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SITTING DAYS—2011

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RADIO BROADCASTS

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FORTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—SECOND PERIOD

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

Senate Officeholders

President—Senator Hon. John Joseph Hogg

Deputy President and Chair of Committees—Senator Hon. Alan Baird Ferguson

Temporary Chairs of Committees—Senators Guy Barnett, Thomas Mark Bishop, Suzanne
Kay Boyce, Patricia Margaret Crossin, Mary Jo Fisher, Michael George Forshaw,
Annette Kay Hurley, Stephen Patrick Hutchins, Helen Evelyn Kroger, Scott Ludlam,
Gavin Mark Marshall, Julian John James McGauran, Claire Mary Moore, Louise Clare Pratt,
Hon. Judith Mary Troeth and Russell Brunell Trood

Leader of the Government in the Senate—Senator Hon. Christopher Vaughan Evans

Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate—Senator Hon. Stephen Michael Conroy

Leader of the Opposition in the Senate—Senator Hon. Eric Abetz

Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate—Senator Hon. George Henry Brandis SC

Manager of Government Business in the Senate—Senator Hon. Joseph William Ludwig

Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate—Senator Mitchell Peter Fifield

Senate Party Leaders and Whips

Leader of the Australian Labor Party—Senator Hon. Christopher Vaughan Evans

Deputy Leader of the Australian Labor Party—Senator Hon. Stephen Michael Conroy

Leader of the Liberal Party of Australia—Senator Hon. Eric Abetz

Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party of Australia—Senator Hon. George Henry Brandis SC

Leader of the Nationals—Senator Barnaby Thomas Gerard Joyce

Deputy Leader of the Nationals—Senator Fiona Nash

Leader of the Australian Greens—Senator Robert James Brown

Deputy Leader of the Australian Greens—Senator Christine Anne Milne

Leader of the Family First Party—Senator Steve Fielding

Chief Government Whip—Senator Anne McEwen

Deputy Government Whips—Senators Carol Louise Brown and Helen Beatrice Polley

Chief Opposition Whip—Senator Stephen Shane Parry

Deputy Opposition Whips—Senators Judith Anne Adams and David Christopher Bushby

The Nationals Whip—Senator John Reginald Williams

Australian Greens Whip—Senator Rachel Mary Siewert

Family First Party Whip—Senator Steve Fielding

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(1) Chosen by the Parliament of South Australia to fill a casual vacancy vice Amanda Eloise Vanstone, resigned.
(2) Chosen by the Parliament of Western Australia to fill a casual vacancy vice Ian Campbell, resigned.
(3) Chosen by the Parliament of Western Australia to fill a casual vacancy vice Christopher Martin Ellison, resigned.
(4) Term expires at close of day next preceding the polling day for the general election of members of the House of Representatives.

**PARTY ABBREVIATIONS**

AG—Australian Greens; ALP—Australian Labor Party; CLP—Country Liberal Party;

FF—Family First Party; LP—Liberal Party of Australia; NATS—The Nationals

**Heads of Parliamentary Departments**

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

Prime Minister Hon. Julia Gillard MP
Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer Hon. Wayne Swan MP
Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government Hon. Simon Crean MP
Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations and Leader of the Government in the Senate Senator Hon. Chris Evans
Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth Hon. Peter Garrett AM MP
Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate Senator Hon. Stephen Conroy
Minister for Foreign Affairs Hon. Kevin Rudd MP
Minister for Trade Hon. Dr Craig Emerson MP
Minister for Defence and Deputy Leader of the House Hon. Stephen Smith MP
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship Hon. Chris Bowen MP
Minister for Infrastructure and Transport and Leader of the House Hon. Anthony Albanese MP
Minister for Health and Ageing Hon. Nicola Roxon MP
Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Hon. Jenny Macklin MP
Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities Hon. Tony Burke MP
Minister for Finance and Deregulation Senator Hon. Penny Wong
Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research Senator Hon. Kim Carr
Attorney-General and Vice President of the Executive Council Hon. Robert McClelland MP
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and Manager of Government Business in the Senate Senator Hon. Joe Ludwig
Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism Hon. Martin Ferguson AM, MP
Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency Hon. Greg Combet AM, MP

[The above ministers constitute the cabinet]
GILLARD MINISTRY—continued

Minister for the Arts
Hon. Simon Crean MP

Minister for Social Inclusion
Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP

Minister for Privacy and Freedom of Information
Hon. Brendan O'Connor MP

Minister for Sport
Senator Hon. Mark Arbib

Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity
Hon. Gary Gray AO, MP

Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation
Hon. Bill Shorten MP

Minister for Employment Participation and Childcare
Hon. Kate Ellis MP

Minister for Indigenous Employment and Economic Development
Senator Hon. Mark Arbib

Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Minister for Defence Science and Personnel
Hon. Warren Snowdon MP

Minister for Defence Materiel
Hon. Jason Clare MP

Minister for Indigenous Health
Hon. Warren Snowdon MP

Minister for Mental Health and Ageing
Hon. Mark Butler MP

Minister for the Status of Women
Hon. Kate Ellis MP

Minister for Social Housing and Homelessness
Senator Hon. Mark Arbib

Special Minister of State
Hon. Gary Gray AO, MP

Minister for Small Business
Senator Hon. Nick Sherry

Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Justice
Hon. Brendan O'Connor MP

Minister for Human Services
Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP

Cabinet Secretary
Hon. Mark Dreyfus QC, MP

Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister
Senator Hon. Kate Lundy

Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer
Hon. David Bradbury MP

Parliamentary Secretary for School Education and Workplace Relations
Senator Hon. Jacinta Collins

Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Digital Productivity
Senator Hon. Stephen Conroy

Parliamentary Secretary for Trade
Hon. Justine Elliot MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs
Hon. Richard Marles MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Defence
Senator Hon. David Feeney

Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Citizenship
Senator Hon. Kate Lundy

Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Transport and

Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing
Hon. Catherine King MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers
Senator Hon. Jan McLucas

Parliamentary Secretary for Community Services
Hon. Julie Collins MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Sustainability and Urban Water
Senator Hon. Don Farrell

Minister Assisting on Deregulation and Public Sector Superannuation
Senator Hon. Nick Sherry

Minister Assisting the Attorney General on Queensland Floods Recovery
Senator Hon. Joe Ludwig

Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Hon. Dr Mike Kelly AM, MP

Minister Assisting the Minister for Tourism
Senator Hon. Nick Sherry

Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency
Hon. Mark Dreyfus QC, MP
SHADOW MINISTRY

Leader of the Opposition
Hon. Tony Abbott MP

Deputy Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Minister for
Foreign Affairs and Shadow Minister for Trade
Hon. Julie Bishop MP

Leader of the Nationals and Shadow Minister for
Infrastructure and Transport
Hon. Warren Truss MP

Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Minister
for Employment and Workplace Relations
Senator Hon. Eric Abetz

Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow
Attorney-General and Shadow Minister for the Arts
Senator Hon. George Brandis SC

Shadow Treasurer
Hon. Joe Hockey MP

Shadow Minister for Education, Apprenticeships and Training
and Manager of Opposition Business in the House
Hon. Christopher Pyne MP

Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Deputy Leader of
the Nationals
Senator Hon. Nigel Scullion

Shadow Minister for Regional Development, Local
Government and Water and Leader of the Nationals in the
Senate
Senator Barnaby Joyce

Shadow Minister for Finance, Deregulation and Debt
Reduction and Chairman, Coalition Policy Development
Committee
Hon. Andrew Robb AO, MP

Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources
Hon. Ian Macfarlane MP

Shadow Minister for Defence
Senator Hon. David Johnston

Shadow Minister for Communications and Broadband
Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP

Shadow Minister for Health and Ageing
Hon. Peter Dutton MP

Shadow Minister for Families, Housing and Human Services
Hon. Kevin Andrews MP

Shadow Minister for Climate Action, Environment and
Heritage
Hon. Greg Hunt MP

Shadow Minister for Productivity and Population and Shadow
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship
Mr Scott Morrison MP

Shadow Minister for Innovation, Industry and Science
Mrs Sophie Mirabella MP

Shadow Minister for Agriculture and Food Security
Hon. John Cobb MP

Shadow Minister for Small Business, Competition Policy and
Consumer Affairs
Hon. Bruce Billson MP

[The above constitute the shadow cabinet]
SHADOW MINISTRY—continued

Shadow Minister for Employment Participation  
Hon. Sussan Ley MP

Shadow Minister for Justice, Customs and Border Protection  
Mr Michael Keenan MP

Shadow Assistant Treasurer and Shadow Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation  
Senator Mathias Cormann

Shadow Minister for Childcare and Early Childhood Learning  
Hon. Sussan Ley MP

Shadow Minister for Universities and Research  
Senator Hon. Brett Mason

Shadow Minister for Youth and Sport and Deputy Manager of Opposition Business in the House  
Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP

Shadow Minister for Indigenous Development and Employment  
Senator Marise Payne

Shadow Minister for Regional Development  
Hon. Bob Baldwin MP

Shadow Special Minister of State  
Hon. Bronwyn Bishop MP

Shadow Minister for COAG  
Senator Marise Payne

Shadow Minister for Tourism  
Hon. Bob Baldwin MP

Shadow Minister for Defence Science, Technology and Personnel  
Mr Stuart Robert MP

Shadow Minister for Veterans’ Affairs  
Senator Hon. Michael Ronaldson

Shadow Minister for Regional Communications  
Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP

Shadow Minister for Ageing and Shadow Minister for Mental Health  
Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells

Shadow Minister for Seniors  
Hon. Bronwyn Bishop MP

Shadow Minister for Disabilities, Carers and the Voluntary Sector and Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate  
Senator Mitch Fifield

Shadow Minister for Housing  
Senator Marise Payne

Chairman, Scrutiny of Government Waste Committee  
Mr Jamie Briggs MP

Shadow Cabinet Secretary  
Hon. Philip Ruddock MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Leader of the Opposition  
Senator Cory Bernardi

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance  
Hon. Teresa Gambaro MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Roads and Regional Transport  
Mr Darren Chester MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Shadow Attorney-General  
Senator Gary Humphries

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Tax Reform and Deputy Chairman, Coalition Policy Development Committee  
Hon. Tony Smith MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Education  
Senator Fiona Nash

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Northern and Remote Australia  
Senator Hon. Ian Macdonald

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Local Government  
Mr Don Randall MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Murray-Darling Basin  
Senator Simon Birmingham

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Materiel  
Senator Gary Humphries

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Defence Force and Defence Support  
Senator Hon. Ian Macdonald

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Primary Healthcare  
Dr Andrew Southcott MP
**SHADOW MINISTRY—continued**

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<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Health Services and Indigenous Health</td>
<td>Mr Andrew Laming MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Supporting Families</td>
<td>Senator Cory Bernardi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Status of Women</td>
<td>Senator Michaelia Cash</td>
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The PRESIDENT (Senator the Hon. John Hogg) took the chair at 12.30 pm and read prayers and made an acknowledgement of country.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Senator McEWEN (South Australia)—by leave—I move:

That leave of absence be granted to Senator Evans for today, for personal reasons.

Question agreed to.

Senator PARRY (Tasmania)—by leave—I move:

That leave of absence be granted to Senator Birmingham from 8 February to 10 February 2011, for personal reasons.

Question agreed to.

COMMITTEES

Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee

Meeting

Senator CROSSIN (Northern Territory)—by leave—I move:

That the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee be authorised to hold a private meeting otherwise than in accordance with standing order 33(1) during the sitting of the Senate today, from 1.50 pm.

Question agreed to.

Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee

Meeting

Senator PARRY (Tasmania)—by leave—I move:

That the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee be authorised to hold a private meeting otherwise than in accordance with standing order 33(1) during the sitting of the Senate today, from 4.30 pm.

Question agreed to.

DOCUMENTS

Tabling

The Clerk—Documents are tabled in accordance with the list circulated to senators.

Details of the documents appear at the end of today’s Hansard.

BUSINESS

Rearrangement

Senator LUDWIG (Queensland)—by leave—I move:

That, on Tuesday, 8 February 2011:

(a) the hours of meeting be from 12.30 pm to adjournment;

(b) the routine of business for the remainder of the day shall be as follows:

(i) condolence motion relating to the death of former senator and chair of committees, Senator Charles Ronald Maunsell,

(ii) motion relating to the death of Corporal Richard Edward Atkinson,

(iii) motion relating to the award of the Victoria Cross for Australia to SAS Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith, and

(iv) consideration of a motion relating to the devastation caused by recent natural disasters; and

(c) the question for the adjournment of the Senate shall not be proposed until a motion for the adjournment is moved by a minister.

Question agreed to.

CONDOLENCES

Maunsell, Mr Charles Ronald

The PRESIDENT (12.34 pm)—It is with deep regret that I inform the Senate of the death, on 17 December 2010, of Charles Ronald Maunsell, a senator for the state of Queensland from 1968 to 1981 and during this time a chairman of committees. I call the
Acting Leader of the Government in the Senate.

Senator CONROY (Victoria—Acting Leader of the Government in the Senate) (12.34 pm)—I move:

That the Senate record its deep regret at the death, on 17 December 2010, of Charles Ronald (Ron) Maunsell, former senator for Queensland and a chairman of committees, and places on record its appreciation of his long and meritorious public service and tenders its profound sympathy to his family in their bereavement.

Ron was born on 8 May 1922 in Cairns. He was educated at Malanda State School and at All Souls School at Charters Towers. Ron joined the Royal Australian Air Force Reserve in 1941 and the RAAF in 1942. He served as a pilot in Australia and was part of the occupation forces in Japan, reaching the rank of Flight Lieutenant, until being demobilised in June 1947. When he returned he purchased a 10,000-acre farm near Longreach and became a grazier.

Ron became active in the Country Party during the 1950s and served as campaign director for state and federal seats as well as vice-president of the party’s Queensland division. Ron gained his party’s endorsement for the 1967 half-Senate election and went on to secure a seat in this place, representing the state of Queensland. As a senator, Ron was a strong advocate for residents of rural and remote Australia including, in particular, primary producers. He served on a number of committees, including the landmark Select Committee on Drug Trafficking and Drug Abuse in Australia and the Joint Select Committee on Defence Forces Retirement Benefits Legislation. Ron was Deputy President of the Senate from February 1980 to August 1981. He was National Country Party whip in the Senate from 1973 to 1980 and deputy leader from 1980 to 1981.

During his time in this place, Ron played a celebrated role in what became known as the ‘night of the long prawns’—part of the high drama surrounding Prime Minister Whitlam’s appointment of then Senator Vince Gair as ambassador to Ireland. Whitlam planned to appoint Gair to the post to free up an extra spot in the Senate, which he expected Labor would win at a coming half-Senate election. Before the resignation could be effected and the vacancy created, a counterplan was hatched involving then Premier Bjelke-Petersen. His role is important, because any casual vacancy caused by Gair’s resignation would be filled by the state parliament, controlled by Bjelke-Petersen. Without the intervention of Bjelke-Petersen and the hospitality of Ron, there would have been six and not five vacancies in Queensland at the half-Senate election due on 18 May 1974. In the way of these things, the Gair appointment was leaked to Laurie Oakes at the Melbourne Sun on 1 April 1974. On 2 April, a Senate sitting day, Ron invited Gair to his room for a drink and something to eat—as it turns out, an abundance of Townsville prawns.

Senator Boswell—The night of the long prawns!

 Senator CONROY—That’s what we’re just talking about, Bos. Interrupted only by the division bells, Senators Maunsell and Gair spent a pleasant night together, leaving Premier Bjelke-Petersen time to advise the Queensland government to issue a writ for five vacancies, thus denying Whitlam the chance to gain an extra seat. For the record, Ron gave a personal explanation in the Senate two days later in which he denied hijacking Gair in his room, though he did acknowledge he knew about Gair’s intention to lodge a letter of resignation. In the end, it really did not matter. On 11 April both houses were dissolved ahead of the double dissolution election on 18 May 1974. Ron unsuccessfully contested the 1980 Senate election and his term ended in June 1981. In 1983 Ron
made an unsuccessful bid for preselection. In the following year he and his wife, Joan, retired from Cairns to the Sunshine Coast, where he planted fruit trees. On behalf of the government, I offer condolences to his wife, Joan, his children—Joanne, Margaret and Barbara—and his family and friends.

Senator ABETZ (Tasmania—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (12.39 pm)—Charles Ronald ‘Ron’ Maunsell served as a senator for Queensland from 1968 to 1981, representing the Country Party and later the National Country Party. He served as Deputy President and Chairman of Committees and in the positions of both whip and then deputy Senate leader of his party. Ron Maunsell came from pioneering stock. The story of his family’s life in Far North Queensland is like something out of the film *Australia* but totally authentic, and the story of Ron Maunsell’s life provides a link to Northern Australia’s early settlement. The life of his mother, Evelyn Evans, was recorded by Hector Holthouse in *S’pose I Die*. She was described as ‘an English rose on a world tour as a companion for a wealthy matron’ but met Ron’s father, Charles Maunsell, who was on a brief visit to Sydney before taking up a position as manager at Mount Malgrave Station on the Mitchell River near Mareeba. They decided to marry within a week and, after five months waiting for her father’s permission, they married in Cairns and began life together in a tin shed with a concrete floor, where Evelyn learned to cope with flood, snakes, sickness and isolation. Evelyn ran a small school for Aboriginal children on the property, but once, when Charles was away mustering, she had to hide under a bed to elude hostile Aboriginals while an Aboriginal woman saved her life by telling them she was away.

Ron was born in Cairns in 1922. Evelyn had already lost two babies in the bush and was determined not to go back, especially in the wet season, to get malaria again and have another miscarriage. Five weeks later, Evelyn took Ron home to Wrotham Park, where Charles was now manager—first to Chillagoe by train, then by buggy with Charlie, with the bassinet hanging at the back of the buggy seat due to the heat. At night, Charlie and Evelyn camped outside on a bed of branches and long grass, their clothes rolled up to make pillows, their new baby between them, and thanked God for His blessings. When they arrived home, the Aboriginal women, who had never seen a white baby before, were fascinated and kept saying over and over ‘Missus bringem back white piccaninny’. That night, the Aboriginals asked Evelyn and Charlie to come to the creek to see the big new corroboree about the arrival of the first white baby at Wrotham Park.

Later the family cleared a small dairy block near Malanda on the Atherton Tableland. Ron Maunsell attended the local state school before boarding at Charters Towers. Describing himself as a dairy hand, Ron enlisted in the RAAF as soon as he was old enough and served as a pilot in Australia until 1945, then went with 77 Squadron to Morotai Island and with the occupation forces to Japan until 1947, rising to the rank of flight lieutenant. After his discharge from the RAAF, Ron went dam sinking and then in 1951 went into partnership with his parents in the purchase of Rio, a 10,000-acre sheep station near Longreach. Ron became involved in local community organisations and the United Graziers Association and was active in the Country Party. As president of the division of Kennedy, he helped Bob Katter Sr win the seat and after eight years on the Country Party central council, including several years as the party’s vice-president, in 1967 he won preselection for the Senate.

In 1969 Evelyn and Charlie, together with Ron’s wife, Joan, and their three daughters, came to Canberra to see him take his seat.
They must have been immensely proud. In his time in the Senate, Senator Maunsell raised issues which concerned people living in remote areas, including access to medicine, transport and communications, taxation concessions, decentralisation and support for pastoral industries. His maiden speech dealt with the fact that 85 per cent of the continent did not have television. He opposed death duties, concerned at the impact they had on the estates of primary producers. No doubt if he were still here he would be amazed that at least one party in this place still retains this policy. He took up defence and veterans issues. He served on the landmark Senate Select Committee on Drug Trafficking and Drug Abuse in Australia and was a member of the 1973 Australian delegation which visited the Soviet Union.

Ron’s genial and laid-back exterior, as evidenced by his well-known friendly chuckle, belied a sharp political mind. He had a great sense of humour, painting an old rabbit trap with words to this effect: ‘The Maunsell patented reps trap to keep our staff intact.’ This was to protect the Country Party senator’s female staff from receiving too much attention from male House of Representatives staffers whom he had noticed hovering in the vicinity of his office. He was very good with his hands, making his own cruets set from miniature Dimple Haig bottles, the contents of which had refreshed him on many trips between Cairns and Canberra. Needless to say, he made a leather case to go with it. I have both these artefacts in my office for anyone who would like to inspect them.

However, Ron Maunsell is perhaps best remembered for his role in the night of the long prawns, the best account of which is in Paul Davey’s very recent book Ninety not out. Frustrated by its position in the Senate in 1974, the Whitlam government enticed Queensland DLP senator Vince Gair to accept an appointment as ambassador to Ireland. The aim was to have the Senate vacancy contested at the upcoming half-Senate election rather than by a vote of the Queensland parliament, giving Labor the chance of increasing its representation. The catch, as Doug Anthony realised, was that Gair had to give his resignation to the President of the Senate, Magnus Cormack, before Queensland issued writs for the half-Senate election which Whitlam had called. Ron Maunsell volunteered to keep Gair occupied until after Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen had writs issued for the half-Senate election in Queensland. In what became immortalised as ‘the night of the long prawns’, Maunsell invited Gair to his office to partake in some scotch, beer and prawns, which Maunsell was renowned for bringing to Canberra from Cairns. As Ninety not out states:

According to Maunsell, Cormack had known what was going on and ‘kept disappearing on the verandah all the time … I’m pretty sure he—that is, Gair—twirged as to what was going on, but he didn’t want to move. The scotch bottle interested him more than anything else.’ Maunsell steered Gair to the chamber for a vote just before 10 pm, stymieing government attempts to argue Gair had effectively resigned when the Governor-General had approved his appointment. According to Davey, Maunsell stuck to Gair like glue, leaving no opportunity for Murphy or any other Labor senator to get close enough to haul him before Cormack. He then spirited Gair back to his office, where the two remained ensconced until an hour or so after Joh Bjelke-Petersen announced to the Queensland parliament at 1.40 am a special gazette for the election of only five senators at a half-Senate election.

The end to Maunsell’s career came not uniquely as a result of internecine Queen-
sland politics. Following the Liberal Party’s decision to run a separate Senate ticket in Queensland, Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen arranged for his wife, Florence, to seek the top position on the National Country Party Senate ticket. By one account:

This caused some heartburn in the party: it meant dumping Ron Maunsell, hero of the Night of the Long Prawns … but Lyons stitched up the numbers for Florence … in a tight race at the party conference. The Joh & Flo Show was an instant media success; Bjelke-Petersen was perceived to have executed another political masterstroke.

Maunsell made a further bid for preselection in 1983 but was unsuccessful. In 1984 he and his wife, Joan, retired from Cairns to a property on the Sunshine Coast hinterland where he became an orchardist. In 1981 he was made an honorary life member of his party.

Ron Maunsell passed away in Cairns, the town where his parents were married and where he was born, on 17 December 2010. With his departure, we lose yet another of Australia’s pioneering past. Our heartfelt condolences and respect go to his wife, Joan, his children, Joanne, Margaret and Barbara, and his entire family, together with our gratitude for Ron Maunsell’s public life and service to the Senate, the Country Party and regional Australia.

Senator JOYCE (Queensland—Leader of the Nationals in the Senate) (12.49 pm)—Obviously I rise to concur with the remarks of Senator Conroy and Senator Abetz and also to pay tribute to one of the greatest senators of the Country Party and the National Party. The intrigue of this person still has a connection here because you might find that the person sitting behind me had something to do with the reason Ron did not actually get preselected! Ron lived an extremely colourful life. For so many of us, long after we leave here, when they give our obituaries they are really going to be scratching for things to say. But that is not the case with Ron. Ron had a remarkable pioneering career both as a grazier and serving our nation in the Air Force. He was part of the occupying forces, I think, on Morotai Island, which is now part of Indonesia.

He is well known, of course, by reason of a certain night, and what happened next will go down in conjecture. It is funny how things change. We now suggest that it was well planned and that those on the conservative side of politics knew exactly what they were up to, but Ron adamantly rejected that. In his speech he said he was just having a night with a friend and things that happen happen.

I thought Senator Conroy might have been more interested in Senator Maunsell’s position on television and the statements that he made about getting television out to regional areas by coaxial cable, which he mentioned in his maiden speech. I will be so polite as to quote him:

As I said, 85% of the continent does not have television. I do not suggest that television stations should be built in the Simpson Desert, on the Nullarbor Plain or in places such as that. Referring particularly to Queensland, the railway lines run directly west from the coast and towns are dotted along the lines. To give people in those towns television per medium of a coaxial cable would not cost a fortune. I hope that the Government when it has the funds available in the future will see fit to provide television for such areas.

One might suggest that Senator Conroy is now endeavouring to fulfil Senator Maunsell’s dream for broadband but not so much for television. Rather than coaxial cables, he is going to do it by optic fibre. So Senator Conroy, in a fashion, is a living legacy of Ron Maunsell. It is interesting how these things move on.

Another thing Senator Maunsell was known for is something that is very dear to my heart and dear to those in the National Party and, I am proud to say, is now part of the coalition platform, and that is zonal taxa-
tion. He said even back in the 1970s that the party’s position on zonal rebates was way out of date. If it was way out of date in 1974, I do not know what it is in 2011. It would be great to see this parliament updating the zonal rebate system to make it a better reflection of the privations of those who live in remote areas.

Ron was always a champion of the people who lived in remote areas. He also believed in a more egalitarian role. As an ex-serviceman, he tried very much to bring officers and other ranks into the greater largesse of government and to involve them in changes he pursued in regard to veterans’ affairs entitlements. Ron was also a great advocate and a fervent fighter against the advent, as he saw it at that time in the early 70s, of drugs coming into Australia. That is a curse that is still with our nation, but it was very fortuitous of him at that point in time to look over the horizon and see the problems that this was going to cause for the youth of Australia.

What we see with Ron Maunsell is a person who was a dynamic tapestry of the things that made him up. He was not easily pigeonholed as a person holding certain views. A lot of the things he did were quite visionary in how he pursued them. He was obviously a person who was very engaging—Vince Gair would have vouched for that—and who had an extremely good tactical mind. He was also a fundamental part of the tactics committee—now they meet in the morning but then they met the night before—and played a dedicated part in how coalition tactics were going to play out the next day in the chamber.

Ron passed away peacefully in Cairns, as has been stated, aged 88 years. He was a loving husband to Joan, a father to Joanne, Margaret and Barbara and a grandfather to Richard, Catherine, Alexander and Elizabeth. Ron has earned his place in the annals of this nation. As I think he was a committed Anglican, no doubt he has gone to a better place. I am sure, if he is watching us now, that he is involved in some intrigue where someone is going to be tossed out from upstairs and sent downstairs, but he will just be having a scotch and a few prawns while it happens.

Senator BOSWELL (Queensland) (12.55 pm)—I join in this condolence motion with the Acting Leader of the Government, the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the National Party. Ron died at age 88. I knew him very well. When I became a member of the party he was already a senator and after the Senate ticket was dissolved and the party split—which necessitated the National Party running a separate ticket—there was a huge commotion as to whether to put up Florence Bjelke-Peterson or follow the traditional ticket. It was a matter of life and death for the National Party at the time. We had to make a decision and the party decided that they wished Florence Bjelke-Peterson to lead the ticket, which was the reason that Ron Maunsell fell off the bottom of the ticket. But he was well liked and he was well known. He was a dairy farmer, a pilot, a flight lieutenant, a grazier and a senator, and all those roles he fulfilled very well.

The Leader of the Liberal Party has mentioned his mother’s story, S’pose I Die. It was a message that she gave to an Aboriginal woman. She told this Aboriginal woman—and they were alone at the station—that she had malaria and she was giving instructions on ‘how to bury me, supposing I should die’. The Maunsells were the absolute pioneers of the North. They were managers of Mulgrave Station, after which they went to another station, the name of which escapes me at the moment. Just before the war, because Ron’s father never had the money to establish his own station, they established a dairy farm at Milanda. From there he went away to war
and the book reflects how every time someone went to war the farmers of that age would have a meeting or a party for them in the town hall. He went away and came back and then, as other people did, took an interest in politics. Before I was involved in the party, he was promoted to the Senate where he served for a good 15 or 16 years and served particularly well.

