges in our local community. These critical pieces of infrastructure provide the linkages for our community and the commerce and transport required, allowing areas to grow. But they cost money—a lot of money, not only to build but also to upgrade and maintain. The federal government's $300 million Bridges Renewal project does just that. In Bombala, an injection of nearly $250,000 allows for the upgrade of the Parsonage Creek bridge. This project will help in access for trucks to the Dongwaha timber mill, which is a major economic development project. In Broulee, nearly $1.1 million in federal funding will make the Candlagan Creek bridge at Mossy Point safer and more reliable—again, a project with obvious economic development benefits for this important tourist destination. These projects are made possible by close and effective consultation between local and federal government. This is the collaboration required under a country-city compact.

Further, the $15 million Port of Eden redevelopment will proceed because of $10 million in federal funding. In Queanbeyan, $500,000 of federal funding to the council made the upgrade of Seiffert Oval possible, and I enjoyed seeing the Raiders rugby league team return home to Seiffert Oval a few weeks ago. In Moruya, the new Eurobodalla Sub-Acute Rehabilitation Unit at the District Hospital was opened a couple of weeks ago. This $11.8 million facility was funded by the federal government's COAG subacute beds program.

These projects are all made possible by cooperation and collaboration between the community and government. But there is more to be done. We will provide funding to address mobile black spots in Eden-Monaro. Further, The federal government has made a high priority of transforming Labor's fantastical promises of the NBN into a commercially viable reality.

Three weeks ago I was joined in Queanbeyan by the communications minister, the member for Wentworth, when we welcomed the era of super-fast broadband to our town. We visited one of the first businesses to switch onto the NBN in Queanbeyan, Codarra Advanced Systems. The NBN will bring multiple efficiency and productivity benefits to Codarra's operations, including providing flexibility for their workforce, allowing them to work from home, on the road or from clients' offices.

Somewhere in the order of $90 to $100 million in NBN spending is in the process of being rolled out in Eden-Monaro. Further, there are major infrastructure projects that I will continue to pursue. The Moruya and Merimbula airports have been identified by local councils as a priority to allow for increased tourism and economic growth. I strongly support these projects and will fight to secure finding.
Another project I will champion is high-speed rail or very fast train, particularly between Canberra and Sydney. I am strongly behind the high-speed rail project, because of its major implications for developing regional Australia. With respect to that project, an objective reading of the research shows that even with private-sector involvement there would be a heavy reliance on the public purse. But how is that different from the tens of billions of dollars being spent on urban infrastructure, right now, for which rural taxpayers see little commercial return to help them meet their cost-of-living pressures?

Regional Australians do not begrudge taxpayer spending on urban infrastructure but seem to cop it when it is used as an excuse for why they do not receive it in return. The high-speed rail project has genuine win-win potential. Allowing us to grow regional Australia and attract population away from the choking megacities, this is where we can see the full potential of the country-city compact realized—economic development and growth in the country, coupled with a reduction in urban stress in our cities. The country-city compact has not been fully revived. It should be something that every school child in the nation knows, as part of their understanding of how this great nation should go forward in the 21st century. Whatever makes country Australia stronger will also make Australia as a whole stronger.

The Liberal national government, through its actions, acknowledging the needs of country Australians, is doing its bit. However, more needs to be done. Deputy Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak.

Mr MATHESON (Macarthur) (13:18): I rise today to talk about the government's historic investment in infrastructure in my electorate of Macarthur and the benefits and opportunities this will provide for people in the region for generations to come. For too long the people of Macarthur were overlooked by previous state and federal governments. Labor's neglect led to a lack of local public-transport connections, road congestion, limited local job opportunities, and health and community services to service our rapidly-growing population.

I am proud to say that the Abbott government has a clear plan of action to end Labor's investment vacuum and is delivering a record $3.5 billion roads package, over 10 years, in the area. That will create 4,000 jobs in addition to other economic spin-offs, not to mention slashing the drive time for local residents. In addition to the $3.5 million Western Sydney Infrastructure Plan, the government is providing $1.5 billion for WestConnex, linking Western Sydney and South-West Sydney with the city, Kingsford Smith Airport and port precincts. In conjunction with our state liberal counterparts, this government has ensured the redevelopment of Campbelltown Hospital. We have invested in new schools in Oran Park and Wilton and preserved a rail corridor for extension of the south-west rail line.

The Abbott government has also invested $350,000 in Campbelltown, through the Safer Streets program, to tackle the increasing incidence of crime, in places like Queen Street, that is concerning local residents. I again acknowledge and thank Campbelltown City Council and Campbelltown Police for supporting this initiative. Visible cameras will make many potential criminals think twice before committing a crime. While reducing assaults and petty theft in and around the national precincts, we can restore the confidence of local shoppers and shop owners and make these areas vibrant, safe and enjoyable places to be.

Not only is the Abbott government tackling crime in making the Macarthur community a safer place to be but also it is providing funding to make our roads safer. This is through the roads' national black spot program, which saw Camden Council receive $295,000 from the
federal government. This investment in the black spot project in Cut Hill Road will result in a safer road for residents through targeted upgrades that will help save lives and reduce road trauma, making it safer for motorists, cyclists and pedestrians. Our government has also invested $2.9 million in the Roads to Recovery Program to assist with local road infrastructure and maintenance. A major benefit of this program is that councils are free to spend this funding according to their unique local priorities, ensuring that local knowledge delivers the best local roads.

Through the Western Sydney infrastructure plan, and thanks to our government, work has already begun on the $500 million upgrade of Bringelly Road that will see it widened from a two-lane road to a minimum four-lane divided road from Camden Valley Way to the Northern Road. Bringelly Road is one of the principal road links within the south-west growth centre, and its increased capacity will make sure that it can handle future traffic growth in the area. It will also improve access to the new Leppington Railway Station, M5 and M7. The upgrade will improve safety for motorists by providing traffic lights at major intersections and a central median to separate opposing traffic flows.

The infrastructure plan will also see the construction of a $1.25 billion motorway alongside Elizabeth Drive, which marks the Northern Road boundary of the Badgerys Creek airport site. This will provide direct access to the airport from the M7 Motorway, while maintaining access to Elizabeth Drive for local traffic. The Northern Road, which is a key north-south arterial link between the major centre of Narellan and the M4 motorway, is also being upgraded to the tune of $1.6 billion—thanks to this government. It will open up our region to the commercial precincts of Liverpool and Hoxton Park, as well Penrith and the North West Growth Centre. The upgrade will take the Northern Road from two lanes to a four-lane divided road along its 31-kilometre length. Provision of a wide median will also allow for a six-lane road to be provided into the future. In addition, the Western Sydney Infrastructure Plan will see more than $200 million of funding to enable the government to invest in a range of minor works in local government areas and to improve local transport connections in Western Sydney. Minor upgrades such as traffic lights, roundabouts or additional turning lanes will have the greatest benefits for local communities by increasing safety and improving traffic flows.

The main street of Camden, which is a common topic of conversation for many locals, will benefit from the government’s local roads package, with $2.6 million in funding to upgrade the street, providing a solution to a number of traffic congestion points and hazards. This investment will reinvigorate the town centre and allow better pedestrian access to shops and businesses. Ultimately, the Western Sydney Infrastructure Plan is a $3.5 billion project, which will see a once-in-a-lifetime investment in the Macarthur region to upgrade our arterial roads and create an economic powerhouse for job creation and commercial opportunity. Our government is investing in the infrastructure blueprint for Greater Western Sydney, which will see our region in Macarthur thrive. I am proud of our Western Sydney Infrastructure Plan. It is a real win for my community of Macarthur. It also happens to be the single, biggest infrastructure investment in any electorate in recent history. This is forward thinking and forward planning by the Abbott government.

As a father, I am always conscious of the need to ensure that we create jobs and opportunities for future generations. I am very lucky that I have two bright and beautiful
daughters, born and raised in Macarthur. I want to ensure that my grandchildren have the same opportunities of study, work and recreation in our area that I have had and that my daughters have been blessed to have as well. I want to see skilled jobs creation in Macarthur. I want to see more jobs where our tertiary-educated children can apply their skills locally and receive a good wage. I want to see young families and entrepreneurs being supported and having the confidence to venture out and start their own businesses, which will create more jobs and opportunities for the rest of the community.

For too long, I have seen the frustration in the Macarthur community as they face congestion on Narellan Road, Camden Valley Way and the Hume Highway as they set off to work outside of their electorate. This has cost businesses in Macarthur billions of dollars in lost productivity as they have to contend with congestion throughout the day because our main arterial roads are clogged with traffic—thanks to years of Labor's neglect. Before the last election, the Hon. Joe Hockey and I announced an investment of $53 million, with the New South Wales state government contributing the same amount, for the upgrade of Narellan Road. Part of the upgrade has already been completed and the second stage is currently underway. This is over $100 million to upgrade Narellan Road, and it will see residents across Macarthur being able to access the Hume Highway more quickly and easily than ever before. The New South Wales government recently completed stages 1 and 2 of the $280 million Camden Valley Way upgrade between Oran Park Drive and Bringelly Road in Leppington, which was completed months ahead of schedule. Both these two major upgrades provide vital east-west links within the Greater Western Sydney region and are yet more examples of infrastructure investments that will drive productivity and job creation in Macarthur. Once complete, they will enable local residents to have shorter commutes. Small businesses will be able to operate in the Macarthur region, without having to worry about delays and costs that arise with congestion. Most importantly, these projects are creating literally thousands of local jobs and opportunities for small business.

This government also knows how important it is that communities receive fast internet speeds as soon as possible. Over 54,000 premises are set to receive super-fast broadband through the National Broadband Network, with the build to commence on the network by June 2016—thanks to this government's NBN strategy. This important milestone for the area offers great certainty for homes and businesses in Macarthur as they prepare for super-fast broadband services. This is a remarkable investment in the Macarthur region. It goes to the heart of what this government is trying to achieve, which is to deliver the means by which the community can enjoy future growth and prosperity.

Under the previous Labor government, investment in infrastructure was virtually non-existent in Macarthur. Photo opportunities were more important than creating real solutions for growing communities. That is what the previous government delivered—a string of flashy photo ops, unworkable school halls, pink batts and projects such as the Dharawal Aboriginal health clinic in my electorate, which provided a building but not the funds to fit it out and run the service. The difference with our government is that we are committed to making legitimate and long-term improvements in Indigenous health by working with communities to improve access for Indigenous families to primary or preventative health care. Last week, I was proud to announce that Indigenous communities across Macarthur will benefit from
$7.75 million in funding in primary and preventable health care as part of the Abbott government's ongoing commitment to closing the gap.

I am proud to say that those dark days of Labor's incompetency are over, but we are still dealing with the very serious repercussions of six years of total and utter fiscal incompetency and contempt for the Australian people. The previous Labor government ran up the national credit card and now it is up to the coalition to clean up the mess. The people of Macarthur and, indeed, the people of Australia were very clear at the last election that they wanted a genuine and committed government—one that could make decisions for the good of the nation, like living within our means but also having a clear vision for the future by investing in the infrastructure that our communities need in the long term; but it does not stop at roads and rails.

Our government is investing in our environment, with Green Army projects already on the ground in Macarthur. The teams of participants are cleaning up Kennedy Creek in Appin, preserving the critically endangered Cumberland Plain Woodlands, the Western Sydney Dry Rainforest and ecological communities at the Australian Botanic Garden, Mount Annan. Last month, I was pleased to announce yet another Green Army project that will be rolled out in Macarthur, where participants will establish habitat for the vulnerable species of eucalyptus Camden white gum by removing 2.4 hectares of its main threat, privet. The Green Army team will also remove 8.84 hectares of African Olive and African boxthorn from a number of reserves on the Cumberland Plain Woodlands.

The Abbott government has also partnered with local councils to provide state-of-the-art recreational facilities, such as providing Campbelltown City Council with a $500,000 investment for a synthetic turf surface at Lynwood Park oval, the home of the Macarthur Rams. This project will reduce maintenance costs by tens of thousands of dollars each year, as well as allowing the fields to be used in all weather conditions throughout the year. This government has also given the Narellan Jets Rugby League Football Club and the Campbelltown Rugby League Club $200,000 each for field upgrades that will offer improved sporting facilities and sporting opportunities for our growing communities.

I am also incredibly proud to have had the Prime Minister in Macarthur to deliver $335,000 of funding for the Mater Dei special needs school to purchase solar panels, which will provide a sustainable heating solution for their swimming pool. As a school that caters for children with mild to moderate intellectual and physical disabilities, the swimming pool facilities are an incredibly important part of their education program. I am delighted that children will have an even better environment to enjoy swimming.

The government also provided over $110,000 in grants for local organisations in Macarthur through the Anzac Centenary Local Grants Program. In November last year, I was delighted to announce that six local organisations will be given more than $73,000 of funding through this program. The Veterans Recreation Centre, Campbelltown RSL Sub-Branch, Campbelltown City Show Society, Camden Community Connections, Anglican Parish of Cobbitty and City of Campbelltown RSL Sub-Branch all successfully applied for funding.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott): Order! The debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 43. The debate may be resumed at a later hour when the member will have leave to continue their remarks.
STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Kumar, Mrs Prabha Arun

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (13:30): Last Friday evening, I joined Adelaide's Indian community at a candlelight vigil dedicated to the life of Prabha Arun Kumar. The vigil was held at the Indian Australian Association of South Australia's premises at Broadview.

Prabha was horrifically killed in Sydney on Saturday, 7 March around 9.30 pm whilst walking home from work. Prabha was only 300 metres from her home and, at the time of the attack, she was on the phone to her husband Arun in India.

Prabha was scheduled to return to India and reunite with her husband and their nine-year-old daughter in April. Arun's last memory of Prabha will be hearing her pleas for her life and her screams before her murderer killed her.

The Indian community in Australia is understandably in shock and in mourning. Adding to the distress is not knowing who ended Prabha's life so tragically or why. Their prayers are that the murderer will be found and brought to justice. They are also pleading with Australian authorities to ensure that community safety is made a government priority so that all Australians can go about their daily life without fear.

To the family of Prabha Kumar, I extend my sincere condolences. I say to them: we cannot restore your loss or ease your pain, but Australians around the country share your sorrow.

Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme

Mr HUTCHINSON (Lyons) (13:31): Last week—and I think I speak on behalf of all Tasmanians—we welcomed the $200 million commitment to expand the Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme to include all exports out of the state of Tasmania. It gives our state a level playing field for businesses to be able to compete with other parts of Australia. It will be of enormous benefit to manufacturers, farmers and exporters, more broadly, in our state.

Tasmanians want to be able to stand on our own two feet, and this is something I know my House of Representatives colleagues—the members for Bass and Braddon—and also my Senate colleagues have been fighting for for the last 18 months.

In terms of value for taxpayers' dollars, it is very important that we make sure that taxpayers are getting good value. That is why the repeal of the 2012 revitalising coastal shipping act, which was the fundamental reason why our state lost its only international shipping service in Tasmania, is critically important. It is about making sure that there are the right levels of competition on Bass Strait to make sure that taxpayers' dollars are being used effectively.

I would also mention the 700 per cent fee increase that the Victorian government has recently put on in the Port of Melbourne. This is completely unacceptable and is an absolute impost when 25 per cent of the freight is Tasmanian. *(Time expired)*

Indi Electorate: Rural Leadership

Ms McGOWAN (Indi) (13:33): I am delighted to welcome to parliament today participants of the Rivers and Ranges Community Leadership Program who are in Canberra on their study tour. Regional Victoria has a commitment to developing leaders, and I am very proud that participants can be with us today.
Victoria has 10 community leadership programs—in fact, three of them are in Indi: the AVCLP, Fairley and the rivers and ranges program. We are hosting the visit together with my colleagues Rob Mitchell from McEwen and Tony Smith from Casey, and are delighted to be part of a diverse program looking at leadership as it plays out in parliament. I would like to acknowledge and thank my parliamentary colleagues and their staff for the help they have given in developing the programs.

However, programs like the Rivers and Ranges Community Leadership Program do not just happen. They take a lot of community work, and I would particularly like to bring to the attention of parliament the work of the chair, Ros Affleck; the deputy chair, Anne Leadbeater; secretary, Megan Buntine; treasurer, Michael Nadella; program manager, Lisa Linton; and my special friend and wonderful colleague, Michelle Dunscombe—thank you for the work that you have done.

In closing, I say to the participants: leadership in rural and regional Australia is not an optional extra. It relies on all of us to get out and do the work. It is important, particularly in this stage of change and development, that we take the opportunity for our communities to reach their potential. (Time expired)

**Swan Electorate: Minister for Health and Sport**

**Mr IRONS** (Swan) (13:35): Although it is not the first time the minister has been to Swan, I was very pleased to welcome Minister Ley to my electorate for the first time in her capacity as the Minister for Health and Sport earlier this month.

This was a very important visit to my electorate for two key reasons. The first was providing health professionals in Swan with the opportunity to share their knowledge with the minister and provide input into the government's future health policies as part of the minister's wide-ranging consultations with health professionals and communities across Australia. It was a pleasure to watch the minister talk to the GPs and speak to them as equals, not down to them as previous people have done in this place.

On March 6, the minister and I co-hosted a round-table discussion with GPs from Swan to gain grassroots insight into how they believe Australia's Medicare system, in particular, should be reformed to ensure its future sustainability.

I also took this opportunity to update the minister about the Lathlain precinct redevelopment project with representatives of the West Coast Eagles and Perth Football Club providing the minister with a tour and briefing of this important community infrastructure project for Swan and the Town of Victoria Park. It was also great to see that they have also included a medical research centre at the development.

This is a project that I have been campaigning for since 2010, so I was very pleased that within a week I was able to welcome Minister Ley to Lathlain Park as well as the Prime Minister, who got up very early in the morning last week to be briefed about the project's major benefits at the proposed redevelopment site.

**Lalor Electorate: Wyndham Legal Service**

**Ms RYAN** (Lalor—Opposition Whip) (13:36): I rise today to talk about the Wyndham Legal Service. Like other community legal centres across Australia, it is facing cuts to its funding from the federal government.
Wyndham Legal Service had a three-year agreement of $120,000 per year. They received one year of that funding and, of course, they have now lost the remainder of it. This is a legal service that services a community of 200,000 people, and their very important funding line from the federal government has been cut. This is a group of young lawyers who work tirelessly with and for my community. They engage on a daily basis with other community organisations within Wyndham to support people on their worst days.

Half of this money was used for victims of family violence to support them through processes. A third of the money was used for our young people—and of course we are a young electorate with an extraordinary number of people aged between 15 and 24 who are accessing this service. The rest was used for newly arrived people in our community, those coming from across the seas to join our multicultural community—people arriving in Australia for the first time; people who are incredibly vulnerable when it comes to the tenancy act; people who pay far too much when asked for a bond for the home they are going to rent; people who need the support of lawyers. My community needs the Wyndham Legal Centre. I ask for that money to be reinstated as it has been in Healesville. *(Time expired)*

**Barton Electorate:** Kogarah High School

**Mr VARVARIS** (Barton) (13:38): I would like to thank Kogarah High School in my electorate of Barton for hosting the Shunde Golden Phoenix Little Art Troupe in their school on Tuesday last week. In particular, I would like to express my gratitude to the school principal, Mrs Virginia Pacey, the head of the creative and performing arts, Ms Leah McKeeown, and the head teacher of Kogarah Intensive English Centre, Mrs Maria Moschatos, for working with my office to help coordinate this very successful event. The performance was a chance for both students and dancers to engage and allow for insight into local cultures.

The Shunde Golden Phoenix Art Troupe is a renowned dance and performance group from Shunde, in China's south. Over 600 children, all of whom are of school age, try out for a spot in this elite performance group, and only 14 are accepted. In between juggling the demands of an academic education, these little dancers rehearse for several hours each week to perform in China and abroad. Their talent and unique approach to traditional Chinese folk dance, along with modern twists, has seen them visit countless international destinations as official representatives of China from the Chinese Ministry of Culture.

I would like to commend the outstanding reception they received from the students of Kogarah High and the teachers, who worked hard to ensure the event was a success. Thank you again to the teachers and students of Kogarah High, who made the Shunde Golden Phoenix Art Troupe feel so welcome. It was truly a fantastic event.

**Parramatta Electorate:** Ride2School Day

**Ms OWENS** (Parramatta) (13:39): On Friday I joined Darcy Road Public School in Wentworthville as they celebrated Ride2School Day. It was not the first time; Darcy Road Public hosts a ride to school morning every year, aimed at getting the kids out of the car and onto their bikes and scooters and riding to school safely. The children, parents, teachers and I met at Caloola Road Reserve and cycled down the hill to the school where a wonderful breakfast had been prepared by parents. Across the country, more than 300,000 children did the same. Forget the bus or the car—they rode, skated, scooted or walked to school.
In the 1970s around 80 per cent of all schoolchildren rode or walked to school, as did I. Today, that number is down to around 20 per cent, even though we know that riding to school has so many benefits. It is a great way to stay fit, the children are more alert and energised when they arrive at school, and riding to school makes the children feel self-sufficient and improves self-confidence.

Thanks to the assistant principal, Sean McLoughlin, who organised the morning, as well as principal Trudy Hopkins for her support. Thanks very much to all the teachers, parents and children who rode their bikes on the day. It was fantastic to see such strong support for safe, active travel in our community.

Disability Services: Youngcare

Mr Ewen Jones (Herbert) (13:40): We have a major issue surrounding young disabled people with high care needs. We all know stories of families wanting to keep them at home in the home environment. But sometimes the care needs are too great, and the families are not capable of maintaining the level of care needed. We have, in this country, over 6,000 people under the age of 65 living in aged-care facilities because their needs are great and because we have nowhere else to care for them. Aged-care facilities are not set up for this specific kind of care. It is a crack in the system, and one which will widen without attention.

Youngcare is an organisation which was formed with the specific purpose of assisting young Australians with high care needs for whom living in or facing the prospect of living in an aged-care facility is very real. Youngcare specialises in developing viable models to provide solutions for young people. They have a model which can be placed in just about any community. It is not cheap, nor is it easy, but Youngcare knows the benefits of providing appropriate housing and care to our most exposed. It is about providing choice and options for profoundly disabled young people.

Youngcare has an event called Budgie Bolt. This is where you pull on your speedos and run six kilometres with your friends. It is about being a little bit uncomfortable. Unfortunately I am unavailable, and everyone should be thankful for that. But I will donate and I will do what I can to support it because I want a Youngcare facility established in Townsville. (Time expired)

Kingsford Smith Electorate: Brien Holden Vision Institute

Mr Thistlethwaite (Kingsford Smith) (13:42): Today a very important meeting of global health experts and practitioners is taking place at the University of New South Wales in my electorate. It is an initiative of the Brien Holden Vision Institute. The global scientific meeting on myopia brings together the World Health Organization and global expert on research and treatment of myopia. Myopia, or short-sightedness, is becoming a serious public health issue. It afflicts 1.45 billion people throughout the world, and the figures are that that will grow to 2.5 billion people by 2020. One in five Australians suffer from myopia. In Asia, the figure is half of all the population. Myopia at an early age can bring on lifelong eye care problems, and if untreated can lead to glaucoma, retinal trauma, malfunction and detachment. However, correcting lenses can reduce myopic progression.

The Brien Holden Vision Institute is a world-leading research and development organisation bringing myopic progression measures to the general public. I wish to congratulate the Brien Holden Vision Institute for their education and research in this area and
also the cooperative research centre, and I welcome our international guests who will be taking part in this very important global health conference.

Hughes Electorate: Anzac Centenary Local Grants Program

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (13:43): Last Friday, alongside the current member for Menai and candidate for Holsworthy in the coming state election, Melanie Gibbons MP, and the Liverpool Mayor, Ned Mannoun, I was particularly pleased to announce a new public art memorial commemorating Australia's involvement in the First World War which will be installed on Heathcote Road at the new entrance to the Holsworthy Barracks. Liverpool City Council is now calling for expressions of interest from artists and designers to submit their ideas for the memorial, following their success in securing federal government funding for the project from the Anzac Centenary Local Grants Program.

The significant works that are currently taking place at Holsworthy Barracks, including the construction of a new entry on Heathcote Road, have provided an opportunity to build a fitting and lasting tribute to those who served. That is exactly what the Hughes' Anzac Centenary committee has decided to do in approving the application of the Liverpool City Council. In approving this major project, the committee reflected on the desire for the grant to go towards something that would last, something that would be highly visible and something that would be significant.

I would like to thank the committee members: Barry Grant, the president of Woronora RSL and the Australian Commando Association; Harry Morgan, former president of the Sutherland United Services Club; David Sutherland, president of the Liverpool RSL Sub-Branch; Garry Murray, the president of Panania Diggers; and Jack Abernethy, the secretary of the Engadine RSL. The challenge is now on. We are looking for artists and designers to come up with a concept for our memorial in Holsworthy that will last, hopefully, for another 100 years.

Defence Personnel

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (13:45): I rise again to raise my concern about the damage that the Abbott government is doing to the Department of Defence. Ever since the election, the Prime Minister has shown nothing but contempt for Defence, including ADF personnel and including Defence civilians. At the end of last year, the Prime Minister cut the pay and conditions of Australia's 57,000 service men and women. He was only forced to back down after it sparked widespread criticism from Defence families and the community.

At the same time that he is backing down on his cuts to ADF pay, he is attacking the pay and conditions of Defence civilians. Last month, Defence civilians were offered a below-inflation deal that would see their real wages fall, as well as see them lose out on a number of hard-fought-for conditions. The offer is so insulting that the Secretary of the Department of Defence, Dennis Richardson, expressed regret when it was put on the table. This insulting offer undermines the strategic important work that is done by Defence civilians.

During Senate estimates, Secretary Richardson said:

… the greater the differential you have, between base salaries in the ADF and base salaries in the Defence APS, the greater are the difficulties we are going to run into in terms of an integrated workforce.

In an Australian Strategic Policy Institute speech he gave last year, he said:
There is a bit of a tendency for some to see Defence civilians as constituting something called a ‘back-end’ supporting the ADF ‘front-end’. … We have an integrated work force where many civilians report to uniformed personnel and many of the latter report to the former.

The Abbott government now needs to back down on its harsh attack on Defence civilians and public servants. *(Time expired)*

**Capricornia Electorate: Cyclone Marcia**

Ms LANDRY (Capricornia) (13:47): Last week, I spent several days travelling through cyclone-ravaged parts of the Capricorn Coast in Central Queensland. Primary producers and small businesses are hurting badly. There is still much to be done in the wake of Cyclone Marcia. Last week, the Prime Minister signed off on additional disaster assistance for primary producers under category C disaster arrangements. Eligible primary producers in the Livingstone, Banana and Rockhampton shires can now access grants of up to $25,000 to assist with recovery. Category C will be administered by the Queensland state government under the joint Commonwealth-state Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements, known as NDRRA. Eligible primary producers should contact the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority. The hotline number is 1800623946. You can visit online at qraa.qld.gov.au.

We also urgently need category C to be applied to small businesses as well. Once the Queensland Premier has submitted the necessary documents to Canberra, I would expect a category C rating to also soon apply to small business owners. I believe that some parts of Livingstone Shire require a further category D rating, but nothing can be fought on this rating into the Queensland Premier first makes a submission.

**Australia Post**

Ms CHESTERS (Bendigo) (13:48): I rise to inform the House that in my electorate on Saturday a group of Australia Post workers gathered together to protest and sign a petition calling on this government to change its plans for Australia Post and calling on the community to speak out with them and say, ‘Hands off our Aussie Post.’ These workers and community members are very concerned about what the impact of this government’s plans will be for mail delivery services in our region.

The government talks about a two-speed mail delivery service, which concerns a lot of us because our post is already delayed when we get to central Victoria. Businesses report to me regularly that they are waiting for up to a week for regular postal services and a week for letters to get from A to B. One of the people who has also raised an issue is Jody Hardiman, who is the co-founder of Thank You Fireys, which is a national day dedicated to acknowledging the work of our fireys. This organisation sent balloons out to people a week before the day so that they could hang them in front of their businesses and tie them to their homes to thank their the local CFA fireys. The balloons did not arrive in time.

We already have slow postal services in the bush and these reforms will only make it harder. I join these workers in calling on the government to guarantee that there will be no job losses and to guarantee that speeds in the bush will not be slower for receiving mail as a result of these changes. *(Time expired)*
Eden-Monaro Electorate: Country Shows

Dr HENDY (Eden-Monaro) (13:50): It is currently country show season across Eden-Monaro. In all, there will be 12 shows. In recent weeks, I have attended the Cobargo, Delegate, Dalgety, Cooma and Bemboka shows. All shows have shown that the Australian bush is alive and prospering. The produce displayed in these shows has been of a first-class quality, but even more so have been the display of sheep and cattle. Indeed, we have some of the finest examples of both in the world. Industry participants tell me that the Monaro has more sheep than the whole of Queensland combined and I would not be prepared to second-guess them on this.

In the recent Cobargo Show, I was happy to talk to Ray Sawtell at length about farming in this region and also about the strength of the agricultural show society. He is the regional district representative and been a fixture at shows in the region for many years. He said that the recent shows have been some of the best he has seen in those years. At the Delegate Show, I spoke to Bombala's mayor, Bob Stewart. I commend him and the local community for the best little show in the district.

At Dalgety, I was pleased to speak to Mayor John Cahill, former mayor Richard Wallace, local businessman Ian Ware and Howard Charles of Nimmitabel. Dalgety is a terrific country show. It was a great turnout of over 3,000, who were treated to some of very impressive displays, especially the working dogs. The Cooma and Bombala shows were also strong events. At Cooma, I had the benefit of a long chat to Michael Litchfield and local mayor Dean Lynch.

University of Queensland: Poche Centre for Indigenous Health

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (13:51): As shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs, last week I had the privilege to attend the official launch of the University of Queensland's Poche Centre for Indigenous Health. This was an important occasion because Mr Greg Poche AO and Mrs Kay van Norton Poche have donated $10 million to make the UQ centre possible. The centre is an additional effort to the existing Poche centres, including those at the University of Sydney, Flinders University, the University of Western Australia and the University of Melbourne.

Mr Poche has made an important contribution to Indigenous health. He has stressed the 11-year life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and has said this is unacceptable. I think everyone in this place would agree.

The establishment of UQ Poche Centre is a vital contribution to Indigenous health. I was pleased to see the Institute for Urban Indigenous Health CEO, Adrian Carson, Jody Currie and a number of important players in Indigenous health in South-East Queensland present. At the launch, Professor Cindy Shannon, UQ Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Indigenous Education, stressed the centre is the right fit for the region given that South-East Queensland has the largest Indigenous population—currently 65,000—in the country. By 2030, it will have 1½ times as many Indigenous people as the whole of the Northern Territory at 139,000.

Improving Indigenous health is one of the country's biggest challenges. I congratulate University of Queensland, Professor Cindy Shannon, Mr Greg Poche and Kay van Norton Poche for making this transformational contribution to Australia's Indigenous health. (Time expired)
Reid Electorate: Meriden School

Mr LAUNDY (Reid) (13:53): I rise today to congratulate Meriden School in my electorate of Reid and, in particular, the school's tennis team which, over the weekend, was crowned world champions at the World Schools Tennis Championship in Qatar. Meriden earned the privilege of representing Australia after winning the Australian schools tennis championship in November last year and it faced off against Turkey in the final. What an amazing achievement it is to win. It is an illustration of what raw talent, hard work and excellent guidance can achieve. I can quote the PM in a letter he penned to me today where he said Australia is proud of them.

I am even more proud to report that the final match, a dead rubber, was a mixed doubles game where the teams, Australia and Turkey, decided to play mixed doubles to commemorate the centenary of Anzac. Australia could not ask for better ambassadors for the world stage than these Meriden students. I think that display of great and classy leadership is a true testament to them.

Congratulations to the six players: Violet Apisah in year 9; Amne Ghamraoui in year 10; Michaella Haet, Linda Huang and Shubhika Dubey in year 11; and Claudia Furdi in year 12. Also, I give a massive congratulations to the team manager, Lisa Brown, who kept me updated over the weekend by email, and head coach, Ross Anton, and coaches Brian Ly, Stelios Pikoulas and Clare Kinnane, who have worked tirelessly with this amazing group of girls. Congratulations to you all. You did Australia and the electorate of Reid so very, very proud.

Perth Electorate: St Patrick's Day

Ms MacTIERNAN (Perth) (13:54): The green and gold were out in force in Leederville yesterday as the group Irish Families in Perth and the City of Vincent staged another brilliant St Patrick's Day parade and celebrated a heritage shared by so many Australians. Karen Hennessy and her team from Irish Families in Perth are part of the latest wave of Irish migrants to Australia. They have brought together with them those of us from earlier diasporas to celebrate our heritage.

The chief marshal for this year was an inspired choice—Andy Keogh, the Perth Glory striker. I have to say that when you are travelling in a vehicle with a Perth Glory star you get an idea about the relative value perhaps many of our constituents place on politicians compared to sporting stars! Andy was a great hit. It was fantastic to see so many young people, including people with Asian heritage, who came out—perhaps attracted by Andy—to become honorary Irish-Australians for the day. Good on you, Karen and all of your team. You do a wonderful job.

Bushfires

Ms MARINO (Forrest—Government Whip) (13:56): I want to thank the thousands of volunteer firefighters who faced one of Western Australia's biggest challenges in fighting the enormous and complex fires that threatened Northcliffe and Boddington. The Northcliffe fire burnt 98,000 hectares—the biggest bushfire in the south-west since the Dwellingup fires of 1961. The Boddington fire burned 52,000 hectares. Volunteer and career firefighters worked more than 96,000 hours to contain and control these fires.
Firefighters came from Yarloop and Harvey in the north of the electorate and from Allanson, Collie, Dardanup, Donnybrook and Nannup in the east. From the south, they came from Augusta, Alexander Bridge, Karridale and Margaret River. From the west coastal part of the electorate, firefighters came from Yallingup, Busselton, Bunbury and Leschenault. From central areas, the brigades came from Ferguson, Waterloo, Brunswick, Dardanup and Eaton.

It was an outstanding on-the-ground logistical provision of equipment and resourcing effort given to saving communities, properties and livestock.

There were teams of other people working around the clock to ensure that the firefighters, emergency services and other volunteers had sustenance and somewhere to rest between shifts. We cannot survive without these people. They deserve our deepest gratitude and respect for their commitment and hard work. I also thank the employers who encouraged their workers to be part of the emergency volunteer groups and the families who supported them. These services are the difference between life and death in rural and regional areas. Firefighters protect our property and frequently put their own lives at risk, making personal sacrifices to do so. As a nation, we are eternally grateful to this outstanding group of volunteers.

Road Infrastructure

Mr WATTS (Gellibrand) (13:58): Despite proclaiming that the last Victorian state election was ‘a referendum on the East West Link’, the Liberal Party continues to flog this deadest of dead horses. The assistant minister for infrastructure, when he is not getting sandwiches for the member for Wide Bay, has been tweeting recently, ‘Build the link.’ The member for Deakin has launched an advertising campaign in which he says, ‘Just build it.’ You can imagine them running around Victoria like Lyle Lanley from *The Simpsons* episode 'Marge vs. the Monorail' saying, ‘Just don't think; build the link. Just don't think; build the link.’

They do not want you to think about the fact that Infrastructure Australia has said the Melbourne Metro rail tunnel is a bigger priority. They do not want you to think about the fact that even on the government's own business case they found that the taxpayer would lose 55c for every dollar spent on this project. And, especially, they do not want you to think about the fact that the Victorian Labor government, led by Premier Daniel Andrews, promised at the last election that they would not build this link. They do not want you to think about anything like that. They are saying, ‘Go and build this project that loses more than 50c in the dollar.’

This just shows the narrow mindset of this government.

We have a fantastic Melbourne Metro Rail Project that needs to be done—a project that, I might add, echoes the Melbourne City Loop project built by that known socialist Dick Hamer. It is a project that we need to increase the capacity of public transport in Victoria. So I say to the Prime Minister: change your outdated attitude in refusing to support public transport in Australia; get off your hobbyhorse about the East West Link and get into the 21st century.

Winmalee: Mobile Phone Towers

Mrs MARKUS (Macquarie) (13:59): I rise today with great concern for the community of Winmalee in the Blue Mountains in the electorate of Macquarie. Devastated by bushfires in October 2013, Telstra placed a temporary mobile tower in Winmalee, an investment of approximately $60,000. It served the community well while Telstra looked to lease land to
build a more permanent solution. Telstra found land at Summerhayes Park with a recommended annual lease price, in a review of telecommunications site rentals report, dated 25 March 2013, of $15,000.

The Telstra GM, a resident of Winmalee himself, in an attempt to build and service the community, offered $10,000 more than this recommended amount. However, this increase was not enough, and a bidding game now exists with Telstra, where council would rather raise funds than see this great community gain an essential service. Council has decided to play a game of Monopoly. What is important here is the safety of the people of Macquarie. (Time expired)

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

BUSINESS

Leave of Absence

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:00): I inform the House that the Minister for Justice will be absent from question time this week while he attends the Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Japan. The Minister for Foreign Affairs will answer questions on his behalf. I also inform the House that the Minister for the Environment is attending to World Heritage matters relating to the Barrier Reef and will be absent from question time today. The Minister for Trade and Investment will answer questions on his behalf.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Higher Education

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:01): My question is to the Prime Minister. Now that the government has backed down on its shameful attempt to hold 1,700 scientists and their work hostage for its own political purposes, will the Prime Minister now back down on his plans for $100,000 university degrees?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:01): There are no such plans. Our plan is to liberate our great universities to be as good as they possibly can be. That is our plan.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: There will be silence on my left!

Ms Plibersek interjecting—

The SPEAKER: And that includes the member for Sydney.

Mr ABBOTT: Our plan is to give the universities of Australia the freedom that John Dawkins thinks they should have, the freedom that Peter Beattie thinks they should have, the freedom that Maxine McKew thinks they should have. That is our plan. Our plan is to make the universities of Australia even better.

I am proud of Australia's universities. I think it is good that we have just one, the University of Melbourne, in the world's top 50; I want to see us get at least two in the top 20. That is my ambition. I want our great universities to be even better, and the best way to bring that about is to liberate them from the shackles of Canberra bureaucracy. That is the best way to bring it about.
I say to the students of Australia that they will continue to have access to universities. Without spending a dollar up-front, they will continue to have access to universities, with the vast majority of the costs covered by the taxpayer. This is a good proposal. John Dawkins thinks it is a good proposal, Peter Beattie thinks it is a good proposal, Maxine McKew thinks it is a good proposal. Gareth Evans—not someone who I normally reference in this House—thinks it is a good proposal. The only person who does not is good old 'Dr Negative' over there, the person who does not have any serious ideas about anything other than thinking that everybody should be somebody. Well, if you want people to be somebody, send them to good universities, and that is what there will be under the policies of this government.

Cyclones

Ms HENDERSON (Corangamite) (14:03): My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister update the House on the government's response to the devastation caused by Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu and other Pacific Island countries?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:04): I do thank the member for Corangamite for her question. I can inform the House that the most destructive cyclone in memory has hit Vanuatu, and Australia is responding swiftly and comprehensively. I can inform the House that yesterday three Royal Australian Air Force aircraft landed in Vanuatu with a medical assessment team, a search-and-rescue team and emergency supplies—food, water, sanitation and shelter—for up to 5,000 people. Today there will be two further Royal Australian Air Force flights into Vanuatu with further emergency supplies. As well, there will be an aerial reconnaissance flight over the outlying islands. As well, we have pledged $5 million towards humanitarian assistance, principally delivered through non-government organisations.

Yesterday I spoke with the Prime Minister of Vanuatu to convey Australia's sympathy and readiness to assist. Together with New Zealand, the United Kingdom and France, we will continue to monitor the humanitarian impact of the cyclone and what can best be done to respond. I am advised that there are about 1,500 Australians known to be in Vanuatu. If people cannot contact their family and friends directly, they should contact the Department of Foreign Affairs consular emergency centre, which will do what it can to assist. Tuvalu has also been affected by Cyclone Pam, and Australia is working with New Zealand to support relief efforts there.

Today our thoughts are also with the people of the north-west of Western Australia, who are cleaning up the damage caused by Cyclone Olwyn. Last night I spoke to the member for Durack, who advises that the agricultural and horticultural industries of the Gascoyne region have been very hard hit. The situation there is still being assessed, but in the meantime we all should salute the emergency services personnel, including volunteers, who are, as always, performing magnificently in our time of need.

Higher Education

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:06): My question is to the Prime Minister. On Sunday, the government made a clear threat to the jobs of 1,700 scientists across the country for its own political purposes. Today the government has announced a backdown on its shameful attempt to hold science hostage. Is this another chaotic decision from an incompetent government?
Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:07): It is clear evidence that this government is determined to be as cooperative and as constructive as it can be in working with crossbenchers to get this important reform in the national interest through our parliament. That is what it is, Madam Speaker: it is evidence of our determination to do what we can to bring about this important and necessary reform which is supported by John Dawkins, the architect of the modern university system. It is supported by Peter Beattie, a former Premier of Queensland and candidate at the last election; it is supported by Maxine McKew, a recent Labor member of this House. What we want to do is to liberate the great universities of our country to be even better. We want opportunity to be spread; there will be some 50,000 scholarships given to disadvantaged students under the reforms that we have proposed. This is a good package and, as a result of the announcements by the Minister for Education earlier today, there should be no impediments whatsoever to this reform being considered on its merits. The merits are great, and it should be supported by members in another place.

Gun Control

Mrs MARKUS (Macquarie) (14:08): My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, representing the Attorney-General. Will the foreign minister update the House on action the government is taking to crack down on illegal firearms?

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (14:09): I thank the member for Macquarie for her question. I know she is deeply concerned about this issue, as are the Australian people. The Australian government are determined to ensure the safety of our community. As part of our priority on safety and security we are doing everything we reasonably can to crack down on illegal firearms. There were very significant cuts to the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service between 2008 and 2013. I have to point to that because it led to a 25 per cent reduction in the screening of sea cargo and a 75 per cent reduction in the screening of air cargo. And, of course, that has had an adverse impact on efforts to prevent the importation of illegal firearms.

The coalition government has now put $88 million back into the customs service so that we can increase screening levels of both sea and air cargo. Notwithstanding there are still an estimated one quarter of a million illegal firearms in Australia, it is essential for our crime-fighting efforts and for our management of security risks that we increase our efforts to combat trafficking in illegal firearms. The coalition has been working with foreign law enforcement partners to conduct investigations into the illegal importation of firearms. Since 1 January this year, the national anti-gang squad that we established has been involved in 160 state and territory police gang related investigations, which has led to the arrest of over 400 people and the seizure of more than 300 firearms. I can assure the House and the people of Australia that the Australian government will give the police and our security agencies the tools that they need to do their job.

One of those tools is adequate penalties for people who are trafficking in illegal firearms. Prior to the 2013 election the coalition committed to introducing mandatory minimum sentences of five years imprisonment for trafficking in illegal firearms. While this measure did pass the House of Representatives earlier this year, the legislation was blocked by the Labor Party in the Senate. This week the Minister for Justice will re-introduce legislation to
give effect to our commitment as part of a broader package of further national security reform.

Mr Morrison: What about people smuggling?

Ms JULIE BISHOP: I note that when in government, as the Minister for Social Services just pointed out, the Labor Party introduced mandatory minimum sentences for people smuggling and so I now call upon the Labor Party to similarly support a minimum sentence for trafficking in illegal firearms. The government is determined to keep our community safe through strengthened legislation to combat this trafficking of illegal firearms, and I call upon the Labor Party to support this vital legislation.

Distingushed Visitors

The SPEAKER (14:12): Before I call the member for Sydney, I would like to advise the House that we have with us His Excellency, Mr Xanana Gusmao, the former Prime Minister of Timor-Leste, who is currently the Minister for Planning and Strategic Investment. He is accompanied by His Excellency, Ambassador Guterres, who is Timor-Leste's ambassador to Australia. We make you very, very welcome.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

Questions Without Notice
Higher Education

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (14:12): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer to comments by Liberal Senator and former parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister, Cory Bernardi, who said: 'Playing games with our scientists and research hasn't seemed to have done the government any favours.' Is the Prime Minister's backdown from the shameful attempt to hold 1700 scientists hostage all about the Prime Minister's leadership and nothing about the government?

The SPEAKER: I call the Honourable Prime Minister, but he will ignore the last part of the question.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The members for Grayndler and Jagajaga will desist.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:13): If the Labor Party thought this was so important, why did they not fund it? This is a program that was introduced by the Howard government. It was a Howard government program which members opposite, when they were in government, refused to fund beyond 30 June 2015.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr ABBOTT: The previous government made no provision for this funding beyond 30 June 2015—

The SPEAKER: There will be silence!

Mr ABBOTT: What we have done is to restore a cut that members opposite made. This is complete hypocrisy—

Ms King: It was funded until 2015!

The SPEAKER: The member for Ballarat.
Mr ABBOTT: Complete hypocrisy from members opposite, who believed in this so much that they did not bother to fund it. We think it is important, and that is why it is being funded now.

Asylum Seekers

Mr WILKIE (Denison) (14:14): My question is to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, the government claims asylum seeker children in detention in Australia are being freed—but in fact more than half of these children are being sent to the Republic of Nauru, which is just 21 square kilometres, has a population less than 10,000 people, and a 90 per cent unemployment rate. Prime Minister, why does the government think that some kids are less precious than others?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:15): I absolutely share the view of the member for Denison—that we want to get children out of detention. We absolutely want to get children out of detention; and the only way to get children out of detention is to stop the boats, and that is exactly what this government has done. The only way to keep children alive is to stop the boats, and that is exactly what this government has done.

At its peak, when the people-smuggling trade was in full swing—under members opposite—when the red carpet was being rolled out every day for the people smugglers and their customers—there were almost 2,000 children in detention. Because this government has stopped the boats, there are about 100 illegal maritime arrival children in immigration detention in Australia, and about the same number in Nauru—a 90 per cent reduction in the numbers of children in detention. I do not like seeing any child in detention. No-one does. But if we want to see no children in immigration detention, we need no illegal boat arrivals. That is exactly what this government has delivered. And we know that members opposite want to give the people smugglers their business back. That is what they want to do. Because we had no less a person than the Deputy Leader of the Opposition come out and say yesterday that Labor was opposed to turn-backs. At the heart of any serious policy to stop the boats is a readiness to turn boats around when it is safe to do so.

Mr Wilkie: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order on relevance: the question is to do with currently sending children back to Nauru.

The SPEAKER: It is not an invitation to repeat the question. The member will resume his seat. The Prime Minister has the call.

Mr ABBOTT: We are taking children out of detention because the boats have stopped. And the member for Denison needs to know that, if the Labor Party were ever again to form a government, not only would the carbon tax be back, not only would the mining tax be back, but the people smugglers would be back, the children would be back in detention and the children would be dying at sea—because, as the Deputy Leader of the Opposition made clear on the weekend, the policies needed to stop the boats would instantly be scrapped by members opposite. Shame on them!

Infrastructure

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (14:18): My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer update the House on the importance of infrastructure investment as a key enabler of Australia’s future prosperity? And how will we achieve greater certainty and consensus around support for major infrastructure projects?
Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney—The Treasurer) (14:18): I thank the member for Hughes for his question. He is a great advocate of better infrastructure—as well his Southern Districts Rugby team!—and he is someone that believes that we need to have better infrastructure in order to help to deliver the prosperity that our nation needs over the next 30 or 40 years, as is the case illustrated in the Intergenerational report. Having better infrastructure will be vitally important to help to lift our productivity, and that means increasing our output for every hour we work. If we can do that, we can lift the wealth of the nation, and we can help to continue to pay for the services that are essential.

In last year's budget, we announced the equivalent of eight new Snowy Mountains schemes in additional infrastructure over the next decade. Everyone kept saying—around the country—'what we need in Australia is a new Snowy Mountains scheme'. We in the coalition government have announced the equivalent of eight new Snowy Mountains schemes over the next decade in Australia. And the Labor Party is opposing it. The Labor Party is opposing that rollout of new infrastructure; they are opposing the creation of tens of thousands of new jobs.

Nothing illustrates it better than their position on the East West Link in Melbourne: the fact that they are tearing up a contract for 7,000 jobs. The Leader of the Opposition is all over the joint on this. He is all over the joint like his loyalty to a leader. He all over the joint—one day, one night—different positions. Here is his submission on behalf of the Australian Workers Union, saying he wants an East West Link; here is his submission as the member for Maribyrnong, saying 'get on with the construction of the East West Link'—and yet just last week, the member for Maribyrnong, the Leader of the Opposition, said to Jon Faine in relation to the East West Link: 'we need a national infrastructure market where people can invest in infrastructure projects in the future with the certainty that infrastructure is not politicised'. So just before question time, the Leader of the Opposition is out there answering—'do you now support the building of East West Link?' Bill Shorten: 'No.' Not politicising—one day he supports it, the next day he opposes it! The words that will ring true—the words you cannot believe—are what his own colleagues say about him and, in this case, what Chris Bowen said about him on 11 September 2014: … Bill Shorten and I are of one mind, Labor honours contracts. Labor in Government honours contracts entered into by previous governments. Even if we don't like them for issues of sovereign risk, Labor honours contracts in office signed by previous governments.

What a hypocrite!

The SPEAKER: The honourable Treasurer knows that that is unparliamentary language.

Higher Education

Ms CHESTERS (Bendigo) (14:21): My question is to the Prime Minister. Nobel prize winner, Professor Brian Schmidt, said about the government's shameful attempt to hold 1,700 scientists and their work hostage for its own political purposes: 'This is not the way a grown-up country behaves. It is very childish.' Why did it take the government so long to back down on this childish plan?

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House and Minister for Education and Training) (14:22): I thank the Prime Minister for the opportunity to answer this question. I think the Labor Party must have left the wrong questions pack in their offices, because they have obviously come in with a set piece question time strategy which has been utterly obliterated by the decisions that
the government announced earlier today to re-fund the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy—

_Opposition members interjecting—_

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Bendigo has asked her question. We will have silence so that the minister can answer it. That includes all in what I might term this afternoon 'the naughty corner'.

**Mr PYNE:** The thing about opposition, Madam Speaker, as you would well remember, is that you have to be nimble. You have to be capable of changing your tactics when circumstances change. The problem with the Labor Party is that they are still running the same tactic they were planning at this morning's 10 am questions meeting. The Manager of Opposition Business needs to understand that, when the circumstances change, a good general changes their tactics, as Ataturk once famously said.

Before question time the government made two important announcements. We removed from the higher education amendment bill the Commonwealth Grant Scheme reduction by 20 per cent. We have decided to put that in a different bill so that the government's vital deregulation agenda can stand on its own merits and be dealt with by the crossbench on its own merits this week.

_Opposition members interjecting—_

**The SPEAKER:** The naughty corner will be quiet.

**Mr PYNE:** We also found the money to re-fund the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy that Labor cut. Labor not only cut $6.6 billion from higher education over three years; they also did not fund the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy. Due to the generosity of this Prime Minister and this Treasurer—

_Ms Butler interjecting—_

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Griffith is warned!

**Mr PYNE:** we have found the money to ensure that that vital scheme keeps going. We are already spending $9 billion a year on research across government—and I thank the Treasurer for his generosity—and we will continue to fund the NCRIS.

Do not take my word for it about why this reform is so vitally important. This is what Peter Beattie said about this vital deregulation reform:

Make no mistake, without funding reform, Australia's universities will inevitably slip towards mediocrity and the quality of Australian graduates will decline in relation to our international competitors, both in business and education. This means Australia will be greatly disadvantaged as graduates of other countries become better prepared for the knowledge-based jobs of the 21st century. In blunt reality, we will no longer be competitive.

On this side of the House, we will free universities to be competitive. On that side of the House, they will slam the door in the face of low-SES students.

_Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme_

**Mr HUTCHINSON** (Lyons) (14:25): My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development. Will the Deputy Prime Minister inform the House how expansion of the Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme will allow
Tasmanian businesses to compete on a level playing field and how this will support the Tasmanian economy?

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development) (14:26): I thank the member for Lyons for his question and compliment him on his strong advocacy on these issues, together with his colleagues the members for Bass and Braddon. They have certainly been strong advocates for Tasmanian business. As a result, last week the government announced that it will continue the Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme and extend it by a further $203 million to cover a $700-per-shipping-container subsidy for containers not covered by the current scheme, mainly containers destined for export.

This is an important step forward for Tasmania, and it has been warmly welcomed by Tasmanian business. As Rod Bender, the general manager of Norske Skog, said:

This is critical to operating a business in Tasmania cost-effectively and, more importantly, giving us access to markets that currently we can't ship to economically.

Clearly, as an island state, shipping services are absolutely critical to Tasmania's competitiveness. Almost 40 years ago the coalition introduced the Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme to correct the difference that there is in freighting goods from Tasmania compared with the mainland states. This subsidy was intended to make up that difference. It has helped to meet some of the extra costs that businesses in Tasmania inevitably face because it is an island state.

But we will really have to do more to ensure the competitiveness of shipping from Tasmania and, indeed, from other states. Over the past decade Australia's freight task has increased by about five per cent per annum, but the volume of freight carried by shipping has decreased by 2½ per cent per annum. During the previous government's term, they introduced legislation which has had a devastating effect on the local shipping industry. It has cost jobs in the Australian shipping industry and, more than that, it has cost hundreds of jobs in land based industries, including in states such as Tasmania. Those job-destroying, bureaucratic reforms of the previous government are in fact undermining the effectiveness of Australian shipping. Indeed, the volume of ships on the Australian flag register has fallen by 64 per cent since Labor's initiative. Bell Bay Aluminium tell us that their freight went up 63 per cent in the year that Labor introduced its so-called reforms. Those reforms have been damaging to the Australian shipping industry, and we know that they have to be reversed if we are going to have a shipping industry capable of playing its role in Australia's important freight task.

**DISTINGUISHED VISITORS**

The SPEAKER (14:29): I would like to advise the House that we have in the Speaker's gallery members of the Inter-Parliamentary Study Program delegation, and we make you most welcome. I would also like to advise the House that earlier with us was Ms Janelle Saffin, the former member for Page, who is currently serving as a legal adviser to the Prime Minister of Timor-Leste.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Minister for Agriculture

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:29): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer to the Prime Minister's statement yesterday that he was not privy to all the details of the sacking of the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture. If the Prime Minister was not privy to all the details, why did the Prime Minister recommend the sacking of the secretary without knowing them?

Mr Snowdon: Lifestyle choice!

The SPEAKER: The member for Lingiari is warned!

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:29): In the previous parliamentary sitting fortnight, the secretary of my department drew it to my attention that there were some issues between the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture and the minister. I asked my secretary to look into this matter. My secretary did so. He made a recommendation to me and that recommendation has been acted upon.

The SPEAKER: I call the honourable member for Banks.

Mr Burke: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, there have been circumstances where someone has missed the call and it has been evened up later in question time, but to give someone the call when he is not even on his feet is extraordinary.

The SPEAKER: I am sorry, he was on his feet. The member for Banks has the call and the member for Hunter will resume his seat.

Broadband

Mr COLEMAN (Banks) (14:30): My question is to the Minister for Communications. What steps is the government taking to ensure the rollout of fast broadband to Australians and particularly people in my electorate of Banks?

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Minister for Communications) (14:31): I thank the honourable member for his question. Around 3.4 million homes in Australia are either passed by or within the footprint of the hybrid fibre coax networks—these are the pay TV cable networks that were rolled out some years ago. Under the Labor plan for the NBN, the owners of those networks, Telstra and Optus, were to be paid billions of dollars to switch them off—to turn them off, to render them utterly useless.

What we have done is that we have been trying to mitigate the massive losses incurred by Labor in this project and get it built and underway properly, as we are doing. What we did was negotiate with Telstra and Optus to secure, for no extra money, access—indeed, ownership—of the HFC networks. Those HFC networks are not only able to deliver very high speed broadband today of 100 megabits per second; but, as the NBN Co announced last week, by 2017, using the DOCSIS 3.1 technology, we will be delivering fibre-like speeds of one gigabit per second down and 100 megabits per second up.

When you consider that it costs over $4,000 on average to connect premises with fibre to the premises, and when you consider there are close to three million premises already passed by the HFC and 3.4 million within the footprint, you can see that the amount of money Labor was going to waste by junking those networks was truly extraordinary.
In the honourable member's electorate and in many other urban electorates in Australia, including in the electorates of McPherson and Moncrieff and Fadden and, indeed, Petrie and Longman, where I was over last week—in all of those electorates—there are thousands of households with HFC present. What our approach will enable us to do is deliver on our word, which is to deliver very fast broadband, in this case at extraordinary speeds, fibre equivalent speeds, much sooner, much cheaper and at much lower cost to customers.

This is only part of what we are doing right across the board, because our approach to the NBN is focused on the customer. We are focused on delivering very fast broadband to customers; Labor were focused on one political stunt after another. They were not interested in fibre to the premises; it was, again and again and again, fibre to the press release—that was their only interest and they failed even at that.

**Minister for Agriculture**

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (14:34): My question is to the Prime Minister and I refer him to undertakings made at Senate estimates by the former Secretary of the Department of Agriculture to provide a number of documents relating to the Minister for Agriculture's doctoring of Hansard. Now that the secretary has been sacked, will the government still commit to providing these documents?

The SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hunter is not permitted to use that term in a question. If he wants to make that sort of allegation, there are other forms of the House. He will reword the question.

Mr FITZGIBBON: I remind the Prime Minister that the then Secretary of the Department of Agriculture made undertakings to Senate estimates that he would provide further documents relating to changes to Hansard. Now that the secretary is no longer in the employee of the Commonwealth, will the Prime Minister still commit to providing these documents?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:35): It would be the standard practice of the government to honour undertakings made in Senate estimates.

**Trade with Asia**

Mr TEHAN (Wannon) (14:36): My question is to the Minister for Trade and Investment. Will the minister update the House on steps the government is taking to help business capitalise on the opportunities presented by the free trade agreements the government has concluded with the major economies of North Asia: Korea, Japan and China?

Mr ROBB (Goldstein—Minister for Trade and Investment) (14:36): I thank the member for Wannon. He comes from a great agricultural area of Australia and he is also one of the strongest advocates for freer trade and investment in this parliament. The free trade agreements with China, Japan and Korea concluded last year do present unprecedented opportunities across all three markets—in goods, services and investments. Historically, however, while Australia has been good at concluding agreements, we have not been so good at ensuring that the benefits are well understood and acted upon by business, so we are making a determined effort to avoid this outcome this time. We are commencing a national roadshow to communicate the huge business opportunity in these agreements. We have held two half-day pilot forums in Queensland and Victoria, and we are now ready to roll out this
national roadshow. Over the next two years, we intend to conduct over 50 forums at the rate of two or three a month covering all capital cities, and rural and regional centres.

Ms Ryan interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Lalor!

Mr ROBB: Members from across the chamber will be invited to participate when forums are scheduled in their areas and will be encouraged to seek strong local business participation. It is crucial that we bridge the gap between policy announcements and business activities on the ground, notwithstanding the puerile comments from the other side of the chamber.

Honourable members interjecting—

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

Mr ROBB: It is also crucial that we create the projects and potential investments to take and capture the greatly heightened international interest in investment in Australia that has been prompted by the government's open-for-business policy and these agreements. To this end, I can report that, having visited major pension funds and private investors in Toronto and New York last week, I was asked continuously about the disappearance of $37 billion worth of infrastructure projects following the election of a Labor government. Just as damaging were the references to the new Victorian government's tearing-up of the contract to construct the East West Link. Comments were being made that these sorts of contracts were no longer worth the paper they are written on. Labor, state and federal, seem hell-bent on severely damaging our economy for crass political purposes.

Minister for Agriculture

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:39): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer to reports that the Prime Minister's own department contacted Dr Grimes a number of times about his request to convene an extraordinary Senate committee hearing to reveal the circumstances and truth about changes to the Minister for Agriculture's Hansard record. Did the Prime Minister personally instruct his department to communicate with Dr Grimes or anyone in his office?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:40): This matter was handled entirely by the secretary of my department, as it should be.

Mr Snowdon: Just answer the question.

The SPEAKER: The member for Lingiari!

Asylum Seekers

Mr HOWARTH (Petrie) (14:40): My question is to the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection. Will the minister please inform the House of the importance of a consistent approach in relation to border security. What are the consequences of inconsistency in relation to border protection?

Mr DUTTON (Dickson—Minister for Immigration and Border Protection) (14:40): I thank the member for Petrie for his question. The coalition has been totally consistent when it comes to the very important issue of border protection. We were consistent during the Howard years and we have been thoroughly consistent during the period of government under Tony Abbott.
What does it result in?—a couple of very important outcomes because of this consistency. Firstly, we have been able to stop the deaths at sea—1,200 people died at sea under Labor's watch. The boats have stopped and the deaths at sea have stopped. In the last 12 months of the Labor government, 302 boats arrived. That meant that over Labor's period in government, 50,000 people had arrived on 800 boats. The boats under this government have stopped.

The Prime Minister spoke before about the number of children in detention, and those numbers have declined also. I want to report to the House that in 2007 there were zero children in detention.

Mr Perrett interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Moreton!

Mr DUTTON: There were zero children who had arrived by boat. In the first year of Labor, the number went from 35 up to 342. In 2010 it went up to 1,251. In 2012 it went to 2,500. In 2013, under Labor, the number went to 3,523. In 2014—the first period under which this government had responsibility—it went down to 50. In 2015, so far, that number is at zero. If you want to keep children out of detention, you stop the boats, because the worst possible thing that could happen is that the boats start again and the children start to flow back into our detention centres. It is very interesting, when you have a look at a contrast in relation to policies in this very important area.

Ms Burke interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Chisholm!

Mr DUTTON: Labor has now had, as a result of the member for Sydney's comments on the weekend, 13 different positions since 2007. Firstly, they proposed to abolish TPVs and abandoned the Pacific solution; they extended appeal rights and legal assistance in November 2008; they had the East Timor solution, which famously, some indicated would result in people jumping the fence to get into the detention centres, not to get out; they had the Afghan return solution; they had—one of my favourites!—the Malaysian people swap, the five-for-one deal, which was a complete outrage and abrogation of responsibility, but that is what we expected from Labor; they had Manus Island mark 1; they had the Houston expert panel in August 2012; they had the PNG arrangement in July 2013.

Mr Perrett interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Moreton is warned! One more statement and he will leave the chamber.

Mr DUTTON: If only I had more time, I could detail more about Labor's flips and flops when it comes to border protection, but be assured of one thing: if Labor is re-elected at the next election, the boats will return.

Superannuation

Mr BOWEN (McMahon) (14:43): My question is to the Treasurer. I refer to the Treasurer's proposal to allow early access for superannuation for housing, a proposal that the communications minister has labelled a thoroughly bad idea. What does the Treasurer say to the former Treasurer Peter Costello, the finance minister, the communications minister, and, today, his former boss Peter Collins, who all oppose his proposal?
The SPEAKER: I call the Treasurer, the Hon. Joe Hockey, who will respond to the question in general terms.

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney—The Treasurer) (14:44): As part of the response to the Intergenerational report there have been a number of submissions, as there were submissions in relation to the budget. A number of those comments related to the affordability of housing for young Australians. We think it is a big issue. We think that the question of how young Australians will be able to afford to get into their first home is a very significant issue. Currently, it is roughly the case that you need to have over four times your annual income to buy the equivalent of a home—

Mr Husic interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Chifley is warned!

Mr HOCKEY: whereas two decades ago it was around 2.6. Of course, there have been proposals around for a rather long period of time. The Real Estate Institute of Australia has had a proposal on the table for quite some period. I was doing a bit of cursory research as to who, formally, actually came up with the proposal for the first time. I know my colleagues will not believe it, but the first proponent of using superannuation to help pay for first-home ownership was Paul Keating. I know this guy here was too young to be born but, in a 1993 election campaign speech, Paul Keating stood up and said, 'Young Australians should be able to use their superannuation to purchase their first home.' Paul J Keating—I know he is a mate of yours. Pick up the phone to him. I tell you what: there is a lot of hypocrisy in this debate and no more a hypocrite than one sitting at this table, right over there. As I said before, you have always got to remember your history with the Labor Party. You cannot forget the Labor Party, the Labor Party that chooses to forget its history. But do you know what? We have got some fantastic researchers on our side and we are always watching you.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: There will be silence on my left! I would remind the Treasurer that the word 'hypocrite' is unparliamentary. I warned him on the last occasion. I would ask him to withdraw.

Mr HOCKEY: I withdraw.

Employment

Mr LAMING (Bowman) (14:47): My question is to the Minister for Social Services. I remind the minister that the Intergenerational report projects a decline in labour force participation over the next 40 years. So, Minister, what steps is the government taking to counter this trend and is the minister aware of any alternative approaches?

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Minister for Social Services) (14:47): I thank the member for Bowman for his question, because he knows that it is important that it is business as usual when it comes to our welfare challenges. It is not something that is sustainable in the future. He also knows that it takes eight out of 10 income tax payers to go to work every day to pay that welfare bill. He also knows that the people who go to work to pay taxes every day know that the best form of welfare is a job and our task is to get as many Australians as we can off the welfare payroll and onto an employer's payroll.
It was good news last week when we learnt that 150,000 new jobs were created in the past year, getting people into jobs. That is what this government is doing—150,000 new jobs in the 12 months to the end of February. But you cannot be complacent about these things because, as the Intergenerational report shows, we will have to work even harder to keep more Australians actively involved in the labour force as time goes on. The Abbott government is working hard to set up Australians for success when it comes to being involved in the labour force and succeeding in work. There are three key measures that we are working on. The first one is the jobs package that will come forward from this government, which will seek to help young people transition into work and to deal with one very serious problem which requires serious debate in this place, not the constant opposition of those opposite, where we have out-of-work 15- to 20-year-olds who are 4½ times more likely to be out of work when they are aged 25 to 30. So if they are out of work when they are 15 to 20 and you cannot get them into work when they are aged 25 to 30, they can be written off on welfare for life. That is what the jobs package will deliver against.

There is also the families package where we are working to make the equation better for families who need to get back into work and stay in work when they have children. We are working hard to deliver on that package as well. Then there is the Intergenerational report and our response where we are encouraging Australians to work longer and extend their working life. Why? Because it is in their interests. When people are healthier and are able to, and when we can support ourselves and continue to contribute in the way that people of that generation have over a lifetime, then we want to encourage them to do that.

I am asked what the alternative approaches are. There have not been any alternative approaches from the other side put forward. It is a 'Festival of No Ideas' from the Leader of the Opposition. We continue the debate. We have a shadow ministry of shoulder shrugging. Every single time they are asked: how are you going to pay for it, what are you going to do or to even come up with an idea, the shoulders go up and down for the rest of the day. (Time expired)

**Superannuation**

**Mr SHORTEN** (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:50): My question is to the Prime Minister. Last question time the Prime Minister told the House:

... we have made no changes to superannuation rules other than doing what we said we would do before the last election.

But last September the Prime Minister announced a new freeze on the superannuation guarantee at 9½ per cent, until 2021, as part of his deal with the Leader of the Palmer United Party. Why did the Prime Minister mislead the House and will he now correct the record, as is required by paragraph 5.1 of his own statement—

**The SPEAKER:** The honourable Leader of the Opposition knows perfectly well that if he wishes to make an allegation it needs to be on a substantive motion. You can reword your question, if you wish.

**Mr Burke:** Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Considering whether or not it is 'deliberately mislead' or 'mislead' is part of the distinction that needs to be drawn. There is no imputation from the Leader of the Opposition in that question that the Prime Minister deliberately misled the House. He may well have not known what his own government did
when he was in question time last time. We are asking him why he has not come back into the chamber to correct the record, as he is required to do so.

The SPEAKER: I will call the honourable Leader of the Opposition and, if there is no implied deliberate misleading, the question can stand.

Mr SHORTEN: I can reframe the question. It certainly was not imputing deliberate misleading. Last question time the Prime Minister said that his government had made no changes to superannuation rules other than what he said they would do before the last election. But, as a matter of record, last September, the Prime Minister announced a new freeze on the superannuation guarantee at 9½ per cent, delaying it to 2021. Will the Prime Minister now correct the record to the House?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:53): I understand that, as part of some concessions that the government made in order to secure the passage of legislation that was opposed by the Labor Party, we did make some changes. But, certainly, except in this particular respect, we have made no changes to superannuation.

Taxation
Superannuation

Mr BROUGH (Fisher) (14:53): My question is to the Assistant Treasurer. Will the Assistant Treasurer update the House on progress the government is making towards bringing certainty to Australia's tax and superannuation system to provide stability for Australian business? What challenges are there to this approach?

Mr FRYDENBERG (Kooyong—Assistant Treasurer) (14:53): I thank the member for Fisher for his question and acknowledge the significant contribution he has made to policy in this chamber. After six years of chaos and dysfunction from those opposite, it was up to us to bring stability and certainty to our tax and superannuation system. We inherited 96 announced but unenacted tax and superannuation measures. We are not proceeding with 59 of those, and we are proceeding with 37 of those. We have also changed the thin capitalisation rules on taxation on some of our largest multinationals, and we have also saved $1.3 billion by changing the R&D tax concession on some of Australia's largest companies.

I am asked: am I aware of any challenges to this approach? I am certainly aware of three separate challenges from those opposite. Let me start with the first from the shadow Assistant Treasurer. In The Australian on 27 January, he let the cat out of the bag in an op-ed entitled 'In defence of the carbon and mining taxes', saying if they had not been repealed:

… the budget would be comfortably back in surplus in 2017-18.

Dream on! I am aware of a second one. I am aware from the shadow Treasurer who said in the Financial Review on 10 January:

The whole gamut of savings and revenue measures needs to be on the table.

I am aware of a third approach from the Leader of the Opposition, from that horror interview he did last Friday with Jon Faine—dare I say it, Friday the 13th. In between quoting Martin Luther King, the Leader of the Opposition was asked a firm question from Jon Faine:

You want to put taxes up?

He gave two-word answer: 'No. Well.' I did a bit of sleuth work. We went to the website of the Leader of the Opposition, and we dug up the transcript. Do you know what two words
were missing? 'No. Well.' They not only doctored the books in government, they are now doctoring their transcripts in opposition. The Labor Party is lost. They are divided. They have no plans and no answers. Do not take my word for it. Listen to the Leader of the Opposition. On the 7.30 report, the Leader of the Opposition—

Mr Burke: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I refer to the well-established precedent about the use of the word 'doctoring' being unparliamentary.

Mr Pyne: On the point of order, Madam Speaker, there is a very big difference between stating that the Labor Party doctored the books and doctoring transcripts and the quite unparliamentary suggestion of changes to the Hansard being doctored.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: There will be silence on both sides of the House. The Leader of the House makes a perfectly valid point.

Mr Frydenberg: I was saying that Labor is lost, has no plan and no answers. Do not take my word for it. Take the Leader of the Opposition's word for it. On the 7.30 report with Leigh Sales recently, he was asked to spell out Labor's direction. These were his words:

If you don't know where you're going, any road'll get you there. This is what you get from Labor in the year of big ideas.

Pensions

Ms Macklin (Jagajaga) (14:57): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer to comments made by the Prime Minister that indexing the pension to only CPI is 'perfectly reasonable'. Does the Prime Minister also think it is perfectly reasonable for pensioners to suffer an $80-a-week cut to their pension within a decade?

Mr Abbott (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:58): Members opposite should not run around the country trying to scare people.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Jagajaga has asked her question, and we will now have silence to allow the Prime Minister to reply.

An opposition member interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Whoever said that will remind themselves that they will be out next.

Mr Abbott: Members opposite should not set out to mislead, to scare and to distort. Members opposite should accept that, under this government, pensions go up twice a year, every year.

Ms King interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Ballarat!

Mr Abbott: Under this government, pensions go up twice a year every single year. What this government has done is to deliver an unprecedented benefit to the pensioners of Australia, because what we have done is scrap the carbon tax and we have kept every cent of the carbon tax compensation for pensioners, a very good deal for the pensioners of Australia. That is what they get from this government.
Ms Macklin: Madam Speaker, I seek leave to table the Australian Council of Social Service paper that shows it is a cut of $80 a week.

The SPEAKER: It is a matter of public record. The member knows perfectly well that if a matter is on the public record it is not available for tabling.

Road Infrastructure

Mr TONY SMITH (Casey) (14:59): My question is to the Assistant Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development. I ask the minister to update the House on the benefits of the East West Link and outline the consequences of not building this vital project.

Mr BRIGGS (Mayo—Assistant Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development) (15:00): I thank the member for Casey for that question. I thank him and the members for Deakin, Aston and La Trobe for the campaign they are running on the eastern side of the East West Link and I thank the member for Corangamite for the efforts that she continues to put in on the western side—which, in fairness to the Leader of the Opposition, was his preferred option when he put in not one but two submissions to the Sir Rod Eddington inquiry at the end of the last decade. Sir Rod Eddington said that doing nothing was not an option. Melbourne needs another east-west crossing. That was made clear in Sir Rod Eddington's report, which the Leader of the Opposition supported twice—once as a union boss and once as the member for a western seat in Melbourne.

What has become clear since the Victorian election is that Daniel Andrews, the Leader of the Victorian Labor government, will tear up the East West contract. In an effort to hold the Greens at bay in the inner suburbs of Melbourne, he has said he would tear it up. It was an attempt he was half successful at; he lost to the Greens two of the seats they were trying to keep and he held onto the other two.

Ms Butler interjecting—

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

The member for Griffith then left the chamber.

Mr BRIGGS: In recent weeks, through the Herald Sun's reporting, it has become very obvious that the Victorian government is now considering legislation to legislate away the rights of this consortium—a lawfully signed contract that they signed just before the Victorian election. The Victorian government is now talking about legislating that away, risking Australia's sovereign risk and Victoria's credit rating. Indeed, last week the international Infrastructure Investor magazine had on its front page: 'Can Australia be taken at its word?'

These are the sorts of headlines we are now seeing internationally.

Mr Shorten interjecting—

Mr BRIGGS: The Leader of the Opposition asks, 'What's it in reference to?' It is in reference to retrospective legislation for the East West contract.

Mr Burke interjecting—

Mr BRIGGS: Do you really want me to repeat what he actually said?

Mr Burke: Madam Speaker, on a point of order the goes to direct relevance: the assistant minister has acknowledged that he is misquoting the Leader of the Opposition.
The SPEAKER: The member for Watson knows perfectly well he may not use a point of order for that purpose. He may do so at the end of question time, when the Leader of the Opposition will be quite able to correct his own record.

Mr BRIGGS: It was not the only publication. Arnold Dix, who is the chairman of the legal committee of the International Tunnelling and Underground Space Association, said in a letter to Daniel Andrews—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr BRIGGS: They think it is funny. These people think it is hilarious that they are going to rip up contracts. Mr Dix said: 'The impact on the perception of Victoria and Australia's sovereign risk is significant. It would certainly result in the decreased access of Australia to foreign capital, increased interest charges, degraded sovereign risk profile, degraded credit rating and less local opportunities for investment.' This is a serious issue and the Leader of the Opposition must tell the Australian public whether he supports legislating away the rights of this consortium or not.

Pensions

Mr BOWEN (McMahon) (15:04): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer to page 30 of the government's Intergenerational report, which says that, over the next 40 years, wages growth will be four per cent a year whereas growth in domestic prices, or CPI, will be 2½ per cent a year. Why is the government cutting pension indexation that will see the value of the pension fall from 28 per cent of male total average weekly earnings today to just 16 per cent by 2055?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (15:04): Let me repeat the two fundamental points. Pensions will go up twice a year every year—that is point No. 1. Point No. 2 is that the pensioners of Australia are significantly better off thanks to this government because the carbon tax has been abolished and the carbon tax compensation has been kept. I say to members opposite who are so enamoured of MTAWE that, if pensions had only gone up by MTAWE since the election, they would now be $20.70 per fortnight lower. That is the truth: under Labor's favourite indexation method, pensions would be lower at this time.

Food and Grocery Code

Dr HENDY (Eden-Monaro) (15:05): My question is to the Minister for Small Business. Will the minister outline to the House the response to the government's new Food and Grocery Code and how it will protect small businesses who supply the major supermarkets? Are there any threats to its effectiveness?

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley—Minister for Small Business) (15:06): I thank the member for Eden-Monaro. He is a great advocate for small businesses in his community, and that is why he sees the great value of the Food and Grocery Code. The Food and Grocery Council itself described the day the code was introduced as a historic day. There has been a lot of discussion and a great deal of concern expressed in the community, and even among members in this place, about the conduct of big retailers and big wholesalers towards small suppliers in the food and grocery space. There was a time when Labor actually thought this was interesting. The now shadow Treasurer made the point of saying at the time that 'smaller operators have issues and Labor's grocery inquiry is looking through those issues'.
He said they were 'looking through'—talk about looking at nothing! That was in 2008, when Labor expressed an interest. And what happened? Absolutely nothing. Nothing was achieved by Labor. Nothing was demonstrated as a constructive step forward. Nothing could be characterised as an historic day; it was just a whole lot of nothing.

What we have seen is a need to get on with this work. We have done that and we have delivered the food and grocery code. The ACCC chairman Rod Sims said, quite rightly, 'The new code makes it clear that no matter how much bargaining power a retailer holds, they must deal fairly with the suppliers.' That is what the code seeks to deliver, not just because that is good for the small businesses that are suppliers to the retailers, but because it looks after the consumers as well. If certain behaviour was to continue, and without the code to keep that conduct on track, the consumers would be disadvantaged. Who would invest? Who would make the innovations to give new choice and new opportunities to consumers? And that is why this code has been received in an overwhelmingly positive way.

Food South Australian said:
It should lead to the ongoing sustainability and viability of the Australian food industry because if our food companies continue to be screwed, there won’t be a food industry.

COSBOA said that this is a big step forward. For ACCI, Kate Carnell, said:
The Code of Conduct sets a sensible framework for the relationship between suppliers and retailers. We have not heard from those opposite. Where are you guys on this position? Where is Labor? They said they had an interest in this back in 2008. We have now got a disallowance period, where the worst outcome could see Labor stand in the road of the introduction of this important step forward. It was a historic day, a great piece of progress and this government delivering once again. And after saying something about it back in 2008 we now have silence from Labor. Why don't you just get behind the good work of the coalition to give small businesses an opportunity to grow and prosper in this economy rather than sit back, carp and complain, and add nothing to supporting energising enterprise in this economy?

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

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE: ADDITIONAL ANSWERS

Superannuation

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney—The Treasurer) (15:10): I wish to add to an answer. And I want to assist the member for McMahon before we are on Q&A tonight and refer him to this document: the Australian Labor Party policy document presented by Paul Keating at Bankstown on Wednesday, 24 February 1993. This is where I first heard of the proposal. It said, 'For most people, however—

Mr Clare interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The Member for Blaxland will desist!

Mr HOCKEY: This is a Labor Party document. You want to be president of the Labor Party; you should listen to this. I am trying to help you! It said, 'For most people, however, a debt-free home—

Mr Burke: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order on speaking through the chair. I think it is unlikely that you want to be president of the Australian Labor Party, so if the Treasurer could speak through the chair that would be appreciated.
The SPEAKER: Is that an invitation to take action?

Mr HOCKEY: I have absolutely no doubt you do not want to be the president of the Labor Party, Madam Speaker. This is a Labor Party policy document. It says: 'For most people, however, a debt-free home is as important a part of retirement security as superannuation income. Labor will therefore permit all Australians to draw whichever is the greater of $10,000 or 75 per cent of the vested benefit from their superannuation savings as a deposit on the purchase of their home.' That is where it first came from—the Labor Party. I table the document for them and if the Labor Party were not contradicting themselves all the time on these things perhaps they would be part of a proper conversation about how young Australians can get into their first home.

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORTS

Reports Nos 26 and 27 of 2014-15

The SPEAKER: I present the following Auditor-General's performance audit reports for 2014-15: No. 26, Administration of the medical Specialist Training Program: Department of Health and No. 27, Electronic health records for Defence personnel: Department of Defence.

Ordered that the reports be made parliamentary papers.

DOCUMENTS

Presentation

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House and Minister for Education and Training) (15:11): Documents are presented as listed in the schedule circulated to honourable members. Details of the documents will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings.

BILLS

Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2014-2015

Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2014-2015

Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 2) 2014-2015

Second Reading

Cognate debate.

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

to which the following amendment was moved:

That all the 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 notes that:

(1) the 2014-15 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook showed a $44 billion blow-out in the budget deficit over the forward estimates from the 2014-15 Budget, which represents a $202 million blow-out in the Budget deficit by the Government each and every day;

(2) Government debt is higher now than it was when the Government took office;

(3) the Budget bottom line in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook incorporates a series of broken promises, including: the introduction of the GP tax, increasing the petrol tax, cuts to pension indexation, $6,000 cuts to a typical Australian family, plans for $100,000 university degrees, cuts to the ABC and SBS, and a $11.3 billion cut from foreign aid;
(4) the Government continues to undermine business and consumer confidence with its unfair Budget, which are now below the levels at the 2013 Federal Election; and

(5) the Government's failure to have a clear plan for economic and jobs growth has led to the unemployment rate increasing to its highest level since August 2002, when the current Prime Minister was the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations."

The SPEAKER: Before the debate is resumed on this bill I remind the House that it has been agreed that a general debate be allowed covering this bill, Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2014-2015 and the Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 2) 2014-2015.

Mr MATHESON (Macarthur) (15:13): One of the successful applicants, Lauren Hokin, has been awarded $33,375 to write and publish a book commemorating the citizens of Macarthur who enlisted in World War I. This research project, the first of its kind covering the whole of Macarthur, ensures that the great sacrifices made by local men and women from our region during World War I will be formally acknowledged and recorded in history. These are just some of the fantastic investments that the government is making in the Macarthur community. This government is investing in the future of my electorate of Macarthur and the future of Greater Western Sydney and south-western Sydney that will benefit the region, the state and, ultimately, the country.

I am proud that I have been given the opportunity to represent my community and to help secure this funding to create jobs, to create opportunities and to create a safer, more integrated community. My electorate of Macarthur stands as proof that the Abbott government is providing the right mix of infrastructure, public transport and investment in health, education and sporting and cultural activities that is making, and will continue to make, Macarthur one of the best places to live and work in the country.

After six years of the chaos and dysfunction of the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd government, the Abbott government is focused on delivering the infrastructure of the 21st century. As the saying goes, purpose is the engine, the power that drives and directs our lives. The government's unprecedented investment in Macarthur has given our region the purpose and the opportunity it needs to reach its full potential, and in doing so Macarthur and south-western Sydney will in turn become the power that will drive our economy.

Mr GRAY (Brand) (15:14): Next month, on 17 April, my dad would have been 81. But, if he had not died, as he did, I would not know him as well as I do now. I am pleased that I know him well. I wish he had not died, but I treasure the love we did share, and I am proud of Dad—proud of how he died and proud of how he lived. It has been six summers now since my father, Gordon, died. He was a mate, a partner and a supporter that I often did not know I had. Dad died in August 2009. He was proud of me, of my brother David and of my twin sister, Carol, and after 53 years he was still in love with our mum, Olive.

Dad's death came at the hands of cancer—an oesophageal tumour identified in late January 2009, which meant that in 202 days Dad was dead. There are worse things than a cancer death. After his diagnosis, Dad and I could talk about our relationship. We talked about our conflicts—many matters I came to understand which before he began dying I just did not know about. There were many things I did not know, but by the time of his death I understood more. We had taken long walks together throughout March, April, May and June 2009 and by July he could not walk, but we could still talk.
I learned about my dad before he died. That was a blessing. That he died was simply inevitable; an oesophageal tumour is a fatal opponent. I had been impatient and sometimes aggrieved by Dad. He was a good bloke. He enjoyed a beer, did not work too hard and lived by a simple working-class ethic. 'The kids will be okay if I look out for Mum'—and he did that. He would vote Labor nationally, and he said, 'Workers will get whatever little bit is able to be given by a Labor government.' He would also say, 'The Liberals, by their nature, won't help at all.' He would vote conservative in local government elections. He would say, 'They will keep the rates down.' And he would vote communist in union elections: 'They'll give the bosses hell,' he'd say. None of that is a philosophy I agreed with, but it was Dad.

Gordon Gray was born at home in Dalton Brook, Yorkshire, in 1934. His mother, Fannie, was 22 years old. His father, David, was a 28-year-old stonemason. Gordon often talked about his father's work as a stonemason on the maintenance of All Saints Church in the centre of Rotherham. Gordon attended Doncaster Road Primary School and was a full-back with the school soccer team. He grew up in the shadow of the Great Depression and was a boy during World War II. Gordon talked of the bombings of Sheffield, of the life of a child in air-raid shelters, of growing up when there was not a lot to go around, and how his mother's sister—his Aunt Kath—became the most important person in his life. Kath lived with the family in Dalton Brook. She gave Gordon the love and support his mother could not.

Gordon's grandfather, Robert Gray, had been a coalminer at the Silverwood colliery. Like his father, Gordon was determined not to work down a coalmine. Gordon left school at 14 to start an apprenticeship as a motor mechanic. He worked on Bedford trucks. However, in 51 years I never, ever saw Dad display any mechanical skill whatsoever. I guess that is why, in 1949, answering the call of the Navy, Gordon began training with HMAS Raleigh. Over the following six years he visited ports in South Africa, South Korea and South America. He later transferred to submarines, serving on T-class submarines HMS Telemachus. Gordon enjoyed life in the Royal Navy—in particular, the raucous life of a stoker. In 1955 Gordon's father succumbed to cancer—he was 48—and Gordon returned to England.

That year Gordon met Olive Lees and they married on 14 January 1956 at All Saints Church in Rotherham. Through the late 1950s and early 1960s Gordon worked as a steelworker and he and Olive began a family. David was born on 11 July 1956 and the twins, Carol and I, on 30 April 1958. Gordon was convinced that his young family would have greater opportunities in a new country. In June 1966 they packed a few suitcases and a tea chest of belongings and boarded the Fairsea and moved to Australia. Gordon thrived in Whyalla. Indentured to the Broken Hill Proprietary Company as a labourer, he enjoyed the town, its life, the sun and the beach, the Ada Ryan Gardens, and the people. Most of all he enjoyed the opportunities on offer for David, Carol and myself. The family even bought a car—a Volkswagen beetle—in 1967, in which family tours of the Flinders Ranges and Eyre Peninsula would be taken. Gordon held positions in the local naval club and the RSL. He was not just a club joiner; he was a doer. As a long-term treasurer his financial numbers always added up. He took pride in getting his numbers right, and he was a popular and social person—very smart, very clever.

From BHP Gordon moved to the Electricity Trust of South Australia. He enjoyed his work as a storeman, but, most importantly, he enjoyed his life with Olive and his children. David became an electrical engineer at BHP and now lives in Brisbane, I am a parliamentarian and
live in Western Australia, and Carol is a carer in Whyalla, South Australia. Throughout their adult years, Gordon and his children often mused that Gordon's Victa lawnmower arrived after David and Gary left home, and the air-conditioner and the colour television set were purchased when Gordon and Olive moved out of their housing trust house into one that they owned themselves once all three kids had left home. Gordon and Olive planned and built their lives together and around each other. In later years Gordon and Olive travelled on yearly pilgrimages to Brisbane and then Canberra and Perth to visit David's and my families. Carol lives in Whyalla, and Gordon played an important part in the life of her daughter, Victoria. This relationship was reminiscent of the one he had enjoyed with his own Aunt Kath while growing up in Dalton Brook, Yorkshire, 70 years before.

Gordon was diagnosed with oesophageal cancer in January 2009. And Gordon died as he lived—in Olive's loving care—on 17 August 2009. He was strong and in complete control of his life and his death. You see, Gordon had made an informed and thoughtful decision about dying. Under care, Dad could have lived longer. He did not want that, and he told me so. He told me that if the positions were reversed he could not bear to see mum as sick as he was, and he could see that his pain hurt mum more and more. He chose his end carefully, thoughtfully and with some humour. He checked into palliative care on a Friday night, having first checked the detail of his will with his solicitors—checking again and again that Mum would be okay. On the day he died—on the Monday—from his room at the palliative care ward at Whyalla hospital, I was able to ask Mum to go home, so that she could get dressed in her best clothes and return, as she did, looking beautiful. By then I had all the medical machinery, the bottles, the pipes and the like removed from Dad's room. The bedsheets were changed. Dad was clean, neat, tidy and rested. The room was full of flowers, full of the music Mum and Dad loved—and there was Mum and Dad, he with a central line delivering him the peace and ease he wanted.

Dad died, as he lived, in mum's care. And he died, as he wanted, in mum's arms. Dad died at 12.30 pm that day.

Later that week we celebrated dad's life where the sun, the sand and the beach meet at Ada Ryan Gardens on the Whyalla foreshore. Mum did not like the idea of a funeral at the funeral home. 'It's too dark,' she said, preferring the beach, the sun, the trees, the grass and the sounds of children playing—even during the funeral. Dad's casket was near the garden seat where she and he had often sat watching children play.

You see, there are worse ways to die than cancer, because with cancer I had the time, and dad had the time, to say goodbye. How we die is important. It is not as important as how we live, but we should be able to die peacefully and, as best as we are able, with dignity, as dad did. I will miss Gordon—husband, father, grandad and great-grandad. He is survived by his wife Olive; his children David, Carol and Gary; his grandchildren Sonya, Andrew, Victoria, Riley, Darcy and Toby; and his great-grandchildren Aydan, Charlotte and Oliver.

I do not support many of the calls for legalising processes that govern how we die. I do believe that, in our modern hospital system, in our modern systems for providing care and palliative care, with good general practice, with good doctors, and with consent, care, compassion and love, it is possible to die with dignity, without attempting to regulate and unnecessarily create black-letter law around those provisions that govern our dying. I think my dad demonstrated that, and the doctors who cared for him and his family demonstrated that it is possible in our current system—perhaps especially possible in a regional hospital, or
perhaps especially possible with a GP who has known a patient for 20 or 30 years, or perhaps especially possible with a person like my dad who realised he would not get well and that mum would only get more worried, more sick and more uneasy by dad's slow and painful death so he made the choices that he made. He made them as a loving husband, he made them as a person who enjoyed life and he made them in a way that made me proud. Thank you.

Mrs ANDREWS (McPherson—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Industry and Science) (15:25): It gives me great pleasure to rise and speak to Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2014-2015 and related bills and to talk about the work the Abbott government is doing to help the people in my electorate of McPherson and all Australians. Every day we, the government, are working to build a stronger economy and a safer Australia. The Abbott coalition government is continuing to deliver growth, jobs and real opportunity for all Australians.

Today, I would like to speak about some of our recent achievements, including that the carbon tax is gone, saving the average household $550 a year. Our Direct Action Plan is making a practical difference to the environment without slugging Australians with a carbon tax. Major projects worth $1 trillion have been given environmental approval which will provide many of the jobs of tomorrow. We have delivered the biggest cut in electricity prices on record, which is good news for everyone looking to save money. The mining tax is gone, so this vital sector can create more jobs. Our $50 billion infrastructure program is underway. This includes major projects right around Australia to save you time and money. We are cutting red tape, with $2 billion in red tape savings already identified. We are driving trade with our neighbours by delivering free trade agreements with Japan, Korea and China. This means more exports, more jobs and lower prices for families, and we are working with Australian businesses to ensure we are taking advantage of these new opportunities. The NBN is being rolled out in a way which is fast, more affordable and less costly to taxpayers. There is a $200 million boost for more than 770,000 Australian part-pensioners and allowance recipients, with the lowering of the social security deeming rates. This has certainly been well received in my electorate of McPherson where we have a high number of retirees. We have put in place better scrutiny and reporting of foreign purchases of agricultural land. These are just a few of the many things that we have achieved.

As the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Industry and Science, I would like to take this opportunity to speak about some of the great things happening in that portfolio. We have introduced the Industry, Innovation and Competitiveness Agenda. This has been the focus of the first full year of our government, and we have been very active in this area. Some of our achievements to date associated with this agenda include the rollout of Industry Growth Centres, with three chairs already being announced: Mr Andrew Stevens, Chair of the Advanced Manufacturing Growth Centre; Ms Elizabeth Lewis-Gray, Chair of the Mining Equipment, Technology and Services Growth Centre; and Mr Peter Schultz, Chair of the Food and Agribusiness Growth Centre. We are well on the way to reforming the vocational education and training sector, and this work is continuing in the education and training portfolio. I congratulate the Assistant Minister for Education and Training, Senator Simon Birmingham, for the work that he is doing in this area since his appointment as the assistant minister in December last year.

In schools we are promoting the stem subjects of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. We are implementing the Entrepreneurs' Infrastructure Program, worth $484
million, to support SMEs. In Tasmania, we have established the Tasmanian Innovation and Investment Fund in recognition of the unique challenges this state faces. We are now assessing more than 130 applications from across the Tasmanian economy, including in forestry, food, furniture and tourism. In Victoria, the Geelong Region Innovation and Investment Fund rounds 1 and 2 have now been completed and round 3 is to follow. Melbourne's North Innovation and Investment Fund round 1 has been completed. Australia's anti-dumping system has been reviewed and there is now legislation before the House that deals with a number of very important reforms.

I turn now to some of the important commitments the government is making in science. Science is vital to Australia's future, particularly given the strong impact of science on industry. Across government we are continuing to make a strong commitment to science and the critical role it plays in the economic growth of Australia. In 2014-15 we are spending $9.2 billion in science, research and innovation across all portfolios. Over the next four years this government will spend approximately $5.8 billion for science and research in the Industry portfolio. This includes $3 billion for CSIRO over the next four years. This will see year-on-year funding increases over the forward estimates.

We are also making new investments of $181.2 million to secure the operation of vital scientific activities and promote the benefits of science to Australians, including $65.7 million for CSIRO to operate and maintain the new research vessel, Investigator. There is $31.6 million over four years for ANSTO to operate the Open Pool Australian Lightwater reactor, OPAL, at full capacity. There is $25.9 million over four years for the permanent and safe disposal of used Australian nuclear fuel. There is $28 million in science for Australia's future, which includes National Science Week. There is $10 million to extend the Australia-China Science and Research Fund and there is $20 million to extend the Australia-India Strategic Research Fund.

Australia's ability to compete in global markets—in all sectors—depends on our ability to move up the value chain. Producing high-quality innovative or niche products and connecting science to industry is the cornerstone of our industry policy. The Australian government is continuing to support businesses to innovate and engage in research and development through the R&D tax incentive, which is expected to provide over $1 billion in tax offsets for eligible companies in 2014-15.

I turn now to a topic dear to my heart, STEM. As part of the government's Industry Innovation and Competitiveness Agenda, announced in October, we are delivering an extra $12 million to improve the focus on science, technology, engineering and maths—the STEM subjects—in primary and secondary education. I am privileged to have been given the responsibility, by the Minister for Industry and Science, to assist in the preparation and implementation of the whole-of-government response to the chief scientist's STEM strategy and recommendations. It is essential that we inspire young Australians to participate more actively in the STEM subjects and to develop strong STEM skills. We must continue to promote the value of STEM skills not just to the students of tomorrow but to all Australians. We need to promote the impact that STEM research has had on our quality of life as well as the impact STEM will have in the future. Those STEM skills are critical to future economic growth, sustainability and social wellbeing.
I will briefly touch on skills and training, having worked closely with Minister Macfarlane on this area before becoming the parliamentary secretary. It was pleasing to see the successful implementation of the trade-support loans, with legislation passing through both houses last year. Pleasingly, this was one of the first pieces of budget legislation that went through and is now delivering support for thousands of tradies around the country. With our VET reforms, started by Minister Macfarlane and continuing under Assistant Minister Birmingham, we are changing the focus of the system to be more outcome focused and industry led.

From 1 January this year we saw new training provider and national regulator standards introduced that have allowed for a crackdown on dodgy practices through new requirements around marketing and advertising policies. It was this government that provided new funding of more than $68 million, over four years, for the national regulator, ASQA, to focus on serious breaches of standards. From July this year we will see the new Australian Apprenticeship Support Network take off. This will provide a one-stop-shop for apprentices and their employers. It is currently out to tender. Very exciting for both industry and workers is the new $476 million Industry Skills Fund, which includes two new $44 million youth pilot programs. The Gold Coast will definitely benefit from this.

Turning to my electorate of McPherson, as a government we are spending more than $23.4 million in road infrastructure for the 2014-15 financial year. One of the major road projects to which the government has committed more than $111 million, over the life of the project, is the M1 Nerang to Robina widening, which will have a huge positive impact on both my electorate and the Gold Coast region. Across my electorate, our government is getting on with the job of tackling black spots on the roads. From Coolangatta to Cottesloe Drive at Robina we are making our roads safer through this vital road-funding project.

I am committed to working with other local members and all levels of government to further improve transport and road infrastructure for the Gold Coast. I have spoken in this place on many occasions about the transport issues that are facing Gold Coast residents and tourists. Effectively, the problem we have on the Gold Coast with regard to transport is that the Gold Coast is very different from every other major city—just about in the world, but particularly in Australia. Instead of having a central CBD, where all of the road and transport infrastructure emanates from, to the outer suburbs, the Gold Coast has evolved from a number of small villages that over time have developed and joined together. The Gold Coast is effectively a long coastal strip.

This gives us a number of significant issues with relation to transport infrastructure. We have three opportunities available to us on the Gold Coast and they serve somewhat different purposes. We have the M1, which is going through an upgrade process, interchange by interchange. It certainly would have been more advantageous if the former Queensland Labor government had not changed the priority from Tugun to Nerang to further north, closer to Brisbane. That way, we may well have—and should well have—had the M1 widened by now, all the way through to Tugun. But it is progressing.

Secondly, we have the heavy rail from Brisbane which currently terminates at Varsity Lakes. This is perhaps three stations away from the airport at Coolangatta. We also have the light rail, which at this stage has very limited capacity on the Gold Coast and terminates south at Broadbeach, which again is a long way from the airport at Coolangatta. We do know that
tourists to the Gold Coast wish to stay within a kilometre of the beach, and so the light rail is ideally suited for our tourist visitors as well as our local residents.

Work clearly needs to be done on all three—the M1, heavy rail and light rail. The priority of people who speak to me is, at this stage, getting the light rail through to the airport. I would also say that we must continue at the fastest possible pace to upgrade the M1, which provides commuter access up through to Brisbane and is invaluable. What I would see as the third priority is getting the heavy rail down to the airport. We of course cannot ignore the fact that the Gold Coast is developing westwards. We need to have good transport links to the east and to the west to make sure that we are looking after the best interests of our residents on the Gold Coast.

As I indicated earlier, I have spoken in this place on many occasions about transport on the Gold Coast. It continues to be an issue and it is an issue that I will continue to fight for, not only by talking here in Canberra to my colleagues but also by pushing the new state government in Queensland to make sure that the Gold Coast, and particularly the southern suburbs of the Gold Coast, is not ignored when it comes to transport infrastructure.

In conclusion, I say to the naysayers and those engaging in constant negativity, we as a government are getting on with the job of good government. We see very little by way of real positive policy alternatives coming from those sitting opposite. We are a government that is responsible, sensible and united—united in our commitment to clean up the mess left by those opposite and united in delivering a better future for all Australians.

Mr ALEXANDER (Bennelong) (15:39): I rise to speak on Appropriation (No. 3) Bill 2014-15 and related bills and, in doing so, update the House on a number of exciting initiatives from across Bennelong. This will include the latest news on the Hyundai Bennelong Table Tennis Schools Program and Bennelong Cup in the year of the Anzac Centenary, as well as the Bennelong Gardens Initiative and the resumption of the Bennelong Village Business campaign.

As I have informed the House on several occasions, I founded the Bennelong Schools Table Tennis Program in 2011, when, during visits to local schools, I identified cultural divides amongst students in their participation in sport. Through the generosity of Hyundai Australia, and in cooperation with Table Tennis Australia, table tennis tables have been provided to almost all schools in Bennelong. Coaching clinics for the students were organised for each school, and the Bennelong Schools Table Tennis Competition was born and is now held every year.

Bennelong is home to a diverse range of cultures and identities, and table tennis is a great way to get people of all backgrounds active and interacting with each other. It is an excellent exercise in inclusiveness, which is bridging the cultural divide throughout my electorate. I warmly remember a moment from the competition in its first year. I watched a particularly timid child grow before my eyes when his table tennis ability was shown off with a leading Korean champion in front of his school mates. With his sudden popularity came confidence, acceptance and a renewed zest for school life. His table tennis career is progressing well too. If this program can bring this sense of fulfilment to more children, it will continue to grow into a roaring success.
Likewise, the international tournament is this year also taking on a very exciting and topical turn. The Hyundai Bennelong Cup is an official annual sporting event, involving the Australian table tennis team and international competitors. It is held annually, with games played within my electorate and some exhibition matches played in the Great Hall right here in Parliament House. Hyundai Australia has extended its generosity to sponsor these test matches, and over the past four years the tournament has involved high-level competition between four nations: Australia, South Korea, China and Japan. This year, I am very happy to announce that two more countries will be joining us: Malaysia and New Zealand. I am particularly delighted that we will be joined by our friends from across the Tasman.

In this year that commemorates the 100th anniversary of the ANZAC landings, I am happy to declare that this strong relationship of partnership will continue as the Australian and New Zealand teams will be together, competing as one Trans-Tasman team. This sporting collaboration is not a first. In fact, we owe our grand slam status to our friends from across the Tasman. New Zealand and Australia originally competed in the Davis Cup, with great success as Australasia. There are countless other collaborations that could be mentioned from the fields of sport, academia, diplomacy and more. However, it is our 100-year old military alliance which I would like to briefly speak to.

One hundred years ago, when the Australian nation was forged on the Turkish beaches of the Gallipoli peninsula, a special bond was created not only amongst our diggers but also with the allies who shared our trenches. New Zealand celebrates their national baptism on 25 April like we do, yet the creation of the shared bond between us, forged at the same time as our respective national identities, receives less attention. The ordeals were shared between two nation's troops, which were of course no more segregated than those of the Australian states. And 100 years on from this momentous time our troops will once again be working alongside our New Zealand allies in the Middle East. The Anzac spirit of partnership is still alive and well.

Bennelong will, along with the rest of the country, be hosting a plethora of events for the Anzac Centenary. Over $100,000 in Anzac Centenary grants have already been approved to a vast range of organisations across Bennelong. To pull out some highlights: Rydalmere East Public School is putting on a theatrical production entitled ‘Do not Forget, Australia’; Gladesville Public School and Denistone East Public School will both be building or upgrading memorials on their grounds; St Alban's Anglican parish in Epping is restoring its World War I memorial; and Epping RSL is providing an exhibition of First World War memorabilia.

I would like to officially congratulate all of the organisations who are contributing to these commemorations and I look forward to visiting each of these projects over the coming months. I also look forward to visiting all of the excellent RSLs within Bennelong for the large number of events that I know are being organised. The celebration and commemoration of this anniversary is being taken up wholeheartedly across Bennelong, and I know that the Anzac spirit will not be forgotten in my electorate.

The centenary will be an important time to reflect on the ideals that have grown out of the trenches. These same ideals have gone on to forge our Australian identity and indomitable spirit. It is right that this centenary of the Gallipoli landings is indeed a celebration of this
spirit as well as a memorial to the brave diggers who gave their lives and suffered on the other side of the world.

And it will be all the more symbolic for 300 families following this month's announcement that once again our troops will be returning to the Middle East—and, again, we will be alongside our trans-Tasman neighbours. I wish all our troops well on this new mission and hope they all return safely and soon.

To return to electorate matters, alongside the revamped and expanded Hyundai Bennelong Cup, there are a number of big initiatives that are continuing this year that I would like to update the House on. I have spoken in the past about the Bennelong Gardens initiative which I am promoting, and now it is coming along at a rapid pace.

Bennelong Gardens is a large-scale, commercially viable community gardens project, utilising unused public lands across Bennelong. It provides rewarding work for people with disabilities as well as volunteer opportunities for local retirees and others who will benefit greatly from social interaction and physical activity.

This initiative has been hugely popular across the electorate and is being supported by a large and varied number of other groups. These include Achieve Australia; Royal Rehab; Harris Farm Markets; Ryde city council, the New South Wales state government; Australian Native Landscapes; TAFE New South Wales; NOVA Employment; and Social Ventures Australia. In addition, a number of businesses and individuals have pledged money, expertise and materials to ensure that Bennelong Gardens are a success.

The aim is to establish commercial gardens across approximately 100 acres of unused land throughout the electorate. Fresh fruit and vegetables grown in the Bennelong Gardens will be sold on site to local greengrocers and members of the public. Harris Farm Markets has agreed to allocate shelf space to Bennelong Gardens, with all sales going directly to our social enterprise.

As beneficiaries of the Bennelong Gardens social enterprise, the people with disabilities will gain economic benefit from the sale of produce. Achieve Australia have agreed to administer the project. Their expertise in the field of disability employment has been invaluable. They will be essential to the ultimate success of the garden's main goal, which is of course providing social and physical activity for those who need it—from people with disabilities to retirees.

Seed funding for Bennelong Gardens comes from the establishment of the Granny Smith apple Heritage Orchard—in honour of Bennelong being the home of Grandma Maria Smith and her famous apple variety. Each tree will be sponsored by a company or individual for $1,000, and I was delighted to purchase the first tree.

Royal Rehab in Putney is housing the first of the apple trees. Royal Rehab is another fantastic local facility that helps get people back on their feet after tragedy strikes. Like Achieve Australia, they fully appreciate the necessity of movement and social interaction in the rehabilitation process.

Towards the end of last year, I visited Royal Rehab to turn the first sod in our silver spade event. The first of the trees in the Granny Smith Heritage Orchard were planted, and the event was a huge success. Subsequent to this, more donations have come in and the trees will
continue to be planted, highlighting the huge popularity of the scheme and the real desire to see it succeed.

Ryde city council has also been consulted with extensively, and I addressed the council in the last month. The support was unanimous from all sides of the political divide, and my office is currently working with all of the partner organisations to get the paperwork approved so we can get plants in the ground as soon as possible.

This project represents direct action to support those that need it most in our community, to empower them to achieve independence and an increased sense of personal pride. It will have fantastic outcomes, and I look forward to it becoming a reality very shortly.

Finally, I would like to update the House on my ongoing local campaign known as the Bennelong Village Businesses. In conversation with a number of local businesses, I heard that there is real concern within Bennelong—and indeed across the country—with local businesses being forced out by the larger supermarkets and chain stores.

The BVB program is designed to reinvigorate community shopping villages through a combination of strategic business initiatives. To promote the enormous benefits to shopping locally, each month I will be celebrating a new Bennelong village—22 shopping precincts have been identified across Bennelong which will take turns for the honour. They will be publicised widely and even have access to cheaper advertising rates in one of the local papers.

The 22 villages are made up of over 200 small and local businesses. Small businesses are the lifeblood of our communities; yet they are often overlooked for the apparent convenience of the larger shopping centres. The allure of bigger shops is plain to see but denies some real local benefits.

The benefits of shopping local are wide and varied, including supporting the local economy, the convenience of staying close to home and, of course, the social benefits to elderly or less mobile local residents. A core group of 10 reasons to shop local has been set out by my office and forms the cornerstone of the campaign.

This campaign will resume in the middle of April with a fantastic little line of shops that have been a part of the local community for as long as it has existed. The exact location will be announced in a matter of weeks and will be the first in a long line of local shopping districts that will receive the benefit of their local community's support. These are just a few of the exciting developments in the suburbs of Bennelong.

Mr PASIN (Barker) (15:51): I rise to speak on the cognate appropriations bill before the House and to highlight the significant contribution to South Australia being made by the Commonwealth through the budget—in contrast, of course, to the hysterical claims being made by the South Australian state Labor government. As members would be aware, in 2007 Australia had an unemployment rate of four per cent and zero government debt, and we were operating budget surpluses. When the Labor government left office six years later, they left us with over 200,000 more unemployed Australians, gross debt projected to rise above $667 billion, $123 billion in cumulative deficits and, of course, not to forget, the world's biggest carbon tax.

This budget has begun the long, difficult task of fiscal repair that will be the basis for sustained economic growth and prosperity into the future. It is clear that the former Labor
government's approach of using borrowed funds for current expenditure was neither sustainable nor desirable. What the coalition has done, as laid out in the budget and in the *Intergenerational report* tabled on 5 March, is to remove the debt burden from current and future generations. These decisions have been difficult and have been opposed, in most cases, by those opposite, despite the responsibility they bear for having caused the budget crisis we inherited. Despite the fact that some of the saving measures were in fact proposed by those opposite, they are now opposed by those opposite in the Senate. This is the height of political opportunism and the first best demonstration that the Labor Party does not have the political maturity or, indeed, policy honesty to govern this country.

Even more disturbing than federal Labor's economically reckless tactic from opposition are the tactics of the South Australian state Labor government. First, I want to place on record the level of Commonwealth investment in South Australia. Total Commonwealth funding to South Australia continues to increase in each and every year over the forward estimates. Total Commonwealth payments to South Australia will rise from $7.6 billion last financial year to $8.2 billion this year, to $9.3 billion in the last year of the forward estimates, that being the year ending 30 June 2018—a $1.8 billion increase over this time. Going forward, South Australia is projected to receive $35.6 billion in total funding from the Commonwealth across the forward estimates. This figure includes both GST revenue and payments for specific purposes. Comparing the numbers contained in federal Labor's last budget, that of the 2013-14 fiscal year, to the numbers in our latest MYEFO, over the same common four-year period, from 2013-14 to 2016-17, South Australia will receive an extra $1.4 billion from this coalition government.

At the 2014-15 budget the Commonwealth government provided $2 billion in funding for major South Australian road projects, with $1.8 billion to be spent over the next four years including, of course, a billion dollars for the north-south road corridor upgrade to improve freight transport productivity across Adelaide. The Commonwealth government has abolished the carbon tax and the South Australian Labor government has booked a $10 million dividend from that abolition. The abolition of the carbon tax is also helping households, who are benefiting right now through lower electricity prices—a drop of eight per cent in my electorate of Barker alone. Commonwealth funding for South Australian hospitals will increase by $293 million, or 30 per cent, from the level we saw in 2013-14 to the projected level in 2017-18. This funding grows at an average rate of seven per cent per year. Across the forward estimates Commonwealth funding to schools in South Australia will increase by $274 million. Year on year, school funding to South Australia grows by seven per cent, six per cent, six per cent and six per cent. This is a significant investment by the Commonwealth into South Australia, but that is not the story you will hear from Premier Weatherill or Treasurer Koutsantonis.

The South Australian state Labor government has a very clear strategy in place designed to shift blame, distract and avoid scrutiny over the myriad problems it has presided over for more than the past decade. Central to that strategy is to use the responsible but politically unpopular decisions of the Commonwealth as cover for its own mismanagement. Every time it has failed to invest properly in infrastructure, schools, education or regional development, the South Australian state Labor government points to Canberra and says, 'Blame them.' Well,
I am sorry, Premier Weatherill, but you need to show some leadership and take ownership of your own decisions.

It is the Weatherill government that refuses to accept $25 million in Murray-Darling Basin diversification funding—money that is available for my electorate today, if Minister Brock were to act. The Commonwealth has put the money forward. It has been waiting for Premier Weatherill and Minister Brock to confirm the projects since August 2013—not August 2014; August 2013. In an all too familiar pattern, the South Australian government is dragging its heels on its responsibilities, when every other state government has agreed to the package, confirmed the projects and indeed, in many cases, has spent the money, which is intended to help create new jobs and new opportunities for people living in river communities.

Despite the fact that they signed up to this agreement when federal Labor was in office, because it is no longer politically advantageous for them they are confecting some sort of claim about GST funding, the figures of which are very rubbery, and punishing people who do not live in metropolitan postcodes because—and here is the rub—it may be possible that they will lose some GST money that they can spend in Adelaide. They would prefer to harm the people of Barker, the Riverland and Murraylands than lose any of the capacity to spend that money in marginal Labor seats in Adelaide.

It is the Weatherill government that refuse to maintain the pensioner concessions on council rates, instead pocketing $98 million. Despite being responsible for $171 of the $190 rebate, they are using the federal government's decision to pull back $19 of that same rebate as cover for their decision to save, as I said, $98 million. It is the Weatherill government that are closing hospitals across the state, like the repatriation hospital. I have seen firsthand the reckless and wilful neglect of the state Labor government in inflicting damage on regional hospitals and health services. Thanks to the state government, there is not a single MRI machine outside of Adelaide, nor a resident clinical psychiatrist between Adelaide and Warrnambool in Victoria—and that is before the government's Transforming Health process starts. Now we have a clear stated intention to cut services to the bone. You cannot even go as far as from North Terrace to Noarlunga before you run out of emergency departments under the government's plan. How are the people in the Riverland and Mount Gambier expected to access metropolitan equivalent emergency services when the people in the southern suburbs of Adelaide cannot?

Sorry, Renmark; sorry, Murray Bridge—you do not even rate a mention in the document, and Berri and Mount Gambier are referred to only once in relation to some much needed and long-overdue mental health beds. But there is nothing on accident and emergency and nothing on increasing surgical bed numbers, even at the new RAH, and yet somehow, despite all these cutbacks and chronic lack of investment, regional services are magically going to achieve better outcomes for patients because we are putting more people through fewer fully equipped hospitals. It is your government, Premier Weatherill, that has imposed massive increases in the emergency services levy and now wants to impose an additional $1,200 land tax on every single South Australian family home.

Despite these actions, the South Australian Labor government continues to run deficits year on year and has a ballooning debt crisis. It is the Weatherill government that has presided over the worst unemployment rate in Australia, at 7.3 per cent—clearly shameful. What is the state government's answer to these problems? Its first tactic is to blame the Commonwealth
for everything, as I said earlier. The second tactic is to announce an investigation into controversial subjects without actually taking a firm position or taking any action on them itself. An example is a discussion which has begun around a South Australian nuclear industry. I think it is a great debate and a good one to have, but what is the state Labor government's position on this? It does not have one because this is all an exercise in distraction. No-one knows its position, but the state government will spend millions of dollars on finding out what it already knows. It ought to be mentioned that this is the same proposal that the South Australian state government some years ago spent hundreds of thousands of dollars arguing against in a High Court challenge.

Should we change time zones? That is another distraction. You could hardly believe it, but it is what is occupying the minds of North Terrace at the moment. Talking about time zones is certainly more important than the government providing details about what services it is cutting from regional hospitals or about how it has manifestly failed in child protection or what really went on with the Gillman land deal. I jest, of course, but this seems to be the debate that is wont to be had in South Australia, as I said, as an exercise in distraction. These are just a few of the examples where the duplicity of the state Labor government's claims about federal funding is revealed. It reflects the very clear intention of the Weatherill Labor government to punish people in regional South Australia and intimidate them into changing their votes lest they face some kind of further reprisal. It is not just a preference for economies of scale available in metropolitan Adelaide but a deliberate ploy to punish people for their democratic choices.

The third tactic is to say that anyone who criticises them is not a team player. I cannot begin to tell you the number of times I have heard the state government announce with much fanfare that they are undertaking a massive infrastructure project, complete with hard hats, high-visibility jackets and shovels, only to later find out that the project will only go ahead if there is substantial federal funding and that there was no agreement between the governments before the state government made the announcement. In fact, I understand that in one case in particular, despite heaping blame on the Commonwealth for not funding a certain project, the state minister has not once, on my investigations, raised that issue with his federal counterpart across 18 months. Instead, we get taxpayer funded, party political advertising campaigns, each one costing $1.1 million, attacking the federal government. These actions are not those of a responsible government and do not reflect the fact that there is now more federal investment in South Australia than ever before.

The people of South Australia are being repeatedly taken for mugs by this state Labor government and being fed a campaign of lies and misinformation. There are serious challenges facing our country and my state, and this budget is a serious attempt at addressing those challenges before they become insurmountable. Unlike those opposite and those back home on North Terrace, we will not avoid our duty to leave Australia in better shape than how it was left to us and we will not hide behind cheap political tricks to obscure the hard decisions that need to be made. I commend these bills to the House.

Mrs GRIGGS (Solomon) (16:04): I rise today to speak to the appropriation bills and update the House on the electorate of Solomon and the solid progress that the coalition government is making for the people of Darwin and Palmerston.
When the government were elected we promised we would stop the boats. And we have. For the people of the Top End, people-smuggling activities were more than something we read about in the newspapers. They were something that we dealt with on a daily basis. Mr Deputy Speaker, you probably remember that one boat got within 13 kilometres of Bathurst Island and another one landed on Croker Island undetected. When the number of boats surged after Labor opened the gates to the people smugglers, my electorate was one of the ones that bore the brunt of it. At the peak of the boat arrivals in 2013, there were five immigration detention centres within, or immediately surrounding, my electorate. You would have heard me, Mr Deputy Speaker, saying that Labor opened more detention beds than hospital beds during its term in government.

Labor's complete loss of control over the immigration system had a number of flow-on effects for my electorate. Essential services had to cope with the rapid influx in the population. The ambulance, police and fire services felt the strain, as did the Royal Darwin Hospital and the other medical services in my electorate. The tourism industry felt the squeeze, with entire hotels in the CBD booked out by immigration, either to accommodate asylum seekers—yes, things got so bad that the immigration department rented an entire CBD hotel as a makeshift detention centre—or detention centre workers, and there were fewer rooms available for tourists. Even major construction projects and heavy industry were put out, with the developments built to accommodate the fly-in fly-out workforce snapped up by Immigration.

This is why I welcomed Minister Dutton's announcement last month that, due to the coalition government's success in stopping the boats, the Blaydin Point facility would no longer be required by the Australian government. The Blaydin Point facility is the 11th immigration detention facility that the coalition government has closed in just over 12 months. The savings to the federal government from the centre closure will be around $18 million in lease costs alone. Despite Immigration moving out, the local economy will not suffer. I am pleased to advise the House that the facility at Blaydin Point will actually revert to its original intended purpose as accommodation for fly-in fly-out workers on a nearby major construction project.

You have heard me speak, a number of times, about Tiger Brennan Drive. When I was campaigning for re-election I promised the people of Solomon that we would deliver on the duplication of Tiger Brennan Drive. Tiger Brennan Drive is one of the major arterial roads linking my home in Palmerston to the Darwin CBD. It gave me great pleasure to stand beside the Deputy Prime Minister and my Northern Territory colleagues at the opening of another stage of the Tiger Brennan duplication. The duplication of the section between Woolner Road and Gonzales Road is easing the congestion and improving safety for traffic arriving to the CBD.

The $88 million duplication of Tiger Brennan Drive's section between Woolner Road and Berrimah Road is well underway. Just last Friday I was joined by my good friend the Assistant Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development, Minister Briggs, and another good friend of mine, the Northern Territory transport and infrastructure minister, Peter Chandler, and we inspected the works that are currently underway. Despite the wet season, it did not rain while we were having a look.
The many thousands of constituents who commute between Darwin and Palmerston every day along the road will already be seeing construction of safety barriers and heavy equipment moving into place, as well as the specialised machinery building up the roads in low-lying areas to protect against storm surge. When these are completed, these works will give the 22,000 vehicles that use the road each day easier access between Darwin's CBD and the Palmerston and rural area. It will reduce traffic on the parallel Stuart Highway, and will ease congestion of traffic between the East Arm Wharf and the Darwin industrial areas.

And that is what this government is all about. We are about delivering on our promises—delivering infrastructure. Tiger Brennan Drive alone represents a $103 million commitment. The coalition government promised that we would deliver the roads of the 21st century; that we would be an infrastructure government. I am very pleased to report that, in Solomon, we are doing exactly that.

It is not just in constructing world-class road infrastructure that the coalition government is making life easier for people in the Top End. We are also doing our very best to drive down the cost of petrol. Darwin and Palmerston motorists—and, indeed, all Territorians—have been paying far too much for petrol for far too long. At its worst, someone filling-up in my electorate would pay probably 30 cents per litre more than a driver in Sydney. That is an extra $18 on every 60 litre tank of fuel. A forum convened by the Northern Territory government had an immediate impact by reducing prices by a few cents a litre, but Territorians are still paying too much.

That is why I was delighted to hear the news last week that the ACCC is to undertake an unprecedented investigation into the fuel price in Darwin. Under its new powers, the ACCC will break down each element of the supply chain to determine where it is going so badly wrong for Territory motorists and to see what can be done. And I would like to place on record my thanks to all the Territorians who got involved in the campaign to get the ACCC to come to Darwin and investigate. It is a true sign that people power actually works.

A fortnight ago I was also delighted to announce to my electorate that a proposal for an $18 million joint defence logistics facility at Darwin's East Arm Wharf is being investigated by the Public Works Committee, and I am hoping to have their sign-off very soon. This facility, including barge ramps, staging areas and supporting infrastructure, will give the Navy the ability to operate their new helicopter, and to dock ships and amphibious vessels out of Darwin harbour. It will also be available to commercial operators such as the Top End's transport, fishing, oil and gas operations, and pearling fleets. This is another big win for Darwin and Palmerston. A facility of this scale will mean jobs in the construction phase, ongoing civilian and military jobs to run the facility, and a boost to the industries which will use this area.

Another thing that I have talked about many times in this House is the Palmerston hospital. Throughout my 2010 election campaign and my first term in office, I fought hard for the people of Palmerston to get a hospital. Northern Territory Labor had 11 years in office, and federal Labor, as we know, had six years through the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd era, and in that time they could have built a hospital. Throughout this time, though, the only progress towards a Palmerston hospital was a temporary fence erected around a small bush block on Palmerston's fringe—hardly something that I would call progress.
I can tell you that works are now well underway upgrading infrastructure around a larger site in the area to accommodate a major new full-service hospital at Palmerston. The roads, intersections, traffic signals and paths in the area are already in the process of being upgraded and planning for the hospital itself is well underway. There is room for the hospital to grow, which was always the Country Liberals plan: to build a hospital that is going to grow with the community.

Labor were aiming to underdeliver. It was a box-ticking exercise for them. They were aiming to build a small hospital on a small block, with no room for growth, in the fastest growing city in Australia. And they could not even manage that!

As I said, during the six years in the federal government and 11 years in the Territory government Labor managed to deliver only a temporary fence around three hectares of bush. Thanks for nothing!

When complete, the new Palmerston Regional Hospital will be the first facility of its kind built in the Northern Territory for more than 40 years. The coalition is delivering a level 3 facility, meaning it will offer a 24-hour accident and emergency department, as well as general medicine, surgery, maternity and children's services. The hospital will have a full-support service, including pathology and pharmaceutical services. The Palmerston Regional Hospital will complement the service already offered by the Royal Darwin Hospital, the Northern Territory's only level 6 facility.

The Northern Territory Minister for Health, John Elferink, along with my Palmerston Territory colleagues Lia Finnachiaro, member for Drysdale; Peter Chandler, Minister for Infrastructure; and Nathan Barrett, member for Blain and I are all absolutely united in our drive to deliver a new hospital for Palmerston and the Greater Darwin area.

Minister Elferink will be here this week, meeting with our new federal health minister, Minister Ley, and me, to update us on the Palmerston hospital, because there are some mistruths being spread by those opposite.

Mr Frydenberg: Very unusual!

Mrs GRIGGS: I know it is very unusual, Assistant Treasurer, for those opposite to spread mistruths! But, in this case, they are. The coalition government is not the only organisation investing in Northern Australia. Private enterprise is flourishing under this 'open for business' government. New industrial and commercial areas are springing up throughout the Top End.

Perhaps the best example of this is the beef industry. After Labor's disastrous knee-jerk decision to ban live animal export, the Territory's cattle industry was absolutely crippled. Many farmers and agribusinesses were bankrupted. There were some terrible stories which I know you, Deputy Speaker Scott, are aware of.

However, just south of Darwin, the Australian Agricultural Company has invested $90 million in a new beef-processing facility. I, along with the Prime Minister, was delighted to attend the opening of this facility just a few weeks ago.

Compare and contrast: under Labor, an entire industry and a sizeable chunk of the Northern Territory economy was deliberately crippled in one fell swoop. Now, 18 months into a coalition government, we have a diversified industry: live cattle and boxed beef, attracting major investment. So what has changed? The government. Under the coalition, stability has
returned. Free trade agreements with Korea, Japan and China are opening up economic opportunity for Australian businesses. This means that our agricultural, mining and service industries in the Top End now have access to huge new markets.

The China free trade agreement alone will drop or eliminate tariffs on exported products, including live animals, beef, hides, skins and leather. This agreement will give Australian exporters unprecedented levels of market access to the world's second largest economy, with a population of 1.36 billion and a rapidly growing middle class. This will mean greater economic growth, more jobs and higher living standards for those households across the country but particularly those in Darwin and Palmerston.

Free trade agreements will provide a range of new opportunities for our service providers—everything from legal services, financial services, education, tourism, agriculture, architecture, urban planning and transport, and many more.

In summary, the people of the Top End bore the brunt of Labor's incompetence. It is a great honour to stand here as part of the coalition government to report that things are getting better. Job creation is running at three times the rate it was under Labor. Job ads growth is currently at 13.6 per cent so that is 585 jobs a day.

The Australian Stock Exchange is sitting at a six-year high. Thousands of pages of unnecessary red tape have been slashed. The carbon tax is gone, the mining tax is gone and the boats have stopped. (Time expired)

Mr SUKKAR (Deakin) (16:20): It is an honour to speak today on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2014-2015 and cognate bills. Given the wide-ranging nature of the debate, I want to focus on an issue of paramount importance to not only my electorate of Deakin and the state of Victoria but, increasingly, all Australians and that is the progress of Melbourne's East West Link. I refer to the abysmal way in which that project is now, purportedly, being handled by the state Labor government and, unfortunately, the way in which that project is being treated by the Leader of the Opposition, given some comments that he made earlier today, which I will refer to a little bit later on.

For those who do not know, the East West Link is the most important infrastructure project, in recent memory, in Melbourne. It is a cross-city link that will basically enable the free flow of traffic from, as the title would suggest, the east to the west of Melbourne, saving commuters in my electorate of Deakin and, indeed, all throughout Melbourne, up to three hours of travel time a week, enabling the free flow of goods from our major port to the eastern suburbs and indeed the western suburbs of Melbourne and also the free flow of all goods between small businesses operating in Melbourne. So it is, absolutely, a productivity-enhancing piece of infrastructure. It is also a piece of infrastructure that will improve the lives of Melburnians who are living in an ever congested city. With a population set to grow quite significantly in the years to come, quite frankly, it is a project that will be catching up on work that should have been done previously.

I was very fortunate to be able to secure $1½ billion before the last election for stage 1 of the East West Link, which was really the federal contribution that unlocked the ability of that project to happen. We were then able to secure an additional $1½ billion before the election for stage 2 of the East West Link. So, $3 billion of federal funding was committed to ensure that this transformational infrastructure project could go ahead. On the basis of that very
generous commitment, the former state government committed, with a consortium, to proceed with the project.

Where we are now is that the project is shovel ready, it is fully funded with contributions committed from the federal and former state governments and, obviously, from private operators. The problem is now, though, that the state Labor Party is committing to tear up the contracts and potentially open up Victorian taxpayers to hundreds of millions of dollars—if not over $1 billion—of compensation not to build the East West Link. It is quite extraordinary. We now have a state Labor government which has said, 'No thank you. We don't want the $3 billion the federal government's committed to the East West Link. And not only are we going to say we don't want the $3 billion commitment, we're actually going to cancel the contract that we said before the election wasn't worth the paper it was written on. We know that was a lie. But we will cancel a contract and pay potentially over $1 billion not to build the East West Link, a piece of infrastructure that the Labor Party has championed for many years, all the way back to 2008.'