We could not go past this condolence motion without mentioning the night of the long prawns. People have gone into it in a great deal of detail—far more detail than I want to go into. There will always be speculation about whether he knew what he was doing or it was just one of those coincidental meetings where you had a few prawns and a few scotches. Maybe we will just leave that to speculation, but there are many people who thought that it was a well-planned and well-executed campaign to control the Senate, and that is what happened. The repercussions from it were that there was an election, Senator Bjelke-Petersen got a very good vote and the government changed, and maybe you could put it down in some ways to Ron Maunsell.

But he was a good man, a man who absolutely, to the bootstraps, stood for rural Australia, primary industry and all those people who lived in the non-metropolitan areas of Australia. I wish to pass on my condolences to his wife, Joan. I know this will be a very sad time for her, her children and her grandchildren.

Senator McLUCAS (Queensland—Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers) (1.00 pm)—I wish to add my condolences to those that have been expressed here in the Senate today on the passing of former Senator Ron Maunsell. Senator Ron Maunsell was well known to my family, and my father was deeply saddened to hear of his passing. He was a very well respected representative of Queensland and, in particular, Far North Queensland, and I want to pass on my condolences to Mrs Maunsell and her daughters.

Question agreed to, honourable senators standing in their places.

Atkinson, Corporal Richard Edward

Senator CONROY (Victoria—Acting Leader of the Government in the Senate) (1.02 pm)—I move:

That the Senate record its deep sorrow at the death, on 2 February 2011, of Corporal Richard Atkinson while on combat operations in Afghanistan, and places on record its appreciation of his service to our country, and tenders its profound sympathy to his family and friends in their bereavement.

Like 21 members of the Australian Defence Force before him, Corporal Richard Atkinson lost his life in service to his nation in Afghanistan. Twenty-two-year-old Corporal Atkinson was from the Australian Army's 1st Combat Engineer Regiment, based in Darwin.

Corporal Atkinson was born in Hobart, Tasmania, in 1988. He joined the Army in 2007 and completed recruit and combat-engineering basic training prior to a posting to the 1st Combat Engineer Regiment, based in Darwin. In 2009, he was promoted to lance corporal. His commanding officer noted the leadership he displayed in bringing his section to combat readiness during his preparations for operations in Afghanistan. For his efforts during this important phase, he was promoted to corporal prior to deployment in October 2010. Corporal Atkinson was leading his combat engineer section as a search commander when he was killed in action. He had previously been deployed to Indonesia in October 2009 as part of Operation Padang Assist.

Corporal Atkinson leaves behind his fiancee, Dannielle; his mum and dad, Ross and
Kate; brother, James; and sister-in-law, Sumah. The government, together with the parliament, the defence community and the Australian people, deeply mourn the loss of Corporal Atkinson, alongside those who have died before him in service to our nation. We acknowledge the profound sense of loss experienced by Corporal Atkinson’s fiancee, Dannielle, and his family and friends, as well as his mates who served with him in the 1st Combat Engineer Regiment in Afghanistan. Corporal Atkinson died before his 23rd birthday, before he could realise his dream of a future family with his fiancee, Dannielle. No words can compensate for his loss, but I hope all who knew and loved Corporal Atkinson can take some comfort in the knowledge that his sacrifice was not in vain. He will not be forgotten by a grateful nation.

I also want to acknowledge the injuries suffered by a soldier in the same incident in which Corporal Atkinson was killed. I am advised that the soldier is receiving the best possible care and extend to him best wishes for his recovery. More than 160 Australian Defence Force personnel have been injured in Afghanistan. Many of them continue to live with the consequences of their service every day. All of them share the gratitude of a nation that honours their services on our behalf. Our thanks for their efforts are deep and abiding.

Senator ABETZ (Tasmania—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (1.05 pm)— Last Wednesday at about 9.30 am, Australia lost one of its finest in the cause of freedom. Another one of our finest was seriously injured in the incident. Our thoughts and prayers are with him for a full and speedy recovery.

Corporal Richard Atkinson’s life was cruelly cut short, but his memory will live on not only in the hearts of his family but also in the heart of a thankful nation. Anyone who saw the pictures last week of 22-year-old Tasmanian Corporal Richard Atkinson and his fiancee, Dannielle, could not help but have been affected by the pathos of a young life so abruptly ended, and with it many dreams and aspirations. Corporal Atkinson leaves behind his fiancee, Dannielle, to whom he was engaged only one month before his deployment and with whom he had planned a trip to Italy. He also leaves behind his parents, Ross and Kate; brother, James; and sister-in-law, Sumah, who are all, deservedly, so very proud of him.

Corporal Richard Edward Atkinson was born in Hobart in 1988. He attended school in Tasmania both at Trevallyn Primary School and at the Launceston Church Grammar School. His high-school yearbook from Launceston Church Grammar School records his ambition to be an Army man. In a tribute, Launceston Grammar headmaster Stephen Norris said he was highly respected, reliable, kind, considerate and well mannered and showed initiative. In grade 12, Corporal Atkinson was selected as the boys’ captain of Wilkinson House and captain of the soccer team. He received the school’s top sporting award, the full blue.

Just yesterday Corporal Atkinson’s father graciously spoke with me about his and his family’s sense of loss. He told me that, whilst farewelling their son in September last year before his tour of duty, they knew the risk but it was an abstract concept—that it happened but to others. Devastatingly, the abstract has turned into a harsh reality for the Atkinson family. Nevertheless, his father, Ross, told me of his and the family’s pride in Richard. He told me about their last talk, courtesy of Skype, only 14 days before his death, where Corporal Atkinson reinforced how he considered that he and Australia were playing an important role and how pleased he was with what he was doing. In short, he believed in the task in which he was en-
Tuesday, 8 February 2011

To borrow some words of our latest Victoria Cross recipient, Corporal Ben Roberts-Smith: ‘I do what I do because I believe in the country that we live in. I believe that we are making a difference in stemming the flow of terrorism.’ Corporal Atkinson’s father also indicated to me his great appreciation of the wonderful work of the Department of Defence and the support that he and the family are receiving in their time of loss.

Corporal Atkinson joined the Army in 2007. He was promoted to lance corporal in 2009 and his dedication to his section was rewarded with his promotion to corporal in 2010, prior to their redeployment. Corporal Atkinson was in a mixed patrol of Australian and Afghani troops, moving on foot through the Tangi Valley at about 9.30 last Wednesday morning, when a roadside bomb exploded. He was part of an operation trying to drive the Taliban out of the Deh Rahwod area, west of the Australian base at Tarin Kowt, a vital strategic area in the war against the Taliban insurgency. In the past few weeks Australian and Afghani soldiers had successfully discovered several insurgent caches, including large amounts of explosives. On Saturday, in a memorial service at Tarin Kowt, Major David French spoke of Corporal Atkinson’s ‘cheeky nature and quick wit as well his dedication to his job and his professionalism in always leading from the front’. Major French said:

Akka was never happier than when he was on the job and he was bloody good at it.

Best mate and fellow engineer, Corporal David Myers, said:

Words will never do justice to describe the kind of mate ‘Akka’ was. He would want to be remembered by us with a smile on our faces and laughter in our hearts …

Our deepest sympathies go to Corporal Richard Atkinson’s fiancee, Dannielle Kitchen, of the Northern Territory; his parents and his extended family. We feel incredible sorrow about a young man, his life full of promise, on the cusp of marriage and starting his own family, being cut down in a foreign land. We will never fully know the sorrow of Richard’s fiancee and family, but we feel intensely for them as they carry their loss, in the hope that it will ease their sense of loss. It is consoling that Richard was convinced that we were and are doing the right thing and that he was doing good in Afghanistan. After receiving the Victoria Cross, Corporal Ben Roberts-Smith, in urging Australians to remember our digger heroes who have died in Afghanistan, said:

These are the guys who put their hands up willingly and they didn’t come back.

They are our mates and their families live with that every day.

I urge the public to remember that they are heroes, that they are the ones who gave the ultimate sacrifice. Corporal Richard Atkinson is a hero, who volunteered and made the ultimate sacrifice. May his service and sacrifice in the cause of freedom be an inspiration to all. A thankful nation salutes his volunteer spirit, his service and his sacrifice.

Senator JOYCE (Queensland—Leader of the Nationals in the Senate) (1.12 pm)—In speaking to this condolence motion I rise also to concur with the remarks made with regard to Corporal Richard Edward Atkinson. He was part of a patrol to the west of Tarin Kowt. He lost his life. Not only has he left behind a bereaved fiancee, Dannielle, but also he is a loss to his family—to his father, Ross; mother, Kate; and brother, James.

With the loss of Corporal Atkinson we also see the loss of a person who was really at the cusp of so much that would have been ahead of him in life—his impending marriage and all those dreams that we take for granted. He lost and sacrificed that because he believed in what our nation had asked him
to do in a foreign land. There have been so many tragic deaths—so far, 22 have lost their life—in this endeavour. These people do it so that we do not have to engage with the enemy on our shores. As they always say, ‘You seek out and close with the enemy,’ and that is what Corporal Atkinson was doing. Corporal Atkinson came from Hobart and, as Senator Abetz properly portrayed him, he had so much to offer right from the word go. He was a person who, with his sporting ability, had so much promise. He was a person of good character and he willingly laid that on the line for his nation and he paid the supreme sacrifice.

Australia will never forget those who have served our nation, nor are we ever able to repay what they have offered. Of course, we can ensure that we give the best support that we can to those who have been left behind following the tragic death of Corporal Atkinson and let them know that, like those who have also been maimed and who have also paid the supreme sacrifice, this chamber will continue in the remembrance of their service and will continue to lend whatever support, in the many and varied ways that the people in this chamber do.

Senator MILNE (Tasmania) (1.14 pm)—On behalf of the Australian Greens I join all other senators today in expressing my admiration for the bravery of Corporal Richard Edward Atkinson, my sadness at his untimely death in Afghanistan and my condolences to his family and fiancee. He was only 22. He was a very young man, but a brave soldier. He was based in Darwin, as part of the 1st Combat Engineer Regiment. He was the 22nd young Australian to be killed in Afghanistan and I would also like to send my best wishes to the 168 people who have been wounded in Afghanistan.

Corporal Richard Edward Atkinson was on his first deployment to Afghanistan and he was killed by an improvised explosive device while on a foot patrol in the Tangi Valley, in southern Oruzgan province. Another soldier was badly wounded at the same time. The Australian soldiers had been working with their Afghan partners at a new patrol base in the Tangi Valley and had discovered several insurgent caches, including explosives.

I want to think especially today of Corporal Atkinson’s family. As a mother of sons in their twenties myself, I cannot even begin to understand and imagine the profound grief and sense of loss that his mother and father, his brother James and his wife, and his fiancee must be feeling. His parents, Ross and Kate, have spoken of their profound sadness. His father said that his son loved the Army and had a ‘real knack for adventure’. His father also said:

He enjoyed being deployed. He was just a lovely boy. He was funny. He loved playing sports. He was a loved son and a loved brother to James.

To his mother and father, to his brother, and to his fiancee, Dannielle, we say: we know that you are suffering and we care. We know that you have suffered a great loss, and every day henceforth you will feel that loss. We acknowledge that. We are a grateful nation.

In summing up his life, former principal of Launceston Church Grammar School, Mr Norris, said that, as a student there until year 12, Corporal Atkinson was highly respected, reliable, kind, considerate, well-mannered, had showed initiative and was obviously a great sportsman, having been the captain of Wilkinson House and having won the highest sporting achievement of the school. He particularly loved his soccer. He graduated in 2006—that is very recent, when you think about a year 12 boy leaving school in 2006—saying, ‘I want to be an Army man’. He joined the Army in 2007, and now he has
been killed in Afghanistan. As a nation we need to really reflect on that, because there is no greater sense of responsibility than those who make the decision to deploy our troops overseas into a battle zone.

His friends in the Army described him as quick-witted, as a dedicated professional, as a great mate and as cheeky and fun-loving. At his funeral service in Afghanistan they said he would want to be remembered by us with a smile on our faces and laughter in our hearts. We also remember him, though, as General Hurley, the Acting Chief of Defence Force, said:

His bravery should not be forgotten and his sacrifice brings great honour to him, the Australian Defence Force, our Army and most especially his family.

The Australian Greens join all Australians in our gratitude for the service to the nation that he has offered. We offer our deep sympathy to his family, to his friends and to his serving comrades.

Senator FIELDING (Victoria—Leader of the Family First Party) (1.20 pm)—On behalf of Family First I also join with the remarks that have been made in this condolence motion. Our heartfelt condolences, thoughts and prayers go to the family of 22-year-old Corporal Richard Edward Atkinson. There is no greater sacrifice than laying down one’s life for one’s country, and Corporal Atkinson has done this. It is a deep loss. I know Corporal Atkinson’s parents, Ross and Kate, are saddened deeply by his death. Our hearts go out to them and to his partner, Dannielle.

Senator XENOPHON (South Australia) (1.21 pm)—I, too, join this condolence motion and endorse all that my colleagues before me have said. This is a great loss. I think Senator Milne, Senator Abetz and others have painted a picture of a lovely young man—energetic, funny, great with his peers and mates, much loved by his family and his fiancee. He died doing what he loved: serving his country. That is something that we can never forget. This is an appropriate tribute to him, and I am sure there will be many other tributes in the weeks and months to come. His contribution will never, ever be forgotten. I extend my condolences to his family, to his loved ones and to his colleagues in the Australian Defence Force. I cannot imagine what his family is going through, but I think they know that they have a grateful nation that supports them and that extends their condolences to them.

Senator FAULKNER (New South Wales) (1.22 pm)—I too support this condolence motion on the death of Corporal Richard Atkinson. Corporal Atkinson was from the Darwin based 1st Combat Engineer Regiment and was on his first deployment to Afghanistan. His death is the 22nd operational death in Afghanistan. Corporal Atkinson was participating in a dismounted security patrol in the Deh Rawood Valley in Oruzgan Province. His patrol was a partnered patrol with the Afghan National Army. Corporal Atkinson was killed and another Australian soldier seriously wounded when struck by an improvised explosive device. I have described to the Senate before what a deadly, brutal and indiscriminate weapon the IED is. I think Corporal Atkinson’s death again reminds us of that terrible truth.

We have heard that Corporal Atkinson was a dedicated and professional soldier. We have heard how much his mates depended on him and how much they will miss him. This is a time when all of us who serve in this parliament think of those who serve in Australia’s defence forces, of those who spend their lives in the nation’s service, of those who serve in Afghanistan, of those who have been wounded in that service and of those like Corporal Atkinson who have given their lives. I am only too painfully aware that per-
haps no words of condolence in the parliament can ease the pain of Corporal Atkinson’s family and friends. I can only say to them all—to Corporal Atkinson’s family, his fiancée, his parents, his brother and other family members, his friends and his mates, particularly those in the 1st Combat Engineer Regiment—that Australia proudly and profoundly honours his service and sacrifice. I join with other senators in offering my deepest sympathy to Corporal Atkinson’s family and friends.

Senator JOHNSTON (Western Australia) (1.25 pm)—I rise to support the remarks of all senators in this condolence motion on the death of Corporal Richard Atkinson, particularly the remarks of my leader, Senator Abetz, and Senator Conroy, representing the Leader of the Government in the Senate. It was last Wednesday morning—2 February—that Corporal Richard Atkinson, who as we have heard was serving with Australian Mentoring Taskforce 2, was killed in an improvised explosive device strike. A second soldier, Sapper Robert Rose, was seriously wounded in the blast, which occurred during the partnered Afghan National Army-MTF2 patrol as it moved through the Tangi Valley in the Deh Rawood region of Oruzgan Province in Afghanistan.

Corporal Atkinson was 22 years of age and from Darwin, based with the 1st Combat Engineer Regiment. He is survived by his fiancée, Dannielle; his parents, in Tasmania; and his brother, who lives in my home state of Western Australia. As we have heard, this was his first deployment to Afghanistan. He had previously been deployed with combat engineers to Indonesia on a humanitarian assistance mission, Operation Padang Assist. This young man was truly a fine and outstanding professional soldier. Corporal Atkinson is the 12th Australian soldier to have been killed by an improvised explosive device, out of the 22 brave and courageous young Australians who have died so far in this dangerous and difficult Afghanistan environment. There is nothing more dangerous than performing dismounted patrols in Afghanistan. It was whilst performing that task that Corporal Atkinson was killed and Sapper Rose seriously injured.

Our thoughts and prayers are with Richard Atkinson’s fiancée, his family and his comrades at this very difficult time. We mourn the loss of a very fine young Australian. We also wish Sapper Robert Rose a speedy recovery from his serious wounds resulting from this IED detonation. I pause to acknowledge the ongoing commitment, service, bravery and courage of all Australian soldiers in Afghanistan. They continue to occupy our thoughts and our prayers. Corporal Richard Atkinson is and will continue to be an inspiration and a very fine example to all of us.

Senator BARNETT (Tasmania) (1.28 pm)—I rise to support the statements of my colleagues in this chamber in this condolence motion and to pay tribute to Corporal Richard Atkinson. He was born in Hobart and lived his life in Launceston. He was educated at Trevallyn Primary School and then at Launceston Church Grammar School and was known as a Launceston boy. He was 22 years of age when he died—when he was killed. He was leading his combat engineer section as a search commander. I note that he has been awarded the Australian Active Service Medal with clasp: International Coalition against Terrorism, the Afghanistan Campaign Medal and the Army Combat Badge. In paying a tribute to Corporal Richard Atkinson, it is an honour to note his service, his bravery and his courage and to know that a grateful nation is thankful for that service and that sacrifice. My hope and prayer is that that sacrifice is indeed not in vain, lest we forget.
Words cannot describe the sadness and the grief that is currently being endured by his family and, in particular, his fiance, Danielle, who he was planning to have a family with; his parents, Ross and Kate, who live in Launceston; and his brother, James, and sister-in-law, Sumah. My heart also goes out to the Grammar community at this time, because only last week they were advised of the death of James Poland, who died in a bushwalking accident in New Zealand. We had a wonderful thanksgiving service for his life last week with the whole school community. The students are now returning to the school at Grammar—this week in fact; grades 11 and 12 yesterday and the rest of the school community tomorrow. It will be a very heavy burden for them to bear. But it will be good for them to know that we stand with them shoulder to shoulder in terms of their condolences and support for Corporal Richard Atkinson’s family and the friends that he knew so well at Grammar. I pay tribute to him and give honour to his courage, bravery and sacrifice. He is the 22nd soldier to have died in Afghanistan.

I note in particular the comments of the principal, Stephen Norris, about him being a leader at Grammar. It has been noted that he was the head of Wilkinson House. Mr Norris also noted that he was highly respected, reliable, kind, considerate and well mannered and showed initiative. I know that the school community will be mourning his loss with his family. Together with other senators and the entire Senate, I pay my respects and give him honour.

Question agreed to, honourable senators standing in their places.

ROBERTS-SMITH, CORPORAL BENJAMIN, VC, MG

Senator CONROY (Victoria—Acting Leader of the Government in the Senate) (1.32 pm)—I move:

That the Senate records the occasion of national significance in the awarding of the Victoria Cross to Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith, VC, MG on 23 January 2011.

The Victoria Cross for Australia is awarded to those who ‘in the presence of the enemy display the most conspicuous gallantry; a daring or pre-eminent act of valour or self-sacrifice; or extreme devotion to duty’. On Sunday 23 January 2011 the Governor-General, Her Excellency Quentin Bryce, invested Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith, of the Special Air Service Regiment, with the Victoria Cross at Campbell Barracks in Western Australia.

Corporal Roberts-Smith’s citation award reads:

For the most conspicuous gallantry in action in circumstances of extreme peril as Patrol Second-in-Command, Special Operations Task Group on Operation SLIPPER.

On 11 June 2010, Corporal Roberts-Smith demonstrated extreme devotion to duty and the most conspicuous gallantry in action in the face of a very determined and aggressive enemy. With total disregard for his own safety, Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith initiated an assault against an elevated fortification consisting of three enemy machine gun positions and superior numbers of heavily armed insurgents. With members of his patrol pinned down by the three enemy machine gun positions, he knowingly and willingly exposed his position in order to draw fire away from his team mates and enabled them to apply fire against the enemy. Fighting at ranges as close as 20 metres, he seized the advantage and, demonstrating extreme devotion to duty and the most conspicuous...
Corporal Roberts-Smith enlisted in the Australian Regular Army in 1996 and completed the Australian Special Air Service Regiment selection course in 2003. As a member of the regiment, he has been deployed on Operations Valiant, Slate, Slipper, Catalyst and Slipper II. In 2006, Corporal Roberts-Smith was awarded the Medal for Gallantry for his actions in Afghanistan.

The VC for Australia was established in 1991 and has been awarded on only one previous occasion—to then Trooper Mark Donaldson in January 2009. Corporal Roberts-Smith is the 98th Australian VC recipient and joins Corporal Donaldson VC and Warrant Officer Class II Keith Payne VC OAM as the only living Australian recipients of the VC. This is august company indeed.

Earlier today the Senate mourned the loss of Corporal Richard Atkinson, the 22nd member of the Australian Defence Force to lose their life in Afghanistan in service to their nation. The danger that our forces confront every day in Afghanistan cannot be underestimated. Through his actions, Corporal Roberts-Smith has brought great honour upon himself, his family, the Australian Defence Force and our nation. On behalf of the government, I extend to him warm congratulations and the thanks of a grateful nation for his continuing service.

Senator ABETZ (Tasmania—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (1.36 pm)—Corporal Ben Roberts-Smith received his Victoria Cross for:

... the most conspicuous gallantry in action in circumstances of extreme peril as Patrol Second-in-Command, Special Operations Task Group on Operation SLIPPER.

In an early morning raid on a Taliban stronghold near the village of Tizak in Afghanistan, Corporal Roberts-Smith and two other special forces soldiers were lying in a horribly exposed position just 20 metres in front of an insurgent machine-gun post. According to one report, he was part of a force of 25 up against 100 Taliban. From the cover of a small pile of rubble, Corporal Roberts-Smith saw gunfire tearing up the ground around his friends and realised that they would soon be killed. He stormed the machine gun, drawing fire away from his comrades, silencing it at point blank range. He then moved on to silence another machine gun and then moved on in company to silence a third.

SAS Corporal Ben Roberts-Smith has the words ‘I will not fail my brothers’ tattooed across his chest. To him, it is not just a slogan; to him, it is a commitment. His words on receiving our highest military honour tell us a lot about this man:

I saw my mates getting ripped up, so I decided to go forward. I wasn’t going to sit there and do nothing. I thought I’d have a crack. I’m not going to let my mates down. It just got to a point where we had to stop the fire. Someone just had to move forward, and I think that if it wasn’t me it would have been someone else. That’s what it’s about: to complete the mission, get the job done.

Corporal Roberts-Smith is a giant of a man and soldier, but he is also extraordinarily self-effacing. He also said:

I saw a lot of brave men do a lot of brave things that day. I am wearing it—the VC—for my unit.

He also said:

Every single person there showed gallantry.
Laconically, RS, as he is known, described this action as ‘just a busy day’. More than saving the lives of his comrades, Corporal Roberts-Smith’s conspicuous gallantry in perilous circumstances was instrumental to the success of the troops against a numerically superior force. This decisive engagement caused the Taliban to retreat from the Shah Wali Kot District.

His obvious heroism aside, Corporal Roberts-Smith is dedicated to his mission in Afghanistan:

I want my children to be able to live as everyone does now without the fear of getting on a bus and having it blow up.

I will definitely deploy again ... Being a father ... I think about my children every second of the day and that is what I do it for.

I do what I do because I believe in the country that we live in. I believe that we are making a difference and stemming the flow of terrorism.

I am just very proud to do my job I do so that my kids will grow up and know that.

The coalition pays tribute to this soldier’s sense of purpose. We stand in awe of his selflessness. It should be noted that his VC follows a Medal for Gallantry that Corporal Roberts-Smith received in 2006. The account of his gallantry near Chora Pass on that occasion—disregarding his own personal safety and maintaining an exposed sniper position under sustained fire, with a risk of being surrounded by the anticoalition militia—is truly inspiring. At one point, while alone in an exposed position, he used his sniper rifle to stop the advance of 16 insurgents and held his position while under fire from other militia until air support arrived.

Our country and his comrades owe a great debt to Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith. He is truly a worthy recipient of the Victoria Cross. He is a great role model for all Australians. We in the coalition salute him and congratulate him.

**Senator Joyce** (Queensland—Leader of the Nationals in the Senate) (1.41 pm)—I rise to concur with the remarks of Senator Conroy and Senator Abetz about Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith, who now forever more will have the postnominal VC. He is a person of absolutely exceptional character. The thought of approaching one machine gun is beyond what most people would ever contemplate, but the thought of approaching three is absolutely incredible. This person is also not a small target. Corporal Roberts-Smith is two metres tall. I do not know what that is in the old measurements, but I think it is about six foot seven or six foot eight. The other thing about Corporal Roberts-Smith is that this was not the first time he has done this. He has already received a citation for gallantry. So this person is of exceptional character. To emphasise what the Victoria Cross means, I note that during the Second World War only 20 were awarded. During the First World War, only 64 Victoria Crosses were awarded. In Australia at this point in time, Trooper—now Corporal—Mark Donaldson, Keith Payne and Corporal Roberts-Smith are the three recipients that we have. So it is not something that is ubiquitous; this represents the absolute pinnacle of gallantry.

It is an interesting day today, in that we are talking about three servicemen. We have offered condolences and basically celebrated the life of former Flight Lieutenant Maunsell, who has died at 88 years old, and offered condolences on the tragic passing of Corporal Atkinson. Now we come to this presentation for gallantry for Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith. It should be noted that this is the ultimate statement of someone who is willing to lay down their life for their friends. Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith’s friends—his brothers, as he has noted—were
in a position where they were in dire requirement of being relieved of the fire they were under. Corporal Roberts-Smith at that point made a movement forwards that would most likely mean that he would be dead. He did it not because he was suicidal; he did it to put himself in a position which would give the people serving in his section the capacity to be relieved. The action was not done in a sense of insanity; it was done with a full calculation of what the likely consequences would be to him. It was not done by a person who was intoxicated or lacking their faculties; it was done by a person who was completely cerebral and knew exactly what they were about to do. That action, that exhibition of the highest form of character, of the highest form of bravery, recommends Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith as a human being of immense worth. His action is part of a catalogue of similar actions by this person, so it was not a one-off; it was the kind of thing for which he had already received a citation and, in other instances, been noted in dispatches.

We in this chamber commend his character and we have the greatest sense of gratitude for Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith, VC, MG. We hope and pray that he remains safe for the remainder of his time in service.

Senator FIELDING (Victoria—Leader of the Family First Party) (1.45 pm)—I join with my fellow senators to congratulate Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith on being awarded the Victoria Cross. It is the highest honour that can be awarded to a soldier, and Corporal Roberts-Smith is thoroughly deserving of it. The courage he displayed on 11 June 2010 as he put his life under threat in order to draw fire away from his patrol is unquestionable. His actions saved the lives of his fellow soldiers and were an act of complete selflessness. He is an inspiration to all Australians and embodies the true meaning of the word ‘hero’. On behalf of Family First I congratulate Corporal Roberts-Smith on his great bravery and his VC award.

Senator JOHNSTON (Western Australia) (1.46 pm)—I rise to congratulate my fellow Western Australian Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith on his investiture of the Victoria Cross for conspicuous gallantry and bravery in Afghanistan. In so doing I of course want to support the remarks of all senators so far, but particularly those of my leader, Senator Abetz, and of Senator Conroy, representing the Leader of the Government in the Senate.