In the submissions to the 2008 Eddington review, which was commissioned by the former state Labor Party under John Brumby, there was a very good submission from the Australian Workers Union. The key submitter here was Bill Shorten, the National Secretary. They absolutely supported the East West Link and said it was crucial to the future development of Victoria and was key to the economic prosperity of Victorians.

**Mr Frydenberg:** I thought he was against it!

**Mr SUKKAR:** Bill Shorten, the now Leader of the Opposition was right when he said that. But after he entered parliament in 2008, when he was the member for Maribyrnong, he co-signed another submission, to the East West Transport Options Review, again supporting the East West Link, saying that he and the other members that wrote the submission support a cross-city road link from the western suburbs to the Eastern Freeway. That is called the East West Link.

But, quite extraordinarily, I have been waiting for this moment for a while, because we all know the bumbling Leader of the Opposition just bloviates and waffles and pulls up pointless historical references—as we all heard on John Faine last week—and basically gets through interviews without saying a thing. He has done that on half a dozen occasions, but today he let the cat out of the bag. Finally, he got pinned down to giving an answer. The question asked by a reporter was: 'So, do you support the building of the East West Link? You've written two submissions previously broadly supporting Sir Rod Eddington. Do you now support the building of the East West Link?' Given the Leader of the Opposition has supported it twice, as correctly referenced by that reporter, and given that he is a man of such conviction who never really changes his mind—he is not known for changing his mind very often—I was wondering what the answer would be. This was his answer: 'No, not in the current circumstances.'

So there we have it. Mark it in the diary. Today is the day that Bill Shorten, the Leader of the Opposition, notwithstanding his previous strong support for the East West Link, is giving Daniel Andrews and the state Labor Party permission to trash Victoria's economic reputation and ruin the development of Victoria by tearing up the East West Link contracts. I held very slim hopes for the Leader of the Opposition, because you may not have picked up from my comments when I said he does not change his mind very often that I really had my tongue in
my cheek when I said that. We all know that he does change his mind on a far-too-regular basis. Just ask Kevin Rudd or Julia Gillard. I was hoping he would pick up the phone to Dan Andrews and say, 'Dan, this is not just a Victorian problem.' Victoria is an economic powerhouse in this country. It represents 25 per cent of the Australian economy. If a state Labor Party is going to trash the economic reputation of the state government and the state in its entirety, this has flow-on implications for the rest of Australia, and for that reason I thought the Leader of the Opposition would do the right thing and pick up the phone and tell him to change this outrageous proposal to cancel the East West Link contract.

But it actually gets worse, because now the state Labor Party is saying that in order to get out of possible compensation that will be payable—potentially over $1 billion—they may legislate to cancel any damages claim that the consortium may have. So we have got the first lie, and that lie was that this contract is not worth the paper it was written on. That is what the state Labor Party said. That is what the Leader of the Opposition supported before the Victorian state election. When that was proven to be a complete falsehood and compensation is definitely payable and most likely over $1 billion, the state Labor Party have said that they are actively considering legislating to ensure no compensation is payable. This has sent shock waves through the investment community, including not only through those investors in Australia but also through international investors. A very reputable publication, *Infrastructure Investor*, had a front page just a couple of weeks ago. The headline to the article referencing Dan Andrews and the state Labor Party and now the Leader of the Opposition and all of the Labor opposition was: 'Can Australia be taken at its word?'

The first line of the article says: 'Retrospective legislation—two words designed to send shivers down the spine of infrastructure investors following the post crisis solar PV debacle in Spain.' The solar PV debacle in Spain was just another example of a government retrospectively legislating away previous commitments it had made, previous contractual arrangements it had made. The article went on to say this: 'So why would any other country even think about following suit today? And, more to the point, what would the world's leading infrastructure market think about it? Those questions are being directed with increasing frequency at Daniel Andrews, Premier of the Australian state of Victoria.' So we now have reputable publications around the world highlighting that the market and investors whom Australia relies upon for a lot of our development—in particular, our infrastructure development—will not want to touch Australia with a 10-foot pole if the environment is such that a contract legally entered into in good faith is cancelled by an incoming government.

I can assure members opposite that, every time a coalition government takes power, there is a hell of a lot of stuff that we would love to cancel—because we always inherit an absolute mess. In my state of Victoria we inherited a white elephant desalination plant. It is costing us millions of dollars a day and not even a drop of water is coming out of it. We inherited the myki ticketing system on our public transport system which, frankly, is moribund. But so much money was invested in those things that it was not prudent, not in the interests of taxpayers, for those contracts to be cancelled. So we did not cancel them—even though, to our core, we dislike those projects.

But here we have got a project which in addition to the time savings for commuters will also create nearly 7,000 jobs during the construction phase. It will be the economic shot in the arm Victoria needs. Victoria cannot afford to say: 'Thanks but no thanks; we don't want 7,000
construction jobs. But that is what the state Labor government is doing and that is what the federal Leader of the Opposition has today endorsed. So we are now in a situation where we are absolutely on the edge of it. I know there are a lot of Labor Party people who are shaking their heads at the thought that they would trash Victoria's reputation like this. I appeal to those few sensible people in the Labor Party to speak to Dan Andrews and the federal Leader of the Opposition and tell them this would be an absolutely disastrous decision for the Victorian economy.

I would also recommend that everybody get behind our campaign. Recently we launched the Build the Link campaign—at buildthelink.com.au—and we got nearly 40,000 signatures in a couple weeks. The reception from the electorate has been absolutely extraordinary. Victorians want the East West Link. They absolutely weep at the thought that the disgraceful Labor Party would spend over $1 billion of taxpayers money not to build a piece of infrastructure that is going to future-proof our city. We are already congested and Victoria is projected to grow quite significantly over the next five to 10 years. This is going to affect the lives of everybody, not just the people in my electorate of Deakin. Sure, the people in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne will be hit hardest. We will be the ones who pay the best price for Labor trying to win over a few inner-city Greens voters. I say to the Labor Party: don't look at the inner-city Greens voters as your core constituency, look at what is right for all voters—and that includes people who live in the outer eastern suburbs of Melbourne. I say to Bill Shorten and Dan Andrews: walk away from this ridiculous position and build the East West Link.

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment) (16:35): I rise today to speak on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2014-2015 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2014-2015. These bills seek approval for appropriations from the Consolidated Revenue Fund for the ordinary annual services of the government. I am pleased to speak on the appropriation bills today because they help provide a road map that aids us in achieving sensible, responsible budgetary measures. I note that standing order 76(c) provides that, when we are debating appropriation bills, members of parliament are able to speak freely about issues in their electorate. When considering these bills, I think about the concerns and funding needs in my electorate of Paterson.

Our future depends upon what we as a nation do today. Every generation before us has contributed to the quality of life that we enjoy so much today. Our nation's prosperity is not just a matter of luck. Prosperity needs to be earned; it should never be taken for granted. It is our turn to build, it is our turn to contribute, so that the generations to come may enjoy a prosperous quality of life. As 2015 has well and truly commenced, I am looking forward with renewed vigour, energy and enthusiasm to working with my coalition colleagues to produce real outcomes as we continue to build a strong and more prosperous economy for a safe and secure Australia.

I want to take this opportunity to update the House and my constituents of Paterson on what action has been recently taken to advance their cause, as we have recently seen some great outcomes in my electorate and, indeed, across the Hunter. I am absolutely pleased to report on a number of road and infrastructure projects that are taking place within the electorate of Paterson. I know that the government had a clear mandate prior to the 2013 election, and this mandate was to reduce road fatalities, to make our roads safer, and to...
increase the efficiency and ease of use of our roads and our motorways, in particular for road freight and traffic movement.

I am proud to announce that the coalition government is delivering on this promise. One such example is through $325,000 of federal funding to update Woerdens Road Bridge near Clarence Town in my electorate of Paterson. This funding is part of the government's new Bridges Renewal Program. By way of background, I sat and talked with the Mayor of Dungog Shire Council, Harold Johnston, and the General Manager, Craig Deasey. We sat down and we had a look at the bridge that was there. It was an old bridge. It was in tatters. It was unsafe, and it was actually propped up with a temporary bridge structure that they had bought from an army disposal. This funding of $325,000 will go towards the cost of replacing this bridge, which will provide certainty of access for the farmers and the community there. And it is good that that temporary bridge structure will now be moved to support another failing bridge. More work needs to be done, and I make the minister aware and I warn that I will be knocking on his door regularly, seeking funds to help repair and rebuild bridges in my electorate.

We have also seen a great example of the fusion of council and the federal government, coming together to develop infrastructure projects that will benefit the community. Recently we committed $28.5 million, matched by proponents, to 29 projects across New South Wales as a part of round 1 of the Bridges Renewal Program. This coalition government has also recently delivered $100,000 to fix an extremely dangerous black spot within my electorate of Paterson. The intersection of Head Street and West Street in Forster has been in dire need of urgent attention for years. The dangerous intersection has seen six accidents—sadly including one fatality—and three injury crashes in the five years to June 2012. This upgrade will see the installation of a concrete median island and signage on both sides of West Street at the intersection, reducing the risks of accidents. This is all about putting safety first. The additional works on the existing narrow concrete median and the line marking on Head Street will increase lane width for vehicles turning right from Head Street into West Street.

This funding follows a number of funding packages in the past year for my electorate of Paterson to upgrade roads, to ensure that my constituents have safer, better driving conditions and to make travelling around my electorate much easier and, as I said, much safer. Last year, $265,774 was allocated for Phoenix Park Road in Maitland; $350,000 was allocated for the Pacific Highway from Gates Road to Swan Bay Road, as there were eight dangerous crashes on this stretch of road in the five years prior to 2012. There was $195,943 for Maitland Vale Road and Melville Ford Road, as there was 2.2 kilometres of road along this stretch that caused six serious injury crashes in the five years to 2012. There was $100,000 for Gresford Road, as there have been, in tragic circumstances, one fatal crash and two serious injuries on this stretch of road.

I know that more work needs to be done. I know how hard it is for councils to fund roadwork, and I am sure that this federal government will, in the process of time, provide much needed support to upgrade these roads. But these funding announcements are on top of the $13.8 million that was announced by the Deputy Prime Minister through the Roads to Recovery funding. The $13.8 million is to give councils in my electorate the discretion to use that money based on local needs—to ensure that this funding was directed to where it was
most needed within our community. I am proud to report that Paterson electorate has received a 22.31 per cent increase in funding under the Roads to Recovery program since between 2009 and 2014, an increase on what was outlined under the previous, Labor government. I am amazed that they could spend so much money and create so much debt and deficit and not deliver road infrastructure projects to my constituency. The 22.31 per cent increase is a welcome injection of funds into roads and infrastructure in Paterson, and it is necessary to ensure upgrades to our rural and regional roads and bridges to make them just a bit safer and a bit better.

Under the Roads to Recovery program the Dungog Shire Council received $2.4 million. Great Lakes Council received $4.5 million. Maitland City Council received over $3.5 million, and Port Stephens Council received $3.2 million. I have also campaigned hard for upgrades to the Tourle Street Bridge. Although I note that this bridge falls outside my electorate, it directly services the thousands of my constituents who utilise it and commute daily into Newcastle for work, study at the schools and universities, or for leisure and recreation. The $51.9 million that has been allocated to the Tourle Street Bridge under the infrastructure and investments program is being matched by the New South Wales coalition government, and I congratulate them for that.

I want to point out that the members opposite will try and say that this funding was always going to be matched by Labor, but this is grossly untrue. It is grossly untrue because Labor's so-called commitment was predicated on a mining tax—a mining tax to fund a bridge; a mining tax that delivered little or no revenue. How were they going to fund these projects when, indeed, there was no revenue from a mining tax? The mining tax was a poorly conceived tax that actually stymied investment in the industries that support my electorate so well. This $51.9 million, promised and being delivered by the coalition government, is based on real dollars for this project—not whimsical promises based on non-performing and burdening taxes. Under Labor's reign, road funding in my electorate eroded and the people needed affirmative action—not spin and news articles, but real action and real dollars—delivered on roads. It was time for the rubber to hit the road. I am proud of these funding announcements, as they demonstrate that the Australian government's focus is not just city centric, but that this government is committed to upgrading regional and rural roads and infrastructure. Each of these funding announcements are in direct action to the mandate given by my constituents to target road upgrades to save lives and reduce road trauma.

I am also pleased to update my constituency on projects that pertain to my portfolio as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment. I welcomed the announcement that my electorate of Paterson will be hosting four new projects under round two of the government's Green Army program. I am passionate about the Green Army, as I was of the previous Green Corps, and about these recent developments for two main reasons. Firstly, my electorate of Paterson features some of the most beautiful coastlines, rivers, creeks, forests and national parks in New South Wales, if not Australia. I, like all of my constituents, want only to see this natural beauty preserved, developed and maintained.

Secondly, I see that the Green Army provides opportunities for young Australians aged 17 to 24 to gain training and experience in environmental and conservation fields and explore careers and future studies in conservation management, while participating in projects that generate real benefits for the Australian environment and their communities. It is a win-win. I
see this as a great fusion of educating and providing practical, hands-on experience for the next generation with fostering and cultivating our existing and fragile beauty.

In round two of the Green Army projects being rolled out in my electorate, Minister Hunt announced $11,000 for habitat regeneration at Clarence Town wetlands, the ex-pony club and Wharf Reserve to reverse years of neglect and environmental degradation; $10,000 for Caring for the Dungog Common Recreation Reserve to protect and preserve the locally listed eucalyptus glaucina through weed removal; $10,000 for Enhancing Littoral Rainforest Connectivity and Wallis Lake Clean-up Project; and $9,560 for Living in Harmony with Nature for the Port Stephens Koala Corridor Restoration to protect and enhance habitat vital to the survival of our koala population in Port Stephens. That does not sound like a lot of money, but each of these projects is backed up by over $190,000 in wages, support and training. That money I announced was for the capital aspect of the project; there is more to it.

This is very welcome funding that will help young people in Paterson to be a part of an outcome that directly benefits our community and delivers important local conservation outcomes. I look forward to visiting and meeting with these teams and observing and monitoring the results through the six-month program. I welcome and encourage applications within my electorate and, indeed, from across Australia for round three of the Green Army projects, which are now open until tomorrow, 17 March 2015.

I am also proud to announce that the Myall River, Corrie Island and Jimmy's Beach in New South Wales—which are in my electorate, around the Port Stephens area—will benefit from $750,000 as part of the Australian government's National Landcare Program, which is being matched by $743,000 from the NSW government's Coastal Management Program. That is part of $3.1 million project that is supported by Great Lakes Council to dredge the channel at Corrie Island. Importantly, it is to rehabilitate, provide restoration and get rid of feral animals that have been going across because of the siltation that has occurred, which are affecting this Ramsar wetland. This is a complete package that will deliver for the long-term. It is placing much-needed dredging infrastructure in on a permanent basis to help rehabilitate Jimmy's Beach. It will also provide protection for Corrie Island.

I congratulate the Myall River Action Group on their work in bringing this project to fruition. This area around Winda Woppa and Jimmy's Beach has some of the worst erosion issues in Australia. The siltation of the channel near Corrie Island has had a very detrimental effect to the health of the whole Myall lakes and river system because of the lack of flows. It will also provide a great benefit for tourism in my electorate, as constituents and businesses alike will be able to safely navigate these waterways. Again, I congratulate the Myall River Action Group.

Time limits me from being able to speak about the many more projects that have been delivered. I want to give this commitment to my constituency: while each and every one of those projects may not be able to be spoken about in parliament because of my restricted speaking abilities as a parliament secretary—which means I do no adjournment debate speeches et cetera—I have no shortage of time for you. I am knocking on ministers' doors, demanding that my constituents' projects be funded and putting forward the best case. I will continue to do that, as I have done in the past, because I believe I am fortunate to represent the very best area in Australia with the very best people. They deserve the best of representation.
Mr CHRISTENSEN (Dawson—The Nationals Deputy Whip) (16:50): I rise to speak on Appropriation (No. 3) Bill 2014-2015, Appropriation (No. 4) Bill 2014-2015 and Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments) (No. 2) Bill 2014-2015. When this government was elected, the people delivered to Canberra a very clear request to do a number of things. These things were spelt out clearly in the Liberal-National campaign. We were going to stop the boats, axe the carbon tax, scrap the mining tax and clean up Labor's mess. After just one year, the Liberal-National government has already put runs on the board with those issues: the boats have stopped and people have stopped drowning at sea; the carbon tax is gone and families are saving on their power bills; the mining tax is gone, making Australia less risky for business investment; and the clean-up of Labor's debt and deficit disaster is ongoing.

The scale of Labor of the mess left behind cannot be overstated. The 2015 Intergenerational report: Australia in 2055 forecasts that Australia's net debt position under Labor's policies would put us in the same league as Greece and Japan and worse than Italy, France, the UK, the United States, Spain, Germany, Canada, Korea, the Netherlands and New Zealand. Those countries were already carrying enormous debt levels seven years ago. That was at a time when Australia had zero net debt and a time before Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard got their hands on the public purse strings—and not to forget the member for Lilley.

It was clear during that Rudd-Gillard-Rudd era that Labor set the debt levels of Greece as their target. But just as worrying as their waste on the spending side of the budget was a determined undermining of the economy on the revenue side. Labor's reign weakened our economy, and their allegiance with the Greens, in particular, attacked jobs.

A key focus for the Liberal-National government now is to rebuild the economy and to create the jobs that families need to put food on the table and that the government needs to fund services. In his address to the National Press Club last month, the Prime Minister said:

During 2015, our priority will be creating more jobs; easing the pressure on families; building roads; strengthening national security; and promoting more opportunity for all—with a new families policy and a new small business and jobs policy.

To create more jobs and more opportunities for families, the Prime Minister said we must build a stronger economy. He said a stronger economy would provide a foundation for a stronger Australia, make everyone's life better and help everyone who is doing it tough. That includes:

- parents wrestling with school fees and health costs;
- small business people anxious to keep their staff;
- seniors whose superannuation has to fund their retirement;
- volunteers wondering if they can still afford to serve the community; and
- young people looking for their first job and their first home.

In North Queensland we are witnessing first-hand the effects of putting politics ahead of the needs of ordinary Australians. At a time when we have seen thousands of jobs disappear from the mining sector, we have seen the extreme green movement actively campaign against projects that would create in excess of 10,000 jobs for the state of Queensland. The motivation of these extremists is nothing to do with the Great Barrier Reef, as they often trumpet. They have used the reef as a weapon to wage war against coal mining.
This has been especially evident in their war against the expansion of the Abbot Point coal terminal near Bowen in my electorate. Even in the lead-up to the 2013 election, the Greens candidate for Dawson admitted that they would not necessarily oppose the dredging and expansion of the terminal if—it was being used for agricultural exports rather than coal exports. This was at a time when the proposal included disposal of dredged material at sea. So they would not have minded if that had taken place if it was ag exports, but, given that it is coal, they do not want it.

As a result of the extremists' campaign against the port expansion, including delaying the project through many frivolous legal challenges, a different solution was negotiated. The then Liberal-National government in Queensland and the federal Liberal-National Abbott government put forward a land based solution which would place dredged material on land adjacent to the current terminal, including on a man-made wetland area. The affected area where the spoil was going to go was around three per cent of the Caley Valley Wetlands. I have to say that the Caley Valley Wetlands are far from being a century-old pristine wilderness. It was once a dry flat plain before two gun clubs got together in the 1950s and diverted water courses to create a wetland where they could shoot ducks. So suddenly the Greens were out there campaigning to save a duck-hunting pond. The Liberal-National government at the time were not going to be fooled by such a ridiculous campaign. We were on the verge of approving the Queensland government's proposal when the state election happened and the government changed.

The newly elected Labor government in Queensland was immediately fooled by the Greens campaign to save this pond and caved into the extreme Greens and their plan to close down coal mining in Queensland. While the Labor Premier claims a victory by moving the dredge spoil location a stone's throw to the left, what she has actually done is reset the clock on this to zero. The move triggers a new application process and is likely to set the project back by another year at a time when the proponents have said extended delays could place this in jeopardy. I note the state development minister Anthony Lynham has said it is going to take six to nine months to get the application through. We simply do not have six to nine months. We probably have six months at best for everything, including the federal approvals, to get out. It will need to happen if this project is to go ahead this year, and there is desperate need for that to happen this year.

Instead of seeing job advertisements going in newspapers this week, we see these 10,000 or perhaps even up to 20,000 jobs put back on the shelf. At stake is not only the port expansion at Abbot Point but also the job-creating coal mines in the Galilee Basin and the rail infrastructure that would link the mines to the port. These are the jobs that were needed last year. They are the jobs that would have been created this year if the Greens were not at war with coal mining. As these jobs have gone begging, we have seen dozens of businesses in the town of Bowen close down. We have seen families pack up and leave from Bowen and the Mackay region and from right throughout Central Queensland. And there will be more to come because, instead of jobs being advertised this very week, as they would have been under the LNP, the project is going on hold once more all for the sake of three per cent of the Caley Valley Wetlands, which is a man-made duck-hunting area. There was a time when the Labor Party actually stood up for jobs and stood up for workers and that they wanted jobs to be created for working families. But that time looks long gone.
Already, we have seen the evidence that the Queensland Labor government is getting ready to walk away from its commitment to end 100 per cent fly-in fly-out operations at mines throughout Central Queensland. In the lead-up to the Queensland election campaign, the now Premier put out a policy document clearly promising to end 100 per cent fly-in fly-out operations that are killing local communities in the Bowen Basin. One of the Labor Party’s commitments in its policy document *Strong and Sustainable Resource Communities* is this:

> Review, within the first 100 days of office, all existing 100% FIFO approvals. Where a mining operation is located near a resource town or regional community, 100% FIFO will not be permitted.

But just four days after the election there were signs that Labor was walking away from that commitment. In a radio 4BC interview with Patrick Condren on 4 February, the now Deputy Premier Jackie Trad said:

> Just for clarification it’s 100 percent fly-in fly-out, so it’ll be about new proposals for mines, so it won’t be retrospective.

It will not be retrospective, yet before the election its policy said it would be.

There is no way BMA’s current 100 per cent FIFO mines can be seen as anything but located ‘near a resource town or regional community’. If a miner living at Moranbah wants to work at the mine just a few minutes up the road from his home, he must go to the Moranbah airport and fly to Brisbane, get off the plane, get on another plane and fly back to the Moranbah airport. That is because the FIFO workers must fly from Brisbane or Cairns to Moranbah. But even that is not allowed, according to current job advertisements.

This morning, jobs were advertised on Seek that were very specific about where you must live to be allowed to apply for the job. There is an advertisement for mining jobs in Mackay and the coalfields, for ‘CHPP Operators/ Fixed Plant Fitters’. And here's the kicker:

> Please note only those residing within 100kms of Brisbane Airport or Cairns will be considered for these opportunities

Another ad for a job in Mackay and the coalfields is for 'FIFO Document Controllers', with the ad stating:

> Must live within 100 kms of Brisbane Airport.

In North and Central Queensland at the moment there is no policy more unpopular that 100 per cent fly-in fly-out. Even the number of people employed on 457 visas has dramatically reduced under the Liberal-National government. When so many in mining communities and the regional service centres are out of work, there should be no requirement for FIFO workers and there should be no requirement for 457 workers in the resource sector.

If employment in North Queensland is to be restored, the radical green movement, which has hijacked the environment to fight a socialist cause, must be exposed for what it truly is. Governments must see through the lies and deception and concentrate on delivering for families, and that starts with employment creation, with industry, with jobs. We cannot give in to the Greens and their anti-nuclear power stance, as the Queensland Labor government did last week when they declared a ban on uranium mining in the state. Uranium mining is just one more industry that should be a part of the mix for growth in North Queensland.

As a member of the committee inquiring into the development of Northern Australia, I was privileged to visit many parts of the northern half of the continent where potential job-creating projects and development opportunities are going begging. Sometimes they are blocked for
environmental reasons. While I support environmental regulation where it is appropriate, at times you have to say that it is highly inappropriate and counterproductive.

In the Burdekin, in my electorate, an aquaculture project was stalled because of ridiculous environmental regulations. A new prawn farm proposed to extract water from the Great Barrier Reef lagoon to feed into ponds. The water would be treated so that it would be a higher quality than the original water and then put back out into the lagoon. So the water would be cleaner going back out than when it came in. But the environmental regulations do not allow it.

There are also environmental regulations that prevent a new industry in the Whitsundays—the superyacht industry. The regulations apply to boats larger than a certain size, despite the fact that smaller boats, laden with tourists, have a far greater impact on the marine environment. The superyachts would carry only a handful of passengers but would make enormous contributions to the local economy in terms of jobs and revenue. A local, Paul Darrouzet, from Abell Point Marina, explained to me that every week one of these superyachts is in dock $50,000 is injected into the local economy. In Noumea, I understand the average stay for a superyacht is a week or more, and they have 200 visits a year—a $10 million boost to their economy that could be coming into the Whitsundays. But, because of environmental regulations, they cannot come.

These are industries the government should be supporting. These are job-creating industries that you would expect to be supported by any party that supports workers in Australia. It is vital to encourage new industry and also to support the industries our nation was built on. It is not government that creates jobs; it is business that creates jobs. But government needs to do whatever it can to help businesses employ people and to keep the doors open—even the doors to the farmhouse.

In North Queensland, the biggest concern for sugar growers at the moment is their relationship with their mill. Since Wilmar announced that the sugar they milled would be withdrawn from the marketing process undertaken by QSL, growers have voiced concerns to me about losing their right to have a say in how their sugar is marketed. I am currently chairing a government task force looking at the need for a code of conduct in the sugar industry. If we do not stand up for the long-term viability of farmers today, there will not be any farmers tomorrow. We need to do whatever we can to lower their costs. The cost of electricity for those farmers in sugar and horticulture is spiralling out of control. Families also face cost-of-living issues with electricity, child care, and an issue specific to the North: insurance. The government is working on these issues because balancing the household budget is as important as balancing the national budget. We are enabling business to create jobs and we are building a stronger Australia.

Mr BROAD (Mallee) (17:05): At the heart of good government is good financial management. The challenge we always have in this place is to turn what we believe into reality. It is easy to stand by and say, 'I believe in free education for all.' I have heard that said by some in this place. It is another thing to say, 'I believe in universal health cover.' These are wonderful things—they are wonderful things to believe in, and it is good to have beliefs and dreams. But what separates the boys from the men in this place is the decisions we make. Talking about appropriations bills really heightens this, because they are about the decisions
we make. It is very easy to have dreams; it is a lot harder to take those dreams and turn them into reality.

I fear that we have not taken Australian people on the journey, like we should have done. Perhaps that is an overhang of our history. If you think back in recent history to 1992, when Australia had the recession it had to have, people felt the pain of bad economic management—the difficult times when houses were repossessed, when people lost their jobs, when there was high unemployment. When it came into power in 1996, the Howard government presented a rather disciplined and tough budget, but people accepted it because they could understand that there had to be tough choices made. They accepted that a parliament needs to make tough choices—choices that are not always universally popular.

Contrast that with the scenario in 2007, when the world went through a global financial crisis, which was largely driven by people living beyond their means across the world—people had high personal debts. The government of the day attempted to stimulate the economy by moving private debt into public debt, and the borrowings of the country were substantially increased. They threw money around; I got the $900 cheque, as many other people did, including a few dead people—at least they probably could not cash their cheque. The government attempted to stimulate the economy by moving things into public debt, and we now find ourselves with a substantial public debt of $320 billion. But we do not have an Australian population who was put on the journey, though they have lived through the consequences of those decisions. We are trying to say to the Australian people that we need to tighten our belts and that we need to live within our means because at the heart of good governance is good financial management.

We believe in quite a number of things in this parliament. We believe in creating opportunities for our children to make sure that they can access good primary education, secondary education and good higher education, but we have to make tough decisions about how we afford that. We believe that a strong society looks after those who are unwell, but we have to fund that. What separates us from the other side is that we are putting forward scenarios and suggestions and ideas on how to do that in a sustainable fashion. We also believe in good aged care. I think those who have worked all their lives, who have been valued and have contributed to the Australian economy—if they are unable, through their own means, to pay for their retirement—we need to make sure that they are not on the poverty line. We are putting forward suggestions on how to address that—difficult suggestions so that our welfare and pension remain viable, ongoing and sustainable. The greatest thing you can give to a senior Australian is surety that the pension will go into their bank book every fortnight. It is these things that separate us.

It is easy to talk about what you believe in, but it is harder to talk about what you are going to do about it. This appropriation bill is quite important to me, because it allows about $90 million for agricultural concessional loans. It is appropriate that our food producers, who contribute so much to the Australian economy, have a government that stands by them in difficult times. They usually ask very little. I know even in my electorate in a good year they would produce $5.3 billion worth of economic activity to the Australian economy. What we have proposed is some low-interest loans of $30 million. The advantage of offering low-interest loans is that it introduces some competitive tension with their existing finances. In the past some banks were inclined to put the penalty interest rate up in order to mitigate the risk
and the outworking of that was that the interest rate became even more burdensome for the business going through a difficult time. A low-interest loan affords us the opportunity to say to a farmer that there are other options, and it also puts less pressure on the banks to put penalty rates up.

As well as running a strong, robust economy, we are also building. It is also important that the government has a role in growing the economy and in looking at ways that we can achieve growth so that we can ultimately set ourselves up for prosperity. Even in my electorate in the last 18 months, we have received over $297 million of additional federal investments. There is the $103 million of federal money for the Sunraysia Modernisation Project—a project that will revolutionise agriculture in a horticultural region and that has the potential to export to the world with the additional free trade agreements that we have developed and achieved. We have to take the next step of getting the protocols right, so producers can access those markets. The Sunraysia Modernisation Project has largely been built by local contractors. We have seen $4 million to upgrade to the Henty Highway and $5.6 million to upgrade to the Western Highway. We have opened trade training centres to harness the potential of our young students and give them the skills to build productivity. We have given additional money to local councils for Roads to Recovery—doubling that money in fact in the 2015-16 financial year.

I am a strong believer in practical environmentalism—environmentalism where young Australians can experience the environment and where their love of the environment is fostered by doing something. My passion that comes from my farming background. When you walk around the farm, you have time to think; you have less noise; you can hear the birds tweet in the trees. It makes you realise just how special the Australian ecosystem is—very unique. Having Green Army projects that take our young Australians and give them those opportunities to identify a scar tree or the type of grass or to understand the difference between a eucalypt and a wattle; to understand birdlife and to understand why, for example, carp do so much damage to the Murray system, whereas Murray cod do so much good. It has been a good project.

We have announced money for a Headspace, not only for Swan Hill, but also for Mildura and Horsham. Headspace centres show we stand by young Australians as they experience the struggles of life. We have seen rollouts of NBN in the Wimmera, Mildura and Kerang. We are providing Safe Haven Enterprise Visas to give opportunities to people who come into our communities to work. We have upgraded Longerenong College—$2 million in partnership with the state government to invest in the skill set of our food producers into the future. So—amongst the difficult budget—we are doing a lot of things. To continue on with the list: we have committed to building an overtaking lane between Red Cliffs and Ouyen to make it safer for people to drive on the roads; and we have invested in tourism, with $1.86 million for the Heartbeat of the Murray Experience.

My great dream is that more Australians will come to my part of the world—because it is simply a beautiful part of the world to come to—and not only that, but that they will come and spend time: to the port of Echuca; to then move their way on to Swan Hill and the pioneer settlement, where they can understand the trials and tribulations and value of our history; and to see the Heartbeat of the Murray while they are there—which is going to be a great laser light show on water; and that they will then to continue on to Robinvale, the sister city of
Villers-Bretonneux—which will be particularly relevant in three years' time, when we celebrate the struggles of Australians at Villers-Bretonneux at Anzac Day Centenary events in 2017; and then continue on to Mildura, which is the mecca of great food. So we have invested in that tourism route. We have also provided cheap energy. We have committed to a natural gas pipeline in Robinvale, Swan Hill and Kerang; something that was raised with me on behalf of business. I know there is some argy-bargy—is gas going to be cheap?—but if you can provide gas—an energy source—with our food production, it then facilitates secondary business. We have made it easier for business by repealing the carbon tax—something we said we would do and something we have delivered on. And we are also valuing our culture with the Anzac Centenary Local Grants Program: a great program that has also given us the opportunity to restore some of the memorial plaques in our country halls, and to educate schoolkids and inspire them about the sacrifices of so many before us.

We were also very blessed last Thursday to have the Prime Minister of Australia, Tony Abbott, come to the electorate of Mallee. In my understanding, it is the first time a Prime Minister has visited the electorate of Mallee in over 32 years, with the last to visit being Malcolm Fraser. It was nice that the Prime Minister came, but what was more important was that he came with money! He came with $1 million to commit to the $1 million that the community is raising—and hopefully the state government will commit another $1 million—to build an oncology wing to look after people with cancer. In fact, I have to say the Prime Minister did commit $1 million, and also $100—because I gave $1,000 of my money, and that kind of shamed him into having to reach into his own wallet and pull out two $50 notes and chuck them in the tin as well. That is all he had in his wallet—I can verify that he did give every last cent that he had on him at the time. So that is the way to get some additional funds out of a prime minister!

At the heart of good government is good financial management: we are doing this. We are slowly but surely offering up suggestions about how to tackle the hard decisions—to make our economy and to make our society great. It disappoints me at times that those hard decisions and ideas which we put forward are not given time to be considered by the opposition before they are just dead against them. It is perhaps a utopian dream that we should consider ideas and listen to one another a little bit more, rather than being dead against them. I know that if Labor were in government, there would be real soul-searching as to how they, too, would go about making the tough decisions that have to be made. The future is determined by the decisions we make. The decisions we make are certainly an outworking of the beliefs which we have but, ultimately, it is the decisions that define us.

The future for the Mallee electorate is pretty good, I think. We have free trade agreements that create opportunity. We need to turn the opportunity into reality. Today, I have written to the Prime Minister outlining that, whilst Andrew Robb is leading the way and opening up these great opportunities, we also need to be resourcing someone—as assistant minister, or certainly someone in the department—to make sure that we can turn the opportunities into realities. How do we work with small business people who want to export, and help them to become exporters? I think our free trade agreements are good. I think our liveability in the regions is great. I think we have great opportunities for those people who want to realise their assets—and who are in capital cities which might be a little bit congested with traffic; the region might be reasonably well-priced for those people to come and shift to our region: we
can use your skills—and the weather is warmer, so it is better for your arthritis!—and there are some great golf courses. We can have you in our country area.

We are what we believe, but we are defined by the choices we make. Our government is prepared to make the tough choices—sometimes the unpopular choices—to set up Australia's prosperity in the future. When our performance review comes up at the next election, I think Australians will consider that, and will look favourably upon us.

Ms HENDERSON (Corangamite) (17:20): It is a great pleasure to rise to speak on these appropriation bills. Today, I want to focus in my contribution on the many job creation programs and initiatives that our government is rolling out in Corangamite and across the Geelong region. Our government proudly has a very strong focus on job creation: front and centre in reflecting that focus is the commitment of the Australian Bureau of Statistics to an ARC Centre of Excellence that will be commencing operations in Geelong next year, with 250 jobs coming to Geelong. This is particularly significant because it stems from a review of the Victorian economy, chaired by industry & science minister Ian Macfarlane, that was established in the wake of the announcement of the end of car manufacturing in this country. The review identified a number of different initiatives including asking how we as a government can work with communities around Australia, including in my electorate of Corangamite, to create the jobs of the future—not the bandaid solutions that we saw under so many of the programs delivered by Labor.

A great example is the money that was given to Alcoa. Very sadly for our town, Alcoa is closing its operations in Point Henry. This is causing enormous distress and concern amongst many families in Geelong. But we are focused on the long-term solutions. We are focused on creating long-term jobs—not on band-aid solutions, not on giving money here, not on giving money there, but on building a strong and prosperous economy. We are investing in businesses, because let us not forget that 80 per cent of our economy is driven by private enterprise. Unless we support businesses—small, medium and large—we will not see those jobs generated.

The ABS Centre of Excellence is one of the initiatives identified by the review panel. It is a great opportunity to bring part of this agency to Geelong. It will be based at Deakin University on the waterfront and will open up many other opportunities for both Deakin and our town. That is very, very positive. As part of the review that we conducted, we established a $155 million growth fund including $30 million that will be rolled out shortly for regional infrastructure and $60 million for a next generation manufacturing investment fund.

Again, I come from a proud manufacturing town. It was with some significant disappointment that in a recent contribution I heard the member for Corio speak about the fact that, under the federal government, manufacturing has died. It was regrettable. I think the member for Corio now regrets what he said. He knows that is not the case. Manufacturing is responsible for something like 40 per cent of our local GDP—12,000 jobs and 500 manufacturing companies—and we are going from strength to strength. Yes, we have challenges, but our growth fund announced last year by both the industry and science minister and the Prime Minister in Geelong—a great heartland of manufacturing—will help to drive the jobs of the future.

One of the applicants under the next generation manufacturing investment fund that I am supporting is AKD Softwoods, a wonderful softwood saw mill in Colac. They are investing
enormous dollars in their local business and in the Colac economy. The forestry industry is very important in my region. AKD supports about 300 local jobs, and I am very, very supportive of the investment that they wish to make.

Of course we have the Geelong Region Innovation and Investment Fund, which to date has created something like 750 jobs at wonderful companies such as Cotton On and new and developing companies like Carbon Revolution, an advanced manufacturer which is making state-of-the-art carbon fibre wheels and is making Geelong so proud. The GRIIF is primarily funded by the federal government but there is also funding from the state government, Ford and Alcoa. Our government helped to negotiate a $10 million contribution, with $5 million going directly into the GRIIF. Under this fund, we are helping to drive these advanced manufacturing jobs. I visited Carbon Revolution recently with the defence minister, Kevin Andrews, and we saw what they are doing already. It is incredible. Already this new factory that has been developed—again at Deakin University, but this time at the campus in Waurn Ponds—is delivering something like 160 new jobs. Another recipient of the GRIIF fund is Quickstep, which is working in the area of high-tech automotive materials development for the global auto industry. Anyone who says that manufacturing in our town is dead needs to come down to visit and see what is going on. We are proudly investing in these jobs. We are a proud manufacturing town and we have a great future in manufacturing. Just last week we announced, under our auto diversification fund, a $200,000 grant for another great manufacturer—Backwell IXL, which is also doing wonderful things with the manufacture of solar panels.

That is one of the reasons that I have been so supportive of the renewable energy target. The renewable energy target is incredibly important for driving jobs, investment and opportunities, particularly in regional Australia. I am very pleased with the announcement today from both the environment minister and the industry and science minister in relation to the important position that we have reached in trying to get a deal. We really hope that the Labor Party comes to the table. We have certainly made some concessions because, as even the Australian Workers' Union has said, the 41,000 target is actually going to hurt jobs because it absolutely will impact on the aluminium sector for one. We have tried to come up with a practical, rational proposal—one that I think is supported by unions such as the AWU. There is a lot of support from bodies such as the Clean Energy Council. The position that we have announced is a very important one because it recognises how important renewable energy is in Australia. It is certainly embraced very widely across my electorate of Corangamite, where some 24 per cent of homes have either solar PV systems or hot water systems. The RET has been very, very important in driving up this uptake in solar energy.

I have also been very, very proud of a local program that we have announced—the Geelong employment connections program. This is a $500,000 program assisting the delivery of local job creation programs. It is doing some incredible work. It is supported to a large degree by the Geelong LLEN. I must particularly mention Anne-Marie Ryan, who has been driving that program and bringing local employers together with industry and retrenched workers to introduce them to new opportunities. There are some wonderful programs, such as the community services taster program, which gives retrenched workers an insight into the opportunities in the community services sector. The 'On the front foot' series was also funded. This was a series of six half-day sessions targeted at retrenched workers but open to all job
seekers that again identified areas and gave people the incentive, enthusiasm and skills to find out how they could seek opportunities in those areas.

There is another program, the advanced manufacturing taster program, which is, again, a very important program in helping workers and job seekers identify new opportunities in advanced manufacturing. We talk about advanced manufacturing very broadly, from companies like Carbon Revolution right through to Boundary Bend, which is the biggest producer of olive oil in Australia and a very proud local manufacturer. The Foot in the Door program is being rolled out—again, giving job seekers the important opportunities to identify the jobs in our region. And the National Disability Insurance Scheme—the Barwon trial—is being rolled out, and that has been a great success, with some 3½ thousand participants already reaping the benefits of being involved in the NDIS trial. We proudly have the headquarters in Geelong, and when it is up and running by about 2018 it will deliver some 300 jobs—again, some wonderful opportunities for our region.

One of the projects I am championing, which will absolutely be a game changer for our region, is the LAND 400 project—the $10 billion Defence contract which will deliver armed combat vehicles. It is an incredibly important project for the region. I have got on the front foot on that project. It was wonderful to be there with the Defence minister—on an ASLAV, wearing my hard hat—and saying to all the primes, the international defence companies, 'Come to our region, and if you leave Geelong out of your bid you do so at your peril.' I was pleased to see that the Victorian government has announced a defence procurement office for Geelong. But I am disappointed—and I do want to make note of the fact—that, while it was a $5 million commitment, so far we have had a commitment of only three jobs in that office and very little evidence of an expenditure of $5 million by the Andrews government. The Victorian government really needs to ramp up its effort if it is going to compete with South Australia. We need an ambassador, we need an incentives package, we need the sorts of incentives to bring defence companies to Geelong to make sure that we are front and centre on the LAND 400 project. The Victorian government and Premier Andrews need to get their act together very, very quickly.

We have some incredible roads infrastructure projects in our region: the Princes Highway, a project for which I have been advocating for some six years, has been rolled out. Some sections of the road between Geelong and Winchelsea have been opened and work has started on the section between Winchelsea and Colac, and that is going to make such an enormous difference for Winchelsea, for Birregurra, for the people of Colac. And for the Great Ocean Road a $50 million commitment has been made by ourselves and the previous Victorian government. It is very disappointing that this project—such an iconic tourist road—was so opposed by Labor in the lead-up to the last election and is still being opposed by Labor.

As we heard in question time today, the big missing link is the East West Link. This is a project that will deliver 7,000 jobs. This is a project that, frankly, is making Daniel Andrews look like an absolute laughing-stock in the eyes of investors right around the world. This is a project that will save commuters in my home town of Geelong some three hours a week during peak hour. And this is a project for which Daniel Andrews is threatening to pass retrospective legislation to ensure that the Victorian government does not have to pay compensation for ripping up the contract.
As the Prime Minister said in his letter to the Premier on 11 March, this is a vital project for Melbourne and it is a vital project for Geelong, and the threats made by Premier Andrews are, frankly, quite frightening, because they will cause irreversible damage to our state and they will cause irreversible damage to our reputation as a place to do business. So, once again, as I have been campaigning for, for many months, let us build the East West Link. Let us deliver almost 7,000 jobs. Let us invest in this vital infrastructure that is so important for jobs, for our future and for our regional economy—where, frankly, we need every job we can get.

Last but not least is the NBN. I am incredibly proud that after such a mess under the previous government—where the satellite did not deliver what Labor said it was going to deliver, and, on fixed wireless, the government did not acquire the spectrum it was meant to acquire in order to roll out fixed wireless NBN—we are now rapidly rolling out the NBN. In my electorate some 34,000 premises will receive the NBN under the first 18-month rollout, on top of about another 5,000 premises under fixed wireless. And all of the small towns, like Barongarook and Alvie and Coragulac and Gellibrand—so many small towns that were left off the rollout under Labor—have now been embraced by our government, because we committed that we would fund and we would roll out the NBN to those towns that need it first. But I am very much on a mission that Geelong must be included in the next rollout, the southern suburbs of Geelong—Belmont, Highton, Grovedale, Marshall and Waurn Ponds. It is so important for our local economy and so important for our future.

Mrs WICKS (Robertson) (17:35): The people of the Central Coast deserve a government that delivers on its commitments, and I am pleased to say that with this package of appropriation bills before the House today this coalition government is doing exactly that. We took to the electorate of Robertson the coalition's growth plan for the central coast, a document with clear commitments to our region that would deliver growth, jobs and opportunity. I am pleased to say that we are delivering, and in some cases increasing, our commitments to the people on the Central Coast. These commitments reflect the concerns and aspirations of people in my electorate. We are privileged to live in the best region of the best country in the world, but we also need to see better infrastructure, more jobs and a place where hope and opportunity abound.

As part of this positive growth plan for the Central Coast which we took to the last election, we pledged to locate a Commonwealth agency, or part thereof, in Gosford's CBD. This is a city that local newspapers have recently described as a 'dead zone' with empty buildings and run-down streets. We want to revitalise Gosford so it can truly be the capital city of the Central Coast that our region needs. Combined with the other commitments that I will outline today, and the great work being done by the New South Wales state Liberal government and by Gosford City Council, things are starting to turn around. In fact, many community leaders are declaring that they are more optimistic than ever.

The Commonwealth agency relocation—thanks to the delivery by this coalition government—has the potential to add significantly to their optimism, because this is an investment of 600 jobs. That is 600 new jobs for Gosford right into the heart of the CBD. In the lead-up to the election we committed 250 to 300 jobs, but in last year's budget we doubled it to 600. Five hundred of these jobs will be from the Australian Taxation Office, with another 100 from a complementary agency or agencies. There has already been significant interest in this project and in the tender process, which will ultimately see a purpose-built building
constructed in Gosford and open by the end of 2017. In fact, the Treasurer recently described this Commonwealth agency as 'a centre of excellence for Gosford', and in his earlier visit to Gosford outlined why this will have such a vital impact on the Central Coast as a whole. The economic multiplier effect of 600 jobs into Gosford shows great flow-on effects to our economy. That is 600 more lunches that will need to be bought and 600 more coffees every single day—and, if you are like me, that is probably 1,200 coffees that will need to be bought.

Mr McCormack: Or 1,800.

Mrs Wicks: Eighteen hundred some may say. And, of course, there will be a rise in demand for accommodation and services. So that is hundreds of additional new jobs that we have demonstrated can be created as a result of the significant investment by the federal government. It is an important commitment that has been embraced wholeheartedly by my community, and it is one that I am determined to ensure becomes a vital part of Gosford's long-term future.

We have also committed $7 million in funding for Kibbleplex, a project that will further revitalise Gosford by transforming the old market town building—once a vibrant shopping centre that I frequented as a teenager that now lies dormant and is used as a car park. The Australian government delivers on its election commitments and we will deliver funding for this project. We committed the funding in last year's budget, and the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development is now awaiting information from Gosford City Council so that a value for money assessment can occur and a funding agreement can be prepared. In turn, I am advised that council is working with the State Library of New South Wales on possible locations for a city library in Gosford with the planned Kibbleplex Learning and Enterprise Centre one of the preferred places. The council has advised me it is still working to finalise the remaining tenant mix for the Kibbleplex project and the review of the state library's report will form an important part of this process. Work to build the Gosford Smart Work Hub is also well underway, and I am advised that council also plans for this to be located in Kibbleplex.

The vision that council have outlined includes a mixed-use complex, including a hub for collaboration and innovation, new business start-ups and education and research that delivers educational, business and other services to the Central Coast. As part of our growth plan we have also indicated we would consider stage 2 funding for a performing arts centre in Gosford should the New South Wales state Liberal government and Gosford council pledge support. As somebody who used to learn violin from expert violin teachers at the Central Coast Conservatorium of Music and as somebody who taught music and violin to young students on the Central Coast, I warmly welcome the Baird Liberal government's recent commitment to this project. I encourage Gosford City Council to consider applying for a grant from the federal government's National Stronger Regions Fund to assist us seeing this vision become a reality for our city.

For those who may know the city of Gosford, you will also know its proximity to the M1 and the thousands of commuters who head down the freeway to Sydney or north to Newcastle each day. In my electorate of Robertson alone, that adds up to around 30,000 commuters who leave their homes early in the morning and return late at night to their families. For decades there has been debate about building what the locals now know as the 'missing link', joining up the M1 at Wahroonga with the M2 down Pennant Hills Road. I am pleased to say that this
project, now of course called NorthConnex, is underway. The first sod has been turned, and we are on track for completion in 2019. The federal government has committed $405 million towards this project which will build a nine-kilometre tunnel that will service up to 50,000 vehicles in each direction. For the people of the Central Coast who head down to work every day—including my husband Chris—NorthConnex means that you can bypass around 21 sets of traffic lights and save up to 15 minutes of travel time each way. That is 30 minutes every day, around 10 hours a month, that families with commuting members can spend at home with their family instead. With NorthConnex a reality you could also drive from Newcastle to Melbourne without a set of traffic lights. NorthConnex will also deliver 8,700 jobs as a direct result of construction each year. Once open, there will be about 120 jobs to support operation, contributing around $32 million directly to the state's economy with a flow-on effect of $17 million a year.

We are also delivering funding for local roads. Our growth plan includes $675,000 for the dangerous intersection at Langford Drive and Woy Woy Road in Kariong. In the lead-up to the 2013 election, 3,000 locals put their name to a petition, calling for us to help improve safety in the area. After consultation with Gosford City Council, I am confident that we are close to securing a traffic solution that will make this busy intersection, which is near a much loved community centre, safe for pedestrians. We are delivering a share of the Australian government's $2.1 billion Roads to Recovery program to assist with local road construction and maintenance. Just this month we have delivered the latest instalment of more than $400,000 into my electorate of Robertson. We have also announced $305,000 to fix two dangerous black spots in Narara and Kincumber as part of a separate Black Spot funding program. For the commuters I mentioned earlier we have also launched a petition for fairer petrol prices. Our petition attracted hundreds of signatures within just a few days to help put pressure on the ACCC to select our region as a place to investigate fuel price disparity.

Our growth plan also includes funding for important community and civic infrastructure. We have delivered $3.5 million for the redevelopment of Woy Woy Oval for the construction of a new grandstand building, clubhouse, change rooms, forecourt and field relocation. Many local clubs that use this field have told me how this project will be a great boost to the peninsula as well as to its club members, and will improve the region's ability to meet the demands of population growth and the need for more recreational facilities. The project will create approximately 186 jobs during construction, which I am pleased to say is already well underway. We have also committed $100,000 for the popular Terrigal sportsground, Brendan Franklin Oval. Local sports groups have told me the field has been reshaped, irrigated and turfed and the drainage is also expected to be completed soon.

Another massive uplift for our community is the rapid rollout of the National Broadband Network into my electorate. We recently added another 17 suburbs to the rollout plan to June 2016, and have seen start-up companies choose suburbs like Koolewong as their headquarters, because they trust our NBN rollout and its rapid progress.

Unfortunately, Labor's record on the Central Coast was abysmal in this regard—just 203 connected premises after six long years in government and misleading announcements about who will be connected and when. But under this government we are delivering to more than 50,000 premises, which is great news for people living and working in places like Umina Beach, Woy Woy, Pearl Beach, Patonga, Green Point, Killcare, Killcare Heights, Ettalong...
We also have a $100-million plan to fix mobile phone black spots, to assist people who need it most in regional areas that may be currently under-served by mobile coverage. This is an issue I campaigned on at the last election and which we included in the coalition’s growth plan for the Central Coast. I am pleased to say that while there is always more work to be done in this area we have made some great progress. We have announced locations that have been nominated as having poor mobile coverage, after consultation with the community. The first list of base stations will be announced by the end of June this year.

I have also fought hard for—the district of workforce shortage system for the Central Coast. This will allow GPs in busy locations, like Erina, to hire more doctors, because finally the data is up to date and shows, in over 20 suburbs in my electorate, where we need more medical services. To give the House an indication of the weight of importance of this announcement, the Erina Fair Medical Centre Practice Manager, Peter Carr, has described the change as the biggest single positive step to get more GPs to the area than anything in the last 20 years. Mr Carr said it was smart policy as it gives all practices an equal opportunity, unlike the superclinic idea, and it does not cost the government anything to do it.

We have already delivered—or are delivering—so many things in my electorate, but there is always more to fight for on behalf of my community. There is one issue, in particular, that weighs deeply on my heart—that is, seeing a university campus in Gosford established at some stage. In our growth plan we recognised the crucial role that universities play in driving development, in regional areas, through job creation and educating the community. We pledged to work in partnership with the Central Coast community to identify further training and education opportunities, particularly in progressing approvals that are necessary to facilitate universities to develop campuses on local government owned land.

In this effort to have or fight for a strong university presence in Gosford, I welcome the state Liberal government's support for a globally connected, fully integrated Central Coast health and medical research institute. It is an issue very close to my heart. I have been lobbying the state government for around six months, alongside the University of Newcastle Vice-Chancellor, Professor Caroline McMillen, for capital infrastructure funding to deliver a medical research institute and medical school attached, perhaps, to the new Gosford Hospital. This is a unique opportunity to deliver a shared vision for a university in Gosford, which would be another centre of excellence, right in the heart of the city. These facilities have the potential to become a base for world-class health care, medical research and education co-located with a fantastic hospital.

The University of Newcastle is working with partners to develop two shared components in the plan: a globally connected, fully integrated Central Coast health and medical research institute and a co-located Central Coast medical school. This plan would help tackle emerging health issues on the coast as well as attract high-quality students, clinicians, researchers and healthcare professionals to Gosford. We are keen to see this happen as soon as possible. We want to work in collaboration with the world class University of Newcastle and key stakeholders across the Central Coast.
This is a government that is determined to ensure we deliver hope and opportunity to the Central Coast. Our growth plan is a major part of seeing these projects become game changers for our region. We are delivering growth, jobs and opportunity to a region that has a perception—perhaps made too real until now—of being long forgotten. But it is now seeing real solutions delivered to benefit future generations in the most important and beautiful region in our nation. I commend this bill to the House.

Mr McCormack (Riverina—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance) (17:50): Firstly, I would like to thank those members who have contributed to this debate on these additional estimates appropriation bills and for the member for Watson's grandstanding amendment. I will come to that shortly.

As is often the case with appropriation bills, the debate in the House has been wide ranging and informative. This place is, I think, at its best when members speak about the part of Australia they are privileged to represent. We heard the member for Robertson do just that. That is, after all, the purpose of this, the people's House. So it is a pleasure to have this opportunity to reflect on members' contributions to this debate on these appropriation bills.

A theme in this debate—at least in contributions from this side of the House—was this importance of pressing on with the task of repealing red tape, creating export opportunities for Australian businesses and investing in all-important infrastructure. We are repealing red tape, doing away with regulations that stifle enterprise and that do not serve a wider public purpose. We have already exceeded the target of $1 billion per year that we set ourselves, but that is no reason to rest on our laurels.

The member for Page hit it squarely on the head when he remarked during the debate that 'red tape is real money and a real cost to our businesses'. We have another repeal day coming up, and I know the member for Pearce and Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister is on the case, continuing the good work initiated by his predecessor the member for Kooyong. I am always pleased to hear from the member for Page—he is a good member. It was terrific to hear about the opportunities that preferential trade deals with China, Japan and Korea are opening up for businesses in his electorate of Page, particularly for his dairying enterprises and meat processes and, I understand, even for a local manufacturer of campervans! It is the same story I hear as I travel around my electorate of Riverina. I know that citrus growers and horticulture producers throughout the Murrumbidgee and Coleambally irrigation areas are excited about the possibilities created by the significant cuts to tariffs that these agreements will deliver. We will see Australian businesses reap the rewards of preferential trade deals with China, Korea and Japan for many, many years to come. Nobody underestimates the challenges involved in reaching a similar agreement with India, but I have every confidence that the Minister for Trade, and member for Goldstein, is very much up to the task.

It is a pleasure to be able to reassure members opposite that despite all their fears and protestations to the contrary there have been no cuts to the Financial Assistance Grants. Local councils are $30 million better off this year than they were last year. It is true that as part of our budget repair strategy we have paused indexation of these grants for three years, but we are also making important investments that will benefit local councils and the communities they serve, including an extra $200 million for the road Black Spot Program—totalling half a billion dollars; $2.1 billion for the Roads to Recovery program, including a double $350
million payment in 2015-16; a new $300 million Bridges Renewal Program; and an expanded $200 million Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Program.

The member for Mallee said that the basis for good government is good financial management—and he is dead right. The member for Dawson, who spoke earlier tonight, understands that in order to build a stronger economy government needs to focus on job-creating industries. I know how much the towns and communities in his electorate around Mackay rely on the resource sector and how passionate he is in standing up for farmers to ensure they have a viable future. In the Riverina, we have seen funding for road upgrades. There is the upgrade of the Byrnes Road with funding of $1.276 million under the Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Program. There is the Carrathool Bridge upgrade with funding of $7½ million under the Bridges Renewal Program. The communities have waited 30 years; the coalition, in conjunction with the state government, is answering their call. I was very, very pleased to be there the week before last with the member for Murrumbidgee, Adrian Piccoli, to announce that joint funding initiative. The Gobarralong Bridge project in Gundagai is receiving $1.046 million—again, under the bridges renewal strategy. There is $27½ million, in conjunction with the state government, for a new Kapooka Bridge. I know how hard The Nationals Duncan Gay, the upper house member in the roads ministry in New South Wales, has fought, in conjunction with the member for Wagga Wagga, Daryl Maguire, to provide that funding for the Kapooka Bridge. There is half a million dollars for closed-circuit television in the Wagga Wagga central business district.

We have all got Anzac grants. It is still a good initiative, with up to $120,000 for each electorate. With the Financial Assistance Grants, there is more than $52 million for the Riverina. There is more than $5½ million in funding confirmed for local trade training centres. The coalition government is funding the round 5, phase 1 trade training centre projects. This is fantastic for Riverina students. It means that the Riverina will have funding for four trade training centres, which will benefit six schools. Temora High School, Batlow Technology School and Tumbarumba High School will each have a trade training centre facility, with Ardlethan Central School, Ariah Park Central School and Barellan Central School as partner schools in a $2.845 million centre. These four trade training centres will provide students with certificates in engineering, building and construction, agrifood operations, carpentry and joinery and the metal fabrication trade. We have also provided $3.8 million for the University of Notre Dame Australia’s Australian Rural Clinical School, Wagga Wagga.

Members on this side understand the importance of investing in road infrastructure—we really do. In some parts of Australia we are dealing with years of underinvestment in roads. The member for Forde noted that much of the investment we are making in road infrastructure in his electorate is the result of a failure of infrastructure to keep up with population growth in the region. We have heard members on this side from Victoria speak passionately about the need for the East West Link. The members for Corangamite, Aston and Casey—to name just three—all called on the Andrews government to just get it done. We heard the Assistant Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development in question time today talk about the reputational damage the Andrews government is doing to Australia as an investment destination; it is not good enough.
It was great to hear the member for Capricornia explain in this debate what the investments we are making in repairing roads across Central Queensland will mean for her community. The people of Capricornia made a wise choice sending her here. Her response to the recent devastation caused by Cyclone Marcia just goes to show they have elected a true and strong local champion. The member for Calare understands the importance of infrastructure. I know he is passionate about the $250 million upgrade to the Great Western Highway, specifically the stretch between Katoomba and Lithgow. It is a project that will create local jobs—that is important; but, more importantly, it is going to save lives, as will the upgrade to the Pacific Highway. I know that this is a project of vital importance to the members for Lyne and Cowper and the communities they serve. The Pacific Highway is an important artery for keeping our nation's economic pulse beating. We have made good on our commitment to invest $5.64 billion to finally get the job done on the duplication of the Pacific Highway, and we are on track to see it finished by the end of this decade.

I note that the member for Longman spoke of his pride in having delivered a headspace centre for Caboolture, describing it as one of the best things that he could possibly do during his time in parliament. I trust that he will have many more years of delivering for the people of Longman, but I agree wholeheartedly with him about the importance of mental health support and facilities, particularly for our young people. I am also proud to have finally delivered a headspace centre for Griffith, in the western section of the Riverina. It was the result of a strong grassroots campaign, involving local advocates, council—particularly Peta Dummett—and literally thousands of people who contacted me, indicating their support for a headspace facility in Griffith. I particularly want to acknowledge the advocacy of Griffith teenager Jenna Thornton, a victim of school bullying who made it her personal cause that this centre became a reality—and, under the coalition government, it has.

Mental health and issues of addiction are two of the most serious health challenges facing our communities. It is certainly something I hear about a lot as I travel across my electorate of Riverina, which is almost as large as Tasmania. The member for Gippsland and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence spoke about the impact of ice on his community and particularly its infiltration of local sports clubs, especially football clubs. He has seen firsthand—as I am sure have many members on both sides of the parliament—the invidious effects of this pernicious drug. As the member for Gippsland said, there are no easy answers but that is no reason not to try. We have made ice the focus of work to be undertaken by the Australian National Advisory Council on Alcohol and Drugs, and I know it is something that the Assistant Minister for Health is very engaged in and that is good.

The impact of ice and amphetamine use in regional Australia was also an issue raised by the member for Parkes—an outstanding local representative who also mentioned the great work the government is doing by continuing to fund the successful Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative. It sounds long-winded but it is so important in the overall scheme of what the member for Parkes is getting on with and doing for his electorate. He knows the value of this program, because he has seen firsthand the difference it has made to protecting the important environmental and economic resource that is the Great Artesian Basin.

And it was great to hear members, including the member for Hinkler, speak of the good being done in their electorates through programs like Work for the Dole and the Green Army. I know we are spending $50,000 in Riverina with the Green Army, but in electorates like...
Hinkler, where unemployment is a real and ongoing challenge, these programs can make a real difference in helping to get job seekers, job ready. Having been an apprentice himself, the member for Hinkler knows the value of the $20,000 trade support loans that we are making available for tools and the like.

Turning now to the member for Watson's amendments—amendments that reveal that Labor has not learned; no, they have not learned—yes, the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook confirmed we are still facing a very real and serious budget deficit—a deficit that would have been worse had we not taken action to get it under control, had we not take action to get government spending in check. As the Intergenerational report showed, without any policy change—

Mr Feeney: How is it going?

Mr McCormack: I will tell you how it is going, Member for Batman: we were on track for a growing budget deficit. In fact, we would face continuous budget deficits for the next 40 years—that is how it is going—had we not done something.

But as a result of the tough decisions we have taken since coming to office, we have started to get spending growth under control—something Labor is not used to, but we are. There is still more to do, and we understand that we are going to need to bring the community along with us.

As the member for Moncrieff and parliamentary secretary to the Ministers for Foreign Affairs and Trade put it during this debate: 'It's easy to be Santa Claus'. It is easy to tell people they can have whatever they want and not to worry about the consequences. We credit the Australian people with a little more nous than that. And that is why the IGR is such an important document—it demonstrates what is at stake tomorrow from the decisions we take today. And what is at stake is nothing less than the living standards that our children and grandchildren will enjoy.

In closing, I would like to highlight five areas relating to the delivery of the government's commitments that are supported by these bills. First, these bills provide the Department of Defence with just under $558 million, reflecting, in the main, additional funding for Defence's overseas operations; the re-appropriation of amounts between Appropriation Acts to better align funding with Defence's current work programs; and supplementation for foreign exchange movements. I know the member for Batman will be interested in that, because I know how interested he is in defence. But he also knows how under Labor we let Defence slip as a proportion of gross domestic product down—down to 1938 levels.

On this side of the House, we are certainly interested—here we go.

Mr Feeney: Mr Deputy Speaker Hawke, I seek to intervene.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hawke): Is the member for Riverina willing to give way?

Mr McCormack: No, I am not, and he knows full well that this side of the House understands the importance of spending on defence. He understands the importance of making sure that infrastructure is so important at places such as Forest Hill and Kapooka. Labor never worried about it, but we are.
The Department of Employment receives just over $115 million, primarily for increased payments to providers following an increase in the number of successful job placements and to implement the new employment services 2015 contracts.