Corporal Roberts-Smith, like all of his fellow soldiers, particularly those down at Swanbourne, would not invite accolades and awards and would just believe he was simply part of a team engaged in a difficult and challenging mission. However, as a nation we would be remiss not to recognise his incredible courage with the highest decoration a soldier in our Australian Defence Force can receive. I know his family is extremely proud of him. His soldiers and those who have made the ultimate sacrifice would look down on him and smile and say, ‘That is the way to deal with this enemy.’

Corporal Roberts-Smith has been totally supported in his ADF career by his wife, Emma, and his twin daughters, Elizabeth and Emma. In addition, he is the proud son of a highly acclaimed Western Australian, Supreme Court Justice Len Roberts-Smith, a revered jurist in Western Australia and, may I say, a former Judge Advocate General of the Australian Defence Force and, until recently, the head of the Western Australian Corruption and Crime Commission. It is a very proud family heritage.

His VC citation states—we have heard something of it already but I do wish to repeat it:

Immediately upon the helicopter insertion, the troop was engaged by machine gun and rocket propelled grenade fire from multiple, dominating
Two soldiers were wounded in action and the troop was pinned down by fire from three machine guns in an elevated fortified position to the south of the village. Under the cover of close air support, suppressive small arms and machine gun fire, Corporal Roberts-Smith and his patrol manoeuvred to within 70 metres of the enemy position in order to neutralise the enemy machine gun positions and regain the initiative.

Corporal Roberts-Smith and his patrol members fought towards the enemy position until, at a range of 40 metres, the weight of fire prevented further movement forward. At this point, he identified the opportunity to exploit some cover provided by a small structure.

As he approached the structure, Corporal Roberts-Smith identified an insurgent grenadier in the throes of engaging his patrol. Corporal Roberts-Smith instinctively engaged the insurgent at point-blank range resulting in the death of the insurgent. With the members of his patrol still pinned down by the three enemy machine gun positions, he exposed his own position—at great personal risk—in order to draw fire away from his patrol, which enabled them to bring fire to bear against the enemy. His actions enabled his Patrol Commander to throw a grenade and silence one of the machine guns.

This decisive engagement subsequently caused the remainder of the Taliban in Shah Wali Kot District to retreat from the area.

Corporal Roberts-Smith’s most conspicuous gallantry in a circumstance of extreme peril was instrumental to the seizure of the initiative and the success of the troop against a numerically superior enemy force.

The citation concludes by saying:

His valour was an inspiration to the soldiers with whom he fought alongside and is in keeping with the finest traditions of the Australian Army and the Australian Defence Force.

I certainly endorse that comment.

As a fellow Western Australian I am particularly proud of the fact that Corporal Roberts-Smith is only the 14th recipient of the Victoria Cross from my home state of Western Australia and just the 98th to be invested in Australia. I sincerely congratulate him. All of us from Western Australia are very proud of him. We wish him every success in the future.

Senator BACK (Western Australia) (1.50 pm)—I rise also to endorse the comments made by Senator Conroy, Senator Abetz and others. I speak with pride about a Western Australian VC winner, Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith, VC, MG. As Senator Johnston said, he is the 14th person from our state to win the VC, the first being Lieutenant Fred Bell, in 1901 during the Boer War, and the second being Lieutenant Hugo Throssell, in 1915, who remains the only light horseman to have won a Victoria Cross.

In joining in my congratulations I will not repeat the comments made by others, except to refer to Senator Joyce’s comments about Ben Roberts-Smith and his size. He is an enormous man, and, in seeing the most wonderful photograph of him with his two young twin daughters, one on each arm, on the day that he received his citation, I could not help but be concerned for any young fellows in 15 or 16 year’s time who might actually have some interest in those daughters, because not only the size of the potential father-in-law but his track record would cause them to think more than once.

If I may, I just want to quote from Ben Roberts-Smith himself because I think this is the significance and the depth of the man. He was asked to describe in exact detail the incident for which he had been recognised and he simply likened the situation to a football
match with his mates. ‘I saw my mates getting ripped up and just decided to move forward because I was not going to sit there and do nothing,’ he said. ‘I thought I’d have a crack. I didn’t want to let my mates down. It was certainly an amazing squadron effort and a good result. We are always hearing these stories about ambushes and losing good Australians but we won and we hurt the insurgency.’ He said again, ‘It’s just like being on a football team. You don’t let your mates down. You go as hard as you can until the game is won.’

I will conclude with the reaffirmation of those comments. He is an old boy of Hale School, one of the colleges in Perth, and those of us who were interested and represented other schools at that time were always very concerned when the First XV was playing Hale, because he played in the second row and they did not need anybody else in their scrum. He was invited last week to Hale School to present the prefects awards to the prefects for this year and he reiterated this theme. He urged the next generation of students to strive for the pursuit of excellence, integrity and the team. He told the prefects, ‘We are representatives of Australia in all we do and must represent these values.’ ‘Remember,’ he said, ‘it is not a single act nor the grand final that you win and lose nor the exam that you pass or fail and not the Victoria Cross that defines you. It is who you are all the time that matters. You need to give 100 per cent always, however daunting it may seem and, to coin a phrase, have a crack at it, fellas.’

I join with my colleagues in congratulating Ben Roberts-Smith, his wife, their children and the family. As Senator Johnston has said, it is a very august family in Western Australia. All Australians are rightfully proud of this man’s contribution and the award that he has been offered.

Senator BOB BROWN (Tasmania—Leader of the Australian Greens) (1.54 pm)—I join with all fellow senators in congratulating SAS Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith, who was awarded the Victoria Cross for his conspicuous gallantry in action in circumstances of extreme peril in Afghanistan. I preface further comments by saying that war is extraordinarily horrific for those who are faced with enemy fire and the consequences of that. It is brutish, it is nasty and it is deadly. The memories of circumstances like those that this very brave corporal have been through do not leave one this side of the grave. I hope he will remember that he was in these circumstances at the behest of this great country and he served this great country in that role in an extraordinary way, which has led to him receiving the Victoria Cross.

I will not reiterate the circumstances of that, as good senators have done that before me, but it is notable that this special man not only was prepared to get in the line of fire to defend his Australian comrades but is prepared to remove himself from the spotlight to honour those comrades who will not come back from Afghanistan. I quote:

Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith … urged Australians to remember the digger ‘heroes’ who did not come back alive from Afghanistan.

‘These are the guys who put their hands up willingly and they didn’t come back,’ he said.

‘They are our mates and their families live with that every day.

‘So I will really urge the public to remember they are the heroes, they are the ones who gave the ultimate sacrifice.’

They are the words of a very special Australian.

Question agreed to.

Sitting suspended from 1.57 pm to 2 pm
CONDOLENCES

Australian Natural Disasters

Senator CONROY (Victoria—Acting Leader of the Government in the Senate) (2.00 pm)—I move:

That the Senate:

(a) acknowledges with great sadness the devastation occasioned by this summer’s natural disasters including unprecedented floods, Cyclone Yasi and bushfires;
(b) extends its deepest sympathies to the families of those who have lost loved ones;
(c) records its profound regret at the impact of this summer’s natural disasters on the economic and social well-being of affected communities;
(d) records its admiration for the courage shown by so many in the face of these disasters;
(e) acknowledges the enormous effort of defence personnel, emergency workers, and so many volunteers in responding to these disasters;

and

(f) pledges the full support of the Australian Parliament and community to assist affected areas to recover and rebuild.

Almost two years ago, the Senate met in sorrow to offer its condolences to the victims of Victoria’s Black Saturday bushfires. It is with profound sadness that we now gather to mourn the loss of life caused by another extreme weather event. The floods that have swept across Australia have been the most devastating in our recorded history. At least 35 people are believed to have lost their lives in Queensland and nine people remain missing. Two further flood related deaths have been reported in New South Wales and Victoria, both sadly involving young children. Many Australians are mourning these lost lives as we gather here today. Their sense of loss will endure long after these words of condolence are spoken and the essential task of rebuilding is complete. Today we acknowledge all who have lost their lives in this summer’s floods and extend our sympathies to those who mourn their lost loved ones or await news of their whereabouts.

This summer, residents in Queensland, Victoria, New South Wales, Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania have all experienced the frightening reality of rising floodwaters. Some communities have experienced more than one flood in the space of months or even weeks. Homes have been lost, businesses destroyed and lives turned upside down. Electricity, gas and water supplies have been cut and communities have been left with the legacy of shredded roads and collapsed bridges. In Queensland, the state hardest hit by this season’s terrible floods, more than 70 population centres and hundreds of thousands of people have been affected. In more recent days, residents in the north of Queensland have been confronted with the full fury of Cyclone Yasi, leading to further loss of life and even more physical destruction.

Floods and cyclones are not the only natural phenomena to threaten lives this Australian summer. Just this week, bushfires have threatened lives and destroyed more than 60 homes in the Perth foothills. Common to all extreme weather events across the nation this summer has been the resilience of affected households, businesses and communities; the courage of emergency services and defence personnel; and the selflessness of volunteers who have lent a hand to those in need. The Prime Minister recently announced that she has written to the Queen seeking approval for a new medal to honour those who have performed heroic and selfless acts and who have volunteered their services during recent times of crisis. Subject to approval, the first awards will be presented next Australia Day and will include recognition of those who reached out to others during the Black Saturday fires two years ago. The selflessness of individual volunteers during the current summer has been reflected in the generosity
of individuals and businesses who have donated and continue to donate to the various appeals established to help people affected by flood, cyclone and now fire. The total raised by one appeal, the Queensland Premier’s Disaster Relief Appeal, now exceeds $201 million. Many donations and offers of assistance have been received from overseas and we thank our friends in the international community for their support.

We also thank our friends in the media for the work they have done this summer alerting Australians to the danger of flood, cyclone and fire and bringing us the stories of heroism and heartbreak that characterise natural disasters of this scale. It is appropriate to acknowledge in particular the role ABC Radio has played conveying essential safety messages to people placed in danger by this season’s unfolding natural disasters.

It is important for Australians affected by these disasters to know that the parliament and the government are by their side. The Commonwealth is working with state governments to provide a range of assistance measures to individuals, businesses and primary producers. These measures include personal hardship and distress payments for individuals, concessional interest rate loans and freight subsidies for businesses and recovery grants for primary producers and small businesses. Much of this assistance is provided through Centrelink, whose staff have worked long and irregular hours to ensure that people get assistance in their time of need.

With three-quarters of Queensland declared a disaster zone, preliminary estimates indicate that the Commonwealth will need to invest more than $5.5 billion to rebuild flood affected regions alone. Recovery and reconstruction is not a short-term task and this is not the time to debate the government’s plan to fund the task ahead. What Australians want to hear today is that this Senate, representing every state and territory in the federation, is united in its resolve to support affected individuals, families, businesses and communities. It is the Australian way to help each other in times of need. Countless individuals with mops and brooms in hand have started the task; governments must help finish the job.

I conclude my contribution to this debate by acknowledging that for some families it is too early to contemplate the next stage of their lives. There are still people missing in the wake of the Queensland floods. My heart goes out to family members who are waiting for news of their loved ones. On behalf of the government, I extend my profound sympathy to the families and friends of those who are lost and missing in the floods and offer support for the recovery and reconstruction task ahead. I commend the motion to the Senate.

Senator ABETZ (Tasmania—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (2.08 pm)—That greatly loved poet who captured so much of that which is unique about our great country, Dorothea Mackellar, summed up Australia’s capacity to deliver brutal weather events in her moving tribute My Country, penned some 100 years ago. In that renowned poem she talked of Australia’s ‘droughts and flooding rains’. She spoke about our country’s terror, of ‘flood and fire and famine’. That word picture of our country by Dorothea Mackellar 100 years ago has rung especially true this summer for many Australians. While she may not have specifically mentioned cyclones, I am sure that those who were confronted by Cyclone Yasi will say it was appropriately covered by the descriptor ‘terror’ in the second verse.

Whilst devastating weather events have always been part of our history and experience as a nation, it does not make it any eas-
ier for those who actually experienced the floods, the fires and the sheer terror of the cyclone. So on behalf of the coalition, the alternative government, I extend our deepest sympathy to those who have personally felt and experienced the full front and the terror of the recent natural disasters—floods in every state, fires in two and a cyclone. To those who have lost loved ones, to those who fear the worst for loved ones who are unaccounted for, to the injured, to those who have lost their worldly possessions and to those who have lost their livelihoods we extend our sympathy and support.

Here in this modern marvel, our Parliament House, with its full air conditioning and other creature comforts, we are far removed from the experience that so many tens of thousands of our fellow Australians experienced in recent times and, indeed, are still experiencing. It is appropriate therefore that this parliament take time out to extend sympathy, to reflect and ponder, to salute our emergency service personnel, our police and our defence personnel, to acknowledge the spirit of the private and mostly anonymous volunteers who excelled, to embrace and highlight the thousands of acts of selflessness we have witnessed and to appreciate the generosity of those who have donated to the flood appeal, which already represents about $10 per man, woman and child.

It is also appropriate to thank our national broadcaster, the ABC, for its role and, also, our commercial media, which lived up to their community service obligations. As is so often the case, we see our nation and her people at their best in times of adversity. Regrettably, and thankfully to no great extent, we have also witnessed the worst of behaviours with looting and other undesirable acts of preying on our people in their plight and time of need. I trust the courts will keep in mind the community’s overwhelming sense of disgust at such behaviour.

We have witnessed leadership at its best by the Lord Mayor of Brisbane and the Queensland Premier. Regrettably, we have also witnessed cynical public utterances. While more needs to be said about this appalling behaviour, now is not the time other than to note its regrettable occurrence.

As the weather stabilises again and the clean-up, the repairs, the rebuilding and the new starts are made, we need to recognise that the task of rebuilding will be with us for days, weeks, months and, indeed, years to come. The clean-up, the rebuilding and the repairs will not only entail the infrastructure of road, rail and community facilities; it will also entail private housing and businesses and, most importantly, the rebuilding of shattered individual lives and communities. I fear the tragedy of a delayed impact on many of the survivors—families torn apart, fractured emotions, shattered self-esteem, feelings of guilt and the nagging thought, ‘Could I have done more?’ All those people deserve our support and will need our help for many tomorrows to come.

So while we pause to mourn the dead, to comfort the injured and to sympathise with those who have lost their worldly possessions, the coalition also stands ready to support the survivors, the fellow Australians whom we have the honour of representing in this place, to get justice from their insurance companies, to get justice from their banks, to obtain understanding from the Australian Taxation Office, to gain support from employers and to ensure that government support is properly targeted and administered. In times like these, it is far too easy to talk the big picture and the broad brush. Our task is also to concentrate on each individual and on each community, focusing especially on the smaller population centres where the capital to rebuild the local supermarket or pub will be the determining factor as to whether that township revives or dies.
The insurance companies and the banks bear a very real responsibility here. Their decisions, made in air-conditioned high-rise offices, will determine the future prospects of families, businesses and communities alike. There will be those whose real estate assets have plummeted in value or those uninsured who have had their homes washed away—will they be able to rebuild; will they be allowed to rebuild? If not, what can they do with the block of land they own? There will be the local publican who leases flooded premises where the owner cannot raise the capital to rebuild; or indeed the owner of the pub whose lease was a retirement income stream; or the business which was not impacted at all physically but sells its product into a devastated area and has lost its market; or those who have or will lose their job as a result; or the widow whose lifetime of memories in pictures and photo albums no longer exists—all those reminders of happy bygone days simply and brutally obliterated.

In future days this parliament will debate how best to assist those who have been so devastatingly impacted. Different approaches will be considered and discussed, as they should be, and there will be passionate debate, as there should be. I do not presume to speak on behalf of all senators but on this occasion let me try. Irrespective of our passionately held views, one thing those impacted on can be assured of is that we are united in this place in our desire to help. That will not be in dispute. The only question is: how can we best help? And that too is as it should be.

Our nation will rebuild. It is in our DNA. When bushfires, droughts, floods, heatwaves, big freezes, cyclones and landslips assail us we do not simply walk away. If we did, we would have abandoned large tracts of our great country over the centuries. The fact that we have not bears testament to our intergenerational resilience and determination. As our forebears replanted, restocked and rebuilt, so will we in 2011 replant, restock and rebuild. We inhabit a continent that Dorothea Mackellar poignantly described as having both beauty and terror. The good news is that the terror our continent inflicts is only momentary whereas her beauty is constant. We rebuilt after the Gundagai flood of 1852, which took 89 lives. We rebuilt after the 1916 Clermont flood, which took 65 lives. We have rebuilt after cyclones, fires, landslips and drought. I trust that in years to come our successors will look back on 2011 as another chapter in the story of Australia where we excelled ourselves in helping each other to rebuild after the calamities of fire, floods and cyclones. In the meantime, let us remember in our prayers the deceased, the bereaved, the injured and the devastated and let us draw strength together from our forebears who, when confronted with similar or even worse ordeals, simply got on with the task of rebuilding—and the coalition stands absolutely committed to doing its bit. With that spirit, with that commitment, with that resolve, our fellow Australians’ lives, both individually and in community will be rebuilt.

Senator BOB BROWN (Tasmania—Leader of the Australian Greens) (2.18 pm)—I join with the previous speakers in supporting this motion wherein the Senate acknowledges the extraordinary destruction, death and anguish that have come to so many parts of this great country of ours in recent months through floods, cyclones and fires. The total toll can now be measured in more than 40 lives; more than 40,000 homes destroyed or inundated by flood waters; and a monetary cost of at least $12 billion in damage concentrated on a small part of the Australian population. Through this motion the parliament hopefully will bring forward the great warmth and comradeship Australians have for people in such distress and share the
burden of doing what we can in reparation for those people who have lost so much.

Nothing could be more terrifying than the news, following the floods through Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley earlier this year, of the swiftness with which that extraordinary event overtook the people in its path, leaving them helpless and in some cases watching as their families and communities were destroyed in front of their eyes—that is, those who survived. It is beyond our ability to give reparation for the horror faced by people in those circumstances, as indeed it was beyond our ability, when as a nation we watched and wondered and slept badly, if at all, on the night that Cyclone Yasi crossed the coast, to feel the terror of so many people, even though forewarned, as Yasi cut that massive naturally destructive swathe.

In a healthy and great democracy like ours, it is natural for all of us to want to put our shoulder to the wheel in getting assistance as rapidly as possible to aid and abet that of state governments, local authorities and the meritorious work done to assuage the extraordinary difficulties faced by so many people in the wake of these destructive events. It is also a time to pay tribute to the hundreds of thousands of people who have contributed, volunteered or gone to the aid of neighbours, friends, families or people they did not know in these extraordinary circumstances. It brought out the best in humanity. We know some of the stories of selflessness and assistance in the midst of terrifying circumstances, but I bet we do not know a lot of them yet—and they will emerge. We must congratulate all those people who came together to minimise the impact of these disasters.

Senator Abetz mentioned the flood at Gundagai, where he said that 89 people died. That little township was swept away from an island in the middle of the Murrumbidgee River in a horrific flood in the middle of the night when, by the time the residents recognised what was happening, they had nowhere to go. Of course the township since then has been built higher in much safer circumstances and has survived a number of floods without that terrifying loss of life. In the future as a nation we must help to plan local communities to make them safer from the repeat of the events we have seen in recent years in this country such as bushfires, floods and cyclones. We know from the records that 300 people, including 100 Indigenous Australians, lost their lives in the great cyclone of Cairns in 1899; over 400 people lost their lives in the disaster of the Cata-raqui going ashore in a storm off the west coast of King Island 50 years before that; and we have seen catastrophic bushfires, the worst of which just two years ago took 170-plus lives in Victoria.

We are a more populous country than we were but we are a very innovative country. We have technologies now that our forebears can only have dreamt of, including forecasting wherewithal. We have to acknowledge the services of people who face the hazards of forecasting, of SES personnel and of people who have done whatever they can to get people out of harm’s way, and we have to acknowledge also those who have rebuilt after previous disasters in a way which has minimised the impact of harm. I refer here, for example, to the cyclone proofing or defensiveness of modern homes built in this country since the era of Cyclone Tracy. There is no doubt that hundreds more people would have lost their lives without these technological breakthroughs and without the work of people dedicated to minimising the impact of such awesome events as we have seen in recent times.

Our heart goes out to those who are suffering and will continue to suffer from the impact of these events. We hope that there
maybe some respite from it so that we as a nation can move on and hopefully make ourselves safer from such events in the future. The Australian Greens join with other members of this parliament in assuring all those who have been victims of these events that we will do, and are doing, what we can in the political arena to assist the rapid deployment of aid and facilities through not just money but also the remarkable services of public servants, the Army, the SES, the police, medical personnel, people in local government and others throughout this nation. They are deployed to those jobs at our behest and for the benefit of our fellow citizens right now.

Finally, a word on the natural environment, which we look to after the human factor is, as best it can be, attended to. There is no doubt there has been a lot of havoc on the Great Barrier Reef in recent times, a lot of destruction of the great rainforests of Queensland and the wildlife and ecosystems there, and the same applies through the areas which have suffered flooding and fire damage elsewhere in the country. It is part of our harrowing job, but a responsibility we must take on, to see that we do whatever we can to minimise the impact on this nation’s great environmental amenity, because our employment prospects in the future and our economy—as well as our feeling of wellbeing as citizens of this great country—depend on us doing just that.

I thank the government and the opposition for their lead in this debate. I join with them. I add the support of the Greens in bringing comfort wherever and in whatever way we can to the victims of these events and a commitment to see that everything is done that is humanly and politically possible to lessen the burden on the shoulders of those citizens who have been unfortunate enough to be most affected by this series of floods, cyclones and bushfires in Australia.

Senator Joyce (Queensland—Leader of the Nationals in the Senate) (2.27 pm)—I rise solemnly to speak to this motion on natural disasters and I start with a quote:

Mr McErlean grabbed a rope, tied one end to a post, the other around his waist and set out to rescue the woman and two boys but the fast-moving water swept him downstream.

Another rescuer, known only as Chris, pulled Mr McErlean to safety before tying the rope to himself and approaching the car to grab Jordan.

But Jordan wanted his brother to go first so Chris took Blake, handing him to Mr McErlean part way across before heading back to the car.

‘I had the boy in one hand, the rope in the other. I wasn’t going to let go but then the torrent came through and was pulling us down,’ Mr McErlean said.

‘Then this great big tall fellow just came out of nowhere, bear hugged us and ripped us out of the water. When I got back I turned to look at this guy [Chris]. He looked at me and we knew it was over. The rope snapped and the car just flipped.’

Chris, who had been holding Jordan’s hand until it was torn away from him, flew metres in the air before locking his legs around a post in the centre of the road, said Mr McErlean.

‘The others were just gone, just disappeared,’ he said.

I think the story of Jordan Rice unfortunately personifies the terror of the flood. The terror, and the bravery, of Jordan Rice was no greater and no lesser than the bravery of the others who perished. It seems beyond belief that at this point in time we would be talking about 22 people perishing in South-East Queensland—35 if you look from 30 November; people who literally could not believe their eyes.

We have heard terrifying stories of creeks that had been mere trickles rising five to six metres in just 10 to 20 minutes. Stories have been conveyed to me of houses taken away by the floods where grandparents had been minding grandchildren. This is the sort of
horror you just cannot grow used to. But it happened in Queensland and it has now also happened in other areas due to the cyclone, and also now due to the fires—perhaps there have not been the deaths but certainly there has been the same horror and the same fear. It has brought out the best and the worst, and this period continues.

I do not think anything can match the terror experienced at places like Murphys Creek, Grantham and Lowood. Driving through those areas and seeing the damage is beyond comprehension. These areas have been gouged out by the flood waters. Pads of concrete remain where houses once stood. Dead bodies of people were carted 80 kilometres from where they had unfortunately perished. This is what was delivered to this section of the state. In places like Toowoomba nothing really could have been done. It was a freak event; an urban flood sheeting off concrete and off roads. The consequences of this flood when it arrived in the CBD and in the middle of towns are beyond comparison.

There are many whom we will always remember; names and faces of Australians we will remember. When you see a house that was not much of a house to start with—not an opulent house but a house belonging to a person whom you would say was struggling—that was completely devastated by the floods and on the front of that house an Australian flag is hanging, you know there is a spirit there and that they will offer their support to the people around them. This disaster will have an immense effect on the psychology of the people in these areas. People are having to deal with their grief. People are still missing. I think seven are still missing at this moment. In the future there will be a plaque, a memory or a story, but for the people involved it is their lives.

Llync-Chiann Clarke, 31, and her two children aged five and 12 were caught in a rural fire brigade truck when it was hit by a wall of water on the Gatton-Helidon Road. All three were found dead inside the truck. Imagine the terror of the children. How would they fathom what was happening to them? How would they understand going from being on terra firma, on grass near a road not associated with flood, and in an instant the topography changes to a roaring and terrifying mass of dark water and everything that goes with that? Imagine the fear in the eyes of children and the fear of the parents as they try their very best to save them. We hear stories of cars going past with people inside screaming. These stories leave an indelible image and it breaks the heart of even the most hardened person. It is outside of what we can reasonably perceive as happening to people whose faces and accents we know. We know the houses they lived in but they are not there anymore.

Pauline Lesley Magner, 65, was found dead on the bank of a creek near the sawmill in Gatton. Selwyn Hector Schefe, 52, was swept away in his home on Monday and his body was found on Thursday. Everything has been put asunder. Who would have thought that someone could be in their house and that their house would become a trap. Who would have thought that you could be in a house that could subside in a flood. The vision of the floods as they tore through houses is beyond comprehension. Whole paddocks were turned into a tumultuous sea of water. This happened on both sides of the range. The body of Robert John Kelly, 30, was found in his upside down Toyota Landcruiser in Myall Creek, Dalby. People in these situations would have been terrified. These people and these events are what we are remembering at this time.

We saw the evacuation of whole towns. That has never happened before in Australia.
In towns like Condamine and Theodore everyone was moved. When these people move back we have to be conscious of what they are moving back to. What did they have to start with? How do they get their lives back on track? Let us not forget other areas such as Bundaberg, Rockhampton—massive floods went through Rockhampton—Emerald and my home town of St George. In St George, we were unfortunate in that it was our third flood in the last 10 months. But through that people had begun to prepare themselves better and gain a better understanding of how to deal with the situation. Those who got flooded before got flooded again and, in some instances, fortunately, the damage was not that great because they were still repairing from the last flood. Some people however had spent hundreds of thousands of dollars of their own money renovating their own house only to see it flooded again. Crops were lost. You have to keep a financial lifeline going in these areas. You must keep commerce going in these areas. Without a job people have nothing. Just in my area tens of millions of dollars in crops have been lost.

On the good side, it showed the best in character. I remember looking at people around St George. The thing that went out everywhere—and I am sure it was the same in all towns—was that you did not have to ask for help; it just happened. As one so aptly put it, ‘People turned up like black flies.’ As soon as they saw the problem you did not need to ask for help—they just arrived. People would arrive to go sandbagging. People would drop off their bobcat or their excavator to help you build a levy. People who were already doing it tough with the bank would say, ‘Don’t worry, I will lend you some plant to try to make sure that we keep the flood away.’ People would turn up at people’s places and say, ‘We will try to muster this section of your place and see if we can get your stock to a place where they are not going to perish.’

It was not that people were expecting great laurels for it; it was just the way people worked. Later on we saw people turning up in Brisbane—in fact, so many people turned up that they had to start to tell them to turn around because the numbers were so great. This is the positive side of the story. People from Brisbane, Rockhampton and Emerald would just turn up and help. They did not need to be asked; they just did it. Something bound them together that said that they were all in this together and that they will empathise with you by doing more than just watching you on television—they must get to where you are and help you.

This was incredibly powerful. It gave so many people a sense of succour and comfort to see that people were prepared to turn up without even knowing who they were helping. We always have the minor instances of people who exploit a situation, but they were so minor. The overwhelming story was one of empathy, shock and horror. Then it was the overwhelming desire of so many Australians to say, ‘What can I do to help?’ I was humbled in my own town to get call after call that went like this: ‘I want to be off the record. I do not want to be known. I want to put some money up. Can you tell me where to put it? What can I do to help?’

There were people from other states and territories who put substantial amounts of money on the table who said: ‘I just want to do something. I have seen this on television. I cannot believe this is my nation, but I want to do something to help. I just want to be part of a solution. I want to be somewhere of some effect. Do I turn up myself or do I just send the cheque? Or do I send something else? What can I do to help you?’ After such a tragic and terrifying event, this is what gave you the sense of a nation pulling to-
gether—that at times people will speak up for an area other than their own and say, ‘They are doing it tougher than us.’

I remember in St George when everybody saw what was happening in Gatton, in Lowood, in Grantham, in Toowoomba and in Murphys Creek. Everybody in St George stopped thinking about St George. St George, at that point, did not matter. What mattered were those people down there and what we could do to help them. These were the same people in my town who left a positive message when the bushfires were happening in Victoria. They had the same attitude: ‘What do we do to help those people down there? Do we go fencing? What do we do? Do we go down to clean out? How do we help?’ This is the positive story.

The people in our area would have disaster meetings at one o’clock to try to work out what the tactics were for the day. No-one in those meetings was self-aggrandising; they were just asking, ‘Where do I go in this maze to be of some use?’ The Army were great. They were doing whatever was in their power to do. Shift after shift, the SES were continually trying to help. They never got tired of it and never whinged about being sick of it and wanting to go home. They just said: ‘Oh well, if we have to work tomorrow we will work tomorrow. If we have to work the next day we will work the next day. If we have to work the next week and the next month we will work the next week and the next month.’ I remember seeing on Australia Day the SES boat cruising up and down our river, still carting people with the Australian flag flying out the back. They were just giving people a sense that everything was going to be fine and that we were going to get through this.

You have to thank the doctors who went out of their way to help. They were always planning and thinking ahead: ‘If this goes bad what do we do next? If the hospital floods where do we move the people? If the old people’s home has to be evacuated how are we going to get them out?’ Everybody was diligently being a cog to try to make it affect people as little as possible.

The media were great because you had to get the messages to people about everything from trying to evacuate areas to looking after people to getting other messages that you needed to get out—such as, when the floods go and the sandflies and mosquitos turn up, remember that it is also when Ross River fever and other things will turn up. They helped people to think over the horizon about what they were going to do next. It was essential to get those messages out. The ABC local radio was great at continually informing people about what was happening, where to go and what not to do.

People in general were also very good in that they were not going into areas—especially where there had been a tragedy and where people were affected by grief—and being unnecessarily intrusive in the lives of people who were going through the absolute depths of despair over the loss of family members, friends and people from the community. People were generally pretty respectful and gave them the space to find their own solace in their own time, in their own area and with their own people. This was a wider sense of the Australian community working together.

Now we also have the unity of politics. There is a desire across this chamber and the other chamber, and between all parties, to do something and to rebuild. We must rebuild the economy of this nation because the one thing that we do not want to have at the end of this disaster is people without jobs or people in towns with no economic future. We want to make sure we fix the roads. We want to make sure the tourists come back.
want to make sure the produce is moving. We want to make sure the mines are open. We want to make sure the planes are landing. We want to make sure we get back to where we were and move ahead as quickly as possible. We want to make sure we never forget those who were so tragically killed by the floods.

This will not be the last natural disaster we have, but it is one for our time. We are so lucky and so blessed that we did not have any fatalities from Cyclone Yasi. Why is that? Hopefully it shows that when you plan, when you are ready, when you see what is coming and you put all your endeavours into protecting human lives, there is the capacity to save those lives. There was nothing we could really do about the people in the Lockyer Valley. Those people at the epicentre of this disaster died because of a freak of nature. You cannot plan for five, six or seven inches of rain in a couple hours; it just happens. If we can do whatever is within our power in the future to mitigate the effects of future events like this then the purpose of this is not lost and possibly the lives of those who were so tragically killed will provide some benefit into the future. Maybe that gives some meaning. All those who were killed remain in our thoughts and prayers, as they will forevermore.

**DISTINGUISHED VISITORS**

The President—Order! I acknowledge the presence in the President’s gallery of the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker of the parliament of Tonga. I welcome you to the Australian parliament and wish you all the best.

Honourable senators—Hear, hear!

**CONDOLENCES**

**Australian Natural Disasters**

Senator Fielding (Victoria—Leader of the Family First Party) (2.46 pm)—On behalf of Family First, I join with this motion and express my profound sadness about the devastation caused by the natural disasters which have lashed our country—the floods, the cyclone and the bushfires. Family First also extends our deepest sympathies to those families who have lost loved ones and our thoughts and prayers go out to everyone affected by these disasters. What we have witnessed over the past month or so has been a disaster on a scale that is unimaginable in modern Australia. The loss has been extraordinary. Many families and businesses have lost everything. It is almost impossible to fully comprehend. People who have devoted their lives to building their families, homes, farms, businesses and communities have seen them wiped out just like that. It is a disaster that is still unfolding. In my home state of Victoria we have faced more floods. Yesterday a Glen Waverly man died after falling from his storm damaged roof. It was another sobering reminder of the devastation that has hit our country and affected so many families.

Only a few days ago I was up in the northern parts of Victoria to see some of the damage firsthand and speak to some of those affected by the floods. Places like Echuca, Rochester, Kerang and Horsham bore the brunt of Mother Nature. The stories of the victims are nothing short of heartbreaking. It is difficult to imagine what these people must be going through—seeing everything they have worked hard for simply destroyed. I think the full ramifications of what has occurred are yet to be fully realised. The damage bill is growing every day and the losses are still being counted. The economic cost to agriculture from the floodwaters in Victoria alone is estimated to reach $2 billion. In Queensland the figure is even higher. Many communities are still cut off from power and other services. People’s livelihoods are up in the air and many people still missing. What
this tragedy has also done, however, is reveal the true meaning of the great Australian spirit. No sooner had the floodwaters started to recede than thousands of volunteers came out in their droves to help their fellow Australians and to help their local communities. It was a case of Australians helping fellow Australians, not because they knew them personally or had some long-term connection to them, but because they were fellow Australians in need of a helping hand.

Not only have we had floods across the country, we have had cyclones and bushfires too. Only two years ago Australians were left shocked from the devastation caused by the Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria. It has been a difficult path in those two years trying to rebuild what was so quickly taken away. However, as each day passes, the people of Victoria have continued in their struggle to restore the affected areas and rebuild their lives. I can assure those victims of the recent disasters that our commitment will be the same. We are united in our resolve to see these areas prosper once again. The clean-up will be enormous but the resilience shown by the Australian people is inspiring. As a nation we will get through these disasters together.

Senator XENOPHON (South Australia) (2.51 pm)—I too rise to offer my condolences following the series of natural disasters that beset our nation this summer and to endorse the comments of my colleagues. I also want to comment on Senator Joyce’s very evocative description of what it was like on the ground in St George, which fortunately, in relative terms, was spared from the worst of it. I think the fact that the worst of times brought out the best in people says something about the Australian spirit of mateship and about people all doing their best to help each other.

The scale of the natural disasters we have faced has been such that many of us have struggled to put them into perspective. How do you quantify this much suffering? Does an appropriate method even exist? There are things that you can observe—regions affected, houses and businesses lost and, most tragically, lives lost. But even those shocking facts do not quantify the impact that natural disasters have had on those affected both directly and indirectly. I would like to offer my sincere condolences to those who have lost loved ones both in the Queensland floods, in the aftermath of the Victorian flood and also in relation to the life lost during Cyclone Yasi. I would like to make specific mention of the people of Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley area who seemed to be hit without warning and, as a result, incurred the most fatalities and loss. I would also like to offer my support for the families of the nine individuals who are still listed as missing. I cannot imagine what you are going through. I just want to say that our thoughts are with you as you endure this terrible period of waiting.

The floods in Victoria and New South Wales have been slightly overshadowed by the events in Queensland but their impact has been just as devastating to those affected, and I would like to specifically commend Premier Baillieu for the support he has given to his state during this crisis. And then came the cyclone—it is extraordinary to think that three-quarters of Queensland was declared a disaster zone due to flooding before Cyclone Yasi even struck, decimating parts of Far North Queensland. I visited the region only a few weeks before the cyclone with the member for Kennedy. I went to Innisfail, Tully, Atherton Tablelands and all around there. Like most Australians, I watched on with great trepidation as the ferocious Cyclone Yasi approached the coast near Cairns. I think like many people I kept tuning in that
night, waiting to see what would occur and watching the live coverage. When viewing the aftermath in the media, I genuinely felt it was a miracle that there were so few fatalities. This was testimony to the preparedness of so many people in that region. But we should all remember that, while the initial impacts of these disasters have passed, their effects will last for many years. News cycles might move on, but it is a lot harder for the victims of these disasters to move on. Yesterday was the second anniversary of Victoria’s horrendous Black Saturday bushfires, during which 173 people died and 414 were injured. Two years on, I think it is worth noting that only half the houses that were lost have so far been rebuilt. Getting back on your feet takes time; it also takes money.

Later this week and in subsequent weeks, there will no doubt be significant discussions about the cost of rebuilding, who should pay and how they should pay. This occasion is not the time for those discussions. But one thing we can all agree on is that every state in need must receive the support required to get them back on their feet. We can question who should pick up the tab but no-one should doubt that the tab must be picked up and quickly. I think we also need to accept that natural disasters are likely to become more common—and that view is not just coming from environmentalists; it is also coming from global re-insurance firms who are factoring a more dangerous and volatile climate into their calculations and risk projections. As a parliament, we too need to expect an increase in natural disasters and to factor that into our planning. We need to be ready to deal with not just this disaster but whatever Mother Nature throws at us in the future.

I would like to conclude by commending Queensland Premier Anna Bligh for the comfort and leadership she has given Queenslanders during this terrible period. Politics can be a thankless job and politicians do get kicked from time to time, and sometimes justifiably. That is why it is important to balance criticism with praise where appropriate. But today is a time to commiserate and to praise only, and I would like to praise Premier Bligh for the way she has helped the people of Queensland to prepare for and endure the floods and Cyclone Yasi. Having spoken to people in Queensland, there is little doubt that the Premier’s actions have made a tangible difference to many during the crisis.

We live in a land of environmental extremes. I believe man has had an impact on global conditions. The fact is that, when it comes to individual events, we cannot stop a cyclone and we cannot stop a flood. So we need to focus on being ready to deal with these disasters before they occur and with the cost of any aftermath. We might plan for the impact, but have we planned properly for the aftermath? For this parliament, that means the work is only just beginning. I commend this motion and again give my condolences to all those affected.

Senator LUDWIG (Queensland—Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) (2.56 pm)—I rise to contribute to this motion on natural disasters and, in so doing, echo the remarks made by earlier speakers in expressing the sorrow felt by all Australians over the tragic loss of life as a result of these natural disasters and their impact on Australia and, in particular, my home state of Queensland.

Having spent a part of my life in western Queensland and its far north, I know many of the towns and communities impacted by these events. So, like many in this place, when I heard the Police Commissioner talk of an inland tsunami moving through towns like Toowoomba and on into the Lockyer Valley, it was hard to comprehend. After vis-
iting the communities of Grantham and Helidon with Mayor Steve Jones a few days after the flood levels had receded and only damage remained, I found it difficult to imagine that the water which had passed through the area had done so much damage. I know these towns and their people, and they are resilient. In the last few weeks I have seen firsthand their determination to get back onto the land, clean out businesses, restore homes and start the long, slow and painstaking task of rebuilding their communities. The people of Queensland should feel confident that those on both sides of the aisle in this place support them wholeheartedly. Undoubtedly, the loss of life has been the hardest blow for these communities to bear. I know that the whole Senate is united in its shock at the extent of the destruction that these natural disasters have caused. I offer my deepest and most sincere condolences to those families suffering the most—those who have lost loved ones. Your loss is being felt by the whole Australian community.

I wish to praise the work of emergency services personnel, both their professional ranks and the marvellous volunteer forces, along with members of the Australian Defence Force, State Emergency Service officers and the many, many other organisations, groups and individuals who, without exception or hesitation, went onto the front line. They diligently and skilfully went about their work, often putting their lives at risk to protect the community and the public. Through the tragedy we have been touched and uplifted by many great and generous acts of people who were looking out for others. These stories have provided relief and encouragement to us all.

It is difficult to adequately explain the scale of the disasters that have impacted a significant proportion of Australia. The floods have been one of the largest natural disasters to ever hit our nation. As I address the Senate today, areas are still being impacted by flooding, waters are still slowly receding and only now are we able to begin to come to grips with the damage the water has left in its wake. In Far North Queensland, along the Cassowary Coast down to Townsville, the extent of the scars of Cyclone Yasi is becoming clear. Over 80 per cent of Queensland has been declared a natural disaster zone. If you put that in perspective, that is 61 of 73 local government areas.

The damage outside of Queensland has been equally widespread. Many Victorian towns have experienced the most significant floods in living memory. New South Wales has also been hit hard. I have seen firsthand the effects of flooding in areas in northern New South Wales, particularly on primary producers in the areas around the Tenterfield Shire Council, and understand the impact that flooding has caused for those communities, not only the damage to infrastructure—to bridges and roads—but also the loss to primary producers and in some parts their homes. South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania have also been impacted by floods and flash-flooding events. Western Australia, first hit by flooding in Carnarvon, is now experiencing bushfires in the south of the state. These fires are destroying homes, but they are not breaking communities.

The story in Far North Queensland, the Cassowary Coast, Hinchinbrook and Townsville, is one that has been seen in other parts of the state as the region moves from crisis response to the first steps on the road to recovery. The effects of Cyclone Yasi are still being dealt with by the state government and some people, even at this point, have not even had the chance to return to their properties to assess the clean-up work ahead of them. Australian Defence Force and emergency services personnel, together with many individuals and their communities, are
now lending a hand in those regions to support the work ahead.

The images of flood and cyclones have gone around the world. I acknowledge the support, sympathy and offers of assistance extended to the flood victims from more than 45 governments and international organisations worldwide. Just to touch on some of the areas within my portfolio, the impact on the agricultural sector has been extensive. It has impacted on not only the agricultural sector but also the fishing and forestry sectors. In mid-December 2010, the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences estimated that the heavy rainfalls and floods that had occurred up to that point had particularly affected our winter grain harvest. After ideal growing conditions in most parts of eastern Australia during the season, the untimely heavy rainfall at the early stage of the harvest led to a downgrading in the quality of wheat and barley crops. However, the rains and floods that followed over Christmas and the New Year were more widespread and damaging than could have been anticipated, and last week we saw banana and sugar production damaged by Cyclone Yasi.

ABARES has estimated flooding in eastern Australia is likely to have reduced the 2010-11 agricultural production by at least $500 to $600 million, including impacts on the production of fruit and vegetables, cotton, grains and sorghum, and has presented some further challenges for the winter crops. Livestock production has also been affected through impaired transport infrastructure corridors, causing impacts on the movement and processing of livestock. I have had an opportunity to meet with key livestock production facilities in the state’s south-east—particularly in the Lockyer Valley region—about these issues and the challenges they have to ensure that they continue to have open and clear supply lines to markets. This summer will now be remembered for unfavourable reasons. Every Australian can directly support local farmers and primary producers by buying fresh Australian produce. Even with external blemishes, Australian fruit and vegetables are still healthy, high-quality products that the community should support.

Turning to the road ahead, it will take time to rebuild lives, homes, businesses and communities. It will not be an easy process. Many areas of the country have already started the mammoth task of cleaning up and rebuilding. Other areas such as within Victoria are still in crisis response mode. Of course, rebuilding requires hard work and goodwill and this involves all levels of government, business, communities and individuals working together. The Australian government is working closely with the flood affected states in the recovery task. In terms of the immediate crisis response and assistance, the Commonwealth has had available a range of support mechanisms that have continued to be supported by both this government and previous governments—the Australian government disaster recovery payment, the disaster income recovery subsidy and the national disaster relief and recovery arrangements funding, the personal hardship and distress assistance and assistance for the replacement of essential public infrastructure. The Commonwealth government is working with the Queensland government and local councils to ensure that the communities that have been devastated by the floods can get back on their feet as quickly as they are able to. However, it will take a while for the rebuilding effort to be finalised.

In conclusion, I am humbled by the role I have been appointed to play in this process. The Commonwealth will stand together with Australian communities as rebuilding of the states occurs. As minister, I will continue to
work closely with all governments and communities to see these areas rebuilt and supported in their recovery. As a Queenslander, I can do no less. I pay my respects and commend this motion to the Senate.

Senator BRANDIS (Queensland) (3.07 pm)—January 2011 is a month that Australians will never forget. It is a month in which, in a variety of forms but particularly in the form of water, so many parts of Australia were affected. The part of Australia which suffered the greatest effect was the city in which I live, Brisbane, and I want to confine my remarks to how the great flood of January 2011 appeared to those of us who call Brisbane our home and how it affected our city. I understand Senator Macdonald, who is, of course, a proud North Queenslander, will be addressing his remarks primarily to the effect of Cyclone Yasi on North Queensland and in anticipation I want to associate myself with what Senator Macdonald will say in relation to that.

Let me talk about my own hometown. Brisbane is a city of hills and valleys but, first and foremost, it is a city built on a river. Whether people live on it, or near to it or cross it on their daily journey to work or school, the Brisbane River is part of our lives. So many authors who have written about Brisbane, like David Malouf, Nick Earls or Matthew Condon, have observed there is something about the Brisbane River that captures the city’s soul—understated, relaxed, undramatic, sometimes languid, usually benign. Most of the time we take it for granted. But in the third week of January the Brisbane River was anything but benign. In the early part of that terrible week we had seen the horror of the flash flooding in the Lockyer Valley, in towns such as Grantham and Murphys Creek, and the shocking events in Toowoomba. We had been astonished by the appalling suddenness and loss of life. Then, as the week wore on in Brisbane and Ipswich, the river began to rise. It was not sudden or violent as the events in the Lockyer Valley or Toowoomba had been. But there was something almost sickeningly cruel about the sheer remorselessness with which the waters inched higher on the Wednesday of that week. By Thursday morning, when a king tide in Moreton Bay coincided with the biblical quantities of water coursing downstream, thousands of homes had been flooded in Brisbane and Ipswich. In the case of more than 5,000 of them the flood waters flowed through the homes above the level of the floorboards while tens of thousands of other homes were flooded or damaged to a lesser degree.

It was a remarkable thing to see—in the space of one lopsided suburban block some houses were quite unaffected while houses or shops down the road were completely submerged. But it was not just the people whose houses were inundated who felt the effect of the flood, although, of course, they felt it most cruelly. Everybody in Brisbane was affected just as everybody in Ipswich was affected. Everybody had a shared sense that we were in this together. The spirit of community was palpable as the people of Brisbane gathered themselves. By Friday morning, after the waters had begun to subside, there were armies of volunteers in the flood affected areas.

I will never forget the sight of the Rosalie shops when Tony Abbott and I accompanied Teresa Gambaro, the member for Brisbane, and Jane Prentice, the member for Ryan, two of my colleagues whose citizens had been most directly affected. We saw literally hundreds of people, armed with pumps, brooms and other equipment, cleaning up restaurants, shops and homes, with the sorry detritus of the floods—the smashed furniture, the sodden mattresses and the paraphernalia of people’s lives—lying in heaps on the footpath. The smell of the muddy floodwaters, which
were still about though subsiding, was something that none of us will ever forget. It was something that I remembered because I have lived in Brisbane long enough to remember the 1974 floods. The scenes then were eerily the same, of disrupted lives, destroyed homes and ruined businesses.

Yet that Friday morning, as we walked among the people in Rosalie, there was no sense of despair and there were no recriminations. There was just a gritty, almost cheerful determination to get on with the job, defy the odds and not be overborne by overwhelming circumstances. I remember talking to a couple from Redcliffe who had a ute with a pump on the back of it. I asked them if they were affected and I remember the lady—Terri, her name was—saying to me, ‘No, we live in Redcliffe. We weren’t affected at all. We just came down here. You couldn’t.’ That was the spirit of the people of Brisbane, as in so many other parts of Australia. It was spontaneous, it was generous and it was no nonsense. It was the Australian spirit, the spirit of the volunteer and the spirit to do with a word often used and abused in political rhetoric but I think deserving of use in its proper sense on this occasion—mateship.

One of the few good things to come out of this disaster was how well the leadership of the state and the city responded. Rarely do we see spontaneous and universal acclaim for political leaders. In fact, I think it is one of the real signs of the robustness and health of our Australian democracy that political leaders are so freely mocked. Yet, on this occasion, we saw no cynicism. We saw genuine acclaim for the leadership of the state and the city on a job well done. The handling of the crisis by Premier Anna Bligh was widely and, I believe, fairly judged to have been exemplary. Throughout the emergency she displayed what Ernest Hemingway once called ‘grace under pressure’. The Premier provided both reassurance and empathy in a way, it must be said, the Prime Minister found impossible. Just as impressive was the Lord Mayor of Brisbane, Campbell Newman, who with similar matter-of-fact competency dealt with the destruction of so much of the city’s infrastructure, particularly that like ferry terminals and boardwalks located on or by the river.

But of course the real heroes of the occasion were not the political leaders. They were the volunteers, the SES workers, the police officers, the paramedics, the Defence Force personnel, the Brisbane City Council workers, the community organisations such as the Red Cross which ran evacuation centres and the school communities. The flood occurred the week before school was to go back and yet with barely an exception, as a result of the work of parents, teachers and staff, almost all of the schools in the flood affected area were ready for the commencement of school only a week or so later. And, something politicians rarely do, I want to pay tribute to the role of the media, particularly the radio channels in Brisbane which broadcast news—612, ABC and the commercial station 4BC—and the Courier Mail, all of which fulfilled their role of communicating information to the community in an exemplary manner.

The immediate devastation may have subsided, and we no longer see news of the Brisbane flood on television news channels as we did for days on end, but the need for help and support has not gone away. On the contrary, it is after the immediacy of the emergency has passed and the consequences have settled in that people are left alone and are feeling overwhelmed, distressed and fearful for their future and their children’s future. So as we talk proudly about the character shown by so many of our fellow Australians let us not forget that beneath the stoicism lies deep hurt which we must assuage with generosity and kindness. In fact, the
mood in Brisbane in the past few weeks—as you know, Deputy President Ferguson, Brisbane has always been a friendly city—has been one of kindness and helpfulness. There is a palpable sense of people caring about one another, being conscious of how many tens of thousands of their fellow citizens have been badly hurt and wanting to provide the emotional as well as physical support that they need so badly.

In closing, I express my admiration for the way in which so many of my colleagues fulfilled their high responsibilities as members of parliament and, as such, leaders of their local communities. I have mentioned already Teresa Gambaro, the member for Brisbane, and Jane Prentice, the member for Ryan, but there were many others. I want, if I may, to single out in particular Scott Buchholz, elected only last August as the member for Wright, in whose electorate the epicentre of the devastation in the Lockyer Valley took place. From all I have heard from so many people, Scott Buchholz’s pastoral care for his community, his sharing of their burden and their loss, was magnificent.

Finally, I express my own sympathy for all those who have lost loved ones, lost homes, lost livelihoods or simply lost memories. As I said at the start of these remarks, the third week of January 2011, like the fourth week of January 1974, was a time no one who loves Brisbane will ever forget and equally there will always live in our memories numberless acts of kindness by the great Australian people.

Senator FURNER (Queensland) (3.21 pm)—As a Queensland senator, I firstly offer my deepest condolences to those families of the 22 lost lives in this nation’s greatest natural disaster. Additionally, I extend my condolences to the family of the young man in North Queensland who was trying to ready himself before the onslaught of the state’s most powerful cyclone—Cyclone Yasi. I also acknowledge the enormous effort of our defence personnel, our emergency service workers and so many volunteers in responding to these disasters.

On 11 January, the Queensland Premier, Anna Bligh, declared three-quarters of Queensland a disaster zone. Brisbane, Bundaberg, Dalby, Gladstone, Gold Coast, Gympie, Ipswich, Logan, Maryborough, Rockhampton, Roma, Sunshine Coast, Toowoomba, Warwick and Redcliffe are only a few of the areas affected by this disaster and were declared disaster areas. In my duty electorate of Brisbane, thousands of residents, by Thursday, were fleeing to higher ground with the Brisbane River expected to peak above 1974 levels. Later that week, we found out that the river was not going to peak above 5.45 metres. But the scope of the devastation was still widespread with Brisbane’s population much higher than it was in 1974 and much of the clear land then is now residential area.

The Queensland floods took a massive toll on our state, claiming not only thousands of homes but also the lives of Queenslanders. One example that I can reflect on is the level of water in a small north-western town, just up the road from Brisbane, called Peachester. Only late last year I was there opening the library in the Building the Education Revolution program. The level there was 835 millimetres in the week, which clearly demonstrates the volume of water that was delivered in our state.

Later on in that week I felt compelled to go out into my duty electorate and visit as many constituents as possible to ensure that they were fine, aware of their government entitlements and were recovering. The first area I targeted was Longman. I went to Narangba Valley on the Thursday, followed by Caboolture the following day. I visited the
Narangba Valley with the state member for Morayfield, Mark Ryan, knocking on houses in an estate that backs onto Burpengary Creek. I remember Burpengary Creek quite well, having been a local resident there some time ago. I recall the creek flooding in those times to something greater than just a creek and amounting to a river. Sure enough, as a result of expansion and the urban population of those areas, neighbours were affected in those areas of Narangba Valley. I found neighbours helping neighbours recovering from inundation which had affected their floor coverings and various other types of furniture close to the ground. One such family that, although not affected, rolled up its sleeves and gave a helping hand was Tina and Steve Murnane of Hideaway Close, Narangba. This is just an example, one of many, of the true Australian spirit that was demonstrated in this terribly damaging natural disaster.

Quickly though, as I doorknocked that area, residents turned their anger towards the insurance companies. Some were, under their policies, covered for storm damage only and were later found wanting when they sought to make claims. They found that storm damage did not cover inundation of their homes caused by the flooding of nearby creeks. The next day I visited the residents in Male Road, Caboolture, which is an area that is predominantly acreage and backs onto King John Creek. King John Creek, in that week, flooded the Bruce Highway and shut the highway for a period of time. So it gives you an idea of the extent of the flooding in this particular area. Similar to the residents in Narangba Valley, those residents had not before seen rainfall to the extent that they had received in this particular area and were affected by flood inundation in their homes. Later that afternoon I visited the Caboolture Caravan Park with the state member for Pumicestone, Ms Carryn Sullivan. Equally, the Caboolture River flooded affecting many residents in that particular caravan park who lost many, if not all, of their possessions.

The following week I turned my attention to the seat of Brisbane and in particular the suburbs of Albion and Milton. This is where memories flooded back, having lived through the 1974 floods as a young teenager and a Brisbane born boy helping residents to evacuate their homes in that year. I reflected back to the time when I helped one particular resident in Thistle Street, Lutwyche, when at that time the house bordered Kedron Brook. I recall removing the furniture from the home—an old Queenslander on wooden stumps—and the last piece of furniture removed was a piano before the house slid off its stumps into the river and got washed away.