The Department of Agriculture receives $90 million for concessional loans under the Drought Recovery Concessional Loans Scheme. These funds will be used to provide support to eligible primary production businesses in Queensland and New South Wales that are experiencing financial difficulties resulting from the impacts of severe and prolonged drought conditions, or as a result of the combined effects of drought.

The Australian Customs and Border Protection Service would be provided with just under $35 million for additional counter-terrorism activities and to repurpose the Australian Defence Vessel Ocean Shield for transition of its ownership from the Department of Defence to the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service.

Finally, the Department of Parliamentary Services would receive additional appropriations to enable it to enhance the security of the Australian Parliament House, including the enhancement and upgrade of closed-circuit television equipment and access systems. It will also cover additional Parliamentary Protective Service staff. The total of the appropriations being sought through these three appropriation bills is just over $1.7 billion. I commend this bill to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The original question was that this bill be now read a second time. To this the honourable member for Watson has moved as an amendment that all words after ‘That’ be omitted with a view to substituting other words. The question now is that the amendment be agreed to.

Question negatived.

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

Question agreed to.

Third Reading

Mr McCORMACK (Riverina—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance) (18:06): by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2014-2015

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 McCORMACK (Riverina—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance) (18:08): by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

**Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 2) 2014-2015**

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 McCormack (Riverina—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance) (18:09): by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

**Customs Amendment (Anti-dumping Measures) Bill (No. 1) 2015**

**Customs Tariff (Anti-Dumping) Amendment Bill 2015**

Second Reading

Cognate debate.

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

Mr Zappia (Makin) (18:10): The Customs Amendment (Anti-dumping Measures) Bill (No. 1) 2015 and the Customs Tariff (Anti-Dumping) Amendment Bill 2015 make several relatively minor amendments to Australia's antidumping laws. The explanatory memorandum of the Customs Amendment (Anti-dumping Measures) Bill (No. 1) 2015 states that the following changes will occur and that those changes will:

…simplify and modernise publication provisions for anti-dumping notices, consolidate lodgement provisions for anti dumping applications and submissions, clarify the length of the investigation period in anti-dumping matters, clarify the cumulative assessment of injury, clarify normal value provisions, clarify the calculation of the dumping margin, clarify material injury determinations, clarify effective notice periods, clarify the definition of a subsidy, amend provisions dealing with new exporters, clarify provisions regarding consideration of the lesser duty rule, streamline the processes and implement a higher procedural and legal threshold for review to be undertaken by the Anti-Dumping Review Panel and allow the Government to replace the statutory International Trade Remedies Forum with administrative business consultative arrangements.

The bill also changes the act to allow the introduction of fees for reviews by the Anti-Dumping Review Panel.

The Customs Tariff (Anti-Dumping) Amendment Bill 2015 makes consequential changes from the first bill relating to, firstly, the publication of notices on the commission and review panel's websites instead of the Gazette or newspapers; and, secondly, clarification of the
lesser duty rule, which I have already referred to. It also clarifies the minister's power to exempt goods from dumping duty with limited retrospective effect. The exemption can only take effect from a date that is no earlier than the date the exemption application was made.

Dumping occurs when goods exported to Australia are priced lower than their normal value, which is usually the comparable price in the ordinary course of trade in the exporter's domestic market. Where the price in the ordinary course of trade is unsuitable, normal value may also be determined using comparable prices of exports to a third country or the cost of production plus selling, general and administrative expenses and profit. Dumping is not a prohibited practice under the World Trade Organisation agreements. Rather, the WTO agreements permit antidumping duties to be imposed when dumping causes or threatens to cause material injury to an Australian industry.

Australia's antidumping legislation is based upon the WTO Agreement on Implementation of Article VI of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade 1994 and the WTO Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures. Where material injury has been caused by the dumping of a product onto the Australian market, antidumping action can then be taken. The same action can also be taken where a government subsidy has been provided for an imported product. It appears that the number of cases of product dumping have increased in recent years, and I suspect that was aided by the global economic downturn, where in some cases there would have been a glut of products for which there was no market. The strength of the Australian economy, combined with the high Australian dollar in recent years, made Australia an ideal country in which to dump products. I will refer to a comment made by the director of Capral Limited, Mr Phil Jobe, on 26 February, in giving evidence to the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Industry in its inquiry into this very issue. He said:

In recent times in our industry, over 500 direct jobs and almost 2,000 in total, which is about one-third of the workforce, have been lost in Australia. We put this down mainly to unfair dumping of extrusions. This has not been helped by the high exchange rate, which is now coming back to a more reasonable level.

In government, Labor on several occasions amended Australia's anti-dumping laws to make them more effective. Labor also established the Anti-Dumping Commission and the International Trade Remedies Forum. It is evident that importers use very clever techniques to circumvent Australian laws or frustrate the existing process. Circumvention is a practice used by exporters and importers of certain products to avoid the full payment of dumping and countervailing duties. I note that circumvention is currently the subject of an inquiry by the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Industry, and I referred to that just a moment ago. Circumvention activities include assembly of parts in Australia, assembly of parts in a third country, export of goods through one or more third countries, arrangements between exporters, and, I understand, in recent times, the use of phoenix companies—and there may be other ways that people find to circumvent the current process. It seems that, wherever there is a will to rort the system, there is a way.

The use of clever techniques highlights why Australia's anti-dumping regime needs to be continuously reviewed. This legislation makes changes to Australia's anti-dumping laws that Labor believes are steps in the right direction and, collectively, should improve the current process. In what Labor believes is a retrograde step, however, the legislation also abolishes the International Trade Remedies Forum. We also have concerns about the fees for appeals to
the Anti-Dumping Review Panel. Labor does not support abolishing the ITRF and I will be moving an amendment to retain the forum at the conclusion of my remarks. I also note that the appeals fees will be set by regulation. We do not know what the fees will be and, whilst the minister states that lower fees will apply to small and medium-sized businesses, the lower fees are not written into the legislation, providing no guarantee that the lower fees will apply into the future.

For the benefit of anyone who is following this debate, I will briefly comment on some key provisions in the amendments as I understand them. If my understanding is incorrect, perhaps the minister in summing up the debate can clarify the matter for us. Firstly, I will deal with the submission deadlines. This bill introduces more stringent deadlines for the submission of information to dumping and subsidisation investigations. The period in which submissions should be lodged in response to the initiation of an investigation, review of measures, continuation inquiry or anti-circumvention inquiry would be reduced from 40 to 37 days. This would align with the minimum time frames established under the relevant WTO agreements. It would also allow information to be considered earlier by the anti-dumping commissioner when deciding whether a preliminary affirmative determination can be made. The reduction from 40 to 37 days does not seem significant, but it is worth doing. Every day matters and every day that a dumping matter continues can cost local industry tens of thousands of dollars.

With respect to lodgement and publication requirements, notices related to anti-dumping processes and decisions will be published electronically on the Anti-Dumping Commission and the review panel's website instead of in the Gazette or in newspapers.

The length of an investigation period has frequently also been raised as a matter of concern by parties involved in anti-dumping cases. The bill inserts a new subsection which intends that the commissioner cannot vary the length of the time for the investigation period once the investigation period has been specified by a notice issued by the commissioner. Again, I think that that is a good thing. In time, we will see how well it works. When considering the termination of an investigation, in certain circumstances the cumulative injurious effect of exportations of goods to Australia from multiple countries can also be considered.

The bill also provides clarification that there is no hierarchy for the methods available to determine a normal value. To clarify the calculation of dumping margins, the investigation period of a dumping investigation considered for the purpose of working out whether dumping has occurred and the levels of dumping is not less than one month. The amendment clarifies that, in calculating a single dumping margin for the good over the entire investigation period, the normal values and export prices of different models or types of that good can be compared over separate one-month periods prior to aggregation.

The definition of a subsidy for the purpose of Australia's anti-dumping system is amended to better align the definition with that of the WTO Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures. The amendment provides that the receipt of a financial contribution by a government does not, in and of itself, confer a benefit but that it must be determined whether that contribution provides a benefit. The bill amends the definition of 'new exporter', narrowing the period used in the definition. This potentially enables more exporters to access accelerated review. The minister's ability to declare that a dumping duty notice not apply to the applicant will also be removed. Instead, when considering an accelerated review, the minister can only leave the duty unaltered or change the variable rates.
The Customs Act would also be amended to require that, where an undertaking converts to a duty, the duty expires five years after the undertaking was accepted, unless terminated earlier. I also note that, although periods prior to the investigation period can be examined for the purpose of determining whether material injury has been caused, a determination that dumping has occurred prior to the investigation period is not permitted. Provisions of the Customs Act would be amended to require that the minister is not required to have regard to the lesser duty rule where a country has not submitted a notification of its subsidies, as mentioned in paragraph 1 of article 25 of the WTO Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures, at least once in the compliance period.

I now turn to the conduct of the review by the review panel. The bill would also increase the procedural and legal thresholds for applying for review by introducing requirements that an application must, firstly, set out the grounds for a review; secondly, set out the decision the applicant considered should have been made; and, thirdly, set out how the grounds support the making of the applicant's proposed decision. There will be a requirement that the Anti-Dumping Review Panel can only conduct reviews on reasonable grounds. The bill will also empower the review panel to hold a conference for the purpose of obtaining further information. This includes the ability to hold a conference prior to commencing a review in order to obtain further information from the applicant and the commission. This seems to be a sensible measure and I will be interested to see if, over time, it makes a worthwhile difference. The bill also amends the Customs Act to allow applicants for review to withdraw their application. Withdrawals will be required to be written and given in the same manner as applies to applications. Importantly, parties continue to be able to apply for judicial review of anti-dumping decisions to the Federal Court in order to resolve issues with certainty, consistent with Australia's obligations under the relevant WTO agreements.

I now turn to some of the savings and non-legislative measures within these bills and within the changes in policy. Labor supports the government's intention to use the savings generated from the measures in these bills to offset the costs of implementing some non-legislative measures of the reforms package: specifically, firstly, the establishment of an anti-dumping information service; secondly, the expansion of the International Trade Remedies Advisory Service; and thirdly, a hotline as a central point of contact for inquiries about Australia's anti-dumping system. We also welcome the establishment of a market research function to enhance the capability of the anti-dumping investigators as part of the anti-dumping information service. That will provide targeted economic analysis of trends and trading behaviours across markets to provide better information earlier in the investigation process. The intention for the minister to direct the Anti-Dumping Commissioner that, wherever possible, provisional measures be imposed at day 60 of an investigation is also a positive move.

Finally, I come to the two matters about which Labor has concerns. The first matter I refer to is the fee for review by the review panel, which I alluded to earlier. The bill will allow the government to introduce a fee for applying to the review panel, as I pointed out earlier in my contribution. There will be, I understand, different fees for different kinds of applicants. The introduction of fees will likely lead to fewer applications for review. Whilst this may benefit the Australian producer when the original decision was to impose duties, it also makes it more expensive for Australian producers to review decisions which did not impose duties. In other
words, if you lose the appeal and there is no finding of dumping, and you want to appeal, and you are an Australian business, then obviously it puts another cost in front of you. I note that the government has stated that the intention is for there to be reduced fees for small and medium-sized businesses.

I made the point earlier on that, as the fees are not in legislation, but are instead established under an instrument made by the minister, we have no guarantee that those fees will apply into the future, or that that principle and the intent of it, will be continued into the future. So, we will reserve our final position in respect of the fees until we have at least seen the schedule of fees proposed. I also note that the coalition's election policy document in respect of the Australian manufacturing sector stated:

The current anti-dumping laws are cumbersome, slow and prohibitively expensive for many Australian businesses to utilise.

I would be interested to hear the minister's explanation of how a fee for review by the Anti-Dumping Review Panel is consistent with this statement, in particular with the term 'prohibitively expensive'.

A further concern which I bring to the minister's attention is that exporters may channel their requests for review through the importer, which is likely to be a significantly smaller business than the exporter, in order to unfairly access the reduced fee structure for small and medium-sized businesses. The point we strongly make is that we would want to be assured that the system of having different fee scales is not going to also be abused or rorted in any way.

Finally, I come to the International Trade Remedies Forum. Labor initially established the ITRF in August 2011 following the announcement of the Streamlining Australia's anti-dumping systems policy. The legislation to formally establish the ITRF came into effect on 10 June 2013. The forum is a stakeholder body comprised of representatives from manufacturers, producers and importers, as well as industry associations, trade unions and relevant government agencies. The forum provides advice and feedback to the government on, firstly, the operation of the anti-dumping system; secondly, the implementation and monitoring of government reforms to the anti-dumping system; and, thirdly, other information which may lead to the further improvement of the anti-dumping system. It provides a good sounding-board for the government when it is considering matters that arise in respect of dumping legislation.

Prior to the announcement of the reforms in June 2011 there was no stakeholder body to provide feedback to government on the operation of the anti-dumping system. The forum was established specifically to do just that.

The former, Labor government committed to establishing the International Trade Remedies Forum to provide strategic advice and feedback to the government on the implementation and monitoring of the proposed reforms. The ITRF was established in legislation to ensure that this valuable dialogue with industry continued into the future. At the time that the legislation was debated in this place, the coalition did not oppose the ITRF, and in fact they supported it. At the time their spokesperson said:

… we support the establishment of the International Trade Remedies Forum. Indeed, the coalition has said for a long time that industry must be given a much greater voice in articulating improvements to the system and, more to the point, that its voice should be far more clearly heard … If we take the
government at face value on this and accept that its genuine intention is to bring together representatives from local industries, importers and unions and give them a better say in identifying problems and suggesting future improvements to our national antidumping system, then it is certainly a step in the right direction.

Those were the words of the former member for Indi who was, at the time, the opposition shadow spokesperson on this matter.

The ITRF has made a positive contribution through the work it has undertaken, which included determination of normal value when a particular market situation is found. Indeed, the Customs Amendment (Anti-dumping Improvements) Bill (No.2) 2012 implemented its recommendation to remove the limitation to the inclusion of profit when calculating the normal value of a good in its country of origin in certain circumstances.

I note that it appears as though the forum has not met since March 2013, despite being required by the Customs Act to meet at least twice each year.

Labor believes that the ITRF was a constructive body that did good work and that the government should utilise the ITRF legislation that is currently in place and the forum itself. It seems that it has, indeed, done the opposite. We have seen no justification for abolishing the forum and I do not accept, as the minister said in his second reading speech on this matter, that the ITRF is red tape or that it is a 'rigid and restricted method' for consultation. I therefore move the following amendment. I move:

That all words after “That” be omitted with a view to substituting the following words:

“the House is of the opinion that the bill should be amended to delete the section of the bill which abolishes the International Trade Remedies Forum.”

With those comments, and having moved the amendment, I commend the amendment to the House.

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

Mr Feeney: It is.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The original question was that this bill be now read a second time. To this the honourable member for Makin has moved as an amendment that all words after ‘That’ be omitted with a view to substituting other words. If it suits the House, I will state the question in the form that the amendment be agreed to. The question now is that the amendment be agreed to.

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment) (18:31): I rise to speak to the Customs Amendment (Anti-dumping Measures) Bill (No. 1) 2015 and cognate bill. This bill introduces a range of reforms designed to strengthen Australia's anti-dumping system.

In December last year this government released a blueprint to strengthen our anti-dumping regime—the first of two tranches of planned improvements to Australia's anti-dumping system.

When the Minister for Industry, Ian Macfarlane, and I, as his then parliamentary secretary, began looking further into industry's claims that we had fallen behind world's best practice, we acted quickly. We began looking at how the rest of the world was tackling dumping and addressing countervailing and subsidisation practices.
I am happy to say that nearly 90 per cent of Australia's approach was world's best practice. In fact, we soon found out that our investigations were amongst those who took the shortest time to complete in the world—with the US taking nearly double the time to finalise their investigations—and yet we were getting comparable results.

What we did find, though, is that we could further strengthen the anti-dumping regime. For example, under WTO laws, Australia could apply stronger penalties to exporters who were found guilty of dumping or to governments who were found guilty of countervailing or subsidisation practices. So that is what we did.

In December last year, Minister Macfarlane and I outlined how we would strengthen our antidumping regime. This included: implementing the outstanding four election commitments and I will talk further about these shortly; abolishing or reforming less useful and underperforming features of the anti-dumping system, including improving the merits review process; improving support services in order to provide better advice, assistance and information to Australian businesses engaging in the anti-dumping system; and seeing a range of other technical amendments made to the system that would simplify and clarify various aspects of antidumping investigative processes.

I would like to focus, just for a minute, on one of the coalition's promises to reverse the onus of proof. We soon discovered in coming to government that reversing the onus of proof was illegal under our WTO obligations and that no other jurisdiction in the world did this, so we were not going to entertain that idea any further.

However, we discovered that the policy intent of this commitment could be achieved by placing a greater onus on exporters to cooperate with the antidumping investigations, something that other international jurisdictions do.

I am proud to say that the policy change has already been implemented and it is working as intended. A good example of an outcome we have already received is that a number of canned tomato exporters from Italy, who were uncooperative with our investigators last year and who were later found guilty of illegal dumping, were slapped with a 26 per cent duty, instead of an eight per cent duty. That duty will last for five years.

To further show the teeth in this new policy, even when the eight per cent duty was reviewed and downgraded to five per cent earlier this year, the uncooperative exporters were not given any reduction and are still paying 26 per cent. We have also seen exporters of wind towers, canned pineapples and various steel products face the same fate for being uncooperative with investigators.

This policy change is doing what it intended: providing an incentive for exporters to cooperate with investigators and for dumpers to stop targeting our Australian industry. I believe this government is also sending a strong message to dumpers that we will not tolerate this practice in Australia.

Another change we took to cabinet was creating a cost-recovery mechanism surrounding the review of a dumping decision. When we looked at who was seeking reviews of decisions and how often, about two-thirds accessing this information were exporters from overseas and more than three-quarters of the reviews backed the Anti-Dumping Commission's original decision. Exporters were essentially getting a free kick at taxpayers' expense and chewing up another 90 days before duties could actually be imposed.
We also made it tougher to access a review by demanding the ADC and exporters attend a mediation session and, in tightening the grounds for an appeal, we now expect more solid grounds for a review to take place. The coalition government will also introduce a range of measures to assist Australian manufacturers and businesses.

One thing that Minster Macfarlane and I quickly realised was that applicants were unsure which type of investigation they wanted to undertake. They were unsure whether they required a dumping, countervailing or subsidisation investigation. I understood how this was happening, because trade law is extremely complex and most companies do not have antidumping experts working with them. To address this, a new unit of dumping experts will be formed in the future. The information service will have three key functions. Firstly, to provide general information and guidance to applicants. Secondly, to undertake a market analysis project, which will help identify dumping trends so we can attack dumping on the front foot. Thirdly, to collate data that we can share with industry to help applicants determine whether they have a genuine case.

The steel and aluminium industry is the one we found that was being most targeted by dumpers. In fact, close to 80 per cent of all cases last year were applications from this industry. So we took it upon ourselves to try and understand why so many applicants were coming from this industry. That was when we were educated about a devious practice taking place called circumvention. For all of those who do not know what circumvention is, it occurs when a foreign business changes their products, often only very slightly, to avoid duties. One case we later nicknamed 'pixie dust' showed just how devious exporters were getting. The steel industry alleged an exporter was avoiding duties by adding, for example, five per cent boron to its steel product. They then claimed it was another product, so duties did not apply. Yet it was still used for the exact same purpose.

Under the current system, we realised they had found a legal loophole. This government has now closed this loophole with a policy change and a test that helps identify these situations and takes action much more quickly. But to ensure we kept a level playing field, we have also provided avenues for Australian importers who feel they have been unfairly caught up in circumvention decisions. They can ask for a duty assessment, a review of the duties or an exemption, which ensures natural justice is adhered to. Australian industry voiced their concerns about circumvention to us and we acted. But there is much more to do in terms of tackling circumvention. In fact, at a meeting last year of the world's dumping experts, they found that circumvention, subsidisation and countervailing were growing trends around the world.

While the Australian government was addressing the 'pixie dust' issue, we asked for a bipartisan committee from the House of Representatives to look further into circumvention, subsidisation and countervailing more broadly. We are expect their findings to be delivered later this year, and it will help us further strengthen tranche 2 of our reforms when we expect to deliver it at the end of this year. When I was first tasked with looking at the antidumping regime back in December 2013, industry was extremely vocal. We also had a number of highly publicised cases, including SPC Ardmona's canned tomatoes case, local wind tower manufacturers were unhappy and the phone was just ringing off the hook from steel and aluminium manufacturers wanting to meet. Instead of hiding, we went proactively on the front foot. We engaged with and worked closely with the Australian manufacturers and
importers and industry as a whole. We found a common ground. We all wanted a fair and level playing field within Australia to operate within. This was then used as the basis to investigate whether the regime could be strengthened.

A bit over one year later and I can say our work has paid off. Their collaborative approach led us to announcing the first tranche of reforms in December last year. I could tell you how closely we listened to worked with the stakeholders, but I would rather you read what they said about the first tranche of reforms. Innes Willox, the Chief Executive of the Australian Industry Group said:

The comprehensive package of reforms, which honours remaining pre-election commitments, includes reversing the onus of proof in line with practices in other international jurisdictions. This will ensure that Australia meets WTO rules placing greater emphasis on overseas producers to cooperate with anti-dumping investigations.

The decision to abolish less useful and underperforming features of the anti-dumping system, including through improving the merits review process, makes considerable sense.

You may remember SPC Ardmona’s canned tomatoes case and the problems that they faced. The member for Murray made constant and solid representations on their behalf to bring about change that supported Australian industry and, in particular, addressed issues that SPC were having. Peter Kelly, the Managing Director of SPC, came out 12 months later and said he was happy with the progress of this government had made to improve the antidumping regime. He said:

These reforms to our anti-dumping system are a significant step forward for Australian manufacturers and producers …

As an Australian food producer this gives SPC a tremendous level of confidence to invest in our future as a proud Australian Company…

I previously said that about 80 per cent of antidumping applicants came from the steel and aluminium industry. So it was heartening to me to see the support through Don McDonald, the Chief Executive of the Australian Steel Institute. He said:

… the reform package will improve support for a fairer trade regime by providing enhanced remedies for upstream and downstream Australian steel manufacturing companies.

These reforms will assist in leveling the playing field through a tougher approach to timeframes and remedies, and they will improve the process for Australian steel manufacturers through expanded information and support services …

This bill and the reforms have always had bipartisan interests. When in government, the member for Blair spoke to the Brisbane Times about the importance of improving our antidumping system and ensuring a level playing field for local manufacturers. He did this because Capral, one of Australia’s largest aluminium extrusion companies, sits within his electorate and claimed at the time that dumped aluminium extrusions from China had seized about 40 per cent of the Australian market and had put the domestic extrusion industry under severe stress. Capral spoke about the circumvention issues, and I am glad to say that their allegations were recently proven. An overseas exporter’s aluminium product has now had dumping duties placed on them.
My neighbour, the member for Hunter, also experienced the effect of dumping and circumvention. Hundreds of jobs within his electorate were lost when Arrium downsized last year. Arrium cited pressure placed on them due to subsidisation and circumvention practices as the reasons for the job losses. I am glad that the member for Hunter is a part of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture and Industry, chaired by the member for Grey, which looking into these circumvention practices, because he also knows firsthand the effect of dumping at an electorate level.

I ask colleagues on both sides of the House to support this amendment bill as it goes through this House, and ask you to encourage your Senate colleagues to support the bill in their chamber. I am confident this bill will get through the House and Senate because there is no reason for delay. The reason is that this bill is in Australia's interest. It is in both our trade interest and Australian jobs interest. It takes Australia's antidumping measures to the very WTO limit, without crossing the line and, therefore, endangering Australia's reputation as a fair and free trader. At the same time it sends a very strong message to those who seek to dump, circumvent or countervail through subsidies into our market that Australia is the wrong place to do so and we will take every action and apply every penalty in our power under WTO rules to stop you.

Finally, I would like to thank the industry minister, Ian Macfarlane, for giving me the opportunity to drive these reforms as his parliamentary secretary. I thank Stephanie McKew from Minister Macfarlane's office and my staff member Aaron Parnell for their hard work. I thank ADC Commissioner Dale Seymour and the department for helping to shape a policy that is so right on so many fronts. I commend this bill to the House.

**Ms Ryan** (Lalor—Opposition Whip) (18:45): I too rise to speak on the Customs Amendment (Anti-dumping Measures) Bill (No. 1) 2015. I thank the parliamentary secretary, the member for Paterson, for the implicit praise for the Labor Party policy in our last government. I embrace the bipartisan approach to this policy area because this is an important issue for my electorate, where Arrium—OneSteel—is located, for Victoria's manufacturing base and for Australia.

Last week I had an interesting meeting with Brendan O'Brien, the director of O'Brien Boilers Services, a local boy whose company is situated in Sunshine in the electorate neighbouring mine. He is a proud business owner and director in our area who is innovating and developing some outstanding solutions to energy production across Australia. This business prides itself on quality and, having tried cheaper imported products—in particular, steel—finds the short-term benefit of a cheaper price is a false economy as the quality does not stand up over time; the long-term maintenance costs cancel out the short-term gain in production. In the west of Melbourne, an area proudly represented by many on this side of the House, anti-dumping laws are vital to ensure our local industries are competing on a level field. But while some businesses have the capacity to make that judgement call, many competing on tight margins do not feel that they can. This can have very detrimental impacts on business and, as we have seen in recent reports, on consumers.

A recent example—and one I am sure we will hear a little about tonight—is in the electrical space and it demonstrates the danger of product dumping in Australia. It is the story of cheap imported electrical cabling. This cheap Chinese cabling, imported to Australia and sold in most of our major hardware stores, has been used by electricians in the domestic...
building market—a small price gain for electricians competing for business that is usually awarded on cost. The problem is that this cabling has been recalled due to its inferior quality; the product becomes brittle and thus has the potential to start house fires. But how do you go about recalling electrical cabling? Most homeowners would not know what brand of cable was used when their house was being built, so they would be unlikely to make a claim. And then there is the question: at whose cost will the replacement be done? Surely not the poor electrician? The hardware retailer that supplied the substandard product? The Chinese manufacturer? This probably explains why only 15.5 kilometres of the 4,000 kilometres of defective electrical cabling known to have been used has been withdrawn—that is, less than 0.5 per cent of this dodgy product has been recalled.

These examples show why Labor in government had a strong record of protecting industry from dumping. Sure, it is important for our manufacturing industries—as we have already heard and will no doubt continue to hear—but it is also important for the average Australian consumer and the average Australian job. Labor established the Anti-Dumping Commission in 2013, after implementing anti-dumping legislation, and on several occasions amended the anti-dumping legislation to ensure it was focused and effective.

A recent example of the good work of the commission is the case involving Capral Aluminium, as we have just heard. Capral was significantly impacted by the rise of cheap Chinese aluminium being dumped into Australia for several years—and the company could probably be partly credited with the former government's decision to establish the Anti-Dumping Commission. Capral is a quality business with start-of-the-art facilities and a strong, well trained workforce. It was heavily impacted when cheap Chinese aluminium imports incurred only a seven per cent import duty when other countries were routinely charging 30 to 60 per cent. Capral brought this case to the Anti-Dumping Commission. The company recently received welcome news when Commissioner Dale Seymour found that the biggest Chinese exporter, PanAsia Aluminium, had indeed circumvented anti-dumping measures. As a result the Minister for Industry, Ian Macfarlane, approved a steep rise in duties. This is an example of the anti-dumping system working well and in Australia's interest.

This case also shows that our free trade agreements allow for anti-dumping duties to be imposed when dumping threatens to cause 'material injury to an Australian industry'. Apparently the US aluminium extrusion industry is enjoying a resurgence thanks to duties on Chinese product averaging 33 per cent but ranging as high as 400 per cent. China managed to capture 20 per cent of the US market by late 2009 but duties imposed since 2010 have crunched that to less than one per cent. Let's hope we have a similar outcome in Australia. Markets are tough places and Australia must play hard and fair. Our anti-dumping legislation means that we will be playing hard and fair—and 'fair' means not allowing countries to dump product and flood our markets the short-term with a view to killing off our industries in the long term, particularly where our product is superior and necessary for safety.

This legislation, which works to build on Labor's proud record, is a step in the right direction. We also welcome some new initiatives proposed to be introduced through regulation: the establishment of an anti-dumping information service; the expansion of the International Trade Remedies Advisory Service; the establishment of a market research function to enhance anti-dumping investigator capabilities; and the establishment of a central hotline for inquiries about Australia's anti-dumping systems. We welcome these measures
because, as we have heard before, these are complex areas of law. Labor welcomes these as sensible measures. They will assist Australian industries to get information and start proceedings where dumping threatens material injury to an Australian company.

There are, however, some aspects of the legislation that Labor does not support. We do not support the abolition of the International Trade Remedies Forum. This forum brings together representatives from manufacturers, producers and importers as well as industry associations, trade unions and some government agencies. The forum was established in 2011 and formalised in June 2013 and was designed to provide strategic advice and feedback to the government during the implementation of proposed reforms. It was the stakeholder body that gave good feedback to government throughout those reforms. Its existence ensures continued engagement across the sectors. It ensures that all voices are heard and that the processes and penalties are constantly reviewed.

It is an important forum. It is an important piece of the puzzle to ensure that those conversations continue. It is a feedback and ideas mechanism—something governments should value, particularly in the protection of our industries. Its continuation would ensure that valuable dialogue between industries continues in the future. Given the current government's support, when in opposition, for the establishment of the forum, and given there was never a discussion about its abolition during the election campaign, Labor is not sure why the abolition of the forum is now proposed. This body was constructive, had bipartisan support and did good work. I know Labor will suggest amendments in the Senate that will ensure its ongoing capacity. The so-called increase in flexibility for stakeholder engagement, which the government seeks, could easily be accommodated by the forum's current structures.

We also have reservations about the introduction of fees. This second aspect of the legislation is the ability to charge a fee for review when making an application for the review of an anti-dumping practice. Whilst there is some justification for a fee for service, the introduction of fees may have a negative impact—particularly for small businesses wanting to bring forward a case. This introduction of fees also goes against the coalition's election policy. The coalition's Policy to boost the competitiveness of Australian manufacturing states:

The current anti-dumping laws are cumbersome, slow and prohibitively expensive for many Australian businesses to utilise.

The introduction of a fee, therefore, seems to be counterproductive to that idea. And given that later this week the government plans to introduce a further round of red tape repeal, why is this hindrance on business being introduced? Despite arguments that they are mostly triggered by importers, fees could still be a barrier for local business.

I want the businesses in my area to be growing and innovating, and many already do this. The dumping of cheap imports in Australia, in my view, achieves so little—a cheap, short-term gain that has been shown to be negated by long-term quality issues. We need to have a strong anti-dumping legislative framework to assist our local businesses to compete on a level playing field, and, mostly, from my perspective, to ensure hard-won jobs are secure into the future, because in the west of Melbourne these are good and important jobs that we need to ensure continue.

I therefore support the legislation but question the two pieces that might make the laws and the commission less effective. We have already seen, even where successful claims have been made and prosecuted, that local jobs have been lost. We should be keeping measures in the
legislation that will ensure that there are continued conversations that includes all the important stakeholders. And when I say 'all the important stakeholders', I include the unions. I include the unions because of my very local experience where the unions, particularly in steel and aluminium, are working productively and collaboratively with business to protect the industry and to protect their jobs. A fee for review might discourage business, particularly small business, from prosecuting a case. So I have concerns there.

The abolition of the International Trade Remedies Forum could potentially hinder the responsiveness of government. Ensuring regular contact and dialogue with all stakeholders, including the unions, is critical to ensuring government remains responsive to this very live and shifting issue. As we have heard earlier, this is a very complex area of law, and so it remains live and there will be more loopholes found, I am sure.

I welcome the government's continuation of Labor's hard work on policy and legislation in this area—as do businesses, industries and unions in my electorate. In fact, this area of anti-dumping sees intense collaboration between business and unions. They are all working hard to stay competitive and working together to ensure the viability of the businesses and the jobs they have created. I commend the bill to the House but suggest the amendments to two areas.

Mr HUTCHINSON (Lyons) (18:58): Before the member for Lalor leaves, I note her comments. It surprised me a little bit that there are not more people speaking on this bill, because it really is an important bill. For anybody that cares about jobs in Australia—certainly in terms of steel and aluminium—the bill is absolutely critical, and I think we have all heard stories about issues where the quality of imported products is not exactly what it should be.

But I suppose when it comes to her point about electrical cables there are other processes, aside from the things that this bill addresses, by which quality and standards are considered—such as Standards Australia. I stand here as somebody who has, in my electorate, a very important business that has taken a case to the Anti-Dumping Commission. I will talk a little bit more about that later. Let it not be said that I am somebody that is not in favour of fair and, particularly, free trade.

I have been a very strong advocate for the work Minister Robb has done in terms of South Korea and Japan and, more recently, China in expanding the opportunities for exporters in our country to take advantage of those large markets to our north. But at all times there should be an element of fairness in that. I note the comments from the member for Lalor about the fundamental support for this legislation. It goes to what I think every Australian would expect of their legislators, and that is to the very edge of the obligations that we have under World Trade Organisation regulations. I do not think that is overreach, I do not think that is unreasonable, because I think they do want governments. I note what the previous administration did in this area, and acknowledge that, but they do not want business that will sacrifice local businesses at any cost. Yes, it is a competitive market, and yes, anybody in business understands that competition is a critical and vital part of delivering better prices and ultimately better products to consumers, and that is something we should all support.

So, there are a number of elements to the bill before us here, and, as I said, I will touch on one specific business in my electorate that has been impacted by that. I look forward also to the contribution by the member for Murray, because I know that she has been as passionate as anybody could be about her manufacturer, SPC, and issues they had regarding tomatoes. So, I
will not go into details there, but I will look forward to her contribution. The bill does a number of things, not least of which are in terms of a number of commitments we made before the last election. One was to move the Anti-Dumping Commission's responsibilities from Customs into the Department of Industry, because, at the end of the day, it is industry that is impacted by that. Notwithstanding obligations that Australia rightly has under WTO guidelines, this policy has allowed the reforms to go to what is quite within the guidelines but to the edge of the World Trade Organisation guidelines. They will put a much heavier onus on foreign exporters to cooperate with investigations if and when they are brought forward. And indeed, if they do not cooperate, they will reserve the right to impose those duties sooner.

And I think 'sooner' is the critical thing here, based on the experience I have had with Norske Skog in my electorate. This is a big business. This is a multinational business. But from their point of view, once they have put a case forward to the Anti-Dumping Commission and are ultimately given a preliminary adverse determination then the timing of that process is problematic for many businesses. I do appreciate the efforts and the intent that is within this bill to send those clear signals that are designed to send and change the behaviours of those exporters that are dealing in this space to react in a time frame that is more appropriate to the fact that we want to see that determination made in a way that allows the business to get on with business or at least limit the damage that is incurred.

The member for Lalor—and I will not dwell on this—made some points around the International Trade Remedies Forum. I am not an expert in this area, I must say, but in terms of stakeholders in issues like this we want efficient mechanisms, we want flexible mechanisms, and these are not the sorts of things you need to bring people kicking and screaming to, I do not suppose. Where there are stakeholders engaged in a process there, where there are concerns, where there are potential cases in this instance of dumping in this market, it is not going to be hard to engage with stakeholders. So, on a case-by-case and in a specific sense, the government's intention is to be able to bring together working groups, and no doubt those working groups would include the different representation that the member for Lalor suggested.

Again, I cannot understand why more people are not on the list to speak to this bill, because it really is important. Small businesses are the engine room here. The difficulty with the whole notion of the process to bring a case of anti-dumping is that it is indeed problematic for those small and medium enterprises. It is less problematic for a business like Norske Skog, whose case I will touch on in a minute. But I am particularly pleased to see that the initiatives within this are all designed to support small and medium enterprises that believe they have a case to make to the commission. And I think that is pretty consistent in terms of what this government is trying to do across a range of areas, not least of which started up with the Minister for Small Business, who is doing a wonderful job to support small business, including the grocery code he initiated in recent weeks. I think this is further evidence of the importance—in terms of procurement but also in this case antidumping—that this government places on small businesses. And many of these businesses are often family businesses, and the timing issue I touched on before is very problematic for some of these businesses.

As I mentioned, Norske Skog is located at Boyer, just near the town of New Norfolk in my electorate. They recently brought a case before the Anti-Dumping Commission in relation to newsprint, and, as I mentioned, they had a preliminary adverse determination. As much as
anything else, it is about confidence for that business to know that there is a process there that is supporting local manufacturers. If you take that notion of confidence and that notion of support for local businesses—in this case, manufacturing businesses—it leads on to how you might muse about or what you might consider to be a disincentive to invest in the future.

Norske have traditionally been involved in the production of newsprint. You do not have to be a rocket scientist to understand that consumption of newsprint around the world is declining for reasons that we are all well aware—we read our newspapers on iPads and a whole range of other things. This innovative business have branched out into the production of lightweight coated catalogue grade paper and they are the only manufacturer in Australia of that product. I am not privy to the process they went through to consider whether or not the substantial investment. A loan from the state government at the time in Tasmania was provided to assist them and there was also a grant from the federal government, as it was at the time, to assist them in the substantial investment—$80 million from memory—required for the establishment of a new line there.

I have seen that line first hand and the very high technical nature of that paper manufacturing process. If you pick up a newspaper and it has a catalogue in it, more often than not, that is where it has come from in Australia. There is a market for around 300-odd thousand tonnes—out of the 400-odd thousand tonnes of paper—of lightweight coated paper in Australia. At the moment, the Norske Skog mill at Boyer is supplying about 120,000 tonnes and we hope in time they will be supplying a little bit more than that into the Australian market. Obviously, they have got advantages in terms of their ability to supply on a just-in-time basis whereas a product coming from overseas takes a little bit longer.

But I come back to my fundamental point, which is that if we want businesses to invest they should have the confidence that there are appropriate mechanisms and a timely process in place—a process that is not so cost prohibitive that it is impossible, particularly for those small and medium enterprises, to bring forward cases initially seeking preliminary adverse determinations that would then be able to incur tariffs if it were deemed to be appropriate.

As I mentioned before, a number of other cases have been brought before the Anti-Dumping Commission recently. I will not go into the details of the member for Murray's contribution. I know she is very passionate about this. We have had cases of cheap timber. As a fellow Tasmanian, I cannot understand why on earth a country like Australia would need to bring cheap timber into this country. It is quite beyond us but that is another conversation. The member for Lalor touched on steel and quality issues that are sometimes there, but arguably that is the decision for customers. That is not an issue for this bill. Where there is product meeting a certain standard being brought in and it is being sold at a price less than what it might be in their domestic market, that is where the Anti-Dumping Commission's role comes in.

After talking to about this with the Rod Bender, the managing director at Norske Skog, I can say that the difficult thing for local companies trying to fight this is that it is difficult to prove in the required time the financial hardship experienced from the dumping. This is an important and relevant bill. I note the member for Lalor's concerns, but we do want efficient and flexible mechanisms that are much less formal, because the stakeholders involved will bring themselves to the table and, on an as-needs basis, we can bring together on specific
issues working groups that will no doubt include representation from a broad range of stakeholders. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms CHESTERS (Bendigo) (19:12): I rise to speak in favour of the amendment moved by the member for Makin to the Customs Amendment (Anti-dumping Measures) Bill (No. 1) 2015. In the beginning of my contribution, I want to briefly touch on a comment that we hear from parliamentarians, including the PM, quite often: 'We want to be a country that makes things.' It is a catchphrase that is just thrown out there. I will say that it is a seven-word slogan. So it is a step up from a three-word slogan. With 'We want to be a country that makes things', we are up to seven words. But, as a government and as a country, we need to be doing more than just mouthing more slogans when it comes to manufacturing. We need to ensure that we have strong manufacturing and that we are in fact a country that makes things.

There are three things I believe that, as a country, we should do to support our manufacturers, to support those businesses, and to support the people they employ in those businesses. Yes, we have got an antidumping bill before us, and that is one thing that government can do. A very simple thing that government can do is buy the things we make. What I would like to see from this government are government procurement policies that are being put forward where the government takes a proactive step to buy the things that we make. If we want to be a country that makes things, then let's show leadership and buy the things we make. I speak specifically about everything from defence manufacturing to the toilet paper that we have here at Parliament House. There is such a wide variety of things that we manufacture in this country, and we need to show leadership in our domestic market by buying the things we make.

I have just returned from a political-exchange delegation to Japan, where I had the great honour of talking to the Vice Minister of Defense about the fantastic Bushmaster, which is manufactured in Bendigo. I talked to the Japanese government about why they should buy the Australian Bushmasters; we as a government and country have purchased 1,000 Bushmasters. This demonstrates how good we are and how good this vehicle is. I did not know how many toilet papers we have bought but, if I had known, I would have been able to speak about those.

One of the things we can do to support manufacturing is to buy the things we make. Another thing government should start looking at, apart from antidumping, is in terms of government procurement when we put out to tender big chunks of money for capital works projects. The Prime Minister has said he wants to be the Prime Minister for infrastructure. There are a lot of dollars on the table for construction. There are a lot of materials and labour required, so let's see some leadership and have local content in those contracts. Talk to the states; talk to local government about how they can help secure local manufacturing jobs by putting local content in government procurement documents. This is another way the government can help support local manufacturing businesses and local manufacturing jobs.

The third way the government can help local manufacturers and those they employ is to have a strong antidumping regime., making sure we have a robust system so that our manufacturers and the people they employ are competing on an even playing field. This is what the antidumping legislation should be focused on. Dumping occurs when goods imported to Australia are priced lower than their normal value, which is usually the comparable price, in the ordinary course of trade, in the exporter's domestic market. Where
the price in the ordinary course of trade is unsuitable, the normal value may be determined by using comparable prices from exports to a third country or the cost of production plus selling the general administrative expenses and profits.

There are already established terms about what dumping is, and previous speakers have spoken on those. Previous speakers have also mentioned that dumping is not a prohibited practice, under the WTO agreements. The WTO agreements say, however, that countries which believe they are subject to antidumping can introduce bills, like this one, to introduce schemes, like those of the former Labor government, to ensure there is an even playing field. The current Australian antidumping legislation is based on the WTO Agreement on Implementation of Article VI of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade 1994, and the WTO Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures.

This WTO agreement seeks to bring together nations that have similar costs—for example, Canada, the US and the EU. It allows those countries to establish a system of ensuring that cheaper product from overseas is not dumped unfairly on their markets. This is an urgent matter. We need to make sure that we are not sitting idly by and watching otherwise competitive, profitable local industries—providing sustainable jobs in our local communities—sucumb to rampant trade malpractice employed by other nations and other companies in those nations. The consequences of inaction to adequately address dumping will be the loss of not only those businesses but also those workers, their families and their communities who are too often subject to loss of employment.

What we have seen, so far, is a lot of people speaking from the outer suburbs and regional areas. They know the impact that cheap product dumped on the domestic market can have on jobs in their local areas. My electorate is no different. We have a large pine plantation at Woodend. Some of that has started to be harvested and over the next five years it will continue to be harvested. One of the concerns of local workers in that industry is the cheap imports that are being dumped on the market and what they will do to value price—and the pressure it will put on the company to process its timber into the wood we need for our frames.

To give a scale of the difference between product dumped on our market and what we are able to produce locally, we are not just talking about wages cost: we are talking about product that is so cheap that even in the country of origin—China or parts of America—it is less than the cost of production. It is very hard for our domestic manufacturers to compete with product so cheap that it is being produced at a loss in the country of origin. It is not about us having high wages in this country or a high Australian dollar, it is about a coordinated effort by some companies and countries to dump cheap product on our market.

The sustainability of Australian manufacturing is under threat because of this cheap product being dumped. It is vital that government adopt a strict rule-of-law approach to illegal practices that is consistent with our World Trade Organization entitlements. It is important for us to defend our local industries; it is in the national interest. Local industry is worth defending. Australian manufacturing employs five times as many people as mining—five times as many! When you include agriculture, which is another area where product is quite often dumped on our market, it means that seven times as many people are employed in agriculture and manufacturing as they are in our mines. So we are talking about a significant
chunk of Australian workers whose jobs are at risk if we do not get the antidumping scheme right.

One of the arguments that is being put forward is that it is okay to have these cheap products come onto the market because they provide a better deal for consumers. This is simply an illusion, because the short-term prices remove local jobs and local industries. Prices will increase as local competition is killed off. Dumping cheap products is a deliberate strategy. Once the local competitors are gone, the price of that product will increase—and that is just the way the market works. This is why it is so important that we follow the lead of other countries around the world when it comes to antidumping. They make sure that their local industries and their local jobs are protected.

I want to acknowledge the work that some of the industry leaders have played in this debate. They have been very vocal in this area for quite some time. I know that many in the government like to criticise the role of unions, particularly the AMWU, the AWU and the CFMEU. They have formed, in partnership with employers and industries, a joint initiative, a round table, to put on the record the need for very strong antidumping legislation rules to make sure that we are doing our bit to protect jobs. In many ways, this joint round table is doing the work of government. It is putting out there why Australia should be exercising its rights under the WTO to standing up and protect our manufacturing. The round table is in response to an urgent concern of members who work in these industries about their local jobs and local products being undercut by cheap imports.

There are two ways that other countries and their companies are undermining our locally produced products: one is through the cheaper product coming in; the other thing is by having a number of subsidies, which in many ways support what is going on. A note to the people who are drafting the text of the free trade agreements would be: perhaps when it comes to the steel, forestry and other industries, there should be some discussion about the subsidies that some countries have for their steel and forestry industries. Their subsidies prop up these manufacturers, who then go on to dump their cheap products onto our market.

This bill is complex and involves a number of technical changes. Two parts outlined in the bill are controversial, and this is why I am speaking today to the amendments. The first is the abolition of the International Trade Remedies Forum. This forum was initiated to keep the conversation going. The forum is a stakeholder body comprised of representatives such as manufacturers, producers, importers, industry associations, trade unions and government agencies. Perhaps it is because the forum involves trade unions that the government wants to abolish it. As I have demonstrated, our trade unions have taken a leading role in standing up and saying that we need to do more as a country. We want to see our government do more to protect and support local manufacturing and to create that equal playing field. The forum provides advice and feedback to the government on the operation of the antidumping scheme, the implementation and monitoring of the government’s reforms on antidumping and other information which may lead to further improvements in an antidumping system. Because we are dealing with overseas companies, because we are dealing with an international market, it is important to have a body or a forum like this to continually review whether the rules we have in place are doing enough.

All the speakers that I can see on the list for this debate have local examples which they will be speaking about. What is really important is that we keep the conversation going about
how we can continue to ensure that we have the best antidumping regime for our country so that we can support local manufacturing jobs. If we want to be a country that makes things it is important that we not only buy the things we make, that we not only ensure we as taxpayers get the best value for our dollar about securing local content but that we also have the strongest antidumping scheme possible to create a fair playing field. This is important not just for the manufacturers and the companies but also for the people who work for them. There are five times as many people working in manufacturing than in our mines and almost seven times as many people working in agriculture and manufacturing— *(Time expired)*

**Mr CRAIG KELLY** (Hughes) (19:28): I have great pleasure in rising tonight to speak on the Customs Amendment (Anti-dumping Measures) Bill (No. 1) 2015 and the Customs Tariff (Anti-Dumping) Amendment Bill 2015. I would like to make a few initial comments about dumping because you can hear from the member for Bendigo’s contribution that there is much confusion about this issue in many people’s minds. Provisions against dumping are not about so-called cheap imports. Provisions about dumping are simply about allowing a country to take action against another country whose goods are being imported at a lower cost than what they are being sold at in the home market. It is not about predatory pricing systems, selling below cost or cheapness; it is about where country A sells something for one price in their home market but when they go out into the international playing field, the export market, they sell it at a lower price. Under the World Trade Organization provisions that in itself is what is considered dumping.

Ultimately, it is simply a form of geographic price discrimination. We could call it ‘international geographic price discrimination’. One thing that has always surprised me—in fact, I find it quite hypocritical—is that, if we say that geographic price discrimination is bad when we do it across international borders, how then is it an acceptable practice if it is done across interstate borders or locally within regions?

In our Trade Practices Act, we have no provisions whatsoever, unlike many other countries, to enact or have prohibitions on localised or internal geographic price discrimination. The World Trade Organization says that, if that happens internationally, it is actually bad because it can harm businesses.

It is also very difficult to prove a case of dumping. How can you compare the price in the home market with the price in the export market? You are not making an apples-for-apples comparison. How do you determine the normal price in a home market and compare the two? We know prices in today’s global markets change quickly. They respond to demand. Just look at how quickly the prices of some of our commodities from iron ore to coal and oil change and in such a short period of time.

How do you make allowances for different quantity purchases? If the quantities sold in the local home market are a thousand units but 500 units for the export market, how do you make comparisons between the two? There are also credit risks. Are there greater credit risks in the home or export market? What about statutory warranties? A supplier in Australia often has to cover a lot of statutory warranties, which adds costs to selling in Australia; but those costs may not exist in foreign countries. This makes it very difficult for Customs officials to make an apples-for-apples comparison to determine if there has been a case of dumping. That is probably why it has been such a difficult area in the past.
We also need to admit that this is important legislation. It is very important that in Australia we get the legislation right—the balance right—and that it is not simply a panacea for competition in Australia to stop cheap imports.

I know the member for Bendigo was very quick to say that she wants us to be a country that manufactures goods. I think everyone in this parliament would say that but, if we are going to be a country that manufactures goods, we need to get our costs locally under control. We need to make sure that the cost of doing business here in Australia is not putting us at a competitive disadvantage. Of course we saw that under the last Labor government. They decided that Australian industry should be burdened with a carbon tax. So if I was manufacturing a product here in Australia, I would have the burden of a carbon tax; but if I was manufacturing that exact same product overseas, I would not pay a carbon tax. Misguided, confused policies like that simply put Australian industry at a competitive disadvantage and make it harder and harder for people to manufacture products in Australia.

We have got rid of the carbon tax and we have seen the biggest fall in electricity prices on record. That has helped make Australian companies more competitive, but there is still a lot more to do. We have seen the renewable energy target. If you mandate or force onto the market a higher cost and inefficient production, you simply force the price up. The renewable energy target simply forces up the price of electricity. The higher the percentage and the more gigawatts we have under the renewable energy target, the higher the cost of electricity. It is as simple as that.

We also have the threat of an ETS. We know that the current policy of the opposition, should they ever come to government, is to implement an ETS upon Australian industry. Again, many of our overseas competitors would not actually have to pay that. It would be another burden on Australian industry, which is the reason why our costs are higher.

I come to the importance of lowering electricity costs. We have seen the most disgraceful and shameful scare campaign in New South Wales on the privatisation of electricity costs. We have New South Wales members of parliament and their union mates running a terrible, disgraceful scare campaign, claiming that privatisation would lead to an increase in electricity prices.

Mr Husic: Terrible!

Mr CRAIG KELLY: I note the member for Chifley is sitting at the table. I hope he will show some leadership and condemn his fellow New South Wales state parliamentarians and say what a disgraceful scare campaign it is. I hope the member for Chifley will show some leadership in that respect and not join the throng of those who are carrying on with this nonsense—this misleading scare campaign.

We then heard from Rod Sims, Chairman of the ACCC, that if the privatisation goes ahead, electricity prices will be lower. We have had Bob Carr, the former New South Wales state Premier—and very highly distinguished foreign minister well known for his requirements of fine-quality pyjamas on first-class flights—also agreeing that electricity needs to be privatised.

We have had the former New South Wales Treasurer come out and say that costs will be lower. We have had ex-Labor Party member after ex-Labor Party member come out and say: 'Costs will be lower if we privatise electricity.' Perhaps the member for Chifley sitting there at
the table could come and add his voice to his former colleagues like the former resources minister, Mr Martin Ferguson, who came out today and said he was ashamed of the Labor Party for not doing the right thing and standing up for the privatisation of electricity. I see the member for Chifley has let this opportunity go. I cannot say that I have not given him the opportunity.

In lowering our costs, we need to look at our tax rates. We currently have a corporate tax rate of 30 per cent, which puts us out of step with our near neighbours. If we look at other countries, in Hong Kong it is 16.5, in Taiwan it is 17 and in Singapore it is 17. At 30 per cent, we are simply out of step, and again that puts more pressure and makes our industry less competitive.

I know some on the other side would like to raise company tax because they think it would raise more revenue. I suppose if you sit down and think of it on a very basic level, which I know many members of the opposition do, you could come up with that. They think that if we raise the rate of tax we will get more money in and that will give us more money to spend. But our history has shown the exact opposite. Over the last 50 years, every single time that we have lowered the rate of company tax, do you know what has happened? We have not got less revenue; we have got more revenue. We have got more revenue not only in gross terms but also—the most important measure—as a percentage of GDP. Every time our corporate tax rate has been lowered the Treasury has received more revenue as a percentage of GDP. So, even if you like the idea of big government and plenty of money to spend, the best way you can get that is by lowering the corporate rate of tax, because that will also assist in making our Australian industries more competitive.

This bill works to get the balance right. If your antidumping provisions are too generous, too easy to bring claims under, you have some of the situations which we have seen in America. Many American companies in the furniture and bedding industry brought claims against Chinese manufacturers and very punitive dumping duties were placed on those manufacturers. But that did not actually do anything to protect or save American jobs. It did not do anything to reduce the flow of imports of Chinese furniture into the United States. It simply worked as an anticompetitive tool. That is why I support the bill—because it works on getting the balance right. That is what we need to do—get the balance right in this dumping area.

There are a couple of things that the bill does. It establishes the Anti-Dumping Information Service and increases the number of international trade remedy advisers to better support business engaging with the system. It directs an Anti-Dumping Commissioner to impose provisional duties at day 60 of an investigation where relevant conditions are met. That is most important, because where there are cases of dumping it is very important that the legislation and the system we have in place work quickly. There is no point in bringing in countervailing duties or taking action months and months after the action has occurred, because by then the horse has bolted and the damage has been done. So reducing that to 60 days is a very important provision. The bill also provides less tolerance for uncooperative exporters. If companies do not respond to requests for information, the Anti-Dumping Commission will proceed with their investigations on the basis of information which could be from an application brought forward by Australian industry. Again, this is an important provision.
In the final minutes left I would like to quickly say that I do not support the amendment proposed by the opposition. The amendment involves the International Trade Remedies Forum, which was set up by the previous Labor government. For all intents and purposes that forum is redundant. We know that it is stacked. By its regulations, it is compulsory that it has a discriminatory provision where four members must be union members. I know that the opposition likes to have these things to give jobs to their union mates. This is an unnecessary, redundant provision, and I oppose the amendment. All up, I commend this bill to the House. It is a good piece of legislation. It works on getting that balance right, without going too far as we have seen in countries like the United States, to make sure that we give Australian industry the ability to bring claims and to act quickly where a dumping case comes up.

As I have said, ultimately, we need to make sure that in government we work to get the costs off Australian industry. We cannot save Australian industry through antidumping legislation. The only way we can save Australian industry is to get their costs down—to get their electricity costs down, to get the taxes down, to get the red tape off their back, to let them get out there and compete on an international playing field. I know from my own personal experience before coming to this place that our Australian companies are good enough to go out and compete internationally and win export orders. That is what we can do, and that is what we want to encourage them to do. We want to encourage our businesses in Australia to get out there and fight on that international playing field, to take the risk and to use their innovation. We have done that with the trifecta of free trade agreements with South Korea, Japan and China. That is what we want to do: incentivise our industry, incentivise our exporters and incentivise our entrepreneurs to get out there. We want to make sure that if they set up a business in Australia—and that is what this bill does, too—they will have effective provisions against dumping and there will be a quick remedy. I commend this bill to the House.

Ms MacTIERNAN (Perth) (19:42): I strongly support the amendment that has been moved by my colleague. I support the underlying thrust of the legislation but I certainly object to the removal of the industry forum, and I will go through each of these separately. I think it is really important for us to understand that we need antidumping laws because markets are not as perfect as people like to imagine. We know that an industry can be under attack from overseas competitors who flood a market with a product at below the cost it takes to develop that product. Of course, one of the advantages of doing that, particularly if you have small market like Australia, is that, for a relatively incidental cost for the company doing that, they can ensure that in that process they can eliminate some of their competition. So smaller countries like Australia, in particular, have to be very, very vigilant about this to ensure that our markets are not improperly and unfairly overrun. We do understand and support the fundamental notion that we are in a globalised economy, but, just as we have within our own country internal laws to prevent unfair competition and certain commercial practices which actually are anything other than equitable and fair, where people can use their position in the market to unfairly disadvantage their competition, likewise we need to do this in an international forum. It is a very real problem for us in Australia.

In Western Australia, one of the areas where there is strong concern about improper pricing of steel is in the lintel industry. Our standard technique of construction in Western Australia is somewhat different to the sticks that you hammer together in the eastern states. Our standard
form of construction is double brick, and so we have a much higher strength lintel. Our manufacturers are very concerned that this galvanised product is coming in from China at about one-third of the price that it can be produced in Western Australia. There is concern that this is a galvanised product. Galvanisation is a risky process, where there needs to be a great deal of care, otherwise people can be injured. There is certainly a level of disbelief that that product is indeed being produced in China for that price. Unfortunately for many manufacturers, particularly the smaller outfits that we tend to have in Western Australia, the delays and the complexity involved in taking an anti-dumping case really militate against it being an effective remedy. The Steel Institute's James England, based in WA, said: 'The delays are the most costly part of the whole exercise. It is assumed the imposition of a tariff against dumped goods will stop the goods damaging our firms, but it is too late to act after the damaged good has been sold.' He went on to talk about how that underpriced good goes right through the supply chain, making it more and more difficult to take action against complex transformed products.

We support and welcome the government continuing the work that Labor has done. This is one of these areas where we have seen governments each building upon the initiatives of previous governments to strengthen these positions. In particular, some of the provisions in relation to making it easier to establish that there has been a breach and ensuring that remedy is available earlier are really important, because delay, as I said, is one of the great impediments to taking an action, as is the complexity. But these things will be totally ineffective if we are not properly resourcing the Australian Anti-Dumping Commission. I note with some concern that Australia's only solar panel manufacturer, Tindo Solar, are seeking to bring an action against the importation of certain crystalline silicon solar panels, which they believe—and they seem to have some evidence—are well below production cost and that many companies have collapsed or been absorbed in recent years as the global supply wreaked havoc through the solar manufacturing industry. So we have a situation where there is possibly a problem in China itself leading to our markets being flooded and our capacity for any local manufacturing of solar panels has arguably been compromised, but, for the second time, the Australian Anti-Dumping Commission has put off the investigation of this matter because it claims it simply does not have the resources given the heavy workload that it has. It is all very well to come in here and talk about a new legislative framework that is going to make it easier, but, if, as with the case of Tindo Solar, you cannot get any action taken because the entity does not have sufficient funds, it is all for naught. So I think that we are going to have to be very vigilant in ensuring that this legislation is something other than a hollow gesture and that the ADC is in a position to take the action that we are here empowering it to do.

I want to talk a bit about the other aspect of this, which is the abolition of the tripartite consultation body. This is a very, very disappointing example of a tendency that we have seen with this government—the extreme anti-union attitude that it has, which ultimately is in fact very destructive to our economy. When we established the International Trade Remedies Forum, it was a body that represented business and the unions. Indeed, one might argue that it had a singularity of interest here in ensuring that Australian manufacturing and agriculture in particular were being given a level playing field on which to compete. I know that, as has been said here previously, since the Abbott government has come to power the forum has not been active, and this has, I think, been to the detriment of business. When representatives
came to Perth in the first half of 2013, after the body was formed, it was very useful for manufacturers to come to this forum to get a clearer understanding of what was going on and to know that their concerns as stakeholders were being taken into the heart of government.

I think that it is really interesting to compare this ideological, anti-union position that we have here in Australia with what we see in Germany. It is interesting to look at an article that was written last year entitled 'From sick man of Europe to economic superstar', which talks about Germany's resurgent economy, and how they have managed to survive. They have had their difficulties, but when you consider what else the rest of the Western world has been through, they have managed to, in some very trying circumstances, keep their economy afloat while bailing out and underwriting the economies of southern Europe.

The article talks about the distinctive characteristic of the labour market institutions—those employee associations, trade unions and work councils that have been established and which have underpinned German economic success. It really allowed Germany to react with much greater flexibility than we saw in other jurisdictions during the GFC. This is because they have a system that has buy-in from across the society. They have a system of wage floors which are negotiated periodically between trade unions and employer associations, typically at an industry or regional level. This really has been the corner-stone of furthering the common interests in improving productivity. They have, in these agreements, created a flexibility within the wage system to increase or decrease the hours of work, which really has been a major contributor to Germany being able to keep the unemployment rate low during the GFC. We can see that even under conservative administrations like Angela Merkel's there is an acceptance of the usefulness of having these tripartite arrangements—the usefulness of having every quotient in the industrial equation engaged in trying to solve these problems and trying to solve these issues.

Unfortunately, what we have here, is the reverting-to-type Abbott, primitive, conservative, old-school response to the fact of unions and their involvement. That is not a creative way to take our economy forward. I think that this is indicative of what we see the government doing. I understand there are a great number of tripartite bodies that this government are either dismantling or taking the union membership from. I think that will make government the poorer. Certainly, it will not boost our productivity or our effectiveness.

These anti-dumping laws are very important. We must make sure that we ensure—in our relatively small economy, operating in a global environment—that our manufacturers, agricultural producers, and service providers have a fair and proper basis for competing in that international community. I will make the comment: it amounts to nothing if we are not going to provide adequate resources to the ADC to implement the changes that we are going to be making here today.

Dr STONE (Murray) (19:56): I, too, rise to support the Customs Amendment (Anti-dumping Measures) Bill (No. 1) 2015. I have spoken often in this place about Australia's anti-dumping regime. In the past I have been condemning it in saying how poorly it has served the Australian nation, particularly our small, medium and larger sized enterprises. But tonight I can stand here proudly and say that this coalition government has brought to an end the travesty of justice that too often was the experience of Australian manufacturers or suppliers of goods when it came to trying to have an anti-dumping regime delivered to stop dumped imports.
It is a fact that, for years, Australia's anti-dumping regime was considered virtually non-enforceable. We had company after company finding that it took forever to bring a case; that costs were prohibitive; that they were buried in red-tape. The government officials themselves did not seem to be interested. In fact, they seemed to take delight in finding no case to answer. I wonder if that was perhaps because, if there were a case brought against a decision in the WTO—a decision challenging Australia's determination to impose an anti-dumping set of duties—then the government department would have to pay the cost of that particular challenge.

All of that is behind us I am very pleased and proud to say. I am also pleased and proud to say that a lot of the changes were brought through the experience and tenacity of the CEO of SPC Ardmona, Mr Peter Kelly. He had the most extraordinary experience at the height of the problems that surrounded the survival of the last Australian fruit processing company. He was trying to maintain exports, and, at the time when the dollar was much higher, the Australian canned fruits and preserved fruits were some 30 per cent of SPC Ardmona's earnings in the export markets. When the dollar went beyond parity with the US currency, those markets were lost and we saw a flood of imported, cheap and, too frequently, dumped product—tomatoes from Italy; peaches from South Africa; peaches from China—flooding into the Australian market. They were snapped up by supermarkets and the hospitality industry, who loved the big three-kilo cans of tomatoes, for example, which sold on average for $8 or $9 compared to $13 or $14 for the same sized can of Australian product.

The difference of course is that the Chinese imported cans of, say, peaches have been tested and have been found to contain levels of lead which are way above human tolerance and are very dangerous to health, particularly for the elderly, the young and those with compromised immunity systems. But the public was not to know that, given that all they saw was this product on our shelves. No antidumping actions were taken against them and hence the incredibly cheap prices simply added to the profit margins of, in particular, the two big supermarkets, Coles and Woolworths.