The stark reality that I saw in 2011 was quite similar to 1974 and proudly, as a Queenslander, that traditional Aussie spirit was not lost or washed away either. People were turning up in their droves to help one another. After meeting with constituents who had had their homes inundated by flood waters, and seeing such destruction in homes and seeing people who had lost everything, I was amazed to see the whole community come together and lend a helping hand. This is the true Aussie mateship that I referred to: mate helping mate. People who were not affected by the floods opened their doors to those who needed a place to stay. Some put their hands up to work in volunteer centres and some were just turned away because the volume of volunteers was too great. Some they did not even know. Some got in there and started shovelling the mud away and some even walked around with cold bottles of drink, sandwiches, food and home-cooked items and handed them out to the volunteers during this time. This is the Queensland and Aussie spirit and the very reason I am proud to be a Queenslander. I saw this Aussie spirit
firsthand when delivering a pallet load of water to the Oxley evacuation centre the week after the flooding of Brisbane. The water was kindly donated by National Foods from the Berri plant at Lytton and my thanks and appreciation go to the operations manager, Peter Finn, who had already the previous week donated some 19 pallets of water to the Brisbane evacuation centre.

There at the Oxley centre, I saw complete strangers—even a handful of backpackers here on holiday—prepared to help their fellow Australians and Queenslanders and going through induction programs to get ready for the daily clean-up ahead of them. That Aussie spirit extended, as it so often does, with the community coming together and offering its generosity in contributing to the Premier’s Disaster Relief Appeal. I saw two amazing acts of consideration—firstly, a fundraiser at Club Pine Rivers in northern Brisbane and, secondly, a huge fundraiser conducted by the Vietnamese community at Bankstown in Sydney.

What started out at Club Pine Rivers as a mere sausage sizzle grew through enthusiasm into a massive event. The outpouring of generosity was just overwhelming—seeing locals and the executive of the club pitching together to make sure they raised money for this appeal. Recognition for the success of this fundraiser goes to the president, Bob Ebborn, to the CEO, Wayne Moffat, and to Peter O’Grady for making this event happen. This is just another fine example of how clubs in Queensland assist their local communities. Additionally, I wish to thank all the Broncos and Lions football players who gave up their time to be involved in the day as well as all the other sporting identities, such as Olympian Jessica Schipper, who appeared in order to assist in raising funds. I also extend my sincere gratitude to the star attraction of the day, the Veronicas—Jessica and Lisa Origliasso—with their brother Julian, for being so accommodating in raising money for this worthy cause. What commenced as a ½ hour visit to the club to assist in the fundraising turned into a much greater involvement, with the girls even offering to be auctioned off as companions for dinner at the club to raise even more money. In total, the event raised $25,600 on the day. In addition to the Club Pine Rivers fundraiser, I am aware that the Vietnamese community of Sydney has been hard at it in raising $140,000. In acknowledging them, I single out Dr Vinh Binh Lieu, head of the Vietnamese-Australian Charity Organisation, and the rest of the organising committee for their amazing efforts.

To assist in dealing with the devastation, the federal government acted swiftly in implementing the Australian government disaster recovery payment through Centrelink, which provided $1,000 per adult and $400 per child for those affected by the flooding. According to Treasury, as of midnight on 2 February, 349,000 claims totalling $411 million had been paid out to affected Queenslanders. The Labor government has also provided assistance to those who are unable to earn an income because of the flooding. We know how hard it is for our working families. The disaster income recovery subsidy is $469.70 per fortnight for singles for a maximum of 13 weeks. Already more than 36,000 claims totalling $16 million have been made for the disaster income recovery subsidy. The federal government is also providing other financial assistance through the state government.

We know it is not going to be an easy task—we have a massive job ahead of us to rebuild flood affected regions. It is estimated that the federal government will need $5.6 billion to help rebuild Queensland in the wake of the floods. As an example of the economic effect of this devastation, trade figures released show that coal exports slid
five per cent in November as the wet weather gathered pace. Flooding has affected more than 40 mines and the Port of Gladstone has abandoned exports. Some of our biggest producers in the coalmining area have suspended sales contracts and production runs until waters recede. Tourism has also been affected by the bad weather and we hope that this crucial part of the economy—particularly crucial in North Queensland—gets back to its feet very soon.

In closing, the Labor government is committed to getting Queenslanders back on their feet after the devastation of the Queensland floods. I believe it is important that we have bipartisan support to assist in rebuilding Queensland, helping people back into their jobs and helping Queenslanders get their lives back on track. Finally, I will steal a quote from the Premier, Anna Bligh:

We are Queenslanders. We’re the people that they breed tough, north of the border. We’re the ones they knock down, and we get up again.

I think that is indicative of all Australians.

Senator IAN MACDONALD (Queensland) (3:34 pm)—I support the motion before the Senate with a mixture of sadness and pride—sadness because of the tragedies that have befallen the people of my home state of Queensland and indeed all of Australia in recent weeks, and pride in the manner in which my fellow Queenslanders have coped and are continuing to cope. It proves yet again that Australians have an innate capacity to confront and overcome adversity with courage, determination and compassion. Like most Australians, my wife and I found it difficult to watch the television coverage of the floods that swamped Central Queensland, Brisbane, Ipswich and the Lockyer Valley in early January. The Brisbane floods left me with a lasting memory of a family—a mum and dad and their young children—trapped on top of their vehicle in swirling floodwaters while a news helicopter hovered helplessly overhead. We learnt later that rescuers were able to save the mother and the child but that the father was lost. He was one of 29 people who lost their lives in this natural calamity and tragedy.

There were many other heartbreaking stories—children torn from their mother’s arms by raging torrents, homes destroyed, precious family heirlooms and memorabilia lost forever and old and infirm people trapped in their homes as rivers rose so dramatically, consuming everything before them. Australia watched in disbelief when a second wave of floodwaters surged down through the peaceful Lockyer Valley, snaking its lethal way through Toowoomba and Grantham and other smaller centres. Again we watched as cars were tossed around like toys and houses were torn from their foundations. My wife and I drove through Central Queensland and saw firsthand the devastating effects that flooding was having on people’s lives and on properties, supply chains, infrastructure and, in turn, local authorities and emergency relief workers.

Two weeks after the Queensland floods, Victorians were faced with their own flood challenge as the drought ended with a vengeance in that state, causing untold damage to towns and rural properties in central and northern Victoria. And again just a few days ago we watched our friends in Western Australia being evacuated from their homes in the path of fierce bushfires south-east of Perth where a total of 48 homes were destroyed, causing immeasurable heartbreak.

It was only this time last week that I and thousands of others who live in north and Far North Queensland from Mackay to Cooktown were battening down in preparation for the imminent arrival of Cyclone Yasi, predicted to be the biggest and most damaging cyclone in living memory. All of us—I have
to confess, somewhat selfishly and guiltily—

were hoping against hope that the cyclone
did not come our way, that it went some-
where else; that, with the notorious unpre-
dictability of cyclones, it did not, in the last
few hours, redirect towards us. Having lived
in a part of Queensland most of my life
where cyclones are common, I have become
used to the threat of cyclones during the wet
season. It is simply a part of life in the north.

In a sense it defines the pioneering spirit
which attracted early explorers to the norther-
n and remote parts of Australia.

We have survived many blows, as we call
cyclones in the north, but this one had to be
taken seriously because of its sheer size and
intensity, with wind speeds estimated to be
up to 290 kilometres an hour. No matter how
many cyclones you have lived through, you
never overcome that two to three hours of
abject terror as cyclonic winds gusting up to
300 kilometres per hour batter your house
and flatten trees in your yard while you are
sitting in pitch blackness with a sound like a
runaway freight train assaulting your home
and your ears. In that situation, you know
what terror is all about.

My wife and I had each other. Many face
these storms alone, exacerbating the fear and
distress that cyclones bring. Where I live we
were lucky. We feel for those further north
who were not quite so lucky. The 400-
kilometre-wide cyclone crossed the coast of
North Queensland around Mission Beach,
Hull Heads, Tully Heads and Cardwell, flat-
tening rainforests and banana and sugar
plants, destroying hundreds of houses and
leaving immeasurable human suffering in its
wake.

I spent the Saturday just past with the
Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott, in-
specting the cyclone-ravaged towns of In-
nisfail and Tully and later Mission Beach,
Tully Heads, Hull Heads and Cardwell. As
we flew into Innisfail, the coastal strip be-
tween Babinda and Cardwell looked as
though a giant scythe had cut everything off
at the base. Whole stands of rainforest had
been stripped bare, thousands of banana trees
and sugar cane stands were flattened and
hundreds if not thousands of houses and farm
sheds were severely damaged, some beyond
repair.

I thank Alf Cristaudo, Chairman of Cane-
growers, and Cameron MacKay, Chairman
of the Australian Banana Growers Council,
for their briefings on the cyclone’s effects on
the banana and sugar industries respectively.
Losses in those two industries alone will
reach an estimated $900 million, with far-
reaching economic consequences for the
thousands of workers and businesses that
rely on those industries for their livelihood. I
was pleased that, while in Tully, Mr Abbott
was able to assure all the people of that re-
gion that the opposition would oppose the
importation to Australia of bananas that do
not have a 100 per cent serious quarantine
clearance. That is what the people of that
area wanted to hear.

I am pleased to announce to all banana
lovers in the country that it will not be too
long before Australian bananas are back on
the shelves. Because of the experiences
through Cyclone Larry and other calamities,
the damage this time to the industry will not
be as severe as previously. As we went
around, I was impressed to see some banana
stalks standing upright where growers had,
the day before the cyclone struck, pruned all
the leaves off the stalks of the banana trees
and the winds had not knocked them over or
broken them off, as happened with most of
those which still had their leaves on them.

During our inspection visit, Mr Abbott
and I met unsung heroes and stoic Austra-
lians at every stop. Smiles had begun to re-
place tears as people faced up to the massive
task of rebuilding their lives, their homes and their economy. Complete strangers became instant friends as victims confronted each other in relief centres run by volunteers and emergency workers.

The relief operation is now in full swing. Power is being restored, water supplies are being reinstated, telecommunications are getting back to normal and highways and access roads are opening. The contribution to the relief and reconstruction effort by over 4,000 soldiers and engineers from Lavarack Barracks in Townsville as well as elements of the Navy and Air Force has been simply magnificent. The sight of a convoy of Army trucks on the Bruce Highway ferrying troops and heavy machinery from Townsville to the Cassowary Coast to help with the clean-up was awe-inspiring and a great comfort to the victims of the cyclone. As shadow parliamentary secretary for the Defence Force and defence support and as a proud North Queenslander I want to thank the men and women of our defence forces for their selfless efforts and tireless work in cleaning up and in giving support to those who suffered the wrath of Cyclone Yasi.

I also take this opportunity to praise and thank the men and women of the Red Cross, the State Emergency Service, Emergency Management Queensland, the Bureau of Meteorology, the Queensland police, Ergon Energy, the Salvation Army, Lions, Rotary and other service clubs, and the church groups, counsellors and innumerable volunteers and individuals who carried out tireless and selfless work during the cyclone and its aftermath. It is practically impossible to identify individuals, and sometimes it is not wise to do so, but without in any way diminishing the heroic work of so many people I do want to mention Tully Red Cross volunteer Noelene Byrne, who typifies the quiet courage, determination and leadership of so many Australians in times of calamity. Noelene worked without sleep for days, ensuring the safety and welfare of victims. It was Noelene who, at the height of the cyclone, went down and corralled evacuees located in one evacuation centre and took them to another, stronger, building only a short time before the first building was completely destroyed by the cyclone. Actions such as this one by Noelene Byrne were repeated right across the board by so many people, and we are indeed grateful and wonderfully blessed to have these people in our community. There were simply so many of them who came to the fore during and after the cyclone.

Everywhere Mr Abbott and I went during our inspection we were inspired by the number of Australian flags and green and gold boxing kangaroo flags that were fluttering on bent flagpoles or hanging from homes that had been completely wrecked. It was as if the people affected were saying to Cyclone Yasi: ‘We will not be beaten. We will be back.’ Those flags expressed that thought ever so clearly and brilliantly. This was yet another example of the resilient strength of human spirit that has made Australia the great country it is.

I should in passing place on record the leadership shown by many of my parliamentary colleagues in those times of calamity. I mention Ken O’Dowd, in the north when the floods hit Emerald and Rockhampton; George Christensen, who had to deal first of all with Cyclone Anthony, which was relatively small in cyclonic terms but nevertheless did impact on the Mackay region; and Ewen Jones, Bob Katter and Warren Entsch, for the work and leadership they showed during and in the aftermath of Cyclone Yasi.

Australia will recover from the tragedies that have confronted the whole nation in recent times and many other challenges that will inevitably confront the nation over the centuries to come. Adversity will only
strengthen us. I want to emphasise that the north is not an inherently dangerous place. It is in fact a great place to live, work and play. We will bounce back, as we have done in the past. The north, with its mineral production, beef cattle, sugar, bananas, other horticultural crops and tourism, makes a very significant contribution to the economy of Australia. North Queensland is a magnificent part of Australia, and the rainforests are as good as they are because they experience rain and get cleaned out every now and again by cyclones, which bring them back even better. Because of the international publicity that this cyclone received before it hit, there will be a bit of a dent on the hard-won reputation of the north as a tourist destination, but I want to assure everybody that it will not be long before the north is back in full swing. Indeed, many parts of the north that were fortunate not to be in the direct path of the cyclone are up and operating again and will continue to provide the magnificent tourism experience for which the north is so well known.

I want to use this debate to call upon all Australians, and indeed my colleagues in the Senate and the House of Representatives, to play their part in rebuilding that part of the north affected by the cyclones by planning now to spend their winter holidays in someplace like Mission Beach, Cardwell, Cairns or Port Douglas and Townsville or the Whitsundays. They are fabulous places to go and there will be some great deals around. As parliamentarians we can all play our part by spending the two or three days we get off as a winter holiday in that part of the world. In doing so you will be sending a message to everyone else in the world as well as—I can guarantee—having a great time yourself. I also urge Australians to eat a bit more sugar and, when the bananas return in two or three months, really get stuck into bananas, because it is in that way that we can all do our bit to help those places and industries recover.

In conclusion, I humbly and with feeling support the motion before the Senate and extend my condolences to the families of all of those who have lost their lives in recent natural disasters in our country.

Senator STEPHENS (New South Wales) (3.52 pm)—I join this motion on natural disasters. My prayers and thoughts and good wishes are with the people of Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and now Western Australia, considering the catastrophes that have befallen all of those states. I particularly acknowledge our Queensland parliamentary colleagues. We have heard several stories this afternoon, and other stories in the media and in other places, about their own personal experiences—their own personal losses as well—and the deep impact that the stories and the losses of their constituents had upon them. As they take a leadership role in the recovery of these devastated areas, I think that it is important that we provide some encouragement to all of you who have to step up in this way. Please remember that we are thinking of you.

We have had extraordinary stories. We have heard some individual stories this afternoon about grief, loss, despair and disbelief and, of course, extraordinary survival. You can combine that with the hundreds of thousands of words that have been written seeking to capture the emotional, physical and structural impact of these natural disasters. But the words that resound in everyone’s contribution are about courage and resilience, and generosity and stoicism, all describing the great national character of Australians. We have seen so much more written and portrayed about the havoc wreaked and the damage done, about the toll on families and communities, environments and infrastructure, businesses and livelihoods, and
economies and institutions. It has been an extraordinary summer. The images that we all hold of this summer are quite awful—etched in our minds for a very long time. We are all mourning. We are mourning many lives and a very significant loss.

This morning we had an ecumenical service for the beginning of parliament. For those who were not able to attend, we prayed for you. I want to read a little prayer for you, if I could:

Our hearts come together at this time of national prayers for all who have suffered. We pray for those who have been bereaved—grant them your comfort. We pray for those whose hearts are broken—grant them your peace in the days ahead. We pray for those who must begin again—grant them strength and hope. We pray for those whose homes have been destroyed—grant them the vision to see new places of refuge and love in the future. We pray for those whose businesses have been devastated—grant them initiative and fortitude in the days ahead.

I think it is very important. It was a very sombre service at the beginning of parliament because everybody had the devastation of the last few weeks very much on their minds.

In contributing to this motion today I would like to focus on the extraordinary role of our community based not-for-profit organisations and the work that they have been doing on the front line during these disasters in shaping the recovery and rebuilding the communities to which they belong. We think about what has been happening. We have already heard some stories today about our sports clubs; our welfare organisations; our arts and cultural groups; our recreation and education groups; our environment groups; our animal welfare groups; our housing associations; and support groups for the carers, the elderly, the frail and the vulnerable. It is very clear that the recovery in flood damaged communities is very dependent on the current and future contribution of our community organisations.

For those of us who are sitting south of the catastrophes, the sense of uselessness that we experience watching the events as they unfolded from the comfort of our safe, dry, cool lounge rooms was very quickly replaced by a sense of action. We saw the flood relief appeal, the telethon broadcast by the Nine Network, the Twenty20 cricket match which galvanised the raising of hundreds of thousands of dollars, the 2011 Australian Open Rally for Relief raising $750,000. As we have heard already today, people wanted to do something and they found ways to respond. I know that there are many large-scale fundraising projects that are being planned: concerts, exhibitions, marathons, swimmathons and bake-offs. To date, we have raised just over $201 million for the Premier’s fund and I know that there is much more to come.

We heard about the volunteers. There were, in fact, more than 55,000 volunteers registered to help clean up Brisbane, with thousands more unregistered volunteers wandering the muddied streets with gumboots and mops. Volunteers from across the country and beyond were flying in to help. This morning I heard of a family from Dunedin who just upped stumps and flew to Brisbane and offered their support. Congratulations need to be extended to Volunteering Queensland, particularly for their efforts in organising and mobilising those volunteers, using new technologies in social media to ensure that people were where they needed to be. The work of our not-for-profit organisations extended beyond the disaster areas, and well beyond any planning and
documentation of effort, because they are often simply responding to community need.

State disaster plans, as we all know, identify the various roles of key agencies. For example, the Salvation Army provides the food at all of the evacuation points, the Red Cross serves to officially record the data of people accessing the evacuation centres and Lifeline provides emotional support to the persons accessing their services. These roles are quite explicit in our disaster management plans, but the countless small and large not-for-profit organisations in our local communities tend to merge into a combined effort. They are everywhere doing everything. They are providing safe shelter, clothes and food; helping people repair or relocate; and reconnecting people with loved ones or supporting them as they grieve for their loss.

There are still many things happening and I want to celebrate and acknowledge that. Relief centres are still being operated in the flooded areas by Vinnies, Anglicare, the Salvos, the Red Cross and others. Some of them will need to operate for quite a long time into the future because many people will not be able to return home for quite a long time. Outside of those centres they are doing so much more. In many places, trained staff and skilled volunteers have been going door to door making sure that people are all right. What they are finding varies enormously. What they are doing is remarkable, especially considering that they are a part of communities and many have experienced their own loss. We know they are at the heart of the response and the recovery efforts, and they are doing whatever is needed to support people affected by the floods, and now by the fires, and they will be there well into the future helping people rebuild their lives and their communities.

Let me share some real examples of community service. Red Cross has been assisting since the first evacuation centre opened on 27 December. More than 1,050 staff and trained volunteers from the Australian and New Zealand Red Cross are on the ground, active in the immediate response and ongoing recovery. Red Cross is providing existing Telecross clients in flood affected areas with extra calls daily to provide reassurance and to check on their wellbeing. The Mission Australia Communities for Children team at Inala have set up and are running a childcare service at the recovery centre that includes specialist trauma staff. Mission Australia have also helped to house a family who lost everything who had been living in the Goodnah caravan park and who have a child with special needs that could not be met in an emergency centre. These organisations have really gone beyond the existing disaster management plans.

The Salvos have fed countless people in shelters and homes as well as emergency workers across Queensland and Victoria. They even managed to provide meals to stranded truck drivers at Coffs Harbour—600 on one side of highway and 300 on other side, all while parked in the stifling heat with no capacity for relief by way of food or water. The Salvos’ emergency teams have been providing grief counselling for those who have experienced significant personal loss.

Let me tell you about Lifeline. Their telephone counsellors volunteered 800 hours over and above their normal shifts to meet additional demand from the Australian community and to cover the Queensland Lifeline centres that were not able to take calls during the crisis. On Friday, 14 January, Lifeline volunteers answered 1,600 calls—the highest call rate on record for Lifeline. Lifeline Queensland have deployed and rotated to the evacuation centres and recovery centres, and outreach teams in affected areas in most need, more than 100 specialist trained community recovery counsellors—and most are
experienced loss and grief counsellors. To
date, they have had more than 2,000 contacts
with people affected by the crisis.

The RSPCA have been there too. They
have set up two emergency animal shelters in
Rockhampton, one of which is still operat-
ing, and they have included in their work
rescue of livestock and companion animals,
humane euthanasia of sick and injured live-
stock and wildlife, lost and found services
for pet owners, a 24-hour emergency line and
an emergency boarding service. They have
been coordinating food drops for livestock
and wildlife carers and for animal shelters,
including the Gympie shelter where the
RSPCA shelter staff were cut off for four
days.

All the major church groups have been
very active in responding to community
need, providing shelter, clothing, food, coun-
selling and support. Rotary and other service
clubs have provided incredible support
across Ipswich and many other towns and
regions in so many ways, from helping pre-
pare for the floods to removal, repair and
support. World Vision Australia has provided
call centre support, office space usage out-
side of Brisbane and advice on responding to
mental health needs during emergencies. Just
this week the Queensland Alliance released a
report, Rising to the challenge, which identi-
fied some of the mental health issues associ-
ated with these catastrophic events and sug-
gested how things could be improved. It is a
very important, perceptive piece of work that
we all need to pay attention to.

After the ecumenical service this morning
one of the diplomatic corps said to me:
‘When you think about New Orleans, what
happened? They declared a state of martial
law for protection. Here, there was a state of
national action. In New Orleans there was a
traffic jam to get out. In Australia there was a
traffic jam of people mobilised to help and
get in.’ That was a perception from someone
not from Australia but who marvelled at the
extent to which Australians have responded.

Can I also talk about the efforts going on
from beyond Queensland. Senator Joyce par-
ticularly touched on the sense of frustration
and helplessness that people who are safe at
home feel while watching all of these things
unfolding. Let me tell you, for example,
what has been happening in my own com-

munity. Of course there are financial appeals
elsewhere—everyone is talking about them;
everyone is trying to help—but in Goulburn
we did something ourselves. Of course we
had an ecumenical prayer service, but after-
wards the civic leaders got together and
launched an appeal. In 10 days, the commu-
nity donated $25,000 worth of practical
goods—kitchen goods, underwear, food,
clothing and sheets; things that we know
could be put in a truck and sent north. We
had an extraordinarily generous contribution.
The Rural Fire Service collected $10,500 in
two days from the community. That is amaz-
ing work.

We have decided to adopt the community
of Dalby and I know that Queensland sena-
tors will be pleased to know that. As we have
been encouraged to do in the south, we have
adopted a community in the north that has
really been devastated because the people
there are very worried that, once the first
flush of response and recovery happens and
the pictures and the stories are off the front
page, they are going to be forgotten. The
community of Dalby will not be forgotten.
Our schools are going to twin with the
schools in Dalby. Our service clubs are going
to connect with the service clubs in Dalby.
Our council will connect with the council in
Dalby. And we will make sure that we can
continue to provide moral, physical and emo-
tional support in the recovery phase.
I also place on record my appreciation, on behalf of all of us, for the amazing galvanisation of effort by our public servants. The Centrelink staff have been phenomenal. They have just blown me away with the way in which they have been so responsive and able to deal with the extraordinary challenges that have been put in front of them. I have not heard one complaint about the disaster recovery payments and I know that my colleagues, as I have asked them, have said the same. Centrelink have been amazing.

I thank the Army Reserve and the Army, our defence forces and everyone who has been there and gone the extra mile. This is the way that you inspire all of us to do what we can and to be part of a national movement that is about recovery and rebuilding. We know as Australians we will endure and I wish you all the best. I express my sincere condolences to those of you who have lost family and friends, as well as those who have lost livelihoods. Know that Australia is with you.

Senator BOSWELL (Queensland) (4.08 pm)—I rise to support all my colleagues on all sides of the house on this motion before the chamber. The floods and Cyclone Yasi have proven—if proof were needed—that our greatest resource is the innate instinct that Australians have to help each other out and to step up to the mark. There were not just one or two heroes around in the days after the floods and the cyclone. There were not just hundreds or even thousands. There were tens of thousands of anonymous Australians being local heroes.

The images of the queues of volunteers with their mops and gloves should be in our minds as we legislators act to make the recovery mobilisation the best, the smartest and the swiftest we can. The parliament has been shown the way by legions of examples of selflessness—many of which have been documented in the media. The media also deserves high praise for the commitment, leadership and courage with which they brought us the stories of these floods and Cyclone Yasi. The faces of key reporters and newsreaders will be etched into our memories of this time, and the networks, producers, editors, photographers, reporters, chopper pilots and all those behind the scenes who handled the logistics to bring us these stories should be congratulated and thanked.

But we do not need to look to anyone famous or powerful for a lead on how to act. We need only to look at the mud army who turned out in Brisbane and Ipswich to help their fellow Australians. We need only to look at the Indigenous boys at the Abergowrie school in Far North Queensland who were isolated for days without power and water. The Bremer River at Ipswich has been gouged by giants who took the silt away with them high above the train tracks, which are themselves flooded. Now commuters look down at the furniture items still caught in the trees and on the slopes way above the river.

It is nearly four weeks since the flood peaked. There were the dramatic and concerning images of frenzied activity in the cleanup that followed. There were piles of flood-damaged property and trucks everywhere. But now if you go back and look up these same streets there is silence and abandonment. Streets are paved with white gyprock dust as the inside drywalls have been gutted and taken out of the houses. There were tens of thousands of anonymous Australians being local heroes.
be seen on fences—who knows where the owners of the hands that were in them are now.

There are streets that lie empty and where houses have only exterior walls but nothing inside—just skeletons. Some have water tanks installed by water-saving residents that are now full of mud and some have dirty solar panels that will never see eye-to-eye with the sun again. In these deserted streets it is odd to see that wrecked letterboxes, all askew and some roofless, are still receiving mail—but there is no-one at home. It is like walking through a crime scene on a massive scale. That is especially so on a brand new estate promising affordable riverside living where some specy houses have been built and not even lived in yet. There is nothing affordable about living there anymore.

There are signs up in these suburbs that have no place in normal suburban life as we know it: ‘Tetanus immunisation’, ‘Mobile laundry—free washing and drying’, ‘Mobile chaplaincy’ and ‘Asbestos removal’. There are a couple of thank-you signs that are now fading. A T-shirt with ‘bugger’ written on it hangs on a fence. An older sign at Fail Park says, ‘Beware of the magpies’—what a safe world that sign belonged to. The only colours amid the drab grey and dusty houses and yards come from the Australian flags that hang defiantly on so many flood-destroyed properties.

The residents have faith that Australia will see them through and that their personal disaster will be recognised and put right because they are Australians. Where are these valiant flag-waving people now? Are they with relatives, friends or work colleagues in caravan parks? It is our duty as legislators to see that they do not remain hidden and that their show of faith and flying of the flag is returned in full measure.

First on the recovery scene is local government and then the state government, with some federal funds being triggered for massive rebuilding and recovery. For there to be meaning in such widespread suffering—and remember that three-quarters of Queensland is a disaster zone—we must design better preparation, assistance, recovery and prevention strategies. To safeguard future lives and property we must vigorously examine and learn from these disasters, just as we did in many ways from the 1974 floods. There will be much to learn from Cyclone Yasi in terms of building codes and the management of utilities, assets and services. Decision makers who preside over development approvals in flood prone areas must be held to account as much as those who may have mishandled water assets.

The generosity of Australians was very evident in the wake of the flooding and Cyclone Yasi. The courage and resourcefulness of emergency services and law enforcement and ADF personnel made a mammoth difference to the recovery effort. All these Australians have shown us the way. It is time to roll up the sleeves if parliaments are to deserve the people they are meant to serve. Legislators should cling like gyprock dust to these people and make sure they are looked after.

Questions remain as to why banks would lend money on uninsurable houses. All these institutions legitimised and profited from others living in flood prone areas. It truly is a crime scene when a brand new estate is heavily inundated, as occurred at Ipswich. Residents in the south-east were told to have confidence in the Wivenhoe Dam holding back extreme flooding. They built and lived on the strength of that confidence. They made lives and families with that confidence. They personalised their homes and landscaped their gardens not knowing, because no-one ever told them or warned them or made laws to stop them, that it was all a
dream that would one day end in a terrible nightmare, taking everything they owned.

The costs are still not in yet. We have only really begun to comprehend the rebuilding and recovery required. It is not just about building a new house over an old site. It is about what job the owner of the house will have if there are no bananas to pick or there is no sugar to mill. It is about how the resident will get to work safely since the roads are so cut up. It is about how the kids will get educated if their schools are badly damaged. It is about how to keep on the teachers, the workers, the doctors and the small business owners so they will underwrite the small towns where so much has been destroyed and there is no money. Queensland will take years to recover. It is not just bricks and mortar; it is multidimensional. Our job is to help make that recovery so good that affected areas will be even better than before.

The government have tried to make much of a levy that will play only a small role in the big task ahead. They are also paying a lot of attention to a carbon tax and a mining tax. These are the two major threats on the horizon for Queensland’s recovery because we are a powerhouse state in mining and agriculture. For that we need infrastructure investment, not taxes and disincentives to invest. We have to get our goods to market without extra costs or we lose our competitiveness, whether it is coal or cabbages.

If the government was serious about getting Queensland back into shape, it would announce an immediate moratorium on any carbon price or mining tax. Queensland, unlike other states, is a decentralised state with a matrix of small communities. The whole state works because of localised private industry. Whether it is mining, agriculture or tourism, roads, dams, rail and port infrastructure link them all together and enable the product to reach its market. Without private industry and sufficient infrastructure these communities cannot exist. New taxes and a disaster zone simply do not mix.

The Queensland Treasurer confirmed that Queensland’s economic recovery has been swamped by the floods, wiping nearly two percentage points from previously expected growth, and that was before Cyclone Yasi. He said:

Our economy will take a hit, wiping almost 2 percentage points off forecast growth …

The biggest hits will come in mining and agriculture, with tourism also facing losses.

Mr Fraser also said royalty income would be hit hardest this year:

Royalties will take a bath – lost production and a rampant Aussie dollar have delivered a $286 million write down this year …

The Queensland Treasurer should make his federal Labor colleagues stop the carbon and mining taxes now and give Queensland a break from disasters.

With regard to the damage done by Cyclone Yasi, banana and cane growers have called for federal and state governments to boost financial assistance to help them recover. They need to increase the size of the low-interest loans, which are now $250,000, or freeze the interest rate at four per cent for six to 12 months to help growers get back on their feet. Banana growers who took out $250,000 to $500,000 disaster relief loans after Cyclone Larry have to worry about servicing them, let alone qualifying for further assistance after Yasi. Other rural leaders are saying that only straight-out grants will help the situation.

The final damage bill to the sugar industry is likely to exceed the $500 million preliminary estimate. The total damage bill for primary producers from the cyclone will top $1 billion. Then there are all the small businesses in the affected towns. They must be looked after as well. They service and rely
on viable farms and a critical mass of population. The flood repair bill for Queensland local councils had already reached $2.2 billion before Cyclone Yasi. Their biggest challenge will be accessing equipment and supplies like gravel, lime, concrete and bitumen spray. They will be competing for supplies with main roads and the private sector, particularly the mining communities. The Queensland Treasurer said the Cyclone Yasi damage bill to mining alone could go over $500 million.

I visited Emerald just after the inundation that displaced thousands and wrecked many farming properties. The Central Highlands Regional Council was declared a disaster area for the third time in one year. Eighty per cent of their roads have some form of damage—and they have 5,000 kilometres of roads. The Central Highlands latest repair bill is likely to top $70 million—more than half the council’s annual budget. I met with the Burnett family. They have lost a $2 million cotton crop and suffered the loss of infrastructure that is worth between $2 million and $3 million. Most growers will have to try to deal with forward contracts of sale for a crop that no longer exists.

I also went to Bundaberg and met with the river front business owners. They stand to lose millions of dollars in personal investment in businesses that they have built up over many years with employees and suppliers, such as commercial fishermen. All of them will be affected. Lorraine and Russell Hausler of Bundaberg Slipways said that it will cost $800,000 for them to rebuild. Ray Foley of Midtown Marinas said that he suffered a $3 million infrastructure loss. Seth Parker, a fish processor, of ASP Holdings has lost $800,000. Somehow, low-interest loans of up to $250,000 are not going to plug the enormous gap. This is the economic environment that the federal Labor government wants to poison further with carbon and mining taxes.

The parliament has a solemn duty to communities who have lost their livelihoods to not repay them with taxes that will prevent them from recovering. There has to be some intelligent, courageous and far-seeing policy action in the insurance area—as well as in the flood mitigation area. Many homeowners believed that they had comprehensive insurance but then they found that it did not cover flooding. This situation must be addressed and, at the very least, policyholders must be clearly informed as to whether or not their policy includes flood insurance. I have flagged the issue of a national insurance pool so that everyone is covered in extreme events. A national disaster fund has also been mentioned as a solution.

There is one crucial aspect that cannot be delayed, and that is the management of waters from the Wivenhoe Dam. There have been too many questions raised about the timing and scale of water release during the flooding. The blacking out of key parts of reports is a sign that the Queensland government is trying to protect itself rather than the rest of Queensland. Yesterday, the Australian reported that the blacked-out pages in the Queensland flood mitigation manual for the Wivenhoe and Somerset dams contain nearly all the key strategies for the Wivenhoe Dam, such as gate settings and water release levels for the days before and during the deluge. The blacked-out table, as reported in the Australian, says:

... Wivenhoe Dam needs to be kept at a level below 75.5m, the level at which the emergency spillway is triggered.

The proposed action is to “retain water in Somerset Dam” and bring the gate open sequence forward to increase discharge from the dam. Somerset, which was finished in 1959 and holds back the Stanley River, was identified in an unrelated
2007 state government report as having cracking and stability issues associated with its main wall. On January 11 and 12, Wivenhoe rose to at least 74.7m, 80cm below the fuse plug or the emergency spillway—a scenario that would have seen an uncontrolled release of thousands of megalitres of water in order to ensure the safety of the dam wall. Should one of the fuse plugs be triggered, the dam should be drained as fast as possible...

This raises two alarming new dimensions: firstly, that Somerset Dam requires some investigation; and, secondly and most alarming, that we came close to the disaster of all disasters, with Wivenhoe on the cusp of being drained in the middle of already devastating floods. These issues must be urgently and openly examined now and not left to a commission of inquiry to report in 12 or 18 months time. We are in the middle of the cyclone season and another disaster could happen. People are worried. People who lease buildings and those who lease from them are worried; they want to know what action is required here in order for them to be confident that the dam release was handled properly. This has to happen urgently: it has to happen in the next two or three weeks. Leaving this as an unanswered question is causing everyone a great deal of concern.

Senator MOORE (Queensland) (4.27 pm)—It is an honour to be a part of the debate on this motion in the Senate, which is designed and intended to bring all senators together to acknowledge the impact and range of natural disasters that have struck across our nation. There is not a state that has escaped the impact. The key aspects of these disasters are happening in my home state of Queensland, in northern New South Wales, in Victoria and in Western Australia. They are the ones that are happening now, and we see that. But the citizens and the senators who represent other states in our nation have also been impacted by these natural disasters. They have watched, as all of us have done, the media coverage of the pain, the destruction and the hope of so many families across our nation.

As a Queensland senator, I want to concentrate on what has happened in my state and to begin by acknowledging the 36 families in Queensland for whom the destruction has been not just about the loss of material things but about the loss of a family member. All of us in parliament want to say to those families: we acknowledge your loss and we give you our greatest sympathy. As we rebuild—we know we are rebuilding; so many senators have talked about the processes that are in place to rebuild—the towns and infrastructure and as we rebuild communities, your loss will stay in our minds. I think it is something that Australians share. For every family member we have hope that their future and that of the rest of their family will be great and that they will be able to remember that the community was with them and that their governments, their parliaments, were with them as well.

In this afternoon’s debate we have heard many senators talking about the amazing stories—and they are amazing in the true sense of the word—of what has occurred. I do not think anyone can forget the images they have seen in the media. They certainly cannot forget the stories that people have shared with them about what has happened and they cannot forget their own responses and the stories from their own families.

I stood on the cliffs at New Farm in Brisbane and watched my Brisbane River rushing forward. I have never seen the Brisbane River in that mode and I hope never to see it like that again. We stood on the hill on the night as we had been told that the peak was coming and that we should be very careful. We made our own preparations and checked that our families were safe. I think Telstra
did a marvellous job because they were overworked, as people were using the internet and mobile phones across the nation and internationally trying to ensure that their families were safe. There were over a hundred people in our group standing on the hills at New Farm and that was reflected in other high spots across Brisbane. There was a silence. People were not speaking. They were in awe of what was going on below them. A couple of people were quietly crying because they could see personal possessions going down the Brisbane River. For each piece of furniture, for each pylon, for each tank, for each boat that we saw rush down in front of us, all of us knew that the piece of detritus belonged to someone—a family, a community.

It reminded us of what had gone on before, because on that very same day we had seen and heard and been confronted by the news of what had happened in my own hometown, Toowoomba, and following down the range to the people of the Lockyer Valley. We saw images of what had happened at Murphy’s Creek and Grantham and related communities going through to Lowood, down the river to where it hit Ipswich and beyond. We had seen to our horror something for which no-one could prepare or plan. Every local government in our state has a disaster preparation plan. We have seen them tested, we have seen them tried, but no-one could possibly prepare for what happened in Toowoomba and at the lower parts of the range on that day.

As we stood at New Farm those memories were with us because we were learning bit by bit what had gone on before across Queensland. We had watched what had happened over the whole month in communities such as Rockhampton and Dalby further out in the Darling Downs. We had heard about forced evacuations in our state for the first time since World War II where small western communities had no option for their safety but to leave their homes, often not willingly but knowing they had to do so to put the safety of their own families first. There were the wrenching scenes of young people and old people being taken away from their homes in places like Theodore and the Condamine and the heartbreak of leaving behind their animals. One of the stories we hear often is about the effect on family pets. Many of us know how important our pets are to us. Talking with people in the evacuation centres in Brisbane and hearing about the stories from the people who had been evacuated across south-western Queensland, one of the ongoing comments and fears was what had happened to their pets that they had left behind—just one part of the loss.

The stories that we heard were about what had been lost and consistently, when people were talking to me, there was still an element of shock. I think that continues in many ways today, particularly when we consider the loss of life that occurred. The people and the local council in Toowoomba are rebuilding the town, they are rebuilding the businesses and they are making sure that the flood preparations are in place for when something happens again. But the overwhelming concern is that lives were lost on that day in Toowoomba. I do not think many people have fully come to accept that it happened, but the communities have come together. I have been watching the local media through the last couple of weeks and, every time there is a funeral coming up with a celebration of the life of someone who has been lost, the local media talk again about how their community is sharing with the local family, understanding what they have suffered and hoping to work together into the future.

We have heard many stories and we will continue to hear them. I want to share one from talking with a principal from a very
small local primary school, asking how they were going to cope in that school with the class who were going into grade 1 because one of the little girls in that class was not going to be turning up for school this year. She and other members of her family were lost in the floods below the range.

People do talk about how they are going to move into the future. We have already heard senators commend the amazing action of our community groups and the marvellous emergency services. When you see those orange vests coming towards you, you know that help is at hand, and not just help but trained and professional help. There is a sense of security and hope that they are going to be with you. The other day I talked to soldiers at the Enoggera Barracks, many of whom had been sent out to the Lockyer Valley. Some of them were talking to their mates who were going out post Yasi in the north. They were welcomed into the communities who were facing a lack of facilities, a lack of buildings and homes having been destroyed. The welcome given to the military personnel—as they came to share with the local community how they could rebuild and to sense the solidarity there on the ground and experience the relationships built under emergency situations—will continue. The communication will continue. We have all seen photographs of the township of Grantham. I do not think Grantham has ever received the notoriety that it has received during this emergency. But that township will be remembered.

As we have heard from previous senators, it is important that all of us involved in this discussion acknowledge that the relationship that we are now forming with the people who have had losses must continue. It is all too easy to share compassion and interest and be completely focused on an area in emergency circumstances and then, as the next day comes and the next need for action comes, forget the people that we have been dealing with. A message from this parliament must be that that will not happen. The ongoing relationship with these places and these people must be exactly that, ongoing. We have seen the devastation and we must now work together to ensure rebuilding for the future. I know that emails, text messages and Facebook exchanges are going between the people who are in these places and those who have come to help them and I hope that will continue. With communities all across the country there has been the process of twinning or bonding with the communities that have suffered. We must make sure the affected communities know that work will continue. That is also one of the things that we need to look at in rebuilding the future.

In the north of Brisbane there has been a wonderful coming together of people to ensure that schools had the facilities needed for young people. Right at the end of this we had the first day of school. Probably all of us in this chamber can just remember our first day of school. It is a bit hard for some of us to dredge up the memories, but we know it is an exciting, wonderful day for most children and their parents. We saw images in the media of children at St George getting into small boats and being ferried across the river so they could get to their school. We know that in Brisbane a number of schools have not been able to return to their own school and have had to share facilities. So one of the real concerns was the impact on young people of not being able to go to a place where they do feel safe and secure and going somewhere that is different; and not having the things that they need to start school, like uniforms, bags and books. I want to talk about a particular group—and I know that in a number of places this happened—around the Caboolture area who got together and decided that they would adopt some schools
in Western Queensland who had been affected and make sure that backpacks, school books and the things that you need to start school were made available. They wanted to ensure that at least the kids and the teachers in the schools would have something so they could have a place where they could restart, a place where they could put the suffering and loss in their past and look at moving into the school year. That was a practical way to respond.

That kind of spontaneous community activity was bursting out all over our country and we acknowledge that in this motion. The Senate acknowledges the amazing work of the military, the emergency services and the local government areas and in a special way the work of local community members who thought they could do something to assist, often working with NGOs and often starting something up in their own kitchens. A wonderful story that came out was of a woman who began baking originally because she needed to do something because the confronting images were affecting her so badly. She felt she had to take some action. So she began baking and then she got her friends together and they provided food to a whole lot of the volunteer workers across the region. These people were working together to support, to help. I know that when the volunteers received that food it was a real boost to their energy as well as their enthusiasm so that they could keep going, given the scenes that they were confronting were so extraordinarily devastating.

On the original big volunteer day in Brisbane there were the images of the people who came together from all over south Queensland. Later in the week they came from all over Australia. We have amazing stories of people who came up from Sydney to help in Toowoomba. We have all those people who gathered together and gave their time. The image of the volunteers walking across a walk-bridge to the buses that were going to take them out to the various suburbs that needed help was graphic evidence of the way that the community got together to volunteer their time and effort and their financial resources to start the rebuilding and to ensure that the people who had lost possessions would feel that there were people who wanted to help and support them.

The volunteering organisations must be commended. They are an intrinsic part of Australia’s community and this has been the time that they have been most publicly on show. I know from talking to the people who were trying to clean out their homes and recoup their losses that seeing the immediacy of the response gave them some hope in a very dark hour. One of my clearest memories is of seeing a family walking down to the lower parts of New Farm that were affected quite badly by mud and the destruction. Here was a little girl of about 11, in full gumboots with her own personal shovel, who had decided that she was going to go down and help. That image reflects so much the spirit that was there in the volunteer services and it gave such a moment of joy to the people that she was there to help. And she did use that shovel! When I spoke to her later in the day, she was a very tired but happy little girl. So she was able to make a difference.

Every small bit helps—I think that is the message for the wider community. Anything that you can do and anything that you can contribute will be most gratefully received and will be used. Certainly that is the message from the various funds that have been set up. The state disaster fund in Queensland has received an amazingly generous range of donations, and other senators have talked about the innovative ways of raising money and awareness. But it must continue because the need is great. I think each day the need continues to be recalculated as we find more of what is actually going on and we see that
there is more of a need for so much help and so much assistance into the future.

In this place over the next few months there will be a chance to talk about more specific incidents of support, activity and also need and I think it will be important that that discussion continues. However, it has been important that we commend today the work that has been done particularly by the volunteers and by those people who have seen where they can best assist but not intrude. Certainly in the past, at times when we have seen cases where there has been sadness or disaster, some people have felt as though there has been an intrusion into their privacy by the work that has been done. Over the last couple of weeks we have seen that in this process people have been most sensitive to that and they have negotiated with the local people, the local communities and the local councils to see where they can best be used. So the message is that that must continue.

There will be further debate. We will have our differences in this place about the best way the government should act for work into the future. That is a very sure thing. There will be disagreement in the future. But I think the focus of today’s motion is, as I said, to bring us together so that we as a Senate can be seen to say to the people of Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia in particular, ‘We have heard your need. We have seen the sorrow and devastation that you are suffering, and we as your parliament want to listen and we will respond.’ I think that is a really important role for us to take. The stories will make us stronger in the future because they are so positive. I think they should be celebrated. The loss of people who have lost family members must be grieved, and we share in that grief.

In the future I am sure that there will be lessons to be learned. That is one thing that has happened consistently in Australian history. Where there has been damage and disaster, through the sorrow we have learned how better to plan responsive moves, how better to have government respond and how better to work effectively to redevelop infrastructure, which must happen. Today should be a way for the community to learn that our Senate can be unified and we can share effectively with our community.

Senator MASON (Queensland) (4.46 pm)—I begin by commending Senator Moore on yet another excellent parliamentary contribution. As part of a generation that watched revolutions and wars unfold on television, it always seemed to me that natural disasters happened elsewhere, usually a long, long way away. Not that Australia has ever been immune to natural disasters. Sure, we have had our floods, fires and cyclones. But the loss of life was much more in earthquakes in Pakistan or floods in China or tsunamis in Indonesia. But with the media revolution of the digital age—Twitter, mobile phones and the internet—we really are a much smaller world. There is no escaping human connection. Our common humanity is not only emotional and biological; it is now graphic. Our sense of community has grown with the communications revolution. There is no escaping natural disasters now anywhere in the world. We all feel the impact of natural disasters. They are no longer some vague abstraction. Fox News broadcasting from the Avenue of the Americas in New York City was relaying shots taken just down the end of my street. The world is changing. If it is not a global village it is at least an international neighbourhood.

Day after day the Brisbane River swelled and when I looked from my place in Teneriffe just around the river bend from New Farm where Senator Moore was it
looked like there were at any given time dozens of large crocodiles just below the surface of the brown, murky water of the Brisbane River. The river carried away thousands of trees, which were then followed by boats and then pontoons. I even remember a restaurant floating by. The river carried away houses and homes, businesses and livelihoods, memories and, of course, lives. We watched a raging river in total quiet. Senator Moore was right: we were awestruck. I thought I would never see soldiers in my street. And yet, when we lost power and torches shone and candles burned, the Australian Army arrived to sandbag and, wherever there were gaps, they gladly filled them in.

While the damage bill in Brisbane is enormous, other parts of the state were much worse hit. When news.com.au superimposed a map of the Queensland floods, the area flooded was greater than England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland combined. It really was a catastrophe. Queenslanders in Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley were very badly hit. So were Central Queenslanders in Emerald and Rockhampton. For all those people, the flood must have seemed of biblical proportions.

The same connectedness and sense of community that all of us experienced as the floods unfolded unleashed an amazing outpouring of community spirit as tens of thousands of people eagerly and cheerfully volunteered to help. They volunteered to help not just friends and neighbours but, in most cases, complete strangers. It says so much about the spirit of my state. It is said that this is the most costly natural disaster in our nation’s history. It will clearly take billions of dollars and months, if not years, for homes, livelihoods and lives to be rebuilt. The people of Queensland performed magnificently under the most extraordinary of circumstances. Right across the world, Queenslanders won admiration for their pluck, their toughness and their great spirit. With all that said, my heartfelt thanks and admiration go to the people of Queensland. Queenslanders are different, and we are proud of that. I hope we never suffer these trials began but, if we do, I know my state and its people will overcome.

Senator TROOD (Queensland) (4.52 pm)—Queenslanders have had several tough months. For much of the summer we have been ravaged by nature’s fury. After the extended pain from years of drought, we have had to endure floods that have affected large areas of the state and, as recently as the last two weeks, have had to experience two cyclones—Anthony and the very catastrophic Yasi. While I imagine there are historical precedents for this succession of natural disasters, few of us in Queensland can easily recall when they might have been. But while we live in Queensland, and while we have confronted our own severe weather conditions, it is appropriate in this debate that we also acknowledge that other parts of the country have been suffering in recent weeks and in recent days. I extend my sympathy to my Victorian and New South Wales colleagues for the floods that have affected their states, and to my West Australian colleagues I extend my concern for the destructive bushfires that have so destroyed homes in and around Perth.

There is little doubt that in Brisbane the summer of 2011 will long be remembered for the catastrophic flood that inundated the city. But long before that occurred, other Queenslanders in places well removed from the capital had already had to face some of nature’s extremes. In places such as Emerald and Rockhampton, in the surrounding towns of Central Queensland and in the south, in the smaller communities such as Dalby, Chinchilla and, of course, in Senator Joyce’s own town of St George, the impacts from the
floods were massive. In Theodore in Central Queensland and in Condamine further south, floodwaters reached record peaks and both towns had to be fully evacuated. In Condamine it happened twice. Across regional Queensland, houses were inundated, businesses destroyed and lives turned upside down by a massive body of water that just seemed to keep coming. Personal and commercial costs are massive and, like other parts of Queensland affected by the floods, these communities will take years to recover. If they are to do so confidently, they will need the support of all levels of government, not least federal government.

As the floods inundated the regions, the optimists amongst us dared to think that the worst of these disasters might be over. How wrong we were. Nature had more to give. On 10 January, an intense rain depression dumped massive amounts of rain in around the Darlings Downs, just west of Toowoomba, again with catastrophic consequences. The rain created what locals called an ‘inland tsunami’. In a very short time an unbelievable torrent of water cascaded through the city overflowing the watercourses and coursing through its usually quiet and picturesque streets. The city was ravaged. And just as quickly as it had risen, it was gone, leaving two people dead and Toowoomba itself severely battered and bruised. After that, the waters washed down the Dividing Range to wreak havoc on the small communities of the Lockyer Valley—Murphy’s Creek, Withcott, Helidon and Grantham, among others.

This condolence motion allows us to remember in particular the 22 people who lost their lives in this epic national and natural tragedy. It also allows us to recall that, even now, seven people are missing, feared lost. The floods did not discriminate. Those who died were young and old, workers and retirees, mothers and fathers, and sons and daughters. As accounts of the ways they lost their lives emerged, it was clear that almost all were caught off guard. They had little notice of the peril they faced. So quickly did the water rise, and with such speed and ferocity, that many had little time to escape and little chance to prepare. As tragic as this is, there can be little doubt that the death toll would have been a great deal higher had ordinary men and women not displayed extraordinary reserves of courage and bravery in their efforts to save others.

Having visited many of these communities, almost everyone has a story of survival and many acknowledge that they have been lucky. It is important here to acknowledge the heroic efforts of Queensland’s emergency services, the pilots of the helicopter rescue services such as the RACQ, the Army Black Hawks that responded so quickly to calls for help, and even the helicopter of the Seven Network organisation. Some of these rescues—out of trees, off roofs, from sinking cars, in the rain and all, increasingly, in the dark—were truly the stuff of which legends are deservedly made. These communities owe an enormous debt of gratitude to those who risked so much to save others. Many of the rescuers say that they were just doing their job, but in many cases it was a great deal more than that. They took enormous risks to save others. In most cases the people were complete strangers. In due course, I hope they will receive appropriate recognition.

After the trauma, havoc and tragedy of these events in the Lockyer Valley, the summer drama moved downstream as the floodwaters inundated Ipswich and, of course, Brisbane. There is now a debate as to whether the flooding in Brisbane might have been mitigated by a more appropriate management of the flood mitigation program through the Wivenhoe Dam. In due course, the Premier’s commission of inquiry will
determine the facts. I welcome the inquiry, although I feel considerable regret that the Premier did not strive for a better political balance in selecting the members of the inquiry panel. It would have been a far wiser response to the trauma the community has experienced.

Whatever the findings of the inquiry, there are some things we already know or can safely and accurately speculate about. We know that the costs of this summer flooding and now the cyclone have been extraordinary, not only to individuals but to Queensland and the nation. As I said, 22 people died in the January floods but, since the flooding began in November, 35 people have actually lost their lives. At its peak in Queensland, riverine flooding covered 500,000 square kilometres—the combined area of France and Germany. Across the state, 200,000 people were directly affected by the floods. 260,000 households in South-East Queensland lost power and more than 4,000 people were in evacuation centres. In Brisbane, 11,900 homes and 2,500 businesses were submerged and another 14,000 houses and 2,500 businesses were partially covered by water.

Economic loss to Queensland is expected to be around $2 billion across the mining, agriculture, retail, tourism, rail and road transport industries. A further $2 billion of agricultural produce has been destroyed—wheat, cotton, citrus fruit, vegetables and sugar cane. Coal export losses alone are estimated at $480 million per week. Once again, the people of North Queensland have had to endure a devastating national tragedy—Cardwell, Tully, Mission Beach and Ingham are amongst the most severely affected communities. The impact on agriculture across the north has been widespread—the banana industry, the sugar industry, aquaculture and tourism have all been widely affected.

As we reflect on the massive costs to the community of this summer of extreme weather, some things are clear. I will remember forever the determination, the resolve and the calm stoicism in the way Queenslanders everywhere dealt with the traumas affecting their communities. Not surprisingly, some found the challenges too much. Who among us could say that they might not also have found it too much? Those who have been severely traumatised will need our support well into the future. As I went round the devastated communities, around the suburbs of Brisbane and around the Lockyer Valley at Grantham and Murphys Creek, I was struck by the resilience, good humour and determination of the people. People who had lost all seemed always to think that others had lost more. Despite everything, there was a grim optimism—an expectation that, notwithstanding everything that had happened, somehow everything would be okay. As senators, I believe we have a responsibility to see that that optimism is not disappointed.

Similarly, everyone who lived through this disaster could not help but be impressed by the extraordinary generosity of the community. There were the volunteers of the emergency services, the Queensland SES, the council workers, the community groups and we should not forget the members of the Australian Defence Force. But it would be a travesty if we did not acknowledge the massive contribution from those whose lives were only lightly touched by the floods and now the cyclone—all those who wanted to volunteer. Most people could not do enough for those who were amongst the most severely affected. Neighbours helped neighbours, but what was perhaps more remarkable was the willingness of thousands and thousands of strangers to come out and help, to respond to the distress of others just because they wanted to help.
No doubt many of us have stories of the way people were willing to assist. I recall turning up on Sunday, 16 January, at Sir Fred Schonell Drive in St Lucia, not far from where I live, to a scene of utter devastation. Rubbish which had been people’s lives was piled high on either side of the street. It was a continuous pile of indistinguishable items of junk. There I met Lauren from Wagga and her family. They had been on holidays in Noosa and, while there, had watched the events in Brisbane and decided they could not continue their holidays. They drove themselves down to Brisbane, they checked into the emergency centre in North Brisbane and they were bussed to St Lucia where they spent a day in the mud cleaning out the houses of people they did not know. There was also Marty Johnson, who lived in North Brisbane and was completely unaffected by the floods, but who decided that the best thing he could do was go down to the local Budget office and hire a tip truck. He spent the next four days ferrying junk and rubbish from affected suburbs to tips around Brisbane. These were truly remarkable examples of generosity and they were repeated right around the state. These are unselfish actions of which I think we can be immensely proud.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the strength of the leadership provided by our elected community officials across Queensland. Premier Bligh has been said to have had what might be called ‘a good flood’—in other words, to have been distinguished in the way in which she led the state. I confess that I am rather less enamoured of her performance which has, of course, been competent, but which has also been relentlessly partisan and political.