With this new regime that the coalition has ushered in, we are going to reduce the time for deadlines for submissions from 40 days to 37 days. Three days difference might not seem much, but this is the minimum time allowed under the WTO. Every day that you have dumped product accumulating in the big supermarket warehouses that will then be sold in competition against your Australian product will cut your transactions. This regime will serve the interests of our Australian industry.

The government are also going to crack down when overseas producers refuse to cooperate with antidumping investigations. It has been a bit of a joke in the past where you could simply refuse to give information or claim that the product that was being investigated was different—for example, that it was organic tomatoes not non-organic tomatoes—and therefore should not be treated as like product. This was of course absurd and a nonsense, even when Coles stamped their cans of imported dumped tomatoes as 'Certified Australian Organic Consistent.' Indeed, there were no agreed organic guidelines at the time but Coles were very happy to put that label on the product. It often confused the customer, who saw the word 'Australian,' picked up the can and imagined they were in fact consuming an Australian tomato product.
Also, if you have not given adequate information and have not responded to a request for data, we will proceed with the investigation based on the information already supplied. That might be the information supplied by the Australian industry bringing the case. To me, that seems only fair. For too long it has been all the other way.

We will strengthen enforcement of the provisions of the WTO agreement on subsidies and countervailing measures. This will be implemented by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which represents Australia at the WTO and other international forums. This will give us a stronger stance internationally and more transparency on foreign subsidies, including those identified during antidumping investigations. Let me say that when the antidumping case was brought against Italian canned tomatoes by SPC Ardmona, of the some 90 separate importers investigated, about 88 or so of those were found to be dumping the product—in other words, selling it below the normal price that was charged in the home country. But two of the companies got away with it. They were found to have dumped but below the two per cent threshold, so they did not have the dumping duties applied to their product. It just so happened that those two brands supplied more than half the market in Australia.

One argument used at the time by SPC Ardmona was that the antidumping agency had not taken into consideration the subsidies that were embedded in the low prices that the Italian tomato manufacturers could pay to their growers. Under the EU agricultural reform policies they were receiving subsidies, which could then be passed on to the manufacturer in the form of very cheap raw material for canning. The SPC Ardmona case has now been brought back against the remaining two large Italian exporters of tinned tomatoes. This time the subsidies embedded in the products will be given proper examination. So there we can see how the antidumping regime has evolved in Australia to be fairer, more transparent and will now more closely conform to WTO guidelines and benchmarks.

The government will also provide better advice to Australian businesses with a hotline. We will enhance the support services with the International Trade Remedies Adviser, in particular, by increasing the number of advisers. We will establish an antidumping information service, to provide new information about products including market analysis. All of this is very important because too often in Australia, as I said before, we have seen poor representation of Australia's interests by the antidumping agency, until these amendments came into being.

With the previous regime, we also had a culture of not appearing to care. I have a lot of faith in the new director in particular. I think he has national interests at heart. But I am also pleased to see that we will no longer always take the side of the imported product, because let me give you one short story. At the height of the dumping activity in Australia, when the dollar was so high, when we were in the middle of the worst drought on record, there was a huge volume of peaches imported from South Africa. They came into the country and ended up on our supermarket shelves. Both Australia and New Zealand at the same time were requested to consider bringing in antidumping duties by their respective industries. In the case of New Zealand that antidumping regime immediately found on behalf of the New Zealand fruit growers that this South African peach product was dumped. They immediately reimposed antidumping duties that had in fact been in place before.

At the same time, the Australian antidumping regime, looking at the same product and the same complaints, ruled that there was some antidumping action but that the Australian
company simply had to get over it. They were not going to have the support and experience the fairness of imposing antidumping duties against the South African tinned peach product and it could continue to flood into the Australian market. And it did.

Very recently there was an extraordinary news item out of South Africa, which trumpeted the fact that the South African consumer protection and competition agency itself was fining these companies that Australia had let off the hook; they were charged with anticompetitive behaviour in export markets. Here was South Africa saying their own companies had not done right by their behaviour in export markets, and they, therefore, fined them. Yet Australia's own antidumping regime had let these same companies off the hook, while New Zealand had set antidumping duties to protect its own industry. That is a classic case of how poor Australia's antidumping regime has been in the past.

Under the previous government, they did not seem to care. They simply had the attitude that anything that gives cheap product to the Australian consumer will do. They seemed to share the same notion as Coles and Woolworths that 'down down', 'everyday, low prices' best serve the Australian grocery buyer. Unfortunately, we have seen in very recent days that that cheap, down down, everyday, low price can sometimes lead to very serious problems with food safety when a company disguises the true country of origin of food, using the 'made from local and imported ingredients' poor labelling.

We have had the hepatitis A outbreak in imported frozen berries from China. I mentioned the lead in the tinned peaches, and they were assessed and found to be contaminated over 12 months ago. There has been more recent testing of tinned peaches from China where arsenic and lead are under very close scrutiny. I am very fearful because, in particular, the big hospitality size cans of this product, typically, are served to people in institutions like hospitals, prisons, the armed forces, Defence forces, school canteens and other types of public institutions. These products are fed to people without them being able to check a label and see what its country of origin is. I have said that we have real contamination issues with heavy metals. But there are also other problems like biological contaminations, such as with Escherichia coli, which is an indicator of faecal contamination, and hepatitis A.

So we have had a whole raft of problems affecting the Australian food manufacturers when they have had to compete against cheap, dumped, imported product with few fair and reasonable results being delivered by the previous antidumping regime. They have had to deal with complex, confusing and probably deliberately non-transparent labelling laws, which allowed a lot of the imported, dumped, cheap product to compete with Australian product without its actual origins being well known and well understood by the buyer. We have also had a problem of poor food security checking at our border. We have product coming into the country now which has serious food safety issues associated with it.

This recent scare of hepatitis A in frozen berries, accompanied by the arsenic and lead contamination in more imported canned fruit products, combined with this new and improved antidumping regime, spells a new potential capacity to compete for our Australian manufacturers. Whether they are in the business of making aluminium, car parts or clothing, we have to have fair play. The World Trade Organization understands this and they have had rules in place for a very long time. Australia has been gutless in the past. We are courageous on the battlefields. We are courageous on the sporting grounds. When it has come to sticking up for Australian enterprise, we have run away. We have hidden our heads for reasons that are
quite beyond me. I commend this Customs Amendment (Anti-dumping Measures) Bill (No. 1) 2015 to the House. I hope that we will never again see the cowardly behaviour of an agency like we had for too long in the form of the Australian antidumping regime.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR (Gorton) (20:11): I am very happy to rise and contribute to this debate and, indeed, support the Customs Amendment (Anti-dumping Measures) Bill (No. 1) 2015, however modest it is. It is an improvement to the current arrangements and it may provide some further support to local industry that has been confronted with serious challenges by antidumping and by certain companies who have sought to breach WTO provisions. For that reason, whilst there might be some amendments foreshadowed by the opposition to strengthen the bill, I think it does assist with efforts by government to ensure that our local manufacturers are not unfairly affected by improper, unlawful conduct by those companies seeking to take some of the market share.

But, to place it into some context, I think it is important to reflect upon some of the very significant measures that were outlined and implemented by the previous Labor government in relation to dumping. As Minister for Home Affairs, I had responsibility for this area of public policy in 2010, 2011 and 2012. As a result, I met with many of the significant manufacturers who were dealing with a number of challenges, some of which were beyond the control of government but, nonetheless, were ones that were causing them great difficulty, namely and in particular, the exchange rate.

These manufacturers, like the tourist industry, were dealing with a very high and persistent dollar, which, as you know, can be helpful to Australians who, for example, want to travel overseas. It is a wonderful thing to have such purchasing power to travel to New York and have a dollar that has more value than the American greenback, and it is good for importers to purchase goods. That can, indeed, be a benefit to importers or consumers who are purchasing imported goods. But it may not be for those manufacturers exporting and for the tourist industry relying upon incoming tourists—and, of course, the value of their currency has a great sway on whether they choose Australia as a destination or choose another destination—and upon the local tourist, who sought to go overseas because of that advantage. For manufacturers exporting there were great challenges in that period.

As a result, we looked at our anti-dumping mechanism through the prism of whether it was of any use to our manufacturing sector and concluded that significant reforms were required to protect the interests of our sector, to ensure that jobs were not unduly lost and to ensure that sectors of our economy such as manufacturing and tourism thrived, not just survived. For that reason, as minister at the time, I introduced a whole range of anti-dumping measures which, if I may say so, were the most significant reforms that had been undertaken in this area of public policy for at least 20 years. It was really responding to the needs of manufacturers. I have recently spoken to OneSteel, BlueScope and other significant employers in this country. They tell me that those reforms, in combination with the further reforms by Minister Combet and further work done by Minister Clare in the portfolio that I held a little earlier, have led to very significant benefits for our manufacturers. These reforms were all in keeping with our WTO obligations but, in combination, sent a very strong message to those who wanted to take a market share of our economy that they would have to do so within the rules.

What I found when I examined comparable anti-dumping regimes around the world was that our regime was probably the least effective. The Productivity Commission, in many
cases, does good work but, despite what I found, the PC’s review of anti-dumping sought to weaken the regime, to weaken the support for local industry and to introduce measures that would have acted contrary to the interests of manufacturers. So I was not in an easy position in having to receive a report that I supported in part but not substantively. From that point, we as a government introduced new reforms which were welcomed by industry and by unions. And there were further reforms undertaken by the then ministers Combet and Clare. So there was a suite of reforms throughout that entire period because it was so obvious that the acute impact of the exchange rate on our manufacturing sector was such that, if we could not provide ways to mitigate it—and one of them was to use the quite reasonable approach of approving our anti-dumping regime—there would have been more job losses and more company failures. It would have been a terrible thing.

This bill is more modest in its reach but consistent with the approach taken by the previous government. While I applaud the government for its introduction, I would refer to the fact that an amendment has been moved to retain the International Trade Remedies Forum. The government wants to abolish that forum. I think that is the wrong move and it is critical that the forum be maintained. It is of great use. If you speak to manufacturers around the country who rely upon government support and this particular regime, you would find almost universal support for that forum. Therefore, it would be a mistake for the government to abolish such a forum—and that is why Labor has moved an amendment to that effect.

The one thing this government seems to have failed to do in areas of public policy is to maintain stakeholders in the process. We accept there are times when you can remove obsolete bodies that are not being effective. But there are many bodies where you have wonderful people from industry and other walks of life providing really good advice to government, and the idea of just sacking all those people under the heading of getting rid of red tape or getting rid of bureaucrats—they are not bureaucrats, they are not public servants; they are industry people—is a big mistake. In relation to this area, whether it is the International Trade Remedies Forum or other areas of public policy, the government would do well to think about the use of mechanisms that provide a platform for industry or others to inform government.

We therefore seek some amendments. But it is good to see that the coalition, whilst failing to do anything when they were in government during the Howard years, have ensured that there is maintenance of the reforms that we implemented. Specifically, on 2 March 2011 we moved to make changes to laws governing the process for reviewing anti-dumping measures. Dumping is when an overseas country exports its goods to another country at a price that is below the price it charges in its home market or below the cost of production. That is the essence of dumping. We sought to respond to that because it was unduly prevalent in some sectors of our economy. What we did was put in place a bunch of reforms. The legislation, for example, outlined a specific procedure for applying for revocation separate to the existing review process. The bill clarified that, if a party wants the minister to revoke anti-dumping measures, it must initiate the request or apply within a certain time. This move, we argued then, would make the review process more open and transparent, giving Australian manufacturers adequate time to respond to an application for revocation.

There were many impediments—and I just point to that example—to enabling manufacturers, particularly smaller manufacturers, to be involved in reviewing a decision as
to whether or not a good had been dumped in our economy. Removing those impediments and providing support for industry has led to a much better result. For example, I have been advised by local companies that they have won cases on review that they believe they would never have won without the reforms that were undertaken in the period when Labor was last in office. Therefore, it is good to see that in this anti-dumping measure—other than the wrongful step of looking to repeal a forum that I think is of use to government—there is no effort to turn back those reforms that were so important to local industry.

Local manufacturers like BlueScope Steel and OneSteel—those very innovative and remarkably good companies—were confronted by the higher Australian dollar and overcame that challenge. Then, assisted by good government, they overcame some improper conduct by some exporters to Australia, which were in breach of anti-dumping rules. As a response to those things those companies have come through very well. If you look, for example, at the profit margins of some of those companies, you will find that they are now in the black—and they were in the black in recent times. That was not the case five years ago. That was not even the case four years ago.

We—employers, unions and government—should collectively be very proud of the fact that what we did back then was the right thing to do. It has been affirmed to me as recently as last Tuesday, when I was meeting with the very senior managers of these companies, who informed me that those reforms made the difference between whether they found themselves running at a profit or a loss. That is how significant it was. I pay credit to this government for not seeking to change those, but instead to add to some measures. I would only like to suggest—I do so by way of finishing—that we do not proceed with removing the forum that is referred to within the regime. This particular forum, the International Trade Remedies Forum, is very important. It should not be abolished. If the government accepts the amendment I think it would mean that there would be a unanimous position—it would certainly be a position of the two major parties, if not of all parties—that this bill should be accepted in its entirety.

Mr RAMSEY (Grey) (20:25): Australia is undoubtedly open for business. We are open for free and fair trade, but we are not open for unfair trade. That is why we have laws against the dumping of products into our Australian market. I am currently the chair of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture and Industry, and at the current time we are involved with an inquiry into the circumvention of Australia's anti-dumping laws and regulations. From about August and September last year, in my position as chair of the committee, I received repeated contacts from our manufacturing industries—the steel industry, the aluminium industry, the food industry and forestry, just to name some of the respondents. I give some credit to the previous government—and the member for Gorton has just been on his feet—who had a go in this area and tried to make some difference. I think their legislation has made some difference, but I do not think we have wrapped it all up yet. I think there is a way to go.

I must say that since the previous government's legislation was implemented in the middle of last year, I have been somewhat surprised that only one company—up until a few days ago, at least—had lodged a complaint under the new legislation. That was Capral. The recent ruling by the Anti-Dumping Commissioner, not only imposing a duty on the offending aluminium products but backdating the penalty to the time the application was lodged, has
given Australian industry some heart. However, anti-dumping rulings, and the effective circumvention of them, is a slippery beast indeed—a little like taxation law. We often make alterations to laws surrounding tax in Australia, and as soon as the smartest brains in parliament come up with some laws to stop taxation evasion, then the smartest brains in corporate law and accounting work out ways to get around them. It seems to be the same with anti-dumping rulings.

My committee has been listening to witnesses in the last few weeks, and in fact Capral Limited was in to speak to us back on 26 February. Referring to the Anti-Dumping Commissioner's decision to impose a penalty—and a back penalty retrospectively—on the importer, Mr Phil Jobe said:

One of the aspects of this decision we were not pleased with was the retrospectivity back to April. We were very pleased that the principle was achieved, but in this case the importers set up a $2 company just after the inquiry was announced and starting buying, we understand, the bulk of the metal through that company, which was not listed in the original application, and by that very simple act they appear, at this point anyway, to have avoided something like $8 million to $8½ million worth of—

Unfortunately, the chair on that day—which happened to be me—cut the gentleman off. I said to him:

This would be what you refer to as a phoenix company?

Mr Jobe said, 'Yes.'

At this stage, we only have Capral's assertions on this issue, but I have no particular reason to doubt what they say. It clearly demonstrates just how difficult this area is, and how quick the actions are of those intent on avoiding our legitimate tariffs—tariffs that are put in place to level the playing field against those who either subsidise their production or practise predatory pricing policy against Australia. Certainly affected industries are very pleased with the appointment of the Anti-Dumping Commissioner and his different view on like goods. They are also very pleased that the government is taking this situation seriously, and today's legislation is the first in what is likely to be a number of amendments to this system.

Already I have had a steep learning curve as to what constitutes circumvention. Antidumping rulings are put in place when the commission finds that goods that are being imported into Australia are subsidised and/or sold at a lower price than the one at which they are sold in their home market. This can make it very difficult for the commission to gather sufficient evidence to prove either case, particularly when they may be dealing with a closed economy and/or questionable accounting practices. One of the tools the commissioner has been afforded is the ability to look at like economies to estimate what a fair price is for a good. Further, they can now, following the Capral decision and its backdating of penalties, put much more pressure on importers and their sources to provide information.

I might take the time to point out some of the methods that have been pointed out in my committee already that constitute circumvention—for instance, slight alteration of the product. In the steel industry, manufacturers have been adding boron to their steel mix. For all intents and purposes, boron does not improve the steel, and neither does it do any harm to the steel. But, in a strictly technical sense, it turns the steel into an alloy. Thus it avoids the original antidumping action. With aluminium, we find that the aluminium manufacturers are altering the extrusions. They might be making them slightly over specification by a millimetre, or under specification by a millimetre. They might be drilling holes at certain
places in the extrusion. So, they say that that is not the same product as the one that has been named in the antidumping action.

And then there are foodstuffs. I was listening to my friend the member for Murray, who knows much about the cases around SPC. For tomato mixes, it is so simple if you have a pasta sauce or a chutney to change the variable rates of the spices that might be added to the product and say, 'This isn't the same product as the one that has been named in the antidumping action; this is a completely new sauce'—or a completely new chutney. That is another way that our antidumping rulings have been circumvented. Companies might seek to go around Australia's regulation by moving products through a third country. They might even rebrand the product while it passes through this country. So, a country that might have an antidumping ruling against it may move it to a second country and rebrand—or not even rebrand but just say that it is sourced from a different country and bring it into Australia that way. Another method is to, instead of importing the entire product into Australia, perhaps bring in a number of parts and assemble here, and maybe source some of the parts from different parts of the world. And of course, as Mr Phil Jobe pointed out, there is the incidence now of phoenix companies, whereby, once an action has been started against an importer, the importer can close that company today and then bring in the product through another company.

One of the things our Anti-Dumping Commissioner needs is the power of legislation and the flexibility to deal with these issues on basically a daily basis so that when it is clear that the object of the change is to circumvent our rulings we can act in an appropriate manner—which of course brings us to today's legislation. One of the things this legislation will do is tighten the time lines for response. Admittedly it is only from 40 days to 37 days, but there is a limit to how low we can go, and we think this is as feasibly low as possible. We will be increasing the pressure on foreign exporters to provide transparent access to their businesses for our investigators, and this is a very important point. We have to be able to see the books of the companies that are exporting into Australia so we can understand exactly what that product is worth in their market and whether there has been a significant input of subsidies or other things that might be going on in their economies that are holding their prices up but depressing them when they send it into our country. If they do not cooperate, then we will take the opportunity to inflict penalties earlier in the process. We will take a stronger line in international negotiations surrounding the WTO. We are tightening the merits review function, and this will more fully deal with the issues of circumvention.

The whole process can be daunting for businesses actually bringing the information to the Anti-Dumping Commissioner. It takes quite a bit of effort. So, very importantly, I think, we are introducing a range of measures to assist our businesses in formulating their cases. It always comes back to self-interest—well, maybe not always, but I think one of the great adages in Australia is, 'Always back self-interest, because at least you know it's trying.' And in my particular case, Whyalla has one of only two blast furnaces operating in Australia. The OneSteel Arrium steelmaking works in Whyalla employs over 1,600 people directly, and it is the heart and the soul of the city. Three or four years ago that steelmaking plant was losing a lot of money, and Arrium quickly expanded its mining and direct export process to a point where it was exporting 13 million tonnes a year. They had opened up a new iron ore mine in the north of the state—which, paradoxically, is called Southern Iron, but it just depends where
you are standing on the map when you are looking at it, I guess. Unfortunately, Arrium has announced the closure of this mine, the mothballing of it. It will cost them in excess of $70 million; 600 workers are losing their jobs. The flipside of that is that they are increasing production out of the Middleback Ranges somewhat, but it will not cover all the losses and it will not cover all the jobs.

In that time frame, the steel industry has got back into the black. It is not making a lot of money, but it is performing better than it was some years ago. Anything that is threatening that recovery, and it can be dumped goods, is of great personal interest to me and the city of Whyalla. So I am very pleased to be in the position I am at the moment as chair of the committee that is looking into this circumvention issue. As I said, back self-interest and at least you know they are trying. So those people will know I am trying, that I am trying to find the truth and trying to find the right answers for the government so we can deal with this on an ongoing basis—because, as I said, it is like taxation law: once you change the law then the smartest brains in the business are out there trying to find a way around it again.

OneSteel, Arrium, are confident they can compete in an even market, but not if others are cheating on us. As I said, Australia is open for business. Australia welcomes free and fair trade but it must be fair trade, and that is the underlying issue. There are another couple of points that are concerning me around Arrium and OneSteel at the moment. They are not directly connected to this bill, but I would like to lay them on the table very briefly at the end of this speech.

I have been making some noise recently about our Coastal Shipping Act. It has a very strong effect on the GRA gypsum mine, which is out west of Ceduna, producing up to 90 per cent of Australia's gypsum, and the steel makers in Whyalla who use coastal shipping both to bring coal to Whyalla from around Australia and to ship steel. Recently, Arrium have been trying to bid for a steel contract in Queensland—I will not go any further than say that they are bidding for a major steel contract in Queensland—only to find, though, that their competitors can now bring steel into Australia freight-wise cheaper from Korea, China or Japan than they can shipping it from Whyalla around the coast under our Coastal Shipping Act.

The Deputy Prime Minister has put out a discussion paper and has spoken to the Australian public and said that he needs to make reforms in this area. I strongly support that position. At the end of the day, if we just protect those jobs that are associated with the Australian shipping lines and put our major businesses out of work, like the steel works and gypsum works, then there will be no jobs for anyone to fight over. There will be no loads on the ships, so they will not have to worry about their jobs, and there will be no-one working at the steel works and no-one working out at Penong. Let's hope it does not come to that and that sensible reform is reached. This is at the margins, but it is a very important margin. I thank you for your forbearance, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I know that was a little off the subject, but I thought I would get it on the plate anyway.

Mr IRONS (Swan) (20:40): I too rise to speak on the Customs Amendment (Anti-dumping Measures) Bill (No. 1) 2015 in the debate on the second reading and on the amendment moved by the member for Makin. I see the member for Gorton is here. He grew up in Victoria, like I did—in a manufacturing state. Now I live in Western Australia, which is a state that is a net exporter of goods. To manufacturing states, this is a bill that will be highly
important to them. The member for Gorton mentioned the previous work done by the Labor government and also congratulated the current government for the work they are continuing to do.

We do not have a lot of manufacturing in the electorate of Swan, but we do have a freight rail and head that is very important to the north-west and the export of iron ore which is then turned into finished goods overseas. What I would like to do is go slowly through the bill for the benefit of members and the people of Western Australia—which is not as strong a manufacturing state as Victoria and all the other states. The antidumping reforms will implement the outstanding four election commitments. The bill will also abolish and reform less useful and underperforming features of the antidumping system, including fixing the merits review process. It will improve support services to provide better advice, assistance and information to Australian businesses engaging with the antidumping system. It will also see a range of other technical amendments made to the antidumping system that will simplify and clarify aspects of the antidumping investigation processes.

Also for the people in Western Australia who do not know what dumping is: dumping is the sale of goods by overseas exporters into our market at a price lower than the normal value, which is generally the price payable for those goods in the exporter's domestic market. Australia can apply antidumping duties up to the difference between the export price and the normal value where dumped goods cause or threaten material injury to the Australian industry producing like goods.

I am sure the member for Gorton has travelled overseas, like I have. I travelled extensively when I was working for a manufacturing base for a commercial industrial air-conditioning manufacturing company in Victoria that originated in South Melbourne and then moved out to Cheltenham. We not only produced our own goods but also relied on importing products from other manufacturers from overseas. This bill not only affects Australian manufacturers but also affects manufacturers in other countries who export to Australia and play by the rules. It is not only the Australian manufacturing companies that are affected by dumping; companies that play by the rules, meet the Australian standards, meet the antidumping laws and produce goods within the restrictions of the anti-dumping laws are also affected.

To give an example, the company I worked for was an importer of Sanyo air-conditioning equipment. On many projects that we supplied to around Australia, they would always make sure that they did not discount the pricing. They had to maintain their factory, the quality and standards for their workers and their profits. During the 20 years that I worked for their company while I distributed Sanyo products in Australia, the Japanese never discounted or dumped into Australia. One of the side effects of that was that they eventually closed down their operations in Australia, because their sales had reduced due to other companies that probably were not playing by the rules and were dumping products based purely on price for sale and not on quality or anything like that. That is another example of how it affects the manufacturers of Australia and the manufacturers of other countries who meet our standards.

The company I worked for—for nearly 50 years—had to cease production because it could not compete with overseas products. Whether there was any hint of dumping into Australia was very hard to prove in those days, back in the eighties. When I finished working for that company there was a potential for not only the loss of manufacturing but also the loss of jobs and all the workers who went with it. There was the engineering department, the guys who
unloaded the stock that came in for the manufacturing component and the loss of goods being supplied to the company by metal manufacturers. There was no work for the trucking companies anymore either. These types of things can affect everyone across the manufacturing industry. So it is important that we have these new anti-dumping reforms put through.

When the government investigated this issue, on coming into government, it was clear that no jurisdiction had reversed the onus of proof, in the legal sense, as this would have been a breach of the WTO guidelines. However, the policy intent of this bill was to increase the onus on exporters to cooperate with anti-dumping investigations. This is certainly being implemented. Our reforms place a significantly heavy onus on foreign exporters to cooperate with anti-dumping investigations. If they do not cooperate then we reserve the right to impose antidumping duties sooner in the investigation process and impose heavier trade remedies.

The member for Gorton would have travelled to manufacturing plants, as I did quite often, throughout Asia. We had a manufacturing facility in Singapore and relationships with Chinese companies. He would have seen, as I did, when we went to those particular places that their factories were always full of stock. To clear that stock, particularly the companies that had products which were not well-known brands, they would reduce the price—with the sweep of a pen—by up to 25 per cent.

Any company that can afford to do that is either rorting the system already or they need to turn that stock over as quickly as possible. They need to keep manufacturing. They build in their manufacturing programs for the year, they forecast and they pre-buy their components 12 months out. If that stock is not cleared off the floor, it means they will have to pay extra money to house the stock that is still being manufactured.

The anti-dumping laws hopefully will prevent those types of companies from slashing their prices purely to clear the stock off the floor. More often than not, there is a quality relationship with some of the stock that goes, because it is not always designed for Australia. That is not the issue here today, but sometimes we see products come to Australia that do not meet the standards of the anti-dumping laws. Why should we not just take advantage of those low prices offered by cheap imports? The anti-dumping and countervailing duties cannot be applied just because imports are cheap. Such duties can only be applied where dumped or subsidised imports cause or threaten material injury to Australian industry producing like goods. Countries that have low barriers to trade, like Australia, need to have recourse to effective anti-dumping action. This is to prevent damage to our local industries by overseas producers who use profits generated by subsidies and protected domestic markets to persistently sell cheap goods into our markets.

What is expected to be achieved by introducing more stringent deadlines? It is important to industries injured by dumped and subsidised goods that they have access to the quickest relief possible. More stringent deadlines will mean the Anti-Dumping Commission gets access to information quicker, allowing the commission to resolve matters sooner. What is expected to be achieved by modernising publication provisions? Removing the requirement to publish notices in the newspaper and the gazette represents savings for the government. These savings will fund better access to the system for potentially injured businesses, particularly for small and medium businesses. Stakeholders will have increased certainty that all anti-dumping
notices will be found on the Anti-Dumping Commission's or the Anti-Dumping Review Panel's website.

How much will business have to pay to seek a review on this decision? I am sure many businesses would like to know that. Applications to the Anti-Dumping Review Panel will be subject to a $10,000 fee. Small- to medium-sized businesses will be eligible for a reduced fee of $1,000. Applicants who withdraw their applications will be eligible for a partial refund. The fee reflects that providing merits review of anti-dumping decisions comes at significant cost to the government and can destabilise confidence in anti-dumping decisions. The fees will be prescribed by a legislative instrument.

What is expected to be achieved by removing the legislative requirements for the International Trade Remedies Forum? The forum is a rigid and inflexible method of consulting a narrow range of stakeholders. Removing the legislation establishing the forum will allow the government to adopt more flexible administrative arrangements for consulting anti-dumping stakeholders. The legislation that establishes the forum is unnecessary. Stakeholder consultation can operate under administrative arrangements.

We have heard from the member for Gorton, the member for Grey and the member for Makin, and I see the parliamentary secretary is here. He is keen to get on his feet to talk to this bill before we—

**Mr McCormack:** I'm enjoying listening to you!

**Mr Brendan O'Connor:** He's learning something.

**Mr IRONS:** You are enjoying it? That is great! I will keep going. I will tell you about the current anti-dumping landscape. In the last three years—January 2012 to December 2014—33 investigations were conducted by the Anti-Dumping Commission, the ADC, which resulted in the imposition or extension of anti-dumping duties. Over the same period, a similar number of investigations were performed in Canada, the United States, the EU, China and Argentina. New Zealand carried out far fewer investigations, only five cases, and Brazil performed far more—132 cases.

In the last three years in Australia, January 2012 to December 2014, the largest portion of the investigation was made with respect to steel products. Some mates of mine worked in the steel industry in Victoria. The killer of the Australian steel industry was imported products, particularly from Asian countries. These countries are processing Australian products for Australian exported iron ore and bringing in steel at a far lower and cheaper price than the Australian manufacturers could do.

In the last three years, January 2012 to December 2014, a large majority of the measures either introduced or extended in Australia were applied to the metals sector, particularly steel products. A substantial number of measures were also applied to the electronic goods and the processed food and beverages sectors. In the last three years, the largest amount of antidumping measures either introduced or extended in Australia were applied in descending order to the products being imported from China, South Korea and Taiwan. We have a lot of stakeholder endorsements for these reforms—and you can understand why. Australia manufacturers—and I am sure there are many of them—would want to make sure that everything is about a level playing field. If these reforms can introduce and then make sure
that there is a better and stronger level playing field than has previously been the case then they can only assist Australian manufacturers.

I can talk about other manufacturers in Western Australia. There was another airconditioning company out at the old Telstra building. They were an opponent of ours—they employed about 500 people at one time—but they, too, eventually had to close up shop. It was not because they were not good manufacturers, and it was not because the unions gave them a hard time. It was purely because they could not compete with the imported products. You could not establish whether those imported products were dumped because at that particular time the legislation—which is what these reforms will bring in—to find out whether those issues had an effect on those manufacturers was not in place. As I said, we have many stakeholder endorsements. SPC Ardmona CEO Peter Kelly said:

These reforms to our anti-dumping system are a significant step forward for Australian manufacturers and producers.

The Australian Steel Institute said:

These reforms will assist in leveling the playing field through a tougher approach to timeframes and remedies, and they will improve the process for Australian steel manufacturers through expanded information and support services.

The Australian Forest Products Association said:

We welcome the proposed changes to place a significant onus on foreign exporters to cooperate in anti-dumping investigations. The imposition of higher dumping duties and interim measures as soon as possible for those companies that do not comply with the Anti-Dumping Commission (ADC) is a particularly welcome reform.

As you see, industry is right behind these reforms. I refer again to my experience in manufacturing, because we also had another business—and it is a nice little story which I might finish off with—which manufactured a product that was Australian designed, Australian manufactured and Australian tested. It was a multi-packed style chiller, and we manufactured it in Bays Water in Victoria. One of my clients came to me one day and said, ‘I just saw one of your chillers down on the port at Fremantle and it is marked to Carrier Inc. in Taiwan.’ I said: ‘That’s interesting. We don’t send anything overseas via Carrier to Taiwan.’ They were our opposition. I contacted my uncle, Bobby Dix, who was then the secretary of the painters and dockers union, and within 15 minutes I had Kim Beazley on the phone saying, ‘How can I help?’ Kim Beazley was very willing to assist. We eventually got that a guarantee from Carrier to say they would not copy it—they would not manufacture it—because Kim Beazley threatened to withdraw the Sikorsky helicopter contract. That is going back to the eighties, but it is nice little way to finish the story. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr McCormack (Riverina—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance) (20:55): I want to take parliament back just for a short moment to the 19th century. On the Griffith University’s website, I read a very interesting online article by Cameron Muir about Australia and its agriculture in 1800s. He writes:

Governments needed to redeem the settler project, and agriculture based on scientific principles emerged as an unexpected solution. The idea that agriculture could play a significant role in the development of the colonies had been largely abandoned as settlers focused on mining and pastoral
pursuits. Few people thought agriculture could pay in such a dry climate, with such a small population and long carting distances.

This has lot to do with the Customs Amendment (Anti-dumping Measures) Bill (No. 1) 2015 and related bill before the House, because it talks about the importance of agriculture. It talks about the fact that agriculture then, as now, has such an important role to play. Mr Muir goes on to write:

In 1892, William Wilkins, the Under Secretary for Public Instruction, wrote a fifty-page treatise on agriculture in New South Wales, which began, ‘It was a maxim of ancient statecraft that the food supply of the people should be raised within its own boundaries.’ … Wilkins went on to comment, however, that imperial relationships and international trade had rendered this obsolete. New South Wales, following Britain, could import its food. Although Wilkins was an advocate of agriculture in Australia, he cautioned that the necessary economic conditions must exist before agriculture could succeed.

It rings so true today.

I note that the member for Makin is in the chamber. I also note that the member for Makin has put some amendments to this antidumping bill. I further note that the member for Makin, who travelled right throughout the Murray-Darling Basin with the Standing Committee on Regional Australia, came to Griffith in my electorate of Riverina. There he saw how important growing food is not just for our country but for other countries as well.

I recall in my maiden speech in 2010 that I spoke of the fact that each and every Griffith farmer—and the member for Ballarat who is in the chamber will be interested in this—grows food to feed 150 Australians each year but also 450 people from overseas. Griffith farmers feed a significant number of people. Antidumping legislation is very important to Griffith people. It is very important to the people I represent, because they want to be sure that when they grow their food they are competing on as level a playing field as they possibly can.

I am really pleased that this legislation is being put before the parliament, because, in the words of the Minister for Industry, the member for Groom, and his parliamentary secretary, the member for Paterson, in their joint media release of 15 December 2014: it is going to bolster Australia's antidumping system with a range of welcome reforms. It is going to strengthen what we have got now as far as this legislation or policy is concerned, while complying with the international trade rules. We have got a good record on trade on this side of House. We have just signed preferential trade agreements with Korea, Japan and China, and we are working hard to get one with India. The minister went on to say:

Australia supports free trade, but free trade should also be fair trade.

He is so right. He continues:

The dumping of goods from overseas is harmful to Australian businesses and action can be taken to prevent this behaviour under World Trade Organization rules. Where local companies are being injured by dumping practices they are able to seek trade remedies.

Of course he is right. What we also need to protect is our Australian growers—our fine Australian producers—because the very best farmers in the world are those from Australia. I would almost dare say that the very best farmers in Australia are those from the Riverina. Of course you would expect me to say that—but they are! And the Riverina is indeed the food bowl of this nation. This legislation is going to help protect and preserve that great food bowl.

I seek leave to continue my remarks.

Leave granted; debate interrupted.
The SPEAKER (21:00): It being 9 pm I propose the question:
That the House do now adjourn.

Budget

Ms KING (Ballarat) (21:00): Madam Speaker, I rise to speak on the impact the Abbott government's harsh budget cuts are having on my community in Ballarat—particularly, the cuts to social services. It is fair to say that the cuts across emergency relief and financial counselling were not something that was anticipated by the sector at all, and it has been quite shocked and it is quite shocking.

Over the past three months alone, we have seen cuts to community and social services, cuts to support for families and another area that I want to talk about—employment services—but, particularly in relation to small business support where we would like to see growth in jobs. Any one of these cuts on its own would be difficult for a community such as mine to absorb, but it is the compounding effect of all of them that is seeing the community services sector reeling.

This government—for whatever reason; I do not know—just before Christmas took $15,000 out of emergency relief funding from Ballan District Health and Care. This is a very small community in my electorate which has a high level of people on pensions and very marginal incomes and with a lot of farmers experiencing quite a lot of pressure. That service has been provided for a long period of time. That funding has not been replaced, and we are not sure at this stage what other organisation, other than one directly out of Ballarat, will make up for that cut.

We have also seen child and family services lose $100,000 from their financial counselling service. Again, this was an organisation I worked for a very long time ago now and I know just how busy those financial counsellors are and how in demand that service is. I refer people from my electorate office constantly to child and family services—this is in the context of major job losses in my community: 80 from Telstra; several from Allied Mills; very disappointing announcements by Fairfax which will see 10 job losses; and other IT job losses.

We are also highly reliant on car componentry and, if we ever get to see a single dollar of any of that transition fund, I will shout, ‘Hey!’ If you think the amount of money cut immediately—$900 million, $500 million down to $100 million—is going to go very far in assisting the communities of Adelaide, Broadmeadows and Geelong and across the country, and filter down to regional communities such as my own in Ballarat that have brake components that have contracts that are solely with Toyota or Ford, they are not going to see any of it.

Add to that all of those support services—Youth Connections, the mentoring program, the brokering program for young people; there are already 17 per cent high youth unemployment rates in my community—and we are often the first to bear the brunt of an economic downturn and the slowest to recover.

To add insult to injury, the small business advisory centre in Ballarat receives no state funding at all—there are other services that seem to have also been the recipient of Commonwealth funding—
Mr Brendan O’Connor: The government of small business!

Ms King: Apparently, this government is a government of small business but, clearly, not in Ballarat or in the Central Highlands region of Victoria. Where we have potential job growth from those small businesses, money has been absolutely slashed. It is to the credit of the small business advisory service that they will try and continue to provide those services at a fee—it was a service provided for free previously.

We are seeing a pattern here: cut after cut after cut. For regional communities such as mine, we do not have other major centres where people can go and find work—particularly unskilled workers and young people. The support services, emergency relief and homeless services are also being cut. Frankly, this government needs to reverse those cuts and understand the cumulative effect, and I call on it to do so. (Time expired)

National Security

Wyatt Roy (Longman) (21:05): I rise tonight to speak on an increasingly frightening reality that we find ourselves in in the modern era. It is a very sad fact that many people across the globe and here at home seek to do us harm simply because of our way of life, and our tolerant, free, democratic society.

There is, as the Prime Minister calls it, an emerging death cult in the Middle East and its effects are felt right across the globe and here at home. We know in this new environment that there are at least 90 Australians fighting in Iraq and Syria. We know that there are about 30 foreign fighters who have fought in Iraq and Syria, and returned to Australia. We know that in Australia today there are at least 140 Australians actively supporting those extremist groups in their terrible endeavours in the Middle East and we know—ASIO tells us—that they are now investigating several thousand leads. Of those leads, there are over 400 high-priority cases, which is more than double from a year ago. As of last September, 55 of the 57 Australian extremists fighting in Iraq and Syria were on taxpayer-funded welfare from here in Australia.

This is a horrible threat that our nation faces and, sadly, we have felt its effects here with the terrorist act at the Lindt Cafe. I stand with all members of this parliament and, I think, almost all members of Australian society in condemning those acts and passing on our condolences to the victims of that terrible terrorist incident. As the Prime Minister has pointed out, as we emerge in this new world and face the new threats that emerge with it, we have to look at the systems that we have in place and look at where the opportunities for people to exploit our generosity exist. As the Prime Minister pointed out in relation to the Sydney Lindt Cafe, our generosity was taken advantage of. Our generosity was taken advantage of when the perpetrator of that terrorist incident applied for a visa. We were taken advantage of when he applied for residency and citizenship. He was again given the benefit of the doubt and our generosity was again taken advantage of when he applied at Centrelink. We were again taken advantage of when he applied successfully for legal aid. And, once again, there was a terrible hole in our system when this individual, who should have been in jail, was granted bail.

So we do need to have a serious look at our deterrents as a country and at what we are doing to ensure that individuals are not radicalised and that we do not face this serious threat from extremism. The first element of that, of course, is to ensure that we are not allowing young Australians to feel disconnected from our society, to feel that our society is not embracing them and giving them opportunity. That is a cultural change that we have to
undertake and one where all agencies of government have to reach out. But we also can do very practical things. We have increased funding to our intelligence agencies by $630 million. We have appointed a counter-terrorism coordinator to work across all jurisdictions and all government departments to coordinate our response to terrorism. That leads to very practical measures where we are increasing our surveillance abilities and doing everything we can to stop extremism taking hold. We are tightening up our borders, as we have done not only through our Operation Sovereign Borders but also by putting more counter-terrorism teams into our airports. We are ensuring that we are stopping the financing of these extremist organisations. We are stopping the online propaganda that is driving this extremism and indoctrination of young Australians. The most important role of any government is to ensure the safety of its citizens, and we all stand ready to rise to that task and ensure the safety of our citizens.

Intergenerational Report: 2015

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (21:10): Earlier this month the Treasurer released the long-awaited five-yearly Intergenerational report. Typical of the Treasurer and of the Abbott government, what should have been a non-political guiding document was twisted for political purposes. Before it was even released, the government reportedly spent $380,000 on focus groups to ensure that it got its messaging right about the report. As most political observers would have noticed, the report was clearly used to set the scene for the May budget. Having failed miserably to sell the 2014-15 federal budget, the Treasurer wants to ensure that the government does not repeat the mistakes of its first budget and has already begun softening up the Australian people by talking up the difficulties Australia will face in the years to come unless tough action is taken now. As with every other policy of the Abbott government, the narrative is one that plays on people's fears. It has become a common theme of the Abbott government. In this case it is the fear of dire financial consequences if governments fail to act now, which is code for saying that parliament should pass its unfair budget measures, many of which particularly hit older Australians.

That the budget should be sustainable over the long term is not in question. What is in question are the choices being made by the Abbott government to balance it. My concern with the government's fear strategy is that it is being used to bring in further austerity measures which unfairly place a greater financial burden on the most needy in society. Once again, older Australians are in the firing line. The Treasurer's narrative about an ageing population and people living longer is clearly designed to soften Australians for further cuts or other unfair measures. Even more dishonest is the perception being created by the government that older people are a burden on society. It is a demeaning perception that has little regard for not only the working life contributions of Australians before retirement but equally for their contributions after retirement. Older Australians are at the core of volunteering in Australia, worth tens of billions of dollars each year. They are also a major provider of childcare and foster care for grandchildren, and there are many other examples we could all refer to of the daily contributions older Australians make to the Australian economy.

We already know from its 2014-15 budget that the Abbott government wants to push the retirement age to 70 years and to reduce the pension increase by tying it to CPI increases. But, if that was not enough, the government has also tried to introduce a Medicare co-payment of $7 for doctor's visits, X-rays and pathology tests, knowing full well the impost that that would
have on older Australians. Nor do I believe that the issue has gone away, despite the government having temporarily dropped the idea. The government also wants to increase the PBS co-payment.

But the attack on older Australians by the Abbott government did not end there. The government, without warning, terminated the national partnership on certain concessions, which had been in place since 1993. This was a 21-year-old agreement put in place to compensate the states for additional imposts placed on them by the Commonwealth. For South Australia, terminating the agreement meant a cut of $28 million in 2014-15, an amount almost equal to the cost each year of pensioner and senior card holder council rate rebates. The South Australian government has agreed to pick up the $28 million cut for the 2014-15 year but has made no commitment beyond that. Despite the protests of South Australian Liberal MPs and their spin that the federal government only funds around 10 per cent of the concessions, the fact is that the Abbott government has cut $28 million in concessions and the South Australian government is simply passing on the cuts virtually dollar for dollar. Whether the state government passed on the cut by cutting the council rebate in full or spread it across all concession areas, the net effect on pensioners would be the same.

Not content with those cuts, the Abbott government has also cut the dementia supplement of $16.15 per day; axed the seniors supplement for Commonwealth Seniors Health Card holders, worth $876 for singles and $1,320 for couples combined per year; and cut the deeming threshold used in the pension income test from September 2017 from $46,600 to $30,000 for singles and from $77,400 to $50,000 for couples. The Abbott government should stop trying to balance its budget on the back of older Australians and low-income households and look to the much fairer options that it has available to do so.

Queensland: Cyclone Marcia

Ms LANDRY (Capricornia) (21:15): The recovery continues in Rockhampton and on the Capricorn Coast after the devastation caused by Cyclone Marcia. Last week, I travelled through the worst-affected areas, near Byfield, where the cyclone hit as a category 5 system. Initially, I inspected the area by helicopter with Rockhampton based Senator Matthew Canavan. From the air, the Byfield area looks like it was hit by a bomb or razed by a bushfire. From a birds-eye view, vast tracks of pine plantations are flattened, while beautiful rainforest has been damaged beyond belief.

Farms are also in ruins. On the Vass macadamia plantation, 2,000 trees were pushed over by the wind. These trees were nearly 50 years old. The timber industry also faces devastation. Ron and Brendan O'Connor operate TMS, a timber milling company in Byfield. They invested $35 million into the region. Before the cyclone, they had a 20-year supply of pine forests, but, sadly, 18 years of timber was flattened by the cyclone. This scenario puts the future of their investment, the timber industry and many jobs in jeopardy.

Senator Canavan and I met with small business owners in Byfield. Here, we heard countless stories of hardship and devastation. As the recovery phase continues, one of the best ways we can help small business to recover is by spending money there. Businesses, getting back up and running, now need visitors to return. I encourage people from all over Australia to head to Byfield, book cabin accommodation, buy a meal and spend locally. With everyone's help, we can get this local economy buzzing again. Last week, I visited 15 businesses and farms, including Warren and Jean O'Leary's Rainforest Ranch and Rod and
Ellen Taylor's Byfield store and bush cafe. Both the O'Learys and the Taylors have worked hard together to cater for weddings in the area and they have lost a lot of income, with up to nine weddings cancelled due to the cyclone alone. These are examples of small businesses that need visitors to return to help kick-start the local economy.

The general damage bill from the cyclone exceeds $200 million. The Prime Minister last week signed off on category C disaster assistance for primary producers in the Livingstone shire and Rockhampton areas. Grants of up to $25,000 are now available for eligible producers. We now urgently need the category C status to be applied to small businesses as well. This is currently in the hands of the Queensland government.

I also took a road trip through Byfield, stopping at various small businesses and farms. There were many highlights which I want to relay to the House tonight. Ferns Hideaway Resort and restaurant has reopened. This is a famous Byfield getaway owned by John 'Marto' and Genevieve Martin. Aside from its rustic cabins, creek kayaks and popular restaurant, Ferns is also famous for Marto's own live music sessions. Ferns has turned to OzCrowd, a crowdsourcing site, in a bid to raise $10,000 to pay for the clean-up. Some of the other places I visited included: Wilson rose and vegetable farm; Owen and Deb Marsh's Boundary Nurseries; Rod Taylor's Byfield store and bush cafe, famous for their beautiful burgers; John Cranny's pineapple farm; and Ian Grove's mango and lychee farm, which has suffered losses of at least $600,000.

Nob Creek Pottery is another tourist business on the trail to Byfield. Owner Steve Bishopric is busy cleaning up in a bid to reopen this coming weekend. Another icon is Cooberrie Park Wildlife Sanctuary, one of the biggest breeders of endangered cassowaries in Queensland. Owners Sue and Dave Smedley hope to reopen by Easter. They had a lot of damage, but they were very optimistic and shared some great stories of people helping out.

The army also turned up to Cooberrie to handle a very 'snappy' problem. Defence troops had to hop inside a crocodile enclosure to remove fallen trees and repair it, while keeping a sharp eye on some very cranky resident crocs. The highlight of the visit was a cuddle with a cute little koala bear. I also stopped to hand out cold drinks to road crews clearing debris from Byfield roads. Road worker Dave and his team deserve a vote of thanks. I would like to conclude by thanking everyone, both volunteer and professional, who are helping in any way in the cyclone clean-up and recovery process.

Migration

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (21:20): In this very chamber two weeks ago, the Treasurer touted his *Intergenerational report*, declaring it:

... an incredibly important document to start a serious conversation about the challenges and opportunities ahead for Australia.

Some of these challenges are well acknowledged by all members of this parliament, with Australia's ageing population being a case in point. The *Intergenerational report* states that the number of Australians aged 65 and over is projected to more than double by 2055 compared with today, and it predicts that our population will comprise around 40,000 people aged 100 and over in 2055—that is up from just 122 centenarians in 1975.

Given this, and with the *Intergenerational report* concluding that 'these changes will require adjustments to our policy settings and the measures put forward by successive
governments to meet community demands and expectations', the question arises: why has the Abbott government chosen to largely ignore the reality of the benefits of net overseas migration on our economy? The Treasurer may claim that 'this government is preparing and planning for the years ahead', but how can this possibly be the case when it chooses to ignore an economic resource that would help us to maintain our standard of living and care for our ageing population? Australia's tradition of welcoming immigrants from around the world has provided us with a rich source of vitality and has shaped our national character as a diverse and prosperous society. It is clear that, into the future, migration will remain critical both for established purposes and to address new challenges, but the Treasurer has since inexplicably stated that immigration is a 'rather lazy way' to grow. The only thing I would say is lazy here is the Treasurer's reading of the evidence.

In spite of the Treasurer's belief that the Intergenerational report 'provides us with information we need to prepare for the future', in actuality the report bizarrely assumes that by 2055, the net overseas migration rate will be a mere 0.5 per cent of population. This is a figure that is just half the 2007 to 2018 average. How can the Treasurer, therefore, claim that the Intergenerational report helps us identify where the future opportunities will be, when its projections are based on a plainly underestimated migration rate?

Indeed, we need only compare these assumptions to an analysis undertaken by the Migration Council of Australia in its report, The Economic Impact of Migration 2015, released on the same day as the IGR, to know this is the case. Unlike the highly politicised IGR, the findings in the Migration Council report are based on independent economic modelling and more realistically assume net migration will be equal to 0.85 per cent of population, basing this on the average contribution to population growth between 1999-2000 and 2013-14.

If the Treasurer truly wants us to believe that this government will continue to invest in the key economic drivers of growth, as he claimed, perhaps he could take the time to examine the Migration Council of Australia's report, which provides a compelling case for migration and the economic benefits of a diverse and ageing Australia. The findings by the Migration Council conclude that by 2050, migration will have added over 15 per cent to our workforce participation rate; nearly 22 per cent to after-tax real wages for low skilled workers; and, significantly, close to six per cent in GDP per capita growth. More than this, the Migration Council report highlights that skilled migrants generally receive less government entitlements, including the age pension, and have often had the cost of their education met by their home countries. In other words, skilled migrants contribute more to the government in taxes than they consume in government services. It is a net winning outcome for the economy as a whole.

Given all this, there is no doubt that a skilled migration program will be critical to ensuring the continued success and prosperity of the Australian economy. Indeed, we only need to look to past evidence in Australia. The bold post-war immigration policy undertaken by the Chifley Labor government was one of the most profound decisions this nation has made. It opened opportunities for old cultures to flourish in a new land, enriching and diversifying Australian society. It was also a direction that provided a great new engine of human capital—a mass of workers whose energy, experience, expertise and offspring helped build Australia's post-war prosperity to new levels.
In the same spirit, the Migration Council has offered some important findings on the economic benefits of migration for policymakers to consider. And as the Scanlon Foundation's *Mapping Social Cohesion* survey for 2014 demonstrates, the vast majority of Australians recognise that immigrants have enriched and strengthened us.

The Treasurer said, 'We need to be better placed to respond to the potential for future economic downturns and pressures on the budget as we live longer.' If he truly meant this, I would urge him to reconsider the evidence and change this disturbingly myopic approach to the economic benefits of migration.

**Local Government**

Mr BUCHHOLZ (Wright—Chief Government Whip) (21:25): I rise tonight to advise the House of the great work that is happening in my electorate with my four local mayors. John Brent is the Mayor of Scenic Rim Regional Council. Steve Jones is the Mayor of the Lockyer Valley Regional Council—and the House needs no reminder of the devastating floods that went through our electorate some years ago, when we suffered enormous sacrifice. I recognise Tom Tate over on the City of Gold Coast, for the work that he is doing, and also Pam Parker, who is the Mayor of Logan City Council. Recently in the media cycle, Pam Parker has announced that she will not be recontesting the city mayoralty.

Can I say that these four mayors, irrespective of their political persuasion, have been great advocates for the electorate of Wright. Each have quite different skill-sets in the work that they do in representing their communities. I will start with Pam Parker. I have never met a more qualified and enthusiastic mayor in her advocacy of Logan City. She advocates aggressively for her city, which sits between Brisbane and the Gold Coast, two major cosmopolitan cities. For your contribution to your community—and in the face of adversity, and with some headaches that you have had to deal with at a local level—I say to you, Mayor Parker, on the public record, to be recorded in *Hansard* forever, that I am truly indebted to your commitment to your community and for the work that you have done in conjunction with your committed staff. I truly thank you, hand on heart, for the work that you have done. Those will be big boots to fill for any person who follows in your footsteps.

Pam is a true advocate for Logan City and I thank her for her contribution. I wish her well in the final days of her mayoralty.

I recognise John Brent, Mayor of Scenic Rim Regional Council. They call it the Scenic Rim because it truly is a most beautiful part of Australia. Its landscape viewed from Mount Tamborine is a scenic vision. As you stand on the top of Mount Tambourine you can see the Gold Coast landscape and the cityscape. Within the area of Scenic Rim, there are no fewer than 22 private polo fields. It is the playground of those who choose to invest in the sport of polo. Underneath that Scenic Rim there is a low socio-economic area. John Brent's leadership of no fewer than 39 years in local government, is attributable to his contribution despite the enormous challenges that faced him. He is a personal friend of mine. Often John will just roll into the house and ask what is on the table for dinner that night. My good wife knows always to prepare extra in case the mayor decides to roll in.

Steven Jones, the Mayor of the Lockyer Valley and his most motivated council over in the Lockyer Valley do an outstanding job in representing the diverse views of the Lockyer Valley—which is predominantly agricultural, but also has urban sprawl into those areas—and
dealing with the future development. In particular, there are projects that Mayor Jones is lobbying for.

I recognise Tommy Tate, the Mayor of the City of Gold Coast, for his advocacy for the Gold Coast to host the Commonwealth Games. He is always looking for the next cutting edge.

As a federal member, I can find no greater pride than in having this representation around me. In the relationships that I have with my mayors, I make sure that on a quarterly basis I spend time with each of them. In my speech tonight, I advise the Australian public that as a federal member I have some of the best regional mayors in Australia. I thank them.

House adjourned at 21:30

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Mr Sukkar: to move:

That this House:

(1) recognises the demonstrable benefit that the East West Link will provide to commuters and the Victorian economy, by saving up to three hours of travelling time per week, creating around 7,000 new jobs during the construction phase of the project and enhancing the productivity of Victoria for decades to come;

(2) notes that the:

(a) Victorian Government’s position not to proceed with the East West Link:

(i) will deny Victorians the benefit of this critical infrastructure in a growing city with worsening traffic congestion;

(ii) will deny Victorians immediate economic benefits, including almost 7,000 construction jobs;

(iii) will risk Victorian taxpayers paying up to $1.2 billion in compensation; and

(iv) has the potential to threaten Victoria’s credit rating;

(b) Victorian Government’s threat of legislating to avoid paying compensation owed to investors who entered into a contract in good faith with the State of Victoria will:

(i) according to Infrastructure Investor, risk Australia losing its status as the ‘world’s most attractive infrastructure destination’; and

(ii) make it more difficult for Governments across Australia to attract investment in crucial nation building infrastructure in the future;

(c) East West Link is currently the only major shovel-ready project in Victoria which has funding in place from the Commonwealth, the State of Victoria and the private sector; and

(d) Leader of the Opposition supported a new east west road corridor for Melbourne when it was first proposed in the 2008 Sir Rod Eddington East West Link Needs Assessment report; and

(3) calls on:

(a) the Victorian Premier to stop his campaign of economic destabilisation and build the East West Link; and

(b) all Members to oppose the Victorian Government’s threat of legislation to void any liabilities as a result of not proceeding with this vital infrastructure project.
Mr Tehan: to move:

That this House notes that:

(1) Melanoma March takes place this month and will involve hundreds of Australians around the country participating in community walks to raise awareness of melanoma;
(2) 12,500 Australians are diagnosed with melanoma each year and 1,650 of those are diagnosed with advanced melanoma;
(3) advanced melanoma kills more than 1,500 Australians each year—this is one death every six hours;
(4) melanoma is:
   (a) the most common cancer in young Australians aged 15 to 39 and those diagnosed with advanced melanoma have a median survival of only 8 to 9 months;
   (b) estimated to be the third most commonly diagnosed cancer in Australian males in 2014 (7,440 cases), after prostate and colorectal cancer; and
   (c) also estimated to be the third most commonly diagnosed cancer in Australian females (5,210 cases), after breast and colorectal cancer; and
(5) advanced melanoma costs hundreds of millions of dollars each year.

Mr Irons: to move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:
   (a) the previous Labor Government introduced more than 21,000 additional regulations in five and a half years and as a consequence, Australia:
      (i) ranked 128th out of 148 countries for burden of government regulation according to the 2013 World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Index; and
      (ii) came second last in a 2012 ranking of productivity growth by the Economist Intelligence Unit;
   (b) the Government has a deregulation agenda to cut $1 billion in green and red tape each year;
   (c) on 26 March 2014 the Government held the first ever red tape repeal day, removing over 10,000 pieces and 50,000 pages of legislation and regulation saving over $700 million in compliance costs; and
(2) commends the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister for his effective management of the Government’s deregulation agenda.

Mr Thistlethwaite: to move:

That this House:

(1) acknowledges the devastation caused by Cyclone Pam on the people of Vanuatu, Tuvalu and Kiribati;
(2) recognises the enormous destructive force of Cyclone Pam and notes the loss of life and destruction caused including:
   (a) damage to 90 per cent of Port Vila homes and entire villages across the archipelago;
   (b) displacement of 45 per cent of Tuvalu’s population and significant destruction of the outer islands of Tuvalu; and
   (c) severe damage on three of Kiribati’s southern islands:
(3) recognises the:
   (a) enormous effort that will be required by governments and non-government emergency teams to find those missing from the disaster; and
(b) huge task now facing our friends in the Pacific to rebuild and repair following the devastation of Cyclone Pam;
(4) acknowledges the international effort to provide assistance to Vanuatu; and
(5) calls on the Australian Government to monitor the situation closely and to work with the governments of Vanuatu, Tuvalu and Kiribati to provide timely and appropriate further assistance as needed.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Wicks) took the chair at 10:30.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Fraser Electorate: Community Festivals

Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (10:30): Since the 1960s many measures of social capital in Australia have waned. On average Australians have fewer friends and know fewer of their neighbours. We are less likely to join organisations, to attend church or to be part of a union. As a nation we are more disconnected. But Canberra bucks that trend. The nation's capital is also our social capital. As we forge ahead with an Australian civic renaissance, Canberra has many lessons to teach the rest of Australia. The events that mobilise a community reveal a lot about its character. The recent Canberra Show was a reminder that ours really is a bush capital—a city with strong rural roots. The Enlighten festival shone a multicoloured spotlight on Canberra's best performing artists, and last weekend Art, Not Apart showed that fine arts can thrive in our streets and parks as well as in the national cultural institutions.

Of course it is the multicultural festival that is Canberra's biggest community event, and that speaks volumes about our city's embrace of diversity. In a volatile world Australia's pluralism is our best defence against extremism.

Festivals foster community life. They get us out and about. In a city of 400,000, when you attend a big gathering, you are bound to run into people you know. That urban village effect helps build social capital—the bonds of trust and reciprocity that keep a society strong. The better our social capital the more likely it is we will be able to draw on our greatest source of strength—each other.

That is why each year, as festival season comes to a close, I hold my own mini festival to help locals with one of the most important challenges for any community—raising children. On 28 March I will be holding my annual Welcoming the Babies event with a variety of free family entertainment and information stalls from health professionals. Being a new parent can be lonely and isolating. The rewards are huge, but babies do not come with a learning manual. Welcoming the Babies is a celebration, but it also provides a chance for young families to tap into official support networks or compare notes with their other sleep-deprived peers. Caffeine, condiments, company, and conversations! Welcoming the Babies is a reminder that we have to look after the people who are looking after the northsiders of the future. I extend an invitation to all Canberrans with new children to come along to Welcoming the Babies in Hackett on 28 March. You will enjoy meeting everyone from the postnatal support units to playgroups. You will run into new parents who are facing similar challenges and enjoy a sense of community spirit on what I hope will be a sunny day.

Calare Electorate: Health Care

Mr JOHN COBB (Calare) (10:33): Friday the 13th does have its good side. Last Friday in Bathurst, Aboriginal health took a step forward when our Minister for Health, Sussan Ley, took the time when travelling from the coast to Broken Hill to drop in and officially open the Currajong Aboriginal Health Centre in Parkes. Lachlan Smith and his wife Noor bought land there, and they worked together with Amanda Corcoran, the project officer from the Parkes shire, and Keven Bloomfield and Scott Turnbull from the Aboriginal working party in Parkes.
They now have something like four or five doctors working out of the centre. This is an opportunity for Aboriginal people in the region—and, I hope, for others. I said to them that they will measure their success by the number of people from outside the Aboriginal community that want to avail themselves of the services at that facility—and I am sure that will happen. I thank Sussan for taking the time to call in and underline the fact that closing the gap starts with health.

Also that day I opened the Dudley Private Hospital's new hydrotherapy pool. Our government put over $1 million into this. I have to say, though, that Ramsay Health Care, who own Dudley Private Hospital, have a very proud reputation in dealing with rehabilitation. In fact, I would say that Dudley Private Hospital in Orange is the most serious rehabilitation centre from the Blue Mountains to Adelaide, not including Adelaide. It is a very big area.

It is an enormous thing. It is about rehabilitation; that is, it is for people recovering from operations, and, obviously, for older people, but there are any number of reasons why you might need a hydrotherapy pool to assist with rehabilitation. As one of the people who work there said to me: 'It is almost as much a mental thing, and people feeling free.' One person in a wheelchair was lowered into the pool and was then able to stand up and walk around. So it is an amazing thing, and I have to congratulate the government. I also have to congratulate Trevor Matheson and Fran Gearon who are in charge of this in Orange.

**Greenway Electorate: Schools**

*Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (10:36):* One of the great privileges of being a member of parliament is the opportunity one has to spend time with local schools and, when we have a non-sitting week, as we did last week, it is often a very busy time. So I would like to share with the House some of the fantastic experiences I had with some of the local schools in Greenway, which started off on Monday with the launch of the Ride2School event at Glenwood High School where a number of young people were encouraging their peers to start riding to school and to do so safely.

It was also a pleasure later on that morning to join with Holy Cross Primary School at Glenwood for their celebration for the start of Catholic Schools Week. It was wonderful to see so many parents and caregivers attending that event, but I think, most of all, to see the pride that young people took in dressing in some of the traditional outfits of their heritage—so, national dress: everything from saris to some Pacific Islander outfits—and to see them giving such a wonderful sense of and sending such an important message of inclusiveness to our society.

Later on that day I was very pleased to join an International Women's Day event at Girraween High School. Girraween High School is a selective high school, and they hosted a number of young people from around the area—female students as well as male—to participate in a forum on International Women's Day and what leadership means for women. It was a fantastic event to attend. I commend Girraween High School and all the schools that participated in that, which demonstrates that Girraween High certainly is very high achieving in an academic sense but also has such great all-rounders.

I was also very pleased on Tuesday to join in the official opening and blessing and the renaming of Terra Sancta College in Schofields to St John Paul II Catholic College. Again,
this is a growing, once rural, area in my electorate which is now subject to much land development.