No less deserving of recognition have been the roles played by the representatives of local government across the state. Almost all have performed exceptionally and acted in the best interests of their communities. There are too many to recognise, but some deserve attention—the Central Highlands Regional Council, led by Peter Maguire; the Rockhampton Regional Council, led by Brad Carter; the Toowoomba Regional Council, led by Mayor Peter Taylor; the Western Downs Regional Council, with Ray Brown; the Ipswich City Council, with Paul Pisasale; and finally, of course, the Lord Mayor of Brisbane, Councillor Campbell Newman. He without doubt lived up to his nickname of ‘Can-do’ Campbell. Councillor Newman and his council did much of the heavy lifting required to ensure that the impact of the floods in Brisbane was minimised and, after the floods had passed, that the city moved to a recovery plan as soon as possible.

We should also recognise the work of our parliamentary colleagues in the House of Representatives, Teresa Gambaro in the seat of Brisbane and Jane Prentice in Ryan among them. I especially want to mention Mr Scott Buchholz, the newly elected member for the new seat of Wright. Scott’s seat covers the Lockyer Valley, which bore the costly brunt of these terrifying storms and the floods that followed. As I have seen for myself, he performed magnificently, providing the kind of constant aid and support that a community has a right to expect of its members of parliament. Every one of these elected representatives offered distinguished examples of civic leadership.

We rightly mourn the excesses of nature. In the words of Dorothea Mackellar, we mourn the fury of the ‘flooding rains’ which can exact such a massive toll on our community. We especially mourn those who lost their lives so tragically and traumatically. The task we in this place now face is to do all we can to help rebuild the destroyed communities, to help them recover, as best they can, all they have lost. In doing so, we will help to renew and give promise for the future so that when the next floods and cy-
clones come, as surely they will, we will have learnt some lessons. In doing so, we will be as ready as we can be to face the natural challenges of living on a continent which, for all its beauty and indeed for all its grandeur, constantly tests those of us who choose to live here. I commend the motion to the Senate.

Senator CAROL BROWN (Tasmania) (5.09 pm)—I rise to make my contribution to the debate on the condolence motion and to acknowledge with great sadness the devastation caused by the recent natural disasters in Queensland, Western Australia, New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania. We have had floods, Cyclone Yasi and bushfires. The floods this summer mark one of the greatest natural disasters to ever hit Australia. The damage sustained was catastrophic. Whole towns and communities were destroyed. People’s lives were torn to pieces. This was truly a natural disaster of momentous portions, shattering communities. Queensland’s capital Brisbane was brought to a standstill. City streets were turned into rivers, the CBD was turned into an inland sea, and people’s lives were ripped apart. The floodwaters tested the emotional strength of everyone involved. As the Queensland Premier, Anna Bligh, said during the darkest days of the disaster:

This weather may break our hearts but it will not break our will.

This statement exemplifies what is truly remarkable about Australians. We are strong-willed people who, throughout history, in the face of some truly great adversities, have always pulled together and these devastating floods are no exception. As is the Australian way, in times of need we witness extraordinary examples of mateship. Our fellow Australians show the true meaning of the Australian spirit by pitching in and helping out their fellow countrymen and women. We have heard amazing stories of friends, neighbours and complete strangers pitching in to help each other against the rising floodwaters. Last week I heard the Treasurer, Wayne Swan, talking of people driving thousands of kilometres to volunteer in Brisbane and we heard today senators speaking about what they have witnessed—complete strangers going out and helping, taking time out of their holidays or, as we heard from Senator Trood, hiring trucks to help clear the streets.

The damage was not limited to roads, houses, farms and railways; unfortunately, during the floods lives have been lost. Heartbreakingly, people have tragically lost loved ones and some people are still missing. As senators in this place have said, we pass on our heartfelt condolences to all families and friends who have lost loved ones during the floods. Our thoughts go out to them in what is no doubt an incredibly difficult time.

While the floodwaters have had a significant impact across Queensland, other parts of Australia have not been immune either, with large areas of New South Wales, Victoria and my home state of Tasmania being affected. One of my colleagues in Tasmania, the federal member for Lyons, Mr Dick Adams, has been working particularly hard to visit all flood-affected areas. He has also had the Attorney-General, the Hon. Robert McClelland, visit the sprawling electorate of Lyons, to inspect the damage caused by the floodwaters.

In light of the damage sustained in Queensland by the floods and the establishment of the Premier’s flood disaster fund, the Tasmanian state government have been undertaking fundraising, as have other state governments and many organisations and individuals. On 11 January, the Tasmanian Premier announced that the state government would match all money raised by Rotary, dollar for dollar up to $250,000. Since the Premier’s fundraising announcement, a number of community groups and organis-
tions have begun efforts to take up the Premier’s offer to match fundraising. Also, 21 dedicated Tasmanian State Emergency Service volunteers have travelled to Queensland to assist with rescue and safety work in flood-affected areas, as well as nine Tasmanian Fire Service workers and one full-time coordinator. Stories such as these are commonplace around Australia at a time when fellow Australians are suffering and in need. The level of community spirit and support shown by the public is extraordinary. For the work undertaken by defence personnel, the SES and all the volunteers involved, not only in the support effort to fight the floodwaters but also in their work assisting in the clean-up of the affected areas, we thank you for your efforts.

In response to the high level of destruction caused by floodwaters, the federal government has announced a well-balanced and comprehensive response to help flood-affected communities rebuild roads, bridges, railway lines and public facilities. In the past couple of weeks we have again seen the full force of Mother Nature in North Queensland coping with the full brunt of category 5 Cyclone Yasi.

In more recent days, Victoria has again been on the receiving end of large unexpected downpours resulting in widespread flooding through the Melbourne CBD and parts of Gippsland—again, sadly, with loss of life. As well, Perth has suffered devastation with the loss of over 60 homes from bushfires. Our thoughts and support go out to all those people affected by these natural disasters.

As I finish my remarks today I want to reiterate what the Prime Minister has said to people affected by natural disasters: these are indeed incredibly tough and difficult times, but we are here for you. We will do what is necessary to support you so that you can rebuild your lives. We will rebuild. Now is your time of need. We will be there for you in the recovery and the rebuilding of your communities. I again give my heartfelt thanks to the volunteers assisting in the clean-up and I extend my deepest sympathies and condolences to those affected by these terrible natural disasters.

Senator HUMPHRIES (Australian Capital Territory) (5.15 pm)—I rise to identify strongly with those Australians who, during a savage summer, have endured trial by water and fire. I speak of those in Victoria who have endured weeks of slow-moving floodwaters which have isolated communities and starved businesses of their lifeblood; I speak of those in Western Australia whose homes in the last few days have been destroyed by bushfires, against the ironic backdrop of flooding across much of the rest of the nation; I speak of those in flood-affected regions such as Tasmania, whose crises have been very real but who have been largely overlooked by a nation distracted by bigger tragedies; and I speak of countless small businesses, not necessarily inundated by floodwaters but just as certainly crippled by the impact of the floods on their communities and marketplaces.

As I finish my remarks today I want to reiterate the Prime Minister’s offer to match fundraising. Also, 21 dedicated Tasmanian State Emergency Service volunteers have travelled to Queensland to assist with rescue and safety work in flood-affected areas, as well as nine Tasmanian Fire Service workers and one full-time coordinator. Stories such as these are commonplace around Australia at a time when fellow Australians are suffering and in need. The level of community spirit and support shown by the public is extraordinary. For the work undertaken by defence personnel, the SES and all the volunteers involved, not only in the support effort to fight the floodwaters but also in their work assisting in the clean-up of the affected areas, we thank you for your efforts.

In response to the high level of destruction caused by floodwaters, the federal government has announced a well-balanced and comprehensive response to help flood-affected communities rebuild roads, bridges, railway lines and public facilities. In the past couple of weeks we have again seen the full force of Mother Nature in North Queensland coping with the full brunt of category 5 Cyclone Yasi.

In more recent days, Victoria has again been on the receiving end of large unexpected downpours resulting in widespread flooding through the Melbourne CBD and parts of Gippsland—again, sadly, with loss of life. As well, Perth has suffered devastation with the loss of over 60 homes from bushfires. Our thoughts and support go out to all those people affected by these natural disasters.

As I finish my remarks today I want to reiterate what the Prime Minister has said to people affected by natural disasters: these are indeed incredibly tough and difficult times, but we are here for you. We will do what is necessary to support you so that you can rebuild your lives. We will rebuild. Now is your time of need. We will be there for you in the recovery and the rebuilding of your communities. I again give my heartfelt thanks to the volunteers assisting in the clean-up and I extend my deepest sympathies and condolences to those affected by these terrible natural disasters.

Senator HUMPHRIES (Australian Capital Territory) (5.15 pm)—I rise to identify strongly with those Australians who, during a savage summer, have endured trial by water and fire. I speak of those in Victoria who have endured weeks of slow-moving floodwaters which have isolated communities and starved businesses of their lifeblood; I speak of those in Western Australia whose homes in the last few days have been destroyed by bushfires, against the ironic backdrop of flooding across much of the rest of the nation; I speak of those in flood-affected regions such as Tasmania, whose crises have been very real but who have been largely overlooked by a nation distracted by bigger tragedies; and I speak of countless small businesses, not necessarily inundated by floodwaters but just as certainly crippled by the impact of the floods on their communities and marketplaces. I speak most particularly of the people of Queensland, whose state has been battered and buffeted in a way without precedent in my lifetime. I speak of Queenslanders, going about their business, travelling in their cars, sitting in their homes, asleep in their beds, who suddenly were caught in the jaws of a watery death. These people were doing things in places where they might have expected to be safe. Sadly, they were not. It is a reminder of the capricious nature of our environment, our capricious climate and the need for us to be aware at all times that as Australians we may be called upon to assist people in extraordinary circumstances.
There are many sobering statistics about these natural disasters. This is the biggest natural disaster in Australia’s history. The cost of cleaning up and repairing the damage, not just to public infrastructure but to private infrastructure, will no doubt be well in excess of $10 billion. It will take years to restore damaged infrastructure and repair the economy. In some places an entire recovery may not be possible. In the last two months we have had at least 35 people confirmed dead and another half-dozen or so are not yet accounted for. In Brisbane, at the flood’s peak, 11,900 homes and 2½ thousand businesses were completely flooded, and another 14,700 homes and 2,500 businesses were partially flooded throughout 67 suburbs of that city. Eighty-six towns and cities across Queensland were affected. We had 500,000 square kilometres of Queensland, at one stage or another, threatened with inundation—three-quarters of the state, an area larger than France and Germany combined. It is extremely concerning to face a challenge of that kind, and at least as concerning to know that it will take so long and so much effort and money to restore to the people of those communities what they have lost, if that is ever possible.

I want to put a couple of points on the record in today’s debate. I express my appreciation and gratitude to the many people who contributed to the response to the crisis. Many have spoken in this debate already about the work of emergency service workers and volunteers. We have a tremendously professional resource in these people, and I acknowledge that as well. I thank officers of government, particularly people in the federal government offices of the Attorney-General and the Minister for Human Services, who kept a flow of information to my office, in my capacity as the coalition spokesperson on emergency services, allowing a good level and quality of information to be available to colleagues in affected parts of the country and giving them accurate information to pass on to their constituents. I also thank officers in the federal government for being responsive to a number of issues raised by local members who were affected and who had members of their communities affected directly. It goes without saying that a disproportionate number of coalition electorates were affected by these tragedies, particularly in Queensland, but the assistance dealt to my office was quite exceptional, and I thank the officers and the ministers responsible for making that happen.

Senators in this debate have mentioned some of the good things said to have come from this tragedy—the binding together of Australians in times of crisis. I want to note the extensive use of social media to allow people to stay in touch with each other. We witnessed many people getting information on social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter. There was an explosion of information and support through those media, and even authorities used them to get important information out to the community. It is an important development in the way in which we meet the challenges of our, as I said, capricious environment.

I pay tribute as well to the many people mentioned already in this debate who committed enormous acts of dedication and selflessness to deal with a crisis that they were not expecting. Earlier today the Senate honoured Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith for his courage and heroism, which deservedly earned him the Victoria Cross. We have heard witness in the last few weeks of many, many acts of heroism, but in very different circumstances—heroism displayed by people who, in many cases, were not expecting, were not trained and had no demonstrated capacity to deliver acts of bravery and courage in the face of danger but who did so almost without thought in order to deal with
the situation confronting them. I do not know much about the people Senator Joyce spoke about, who rallied around the family who were trapped in a car in Toowoomba, but I am sure none of them were particularly well prepared or trained for the task that they suddenly found themselves with. I think we would all hope that if we were confronted with such circumstances we too would have the courage and the tenacity to deal with that situation to the best of our ability.

To conclude, the test of our sincerity about these terrible disasters is not so much what we say today in the course of this debate but what we will be doing, let us say, three months from now when that tragedy will still be unfolding on a day-to-day basis in the lives of a large number of Australians. There will still be houses as yet unreconstructed; there will still be businesses struggling to survive day by day; there will still be people grappling with legal issues arising out of the death or injury of loved ones; there will still be people struggling with the loss of possessions and family members and perhaps even their homes. At that point, Australians, the Australian government, agencies of government throughout the Australian system of government, will need still to be responsive to what is going on even when the headlines in news bulletins have ceased to mention these tragedies.

There are important lessons to be learnt from what has happened and we do a disservice to the many people who have been victims of these natural disasters if we do not critically analyse what has taken place and be prepared to change the way we do things in such circumstances in response to what we have learned. There is a great deal to be learned from what has happened in the last few weeks and I hope that a spirit of serious inquiry and examination of those issues will not be allowed to be swept away merely because the issues are sensitive and tread on dangerous ground in some respects. We need to ensure that we learn from this experience to minimise the number of people who are victims of such tragedies into the future.

Senator McLucas (Queensland—Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers) (5.24 pm)—I too rise to join colleagues here today to take this opportunity of the motion on natural disasters to reflect on the tragedies that have occurred across the whole of our nation in what we now will sadly remember as the summer of 2011. Words like ‘tragedy’, ‘devastation’ and ‘decimation’ have been used on our radios and televisions over the last month-and-a-half but when we physically see some of these scenes, either in person or on television, those words do not seem to describe the reality of it.

The fires in Western Australia are still posing a risk to people in that state. They have claimed loved family homes. I pass my thoughts to the people of Western Australia for the trauma that they are experiencing at this difficult time. The floods in communities in Victoria, Tasmania and parts of New South Wales have broken into the sanctuary of family homes. I recognise the sorrow and the sadness that people will be experiencing at this time.

In my state of Queensland, and in southern Queensland in particular, the destruction is almost incomprehensible. We have lost 35 good, loved lives. It is a very sad experience for those families. We have the incredible torture for those whose family members are still not accounted for. There has been massive personal loss. Homes and items that are loved—possessions that can never be replaced—will never be retrieved and I share the sorrow of the people going through this personal loss. I also acknowledge the enormous infrastructure cost that this disaster has caused in the South-East Queensland region.
We do not yet have a figure on that but it will take years to replace the necessary infrastructure for those many communities to operate effectively and efficiently.

I pass on my condolences to the families and to the communities more broadly where significant loss of life has occurred in South-East Queensland. But I also commend the people of Toowoomba, the Lockyer Valley, Ipswich, Goodna and Brisbane for their strength, for their resilience, for their plain hard work and for the love and care that they have so openly shown for each other. I also thank the so many willing volunteers who so cheerfully and willingly gave of their labour in order to deliver the first tidy-up—let us call it that because there is a long way to go before we get to the reconstruction.

I would like now to turn to the events of last week. Last Tuesday morning, after we had been tracking this horrid cyclone called Yasi for some three or four days, people of my city of Cairns woke up with the BOM map showing that it was heading for our city—a category 5 cyclone, larger than any ever experienced in the history of recorded meteorology in Australia. Not only was it a category 5; it was also the largest-ever system that we have measured—almost as large as Hurricane Katrina. Its spread in the end affected communities from Wujal Wujal in the north down into the Burdekin. That is a six-hour drive by car. It is a long way, and all of those communities have been affected in some way. Fortunately for my city, Tropical Cyclone Yasi changed its tack, but our relief has turned into devastation again for the people of the Cassowary Coast area. It was almost the same landing point as 2006, with Cyclone Larry. Those poor people have once again been devastated—a little bit more to the south this time but the devastation in that area is almost beyond words.

Families from Ayr, Home Hill, up to Mossman and out west through to Mount Garnet and Innot Hot Springs have had to make some dreadful decisions: what are the things that we still want to have after this event; what things are so important to us as families that we have to put them in a plastic box in the car—or under the house in my circumstance—and hope? It is not just my story; it is the story that we as North Queenslanders have to deal with regularly. It is a tough decision that families have to make. We all got out a plastic box out and filled it with those special treasures and we put it in the car downstairs or in the bathroom, and we found a place where we could hide from this storm. We readied homes—and people did that so well. People shared the task and helped across fences and through the streets, and we waited for this horrid storm. We all pitched in.

When it hit its force was not terribly bad to the north of the cyclone centre. It particularly hit the Cassowary Coast areas of Mission Beach, Cardwell, Tully and smaller communities like Hull Heads, Tully Heads, Euramo and Silkwood—small towns that have not experienced a cyclone of that intensity for some time but received significant devastation this time. One in three roofs are off in Tully—or off to the point that the house is unliveable. That is just one example.

The damage to the south of the cyclone is also significant. The people of Townsville are still suffering significant loss of power, they had problems with their water supply and there are still ongoing difficulties for people in that region. The cyclone then tracked west. Never in my life has anyone considered that a tropical cyclone would hit Mount Isa. When the people of Mount Isa were told to go inside because they were going to get a tropical cyclone category 1, to their grand credit, according to the ABC radio announcer, they did what they usually do.
when it rains—that is, get in their car and go for a drive. They are actually okay. There has been significant damage in communities like Croydon, Charters Towers and to the west in Cloncurry. This cyclone has really affected half of the state of Queensland—in some places dreadfully; in other places to a lesser extent.

There is a large-scale effort underway to establish power, water and phone supplies. I thank all for doing that. Many of our troops are providing an extraordinary service with their hard labour. Seeing men and women in Australian Defence Force uniforms on the streets gives residents enormous strength. I thank our Defence Force people for their presence, their good cheer and their plain hard work. There is much community infrastructure that has to be rebuilt. It will have to be prioritised. Lots of work is being done in family homes.

I reflect also on the impact that this will have on the people of North Queensland both now and into the future. We learnt lessons when Cyclone Larry went through, particularly Innisfail, five years ago. At the moment the effort is in the clean-up. In the weeks to come there will be work done thinking about rebuilding and that sort of thing. There is a task. There is a job to do. I want to make it very clear that in about two months we need to be very aware of our fellow Queenslanders. We have to very aware that the trauma these people have lived through will bubble up in their lives. That is what we learnt from Cyclone Larry and we need to be prepared for that event. We need to look out for our children. Some people say it was terrible that the cyclone crossed land in the night. In some cases that was actually a blessing because many children slept through it, and that is good. But we still need to look out for those young children. They got up in the morning and saw what had happened to their homes and they will need support.

We need to look after those stoic women who will just get on with the job and keep working and keep doing what they do. We must look out for them and make sure that they know that they have help wherever they need it. Very importantly, we must look out for the ‘teflon’ blokes, who think they are invincible and are currently out there working so hard. We must be careful of their mental health in the weeks ahead as well. I encourage us all to continue to contact friends, particularly in the highly devastated areas. If you have friends in the north, thank you for all the emails, texts and messages you have been sending, but send them again in about six weeks. Make sure you make contact to find out that we are all okay.

Our part of the world has done it tough in the last two or three years. The global financial crisis particularly hit the Far North Queensland community of Cairns, the tropical north, because of our reliance on tourism. We have had another hit through Cyclone Yasi. But it is a hit that will hurt us more if we do not get on top of telling people that we are open for business. Tourism operations are happening now as we speak out to the Great Barrier Reef, up to the Daintree and onto the tablelands. I plead with my colleagues in this place to get that message out. If we allow the perception that the Far North has been trashed, we will continue to lose bookings as we are doing now. I really encourage people to spread the word, ‘The Far North is open for business and please come.’ We will have to work with the tourism industry in the short term and in the medium to long term. We have to get the message out that we are open.

The other wonderful asset that we have in the north is our agriculture. We grow the most bananas in Australia. Everyone knows that because of the devastation from Cyclone Larry. This devastation is not so bad because the cyclone did not go onto the Atherton Tablelands where there has been a diversifica-
tion of the banana industry. We will not see the lack of supply that we saw in 2006, but there are plantations in the Tully and Mission Beach areas where not a single tree is standing. Those farmers and their workers need to be supported and I intend to continue doing that. I want to thank the Australian Banana Growers Council for keeping me updated about how we can assist them.

I also recognise that the banana industry is a very large employer. We have some 3,000 people who are currently employed in the banana industry. We need them to keep working. They are picking up bananas off the ground at the moment, so the bananas are a bit bruised but they are beautiful to eat—keep eating them. But come next week, those bananas are not going to be available to be picked up. That means we need to redeploy that workforce into the cleanup of the plantations themselves. All of that material has to be moved off property quickly so that we do not have infestations of pests and diseases. That work needs to continue.

We have some 300 people who are employed in the banana transport industry. They are basically dedicated banana transporters that hub out of that Cassowary Coast region. Those are 300 jobs we also have to look out for. My best wishes go to those in the banana industry. We will be with you. We will be part of the rebuilding and we will get there.

Sugar has also suffered significantly. The Canegrowers of Australia, the peak body for sugar growing in the area, the Sugar Milling Council and Queensland Sugar Ltd have kept me informed about the impact on this year’s crush. There are significant problems in the Tully area. The Tully mill has sustained considerable damage. I look forward to working with the people from the Tully mill in order to do what can be done to assist them.

Tropical fruit is a growing agricultural industry in Far North Queensland. The really tragic part of this cyclone is that some of the crops were just about to come to fruition. Rambutan takes about eight or nine years to get to production and it was about eight or nine years ago that the rambutan industry really ramped up in the Far North. But there is a range of tropical fruits and we need to work with the tropical fruit industry. It is not a massive employer in the region, but it is a significant employer.

Finally, the other attribute that we have in Far North Queensland and in North Queensland generally is our environment. Our environment in particular areas has taken a significant hit. There is some reef damage—it is not ascertained yet—but that will recover. As I said, the tourism industry is open for business and our beautiful reef can be seen. We need to work with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority to replace water monitoring equipment and other monitoring equipment out on the reef.

The rainforests in the Mission Beach area and in the mountains behind there have suffered very badly. We will need to establish a rehabilitation program again. We need to ensure that weeds, particularly vine weeds, are kept at bay so that they do not reach the canopy before the new trees can be established. Of course, we are concerned about cassowaries. The Mission Beach area is an enormous refuge for cassowaries. I am advised that the feeding stations have started already, so that is good, but we will need to ensure that everything is done to maintain the cassowary population that is there because it is at risk.

I want to thank a whole range of people. I want to thank the Prime Minister for her support during this difficult time. I want to acknowledge the leadership of Anna Bligh and her government in providing sensible, calm and direct leadership and information to our people. It is my view that people’s
lives would have been lost if we did not have that clarity of information in the north. I want to acknowledge every local government in the cyclone-affected area. Every local government put together their local disaster management group. They put their district disaster management groups together and fed their information through to the state disaster management group. Every mayor put in well and truly above what was expected, along with all their councillors. So I thank all of you—there are too many to mention by name.

I again thank our ADF troops for evacuating the Cairns Base Hospital and the Cairns Private Hospital so calmly and efficiently. My thanks also go to the Royal Flying Doctor Service for undertaking that task for the first time. The SES have been brilliant. To the volunteers and the personnel who are employed by the SES, you have done everything. I am really pleased that Chief Superintendent Mike Keating has been appointed to lead the rebuilding task force in the north. He knows it well. He has worked through the region in Cairns, in Innisfail, in Tully and in Townsville. He is an excellent choice.

I particularly want to thank the Centrelink team. They have been working very hard. The ABC have been brilliant. But to all of the people in North Queensland who pulled together, who looked out for each other and who made sure we were going to get through this thing, now we are going to work together to rebuild it. My thanks also go to the Bureau of Meteorology for their constant hourly updates. I think their website has probably got the best hit rate of any in the country at the moment. It is extremely comforting to know that you are getting accurate information.

In conclusion, we will get over this. We got over Larry and we will get over this. Together we will rebuild our part of the world.

Senator BOYCE (Queensland) (5.44 pm)—I am grateful to have the opportunity today to speak on the motion of condolence which encompasses the devastation that has affected the eastern states and Western Australia in the last month or so. Like Senator McLucas, I am a proud Queensland senator and, whilst I certainly have great sympathy for the people of Victoria and Western Australia, I will be confining my remarks to the devastation that Queensland has faced over the past month.

I would like to begin by reading into Hansard the names of the 21 deceased who have been positively identified to date by the Queensland coroner’s office in Brisbane. The names are: Sandra Matthews, Steven Matthews, Donna Rice, Jordan Rice, Llynn-Chiann Clarke, Garry Jibson, Jocelyn Jibson, Bruce Marshall, Jesse Wickman, Jean Gurr, Pauline Magner, Robert Bromage, Selwyn Schefe, Katie Schefe, Van Toan Giang, Robert Kelly, Joshua Ross, Brenda Ross, Reinskje van Der Werff, Sylvia Baillie and Jessica Keep. Those people died. Their families, their friends, their neighbours and everyone around them have been directly and immediately affected by their deaths. So many others almost died. A huge scar remains on Queensland.

I had the opportunity to visit some of the flood affected areas near Brisbane not long ago, and I visited Grantham. My hosts there were a family, Ron and Gwen Kuhrt, who live on a property just out of Grantham proper and whose business is hay carting and chaffcutting. They do not have a business right now. They do not have anything you would call a home right now. They do not have very much except themselves and the will to keep going and to survive. The Kuhrs are of Lutheran background and stock. They are proud people, and you could see the pain in Ron Kuhrt’s face when he said: ‘The hardest thing I have had to do is work out
how to accept help. I am not good at accepting help, but we have to have help. We cannot do this alone. The fire brigade had been through their house twice to hose it out. The suggestion was that the floorboards were going to have to be ripped up to get to the mud that was stuck under their house. There was no part of the house that was likely to be reclaimed, except perhaps the frame.

These people were in Grantham, which of course, as many people know, was one of the worst hit parts of South-East Queensland in the floods. Everywhere we went in Grantham, Gwen could point to something that had been devastated. The only thing left of a solid brick house were about 200 to 300 bricks set in three or four little piles in a front yard. She took us to the bridge with the cars jammed under it, which I know everyone here saw on television over and over again. The cars had all gone by the time I saw it, but everyone in Grantham had a story to tell that was somehow related to that bridge. As to their fears, some of them were not realised, thank God; but unfortunately others were very, very real, and people are simply gone. At the recovery centre in Grantham I met a very fit-looking woman in her late sixties who, along with her husband, had clung to the guttering of their home for over three hours. She said, ‘People ask me how I did it, and the answer is that I have no idea how I did it. I just knew I wasn’t going down there’—and by ‘down there’ she meant down into the raging torrent that was over the windows of their home.

We talk a lot about Grantham and Murphys Creek, but there are many other towns in South-East Queensland that have been absolutely devastated—towns like Fernvale and Lowood and Esk. Thank God there was no loss of life in those towns, but the damage has been just as devastating. The mayor of Esk, Graeme Lehmann, was still on his feet after two weeks without sleep, basically, but just as worried as his constituents that there was absolutely no reason for the same thing not to happen again before the month was out. The wet season is just starting, not finishing, so there was real concern in Esk and the towns around there.