It was wonderful on Friday to attend the whole school mass to celebrate Catholic Schools Week at St Bernadette's Primary Lalor Park, which was once my school, and to round that off with the attendance at the St Anthony's liturgy at Girraween.

I always have great hope, as we lead into Harmony Day in particular, when I see the calibre, the quality and the confidence of these young people. I pay tribute to each one of them, and to their teachers and their caregivers—but, in particular, to those young people themselves, who are able to hold conversations and to be so courteous and so prompt, and who I know are learning so well. I congratulate all of them.

Swan Electorate: Anti-Alcohol Campaign

Mr IRONS (Swan) (10:39): I rise to update the House today about an important issue in my electorate of Swan which I am pleased to inform the members saw a very organised act of people power win out against one of Australia's biggest corporations, Woolworths, through its subsidiary ALH holdings. The members would agree that we all promote the concept of people power. But too often it gets caught up in or crushed by bureaucracy. But not this time—so far. On 17 February, I joined with my state government colleague the member for South Perth, John McGrath, my local government colleagues from the city of South Perth, and local residents from my electorate in Swan, in once again opposing an unnecessary and non-compliant booze barn liquor outlet which has been proposed in my electorate of Swan at the heritage listed Como Hotel site, which currently has a small liquor store in there.

Members may recall me discussing this issue in this place previously. On 15 August, the West Metropolitan Central Joint Development Assessment Panel rejected the applicant's appeal against the City of South Perth's decision. Being a big business, the applicant did not accept this was the will of the people and instead pushed ahead with another appeal. Today, however, I am pleased to inform members that again on 17 February, people power and common sense once again prevailed, with the panel once again rejecting Woolworths's ALH Group's application to build a Dan Murphy's liquor store on that site. As Swan's federal representative I was very proud to witness so many of my constituents working together to ensure this development, which would have had an adverse impact on their suburb's amenity and which has a potential to create a range of social issues, was not permitted to proceed.

I congratulate each resident on the decisive arguments they presented at the JDAP hearings and for the time they have dedicated over the past year in opposing this burdensome development. As I said in my submission to the panel, there is no case for an additional liquor store in that area, contrary to the claims made by the applicant. As yet, I have not received any correspondence from, or had any representations made by, residents calling for a booze barn style liquor outlet in our region. In fact, to approve it would fly in the face of the efforts by the West Australian state government and many community groups to help combat Australia's binge drinking culture. Combating this is something I am very passionate about. I am sure members will agree that there would be a clear contradiction in our society if a liquor store development such as this were to be approved when there are already five existing liquor stores within close proximity.
'Alcohol. Think again' is the name of the WA state government's anti-alcohol campaign. Just as they are trying to tell the West Australian people to think about alcohol, I would encourage Woolworths, through ALH, to think before once again trying to develop this booze barn liquor outlet in Como. Local residents do not want it and the Como Hotel certainly does not need it. I am certain ALH are going to attempt a third shot at trying to get the store up, but I support the residents in continuing to fight it.

Charlton Electorate: Ms Leanne Gardiner

Mr CONROY (Charlton) (10:42): Leanne Gardiner is an early childhood teacher at the Maryland Care and Early Education Centre. Leanne was one of three recipients from New South Wales to be recognised at the ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards, which were presented in Melbourne last week. She was selected from more than 1,000 nominations from across the country to receive the award for innovation in teaching. This was based on a project that introduced preschool students to Peruvian culture and geography.

Before travelling to Peru last year, Leanne made contact with an underprivileged school in the city of Cusco, and, after discussing the differences between schools in Peru and Australia with her students—in particular, the lack of resources—together they developed a donation drive to deliver pencils, paper and craft items to the school in Cusco. I am told one child even gave up a favoured pencil from their bookshelf. The children learnt basic Spanish, and were taught about mud brick by making their very own mud bricks—a messy exercise, I am sure. When Leanne returned, the children were fascinated by her travel stories and her mementos. I am told of one lesson where the children learned about the fabric wraps Peruvian women use to strap infants to their bodies. That day, each child was able to try out the wrap sling using a doll.

Maria, the centre manager, says it is this diverse classroom environment that inspired the parents and school management committee to nominate Leanne for the award. This is a not-for-profit centre with 52 students and 14 educators, a centre which is proud of the high quality care it provides, the workplace ethos in which teachers strive to excel and where professional development is supported. Clearly, this is producing results. Natalie, Leanne's colleague from the preschool, says this about Leanne:

She has inspired me to be an early childhood teacher. She sees the best in me and has a really high standard for our services and I aspire to be like her.

I am a strong advocate for the work of early childhood educators, but this is a sector that has been undervalued.

As policymakers, we must commit ourselves to the ongoing improvement of early childhood education. We must acknowledge that child care enables parents, in particular women, to work, but this should not come at the expense of children's learning and development needs. We must meet the challenge of skilling and training the next generation of educators to the standard we expect and at the same time ensure it is a desirable career path that continues to attract the best and brightest. To do this we must start with respect for the fine work of early childhood educators and the important role they play in a child's life. I will have more to say in this place about this, particularly about the Productivity Commission's inquiry.
For now I wish only to praise the achievements of Leanne Gardiner and the Maryland Care and Early Education Centre. It is a tremendous achievement to win this award, Leanne. I congratulate you and the students and families who nominated you. They are among many excellent centres in my region and, of course, across the country. Congratulations, again, Leanne.

**South Australia: Employment**

Dr SOUTHCOTT (Boothby) (10:45): In February 2010 the South Australian Premier stood up at his party's campaign launch and promised to create 100,000 new jobs by 2016. At the time, people said it was the sort of promise he might never be measured on. Now we are in a position where we can see how the South Australian government is tracking. After five years, the South Australian government is not close to creating 100,000 jobs; there are actually fewer jobs in South Australia than there were in 2010. There is a very telling graph that Alan Kohler has shown on the ABC and it has been printed in the *Advertiser*. The graph shows that while job creation is occurring in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia in South Australia and Tasmania it is flatlining. Emeritus Professor Dick Blandy has said that the South Australian economy is no longer connected to the mainstream economy. That is a disgrace. It is a serious matter for South Australia.

When we look at the latest Australian Bureaus of Statistics data, we see that South Australia has recorded its worst trend unemployment rate in 13 years. The unemployment rate has increased from 6.5 per cent to 6.9 per cent, seasonally adjusted, over the last few months and is now the highest in the nation. There are 3,100 fewer jobs in South Australia than there were 12 months ago. What has been the response of the state government? It has introduced a car park tax and it has increased the emergency services levy. Dick Blandy has said that what is required is to foster a culture where start-ups and innovation can occur. There are great possibilities with the SAMRI, the new medical health and research precinct, but we need a culture that encourages the commercialisation of that research.

Unfortunately, South Australia now has the highest unemployment rate in the nation, by trend and seasonally adjusted data. The participation rate has dropped, indicating that many people have given up work. Last year, more than 200,000 jobs were created Australia-wide. It is very disappointing that we are not seeing the same in South Australia. It is not a matter of playing the blame game, but we do need to see a culture where people are prepared to have a go, to take on new staff and to expand new business.

**Women's Legal Service Tasmania**

Ms COLLINS (Franklin) (10:48): On International Women's Day, I together with my federal Labor Senate colleagues Senators Bilyk, Brown, Polley, Singh and Urquhart launched a petition and called on the community to sign the petition to put pressure on the Abbott government to reverse its cuts to the Women's Legal Service Tasmania. This legal service has been providing very valuable support to the Tasmanian community for many years, but has now had a cut of $100,000 a year to its service.

As the organisation's chief executive, Susan Fahey, says, the cut:

... effectively means a loss of services to several hundred women in frontline services such as advice, representation and advocacy.
In a small service, of what was four solicitors, it's a 25 per cent cut in actual solicitors employed and more like a 30 percent reduction in the services we can provide.

She continued:

Lawyers actually play a really key role in assisting people in family violence because a lot of people actually don't know what they need to do to leave a situation.

We deal with family violence day in, day out.

Lawyers assist in telling people: 'Yes, you can actually take some of the linen. You can take the couch,' or 'Yes, you can leave and that doesn't mean you won't have any rights to the property.'

Ms Fahey said not being able to respond promptly to a woman in crisis was the biggest concern. She said:

In that time some of those women will actually be injured quite badly.

We've seen in other states some of those women they're trying to get help …

The service is now resorting to technology and other means to try to help more people. It has an award-winning app called 'girls gotta know', which is a fantastic app about providing legal advice online, particularly to young people. They are in the process of developing an app, called 'boys gotta know', to provide the same service to young boys in our community. They are also fund raising. They had Five Buck February in which they called on people to give $5 to the Women's Legal Service on Fridays in February so they could continue to provide these critical services in our community.

Federal Labor has said that it will invest an additional more than $42 million to front-line community legal services such as the Women's Legal Service Tasmania. We said that as part of what we said we would do to address family violence should Labor be elected at the next federal election. I call on the Abbott government to do the right thing in the coming budget and do the right thing when it comes to community legal services like the Women's Legal Service Tasmania. It does provide front-line legal services. It is not advocacy that it provides but services to people who need them. I would appreciate the Abbott government taking it in the context in which I am asking for today for that cut to be reversed. (Time expired)

Drought

Mr TEHAN (Wannon) (10:51): I rise today to speak about the agricultural white paper, which the government is embarking upon. The process started with an agriculture green paper, which will turn into a white paper. At the moment, there are consultations going on with regard to the agriculture green paper. This process will set up agriculture policy in this nation for the next decade. It will be a very important document.

One of the key things that the government wants to look at as part of this process is drought relief. Currently, the system of drought relief in this country is broken. It is not delivering to farmers as it should be. It is not delivering the certainty that they need when it comes to their planning how they will deal with drought in the future. One of the key opportunities that we have is making our approach to drought proactive rather than reactive. This is a once-in-a-hundred-year opportunity to change the way we deal with drought and other types of disaster in this country.

One of the things that I am very keen on the government's progressing as part of this approach is multiperil crop insurance, which is something that is now in place in the United States and is starting to take place commercially in Australia. But there are still difficulties
with the way this is being rolled out in this country. Farming organisations and financial institutions are looking at the idea of multiperil crop insurance. They think that it is the right way for us to look at revolutionising the way we look at drought in this country. It is something that I wholeheartedly support. Multiperil crop insurance enables farmers to be proactive in planning for disasters and perils. They can say, 'We can look at how we can get some income certainty going forward and prepare for disasters.' It is an approach that means that the farmer is in control of their own destiny. That is something we should welcome, because we all know that at some stage in the next decade our farming communities will be hit by peril. We have to make sure that we arm them with the tools to be able to deal with that. Multiperil crop insurance gives them that armoury. We as a government should be looking at ways to ensure that farmers can take multiperil crop insurance on board and use it as an effective tool to deal with drought. (Time expired)

Lalor Electorate

Ms RYAN (Lalor—Opposition Whip) (10:55): I rise today to inform the House of a successful student representative council forum held in the Lalor electorate on Wednesday, 11 March. This is a process that I have initiated within the electorate, where we call together student representative councils, where they exist, or leadership teams from every school across the electorate for two sessions for the year. We held the first of the 2015 sessions last week. It was an absolute pleasure to work with students from across the electorate across the day. They demonstrated a deep understanding of leadership, cultural change and their school community as well as their broader community. They also demonstrated real pride in their achievements and a strong understanding of the challenges that their communities face.

I would like to thank the principals who supported the program. We had 18 primary schools in attendance. Thank you to Baden Powell P-9 College Derrimut Heath, Bellbridge Primary School, Bethany Primary School, Cambridge Primary School, Corpus Christi Primary School, Iramoo Primary School, Lumen Christi Primary School, Manor Lakes P-12, Manorvale Primary School, Seabrook Primary School, St Andrew's Primary School, St James the Apostle Primary School, Saint Mary of the Cross Primary School, The Grange Callistemon campus, Truganina P-9 College, Truganina South Primary School, Werribee Primary School, Wyndham Vale Primary School and Baden Powell Tarneit campus.

We also had 10 secondary colleges attending the afternoon session. I would like to thank Alamannda K-9 College, Hoppers Crossing Secondary School, MacKillop Catholic Regional College, Manor Lakes P-12 College, Tarneit Senior College, The Grange College Deloraine campus, Thomas Carr College, Warringa Park School, and Wyndham Central College.

The participants who support the program help me to get in touch with the issues, concerns, attitudes and opinions of the young people in the electorate. It is an absolute pleasure to spend the day with these young people and listen to their stories, and schools should be very proud of the contributions they make on the day. Most schools went back with a project of some sort to improve their school culture, and I am looking forward to seeing them later in the year to hear about how those projects went. I also make special mention of Melbourne Islamic School, which joined us for the second time, and the terrific contributions their students made. The Grange College hosted this forum this year, and I would like to thank Melanie Whyte and Taki Tuariki, the college captains, and Travis Walsh and Jonathan Lim-I for their support on
the day—ushering students, but being absolutely useful on the ground as we began each forum and before they joined those forums.

Superannuation

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (10:57): There has been discussion in the media and between various members of parliament recently about the possibility of using superannuation for a home deposit. I would like to put on the record that I believe this is a good idea, but there are two important provisos that I will refer to shortly. We need to ask ourselves, 'Is home ownership something important in this country?' I say, unequivocally, yes. We want to have a society where as many people as possible have the opportunity to own their own home, that piece of the world that they can call their very own. That is what we should encourage in our society; it is what we have encouraged since the Second World War, when home ownership was at a low 53 per cent. Through that great period of the Menzies government, through the 1950s and 1960s, we saw an enormous increase in home ownership in this country.

In fact, in 1981 we had home ownership levels up to 73.4 per cent. But since 1981 we have seen year after year of decline in the percentage of Australians who own their own homes. It is now down to 67 per cent. If we look at that in numbers, that equates to some 500,000—half a million—Australian households that no longer own their own home. There are many reasons why this has happened, and one of those reasons is the superannuation system. If we are asking people to take nine per cent of their income and put it away in compulsory superannuation, that is less money they have to put towards a deposit on a house. That is why we are seeing this decline, and also a decline in the number of people who have finance for small business. Many small business people use their home as collateral to get themselves started, but if they have not got a deposit to get themselves into the market then they not only lock themselves out of homeownership but also lock themselves out of small business ownership.

Two important provisos about using superannuation: firstly, we have to increase the supply of housing in this country. We have to simply release more land. To give you an idea of the situation at the moment: if we were to depopulate the entire mainland of Australia and move everyone to Tasmania—if every single man, woman and child moved to Tasmania—we could give every single household a one-acre block and we would only use up half of Tasmania. We could use the rest for national parks and for industry. With a one-acre block, every single household in Australia could fit into Tasmania. The other proviso is that, if we allow people to use their superannuation for a deposit on their home, it has to work the same at the back end. So if a deposit is used as a draw-down, they have to also use, later on, the equity that they have in their home to help fund their retirement. It makes perfect sense. We need to have this debate. Our superannuation system is currently working against homeowners, and we must reverse that decline and increase homeownership in this country.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Irons): The member's time has expired. In accordance with standing order 193 the time for members' constituency statements has concluded.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Baha'is in Iran

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (11:01): I move:
That this House:

(1) notes the widespread and systematic campaign of persecution of Baha'is in Iran, with more than 110 Baha'is currently imprisoned due to their religious beliefs;
(2) condemns the treatment of Baha'is in Iran, which includes economic and educational discrimination, strict limits on the right to assemble and worship, as well as the threat of raids, arrests and detention or imprisonment;
(3) commends the recent resolution by the United Nations General Assembly in which it expressed its 'deep concern at serious ongoing and recurring human rights violations' in Iran; and
(4) calls for an end to the persecution of the Baha'is in Iran.

I rise today to move this motion concerning the widespread and systematic campaign of persecution of Baha'is in Iran, and I thank the member for Parkes for seconding it. This is of significant concern to the Baha'i community in my electorate of Canberra, and I am very pleased that so many of them could join us here today for this discussion on this motion.

The Baha'i faith is a peaceful faith that was founded over 150 years ago and has been present in Australia since 1920. According to the Australian Baha'i community, the faith's central theme is that humanity is one family and that the time has come for its unification into a peaceful global society. It advocates equality and it advocates education. There are more than five million followers around the world, and they come from all backgrounds and can be found in virtually every country on earth. Many can be found in my electorate of Canberra, as the ACT Baha'i centre is located in Weston.

The community here in Canberra began in 1951, and on 21 April 1957 the community became firmly established with the election of its first local spiritual assembly, a local governing council elected by Baha'is in every locality where there are nine or more members. The community here in Canberra has continued to grow steadily and contributes in many ways to the city. From the mid-1980s, the diversity of the community was enhanced by the arrival of Baha'i refugees from Iran, who settled in Canberra. Today the community is made up of individuals with a wide variety of cultural backgrounds, reflecting Canberra's multicultural diversity.

Since becoming the member for Canberra, I have been involved in a number of events organised by the Canberra Baha'i community. Just last month I attended a film screening of To Light a Candle, which looks at the situation in which the Baha'is in Iran find themselves. It was this event and also my ongoing history on this issue from my time in DFAT and the many conversations I have had that have prompted me to move this motion.

Iran has been actively persecuting Baha'is for the last 30 years, and in 2008 it imprisoned the entire governing body of Baha'is. Since the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, Baha'is have been systematically persecuted as a matter of government policy. During the first decade of this persecution, more than 200 Baha'is were killed or executed, hundreds more were tortured or imprisoned, and tens of thousands lost jobs, access to education and other rights—all solely because of their religious belief. Since 2005 more than 700 Baha'is have been arrested, and there are currently more than 100 imprisoned, including all seven members of a former leadership group serving the Baha'i community of Iran, as I mentioned earlier.

But the human rights violations do not stop there. Baha'is in Iran are also subjected to other types of persecution, including economic discrimination, strict limits on the right to assemble and worship, and the broadcasting of anti-Baha'i propaganda in the government-led media.
Since 2005, more than 49 Baha'i-owned properties have been the target of arsonists, with not one person arrested, and then there was the terrible desecration of the cemetery in Shiraz last year.

One aspect of their persecution which speaks particularly strongly to me is the way they are denied access to higher education. Baha'is in Iran are prohibited from going to university and are blocked from entering many professions. This is a human rights violation of the worst kind, as Baha'is are relegated to a life of poverty, underdevelopment and oppression.

I join those around the world calling on Iran to abide by its international human rights obligations. I condemn the ongoing human rights violations in Iran and call upon the Islamic Republic of Iran to ensure that the rights of all individuals are fully protected without discrimination, and that it fulfils its obligations to its own citizens as set out in the Iranian Constitution. I also commend the UN General Assembly for recently approving a resolution expressing deep concern about serious, ongoing and recurring human rights violations in Iran.

It is encouraging to see Iran engaging more actively with the West and normalising its relationship with the West. It is encouraging too to see President Rouhani's push for reform and call to end international isolation. As part of its reform and as part of its engagement with the West, I call on Iran to put an end to the widespread and systematic persecution of Baha'is. I am pleased to see that so many of my colleagues have joined me in this motion calling for an end to the persecution of the Baha'is in Iran.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Irons): I thank the member. I also take this opportunity to acknowledge and welcome the presence of the Baha'i community in the Federation Chamber. Is the motion seconded?

Mr COULTON (Parkes—The Nationals Chief Whip) (11:06): I am honoured to second this motion, and I thank my colleague the member for Canberra for bringing this motion to the House today. In Australia there are a few things that we fundamentally believe in as the base for our society—freedom of religion, equal rights for women and the opportunity that education provides all citizens. It is for these very same reasons that the Baha'is in Iran are now being persecuted. As the member for Canberra said, this has been going on for 30 years since the revolution that took place in that country at that time.

Australia absolutely abhors this type of treatment. I have had meetings with several ministers of foreign affairs in the previous government and in the current government, and I know from conversations with them that not only have the Australian government and the Australian people been lobbying the Iranian officials in this country but also our embassy and our officials in Iran have been talking about the plight of the Baha'is in Iran.

Recently, the United Nations Secretary-General's human rights report on Iran again reported incitement targeting the Baha'i faith and its adherents, and the destruction of sites of religious and cultural value. It is through the General Assembly of the United Nations that we have to continue this fight.

The issues surrounding the persecution of Baha'is was first brought to me several years ago by one of my constituents, Nasser Sedghi. Nasser is a Baha'i from Iran who has made his home in Dubbo and is a very well regarded and much loved citizen of that town. It is not without some irony that the people of Dubbo probably know more about the persecution of the Baha'is in Iran than many other citizens around Australia. This is particularly important
for Nasser. His older brother Farhad encouraged Nasser to gain an education and encouraged him to make a new life for himself. He was able to do that because of the education that he gained. He is a very successful businessman in Dubbo at the moment. But four years ago Farhad Sedghi was arrested as part of a general sweep of people that were running the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education. Nasser's crime was to be taking part in educating people in Iran, that had been forbidden by the government.

One of the reasons that Nasser found himself as an academic undertaking education of others was that he was pretty well precluded from the workforce. He had a responsible job as an accountant in a large firm, but because of his faith he was sacked from that position, and so, in an attempt to make sure that others could receive an education and have the opportunities that he and his family had, he was involved in the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education.

It is hard to believe that in the 21st century we have this sort of persecution taking place. It is something that we read about happening in the dark past and in the dark ages, but this is happening as we speak today. People are being imprisoned not for committing a crime but for their belief in education and equal rights for women, and their support of a religion that only preaches peace and goodwill to their fellow man.

I am very pleased to be part of this motion today and I would encourage my colleagues in this parliament to support it. As a government we need to continue, directly through our representatives from Iran here in Australia and through the UN General Assembly, to keep the issue of the Baha'is that are behind bars in Iran at the forefront, and to make sure that they are free and able to practise their peaceful religion, as they are entitled to do.

Mr Laurie Ferguson (Werriwa) (11:11): It is very telling that this is not the first occasion on which this matter has come before the federal parliament. In fact, it is one of the string of motions that people on both sides of the parliament have addressed over the 20 years that I have been in this parliament. This stretches to 1979, when the house of Bab was destroyed in Shiraz, and we can trace an incident where the Baha'u'llah's father's residence in Tehran was destroyed. There was the execution of over 200 Baha'is, and as mentioned earlier, the 2008 arrest of the entire leadership.

As announced by the mover, this is a religion that emphasises global solutions. In my old electorate, I attended every year an event on the international Human Rights Day, which was organised by the Holroyd Baha'i community. It was not to propagandise about their own situation; it was to make sure that the world understood these very important principles.

Iran itself campaigns around the world—and quite rightly in some cases—for the Shia majority in Bahrain, about their lack of rights and their suppression. They speak of the persecution of the Houthi minority in Saudi Arabia. They have understandable fears for the Alawites, if ever the regime in Syria falls, and they have quite rightly raised the underrepresentation of the very significant Shiah population in Lebanese politics. On an international front, they raise the condition and the rights of their religious confederates, some of which are for reasons of international politics often ignored. It is thus ironic that within Iran we see systematic persecution of the Baha'is and ethnic minorities such as Kurds and Azeris, people incarcerated for practising theosophy, women arrested for campaigning for human rights, people jailed for criticising very questionable election results and a whole plethora of other people executed and incarcerated. Of course the Baha'is have been very
active around this matter in this country, and that is why, of all the persecuted groups, they are the one that most often comes before this parliament.

We see no real improvement. In late 2013 the United Kingdom's Foreign & Commonwealth Office said Iran 'has not substantially improved its human rights'. It has been the subject of consistent criticism by the UN special rapporteur, Ahmed Shaheed, who late last year spoke of no improvement. It is a situation that has been constantly criticised by the credible international organisation, Human Rights Watch. It has been the subject of a vote in the United Nations in 2013, which expressed deep concerns. We all know how difficult it is to mobilise UN resolutions criticising any country party to the United Nations, so the fact that that was carried 86 to 36 is indicative of how serious problems are there. Most recently, in August 2014 reports found that there were insufficient trial safeguards and inadequate access to legal counsel. Interviewees stated that lawyers refused to take their cases due to the fact that there would be reprisals against them for defending Baha'is and other religious minorities. Despite Iran accepting nine recommendations from the United Nations Human Rights Council, including commitments to uphold freedom of belief and religion and combat incitement, we can say with a great degree of confidence that there is a process of state-instigated discrimination against Baha'is.

As we have seen, there is an inability of Baha'i practitioners to get an education in the country. That is always a crucial need for minority groups in any society, whether they be Jews, Tamils, Palestinians or refugee groups around the world. For these people, education is often the only option, because other areas are cut off. But education is denied to Baha'is.

We have talked about the way in which their leadership has been constantly decimated and the way religious things that matter to them are being constantly destroyed. Iran would be the first country in the world to deplore ISIL's destruction of other religious sites in Iraq or Syria, but they see no inconsistency in destroying and suppressing another religious group. I commend the movers of this motion. I hope it will not be a resolution that will be moved here for the next 20 years. I hope that international pressure and the need for Iran to try and reach some accommodation with the West over nuclear weapons and other facets will increase the possibility of change.

Mr GOODENOUGH (Moore) (11:16): I support this motion moved by the member for Canberra calling for an end to the systematic persecution of Baha'is in Iran. The freedom to practise one's chosen religion is a fundamental right that forms the core of our democratic system in Australia. Our society allows freedom of religion free from persecution, intimidation and harassment. It is our sincere hope that international religious tolerance will spread.

It is estimated that there are currently more than 110 Baha'is imprisoned in Iran due to their religious beliefs. Over the years Baha'is have endured persecution and atrocities including economic and educational discrimination, imprisonment, torture, restrictions on their right to free assembly, raids, arrests, vandalism and violence—and even paying the ultimate sacrifice of death. Since 2005 it is estimated that more than 710 Baha'is in Iran have been arrested and detained.

It is incumbent upon us as elected representatives in a free society to call upon foreign governments around the world, including countries such as Iran, to respect freedom of religion and allow their citizens to worship peaceably with tolerance. In raising public
awareness of this issue it is hoped that world attention will be focussed on addressing this grave injustice.

There is a strong Baha'i community in Western Australia, in particular in the northern suburbs of Perth. I have been fortunate enough to meet a number of Baha'i's living in my electorate and in the surrounding areas. The first member I was introduced to was Mr Mehran Zare, a local businessman, who made mention of his Baha'i faith. At first I did not know much about their beliefs, faith or history. But soon after, prominent members of the Baha'i community invited me along with my colleague the member for Cowan to attend a cultural performance in the auditorium at Hale School, which was filled to capacity. The production provided a comprehensive overview of the Baha'i faith and culture through music and on-stage drama.

Subsequently, I was invited along with Senator Michaelia Cash to a dinner with key members of the local Baha'i community hosted at the home of Mr Ali and Mrs Faith Habibi, where I had the opportunity to engage in conversation over a dinner of delicious homemade cuisine. During the evening an informative documentary on DVD was screened which provided a concise overview of the Baha'i history, faith and beliefs, and the persecution faced in Iran and other countries. I later reciprocated this hospitality by inviting Baha'i assembly members to my office for a roundtable discussion, so I am pleased to be able to have the opportunity to contribute to this parliamentary debate in support of the Baha'i community.

Through my association with the local Baha'i community over a number of years, I have observed its members to be very peaceful, tolerant, and family oriented. The religion could not be described as fundamentalist or extremist in nature—rather, it is very moderate in nature. As I have become more familiar with individual members, I have come to realise that they value education very highly, with many members having postgraduate qualifications and having built professional careers in fields such as business, engineering, medicine and academia. I note that a number of senior positions at my local Edith Cowan University are currently filled by prominent Baha'i's.

What greatly impresses me generally about the Baha'i community in Australia is the ability of its members to integrate and assimilate into Australian society by fully and actively participating in the development and advancement of our nation. By being inclusive, cooperative, and participative they have made the most of the opportunities presented to them, settled in and been embraced by their fellow Australians. The value they have placed on education, professional achievement and family values has seen them prosper in their new country.

In supporting this motion for an end to the systematic persecution of Baha'i's by the government of Iran, and more broadly an end to the persecution of Baha'i's by governments across the world, I urge all governments to consider the potential contributions that can be made to society by allowing the Bahai's to freely practise their religion. (Time expired)

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (11:21): I thank the member for Canberra for moving this motion and for the opportunity to speak about the deteriorating situation that confronts the Baha'i people of Iran, who continue to be subject to terrible persecution. Like the member for Moore before me, I too am fortunate to have many Bahai practitioners in my electorate of Fremantle, and I also welcome members of the Bahai community of Canberra to the parliament. It is disappointing that the range and severity of the discriminatory treatment of Baha'i's in Iran has
worsened since the time I moved a motion on this subject in 2012, and that we find ourselves standing here yet again giving voice to the plight of the Baha'is in their struggle to be accorded fundamental human rights.

At the most recent Universal Periodic Review relating to Iran, held at the Human Rights Council in Geneva at the end of October 2014, Iran's representative stated that Baha'is enjoy all citizenship rights. This is completely contradicted by the evidence and ignores the exclusion of Baha'is from protection under Iran's constitution, which makes plain that the 'human political, economic, social, and cultural rights' afforded to Iranian citizens must be 'in conformity with Islamic criteria.' Despite promises made by the new president, Mr Hassan Rouhani, in relation to improving the observance of basic human rights in Iran, there has been no change in the persecution faced by the Baha'is. In fact, oppression of Baha'is intensified all over the country in 2014—intelligence officials heightened their use of violence during home searches and arrests; coordinated raids were conducted to arrest groups in different localities; and today more than 100 Baha'is remain imprisoned as a direct consequence of their religious beliefs—including the seven Baha'i leaders imprisoned since May 2008.

Officials have implemented discriminatory policies in an increasingly methodical way over the past 18 months, blocking access to higher education, business and trade, in addition to suppressing the social and cultural life for those of the Baha'i faith. Recently, 81 stores belonging to Baha'is were sealed by the authorities in four different localities merely for being closed in observance of Baha'i holy days. All this shows there is a clear intent to isolate, impoverish, and constrain the Baha'i people, with a powerful encouragement for them to leave their own country.

Despite this persecution, and contrary to the Iranian authority's view that the Baha'is are secretly plotting a Zionist overthrow, the Baha'is remain committed to contributing to the peaceful advancement of their homeland by maintaining their faith and refusing to be subjugated. Among these brave people are Mr Danial Owji, who now resides in Western Australia having fled Iran following his persecution for involvement with the Baha'i Institute of Higher Learning. Danial's experience was recorded by the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Iran in a March 2013 report that states:

On May 22, 2011, 15 teachers and administrators of the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education (BIHE) were allegedly arrested. Later that night, Mr. Danial Owji a student and volunteer at the BIHE, while driving was reportedly stopped on his street by plainclothes agents, tasered, handcuffed, blindfolded, put in the trunk of his car, and driven away. Mr. Owji was allegedly taken to an unknown location, that appeared to be an official place of detention, where he was interrogated and physically tortured over the course of four days, including being punched, kicked, suspended from the ceiling by his arms, handcuffed in stress positions, having cigarettes extinguished on his body, and being flogged on his feet. Mr. Owji was held in a bathroom rather than a cell. During his interrogations before his release, Mr. Owji was pressured to sign a document saying he was a participant in the Baha'i university, helped propagate it electronically, cooperated with the Zionist entity, taught classes, would testify against specific professors, and that the administration of school was conducted from the Baha'i facilities in Haifa, Israel in cooperation with the Zionist regime. Mr. Owji was allegedly harassed following his release as he sought legal redress for his mistreatment. When he received a summons from the Revolutionary Court approximately a year after his arrest, Mr. Owji fled the country. Sadly, there are many more stories like Danial's filling UN reports and the records of organisations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.
This week at the UN Human Rights Council, Iran will be indicating which of the recommendations made during its 2014 UPR it intends to accept. The record of the past four years shows that Iranian authorities have failed to implement the recommendations accepted during its first review.

I urge Iran—a once great nation, as I have previously said in this place; a cradle of civilisation and of culture, and a place with a historical respect for education—to finally abide by its commitment to the International Bill of Human Rights. Iran's Constitution, in Article 23, already recognises that: 'The investigation of individuals' beliefs is forbidden, and no-one may be molested or taken to task simply for holding a certain belief.' Iran could simply put this article into practice by allowing Baha'is to participate fully in Iranian society.

Ending this long period of discrimination and repression would allow the Iranian government to make progress on the path to a peaceful, principled and tolerant state—(Time expired)

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (11:27): The challenge of going last in a debate like this is to try to find an excellent point that has not already been made and made very well by all speakers today. I do, however, acknowledge Natalie Mobini for her assistance in the last few days and the members of the Baha'i community here in Canberra.

It does seem like we have been here before, and certainly in my travels in the world, when I have been fortunate enough to go overseas, I have seen persecution in many places. Whatever happens here in this place in these debates, we need to acknowledge that, down there on the ground, people are living the challenges of this every day. And it is not just in recent times, either. The Baha'i community has been persecuted since 1844, from the origins of their faith.

Our mutual friend Mehran Zare from Perth has told me on many occasions about his flight from Iran. It was something like 30 years ago when he was at school that he was taken from a classroom, because he was a Baha'i, taken out into the snow and had his hand held under the snow; the boot of one of the staff of this school held his hand under the snow for two hours—a terrible act of torture against a child. But this is the day-to-day life of people of the Baha'i faith in Iran.

Although persecution has been a constant part of the existence of the Baha'is since the origins of their faith—and we know that that is the case—since 1979 the Islamic Republic of Iran has been responsible for great torture and persecution. It has been described as alienating or keeping people away from education and stopping them from entering universities, and then arresting those who tried to set up a Baha'i university as well. This is systematic; there is no doubt about it. Billions of dollars of property has been seized since the revolution in 1979. It is a wonder to me, and a great indication of the courage and the resolute nature of Baha'i people, that there are still 300,000 of them left in Iran. What brave people they are. I can understand that so many have had to find a better life elsewhere, and it is great that they have found that better life. Many have found that better life here in Australia. It is a great indication to me of how brave and strong the people who remain behind in Iran are.

I have no time for the regime there in any regard, whether it is creating a nuclear program, the killing of apostates or the persecution of the Baha'is and other minorities in their country. I have no faith, no confidence in the Iranian regime. I know that so many of the recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review of human rights in 2010 came to nothing.
Very few of the recommendations were accepted. Those that were accepted were hardly carried through with at all. We know that on Thursday there will be Iran's response to the 2014 recommendations. There are 291 recommendations and we will see what they do with that. But I tell you this: in the circumstance where a religion is not even acknowledged as a minority within the constitution of that bureaucracy, I have little faith that they will either acknowledge the concerns of the international community or even act on them at all.

It is important that, whatever we do in this country, we keep talking about this. I know the Minister for Foreign Affairs has raised it with Iran and our embassy in Tehran has also raised it. We must continue to raise it at every opportunity. It should be part of the furniture. Part of every discussion we have with countries like Iran should be to raise this issue of the human rights of people over there, particularly the Baha'is, a long-suffering but very brave people. We should always keep them in our prayers and close to our hearts, because they certainly deserve our greatest respect.

Debate adjourned.

International Mother Language Day

Ms VAMVAKINOU (Calwell) (11:32): I move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) since 1999, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization has recognised International Mother Language Day (MILD) on 21 February;

(b) on 16 May 2007 the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution A/RES/61/266 called upon Member States 'to promote the preservation and protection of all languages used by peoples of the world';

(c) MILD has been observed every year since its inception to promote linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism; and

(d) 21 February represents the day in 1952 when students demonstrating for recognition of their language, Bangla (as one of the two national languages of the then Pakistan), were shot and killed by police in Dhaka, the capital of what is now Bangladesh;

(2) recognises:

(a) the importance of languages and their benefits in the broader Australian community;

(b) that languages are the most powerful instruments for preserving and developing our tangible and intangible heritage; and

(c) that all moves to promote the dissemination of mother tongues will serve not only to encourage linguistic diversity and multilingual education but to develop fuller awareness of linguistic and cultural traditions throughout the world and inspire solidarity based on understanding, tolerance and dialogue;

(3) acknowledges and commends the Speak Greek in March campaign;

(4) acknowledges that the Speak Greek in March campaign aims to encourage the greater use of the Greek language at home, in the month of March; and

(5) in collaboration with relevant organisations of the Greek community, undertakes a campaign to establish March as the month during which individuals and organisations endeavour to conduct most of their communications at home and in public in the Greek language.

Ms VAMVAKINOU: My motion acknowledges UNESCO's recognition of 21 February as International Mother Language Day. On 16 May 2007, the United Nations general
assembly resolved to promote the preservation and protection of all languages used by peoples of the world. Since then, International Mother Language Day has been marked with a wide range of activities that promote linguistic and cultural diversity. Happily, we are seeing an increase of such activities here in Australia.

Language is much more than an instrument for communication. It is also the main carrier for one's inheritance and the core source for ethnic and cultural identity. Our multilingual world would be better appreciated if we all had a greater understanding of our linguistic and cultural traditions. According to the 2011 census, there are about 418 languages spoken in Australia today. At least 151 of those languages are spoken in my electorate of Calwell. Other than English, the dominant languages are Turkish, Arabic, Italian, Greek, Maltese, Senegalese, Tamil, Maori, Aramaic and Bhutanese, just to name a few. Of course, the language of the Wurundjeri people is often heard during our local welcome to country ceremonies.

The importance of recognising International Mother Language Day is to remind us here in Australia of the enormous multilingual capacity we have and our duty to preserve it. It is also an affirmation of the right of people to speak their mother tongue free of persecution. Nowhere is this more vital than in our Indigenous languages, the mother tongues of our first people. Sadly, we find ourselves in a dire predicament where we are lamenting the decline of our Indigenous languages as they are increasingly becoming extinct.

According to Australian Bureau of Statistics data from 2009 and 2010, Indigenous language endangerment in Australia is illustrated by the decline in Indigenous language speakers across all age groups. At the 1996 census, 12.5 per cent of Indigenous Australians were Indigenous language speakers. This had declined to 11.3 per cent by the year 2011.

Worldwide, it is estimated that more than half of the 6,000 languages spoken will be replaced by the dominant languages. This means that some 3,000 languages will no longer be spoken by the end of the 21st century and that all their cultural, ethnic and ecological heritage, unique to their speakers, will be lost. In Australia we are fortunate to have a rich cultural diversity of languages that are assets to our increasingly global community; however, we must not be complacent. Rather, we should do what we can to maintain, service and support our languages as national cultural assets.

For this reason I would like to commend the Speak Greek in March campaign, which is currently seeing a range of activities taking place and was launched on Saturday, 21 February in Melbourne. The campaign aims to encourage the greater use of the Greek language amongst Greek-speaking and non-Greek-speaking Australians, and to promote the Greek language as one of the world's richest languages and an ongoing source for the development of our modern languages.

Former general manager of SBS Radio Mr Mike Zafiropoulos came up with this concept as a way of encouraging his own children, who are third-generation Greek-Australians, to actually use the Greek language. Mike realised as a bilingual parent of a couple of school-age kids, as he has said, that more needed to be done to encourage speaking Greek amongst the younger generations. Mr Zafiropoulos believes that such a campaign could help arrest some of the worrying trends in the use of Greek within families, where speaking Greek is on the decline.
The campaign has attracted the attention of a broad number of organisations, including the Victorian education department, but in particular the celebrities of Greek-Australian extraction who have thrown their full support behind the campaign. Journalist and broadcaster Helen Kapalos said that, after her mother passed away some 20 years ago, she lost her confident grasp of the Greek language, and that it was only with age that she realised and appreciated the cultural strength contained in the words gifted to her by her ancestors.

I would also like to quote celebrity chef Mr George Calombaris, who has served up his own trademark enthusiasm for all things of Greek extraction, and who said:

Jeez, I love Australia … what we're all about … I'm proud of all the Greeks that came here and put their stamp on this wonderful place …

Finally, I would like to encourage similar campaigns to be undertaken by other community languages in Australia, akin to that of the Speak Greek in March campaign.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Can I have a seconder for the motion?

**Ms Rowland:** I second the motion.

**Mr COLEMAN** (Banks) (11:37): I am very pleased to speak on this motion about the importance of the Greek language and indeed the broader Greek culture and community. My electorate of Banks has a very substantial Greek-Australian population which is justifiably proud of the remarkable history of Greece and the extraordinary depth of its culture. Of course the Greek culture, dating back thousands of years as it does, has an extraordinary list of achievements in terms of the areas of Western democracy as we know it today, trial by jury and so many other areas. Greek society has pioneered in fields such as mathematics, philosophy, poetry and a number of important forms that we take for granted today like satire, tragedy and a range of other areas. The modern Olympics are, of course, drawn from the ancient Olympics.

In my electorate of Banks, about six per cent of residents have Greek ancestry and about five per cent of residents speak Greek at home. This motion is very relevant to that substantial group in my community. There are parts of my electorate with a larger Greek population. For instance, in the suburb of Blakehurst, according to the ABS, about 13 per cent of people speak Greek at home, and in Connells Point it is about 12 per cent. It is a very proud community in my electorate.

Last week I visited the Greek Orthodox Community of NSW head office in Lakemba and discussed a range of things. One of the interesting aspects of that organisation is that they operate four Greek language schools in my electorate—at Connells Point Public School, Danebank school in Hurstville, Peakhurst Public School and Bald Face Public School in Blakehurst. These are important institutions which provide opportunities for our local families to ensure that their kids grow up being able to speak Greek as fluently as their parents and grandparents are able to.

The Greek Orthodox Community of NSW organisation runs a number of other very important events—for example, the Greek Festival of Sydney, which every year attracts up to 50,000 people. A number of different activities make up the festival. There is a museum presentation going back to the First World War and looking at Lemnos in 1915 and contrasting it with a century later. There is a big celebratory dinner at Brighton-Le-Sands coming up later in March, and various other activities. The Greek Orthodox Community of
NSW is an extremely important organisation in our community. In addition to running those important language courses it also runs seniors groups and childcare centres.

I also want to acknowledge the contribution to the local Greek community of the Kogarah Greek Orthodox Church, where Father Konidaris is the parish priest. Parliament has a connection to that church, as my colleague the member for Barton is its parish president. One of the important initiatives of the church has been to run the annual Being Greek Festival, which is held at Carss Park each year. I went along in 2013—I was away last year unfortunately and could not attend—and it was very well hosted by Ada Nicodemou from Home and Away. There were literally tens of thousands of people at Carss Park. It was a really fantastic celebration of Greek culture and of everything that the Greek community contributes to the St George region.

I commend the motion. Maintaining cultural heritage is so important not only in the Greek community but in communities right across our nation. I commend the Greek-Australian community in Banks on everything it does for our area.

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (11:42): I thank the member for Calwell for bringing such a comprehensive motion to the House on such an important matter, which is recognised not only in this place but in our local communities and in global fora. The origins of Mother Language Day are both deeply saddening but also uplifting. They are sad because of the lives lost—born out of a right to speak a language. It is from this that the global movement of recognition stirred for decades before being declared by UNESCO as International Mother Language Day on 21 February.

This has a special meaning for Bangladesh, its people and its diaspora. It is inherently entwined with its independence movement. At a time when more than half the population of East Pakistan spoke Bangla not Urdu, in 1948 Urdu was declared to be the sole state language. This was despite the fact that Bangla had survived hundreds of years of foreign invasions. I want to draw from Ekushey, one of many Bangla-devoted online resources. Ekushey means 21. When this word is spoken, for Bangladeshis it is widely known to refer to 21 February. Ekushey states:
The students of Dhaka University spontaneously opposed—that is, opposed the sole designation of Urdu—and the Language Movement was born. Students, politicians and intelligentsia banded together in a move to implement Bangla as a second official language, alongside Urdu, and the state language of East Pakistan.

Early in February 1952, student leaders decided that 21st February would be celebrated as State Language Day. Peaceful strikes and processions were scheduled across the state …
This included a peaceful procession on the morning of the 21st:
As soon as the procession left the premises of Dhaka University campus and spilled into main streets, police opened fire, and consequently, unarmed students died and many were injured.

The already-disenchanted Bengalis were alarmed and angered by this action, and became increasingly agitated. Seeing this, the government made the gesture of instating Bangla as the state language of East Pakistan and a second state language with Urdu, in April of that year. The gesture came far too late, for the agitation for recognition was sweeping the vast state. It slowly morphed into a desire for self governance, recognition, respect that, after nineteen years of strife and tension, eventually
evolved into a movement for independence, culminating in the nine month long War of Independence that gave birth to Bangladesh in 1971.

It is this line in particular that I want to quote:

In the world's history, no other nation has had to struggle so much, shed so much blood, to be able to hang onto their right to speak their Mother Tongue.

I pay tribute to the Bangladeshi people and their language. They are an integral part of our multicultural society. I have had the pleasure of a long association with many constituents of Bangladeshi descent, and I have a particular admiration for their struggle for independence: I have mentioned Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, or Bangabandhu, in this place. He is one of the great leaders of modern times.

I refer to the UNESCO 2015 theme: 'Inclusion in and through education: Language counts'. More than ever, this highlights what still remains a burning issue for equality through education for the world's citizens. UNESCO notes that education for all goals are far from attained, due in part to the difficulties of reaching the worst-off segments of the population, the debate around language and education becomes more central.' It goes on:

Linguistic minorities are often among the most marginalised populations, with little or poor access to quality education. When they do have access to education, learners from these communities are often either excluded from opportunities to pursue their educational career beyond primary or pushed out of education because the language of instruction is not their own.

It should remain a key goal of Australians to ensure that those educational opportunities are afforded to all, irrespective of one's mother language. I will be celebrating Harmony Day in conjunction with International Mother Language Day. It is important to draw attention to the fact that many local communities, including the Burmese Friendship Association and also Bangla Academy Australia, have initiated many community events to draw attention to this issue.

I want to end by citing a less well-known language, and that is the language of Rotuma. Those of you who know my story know I have Fijian heritage, and my father learnt how to speak Rotuman fluently. Rotuma is a very small remote island of only around 13 by four kilometres. The statistics I have researched show that there are probably only about 2,000 Rotumans still living on Rotuma—though there are probably many more on the mainland. It was a language that my father learnt fluently and I hope that it remains alive, even as more and more Rotumans take up residence outside of Rotuma. Mr Deputy Speaker, I end with 'Faiaksia hanisit', which in Rotuman means thank you for your kindness. I thank the House.

**Dr STONE** (Murray) (11:47): I rise to celebrate the recently designated International Mother Language Day. Languages are a key to culture, and without your home language, or your mother language, you cannot be fully functional in a particular culture. We recognise that Australia is multicultural. We are multilingual, we are multicultural, we have religious diversity and the Australian government is committed to maintaining and building a prosperous and cohesive multicultural Australia. I am very pleased that one of the pilots of a new program to teach different languages is going to occur at the Arthur Dickmann childcare and preschool centre in Shepparton. This will be an attempt to teach children from a very young age—the age of four—second and even third languages or to polish up on their home languages through specially developed IT software packages. I commend that initiative of this government.

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**FEDERATION CHAMBER**
In particular I want to focus on the loss of Australia's Indigenous languages. That is a tragedy because, as I said before, language is an integral part of a culture, but in Australia there is severe discrimination and disadvantage when it comes to Indigenous people, particularly from rural and remote parts of Australia, trying to be best represented in courts, where the language spoken is not their home language, or perhaps when they are presenting for medical treatments or are trying to gain employment or even attempting something as fundamental as getting a drivers licence, without being able to speak English properly or perhaps speaking a Kriol which is not known beyond a very small population or community. These individuals are being disadvantaged in not being able to access the opportunities that other Australians take for granted.

I am very pleased to have been part of a special study of language learning in Indigenous communities in Australia. The study was part of an inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities by the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, which I now chair. The report from the inquiry was called Our land, our languages. Amongst the recommendations made in the report, now several years old, was one that said it should be mandatory that every teacher who has Indigenous Australians in their classroom, particularly in rural and remote areas, be trained in teaching English as a second language. No child in Australia who attends school speaking a mother language should be discriminated against by being forced to learn from their very first day in a language other than their own. The inquiry recommended also that there be literacy and numeracy alternatives as an assessment tool. The difficulty experienced by children learning English as an additional language or dialect when sitting for the standardised NAPLAN tests should be understood. We recommended that the minister for education that work with COAG to develop this national assessment program, which would reflect the different languages spoken by students across Australia.

We also wanted to make sure that we have protocols for mandatory first-language assessment of Aboriginal and Islander children entering into early childhood education. Too often during the inquiry we found that a preschool teacher suspected that amongst her new flock of bright eyed little boys and girls were many who did not speak English. But they had no idea, and there was no assessment process available to them to find out, just what language the children spoke and how they could best facilitate the children's learning, perhaps using native speakers. We also recommended very strongly a national Indigenous languages policy that would include qualifying Indigenous language speakers to work in schools, particularly with the youngest members of the school population. We wanted to see such people trained to be not only teachers' assistants but fully qualified teachers who could use their home language skills throughout the classroom both to ensure that Indigenous students were not disadvantaged and that non-Indigenous students could also learn Indigenous languages as part of their Australian heritage and learning experience.

I endorse this motion. I think it is of critical importance. We should make sure that Australia, which is rich in cultural and linguistic diversity, is not left behind when it comes to having adequate protocols and efforts to maintain those languages.

**Mr Hayes** (Fowler—Chief Opposition Whip) (11:53): I thank the member for Calwell for bringing to us this important motion that highlights the significance of multiculturalism and linguistic diversity in our society. As most in this place know, as the member for Fowler I
have the privilege of representing one of the most multicultural electorates in the whole of Australia. Located in south-west Sydney, my electorate boasts migrants from every corner of the globe. I know that I have the opportunity and privilege to represent many different ethnic groups, but I am conscious of the fact that I am dealing with people of over 150 nationalities, who speak a language other than English at home. That is pretty significant in a modern society and is why I believe that International Mother Language Day is an important celebration. It is a day that allows us to recognise different languages and heritages that make up the face of modern Australia.

Celebrated on 21 February, International Mother Language Day was first formally recognised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in November 1999 as a day on which to encourage speakers of other languages to speak their mother tongue and be proud of it. The importance of preserving linguistic diversity was also recognised by the United Nations General Assembly in 2007, when it encouraged member states to promote the preservation and protection of all languages used by peoples of the world.

However, what people may not know is that behind this very culturally important day lies a very tragic event in Bangladesh. It was a day that actually gave rise to this celebration that we have today. It was about the struggles of the people of Bangladesh for cultural, linguistic and ethnic freedom. On 21 February 1952 a group of students in Bangladesh were shot and killed while demonstrating for their right to speak their mother tongue, Bangla. This language movement was the key inspiration for Bangladeshis to achieve their independence, which they did in 1971. It also became the very foundation for International Mother Language Day. Today, 21 February is not only observed as a public holiday in Bangladesh to commemorate the historic language movement; it is also recognised worldwide for its significance, as a day on which we celebrate culture and heritage.

I would like to thank the Bangladeshi Australian community who have been very much in the forefront in taking the initiative for the walk each year in Canberra which brings people together from all different backgrounds in an effort to recognise the value of language in cultural diversity. In Australia, our cultural vibrancy and our linguistic diversity is something that we should be extremely proud of—and I know that we in south-west Sydney are proud of it. Not only has it allowed the broader Australian community to develop a better understanding of the different cultural heritages that make up Australia, but also it fosters harmony and mutual respect amongst different ethnic communities.

Language is the foundation of our communication. In a cultural context, an individual's mother language is important to customs and traditions. It is the link between the past and the present in understanding heritage. But it is also very significant in developing that very important sense of identity. It is truly one of the most basic values that a person can have.

Sadly, due to the process of globalisation, I presume, mother languages are slowly disappearing, and many are also becoming, to an extent, endangered. And when language fades, so does the rich tapestry of cultural diversity, traditions and memories. Therefore, as citizens of modern, multicultural Australia, I believe that we have a role to play in supporting the preservation of mother languages and in encouraging the intercultural dialogue that it promotes.
Once again, I congratulate the member for Calwell in bringing this matter before the House. She has been at the forefront of these matters in the past and obviously will continue to be so in the future.

Debate adjourned.

Small Business

Broadband

Ms Marino (Forrest—Government Whip) (11.58): I move:

That this House acknowledges that:

(1) small and medium businesses are the engine room of the Australian economy and employment;

(2) all Australians, including small business people, should have access to fast, affordable and reliable broadband;

(3) regional small businesses often encounter greater difficulty accessing broadband and often receive a lower standard of broadband service; and

(4) the Government has a plan to prioritise getting areas of most need connected to fast reliable broadband sooner, especially in regional areas.

Small business is the heart and soul of the Australian economy. Of the over two million actively trading businesses in Australia, almost 96 per cent are small businesses and 3.8 per cent are medium businesses. Small and medium business combined employ 70 per cent of the nation's private sector workers or 59 per cent of all Australian workers. Small business alone—those with less than 20 employees—account for nearly 50 per cent of all of Australia's workers in the private sector. This is why small business is so important to the coalition government, and why the government has moved to make life easier for small business.

Regional Australia needs better broadband sooner. It waited years under Labor. Regional Australia needs to catch up to the major metropolitan centres and have access to the type of broadband service that allows businesses to grow and compete and individuals to enjoy an equivalent level of access. Labor in government failed to prioritise regional communities in the original NBN plan. There were appalling gaps in Labor's rollout plans.

Many regional areas with no broadband service were left behind for six years, or left out altogether. By September 2013 Labor had invested a staggering $6.5 billion in NBN Co, yet the NBN reached only three per cent of Australian homes and businesses and only one per cent actually received services. Labor underestimated by a factor of 2 to 3 the number of Australians in regional and remote areas who want the NBN. This is easily demonstrated by their bungling of the NBN Interim Satellite Service, which provides temporary internet access for premises in metropolitan fringes and regional and remote areas that have no other way of getting broadband.

In July 2013 Labor told 250,000 households and businesses, many with no other option, that they were eligible for the ISS. Five months later, in December 2013, the ISS reached its capacity of just 48,000 customers, and registrations were closed. Tens of thousands were left demanding services but were unable to get them. Labor spent $351 million on the ISS—$7,300 per user—yet it delivered a dial-up service to many users.

By comparison the coalition government has made un-serviced and under-serviced regions a priority. The government moved in April 2014 to fix Labor's mistakes—$34 million was
committed to improving the ISS to improve service quality for existing users, allow new connections and establish a subsidy scheme for the cost of on-premises equipment and installation.

The challenges of Australia's geography and population density mean that outside of city centres, NBN Co has planned a combination of fixed line, fixed wireless and satellite technologies to deliver fast broadband for all Australians. NBN Co's satellite program is now based around both the interim satellite service and a long-term satellite service. The Interim Satellite Service currently in place involves NBN Co leasing capacity from IPSTAR and Optus Satellite.

In the meantime, NBN Co is developing its Long-Term Satellite Service by building two identical satellites to provide high-speed broadband services. The first of two Ka-band satellites that NBN Co will use for this upgraded service is expected to be in operation before mid-2016, lifting broadband quality for users in remote locations. Around $2 billion has been committed for designing, building and launching the satellites and for other equipment and services needed for the LTSS. The LTSS is designed to bring a step change in the experience of broadband users in regional and remote Australia, where so many small to medium businesses are, with peak download speeds of 25 megabits per second (Mbps) and upload speeds of five Mbps. These speeds exceed those typically available to ADSL2+ users in metropolitan Australia today. The LTSS will cover the entire Australian mainland and islands, through 101 dedicated 'spot beams'. Each satellite beam will have a different capacity in terms of maximum bandwidth, split across all end-users in the beam. The highest-capacity beam will serve up to 15,000 premises, while the 20 lowest capacity beams will average 700 premises each.

The coalition is committed to rolling out the National Broadband Network as quickly as possible, at less cost to taxpayers and more affordably for consumers. In just over one year it now reaches more than double the number of users than previously. In nine months the number of premises covered increased 65 per cent, from 348,000 to 573,000. The rollout is proceeding using a multi-technology mix that matches the right technology to the right location and leverages existing infrastructure. It is also worth noting that the 18-month rollout plan shows our commitment to rural and regional Australia, where so many small to medium businesses are, with almost one million premises being covered outside of major urban areas. Of the areas receiving upgrades to their fixed-line network, more than 800,000 are outside of major urban areas, which is almost half of the total rollout in the fixed line footprint. An additional 128,000 premises in rural and regional areas will be upgraded with access to fixed wireless broadband. And under the coalition government since the election the reach of the fixed wireless network has gone from just 39,000 premises to more than 173,000 premises today.

The NBN Co strategic review found that if Labor's NBN proceeded it would cost $72.6 billion—$29 billion more than the public were told—and would lift broadband costs by up to 80 per cent and take until 2024 to deliver. The coalition's approach will save taxpayers $32 billion, get the NBN finished four years sooner and enable nine out of ten Australians in the fixed-line footprint to have access to download speeds of 50 megabits per second or more by 2019.
In my own electorate of Forrest, NBN has recently announced new services to be provided by fibre and fixed wireless technologies in Brunswick, Stratham and Boyanup. This will add to the 44,000 homes and businesses in Western Australia with access to the NBN. I was especially glad to see the media release from NBN Co announcing the additional services in my electorate. I would like to quote from that release:

For many homes, farms and businesses in rural and regional Western Australia the rollout of the NBN will provide access to internet speeds and bandwidth that many in the big cities take for granted. In small rural and regional community like those in my electorate, and yours, Madam Deputy Speaker, we know that there are emerging numbers of small enterprises, even micro-enterprises, that are looking for the level of support that enables them to access the NBN in the way they need to in order to run their businesses. One of the most frequent responses I got from business during the past six to seven years concerned their having access to the appropriate level of bandwidth to be able to conduct their businesses. The fact that we have upgraded and given more businesses access in the short time we have been in government is a credit to the Minister for Communications. As we know, small business is the heart and soul of so many small regional communities. They are the people who support every community service organisation, every sporting club, every and emergency services organisation. Not only do they rely on them for donations and in-kind support, but often it is the workers in small business we rely on to help out in emergency services. We have seen this very clearly right throughout the south-west, particularly with the severe fires we have had throughout Western Australia.

Regional small businesses often encounter much more difficulty, and have, and I am very pleased that we have taken a proactive approach in prioritising under-serviced and unserviced areas. This is the total approach we have taken to NBN. With what has been rolling out in my electorate I can see that it will not just be small premises; it will be businesses, the small businesses right throughout the electorate, who will over time have access to better broadband sooner. That has always been our intention.

So many small businesses that supply a range of different services are looking for the speeds that are necessary simply to do their businesses. Even those who are tradespeople are active in this space. In different pockets of my electorate they find it particularly difficult to access the various services. The other side of this is our plan to prioritise areas to get fast broadband sooner. The regional areas are the thrust of what we are about. (Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Is the motion seconded?

Mr TAYLOR (Hume) (12:08): I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

Mr CLARE (Blaxland) (12:08): Last Tuesday night I was under in Thornton, in the Hunter, at St Michael's Church Hall. There were more than 100 people there packed in like sardines. It takes a lot nowadays to get more than 100 people at a town hall meeting, particularly during the week. People are busy and they have lots of things to do. Last Tuesday night there were a lot of people who wanted to be at that church hall to talk about the NBN. There were a lot of angry people, a lot of frustrated people, and they were there because they cannot get the sort of internet speeds they want. Most cannot even get ADSL. This is the third time I have visited Thornton in the past 12 months. Last time I was there, late last year, I heard the story of a nurse who has to climb onto her roof with a toggle just to download her roster. I heard lots of stories just like this last Tuesday night. One woman was very angry
because her teenage daughter needs to study at night—she is doing a course as well—and because they cannot get the internet speeds they want she has to stay at work till all hours of the night in Newcastle, sometimes getting home at 10 o'clock, 11 o'clock or 12 o'clock at night, just so both of them can study.

Another man I met was a man called Paul. He runs an accountancy business, employing seven people, 71 kilometres down the F3 in Toukley, but he lives in Thornton. He told the public meeting he would like to be able to set that business up in Thornton, but he cannot do that because he cannot get the broadband that he needs to run his business there. Another bloke, whose name I do not know, walked past when we were standing out the front before the meeting began. He said, 'What's this all about?' He did not know anything about the meeting and was not coming along to the meeting. I told him what it was about and he told a very similar story. He said that he had just moved his business from Thornton to Beresfield for the same reason: he cannot get the sort of internet services that he needs. He runs a mining services company.

The motion that we are talking about is about small business, the importance of small business and the importance for small business of broadband services, and they are just two great examples of businesses that need broadband and are not able to get those services in a town like Thornton in the Hunter. As a result of that, people move out or people move their businesses from Thornton to somewhere else.

To give you an idea of just how bad the broadband access is in Thornton, last year, Sharon Claydon, the member for Newcastle, sent out a survey to local residents. She got 177 surveys back, and of those 177 surveys, 74 per cent said they could not even get ADSL. If you look at the government's MyBroadband website you will see that it paints an even bleaker picture. The website ranks broadband quality and availability from A to E. If you put in addresses in Thornton you find that in Thornton it is E for both quality and availability. Here is the rub: before the election, Thornton was on the NBN rollout plan and was scheduled to be getting fibre to the home right now, to be rolled out over 2014, 2015 and 2016. Immediately after the election, Thornton was taken off the rollout map and it is still not on it. In December last year, the government released a new rollout plan for the next 18 months and Thornton is not on it. The motion that we are debating right now says:

… the government has a plan to prioritise getting areas of most need connected fast to reliable broadband sooner, especially in regional areas.

That is exactly what the coalition promised before the last election. In April 2013, the coalition's policy said:

Suburbs, regions, towns and business districts with the poorest services and greatest need for upgrades will receive first priority.

A couple of months later, in November 2013, at The NBN: Rebooted, Minister Turnbull, then the shadow minister, said:

In closing, let me remind you that up to two million households and businesses across Australia cannot get basic fixed-line broadband at present. Addressing these underserviced areas first is a key objective of our NBN policy.

So there is the promise and the commitment, but as you see in Thornton this is not happening; if it was happening Thornton would be getting the NBN right now. Instead, what Sharon and I saw on Tuesday night was more than a hundred very angry and very frustrated people. In two
weeks time, the government has a chance to fix this. In two weeks time, the 18 month rollout plan is due to be updated. It is a chance for the government to fix this and finally to put Thornton on the rollout map. I urge the government and the minister to do this not just for Thornton but for all the places across the country with terrible access to broadband, all the places that the government promised would get the NBN first.

When Whitlam died last year, I asked my parents what the one thing was that they most remembered him for. It was not Medibank, universal access to healthcare services or the changes to universities; it was sewerage that they remembered him for. I grew up in an area in Western Sydney where it changed people’s lives. People may think their response surprising, but if you ever had to go out into the backyard to go to the toilet in the middle of the night in winter, you would know how important having a flushable toilet in the house is.

When Whitlam started talking about this in the sixties, he was sneered at. People thought that it was not the role of the federal government to provide this sort of essential infrastructure. It is not sneered at anymore. Twenty years ago, when Paul Keating launched Networking Australia’s future, he said:

… national information infrastructure will be no less a general right than access to water … or electricity.

Just like Whitlam 20 years before him, there were people who were sneering at what he was saying back then in 1995. But history has proven Keating right. Just like clean water out of the tap, power at the flick of a switch or a flushable toilet inside the house, people expect fast and reliable broadband at the click of a button. When they cannot get it, as in Thornton where 74 per cent of people cannot get access to ADSL, they are justifiably very angry.

The government needs to think hard about this. One of the reasons that people are so upset with this government is broken promises. People can rattle off that favoured famous quote from Tony Abbott the night before the election:

… no cuts to education, no cuts to health, no change to pensions … and no cuts to the ABC.

But it is not just health, education or the ABC; it is the NBN as well. I gave one example of a broken promise, the promise to prioritise the worst places first. But it is not the only broken promise on the NBN. The government promised that everyone would have access to 25 megabits per second by 2016. That promise has been broken. Tony Abbott published an open letter to the Australian people on election night saying that the NBN would be built within three years. That is not going to happen either. We were told the NBN would cost only $29.5 billion. Now that promise has been broken. We were promised that Infrastructure Australia would be the organisation that would do the cost-benefit analysis. That promise has been broken. We were told there would be no new taxes. That promise has been broken.

I am not talking about the petrol tax or the now departed GP tax. I am talking about the NBN tax. As of two weeks ago, if you build a new home then you will have to pay $600 to NBN Co to get the NBN connected to your new home in a greenfields site. As at 1 July, that will go up to $900. Last week, the Minister for Communications made a very interesting speech at The Brisbane Club, where he said the problem with the budget was the sales job and that what they needed to do was explain the budget properly and do what he has done with the NBN. But if anyone thinks this is right, then I would argue they are deluding themselves. The problem with the budget was not the sales job; it was the substance. It is littered with broken promises and it is fundamentally unfair.
It is exactly the same with the NBN—a series of broken promises and also fundamentally unfair. Let me give you an example of what happened the day the Brisbane Club speech. At 10 pm last Thursday night, the government very quietly put on the NBN website a new policy called Technology Choice. There was no press release and no press conference. It was just quietly put on the website. Under this policy, if you live in a fibre-to-the-node area you can get fibre, but it will cost you anywhere 'from a few thousand dollars to tens of thousands of dollars.' On top of that, there is a $600 cost just to get a quote. In other words, if you are in a fibre-to-the-node area you can get it, but you will potentially have to pay tens of thousands of dollars for it. In other words, fibre for the rich and copper for the rest. This is another example of how the NBN—just like the budget we have been debating—is fundamentally unfair.

Mr TAYLOR (Hume) (12:18): It is somewhat galling to have to listen to the member for Blaxland tell us about failures on broadband rollout when, in fact, the greatest failure on the NBN rollout came from those opposite. By 30 June 2012 they were supposed to have delivered 137,000 connections. In fact, the correct number, the number that came out, was 3,867. That is about three per cent of the original target. Scroll forward one year to June 2013: they were supposed to have connected 317,000; in fact, the number was well under 40,000. The failure of those opposite to deliver their promises on NBN was legendary. We have heard many times from the minister for telecommunications about the Conrovian delusion that resulted in Australians believing they were going to be connected to high-speed broadband, when in fact they were not. Many of those failed connections were in my electorate of Hume.

It goes without saying that connecting small business to broadband is one of the great imperatives of this modern age and a great objective of this government. We know that businesses with fewer than 20 employees employ about 50 per cent of Australians and, if we broaden the definition of small business to those employing fewer than 200, we go closer to 75 per cent. An extraordinary proportion of Australians are employed in small businesses, and that is growing and has been growing for many years. It is one of the great structural trends in our economy that small business is the key employer in our economy. It is the engine of growth. But it is also an engine of innovation, because small businesses experiment. Small businesses have a tolerance for failure. It is no surprise that it was not Microsoft that came up with Google or Facebook or Twitter. They were all small businesses. In fact, the greatest innovations at Microsoft itself occurred when it was a very small business in the back of a garage. If you look at my electorate, small businesses are driving the economy. They are driving growth. Brumby Aircraft, in Cowra, is innovating in the area of design of small aircraft. Sarajane Furniture is competing with the Chinese in low-cost furniture. AFS Products Group has come up with innovative structural products for multiresidential construction. All of those businesses need high-speed internet.

One of the great things we have already heard that this government has done is to reset the focus for the NBN to prioritise those areas of greatest need. Nowhere is there greater need for high-speed internet than rural areas and the urban fringe. Also, importantly, this government has focused on choosing the right technology for the right location. That is exactly what I am seeing in my electorate. We are seeing the rapid rollout of towers in my electorate. We are seeing the accelerated rollout of fibre. We are stopping the bleeding, the extraordinary bleeding, we saw from the satellite technology choice made by those opposite—not buying
enough capacity and overselling satellite to try and reach their numbers for the rollout of the NBN.

In my electorate over the next 18 months we will connect 27,000 premises by fibre—that is, about 60 per cent of the electorate. We already now have several thousand connected by NBN fixed wireless towers. We have 12 operating already, with four to come in the next couple months. We will see in the next 12 months or so the launch of two satellites which will deal with the single biggest problem for the NBN, which is those areas that are unable to be reached by other technologies like fibre or fixed wireless.

This is a great imperative for this government. We are already seeing results. We are already seeing people in my electorate incredibly pleased, incredibly happy, that they are able to get very high speed broadband through technology that is well suited to their location. I have no doubt that the results that we have delivered—and those opposite failed to deliver—will continue in the coming weeks, months and years.

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (12:23): I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on this motion on small business and broadband, and particularly to highlight the failings of this government and of this minister who has overpromised yet chronically underdelivered when it comes to broadband. I would not presume to lecture those opposite about the government's failure on broadband. I will let their own side do it. We will start with Nationals Senator Barry O'Sullivan who, in Queensland Country Life in November 2014, highlighted his severe frustration with the government's lack of rollout and the lack of attention being paid to rural Queensland. The article says:

Mr O'Sullivan saw the gaps in the government's highly touted NBN scheme while touring far-western Queensland earlier this month.

"It's a shame on our nation," Mr O'Sullivan said.

"I'm embarrassed to be a part of a party whose government would allow this to continue.

"I think Malcolm should roll his swag out and run his ministry from out here for a month and then I think Malcolm will change his opinion.

"Let's see how he goes and hope that he doesn't need a phone service or internet, and he'll want to hope he doesn't need medical services."

The article went on to say:

Mr O'Sullivan said implementing the technology on an area-by-area basis was harming rural Australians' ability to compete in the global marketplace.

I will get back to that in a moment. But it is interesting that the article also ended by saying that Mr O'Sullivan:

… believed everyday Australians would see the unfairness in the gap between city and country infrastructure.

"The people of inland Australia feel abandoned by Canberra. They deserve better," he said.

On that issue of technology and the infrastructure gap, you need look no further than Senator Fiona Nash, who is not a fan of this government's model because, as she said herself in 2007, the FTTN solution is actually no solution at all: She said:

It's widely understood in the telecommunications industry that FTTN will not deliver improved broadband speeds to rural and regional areas.

That is spot on.
But I want to highlight a significant issue that I see occurring. We traditionally understood the digital divide as being between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas, but now it is quite plain that there is a digital divide emerging between some rural centres and others. You need look no further than the issues of Tamworth and Armidale. In November 2013 in the *Northern Daily Leader* we read of a regional NBN advocate slamming the Abbott government's broadband plan, saying that abolishing the fibre to the premises network would disadvantage regional centres and their surrounding towns. There is a quote in an article in that paper from Inverell councillor and engineer David Jones, who, according to the article, said that:

… Tamworth should be "bellowing like crazy" over the NBN.

The article went on to say:

Mr Jones, who has a consulting business as a civil and structural engineer, said regional MPs should be concerned and fighting for the NBN.

"Armidale's now complete—

that is, the NBN fibre to the premises—

and they have a huge advantage over every other centre in the New England," Mr Jones said.

But, again, you do not have to take it from these commentators. You can take it from members of the National Party. In September last year, local member Adam Marshall, a New South Wales Nationals MP, speaking in the *Armidale Independent* said: 'We have a huge advantage in Armidale over all other regional centres in Australia as we are fully NBN connected. We see Armidale as the hub, the incubator, of a digital enterprise zone, and from here we can grow into other centres right across our region.' Well, that is the story for Armidale, but, comparing it to Tamworth, it is quite clear that Tamworth is extremely concerned that they are getting the second-rate nonsolution that is being offered under this government.

I would also like to highlight this. I recently visited Bathurst—a safe National Party seat—and the Bathurst chamber of commerce, and No. 1 on their list of issues was the need for a true fibre to the premises network for their businesses. I quote here from a paper that was provided to me by Mr Steve Semmens, a local who calls himself an advocate for small business:

We are concerned that FTTN … will become s ineffective as the current ADSL 2.

We require FTTP—Fibre to the Premises.

…… …

The Federal Government does not appear to realise the HUGE impact on business, especially SME's, they are having by not investing in the technological infrastructure we need to take us successfully into the next 100 years.

…… …

How many businesses decide not to set up in regional areas because the internet access is too slow or non-existent?

The bottle neck to future business success and confidence is the lack of understanding and ignorance of Governments Technology policies.

So there you have it, from locals in these areas.
We can plainly see from the get go, in April 2013, the promise that all Australians would have the NBN on by 2016. That promise did not even last until Christmas that year. So this is a government that sold out the bush when they sold off Telstra, sold out the bush on wholesale pricing, and sold— (Time expired)

Mrs McNAMARA (Dobell) (12:29): I thank the member for Forrest for moving this motion and raising awareness of the need for fast and reliable broadband in regional areas. The member for Forrest and I have long advocated the need for the National Broadband Network to support small and medium-sized businesses in regional areas. Since my election, I have been working closely with Dobell's small business community to ensure that their broadband needs are addressed.

In Dobell, small businesses collectively is our largest employer, with approximately 8,500 businesses each employing between one to 20 people. Many of our local businesses are family operated and are looking for opportunities to grow and to generate further employment. A major key to driving this expansion is access to fast and reliable broadband.

Sadly, this was lost on the former Labor government. The original NBN rollout plan in the bill failed to consider the needs of our business community. Business centres such as the Tuggerah Business Park, Wyong CBD and The Entrance town centre were completely ignored. The former Labor government failed even to develop answer these important business communities.

The rollout of the NBN in Dobell was so poorly designed that when I was elected not a single premises had access to fast broadband. Today, approximately one-third of homes and businesses in the electorate have access to the NBN, with a further third under construction. It is estimated that the NBN rollout in Dobell will be completed in 2017, providing fast and reliable broadband services to every household and business.

Following this government's election, a comprehensive audit was undertaken to assess the state of broadband infrastructure throughout Australia. Through this process it was identified that the Central Coast lacked the broadband infrastructure capacity to meet the demand of households and businesses. Unlike the former Labor government, this government promptly developed a plan to expedite the delivery of the NBN to regions such as the Central Coast.

I alluded earlier to the Tuggerah Business Park and the lack of consideration by the former Labor government to acknowledge the park in the initial NBN rollout. The Tuggerah Business Park is home to approximately 220 businesses. Sadly, I am aware of businesses that have considered relocating, and some who decided against basing themselves at the park, due to the lack of broadband services. This is particularly worrying news for a region where the unemployment is above the national average and reliance for work is heavily dependent on small business.

In consultation with the Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP, Minister the Communications, I am pleased to say that the Tuggerah Business Park is now being looked at specifically by NBN Co. As a government, we must support our small businesses to thrive, to improve their productivity and to become competitive against other businesses, both at home and abroad. I recently had the opportunity to welcome Minister Turnbull to the Central Coast, where he met with representatives from local government and the business community to discuss this very topic. Attending the meeting was Mr Edgar Adams, editor and publisher of the Central Coast
Business Review. Edgar has long advocated the need for the NBN rollout, with priority access for small businesses. Edgar stated, 'Our region has many disadvantages, not the least being our high youth unemployment and lack of employment opportunities. Addressing these issues is very complex, but the best way to start is to create an environment where our region and those people who live, work and go to school here have every opportunity to approve and advance themselves. Central to Edgar's point is access to infrastructure that allows businesses to grow, prosper and employ more people.

The Central Coast is a perfect destination for start-up and relocating businesses, as it is situated midpoint between Sydney and Newcastle. However, our previous lack of broadband infrastructure was holding our region back. Lack of infrastructure has no doubt contributed to the 38,000 commuter exodus from our region every day. For those who travel to Sydney this means an average daily commute of up to four hours—that is 20 hours per week. Fast broadband is opening up new opportunities for employment based on the Central Coast. The Nexus Smart Hub, located at North Wyong, is an innovative new business, offering an alternative to the daily commute. Commuters can avoid the daily commute by 'hot-desking' at the Nexus Smart Hub. This is made possible through high-speed broadband which supports videoconferencing and large file transfers. I look forward to the day when access to this level of broadband is available all businesses within Dobell. I am proud to say that under this government we are on track to achieving this outcome.

I would like to thank the member for Forrest for moving this important motion and for her interest in supporting regional Australia. I commend the motion to the chamber.

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (12:34): Like all members, I like to talk about small business because it is an important part of our community. I do so from the perspective of the practical things we can do for small business. While it is a pleasure to see this motion in the House, I would humbly suggest to members of the government that, rather than waste their time mentioning the things we already know—about small business being the engine room of the economy—since they are in government maybe they could do something for small business. Doing rather than talking would be a good idea but, since they are members of the government and they have been in government for almost 1½ years they will have a deep understanding that, yes, small business does need good telecommunications; they need a good connection to the NBN—that is what they are asking you for. I remind government members where the NBN came from. It came from where other big ideas came from—it is from the community, from business or from Labor. You are not going to see it from the Liberals.

We have lots of evidence of this. In the last 18 months the Liberal government has been tearing down ideas, tearing down everything it can. It wants to cut and slash and do anything except put in new programs and new ideas. It wants to get rid of dozens and dozens of small business organisations, small business assistance schemes, employment schemes and innovation schemes, including bodies that helped small business to innovate and employ. Instead, it just wants to cut and slash. Any member of the House, regardless of their background, ought to agree that small business needs decent telecommunications connections—and fast ones, at that. I hear members crowing about the connections to the NBN they have had in their electorate in recent months or a year ago, and I say isn't it wonderful that the programs that Labor put in place are starting to deliver the fruits for small business. It was Labor that put in place those programs and contracts and set up NBN Co and
had a big idea, with the community, that we cannot just live off the old copper network forever. It is a great network that has served us for more than 100 years, but it will not service anyone in 100 years time. That is what the Liberal Party has forgotten.

When Malcolm Turnbull became communications minister his view was that he could not just completely shut down the concept of NBN, so we would have an 'NBN light'. Rather than taking fibre all the way to the home, all the way to the premises, it is just going to be to the node and then we will let everyone fend for themselves. We know that that is not going to work. That is just too difficult and it is not going to deliver the sort of broadband that people want. The fact is now, though, that we just do not get a choice. In the western corridor of Brisbane, through my electorate, one of the fastest growing corridors in Australia, we cannot even get an ADSL connection. You are left with two choices—you are left with satellite or with wireless broadband. These are not good enough for somebody at home let alone for small business. The fact is there are more and more small businesses people who work from home, who self-employ. We should never diminish self-employment as being employment. The other side often talk about small business but they forget that small business is more than companies; they forget that small business is more than those who employ more than 20 people. Sometimes a small business is just somebody employing themselves. I think all the evidence has finally come in, and it is stark—when it comes to the big ideas, it is Labor that puts them forward. With the National Disability Insurance Scheme, we knew that in 20, 30 or 40 years time the current system would break—it cannot survive. We put the NDIS in because we knew we had to do something big. We put the NBN in because we knew that in 20 or 30 or 40 years time—although the current telecommunications system is broken now and needs to be fixed—something would need to happen. Again, we need big ideas about the future, not just cut, cut, cut.

Unfortunately the Liberal Party is in this two-tiered mode—they are trying to implement a two-tiered health system; something for those with a lot of money and something much less for those with less money. They are trying to bring a two-tiered system into education—something for those with lots of cash who can afford $100,000 degrees but the others will have to fight over the small crumbs that are left. We see it in telecommunications—a two-tiered system where there would be one really good telecommunications system, a very fast system for those who can afford it and can afford to pay for that final mile, that final connection to the home or to the business, and then there will be those who will be left with whatever is available for them. The evidence is clear: Labor have the big ideas, and we have put them in place; the Liberal Party get into government and they destroy them and they attack small business on the way.

Mrs WICKS (Robertson) (12:39): I rise to support his very important motion from the member for Forrest regarding the importance of small business and the importance of fast reliable broadband in regional areas. As we have been hearing in this chamber this morning, this is a government that is determined to support small business, because we believe, as I know the member for Oxley has alluded to, they are the engine room of the Australian economy and of employment. They are the engine room, because we know of course that it is not government that creates jobs; it is business that creates jobs. Small business in particular has a direct and significant impact on local communities, especially in regional areas like my electorate on the Central Coast. In 2013, the National Business Register found there were
more than 12,000 local businesses in the Gosford City Council area, whose boundaries are largely within my electorate, and every one of them is important for what they contribute to our region's economy.

It is also true that, like all Australians, small business people should have access to fast, affordable and reliable broadband. This is particularly the case for small businesses in areas like mine. I am pleased to say that after six years of delays and frustration under Labor, Australians now have an NBN rollout plan they can actually rely on. Under the previous government, even suburbs that Labor claimed to be switched on had problems. Labor's approach was to commit $73 billion of taxpayers' money with no analysis, and ignore the fact that their project would raise internet prices by 80 per cent on the most vulnerable consumers. Under the Labor government, only 203 premises on the Central Coast were connected to NBN over a six-year period.

The coalition has the rollout back on track, already rolling NBN out to more than 50,000 premises in my electorate, with a strong commitment to the 18-month rollout plan that includes suburbs like Karijini, Somersby and Macmasters Beach. We are also working with small businesses as we roll out the NBN in locations like Gosford. Just last week I met with the Gosford Chamber of Commerce President Ali Vidler, who has been a great advocate for this city and the importance of connecting businesses to broadband. There has also been a great response to our rollout on the Peninsula. I thank Peninsula Chamber of Commerce President Matthew Wales for his work in standing up for this important area in my electorate. In suburbs like Umina, residents are reporting great download and upload speeds, as our mixed technology rollout continues. Up the road in Koolewong, a great start-up company using leading edge technology, Solar Monitoring Australia, based its global operations centre right on the Koolewong waterfront, and have been reporting encouraging results already. When businesses like this arrive on the Central Coast it is a huge vote of confidence in our region and how we are supporting businesses and creating the right environment for them to thrive and even create jobs.

When the NBN was first made available on the Central Coast it had an enormous impact on businesses like the Real Estate Academy in East Gosford. This business depends on fast, reliable broadband, and has thrived under the NBN. The Real Estate Academy designs and develops leading-edge business systems and career development programs for real estate professionals. The company promises to deliver fresh and up-to-date solutions and training for staff in a fast-paced industry. But to deliver on this promise, they need internet speeds they can rely on. I am pleased to say that business owners Lee Woodward and his wife Robyn have experienced the very beneficial impact the NBN has had on their business. The Real Estate Academy has even been able to improve its ability to deliver one-to-one Skype coaching sessions. Superfast broadband also enabled staff to add webinars and interactive virtual classrooms sessions to the company's output. The Real Estate Academy relies on work being delivered around the clock. They used to load projects overnight, hoping they would be complete by the morning, but the NBN has changed all that. Now, hot topics that could propel his industry forward can be captured, edited and recorded straight away, and delivered and synchronised to clients. Lee Woodward also told me about how the Real Estate Academy has taken on more staff, and now has 17 employees in East Gosford, and another five offsite. In
short, the NBN is delivering faster speeds, significant cost savings and greater autonomy to his small business.

This is the fast, reliable and superfast broadband of the future that we are determined to deliver to even more small businesses across the Central Coast. This is a government that is delivering the NBN sooner, cheaper to the taxpayer and more affordably to consumers, and this is good news for businesses in my electorate.

**Ms BUTLER** (Griffith) (12:44): There are over 14,000 small businesses in my electorate of Griffith. They do drive employment, enterprise and innovation and they play a vital role in creating and building strong local communities. As this motion states:

… all Australians, including small business people, should have access to fast, affordable and reliable broadband …

By the time today's year 7 students finish high school, their household's internet needs will have increased sixfold. Australians need access to fast, affordable and reliable broadband to meet our needs now and into the future, and if businesses are to take full advantage of the productivity gains and the innovation opportunities available to them this century they need access to a world-class broadband network.

Those opposite sure have some gall to come in here and claim that this government and this minister, the aspiring Prime Minister, have a plan to deliver fast and reliable broadband to the small and medium enterprises of Australia. Rather than a world-class National Broadband Network, this government and this minister have delivered only broken promises and are advocating for a second-rate series of networks of different capabilities, different speeds and different technologies. Now the government wants to create a two-tiered broadband network where the rich can afford super-fast fibre broadband, while people of ordinary means will be stuck with the old copper network.

Our neighbours in Japan, South Korea and Singapore are all investing in fibre to the premises. At the same time, Australia will be relying on an old, outdated copper network, which will very likely be obsolete by the time it is completed. We are putting our businesses and our economy at a disadvantage. There are many communities that, despite the promises of those opposite, cannot even get access to this government's second-rate broadband solution. The minister promised:

Suburbs, regions, towns and business districts with the poorest services and greatest need for upgrades will receive first priority.

That promise has turned out to be pretty hollow for the residents and businesses of Mount Gravatt East in my electorate of Griffith, like the business that Christian McCarty runs. Christian is a digital media professional who runs a small business on the south side. His work in feature films has won critical acclaim overseas, and he needs a reliable internet connection to run his business and compete for work against other firms from around the world. The best internet speed that Christian can get in Mount Gravatt East is 1.6 megabits per second. For a business that is just 12 kilometres from the CBD, that is unacceptable. If we are going to grow our economy, we need to support innovative small and medium-sized enterprises such as Christian's. If we do not have the infrastructure of the 21st century, businesses will not be able to access the opportunities of the 21st century; they will lose those opportunities to other countries, and we will lose those businesses to other countries.
Despite the appalling internet speed that Christian gets, Mount Gravatt East is not even in Mr Turnbull's latest 18-month rollout plan. I wrote to the minister on Christian's behalf, and his response was, 'It's Telstra's problem, but don't worry; we'll get to you by 2020.' Now we are finding out that there will be this $10,000 fee that businesses like Christian's will have to pay for the privilege. In fact, not one suburb in Griffith features in the ministers 18-month rollout plan—not one.

Under Labor's NBN, construction of fibre to the premises would have commenced or have been completed for approximately 77,300 homes, businesses, medical facilities and schools in and around Brisbane's south side by 30 June 2016. This government will disconnect Australia from a high-speed broadband future. It will take us back to the 100-year-old copper wire past and strangle the future growth of Australia's economy.

We all know that productivity is important for future economic growth. Labour productivity has been rising very well, and that was noted in the Reserve Bank governor's recent speech, but multifactorial productivity needs to increase, and world-class broadband will assist us with that.

I call on the minister to update his rollout plan so that the residents and businesses in Mount Gravatt East—and, for that matter, those in suburbs like Cannon Hill, Holland Park, Carina and Coorparoo—can get access to at least something resembling fast, affordable and reliable broadband. This country deserves a world-class broadband network. Our competitors will have it and we need it as well.

**Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (12:49):** I rise to speak in support of the motion moved by the member for Forrest. Small business is the engine room of our economy, and, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, there are more than 13,000 registered small businesses in my electorate of Ryan—mum and dad enterprises that reinvest in our community, source local products and employ our family and friends. In Queensland, more than 50 per cent of the private sector workforce is employed by small businesses, and they contribute 46 per cent of our gross state product. Before I entered politics, I had my own small business for 20 years. When you go into business you take on considerable financial risk. You are forced to prioritise expenditure and you regularly make significant personal sacrifices for the sake of your business and your employees. When we invest in small business, we invest in our community.

I have previously spoken in this place about the importance of supporting small business, particularly during the peak retail periods such as Christmas, and the local multiplier effect that occurs when we do so. When we spend our money at large chain stores just 13.6 per cent of the money we spend is reinvested in the local economy, as opposed to 48 per cent when we buy from our local traders. Small business plays a key role in supporting growth and economic opportunity, and that is why the coalition is wholly committed to seeing it prosper.

Of the 13,000-plus small businesses in Ryan, almost 80 per cent are involved in services industries. These businesses range from small retailers to large professional service firms with international clients. If these businesses are to succeed and keep pace with constantly evolving technologies and changing business models, we must ensure that they have access to affordable, fast and reliable broadband internet. Indeed, as technology becomes more integrated in our everyday lives, the economic imperative for fast and reliable broadband, especially for small business, is amplified. Whether it be the local greengrocer introducing a
PayPass terminal to speed up sales or the local health clinic providing after-hours telehealth services to patients, the role of the internet in modern-day business cannot be understated.

It may surprise members to learn that there are areas in my electorate of Ryan located in the heart of a capital city—Brisbane—that do not have access to fast and reliable broadband internet. Rural properties, as well as new housing estates in the west of my electorate, continue to perseveres with outdated technology unsuitable for the new and constantly evolving applications that the internet offers. It is for this reason that the cost-effective and timely rollout of the National Broadband Network is so crucial for my electorate and many others.

When Labor were in office they had no plan to deliver a cost-effective and timely rollout of the National Broadband Network. The former Labor government's rollout projections were unrealistic, and costs continued to blow out by billions of dollars with no regard for taxpayers' money or affordability. I congratulate the current Minister for Communications for the work he has done to save the National Broadband Network from becoming a monumental public infrastructure disaster and for placing it on a clear and stable path of delivery.

The world we live in today is much smaller than the one we grew up in. Tyrannies of distance have been overcome, and cultural barriers have been broken down. Today, we live and work in a global economy. While this brings with it significant economic risk and trade exposure of industry, overwhelmingly it represents unprecedented economic opportunity, particularly with the new trade agreements that the Minister for Trade has opened up with Korea, Japan and China. The key to ensuring that we seize this opportunity is being adaptive to change, especially as business practices evolve and new technologies emerge. A national broadband network is absolutely pivotal in ensuring that Australia’s small businesses keep pace with the changing nature of business and trade both domestically and abroad. I commend this motion to the House.

Ms MacTIERNAN (Perth) (12:54): It has been extraordinary this morning to be here listening to coalition member after coalition member talk about the NBN and clothe themselves in the mantle of the NBN, because let us not forget that the NBN is a great Labor initiative. It was an initiative that was steadfastly opposed by our Prime Minister. Indeed, it was only through the intercession of the next Prime Minister, one Malcolm Turnbull, that we got 'NBN lite'—the second-rate product that is currently being outlined.

I agree with the first three propositions that the member for Forrest has put forward, but I must strenuously disagree with the fourth. I see absolutely no evidence that there is any prioritising of delivery for the areas of greatest need. I will use my own electorate of Perth as a classic case in point. The suburbs of Ashfield, Bassendean, Beechboro, Eden Hill, Kiara, Lockridge and Morley were previously on the NBN rollout plan for 2013-14. Almost $2 million had been spent on the Bassendean Telstra exchange in order to get it ready for the NBN. But when the coalition came into government, these suburbs were binned from the rollout schedule.

In Minister Turnbull's broadband quality and availability review, which allegedly was going to guide where he was going to insert the NBN, those suburbs came out as having the very lowest speeds and reliability in Australia. Indeed, the surveys that we have taken suggest that the estimated speeds in those suburbs are overestimating the real speeds that are being delivered in these suburbs. It is very hard to reconcile that we are now prioritising those areas
where the need is greatest when we have chopped all of those areas of Perth out of contention. When I ask the minister about it, in letters and in questions, he just says: 'Well, you'll get it by 2020.' My suspicion is that the problem is the copper wire in these suburbs is of such a poor quality that they know that their seriously bad fibre-to-the-node plan just simply is not going to work in this area.

Let us have a look at the rest of Western Australia. The member for Forrest was setting out the benefits of the long-term satellite plan. This was a scheme that was developed and scheduled by Labor—a scheme that Minister Turnbull when in opposition sneered at as being a Rolls Royce initiative. Labor then introduced an interim service which was very quickly oversubscribed.

An honourable member interjecting—

Ms MacTIERNAN: It was, but we developed the plan. Now Minister Turnbull has said he is going to have this fixed—but he has not fixed it. Let me tell you a story from the member for Forrest's own electorate—the story of Jeff Pow and Michelle McManus of Balingup. They have a vertically integrated, specialist, free-range poultry business. They are a young entrepreneurial couple who direct sales through social media. This has given their company a very high profile, and it has made them profitable. They rely on the internet for the way in which their business is structured. They tell me that they have such abysmal speeds and data packages that they are simply insufficient for running a modern business. 'We are disadvantaged,' they tell me. They tell me that every day they have to put their computer in the car and drive off into town—a 30-kilometre round trip—to get enough signal so that they can continue to operate their business.

Rolling out this infrastructure is a challenge. But let us be very clear: this is a vision that was driven by Labor and dumbed down by this government. There are challenges. Minister Turnbull is not able to deliver the speeds that he has promised, nor has he been able to commit to the delivery schedule that we had set up in relation to satellite. He has found he has to delay both of those satellites that are delivering the long-term satellite scheme that the member for Forrest was talking about. These are difficult and challenging areas. But let us remember, it was Labor that had the vision. (Time expired)

Debate adjourned.

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Ms CHESTERS (Bendigo) (12:59): I move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:
(a) the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) has announced it will end its television coverage of the Women's National Basketball League (WNBL) at the end of the 2014/15 season;
(b) this decision will end a 35 year partnership between the ABC and WNBL;
(c) the ABC has been a leader in the broadcast of women's sport, which has provided a significant boost to the development of women's sport in Australia;
(d) any decision to cancel the television broadcast of women's sport will have a detrimental effect on the participation in the sport, which will reduce the pool of talent available within Australia and therefore the strength and viability of women's sports such as the WNBL; and

FEDERATION CHAMBER
(e) the basketball statement on the ABC/WNBL partnership on 24 November 2014 as a result of the Australian Government cuts to ABC funding, means that the 2014/15 Wattle Valley WNBL season will be the last shown on ABC TV live around Australia;

(2) recognises the strong role models elite women sports athletes are to young women and the positive value this has on young women, and that without such television broadcast coverage such positive role models will disappear; and

(3) calls on:

(a) the Australian Government to restore the $254 million in budget cuts to the ABC budget; and

(b) the ABC Board to continue the television broadcasting of women's sport including the WNBL.

A few weekends ago—and I note the member for Herbert is here in the chamber with us today—the Bendigo Spirit went head to head with the Townsville Fire in their third grand final in a row to compete for the title of the WNBL premiers for the 2014-15 season. Unfortunately it was not the Bendigo Spirit's year. We had won the two previous grand finals but, in this grand final, the Bendigo Spirit, after a spirited game, went down to the Townsville Fire. I congratulate and commend the Townsville Fire for their very strong performance. The game itself was a showcase of women's elite sport. It demonstrated once again to this nation why in women's elite basketball Australia does really well. The Opals coach has said on repeated occasions that what underpins a strong Opals team is a very strong domestic competition, the WNBL.

I will also note to the House—and this is why I have moved this motion today—that many fans in Bendigo who could not make the trip to Townsville were able to watch the grand final live on the ABC. That is because for 35 years the ABC has been broadcasting the WNBL. Unfortunately it was the last match of the WNBL that will be broadcast not just by the ABC but by any network. It is disappointing to note that not only did the Bendigo Spirit go down in that game but it was actually the last WNBL game that Australian fans of the sport will see being broadcast.

This decision, as I have said, will end a 35-year partnership between the ABC and the WNBL. The ABC have been a leading broadcaster of women's sport, and it is has provided a significant boost in the development of women's sport in Australia. I believe that the cancelling of the broadcasting of the WNBL will have an impact on sponsorship. The Bendigo Spirit's coach, Bernie Harrower, has said repeatedly that this decision to axe the broadcasting will drive out key sponsors and could strip teams of the ability to employ and pay half of their players. A local councillor has said that they believe that removing the national broadcasting of the WNBL will have an impact on showcasing regional sporting centres such as my own as elite sporting centres. This councillor said that we cannot underestimate the impact of simply mentioning Bendigo in a live broadcasting of a Bendigo Spirit game. I know from talking to members of the Bendigo Spirit board that the ABC broadcasting has brought in four major sponsors, with home games that are broadcast allowing them to attach an extra premium to broadcasting sponsorship dollars. This has allowed the team to build the strength that they have had that has allowed local women to compete in their home town. Kristi Harrower has said on many occasions that having a strong WNBL is one of the reasons she was able to come home and play the sport she loves.

What is disappointing—and this is why I have moved this motion—is that the ABC has said that its reason for making its decision is that the Australian government has cut $254
million from its budget. That is what it has said. This is also what Basketball Australia have said. They have said in local media as recently as November that the decision is a direct result of the funding cuts made by this government. This is what Basketball Australia are saying. This is what the local teams are saying. This is what the local community is saying. That is why I have moved this motion, calling on the government to reverse the $254 million in budget cuts to the ABC budget and also calling on the ABC board to continue their television broadcasting of women's sport, including the WNBL.

Our young women should have the same opportunity to see their role models playing sport on TV as do young men. I call on the government to reverse this decision on funding cuts and restore the broadcasting of the WNBL. (Time expired)

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

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

Ms Henderson (Corangamite) (13:05): The ABC's decision to terminate the broadcast of the Women's National Basketball League, along with other women's sporting competition such as women's soccer is very disappointing. However, it has nothing whatsoever to do with the government's efficiency dividend. I regret the fairly poor contribution by the member for Bendigo, who has not made any attribution of the quote that she put into the parliament. She should table the quote, because the ABC has in fact made it quite clear that the programming decisions it has made have nothing to do with the efficiency dividend and everything to do with the ABC's independent editorial program making. That is not to say that we agree with the decision; I certainly do not agree with it. But it is very clear that the ABC's decisions, whether it be in relation to the axing of Bush Telegraph, which is a terrible decision; the axing of the state editions of 7.30, very disappointing; the closure of foreign bureaus; and even the threatened axing of Lateline are all editorial decisions of the ABC. Had the member for Bendigo done some basic research she would know that this has been put forward in evidence before Senate estimates.

The ABC, in respect of women's sport, has made clear on many occasions, including to a Labor senator in estimates on 1 December 2014, that it was moving to a new strategy unrelated to the government's efficiency study with regard to sports programming, and women's sports programming in particular. To the member for Bendigo I say that it is very regrettable that she has, essentially, put forward a very dishonest contribution today. Senator Singh asked the Managing Director of the ABC, Mr Scott, about the conclusion and termination of broadcasting of the WNBL. In reply, Mr Scott said:

What we are trying to do is to focus our sport investment … We will be looking to cover women's sport, but particularly national women's sport rather than local competitions.

It is called the green and gold strategy, Mr Finlayson, the ABC's Director Television, said.

Ms Ryan interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Lalor will have her opportunity to speak.

Ms Henderson: Senator Singh then said:

Therefore, Women's National Basketball League will be broadcast. That is a national women's sport. Mr Scott said:

It is the week-in, week-out competitions that we find hard … One of the things is that—
I am quoting directly—

if you cover the national team, you are more likely to get a national audience around that, whereas, if you cover other competitions, the audiences often are markedly smaller.

I worked at the ABC for some nine years. When I worked there, in the eighties and nineties, I understood very well, as did everyone at the ABC, that there was a fairly aggressive chase for ratings. That is what this decision is all about. It is about an aggressive chase for ratings. I have to say that it is disappointing, because the ABC's charter does not require this. That is why we have seen a drop-off in very important programming like arts, Indigenous programming, specialist regional programs and now women's sport. What a shame that the ABC has pursued the broadcast of sports such as the Asian Cup and left women's sport behind. I have no issue at all in agreeing with the member for Bendigo that this is an unfortunate and regrettable decision, but it is very dishonest and misleading for her to suggest that this is a result of the efficiency dividend, as we have heard in evidence before Senate estimates.

I also want to make very clear that the ABC is receiving in excess of $1 billion a year in funding from the Australian government. The efficiency dividend of $254 million over five years, a 4.6 per cent reduction, represents a reduction from $5.47 billion to $5.22 billion. Let us not kid ourselves: the ABC is still extremely well funded, courtesy of the taxpayer.

It is disappointing that the ABC has run the round of redundancies. I believe that there is some smoke and mirrors involved—an attempt by the ABC to tie its redundancies with the decision on the efficiency dividend and the Lewis efficiency review. But nevertheless the ABC has made it very clear that these decisions are a matter for the ABC. I would urge the ABC to reconsider its decision. We do need women's basketball back on television, and it is regrettable that this motion has been put forward in the way it has today.

Ms RYAN (Lalor—Opposition Whip) (13:10): I rise as the member for Lalor, and I am very proud to do so. I remind the House that the electorate was named after Peter Lalor, who is famous for his role in the Eureka Stockade and who became a parliamentarian. It is not to be confused with the suburb of Lalor on the opposite side of Melbourne. I rise today to speak on this motion, because I think it is an incredibly important one, as is accuracy. I take some umbrage with the words from the member for Corangamite, because there seems to be a disconnect happening. This government cuts funds and then blames those on the end of those funding cuts for the decisions that they are forced to make, and the rationalisation they have to make to make ends meet. This government, and the member opposite, were careful to point out exactly what the size of those cuts were, and I thank her for giving us those details. Also, there is this tendency to continually talk about the taxpayer dollar, as if the ABC has been funded in some other way. I remind the member for Corangamite that that is why we call it 'our ABC', our national broadcaster.

I will go on to say that the ABC has done an incredible amount of work across the 35 years mentioned by the member for Bendigo. My first year of teaching was at Darwin High School some 28 years ago. The 28 years is important, because 28 years ago I asked my English class students to monitor the local media in the Northern Territory and collect data on what sports were being covered by local radio, television and newspapers. Surprise, surprise, what did they find? They found 28 years ago that women's sport was getting very poor coverage locally. It was getting some coverage, but it was marginal compared with men's sport. This
was in 1985. My students would be shocked to find that those statistics have echoed across the years.

I did some research on this. In 2006 the New South Wales Department of Sport and Recreation did a similar survey of media coverage of women in sport and found that the gender breakdown of sports media coverage in 1996 was two per cent for television. Two per cent of television coverage of sport went to women's sport, 56.2 per cent went to men's sport and 41.8 per cent to mixed sports. It was better in the newspapers in 1996—it was 10.7 per cent of newspaper coverage. But this is what the New South Wales Department of Sport and Recreation said of the period between then and 2006:

Women have made a consistent and significant contribution to Australian sport at all levels, yet their achievements on the whole receive limited coverage by the mass media. The quality and quantity of the coverage of women's sport by the media is not an accurate reflection of the amount of sport played or watched by women. Media coverage is generally inadequate and selective. A high media profile is essential for attracting sponsorship, spectators and other sources of financial support.

That is a quote from 2006, some years after the survey my students did.

In 2012 I found a submission the ABC put to a Senate inquiry into women in sport and recreation in Australia. This report tracks some of the history of the ABC and the good work it did in covering women's sport and in increasing the coverage of it.

Since 1975, ABC Television has been broadcasting the national netball competition …

We now know that that has gone to pay TV. When I ask my small netball team that I coach on a Saturday morning, 'Did you watch those intercepts Laura Geitz made last week?', 'Did you watch the Firebirds game yesterday?' or 'Did you watch the Phoenix game?', they say, 'We haven't got Foxtel, Miss; we can't watch it.' In recent history, of course, the ABC covered the women's national basketball and it covered the trans-Tasman netball. In 1982, the Australian women's hockey championships were covered by ABC television for the first time. (Time expired)

Mr CHRISTENSEN (Dawson—The Nationals Deputy Whip) (13:15): I am pleased to speak on this motion moved by the member for Bendigo, and I note the long rivalry on the Women's National Basketball League court between the Bendigo Spirit and the Townsville Fire. The member was undoubtedly a passionate supporter of the Bendigo Spirit as, sadly, they defeated Townsville Fire to take out titles in 2013 and 2014. However, those defeats just made this year's victory all the sweeter for the Fire, for Townsville, for myself and also for the member for Herbert—another passionate supporter of anyone representing Townsville and North Queensland in a sporting arena. The 75-65 grand final win for the Townsville Fire, eight days ago, represents the first national sporting title secured by a North Queensland team.

The ABC's broadcast of women's basketball is a demonstration of the value of a national broadcaster providing services to regional areas and covering sporting events ignored by the commercial networks. As a representative of a regional electorate, I can understand the member for Bendigo's despair with the national broadcaster's decision to cut such a service to regions across the country. I agree with a bit of this motion, but to peddle the ABC's propaganda that axing women's basketball comes as a result of long-overdue savings is supporting the blackmail of our constituents and protecting and supporting the institutionalised waste of taxpayers' funds.
Let me put the government's savings measures into perspective. The ABC is spending more than $1 billion of taxpayers' money every year. As a result of Labor's debt and deficit disaster, the budget asks for small savings that will mean the ABC will receive $5.2 billion over the next five years instead of $5.5 billion. That is a saving of $254 million over five years, or 4.6 per cent. In the real world, where media organisations are not gifted billions of dollars of taxpayer money, such a small saving would be laughable. Commercial networks are able to produce more services and better services at a fraction of the cost. But the ABC's response was to hold Peppa Pig hostage and start blackmailing regional areas and women's sport.

The ABC's own finance executives were involved in last year's Lewis efficiency study, which demonstrated savings were achievable if the ABC was willing to tackle inefficiencies in its back-office functions. The efficiency study canvassed a range of savings measures that would not affect content, such as women's sports, or service delivery to the regions, such as rationalising technology by removing duplication, standardising solutions and retiring old assets; centralising procurement; reducing managers and administrative support staff; outsourcing the payroll function; or working in conjunction with their fellow taxpayer-funded broadcaster, SBS, for procurement. Last year, we saw the ludicrous situation where the ABC outbid its fellow national broadcaster, SBS, for the Asian Cup football tournament. While SBS, the long-time home of soccer broadcasting in Australia, planned to cover the cost of their smaller bid with commercial advertising, the ABC simply threw $1.5 million of taxpayer money at the bid. What is the ABC doing, competing against its fellow national broadcaster—indeed, what is the ABC doing competing on any of the services provided by the private sector?

Why did the ABC waste taxpayer money to establish their FactCheck, effectively killing off the private development of a local version of Politifact? More pointedly, why is the ABC spending taxpayer dollars telling people how to vote? The vast expense committed to the ABC's Vote Compass cannot be seen as anything other than an instruction manual on how to cast your vote, according to the ABC's interpretation. The taxpayer-funded website, Vote Compass, says:

Vote Compass is an educational tool developed by political scientists. Answer a short series of questions to discover how you fit in the New South Wales political landscape.

The site is advertised across the ABC's vast array of networks and it takes you through a number of questions related to policy, framed by the ABC of course. The issues and policies are interpreted by the ABC and reduced to simple questions by the ABC, and answers are weighted to parties by the ABC. The result is how closely your answers align to political parties. There are questions like:

How much should be done to accommodate religious minorities in New South Wales?

What is this sort of question? The ability to align such questions and answers with party policies is highly questionable. Why is the ABC doing this? Why don't they focus on their charter and promote women's sport? (Time expired)

Ms CLAYDON (Newcastle) (13:20): I am delighted to rise today in support of the motion moved by the member for Bendigo. I thank the member for Bendigo for her continued efforts to bring the issue of media coverage of women's sports, in particular the recent decision to end the ABC television coverage of the Women's National Basketball League, to the attention of this parliament.
Make no mistake: the broken promise from the Abbott–Liberal government that saw hundreds of millions of dollars cut from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation has already had far-reaching negative effects that are by no means limited to the core issue of today's debate. The cuts to the ABC hit hard in my electorate of Newcastle with ABC 1233—our local ABC radio station—losing one-third of their total workforce with more than 12 hours of local content completely disappearing from our region. Our afternoon show with local identity and people's favourite Carol Duncan was cut, and a two-hour show on Sundays dedicated to the Newcastle and Hunter region has gone as well.

Now, rather than receiving local stories and news on a weekday afternoon, we receive syndicated Sydney broadcasts that include traffic news about the Sydney Harbour Bridge—a world away from the Newcastle and Hunter region. Having lost so much local content it is little wonder that Novocastrians get offended when Sydney broadcasters call out for the Newcastle correspondent to check-in during their 702 ABC Sydney shows for input. More than 70 per cent of Carol Duncan's 100-plus stories each month were local stories with a particular focus on local arts, music and culture. This fitted well with the timing of the show, which sat outside the morning and evening news cycles, and presented an opportunity for local artists, upcoming authors and young musicians to get a breakthrough with the local engaged audience. The opportunity and community connection has now been lost. The Abbott–Liberal government cuts also leave the community's first line of contact at the ABC—the reception and front desk—without staff, so the 1233 radio station is not always able to respond in a timely fashion. Breaking news stories may be delayed and important community announcements may be missed all together because of this government's broken promises and cuts to the ABC.

Today's motion makes clear the significance of these cuts to the media coverage of women's sport in Australia. As noted in the motion, the ABC has been a leader in the broadcasting of women's sport, which in turn has provided a significant boost to the development of women's sport in Australia. Elite women athletes provide strong role models to women of all ages and from all walks of life. A reduction in media coverage, which is already grossly unequal to the coverage of men's sport in Australia, will further remove such positive role models from the public eye. The television broadcasting of women's sports is an integral part of the ongoing development of women's sport in Australia, and the contribution of the ABC in this regard cannot be underestimated. There is no level playing field when it comes to women's sport in Australia. On the contrary, it is a place of entrenched inequality with grossly unequal pay between men and women athletes, ongoing objectification of our female athletes, underrepresentation of women in positions in power and shocking instances of public sexist abuse. While I am not suggesting that maintaining or improving media coverage of women's sports will be a panacea for all of these inequities, reducing it is certainly not the answer.

The current disparity in media coverage of women's sport, when compared to that of men's, is astounding. A one-week sample last week of just two of Sydney's major print newspapers—The Daily Telegraph and The Sydney Morning Herald, including their Sunday papers—shows just how imbalanced this disparity in media coverage has become. Last week, between the two Sydney papers mentioned, there were more than 300 articles dedicated to men's sporting events, as against 12 articles covering women's sport. One of those articles
covering women's sports was in fact about the sexist abuse that the Australian women's football team had reportedly received from a group of male spectators when competing in a tournament in Cyprus.

In Australia, only two of our top 50 sports earners are women, namely surfer Stephanie Gilmore and golfer Karrie Webb. Mostly women's sports remain amateur and unpaid. Regional areas like my electorate of Newcastle are best served by the ABC, a national broadcaster, to ensure that we get the funding of women's sports that is so deserved. Funding must be restored for regional areas specifically, and I join with the member for Bendigo in calling for the Abbott Liberal government to restore the $250 million in budget cuts to the ABC.

Mr Ewen Jones (Herbert) (13:25): The Townsville Fire are the reigning WBL champions, having defeated the valiant Bendigo Spirit on 8 March. This was the birthday present for which assistant coach Claudia Brassard had yearned since she so proudly wore the Fire uniform herself. I will come to the motion at hand, but first I want to speak about my Townsville Fire. This was a journey of incredible faith over common sense. The Townsville Fire had officially folded, handing back their licence to the WNBL in the 2010-11 season. It was then that a local businesswoman, Jayne Arlett, asked, 'Now what do our daughters do?' and a rescue mission was launched.

My mate David Kippin established a steering committee to keep the Fire in Townsville. He contacted every business in Townsville and got the basics in place to have another go. The two on-court cornerstones of the recovery were our captain, Rachel Flanagan, now Rachel McCully, and our coach, Chris Lucas. Rachel wanted to keep playing for the Fire and would do anything to bring a team together. For Chris, it was a leap of faith. He came to Townsville to head up a franchise which basically had no money and no roster. He said the obvious: 'Well, it's all up from here.'

There were some bumps along the road, but we were always competitive from day one, and now we are champions. The Townsville Fire are the first team from north of the Tropic of Capricorn to win a national championship. That is not just women's basketball; it is the first national championship of any sport and any gender for north of the Tropic of Capricorn. Our Townsville Fire playing group includes three-time National MVP and two-time Franchise MVP Suzy Batkovic, Micaela Cocks, Steph Cumming, Rosie Fadljevic, Cayla Francis, Kate Gaze, Jillian Harmon, Grand Final MVP Mia Newley, Alex Wilson, Jacqui Zelenka, and Captain Rachel McCully, who retires after 324 WNBL games. They are all national champions.

Our coaching staff of head coach Chris Lucas, assistant coaches Claudia Brassard and Mark Wrobel, and our manager, Donna Turner and Big John McCully, the equipment manager and volunteer since day dot, are all national champions. The administration of Richard Goodbody, who built on the great work of Judy Higgins and Eleni Milios, and the board, including Jayne Arlett, Glenys Schultner, George Milford, Michelle Morton, Claudia Brassard, Cath Rule and Sue Willis, are all national champions.

This is a community club. The North Queensland Cowboys assist with the marketing and back office work. The players from the Cowboys and the Crocs are the biggest fans of these girls. It is not just because they play a fantastic brand of basketball or because they are a great team; it is because there is so little money in it for the girls that they have to love what they
do. They are professional in every way, except the income. They do it because they love the sport and they want to test themselves against the best. But they have to be more than just elite sportspeople; they have to study, to work, to build a career, and they have to commit to the game they love. These girls show that they can have it all. You can be a gifted athlete, a scholar, a worker, a role model and a normal person. That is what the Townsville Fire says to every girl in Townsville: 'You can be whatever you want and you don't have to limit yourself.'

The Townsville Fire created history for Australian sport last weekend. They are the WNBL champions, and they will be that for the rest of their lives. My city and my region are just so proud of them.

That brings me to this motion. Sometimes, politics should be played in this place, but we should not limit ourselves to being politicians; we should strive to be parliamentarians instead. Politics should not be played around women's sport in a manner as facetious as this motion. That is what the member for Bendigo has done here. She knows very well that the reason the ABC is not continuing the broadcasting of the WNBL is not because of any budget cuts. She has a Hansard of her own where the ABC said they would not be doing week-to-week telecasts. She has spoken to the ABC herself. Rather, they would be concentrating on events.

In Townsville, we could not get the ABC to broadcast a game from Townsville until we hosted the grand final. So this motion is moot for anyone in the north. To use the WNBL as a political plaything and score cheap points is a callous shame, and the mover should know better. Let's celebrate this fantastic competition and the impact regional teams can have, and work together to get it on the TV for every Australian. Go the Fire!

Debate adjourned.

Sitting suspended from 13:30 to 16:00

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Tweed Hospital

Mrs ELLIOT (Richmond) (16:00): I rise to congratulate New South Wales Labor for their commitment to invest in a major redevelopment of the Tweed Hospital. It was announced on 6 March that a Foley Labor government will invest $211 million for the long overdue redevelopment of the Tweed Hospital—without the need to privatise the electricity network. Labor's $211 million funding will deliver stage one, two and three of the development and will include upgrades to the emergency department; enhancement of specialist units and ward expansions with up to 140 extra beds; up to 22 extra beds in the renal dialysis ward; and expansions to clinical services, such as the intensive care unit, cancer clinic, operating theatres, special care nursery, stroke unit, medical imaging and pharmacy. This is in stark contrast to the Nationals, who have reluctantly promised $48 million to the hospital, and that $48 million of course comes from their plan to privatise the electricity network, which we know will drive up prices.

Tweed Hospital is one of the state's busiest hospitals. Last year, more than 47,000 people attended the emergency department at the hospital. That number will continue to grow over the coming years and the hospital will need the space and resources to respond to that. So I was very pleased to hear that New South Wales Labor understands, listens and is responding to these concerns with its wonderful commitment of $211 million for the three-stage...
redevelopment of Tweed Hospital. This is much-needed in our local area, as the hospital is currently in a state of crisis and it needs an injection of funding like that promised by New South Wales Labor.

**Whaling**

**Mr RUDDOCK** (Berowra) (16:01): I in no way rise to endorse New South Wales Labor. They have been an abject failure. I rise on a matter of importance to us all and which we can all support, and that Australia's efforts to contain whaling. We have gone to the International Court to constrain Japan as they rapaciously follow the whales across our seas. A young man in my electorate, Coen Wightly, is very concerned about these matters. He wrote to me in 2013 and said, 'What can I do?' He gathered a petition of over 100 students from the Hills Grammar School supporting our effort and arguing for whaling to be contained. What I found impressive was that in his lunchtimes at school, he has—as I encouraged him to do—been speaking to the junior students and the senior school students about the importance of protecting the whales, and he has clearly been successful.

He has not presented this petition in a form that is appropriate for the parliament—because I think usually it only includes the first name—but I have here the 400 signatures of students at Hills Grammar School urging support for the Australian government's efforts in the International Court to contain whaling. I seek leave to table the petition.

Leave granted.

**Mr RUDDOCK:** I am delighted to table the petition, and I will inform Coen that you sought that it be tabled, Madam Deputy Speaker.

**Johnstone, Ms Diane**

**Ms BRODTMANN** (Canberra) (16:03): I rise today to speak about a remarkable Canberran who has just recently been appointed a member in the general division of the Order of Australia, and she joins us here today. Di Johnstone was recognised for her significant service to our community and also to the international community. She has dedicated her life to helping others, from her time with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade when she was posted to South Africa in 1976. She was the first Australian female diplomat ever posted to South Africa and one of two Australian female diplomats posted to African postings. Di played a significant role in helping shape Australia's view of South Africa, Australian government action and Australian policy in the United Nations and, with Bruce Haigh, brought township art—or, as it is called now, struggle era art—to international attention.

During her time there Di was a co-founding donor to the the Ifa Lethu Foundation, which is devoted to the development and economic growth of South Africa's creative arts sector. This foundation, now 10 years old, manages South Africa's largest repatriation and creative entrepreneurial development effort.

Di also generously donated her time to a number of organisations back home in Canberra. She is a volunteer with Friends of the Albert Hall, Domestic Animal Services, RSPCA, ACT Rescue and Foster, National Trust ACT and Deakin Residents Association.

It is hard to think of a more deserving Canberran for this award. Our community is a far better place because of her many, many hours of dedication. Thank you, so much, Di Johnstone. *(Time expired)*
Beerwah State School

Mr BROUGH (Fisher) (16:05): In an era when we are all finding it hard to move, when we sit in front of televisions and computers, it was fantastic last week to join the children of Beerwah State School, who were part of the National Ride2School Day. There I met with young mum Deanna, who had just finished pushing her pram in the hot Queensland sunshine to school, with here little baby Samara and her older two children, Indiah and Dalton. She had had a three-kilometre walk in the hot Beerwah sun. We were joined at the school by children from Prep through to year 6. I thank the acting Deputy Principal, Deb Mitchell, for hosting us on the day and for making sure that we let our children know just how important it is, for both our mind and body, that we move. I was able to join the students on stage, where Claire, the house Vice-Captain of Coochin, and Dylan, the school Captain, emceed the day. I was honoured to be able to provide awards to the students of the week, who were for P11, Shylah; PJ2, Peppa; 1B1, Ruby; 1B2, Makayla; 2B3, Jake; 2B4, Grace; 3/2G1, Regan; 3G2, Macey; 3A4, Jesse; 4A3, Tehani; 4A2, Kate; 5A1, Isabella; 5E2, Mackenzie; 6M1, Bonnie; and 6M4, Ethan. Congratulations to Beerwah State School. Your motto is Strive to Excel, and you certainly do.

Lake Macquarie Business Excellence Awards 2015

Ms HALL (Shortland—Opposition Whip) (16:07): Last Monday, I launched the Lake Macquarie Business Excellence Awards. This is the fourth year of the awards, which are designed for businesses of all sizes, new businesses, small businesses and large businesses. The awards are not about popularity but about demonstrating excellence in business. The awards are conducted by Lake Macquarie's Business Growth Centre, and businesses can nominate for more than one category. The awards are supported by many businesses, which sponsor, donate prizes and partner the awards by providing in-kind services. In fact, I support these awards. The awards continue to receive the support of most of the Lake Macquarie business chambers, which are actively involved in the awards.

These awards enable businesses to look at how they operate and how they achieve. They have been very, very successful. The businesses that have won in the past have gone from strength to strength. The young business award winner and the business of the year award winner last year have seen their businesses growing exponentially. I encourage businesses to take the opportunity to enter the awards, to enter in more than one category, and to use the opportunity to examine their business.

Banks Electorate: St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

Mr COLEMAN (Banks) (16:08): Last week I visited St Joseph's Catholic Primary School in Riverwood. St Joseph's is a great school, drawing the majority of its students from the Riverwood, Peakhurst and Lugarno areas in my electorate. It has a fantastic reputation in the local community.

My visit coincided with Catholic Schools Week, which was celebrated across New South Wales last week. It was the school's open day that I attended. To mark the occasion, the Executive Director of Catholic Schools for the Archdiocese of Sydney, Dr Dan White, was in attendance and addressed the students and parents. It was good to meet Dr White and discuss issues of importance in the Catholic school system.
During my visit I also presented the 2015 school leaders with their congratulatory certificates for taking on these important roles. Special congratulations are due to Alanna Cogle and Billy Finn, who are the new school captains, and to Tayla Tandek and Nicholas Molloy, who are the new school vice-captains. There was a very nice liturgy in the morning which had some great songs from the choir and dance performances. I want to also take a moment to congratulate the principal of St Joseph's, Mrs Kim McCue, for her fantastic work in building one of the great schools of our region.

Bruce Electorate: Ronald McDonald House

Mr Griffin (Bruce) (16:10): I had the pleasure last Friday night of attending the opening of a photographic exhibition at the Monash Gallery of Art Community Space in my electorate. It was around Ronald McDonald House at the Monash Medical Centre, and it was an exhibition by a talented local photographer, Morganna Magee, which encapsulated life at the house and looked at a number of families and their children who had been staying at the house over the previous year. It got the essence of, to some extent, the struggle but also the enormous compassion that is involved in dealing with a child with serious illness and the difficulties that are faced by families, often travelling long distances and having to spend a lot of time away from home in order to try to still maintain a family relationship.

Ronald McDonald House is an excellent initiative in the local location. It is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, and the local facility can accommodate 15 families on any given night. Since opening in 1993, it has helped over 9,000 families who have needed to travel to care for their sick child at Monash Children's Hospital. It needs to grow, because the hospital there is growing. They are working now on how they can seek to achieve that outcome. I would like to thank all those involved with the exhibition and congratulate those involved in what is an excellent charity.

Riley, Ms Gloria Stella

Mr Goodenough (Moore) (16:11): I wish to place on record sincere condolences on the passing of Gloria Stella Riley on 8 March 2015, aged 73. Many members, senators and staff in this parliament will fondly recall Gloria, who worked for my predecessor, Dr Mal Washer, over 15 years in public life and approximately 40 years in total.

Gloria was born on 15 February 1942 and lived an interesting life throughout many regional towns across Western Australia on postings with her husband, Rob Campbell-Foulkes, a senior police officer, and her young family. Gloria worked closely with the Washer family as practice manager for the medical centres established by Mal and doing the bookkeeping for the family business, including the avocado orchard.

She had a very strong work ethic, paid scrupulous attention to detail and was a person of great integrity. Gloria was generous in spirit and caring of others in need and had a great sense of humour. She was always firm in her approach but fair. In his valedictory speech, Dr Washer affectionately referred to Gloria as the 'dragon lady', as she had a motherly and matronly nature about her.

Gloria is survived by her five children—Julianne, Peter, John, Rosalie and Donna—and her grandchildren. Her funeral is being held in Perth today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mrs Prentice): Thank you, Member for Moore. I am sure all members in the House would support you in those condolence remarks.
Honourable members: Hear, hear!

Fisher, Mr Paul and Mrs Jann

Mrs ELLIOT (Richmond) (16:13): I rise to speak about the wonderful occasion of a local constituent's 60th wedding anniversary. I was very pleased last week to have the pleasure of meeting Paul Fisher. He popped into my office to talk about the joy of the 60th wedding anniversary of him and his wife, Jann, a great achievement. It was wonderful to be able to spend time with him and hear about their wonderful, happy marriage.

They were married in Sydney on 28 January 1955. Paul told me how thrilled they were to receive numerous congratulatory messages from many politicians and, of course, also from the Queen, which he was particularly pleased about. He told me how he and Jann had met on Greenmount Beach near Coolangatta in 1954 whilst they were holidaying there separately from Sydney. Of course, those were the days of the hokey-pokey, and they had a great time dancing on the beach among hundreds of others. After they were married they lived in Sydney, where they raised their three children, Warren, Christine and Laura, and they retired to the Tweed, where they have been living for the past 28 years. They are proud grandparents of six, and they have two great-grandchildren. Both my husband, Craig, and I asked him what the secret was to such a long, happy marriage, and he said it has to be love and looking after each other, which I think is just wonderful. Also, he told me they had a wonderful family celebration on the Gold Coast for their wedding anniversary and now they are off for a trip to Hawaii—sounds like a great occasion. Congratulations to Paul and Jann for 60 wonderful years of marriage, and I thank Paul for taking the time to come into the office and share his history and the history of their life together.

Corangamite Electorate: Corangamite Medal

Ms HENDERSON (Corangamite) (16:15): I rise to congratulate the 2014 recipients of the Corangamite Medal. The Corangamite Medal is an annual award I initiated which recognises outstanding citizenship in students.

Congratulations go to: Patrick Beale of Alvie Consolidated School; Hannah Vella of Barwon Heads Primary School; Ethan James of Barwon Valley School; Jeremy Dalli of Barwon Valley School; Jayne Fendyk of Bellarine Secondary College; Hannah Ridley of Belmont High School; Luke Gittings of Biregurra Primary School; Jessica Mitterbacher of Ceres Primary School; Conor Killury of Clairvaux Catholic School; Cody Fennell of Colac Secondary College; Claire Mac Donald of Forrest Primary School; Lachlan Solly of Grovedale College; Jessica Guley of Grovedale West Primary School; Ella Morris of Highton Primary School; Jessie Cluistiaans of Matthew Flinders Girls Secondary College; Maddie Lundy of Montpellier Primary School; Lachie Genuill of the Mount Duneed Regional Primary School; Danielle Butler of Oberon High School; Felvia Francis of Oberon Primary School; Jo Hall of Point Lonsdale Primary School; Emma Ristovski of Roslyn Primary School; Shannon Tierney of Sacred Heart College; Mason Kent of Teesdale Primary School; Steven Pople of Surf Coast Secondary College; Hannah Branson of Torquay College; Piper Morrissy of Wallington Primary School; and, from Woady Yaloak Primary School, Izabella Sheridan, Cameron Grant, Kasey Bishop and Connor Palmer. Congratulations to all of the 2014 winners of the Corangamite Medal.
Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (16:16): Last Thursday I attended the launch of the HerCanberra magazine down at the Hyatt Hotel. The HerCanberra magazine is the next phase of the journey for Amanda Whitley, who a number of years ago started a highly successful website that is incredibly popular withCanberrans and particularly with the women in Canberra. Fifteen 'women to watch in 2015' were showcased at the launch, and I congratulate and commend them. The women included: Nellie Peoples, who is an artist and jewellery maker; Zoya Patel, who is editor-in-chief of Lip magazine; Joanna Allebone, who is YWCA communications manager; Tegan McAuley and Belinda Neame, who are the brains behind Hustle&Scout and The Forage—two events that have become hugely popular in the last 12 months, showcasing all the great local food we have in the region as well as all the great designers and fashion that we have; Louisa de Smet, who is also a designer; Sally Moylan, who is a wildlife warrior; Kaleid, which is a highly successful local band; Heidi Stratford, who is a Brand Canberra advocate; Kylie Travers, the ACT finalist in the Australian of the Year award; Tara Cheyne, who is the chair of the Belconnen Community Council; Michelle Melbourne, very well known across Canberra as a highly successful businesswoman; Dr Sudha Rao; Meegan Fitzharris; and many others.

Mrs MARKUS (Macquarie) (16:18): I am delighted to rise today to focus on an announcement made last week to ease congestion in Glenbrook in the Blue Mountains. I am pleased that this government and the current New South Wales Baird government have been working together to improve infrastructure in New South Wales. I have worked with the assistant minister for infrastructure, the Hon. Jamie Briggs, and my New South Wales state colleague, the member for Penrith, Mr Stuart Ayres, to ease the challenge around Glenbrook with regard to traffic.

This is the gateway to the Blue Mountains. Together we are committing funding of $5 million—$2.5 million from the feds and the same from the state—to upgrade the intersection of Ross Street and the Great Western Highway in Glenbrook. I joined the New South Wales Minister for Roads and Freight, the Hon. Duncan Gay, the Hon. Stuart Ayres, and the state member for the Blue Mountains, Mrs Roza Sage, to announce this vital upgrade, which both New South Wales state Labor and federal Labor failed to deliver during their tenure.

Glenbrook—a tourist attraction in itself with specialty shops and a culinary delight with cafes—also houses the Blue Mountains information centre and is an important stop for visitors to the rest of the tourist attractions of the Blue Mountains. Labor fails to deliver, but in spite of the federal government's tight fiscal situation, this government continues to work with a committed New South Wales government to ensure upgrades like the Glenbrook intersection get delivered.

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (16:20): Madam Deputy Speaker, I was just wondering if I could table the 15 names because I did not get through them all.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I am sorry about that, Member for Canberra. Do you seek approval to table those names?

Ms Brodtmann: Yes.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Everyone is in favour.

**Shortland Electorate: Centenary of Anzac**

Ms HALL (Shortland—Opposition Whip) (16:20): I am really pleased to announce grant funding of $34,000 to produce commemorative medals marking the 100th anniversary of Gallipoli. These grants were made through the Anzac Centenary Local Grants Program, with the medallions project being coordinated by the Pelican RSL sub-branch in the Shortland electorate. The medallions will be an important, lasting memory of our Anzac history. About 20,000 medallions are being produced, and they will be delivered to schoolchildren in local schools in the eastern side of Lake Macquarie and the northern part of Wyong Shire. The front of the medallion will feature Simpson and his donkey helping a wounded soldier, and on the back will be the words 'courage, mateship, endurance and sacrifice'. Each medallion will come in a protective velvet pouch. They will be a great talking point for families and a great keepsake for all those students in the Shortland electorate. It will bring home to them the importance of the celebration of Gallipoli. It will be part of the history. When they have children of their own, they can pull out that medallion, show it to them and talk to them about the importance of Gallipoli and Anzac Day.

**Dobell Electorate: Cancer Council's Relay for Life**

Mrs McNAMARA (Dobell) (16:21): This year marks the 15th anniversary since the start of Mingara Central Coast Cancer Council's Relay for Life event. This past Saturday I joined with representatives from the Central Coast Cancer Council, volunteers, survivors, carers and families to celebrate this milestone. Over the past 15 years, the Central Coast relay has raised close to $3 million for the Cancer Council of New South Wales. This fundraising has allowed the Cancer Council to assist those in our community who are suffering from cancer. Assistance includes providing information and support to cancer patients and their families, prevention services, and funding for research and for local services. With one in two Australians diagnosed with cancer before the age of 85, this assistance makes a tremendous difference to individuals and their families as they fight cancer. The relay not only raises much needed funds; it also brings together the Central Coast community to recognise and celebrate cancer survivors, patients and their carers, and to honour and remember loved ones lost to cancer.

I would like to pay special credit to Mr John Millard, who was honoured on Saturday with the founding of the perpetual Cancer Council New South Wales-Hunter Central Coast John Millard Award. This award is fitting recognition of John's community spirit and dedication to helping others in our community who are afflicted with cancer. Congratulations to everyone involved. I look forward to once again supporting the Relay for Life, which will be held this October.

**Harmony Day**

Mr GRIFFIN (Bruce) (16:23): This 21st of March will be the 15th occasion where we as a nation have celebrated Harmony Day. Harmony Day has been an important part of the multicultural calendar over that 15 years. It is all about celebrating Australia's cultural diversity. It is about inclusiveness, it is about respect and it is about a sense of belonging for everyone. It is something which has been celebrated here in Canberra at Parliament House on cold mornings, as it will be tomorrow morning, when members of the parliamentary football
group go out and do battle against a team of former professionals based at SBS. Tomorrow I will be joined by the member for Forde and possibly others to do battle, as we have for several years now—and 'battle' is very much the word. We battle and we strive. We try and have harmony, but I have to say that, at times, even I have been guilty of occasionally raising my voice in anger and frustration. It is certainly an opportunity for us to get out there and together celebrate the fact that we are a very culturally diverse society. We work together and we practise our teamwork. At the end of the day, we might get flogged, but we get flogged together. It will be an occasion where people like Les Murray and Craig Foster will be out there. I just hope they are kind to us.

Lyne Electorate: Clark, Mr Rowan and Ms Anna

Mr HUTCHINSON (Lyons) (16:24): I want to congratulate a farming family in my electorate, Rowan and Anna Clark, from Rupertswood, near Hagley, in the Meander Valley, in northern Tasmania. They have found a novel way of showing off their skills. For the past two years they have developed a crop maze in a five-hectare paddock on their farm. This year, in a sorghum crop, they have used the design of the poppy from Flanders Fields. It is a very significant gesture, this being the Centenary of Anzac. Last year they used an iconic Tasmanian symbol, the Thylacine, and more than 2,000 visitors came to see the maze.

Having driven past the property last Monday, the public holiday, I reckon there might have been 2,000 people there then. So clearly it has captured the imagination of many people. There is a smaller maze there for young kids who do not want to get lost in the eight-foot-high sorghum. They used GPS technology to cut the maze into the sorghum crop. It is a wonderful thing and I congratulate them.

Ovarian Cancer

Ms HALL (Shortland—Opposition Whip) (16:26): I rise to thank all of those members, and you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for supporting the ovarian cancer fundraising campaign I ran through this parliament, and the morning tea I had in Shortland electorate. It was a very successful event, and we had a great morning into the bargain. We had outstanding speakers. The wonderful Carolyn Bear was a great help. In total we sold in excess of $3,000 worth of bracelets and we raised around $5,000. It is a really great cause. Among the speakers were ovarian cancer voluntary ambassador Rose Molloy and Catherine Adams, a health professional. A psychologist, also came along to speak to us. We had in excess of 150 women there. Uproar Ladies Fashions put on a fashion parade and 10 per cent of the sales they had following the morning tea were donated for ovarian cancer. I thank everybody who was involved on the day.

Capricornia Electorate: Cyclone Marcia

Ms LANDRY (Capricornia) (16:28): I refer to the devastation to small business on the Capricorn Coast caused by Cyclone Marcia. The damage bill exceeds $200 million. As the recovery phase continues, one of the best ways we can help small business to recover, especially near the rainforest town of Byfield, is to support them by spending money there. This was my message to the local community and to tourists across Australia last week after I spent two days meeting with local business owners and farmers in some of the worst hit areas. Although the rainforests and pine forests are flattened, people need to know that businesses are getting back up and running and they now need visitors to return and spend money. I
encourage people from all over Australia to fly in or take a weekend drive to Byfield, book cabin accommodation, buy a meal and spend locally. With everyone's help we can get this local economy buzzing again. Last week I visited 13 businesses, including Warren and Jean O'Leary's Rainforest Ranch, Rod and Ellen Taylor Byfield Store and bush cafe, and the famous Ferns Hideaway, owned and run by John 'Marto' Martin and Genevieve Martin. These are examples of small businesses that need visitors to return to the area to get the economy back on track.

Pensions and Benefits

Mr GRIFFIN (Bruce) (16:29): Today in question time the Prime Minister once again sought to try to justify the government's position on pension indexation by saying that the pension will not be cut. But let us be really clear about what that means and what the real answer is in this area. Pensions at the moment are indexed against three different indicators: male total average weekly earnings, the consumer price index and a thing called the PBLCI, the pensioner and beneficiary living cost index. Governments of both persuasions have always accepted the view that you accept whichever one provides the best outcome when you do the review, which is done on a six-monthly basis.

As we all know, the cost of living increases over time but the level of increase may vary. What that means is that you need to maintain the value of pensions in order to take into account that growth. No-one says the pension gets cut, but the value of the pension will be cut, because the value of the pension will fall out of kilter with the changes in the cost of living—and the figures that have been put forward by organisations in the community say it will be by as much as $80 a week over the next few years. Also, according to the government's own report, the pension's current value, of 28 per cent of male total average weekly earnings, will go down to 16 per cent of male total average weekly earnings. This is a disaster for pensioners and those who rely on benefits in our country. (Time expired)

Sun Smiles Project

Mr LAUNDY (Reid) (16:30): Last week I had the pleasure of launching an amazing initiative in my electorate: the Sun Smiles project. The Sun Smiles project seeks to address the declining state of children's dental health. This is a collaboration which brings together the not-for-profit organisation the Carevan Foundation and Bachelor of Oral Health students from the University of Sydney to provide education on the importance of oral hygiene, free dental screening and a fluoride varnish application. The project was launched at Homebush West Public School last week and will also head to Auburn West Public School in my electorate later in the year.

Good dental hygiene is paramount to an adult's overall wellbeing. Through early intervention and education, this project provides children with the opportunity to better understand oral health and gives them a chance to change their lives for the better. Programs such as Sun Smiles, which harness existing infrastructure and promote partnerships, corporate philanthropy and volunteering, are perfect examples of providing sustainable solutions to the problems faced by everyday people.

This proves once again that community projects can have an incredible impact, far beyond the grassroots level. This is a community-serving project, and I would like to thank Dr John Brabant, the founder of Carevan; Professor Chris Peck at the University of Sydney; and all the
teachers and students who helped at the launch. We saw 220 kids that day, and this will make
a real difference in their lives, at no expense to the taxpayer, through harnessing corporate,
government and philanthropic enterprise. It was a great day.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Prentice) (16:32): I welcome the interparliamentary
group from other parliaments in our region. Welcome, on behalf of everyone here.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

New South Wales Seniors Week

Ms HALL (Shortland—Opposition Whip) (16:32): Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like
to add to your welcome.

This morning I moved a private member's motion in the House relating to New South
Wales Seniors Week and to seniors. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those
seniors in Shortland electorate—I did not do this in my contribution this morning—for the
enormous amount of volunteer work that they do within the electorate. They are the backbone
of volunteerism in Shortland electorate. They give many hours of their time voluntarily. Each
and every time I present awards in Shortland, the number of senior citizens that receive those
awards is enormous.

Lake Macquarie City Council also recognises the importance of seniors. To celebrate
Seniors Week, it is having a concert at the Lake Macquarie Performing Arts Centre. That will
be an opportunity for the council to say thank you to senior citizens.

There are many services available within Shortland electorate, the Hunter and the Central
Coast, but a number of those services seniors do not know about. So I have put together a
seniors directory. I encourage seniors to contact my office and get a copy of the directory,
because it will be a very useful resource for them. (Time expired)

Vanuatu: Cyclone Pam

Mr PITT (Hinkler) (16:34): I rise to offer my heartfelt sympathies to the people of
Vanuatu. As with any natural disaster, the estimates about the loss of lives, injuries,
displacement and damage bills are constantly changing and constantly in a state of flux. It will
be some weeks before we have a true picture of the devastation caused by Cyclone Pam.

The Hinkler region owes much to the people of Vanuatu and our other island neighbours. It
is widely recognised that without Australian South Sea Islanders, or Kanakas, our sugar
industry would not be what it is today. The sugar industry almost single-handedly created the
Bundaberg economy. There are thousands of Kanaka descendants living in Australia. An
official number has not been established. In the 2011 census, just 132 Hinkler residents
identified as being of Australian South Sea Islander descent. Clearly, there are many more
than that. That is why last year I called for greater recognition of Australian South Sea
Islanders as a distinct ethnic minority group.

I worked in the sugar industry from a young age, hearing stories about the backbreaking
work they did. They deserve our support. The ADF has commenced operations from RAAF
bases Amberley and Richmond to deliver critical humanitarian aid and disaster relief supplies
to Port Vila. We have committed $5 million to non-government organisations, such as the
Red Cross, and we have deployed many people, including medical and consular experts.
Jane and Geoff Smith from the Bundaberg ASSI community are working to facilitate donations of goods. As soon as information is available about how to donate, I will be sure to spread the word. I encourage all Hinkler residents to do their bit.

Porte, Mr Richie

Mr NIKOLIC (Bass—Government Whip) (16:36): In the early hours of this morning, Launceston's Richie Porte won the Paris-Nice cycling race, often referred to as the race to the sun. In doing so, he has added yet another chapter to Tasmania's proud cycling history. It is Richie's second victory in this race, having also won it in 2013.

What a victory it was! In the penultimate stage a day earlier, Richie had fallen twice in wet, slippery conditions, but got back on his bike to give himself a chance in the last stage: an individual race against the clock. Going into the 9.5 kilometre time trial he trailed the leader by a whopping 36 seconds, but dug deep in wet and windy conditions from Nice to Col d'Eze. Richie Porte is also the Australian time trial champion and he clocked the fastest time trial to claim the title of 2015 Paris-Nice champion.

Now, there are many reasons for Richie's victory: clean Tasmanian air, food and water are chief amongst them; dedication, persistence, motivation and sheer hard work are others. But every Christmas and New Year, Richie returns to Launceston to reconnect with his community. We often see him training. We ride with him along the beautiful cycling routes around Launceston. There is no doubt in my mind that riding with famous bunches like the Coffee Crawlers and Dad's Army in Launceston over Christmas and New Year has sharpened Richie up for the European racing season.

I congratulate Richie Porte for adding yet another chapter to Tasmania's proud cycling history. He is a wonderful ambassador for our state.

Parramatta Electorate: 1st/15th Royal New South Wales Lancers

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (16:37): Last week, I joined one of Parramatta's oldest and finest regiments, the 1st/15th Royal New South Wales Lancers for their 130th regimental dinner, celebrating another year of extraordinary service, as well as their illustrious history. On the evening, we were joined by a number of special guests: Colonel Lee Long, the honorary colonel; Major General Iain Spence, the head cadet of the reserve and employer support division; and Brigadier Kathryn Campbell, commander of the 5th Brigade. Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Rob Lording gave his traditional state of the unit speech, congratulating the unit on a successful year and outlining the challenges as they continue to serve our country to the best of their abilities.

The Royal New South Wales Lancers were first formed as the NSW cavalry regiment in 1885 and have fought in many of Australia's most important battles and wars, including in the Boer War, Gallipoli and Palestine in World War I and New Guinea and Borneo in World War II. They are Australia's most decorated regiment, with 21 honours. I would like to thank Captain Colin Bigger, my host officer for the evening, as well as Major Scott Francis for his assistance in organising the evening. I wish the Royal New South Wales Lancers many successful years ahead.
Forde Electorate: School Leaders

Mr VAN MANEN (Forde) (16:39): It is with much joy that I stand here today to speak about some of our wonderful young school leaders. I very much enjoy meeting with young people in our community who are committed to leadership. It is an honour to be selected to represent the student body. Student leaders have taken great responsibility and can look forward to a rewarding experience. Being a leader takes dedication, as well as the ability to be able to make sacrifices for the good of others. I would like to quote John Quincy Adams: 'If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.' I think this best sums up the role of leadership.

There are a number of school leaders in the Forde community who I, unfortunately, do not have time to mention here today. However, in the short time that I have left, I would like to acknowledge Rivermount College 2015 captains Hannah Lonergan and Robert Ashworth; Canterbury College 2015 captains Luke Clipperton and Samantha Collins, and Parklands Christian College 2015 captains Kaitlyn Glass and Ben Oxley, along with vice captains Rebecca Escobar and Marnie Stollznow. I wish all the 2015 school leaders every success in their roles and encourage all students to be leaders in their own right.

Franklin Electorate: West Winds Community Centre

Ms COLLINS (Franklin) (16:40): I would like to congratulate the West Winds Community Centre in my electorate on their 25th anniversary, which was held last week. The West Winds Community Centre is at Woodbridge in the channel in my electorate. The original property of West Winds was a dairy farm that the government purchased in the 1960s and used as a home for disadvantaged young boys. It then went on to become the Woodbridge Area School. The home was closed for the boys, and the people from the area formed a local committee to investigate possible uses for this property. It was officially opened in 1990 as the community centre.

There is a lot of great work that happens at this community centre in Woodbridge, from health and wellbeing programs to social programs, such as Eating With Friends, and exercises. They have a channel challenge happening in the region later this month, on 29 March. This centre has a wonderful and active committee. They are very active in their local community. The Premier was there with them last week celebrating their 25th anniversary. It is a great local community centre, and I want to congratulate the committee and all the local community members who volunteer in the Woodbridge West Winds Community Centre day in, day out. It is a wonderful committee doing great work in their local community. Twenty-five years is a great milestone for a community house. (Time expired)

Queensland: Tourism

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa—Deputy Speaker) (16:42): I want to issue an invitation to all those living in southern states to come to the great outback of Queensland this winter to get away from the cold and dreary days of southern Australia. Come to the great outback where the temperatures are mild, the hospitality is fantastic and the vision splendid is something that you will live with for the rest of your life. You can come to Cunnamulla to see the Cunnamulla Fella. You can go through Charleville, Quilpie and Thargomindah and see the opals at Eulo.
When you go north you will come to Tambo Teddies. Tambo is the prettiest town in western Queensland. You also have Blackall, where you can stand near the side of the Black Stump. Go on to Barcaldine—I know those on the other side will be interested in this—to see the Tree of Knowledge, the birthplace of the Labor Party, and the Workers Heritage Centre. You can hear the story of Harry Redford at Aramac. When you go to Longreach, the first thing you will see at a great distance is the tail of the great Qantas jumbo. The heritage of Qantas is in Longreach. Across the road is the Stockman's Hall of Fame. You can sail on the Thomson River at night on sunset, have a camp oven dinner and hear the stories of the outback.

You can go up to Winton, the birthplace of Waltzing Matilda. You can hear the story of the dinosaurs. The museums there are a fantastic outback experience. Of course, do not forget the Birdsville races or the Big Bash on Big Red in July this year, with Jimmy Barnes singing. There is so much to see. I urge people to get into their Winnebagos, caravans and camper trailers and come to the great outback. People will welcome you, and you would do a great deal for our economy, which we would welcome as well.

Longman Electorate: Longman Youth Leadership Forum

WYATT ROY (Longman) (16:43): I rise to talk about the Longman Youth Leadership Forum. The Longman Youth Leadership Forum is all about investing in the next generation of young Australians, particularly in my local community. It is about investing in their confidence, self-belief and courage. The great thing about our country is that anybody from anywhere can become anything. As we say at the Longman Youth Leadership Forum: ‘Live a life where you don't let fear define you. Don't let fear of failure or fear of what other people think define you. Life a life liberated from that fear. Be prepared to take a risk and prepared to take a chance, and back yourself.’ That is what the Longman Youth Leadership Forum is all about—ensuring that the next generation of locals takes hold of those opportunities of life, to run to the roar, as Bernie Kelly says, and to change their own lives for the better. I really want to take this opportunity to thank the local businesses in Longman. It is so easy for so many of us to pass on to the next generation a cynical sort of outlook, but they have backed our young people, and Bernie Kelly has got behind this program. It is a great thing that is changing the future for young people in my electorate. I just want to say a very big thank you.

GRIEVANCE DEBATE

Debate resumed.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Prentice) (16:45): The question is:

That grievances be noted.

Budget

Ms COLLINS (Franklin) (16:45): I would like to talk about the Financial Assistance Grants—grants that were first created in 1975 by the then Labor government to enable local governments to provide roads and services in their local communities. In particular, I would like to talk about the Financial Assistance Grants indexation pause that was part of this year's budget from the Abbott government. This will cost local councils around Australia around $925 million in grants which they are not receiving but which they would have received if it had not been for this pause on indexation. That is a cut to local governments—by the Abbott government—of $925 million over four years. Interestingly, some figures that I have recently
got from the Parliamentary Library looking at these allocations show that the cut is actually disproportionate in non-metropolitan Australia. The figures show that metropolitan Australian councils will receive a cut of $245 million, and non-metropolitan councils—that is, smaller regional and rural councils in Australia—will receive a cut of $680 million to their Financial Assistance Grants over the four years. It is a very significant amount of money, and councils are certainly writing to me—and I am sure they are writing to the government minister and to other members of government—about these cuts. There is great concern in local communities about which services are going to need to be cut from communities because of this decision by the government.

There is an article in Launceston's *The Examiner* today which talks extensively about these cuts. I want to quote from some of the commentary about this cut in relation to council areas in Tasmania. A spokesperson for the state Liberal Minister for Local Government, Peter Gutwein, says that it is a significant issue in Tasmania. He says: 'Just like the state government, local governments were blindsided by the last federal budget.' He is right about that. He goes on: 'It is disappointing that Financial Assistance Grant growth was unilaterally cut by the federal government.' It is indeed very disappointing. Barry Jarvis, LGAT—Local Government Association of Tasmania—President and Dorset Mayor, said that he would be lobbying the federal government to reinstate the indexation as one of his key priorities because, he said, councils would be having to make some hard decisions, and councils in Tasmania would see 13 per cent less funding by 2018. To run through some of those cuts: the Meander Valley Council over the four years will be receiving $1 million less; the Launceston City Council—$1 million less; the Northern Midlands Council—$900,000 less; the Dorset Council—$868,000 less; the West Tamar Council—$697,000 less; the Break O'Day Council—$652,000 less; the George Town Council—$447,000 less; and the Flinders Council—$328,000 less. And that is just in Northern Tasmania.

We can look around the country at some of these losses in funding. The Brisbane City Council in Queensland is another example: more than $16 million will be lost over the four years in forgone indexation that the council would have received—that is $16 million in services that the Brisbane City Council will no longer have available for its residents; important funding, I am sure. The Gold Coast City Council will receive over $8 million less in funding; the City of Greater Geelong—over $7.8 million less; the Western Downs Regional Council—$7.6 million less; the Toowoomba Regional Council—$6.8 million less; the Blacktown City Council in New South Wales—$6.7 million less; and the Wollongong City Council will receive over $6 million less in funding over the four years. These figures add up right across Australia and local governments and local councils will no longer be able to deliver the services that they are currently delivering.

Interestingly, Minister Truss put out a media release—obviously, my release got under his skin a little—saying that my figures did not add up. The figures I used are from the Parliamentary Library and they are based on Grants Commission figures. They also include population growth and they are an estimation. Of course, they are an estimation; they are for four years—just like his estimations of any figures that he might come up. He said that whilst there might be a freeze, it is more than offset by other programs.

He talks about extra money in black spot funding and Roads to Recovery. That money is cancelled out by the cuts to the financial assistance grants program over that same period. So
it is not an increase; it is, in fact, more tied money. The financial assistance grants came in
two streams: a general rate and a local roads rate. Councils were free to spend this money on
local priorities. Councils could actually make decisions about what their local residents
needed and spend the money accordingly, whereas the money that the minister is talking
about are tied grants to Roads to Recovery and black spot funding for very specific projects.
They are not like financial assistance grants, which are at the discretion of local government
and local council.

Minister Truss went on to say that there is a new billion dollar Stronger Regions Fund and
a Community Development Grants Program. We know the Community Development Grants
Program is just rebadged money that they have taken from other projects that were already
receiving money but were uncontracted Regional Development Australia Fund money and
reallocated it to their own seats. Indeed, 90 per cent of funding under that program went to
Liberal-held seats. So it is very clear to see what happened to that. I am sure that none of the
local government areas in Labor-held seats will be getting much of that money. The Stronger
Regions Fund is simply a rebadging of Labor's Regional Development Australia Fund, where
we had money available. The coalition took $350 million out of rounds 5A and 5B of the
Regional Development Australia Fund.

Clearly, there is not a whole heap of new money coming from this government to local
councils, particularly in rural and regional Australia. Clearly, the minister, as a National Party
member, has let down rural and regional Australia by not standing up against these cuts—cuts
that are impacting disproportionately on rural and regional local governments right across the
country. Some councils are saying that they might even have to put up rates, make rates
changes or cut essential services. Some of my councils have already laid off some staff in
response to these cuts. One has changed the way that they are charging for child care to make
up for some of these cuts. Goodness only knows where this will end up.

Councils cannot make up for these cuts. They are never going to be able to make up for
almost a billion dollars in cuts from financial assistance grants, where they did have the
discretion to spend the funds as they wanted. Almost a billion dollars over four years has been
cut by the Abbott government, disproportionately affecting regional councils. The Abbott
government have cut $680 million from regional councils right across Australia, dispropor-
tionately affecting some of those seats. There are so many more cuts that I could go
through—cuts to councils right across Australia—but I do not want to waste the House's time.
But I do want to point out one that stands out—the Durack electorate. People will know that
that electorate has been hit hard by the cyclone, particularly the banana crop in Carnarvon.
There has been a cut of more $60 million in that electorate alone in financial assistance grants
over the next four years. I am sure that money could be used by that local community and by
those councils to provide critical services to the local community, particularly at this time,
which I am sure is very difficult for them.

This is a really important issue in regional and rural Australia. It is a really important issue
for local government, and I think it shows that the Abbott government are not serious about
engaging with local government and are not serious about trying to stand up for those
councils in the bush, in regional and rural Australia.
Petitions: Broadband
Queensland Seafood Industry

Mr PITT (Hinkler) (16:55): I wish to table two petitions on behalf of a Hinkler constituent. Both have been certified by the Petitions Committee as meeting all requirements. The first is on behalf of the landowners and residents of Burnett Shores Estate, Burnett Heads. The principal petitioner is Venessa-Lochee Borthwick. It contains 31 signatures and calls on the House to investigate and assist in the ability for Telstra or other providers to provide adequate and affordable broadband internet service to the area. It also expresses the petitioners' discontent with Telstra and the developer of the estate.

The second petition is on behalf of the residents of Burnett Heads, with Venessa-Lochee Borthwick as the principal petitioner. The petition contains 126 signatures and is of a similar nature. I present both those petitions.

The petitions read as follows—

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

This petition of the land owners and residents of Burnett Shores Estate, Burnett Heads QLD 4670.

Draws to the attention of the House: We are lodging our discontent with both Telstra and the developer of this estate for the lack of telecommunications infrastructure provided in what we consider a new development of the township of Burnett Heads.

We therefore ask the House to: investigate and assist in the ability for Telstra and other providers to provide an adequate and affordable broadband service to the area. Possibility for the upgrade of current facilities.

from 32 citizens

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

This petition of the land owners and residents of Burnett Heads, QLD 4670.

Draws to the attention of the House: We are lodging our discontent with the current broadband internet infrastructure that is available within our township. It is very discerning as a community that some facilities are available to some residents and not others more so in the Bundaberg Port area. As this township develops and grows the current telecommunication system is outdated and unreliable.

We therefore ask the House to: Investigate and assist in the ability for Telstra or other providers to provide an adequate and affordable broadband service to the area. A possibility for the upgrade of current facilities to enable ADSL services to be provided.

from 128 citizens

Petitions received.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Prentice): The documents will be forwarded to the Standing Committee on Petitions for its consideration. It will be accepted subject to confirmation by the committee that it conforms to the standing orders.

Mr PITT: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The issue of broadband access at Burnett Heads is one that has gone on for some time. The former Labor government made six years worth of announcements and unfortunately did not connect anybody at all in the Hinkler electorate to the NBN. That is one of the difficulties: they raised expectations and provided no services and absolutely nothing to help the people of my electorate.
This is an issue that we are addressing rapidly. I am very pleased to advise the House that the NBN rollout in Bundaberg is well underway. We have fibre in the ground and we are on the VDSL2 trial—one of only 10 locations in Australia. That trial is well underway. There are some 30-odd wireless towers going into the regional areas of my electorate. For the people of Burnett Heads, who are in the far northern corner against a river boundary, with some legacy infrastructure, it is very difficult.

Unfortunately, Telstra has not made any moves to connect further infrastructure for access to ADSL. These people are all on the hurdy-gurdy, the roundabout, where they ring for an ADSL connection and get put on a waiting list. They get rolled off and, when someone disconnects from their existing home phone, they are put on that port. Then the one who lost that misses out. And this continues. Unfortunately, this it is a very difficult position for the people of Burnett Heads.

The new Queensland Labor government has created more bad news for anyone associated with the seafood industry. I am advised by the Queensland Seafood Industry Association that Queensland commercial net-fishing produces approximately 6,670 tonnes of product, valued at about $31.9 million per year. In the entire state of Queensland, there are only around 220 active N1 and N2 net licences. As everyone in this room knows, we all like Australian fish. It is an Australian product, it is safe, it is fresh and it is good for us. In my view, we have the best-managed fisheries in the country.

In relation to the recent announcement by the new Labor government, I would like to read to the House an advertisement from Paul Grunske, a commercial fisherman in Bundaberg. He is a well-known local fisherman who has been in the district for quite some time. This is an ad that he paid for himself and that he ran in the local papers. It goes like this:

Dear Queenslanders,

The Palaszczuk led Qld Government wants more commercial fishing closures in inshore waters. Just days before the State election—
it was literally days—

Deputy Leader Tim Mulherin proposed net fishing bans for:
• Trinity Bay (Cairns)
• St Helens Beach, Cape Hillsborough (north of Mackay)
• Yeppoon/Keppel Bay/Fitzroy River (Capricorn Coast)

Premier Palaszczuk believes this announcement notice is a mandate, citing the expansion of tourism—

would you believe—
as reason to justify the destruction of hundreds of industry jobs along the QLD coast.

These are jobs which we desperately need, and we need them to continue. The ad goes on to state:

These closures are the beginning of the end of Queensland's fishing industry if implemented. This politically motivated doctrine will send hundreds of industry workers to queue at Centrelink.

The Capricorn Coast area is a major supply fishery for our State and supplies fresh fish to Bundaberg, Wide Bay, Central Qld and beyond every week. These closures will deny access to a public resource owned by all Queenslanders.
The vast majority of Queenslanders consume seafood on a weekly basis—and I would encourage them to continue to do that and, in fact, to consume more if possible.

The ad continues:
The Palaszczuk Government wants Queenslanders who do not, or cannot fish, to eat imported fish such as Basa. (Vietnamese Catfish).

This proposal is a poorly thought out plan promoted at the eleventh hour.

Don’t let the Palaszczuk Government deny our commercial fishers access to our fishing grounds, and fresh fish supply.

**Queensland deserves better than this!**

Help stop this madness!

I fully support what has been put forward by Mr Grunske. The fishing industry in my district has been very strong for a long time but it is being decimated by progressive governments that bow to the Greens. Unfortunately this has resulted in large job losses, including processing facilities and scallop facilities. However we do have some very strong exporters based in Hervey Bay—we have the famous Hervey Bay sea scallops and Ocean King prawns.

But there is good news for the people of Burnett Heads. In the last week of the election campaign Knauf, a major international manufacturer, announced that they would be building a $70 million plasterboard plant at the Bundaberg port. This is a project that is done and dusted. They have done their DA, they have done their environmental plan, they have finished off their land use agreement, they have finished off their port agreement, they have done their pier testing and their engineering and design—they have invested, at an estimate, well over $1 million in preparing for this plant to move forward. This was all on the back of an announcement by the former LNP state government back in August 2014 which committed the government to building gas infrastructure—a pipeline to the port of Burnett Heads. On the back of that announcement we have a multinational business that will come to our district and will spend $70 million on a manufacturing plant that will supply the south-east corner of Queensland with plasterboard. On some estimates this could be over 20 B-double truckloads a day. This plant is ready to go. The pile-driver contractors are there and are ready to go. They are committed to building the project. The only issue we have is that with the change of the state government we cannot get a commitment from Labor to build the infrastructure.

This project is worth jobs. In my electorate the unemployment rate is around 11.3 per cent. It is totally unacceptable. This is a project that is on the line—it is ready to go, and there will be 200 construction jobs and 65 permanents in manufacturing—an area we need jobs in. Knauf have also agreed to build a pelletising plant for gypsum, which will provide our local agricultural producers with gypsum in a pelletised form direct off the boat, straight out of the factory, within 20 kilometres of their farms. This is quite incredible. Most of our major growing areas are around 20 kilometres from the centre of the city, or maybe a little more, and this is a great advantage for our growers. It will reduce their bottom line—they will make more money. We need to get this project over the line. My electorate of Hinkler is one of the biggest producers of heavy vegetables in Australia. We also export things from Macadamia nuts right through to seafood, and of course we are a very large part of the sugar industry. I would suggest to the new Labor member for Bundaberg that she stick to her commitment.

When asked about the gas pipeline on ABC Wide Bay on 2 February this year, Ms Donaldson said there were a number of commitments that had been funded and if those commitments had
been funded in the budget there really would not be a reason that she could see why they would not continue.

We need the Queensland Labor government to come out of their office and make a statement on this—they are running scared at the moment; they do not seem to want to come into the parliament at all. There are no interviews and they are sitting for only 30 or 32 days for the year. I thought they would have wanted to do more than that. We need them to come out and support this infrastructure because the last thing we want is to lose this project. We do not need a Gove site, another site with six piers in the ground where they have done the testing and confirmed that it will work. We need to get this over the line and we will continue to press for it. I encourage the Queensland Labor government to come out and support this project. It was not an election commitment—it was committed to last August, well outside the election period. We need to give confidence to international companies who wish to invest in our country. They need to get on with it and we need to get it done.

There is some other good news if you live at Burnett Heads—it is a fabulous part of the country to live. We have the Volunteer Marine Rescue at Burnett Heads, run by Gary Dick, who is a long-serving president of the VMR and who has rescued many, many fishermen. I know Gary very well and he is a very passionate advocate for VMR. I congratulate him and his team on what they are doing. Of course the Lighthouse Festival that runs every year is another wonderful activity in the district, and there is the local fishing classic. If there is a fishing ban, as proposed by Mr Mulherin, that will be a ridiculous outcome. Queensland is one of the most famous and fabulous places to fish in this country. It is well managed, it is well stocked, we have the ability to look after it and we have been doing that for a long time. I encourage them to get on with it and not take away the jobs of hardworking people like those in the fishing industry. They have managed this stock for many, many years—for decades. It is all they know, in many cases, and they do not wish to retrain. They just wish to continue in their business, as they have done for many years. They manage the stock incredibly well and they produce good, solid Australian fish for us to consume, and that should continue.

Debate interrupted.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Wicks): Before I call the member for Bendigo, I note that we have a number of visitors from the Inter-Parliamentary Study Program with us today. We make you most welcome.

GRIEVANCE DEBATE

Employment

Ms CHESTERS (Bendigo) (17:05): I rise to share with the House my concerns about the temporary employment visa program in this country. These visas are often referred to as 457, 417 or backpacker visas, and there are also the regional subclass visas. We have heard from recent reports in the media about a growing number of cases of exploitation are starting to get attention. These guest workers have come here with the best of intentions to do what any of us do as workers, a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. A lot of these workers work very hard, but some of them discover when they get here that they are the victims of some quite grievous exploitation. I will take a moment to highlight some of the examples that have been publicised
recently in our local media and some of the work that fair work Australia has been doing to expose exploitation that is occurring under the temporary work visa system.

I am using this debate today to highlight these issues because they are undermining people's rights at work. They are undermining the idea of a fair go that we have in our country and they are undermining the Fair Work Act and system. They are quickly becoming a way in which some—not all—employers can underpay workers. They use this visa system to get labour at a cheaper rate than they would have to pay Australian workers. This is a serious problem for the government and an issue that the government needs to address urgently, because it is ruining our reputation overseas. The experiences that these overseas workers have in our country is not a good one, and they take these experiences back to their own country. Because the temporary-work system is out of control and exploitation is rife, we are very quickly damaging our reputation overseas as a safe and fair country to come and work in.

Let me first highlight the example of foreign workers who have been working for a construction company in New South Wales:

Despite being promised almost $30 dollars, they say they were paid as little as $4 and were forced to live in substandard accommodation.

The construction union says many companies are using immigration laws to exploit foreign labour.

One of the workers, Edwin de Castro, said, 'We were underpaid for working for this company. We were expecting to receive $27 per hour per week but we received only $10 per hour.' That was Edwin's case but his was not the worst. As I said, some of them were paid as little as $4 per hour. Edwin said that he accepted this job working for a Taiwanese company working on construction projects in the north-west of Sydney. He believed that Australia was a safe place. He had spent many years working overseas. He entered the country on a 457 visa. He said that he looked forward to getting paid a rate of $27 per hour, because he would send much of it back to his family in the Philippines. That is why he chooses to work overseas. This is not his first employment overseas, but he said that the experience of working in Australia turned out to be the worst experience he has had working overseas. He said that the working and accommodation conditions were terrible. He said, 'We had six persons to a room. Others staying in shipping containers had their pay docked $250 per person for accommodation.'

Mr De Castro said that after several months all the foreign workers were sacked. They were thrown out of their accommodation in the middle of the night—41 Filipino and Chinese workers who worked on three separate projects were affected. This is the treatment of these guest workers in this country, and it is purely unacceptable that this is occurring. It goes to the fault in our system, and it is something that needs to be addressed at a broader level. The Fair Work Ombudsman is investigating the case and has ordered the company to repay the workers a total of $440,000. These situations—where workers on 457 visas and other temporary workers are being grossly exploited by a contractor or an agency—are becoming too common. Another example in my own electorate is one that broke in the media just yesterday. A Bendigo restaurant owner promised a husband and wife about $1,600 a week to work in his Indian restaurants, but paid them no wages for 12 months. The Fair Work Ombudsman alleges in their investigation that the businessman involved only provided food and accommodation for the couple, and was responsible for short-changing the husband and wife a total of $85,000 between August 2012 and October 2013. When the couple were asked
why they continued to work even though they were not being paid wages, the couple said that their reluctance to make a complaint about the lack of payment was because they were reliant on the support of this business for their Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme visa application. They were on bridging visas whilst they awaited the outcome of their application. The couple eventually complained to the Fair Work Ombudsman in March 2014, after they had ceased working for the restaurant and had received advice that their visa application would be declined.

These people are in desperate situations. They are being told by these dodgy employers that if they do not like it, they can go home. They are here as guest workers and they are being held to ransom by these dodgy employers. There is another example I would like to highlight: the Fair Work Ombudsman is prosecuting a Queenstown cafe and hardware store operator for allegedly paying a woman $270 for four weeks' work; it worked out to be $1.35 an hour. All of us in this House would acknowledge that that is not an underpayment—that is slave labour. This is what is going on currently with the temporary work visa system in our country. The Fair Work Ombudsman claims that the woman, who was on a 417 Working Holiday visa, agreed to work for the business owner if he promised to sign her visa extension forms. This is the problem that we have. The Fair Work Ombudsman, I have to acknowledge, is working really hard to prosecute all of these individual cases. But there are just too many for the Fair Work Ombudsman to chase up. I have had the opportunity in this debate to highlight three, but there are thousands and thousands more. This speaks to a systemic problem. It is something that I believe this House and this government need to take urgent action on. The Weekly Times journalist, Emma Field, says in an article printed on 28 January this year:

I have written more than 20 stories in the past 10 months on alleged breaches of workplace, health and safety and housing laws involving foreigners working mainly on farms and in the food processing sector.

But, in all the cases where workers allege underpayment, claim they never received pay slips, paid tax or received superannuation, these foreigners are rarely employed directly by the farm or factory they worked in.

In many cases they were employed by an agency. This is another part of the problem. Employers and companies cannot hide behind using a subcontractor. It is clearly an organised way in which these companies are going about bringing guest workers to our country, and then ripping them off and exploiting them—only for it to be chased up by Fair Work Australia and—hopefully—one day for these people to get the money and the wages that they are entitled to. To bring it back to my original point: if we want to invite people to work in this country and to be here as temporary workers, they deserve the same rights and opportunities as those Australians that are working here. They should not be exploited in the ways we are hearing about day in, day out in our media. There is clearly a systemic problem with these visas and with the way in which people are being brought into this country.

The agencies need to be investigated; the employers need to be investigated; the industries need to be investigated. Workers in Australian workplaces should not be pitted against each other. There should be one rule and one pay rate. No worker here as a guest worker should be exploited in this way.
I encourage all of those who have concerns about their pay and conditions to contact the Fair Work Ombudsman to have their individual case investigated. In the meantime, I join the unions in their call for this government to have an urgent inquiry into this field of work.

Queensland State Election

WYATT ROY (Longman) (17:15): There has been a big change in Queensland. We have seen a change in government at the state level and, while I commit at every reasonable opportunity to work constructively with the new Labor government in Queensland to deliver the best results for our community, I am already deeply worried about what the Labor Party will do to Queensland.

We have an amazing situation, as the member for Hinkler pointed out. The new government has come in and decided to have three days of pomp and ceremony in the parliament but they are not going to answer any questions. And the Queensland parliament is going to go nearly half a year without a single question to a minister. We see Labor ministers and the premier avoiding the media at every opportunity.

The member for Hinkler pointed this out: the Queensland parliament is going to sit for about 30 days this entire year. This parliament in Canberra is sitting for 75 days this year, and the Queensland Labor Party think they will just have 30 days: three days of great pomp and ceremony but no questions to ministers, then a go-slow for a year, and only work about 30 days of the year. That is not good enough for my community. They deserve an honest, transparent and accountable government, which is what the Labor Party promised. But already the Labor Party are running away from that commitment.

There are big concerns already out there about the honesty, transparency and accountability of Labor members—some of whom might be in my community, and I would suggest that the Labor Party will have some questions to answer there in the near future.

But I am also really worried about the issues that are affecting people in my community on a day-to-day basis. The biggest issue facing our community is the cost of living. So many locals are doing it so tough, trying to make it from day to day, from bill to bill, from week to week.

While there is always more work to do, the federal coalition government here in Canberra and the former state LNP government in Queensland have done a lot of work to give relief to locals when it comes to the cost of living. The obvious big ticket item was Labor's carbon tax, which was costing locals in my community with an average family household budget $550 a year. When we repealed Labor's carbon tax—which was costing that $550 a year—we also kept in place all the compensation measures that the Labor Party had put in. So the Labor Party said: 'It is going to cost pensioners in the community more for their electricity, so we are going to compensate them through the energy supplement. So, even though it is costing $550 a year, we will give single pensioners $361 a year and we will give couple pensioners $546 a year.' We said, 'Pensioners are doing it tough. We will keep that energy supplement—that $361 a year extra for singles, and $546 a year extra for couples—but we will remove the carbon tax, saving the average household $550 a year.'

The Labor Party also changed the income tax thresholds—effectively a tax cut—as compensation for the carbon tax. We said: 'We will keep that tax cut, but we will remove the carbon tax.' So we have increased the pension, which was the compensation for the carbon
tax; we have kept the tax cuts, which were compensation for Labor's carbon tax; but we have abolished the carbon tax, saving the average household $550 a year.

Coming up on 20 March, we are lowering the social security deeming rates for pensioners as well, which is about a $200 million boost to 770,000 part-pensioners. That is about another $80 in the pocket of local part-pensioners. When we removed Labor's carbon tax, a carbon tax supported by the Labor Party in Queensland, the then state LNP government reduced public transport by five per cent. That was saving commuters in my electorate from Morayfield to Brisbane $220 a year. So a five per cent reduction was saving them $220 a year. The former state Labor government was increasing public transport costs by 15 per cent. For every single year, there was a 15 per cent increase in public transport fares. The former LNP government halved that; they halved Labor's 15 per cent year-on-year increases.

They also created free travel for daily commuters who were travelling nine trips or more a week—so, their weekly commute. That basically meant they got a free trip home on Friday. I notice that Labor members are laughing. They think that the cost of living is irrelevant. I know they have already lost touch when it comes to the cost of living. They are very sensitive about this. They are very touchy when it comes to this. These changes save commuters in my electorate $1,000 a year on their travel. The LNP, through removing Labor's carbon tax and changing bad state Labor policies, saved daily commuters in my electorate $1,000 a year. That is on top of the $546 a year for pensioners that got an increase for the couples. That is on top of the $550 a year in savings we saw on electricity bills.

Now, as I said, there is a change in Queensland politics. I accept that. There is a question for Labor members here and in Queensland. If the state LNP were re-elected, they were going to set aside $2 billion to lower water bills in our community by paying down South East Queensland water debt. That would have saved the average household in my electorate $100 a year on their water bill. What did the Labor Party say? Nothing, nothing at all.

We also had a multibillion-dollar fund to relieve the cost of living if the LNP were re-elected at a state level. That would have saved another $577 a year on electricity bills for locals in my community. If the LNP were re-elected in Queensland, and I accept that they were not, we would have seen water bills lowered by $100 and we would have seen another $577 reduction in electricity prices. I plead to the new Queensland State government. My question to the Labor Party in Queensland is: what are they going to do on water bills? What are they going to do on electricity bills? What are they going to do on public transport bills? Our plan was clearly laid out. The coalition government has clearly made very significant savings for people in my community. What are they going to do on water bills? What are they going to do on electricity bills? What are they going to do on public transport bills? Our plan was clearly laid out. The coalition government has clearly made very significant savings for people in my community.
electorate. The question now is: what is the Labor Party going to do when it comes the cost of living for locals?

There are also other questions. This one really worries me and I have already written to the Premier of Queensland about it: how are they going to fund the infrastructure that matters in our electorate? I am inviting the Labor member opposite to come up to my electorate and visit Boundary Road intersection on the Bruce Highway. It is a terrible traffic hot spot for locals in my community. We built a Cosco there recently.

*An opposition member interjecting—*

**WYATT ROY:** She says, 'The infrastructure Prime Minister.' Well, the infrastructure Prime Minister and the coalition government here in Canberra put $84 million on the table to upgrade that intersection. The Queensland LNP put $21 million on the table. Do you know what the state Labor Party put on the table? I would ask Labor members. What do you think the state Labor Party put on the table for the Boundary Road intersection? What are they offering people in my community?

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**WYATT ROY:** They are not offering one dollar for a vital infrastructure upgrade in our electorate. The Labor Party is now the government in Queensland. We accept that. I am pleading to them: put back on the table the $21 million to upgrade this vital infrastructure in our local community. The coalition government here in Canberra today has $84 million sitting on the table. The Labor Party has got to find that $21 million that would have come if the LNP government was re-elected.

That the D'Aguilar Highway is another one in my electorate that is a very important road. It is a tragic deathtrap there. There have been far too many deaths there. This is a state government road, but I committed on behalf of the coalition government $16 million to upgrade the D'Aguilar Highway. If there was not the change of government, we would already see work underway there. There has been a change of government and it has gone into limbo with the state Labor government. I am appealing again to the state Labor government. There is $16 million on the table from the Commonwealth. We are not actually asking for any more money from the state Labor government. We just want them to spend the money that is on the table and build these upgrades. With the change of government, with new ministers who are seriously struggling in their portfolios, they are not doing very much.

The other one is of course the Caboolture Hospital. I love how the Labor Party continues to laugh about really important issues to people in my local community. At Caboolture Hospital car park 100 spaces are to be upgraded. Guess how many spaces the Labor Party is committed to: zero spaces. I am calling on the state Labor government to fund this increase, because it matters to our community, regardless of partisan politics.

**Newcastle Electorate: Telecommunications**

**Ms CLAYDON (Newcastle) (17:25):** I rise today to further outline the very strong case for an area in my electorate to be included in the priority rollout schedule of the National Broadband Network. The suburb of Thornton is located on the western outskirts of Newcastle, about 25 kilometres by road from the city centre and about 10 kilometres from the nearby hub of Maitland. Yet Thornton has some of the poorest quality and poorest access to broadband services in Australia.
Thornton is a mix of about 2,500 old and new residences, built from the early 1900s through to pockets of new housing built in recent years. I might add that it is still growing. Thornton and the immediate suburbs are part of a boom growth corridor between Maitland and Raymond Terrace. It is a popular area for young couples and families to settle and build their lives, and for long-term residents to enjoy retirement in the houses they have lived in and enjoyed for decades.

Despite the close proximity to the second largest city in New South Wales and the major arterial roads of Australia's eastern seaboard, Thornton is a suburb that sits in digital isolation. According to the Department of Communication's broadband availability and quality report, published in December 2013, large parts of Thornton have the poorest access in the country to broadband, and the broadband that is available is of the poorest quality, delivering some of the slowest speeds in Australia. According to the My Broadband checker online tool, a tool that most Thornton residents cannot in fact make use of, Thornton's current broadband situation is rated DED, dead. According to the ranking scale, where an A is best and an E is the worst, Thornton scores a D rating for the availability of broadband, and E rating for the quality of fixed broadband available, and D for the current ADSL quality.

When it comes to wireless broadband the situation is little better. Close proximity to busy freeways and road stops at Hexham and Heatherbrae mean that the local wireless network is often clogged with travellers checking in on their journey north, leaving the residents with a slow unreliable and very expensive service.

I have been working with Thornton residents on this issue for more than two years now. The shocking lack of access to broadband and ADSL connections was first raised with me whilst doorknocking in Thornton during my campaign. Since I was elected, in 2013, residents have been in regular contact with me about their broadband and internet malaise. It is rare that a week goes by without a member of the Thornton community calling my office or writing to me to tell me about the issues they are having with connecting to the internet. I have made regular representations on their behalf to the Minister for Communications detailing their frustration and, at times, anger about not being able to connect to the internet. To date the responses from the minister have been generally hollow, with no real answers for the community, no timeline for connection to the NBN and no solution for their current ADSL and wireless issues.

Frustrated at the lack of detail and action for the Thornton community, I put question in writing to the minister, but again received no real answers, and most definitely no action. Late last year I wrote to all residents in Thornton asking them to tell me a bit more about their broadband experience. The response from the 177 residents who completed the Thornton broadband survey was overwhelming. No matter what individual requirements residents have, the current broadband service does not meet the needs of the community today, let alone the needs of the future.

Nearly three-quarters of respondents to the survey cannot get access to ADSL broadband at their home. They have tried to get access but they have received a number of different reasons for why they cannot gain access. For some, the stark reality is that without a new phone exchange being built—which would be a very expensive option to connect residents to the old technology of last century—Thornton residents will never receive access to ADSL broadband. NBN is their only hope.
A lot of people are being forced into using the only service available to them, and that is the very expensive and sometimes unreliable wireless broadband. Depending on the agreement they have with their service provider, users may have to pay up to triple the price for a quarter of the data that is available under ADSL or NBN. Not surprisingly, nearly all respondents to the survey—99 per cent in fact—reported that they need to use the internet every day, with the most common reasons for internet usage being firstly, social connection with family and friends; secondly, shopping for groceries and other items online; thirdly, to do schoolwork or university assignments; fourthly, to work from home or to operate a small business; and, finally, to do online banking and paying of bills.

The survey also allowed respondents to make open comment about their experience of broadband in Thornton. The comments demonstrated an overwhelming sense of frustration regarding both the access and quality of broadband in Thornton. For the benefit of the House, I would like to share a few of the comments that were sent to me. One resident said, 'We purchased our home in August 2014, but didn't realise we would have no access to internet.' Another asked, 'Third World countries get fast broadband; why not Thornton?' On the cost of the only option available to many, another said, 'Currently using four different wireless accounts. Total cost per month: $310. Total gigabytes per month: 32.'

One of the lucky few who has some ADSL access said, on the speed of the service he receives, 'The maximum speed I have ever got is about 300 kilobytes per second.' Frankly—as one resident put it—'Expensive, unreliable mobile broadband has resulted in countless hours of frustration.'

Their voices were clear—their current level of service is completely unacceptable in 2015. The shadow minister for communications is very aware of the issues and frustrations that Thornton residents are having, and has visited the area three times in the last 12 months—most recently last week. He has shared their frustration on the national stage to highlight the gross inadequacy of internet services in areas like Thornton, doing so at the NBN: Rebooted conference in Sydney last year.

While it has been told in the House before, the story he shared is worth telling again. It is actually one that was shared with me when doorknocking in 2013. It is the story of an aged care nurse who lives in Thornton. She lives quite a long way from where she works and she has to check her shift rosters online to see when she is next required to work. That is where things get interesting. Rather than check on a smart phone, tablet or laptop in the comfort and privacy of her own living room, as you or I might do, this nurse has to get on a ladder and climb onto her roof to get an adequate mobile broadband reception to download a simple, text-based shift roster.

Unfortunately, the nurse's story is not unique. Last week, the shadow minister joined me in Thornton for a community forum to discuss the current state of broadband in Thornton and what the future held. There was standing room only at St Michael's church hall, with more than 100 residents squeezed in to get an update of the situation on broadband in Thornton. The residents are understandably anxious, sharing their individual frustrations with the shadow minister and me.

There was the story of a mother who gets up at 5 am every day, heading into Newcastle city to work. She works a full day then stays back for a few hours to do her online study on her employer's network, because she is worried about using up the expensive wireless data
quota at home that her daughter needs for her own study. Returning home at about 7 pm she has a few hours with the family and then goes through the same routine again the next day. And so it goes on, day after day.

We also heard the story of a young nurse who is studying for her master's degree in intensive paediatric care. She cannot access the internet at home and has to find a way to juggle her study, work and personal life. She is often forced to stay at work on campus until the early hours of the morning to complete her study. This is a woman we entrust to care for 26-week-old premature babies. She is trying to improve her skills, but we cannot give her access to the internet. I gave an assurance to the Thornton community last week that I would not rest until they had access to a level of broadband that they need, want and deserve. I again put the Minister for Communications on notice about the dire needs of Thornton residents and call on him to ensure that Thornton is added to the next round of the NBN rollout plan as a matter of urgency. *(Time expired)*

### East West Link

**Mr TONY SMITH** (Casey) (17:35): I rise in this afternoon's grievance debate to again call for the state Labor government to see common sense and to construct the East West Link. This is a vital project for Melbourne. It is a vital project for the outer eastern suburbs and the Yarra Valley that I represent along with other members. This is a project that once had broad support from within the Labor Party. This is a project that was first mooted by the Eddington review set up some years ago. The former Labor government of John Brumby was supportive of this project. The former federal Labor government was supportive of this project. The current Leader of the Opposition was extremely supportive of this project, as were other colleagues of his. We can go back to before the time the Leader of the Opposition was elected when, as a member of the Australian Workers Union, he, together with the state secretary, Cesar Melhem, put in a submission that said amongst other things:

The Eastern Freeway is the remaining freeway to terminate in the inner suburbs without providing the connectivity benefits of other freeways to city and regional users and commuters. An important statement, a self-evident statement in so many ways, but clearly a statement from the Leader of the Opposition of the need to build the East West Link. Anyone in Melbourne who travels along that Eastern Freeway to where it terminates as you approach the city encounters a car park—a car park that is growing by the metre. If this East West Link is not built, that car park will grow and grow and grow.

It is not just commuter times; it is the cost to businesses. As a local businessman in the nursery industry said the other day, no matter what the advocates of alternative transport projects put forward, he cannot put a metre of tanbark on a train or on a bus. They are delivering products all over Melbourne. The small businesses are trying to get about Melbourne to compete and earn a living. The growers in the Yarra Valley are trying to get their produce to market. That is why way back in 2007 the Leader of the Opposition strongly supported an East West Link. Then, when he became a federal member, he together with three other colleagues put in a joint submission that said amongst other things:

'Doing nothing' therefore, is not an option.
I could go through all of the submissions in detail. They received publicity at the time back in 2007. That AWU submission received a lot of publicity with the then leader of the AWU, Bill Shorten, strongly advocating the project. The state secretary, Cesar Melhem, said at the time: We strongly support the project; the project has to go ahead sooner or later …

He is absolutely right. Seven or eight years down the track we have this situation where the state Labor government, with a contract in place, is contemplating tearing up that contract and getting out of it with an act of parliament. Apart from the fact they would pay many, many millions of dollars—we do not know how much—not to build a road, the risk not just to Victoria's economic reputation but also to Australia's economic reputation is manifest.

The now Labor premier went through the last election saying the contract was not worth the paper it was written on. Now he is contemplating passing an act of parliament to void that contract—an extraordinary reckless economic decision, the consequences of which will be felt beyond Victoria, and will affect Australia's financial reputation. As I said, the Leader of the Opposition went from strong support to silent acquiescence, with the election of the state Labor government. Today, just before question time, he finally answered a question and acknowledged he had done a complete backflip on the East West Link. Presumably, he supports tearing up the contract as well. There has been a lot of publicity from those experts in the infrastructure investment community. Infrastructure Investor had this to say just a week or so ago:

Retrospective legislation: two words designed to send shivers down the spines of infrastructure investors …

I could go through many, many more. Embassies have been approached by concerned government representatives about what is going on in Australia with the Andrews government. You do not need to take our word for it or their word for it. It is because what is being contemplated by the Victorian premier would be such a reckless step that in the past the Leader of the Opposition and the now shadow Treasurer have made the point that, from Labor's perspective, they might not like a contract, but for the very reasons I have outlined they have said that they will always honour contracts.

At the National Press Club, the shadow Treasurer had this to say, back on 11 September last year, 'Bill Shorten and I are of one mind—Labor honours contracts. Labor in Government honours contracts entered into by previous governments. Even if we don't like them, for the issues of sovereign risk Labor honours contracts in office signed by previous governments.' The Leader of the Opposition has to show some leadership. That is the position outlined at the National Press Club and that is the correct position. That is the responsible position. That is the position that protects Australia's sovereign interests, and protects Australia's financial security on these infrastructure projects. But, now, the Leader of the Opposition is prepared to stand by and watch a reckless state government not only play fast and loose with Victoria's financial reputation but with Australia's reputation as well.

Let me make this plea to the Labor members who might be capable of speaking to the Victorian premier to see common sense. They have got ambitions for alternative plans. They do not want to build this road, and we understand they are not interested in the outer east. We think it is not too late to change their mind. But if they want to build alternative projects they are going to have to raise money from investors. How do you think they will go in the future?
How do you think any level of government will go in the future if a state government in Australia has gone into the parliament and passed a law to tear up a contract? How are they going to go at getting the investment for projects in the future? This is a cut and shut matter, and for those opposite to sit silently by is either knowingly reckless or hopelessly incompetent about the real risks that this Victorian government is contemplating this very week.

The contract is signed, the road needs to be built. The idea that the East West Link will not be built is ridiculous. They should get on and build the road, protect their own financial interests and, critically, protect Australia's financial reputation in overseas markets.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Griggs):** The time for the grievance debate has expired. The debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 192B. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

*Federation Chamber adjourned at 17:45.*
QUESTIONS IN WRITING

Australian Graduates
(Question No. 622)

Mr Kelvin Thomson asked the Minister for Education and Training, in writing, on 14 November 2014:

(1) Is the Minister aware that young Australian graduates are experiencing unprecedented tough competition to find work in fields such as accounting.

(2) In an environment of high national unemployment, and shaky business and consumer confidence, will the Minister consider reviewing the Government's 'business as usual' approach in respect of Australia's overseas student and migrant worker programs?

Mr Pyne: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(1) Australian accounting graduates experience higher than average employment outcomes. The Graduate Careers Australia's Graduate Destinations Survey shows that in 2013, 77.4 per cent of domestic accounting bachelor degree graduates were in full-time employment four months after completion of their degree in comparison with the national average figure for all domestic bachelor degree graduates of 71.3 per cent.

(2) Migrant worker programs are a matter for the Minister of Immigration and Border Protection.

Commonwealth Regulations for Australian Cafes
(Question No. 667)

Dr Leigh asked the Prime Minister in writing on 25 November 2014:

In respect of his Parliamentary Secretary's (the Member for Kooyong) recent assertion that 'the operation of a typical outdoor Australian cafe that serves alcohol is subject to 75 different regulations, 25 at the commonwealth level, 29 at the state level and 21 at the local level' (The Australian, 10 October 2014). Can he (a) list the regulations, and (b) specify which of these regulations the Government has so far repealed?

Mr Abbott: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a) The figures reported by the then Parliamentary Secretary are from an unpublished report prepared by KPMG in 2014.

(b) Information on the wide array of measures that the Australian Government has decided as part of the Autumn and Spring 2014 Repeal Days is available in the Repeal Day Overviews located on www.cuttingredtape.gov.au.

Australian Defence Force: APS Workforce
(Question No. 703)

Ms Brodtmann asked the Assistant Minister for Defence, in writing on, 9 February 2015:

For each electoral division as at 31 December 2014, and as contained in the final pay figures for the October to December 2014 quarter within the Defence People Group of the Department of Defence, what was the (a) personnel headcount for (i) the Navy, (ii) the Army, (iii) the Air Force, (iv) civilians, and (v) Reserves, and (b) number of civilians (i) on fixed-term contracts, and (ii) employed part-time.

Mr Robert: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a) and (b) The personnel headcount as at 31 December 2014 for Navy, Army, Air Force, Reserves and APS for each electoral division is provided in the table below. The total Australian Public Service
(APS) workforce by actual headcount was 20,551, of which 79 employees were on fixed-term contracts and 1,321 were part-time.

Note that these figures are based on headcount data, rather than full-time equivalents (FTE). Defence budgets for its APS workforce on a FTE (i.e. paid) basis. Headcount data counts all personnel equally regardless of the number of hours worked, and includes all personnel recorded as on duty, or on leave with, or without, pay.

By way of comparison, the Defence APS workforce by actual FTE at payday 18 December 2014 was 19,384.

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### QUESTIONS IN WRITING
### Notes:
(a) Figures include Defence and DMO.
(b) ‘CFTS’ denotes Reservists on Continuous Full-Time Service.
(c) The electorate of Lingiari is located in the Northern Territory. It is also listed against Western Australia (WA) as it includes the Cocos Islands and Christmas Island, which are geographically located in WA.
(d) Electorates not listed indicate there were no Defence employees with a work location in that electoral division.
(e) Fixed Term contracts includes all non-ongoing on a fixed term contract whether F/T and P/T.
(f) Fixed term total include 8 P/T personnel.
(g) Part Time total includes all P/T non-ongoing and ongoing personnel

**Australian Defence Force: Civilian Staff**

(Question No. 704)

Ms Brodtmann asked the Assistant Minister for Defence, in writing on 9 February 2015:

In respect of civilian staff in the Department of Defence (including the Defence Materiel Organisation) as at 31 December 2014, (a) what was the (i) headcount, and (ii) breakdown of the headcount by Defence Group, and (b) how many were (i) on fixed term contracts, (ii) part-time, (iii) based in the Australian Capital Territory, and (iv) based outside the Australian Capital Territory, and where.

Mr Robert: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a) and (b) The civilian staff headcount and breakdown by State and Defence Group is provided in the table below. The total Australian Public Service (APS) workforce by actual headcount was 20,551, of which 79 employees were on fixed term contracts and 1,321 were part-time.

Note that these figures are based on headcount data, rather than full-time equivalents (FTE). Defence budgets for its APS workforce on a FTE (i.e. paid) basis. Headcount data counts all personnel equally regardless of the number of hours worked, and includes all personnel records as on duty, or on leave with or without pay.

By comparison, the Defence APS workforce by actual FTE at payday 18 December 2014 was 19,384.

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QUESTIONS IN WRITING
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Notes:
(a) Fixed Term contracts include all non-ongoing personnel on a fixed-term contract, whether full-time or part-time.
(b) Fixed Term total include 8 P/T personnel.
(c) Part Time total includes all P/T non-ongoing and ongoing personnel.

**Future Submarine Project**
(Question No. 721)

**Mr Zappia** asked the Minister for Defence, in writing on 23 February 2015:

Has the Japanese Government expressed any reluctance or concern in participating in an open tender or competitive evaluation process for the Future Submarine project.

**Mr Andrews:** The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

Australia and Japan continue to engage in a relationship of deepening Defence engagement. Japan is currently considering our invitation to participate in the competitive evaluation process.

**Brand Electorate: Unemployment**
(Question No. 735)

**Mr Gray** asked the Minister representing the Minister for Employment, in writing, on 26 February 2015:

Since August 2012, what was the rate of unemployment by quarter in the electoral division of Brand for the (a) 15 to 24, and (b) 15 to 19, year old age groups.

**Mr Pyne:** The Minister for Employment has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

The most up-to-date teenage and youth unemployment rate estimates by electorate are from the August 2011 Census, which show that the unemployment rate for 15 to 19 year olds in the Brand electorate stood at 17.2 per cent, while the unemployment rate for 15 to 24 year olds was 12.5 per cent.