Kingaroy was affected by a bit of water in backyards and things like that, but the Blackbutt Range road, which is Kingaroy’s main connection to the world, was out of action for over 10 days. The day I was there they had just started to allow traffic and trucks up to 14 tonnes through. The motel owners in Kingaroy were pleased for the first time in two weeks because finally there were some people back in town who might stay in their motels; finally food and other supplies were coming in on trucks, which meant that they could perhaps go back into business. That story was repeated over and over throughout Queensland.

I would particularly like to comment on some problems that have developed for organisations in the disability and mental health sectors. I spoke to David Barbagallo, the CEO of Endeavour—a major disability services provider in Queensland—just after the floods and asked, ‘How is it going?’ He said: ‘In the not-for-profit sector we’re used to getting on with things and looking after ourselves. We’re not going too badly. We did have a bit of a problem in Toowoomba, though. The Endeavour opportunity shop in Toowoomba was flooded and the staff had to swim out.’ I can only imagine what it must have been like for those staff to have to do that. The disability sector is trying to get on with it. Nevertheless, there are dozens and dozens of small organisations that will have great difficulty in recovering from these floods unless we remember them in the months to come and work out ways to fund them.
In the mental health sector, there are six organisations that are basically out of business because of loss of equipment and loss of premises. The mental health sector in Queensland has put a figure of about 19 per cent on the services that are not functioning right now. This sector is already hard-stretched and very pressed in meeting even some of the demand. Given the recent circumstances, the need for mental health services is likely to increase. Again, this is an area that we cannot afford to forget. We must do everything we can to improve the situation for these organisations. They are not big organisations but they are a desperately needed part of their communities and they are desperately trying to hang on in order to help their communities.

Today is, as Senator Humphries pointed out earlier, a day to talk about our losses; it is not a day to talk about the future—but we do need to remember that future. I would like to point out that, whilst we have talked about the deaths and the loss of property, we need to understand that in Queensland, as Senator McLucas pointed out in her assessment of North Queensland, you do not need to be flood or cyclone damaged to be flood or cyclone affected. I do not know of one business, one person, one sector or one corner of Queensland that has not somehow been affected by the floods and the cyclone. People who were not in the flood areas themselves may have lost their jobs because the business they worked for was affected by the floods. Businesses have had problems with customers who cannot pay their bill because they have been affected by the floods. Other businesses have had problems because their supplier cannot supply because that supplier has been affected by the floods. As I said earlier in relation to the Kingaroy group of motels and businesses, their businesses were affected by the floods because the road to Kingaroy was damaged. So every business, including agribusiness and the sorts of primary producers that Senator McLucas and others spoke about, has been affected by the floods and the cyclone. This is something we need to remember.

Rocklea, a western suburb of Brisbane, was seriously affected by the floods. A woman who runs a fireworks events company has her business located there, but it was not affected by the floods. However, you do not have many fireworks events in the sort of weather that South-East Queensland has been experiencing since November. She told me that since Christmas—and this was about two weeks ago; so we are talking about a period of six to eight weeks—she has had 39 fireworks events cancelled. She was very concerned about what to do. She does have a cancellation policy and she could have tried to charge some of them because they had cancelled, but her concern about doing that was that so many of them were small community organisations from areas like Toowoomba, where they will need every cent for the restoration of their community. She is just one example of a company that was not flood damaged but was certainly very, very flood affected. So, as we go forward, we must remember that not just people but also businesses are very damaged and that there will come a time when their strength and resilience will be at an end unless we as a community support them.

As a small measure I would like to encourage everyone here, as Senator McLucas also said, to visit Queensland, to spend some money in Queensland and to do whatever you can to assist businesses in Queensland to redevelop. If you cannot do that, buy some Queensland made products. I was interested to hear people talk about not being able to afford to buy bananas if the price goes up. Could I suggest that they buy half as many bananas if the price doubles rather than stop buying bananas, and apply that across every
business and group. We all need to be very kind to each other in the months to come—and that is not just towards individuals but companies as well.

Senator WORTLEY (South Australia) (5.58 pm)—I welcome the opportunity to speak on the condolence motion before the Senate today. This summer, as we cast our eyes over the front page of the newspaper, turned on the television or switched on the radio, we were confronted with devastating scenes of the full force of natural disasters in Australia and the devastation left in their wake. Floods and cyclones in Queensland, floods in South Australia, New South Wales and Tasmania and, in the past few days, bushfires in Western Australia. Today I join with my colleagues in offering my condolences to all those people affected by these disasters. To the people of Queensland who lost loved family members—children, life partners, parents and siblings—I know there are no words that will ease the pain. Thousands of people are now without a home and many more have major damage to their homes. They have lost treasured personal belongings that cannot be replaced, including much loved family pets. Facing this reality, too, are the 68 families who have lost their homes to the devastating fires that have been raging through the Perth hills area in Western Australia over the past few days. I join with my colleagues in the Senate in saying that our thoughts are with you at this time of great loss and sadness.

I acknowledge the very valuable role of our national broadcaster, particularly ABC radio, and the commitment of ABC journalists, camera crews and production staff in alerting and informing people of the dangers in regions caught in or under threat of cyclones, floods and fire. Today we pay tribute to the very valuable contribution of emergency services personnel, police, medical practitioners, defence personnel, local councillors and volunteers. Your contribution is gratefully acknowledged and it will be remembered.

Also remembered is the second anniversary yesterday of the Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria that resulted in the loss of 173 lives and seriously injured more than 800 people, forever changing the lives of their families. Next week is the anniversary of the Ash Wednesday bushfires of 1983 that caused widespread destruction across my home state of South Australia, where 28 lives were lost, and Victoria, where 47 people died. The devastation and the loss are great. In closing, I extend my heartfelt sympathy to all in Queensland affected by the floods and cyclones and to those in other parts of Australia affected by natural disaster, recent and past.

Senator FARRELL (South Australia—Parliamentary Secretary for Sustainability and Urban Water) (6.01 pm)—I rise to join my colleagues in supporting this condolence motion on national disasters and to extend my deepest sympathies to those who have lost loved ones as a result of the Queensland floods. I also offer my condolences to those affected by the floods and the impact of tropical Cyclone Yasi. These two natural disasters, coupled with the recent bushfires in Western Australia, have dealt tragic and heavy blows to Australia but in particular to Queensland. Lives and livelihoods have been lost as the rebuilding effort continues there and it will be a sad and difficult time for those affected.

Australia has a long history of extremes—an ancient cycle. We are a land of droughts and fires and also floods which have brought tragedy and hardship to Queensland and to areas of New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia this summer. As a nation we were shocked by the horrific scale of the devastation that the floods caused in Queen-
sland. I visited Brisbane just after the floods and was very kindly taken around to see the devastation by Senator Furner. I saw for myself the extent of the impact of the floods in the city and the massive clean-up faced by many residents.

The floodwaters that had done the damage were gone but many homes and businesses were left ruined by the water and mud left behind. In fact, until you have experienced a flood yourself you do not realise just how much damage the mud left behind does. In some places that mud was at least a foot deep, and on occasions even more, and people were sweating over spades and shovels as they tried to shift it from streets, footpaths, driveways, gardens and homes. Those in the worst hit areas were still struggling to come to grips with what had happened. Huge piles of furniture, household goods and building materials were heaped up on vacant land along streets that a few days before had looked more like billabongs. In some places the scale of the wreckage brought by the water was overwhelming.

As Queensland and the nation band together to help repair that damage and rebuild those flood ravaged regions, it is important to remember that, while the damage is terrible and the rebuilding efforts significant, the biggest impact of these floods has been the loss of life. Our deepest sympathies go out to the families and friends of those who lost their lives—and Senator Boyce just read out the names of those people—as a result of the worst floods in Queensland’s history.

Last Thursday, just weeks after the tragedy in South-East Queensland, the state was again hit by natural disaster in the form of tropical Cyclone Yasi. In the early hours of last Thursday morning, communities in Far North Queensland were hit by winds of up to 300 kilometres an hour when a category 5 cyclone hit the Queensland coast. A number of communities—particularly in the Innisfail region—were severely damaged by the cyclone. Places that included Mission Beach, Innisfail, Silkwood, Tully and Cardwell were among the hardest hit. The Queensland government declared 19 local government areas across Far North Queensland to be natural disaster zones, including Cairns, Charters Towers, Croydon, Hinchinbrook, Mackay, Mount Isa, Palm Island, Tablelands, Townsville and Whitsunday. When we see the images of boats piled up, trees flattened and houses almost destroyed, it seems remarkable that the cyclone did not have a greater impact in terms of injury or loss of life. However, sadly, one young man died of asphyxiation shortly after the cyclone hit as a result of running a generator in an enclosed area.

The Commonwealth government is supporting the immediate and long-term recovery of communities across Far North Queensland, at the same time as helping Queensland recover from the worst floods in the state’s history. A $5.6 billion flood recovery package is being put together through the redirection of $2.8 billion in spending, deferral of infrastructure projects worth $1 billion and through a temporary levy that will apply to the 2011-12 financial year. Prime Minister Julia Gillard and Attorney-General Robert McClelland last week announced Commonwealth government assistance for people affected by tropical Cyclone Yasi. Financial assistance will be provided under the natural disaster relief and recovery arrangements, the Australian government disaster recovery payment and the disaster income recovery subsidy.

These two natural disasters did not discriminate and hit individuals and businesses hard. A number of my parliamentary colleagues from Queensland, including my good friend Bernie Ripoll, were also caught out by the forces of nature and had to evacu-
ate and close their offices during the worst stages of the floods and the cyclone. Queensland, under the strong leadership of Premier Anna Bligh, is united in its response to these disasters and Australians are behind it with donations and contributions to the rebuilding effort. I am sure the parliament will unanimously support this motion of condolence as we continue to pull together as a country to offer our sympathy and support to those affected by these natural disasters.

Senator FIFIELD (Victoria)—Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate) (6.07 pm)—It does not seem so long ago that many of us who represent the state of Victoria rose in this place to try to articulate the unspeakable loss that Victorians experienced during the Black Saturday bushfires. And now, barely two years later, we find ourselves here again, reflecting on the devastation wrought by bushfire’s terrible twin—floods.

We are all relieved and grateful that the flooding we have experienced in Victoria over the past couple of weeks has not come close to causing the loss of life caused by the bushfires or reaching the horror witnessed during Black Saturday. However, for many Victorians these floods have destroyed homes, crops, businesses and livelihoods, and they are now left with the task of rebuilding. The Victorian floods claimed one young soul as their victim, seven-year-old Lachlan Collins, who was swept away by flood waters in Shepparton. I know that I speak for all Victorian senators when I convey my heartfelt condolences to Lachlan’s family.

It is quite astonishing to think that at one point almost one-third of Victoria was affected by the floods. From the vibrant regional centres of Horsham, Swan Hill and Shepparton to the picturesque towns of Carisbrook, Charlton, Echuca and Kerang, nearly 2,000 homes were flooded and a further 17,000 lost power. Hundreds of Victorians had to evacuate and spend the night or several nights in emergency relief centres and then return to their flooded homes and properties. I can only imagine how heartbreaking it must feel to return to the family home to find it inundated or destroyed, often unrecognisably so.

Some Victorians were dealt a double blow as not only was their home flooded but their crops were destroyed or their business inundated as well. Thousands of hectares of crops were wiped out by the floodwaters across Victoria and hundreds, and possibly thousands, of livestock were unable to escape the ‘inland sea’ and perished. And closer to Melbourne, the outer suburbs of Pakenham and Narre Warren were hit hard by flash flooding just last weekend, as were the inner suburbs of Elwood, South Yarra and Windsor.

Yet the common experience is that at times like these we see the best brought out of Australians. Stories of resilience, of strength, of compassion, of bravery and of selflessness have accompanied the images that we have seen of inundated towns and flooded cities. It is important to thank those who have worked tirelessly and those who have put their lives at risk to help others, particularly those who work or volunteer for the emergency services and those who serve in the defence forces and came to the aid of the flood affected communities. And I should also acknowledge the strong and compassionate leadership of Premier Ted Baillieu and the Deputy Premier and police and emergency services minister, Peter Ryan.

We are indeed very fortunate to live in a country where people band together in voluntary organisations like the SES to help others in their time of need. These dedicated SES volunteers have responded to hundreds, if not thousands, of emergency calls during
the Victorian floods. They have helped many people whose homes and businesses have been affected by the floods to get back on their feet. Yet for many flood victims the hardest times are still ahead. The long road to recovery is yet to be fully trod. Getting the home dried out, reopening the business or trying to salvage what is left of the crops are tasks that are still being faced.

In comparison to the devastation wrought by the Black Saturday bushfires, the Victorian floods have left the regions they ravaged with fewer outwardly visible scars. Much of the water has now receded and to the naked eye many buildings are still relatively intact. Yet homes that look unscathed from the outside can still be a sodden, muddy mess on the inside. Businesses that look fine at first glance may have severe internal damage that could prevent them reopening for weeks or months and they might find themselves in the position where their customers, because of their own troubles, are not frequenting them. Yet I have no doubt that the resilient spirit of Victorians will see those affected bounce back quickly. Many of the affected communities are already on the rebound, with schools and businesses reopening as homes begin to dry out.

We must, as a community, band together to help each other recover and rebuild, even though the immediate threat in Victoria has passed. I am keenly aware that a speech like this can do little more than demonstrate that the national parliament, in which Victorians and other Australians are represented, is acutely conscious of the difficulty and hardship currently being faced. All we can do in contributions like this is acknowledge the magnitude of these events and commit ourselves to the recovery effort.

Senator COONAN (New South Wales) (6.13 pm)—I rise to speak in support of the condolence motion. I think it is time and indeed appropriate for all of us who can do so in this place to reflect on the devastation wreaked by nature across our country as we consider the largest natural disaster in Australia’s history. I think it is ironic, and I think perhaps this has been mentioned by earlier speakers, that Dorothea MacKellar, one of Australia’s most famous poets and, of course, a New South Welshwoman, penned her much-loved poem *My Country* 100 years ago this year. It was supposedly inspired by the disaster that she observed to her brother’s farm near Gunnedah, in north-western New South Wales.

Gunnedah was one of the first areas to be declared a natural disaster area due to flooding when the Namoi River peaked just below 7.9 metres in early December that year. Of course, we all know the very famous words ‘I love a sunburnt country’ and so on. Less well known are the fifth stanza and the ominous warning:

For flood and fire and famine,
She pays us back threefold.
Australia has certainly seen that in the past three months.

Today we remember the personal loss suffered by so many Australians. As a nation dealing with a series of natural disasters we should not forget that far too many Australians have experienced their very own personal disasters and individual tragedies over the past months that will stay with them the rest of their lives. I join with all my colleagues and indeed all Australians in offering my thoughts and prayers to those individuals.

For flood and fire and famine,
She pays us back threefold.

The months of December, January and now February have seen destructive forces of
nature that have caused a terrible loss of life and wreaked havoc across our land. Like many Australians, we—I and my colleagues in the Senate—were appalled to see torrents of water either on television or in person washing away Australians trapped on top of cars and then shocked by the aftermath as floodwaters receded, leaving the wreckage of cars and the remains of homes, or to see our fellow Australians left apprehensive by cyclonic winds that whipped iron sheeting across deserted streets. Only last Sunday our television screens were lit up by fires raging in Western Australia and the sight of blazing houses.

As we watched these disasters unfold, we could again be proud of our emergency services and our defence forces, who responded with their usual spirit of professionalism and selflessness. They have the gratitude and respect of every Australian—and I think it only right to pay them that respect—as do ordinary Australians who volunteered and lent a hand to others. The heroism of many is remarkable. I have to say the ultimate hero, if there is one, would have to be the 13-year-old Toowoomban boy Jordan Rice, who lost his life in ensuring the safety of his younger brother. But there were many other heroes—the stranger who caught in his arms the woman jumping off a car on to a bridge, the young policewoman who almost single-handedly coordinated flood relief efforts in Withcott in the Lockyer Valley or, in more recent days, the SES volunteer who was out helping others while his own home was destroyed by Cyclone Yasi. Those people raised our spirits in these desperate times.

After the flash floods in the Lockyer Valley and the rising and spreading waters of the Brisbane River that destroyed so many homes and businesses and brought our third largest city to a standstill, we thought it could not get any worse. It did, with floodwaters moving across Victoria on a front 50 kilometres wide and 95 kilometres long. Then early last week we held our breath as we waited for Cyclone Yasi, which wrecked coastal areas such as Tully and Mission Beach and offshore areas in the Whitsundays such as Dunk Island. It beggars belief that only last weekend we had news of both flash floods in the streets of Melbourne and bushfires in the Royal National Park south of Sydney and near Perth in Western Australia.

Our thoughts and prayers now remain with the families of victims and those affected by the flooding, cyclone or fires. Since December, 30 Australians have tragically died as a result of floods, and news reached us last Friday that a young man died as a result of Cyclone Yasi. I say 30 as we should not forget those who died in the Queensland floods before 10 January, when the raging waters wreaked their devastation on Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley. To the friends and family left behind, I extend my sincere condolences. We feel your heartbreak; we feel your loss. I am sure many of you have not just lost loved ones but seen your homes wrecked and your lives turned upside down. Your sadness is the nation’s sadness, but that you are victims of the largest natural disaster in the nation’s history will not explain away or lessen your grief. I suppose there is a small mercy—and it is a very small mercy—that the death toll was not higher, but any death so unexpected and so indiscriminate is a devastating loss.

To my mind, reaching out to communities in need and being accessible and available is part of being an elected representative in a functioning democracy, and I want to commend in particular Premiers Bligh and Bailieu for being on the ground so much of the time and lending support and at times a hand and a hug to those who needed it. They represented all of us wanting to extend a hand or a hug. Modern politics in the glare of a 24-hour media cycle can be stilted and contrived
but we all sensed the genuineness in the demeanour of both premiers. The people needed leadership and they provided it.

As a senator for New South Wales I would like to make special mention of the impact of the floods on New South Wales, noting that flood warnings are still current in many New South Wales rivers—the Macintyre, Culgoa, Bokhara, Narran, Warrego, Paroo, Barwon-Darling and the Murray upstream of Bourke. While north and south of our borders raging or massive floodwaters drew most of the media attention, many New South Wales towns and surrounding areas were also affected if not devastated by floods. It may surprise many in the chamber to know that no fewer than 63 New South Wales local government areas were declared natural disaster zones. Reports had 6,000 New South Wales residents cut off by floodwaters. While most of the areas I have mentioned do not have large populations and their names may just be a pinprick on a map to some, they represent the heart and soul of New South Wales. Because of their size, they are places where resilience and strength have been sorely tested and the Australian spirit has most shone. Places like Moree, for example, should be acknowledged for welcoming those from surrounding areas into evacuation centres set up in that town.

So what do we do now in the aftermath? I would like to address very briefly two aspects in which I have a special interest and offer some suggestions which may go some way to alleviating the hardship caused to so many Australians in the future, if not after this disaster itself.

We can only now hope that the impact can be mitigated, for Australia cannot really afford this disaster, let alone a greater one in the future. To that end, I would like to address a specific issue—the need for clarity in insurance provisions in respect of flooding—and a broader, more challenging issue, that being the need to reframe our planning laws to ensure responsible future development in areas in this country prone to natural disaster.

Plain English contracts were the catchcry of the 1990s in the legal world. Standard forms were the norm and consistency was sought. Since 1984 insurance contracts have been dealt with differently to other contracts under the Insurance Contracts Act. But why is it, some 25 years later, that when so many affected Australians are looking at their insurance policies, they are finding that the wording suggests that they were covered for floods when in fact they were not? Perhaps we should be revisiting the need for separate treatment of such contracts. In the meantime, it seems that if you were a victim of a flood in Queensland you would have been better off to have been insured by Suncorp, which with one provision provides automatic cover for floods—that is, riverine and storm flash floods. Some other insurance companies apparently did not offer such extensive cover, mostly just for storm flash-flooding. So I am very pleased to see that the insurance industry has recognised that now is the time to have a standard definition of floods and that it is expected to unveil its industry plans in the coming weeks. It will not necessarily assist current victims but it will go some of the way towards providing future consumers with certainty and security. We need to understand that insurers need to run a business and that it is reasonable that they price the risk accordingly. It may mean that market forces will make the cost of insurance unaffordable for those who choose to rebuild in flood prone areas.

Reports suggest that around 90 per cent of houses in Australia do not need riverine flood cover, so it is reasonable if those 90 per cent of consumers decide not to pay the extra premium for a risk they will not likely experience. This disproportionate risk is one of
the myriad of thorny issues that surround thinking about whether we should have a national disaster fund or national insurance. While I very much sympathise with the fact that victims may want to rebuild, where it is not in the national interest that they do so, there need to be alternative arrangements. Quite frankly, I believe there is good reason for discouraging Australians from rebuilding in flood prone areas. If higher insurance costs and lower property prices act as a disincentive then that may be well and good. As the CEO of Suncorp said last weekend, risk mitigation is as important as paying insurance premiums. I would, however, suggest that risk mitigation is the more important.

This leads me to a broader second issue that I would like to address very briefly—that is, whether, in flood prone areas, we should mandate that no new development be allowed or that any development be severely circumscribed when, in a country the size of Australia, there are other places which, to use planning terms, could be both economic and sustainable. As I said in a piece published last month in the *Canberra Times*, we need to look at how we plan property and other development, whether of homes or businesses, to avoid the worst of these disasters in future and, if we cannot avoid it, to certainly mitigate their impact. Let us plan how we develop our future; we cannot afford not to. Sometimes it takes a disaster or, in this case, a series of disasters to shake us out of our complacency and to rethink the attitude of ‘she’ll be right’ when things clearly are not right.

So is it not time to develop a national master plan to help guide future planning and development in this country to try and stop the increasing loss of life and damage that the natural forces around Australia unleash? If you look at the past decade, there have been many natural disasters and increasingly our cities are at risk. The reality is that each time there is devastation, the cost becomes worse. The cost of addressing natural disasters may not be what this country can afford, but it is a cost we will have to pay. The federal government is going to have to pay, for example, 75c of every dollar spent by the Queensland government. In doing this, isn’t the federal government, on behalf of taxpayers, entitled to say, ‘If you want us to bear the risk, you also need to share the responsibility to make sure that all new development is as safe as possible.’ Should taxpayers be asked to continually accept the risk as the cost of these events moves from the millions to the multiple billions?

As a nation we should do our best to ensure against future costs. Like an insurer managing risk, we should demand that the risk is lessened and the future cost contained. Stopping development where buildings and lives are potentially at risk is an obvious risk avoidance strategy. The federal government could take the lead to help reframe our planning laws to ensure sustainable and safe development where development is less likely to be susceptible to being ravaged by fire or inundated by flood. In the national interest, we should look at ways to discourage home owners, prospective buyers and other people from taking up residence in flood or bushfire prone areas. Compensation may be required for some.

A national master plan could draw on state planning experiences, and we have had some royal commissions into previous disasters that would no doubt inform this discussion, as will the Queensland commission that has been announced by Premier Bligh. A national master plan would be a blueprint for Australia and an aid for state governments. It would be a planning tool, based on the best science available, as to what areas are suitable for what types of development and what should be left out of harm’s way. Already the information we need for a master plan for floods
has been collated. Defence has sent out mapping experts who have flown over affected areas to record the extent of the floods.

Now is the opportunity to seriously rethink the way our planning laws operate to ensure sustainable safe development—development less likely to be subject to fires or floods. It is a matter that should be on the agenda for COAG. One suggestion might be that the former Commonwealth Natural Disaster Mitigation Program be refocused to include planning to achieve that very outcome—disaster mitigation.

These disasters, as horrible as they are, provide a once-in-a-generation opportunity to look seriously at a master plan for this country—droughts and flooding rains we can live with but not live in. In these grim times we should remember that we have faced adversity in the past and we can do so again. Our Australian spirit has been tested many times before and we have not only survived but united together to help Australians looking for a hand up, not a handout. Not just now but long after the waters, winds and fires have receded, it will be critical that our spirit does not slacken, that we and our nation lend a hand. We will be up to the test and will walk with the victims and their families every step of the way.

Senator CASH (Western Australia) (6.30 pm)—I too rise to support the condolence motion moved by the Acting Leader of the Government in the Senate. In commencing my remarks, I refer to an article on page 2 of the West Australian today, entitled ‘Devastation’, which outlines the current situation in my hometown of Perth. It reads:

One of WA’s most destructive fires in 50 years has razed more than 60 buildings and left dozens of people homeless.

Premier Colin Barnett has declared the area around the fires in Kelmscott and Roleystone a natural disaster.

Schools were closed, a bridge collapsed and power supplies were cut as about 200 firefighters tried to control the fire in difficult terrain.

Late yesterday, officials said 64 buildings had been destroyed. Another 28 homes had been damaged.

There is no doubt that the damage caused by Cyclone Yasi, which hit the coast of northern Queensland less than two weeks ago, and the devastating floods that caused so much tragedy and damage to Queensland last month have centred Australia’s, indeed the world’s, attention on the untold suffering and damage inflicted by nature on the people of the state of Queensland.

Australians watched and waited as Cyclone Yasi built up its ferocious storm power, out in the Pacific Ocean, for about a week before sweeping across the edge of the Coral Sea and striking the North Queensland coast as a category 5 cyclone, with winds at its centre of up to 285 kilometres per hour. As it crossed the coast, Cyclone Yasi wreaked unbelievable havoc on the coastal towns of Port Hinchinbrook, Mission Beach, Tully and Cardwell before proceeding some 900 kilometres inland towards Mt Isa. Fortunately, by the time Cyclone Yasi reached Mt Isa it had dissipated to a severe rain-bearing depression, and the protective sand bagging which had been carried out in Mt Isa as a precaution was not required.

Whilst massive damage to buildings, crops and infrastructure has occurred as a result of Cyclone Yasi, fortunately, loss of life has been limited. In the January 2011 Queensland floods 22 people lost their lives. This takes the total number of those who have died in the floods in Queensland since 30 November 2010 to 35. Sadly, in the Lockyer Valley region a number of people are still missing and they are now feared dead. The January floods have caused massive property, crop and livestock damage,
and it will be years before some of those who were in the path of the floodwaters and those who were directly affected are back on their feet.

In September last year, just six months ago, Victoria experienced severe flooding in many parts of the state. Some scientists have attributed these abnormally heavy rains to the strongest La Nina event since 1973. Last month, Victoria had its wettest January in recorded history and this rainfall has caused flooding across much of the western and central parts of the state. Only last weekend there was heavy rain in metropolitan Melbourne, and significant flash flooding as a consequence of that heavy rainfall. Houses and other buildings were inundated in parts of Victoria, and crops, pastures and livestock have been lost to the floods. Potentially, the damage caused by Cyclone Yasi and the floods in Queensland and Victoria will cost billions of dollars in repair work to private property and public infrastructure, and the loss in both production and productivity will impact on Australia’s gross domestic product.

With today’s instantaneous communications, the graphic horror of the effects of both Cyclone Yasi and the Queensland floods was beamed into the living rooms of Australians and transmitted around the world. Also beamed into our living rooms were images of ordinary Australians whose property was not directly devastated by the cyclone or the floods but who moved to help their fellow Australians in their time of need. Images of the efforts of these fantastic volunteers, who were often seen waste deep in water or covered in mud helping out those who had suffered so much as a consequence of the floods, really typified what Australian mateship is all about.

I am sure those living outside Australia who, watching the television pictures of the devastation caused by the floods, saw the volunteers lining up on the streets of Brisbane, with their wheelbarrows, shovels, brooms and rakes, offering to go wherever they were needed to help out their fellow Australians in their time of need, would have readily recognised the act of compassion and genuine support for our fellow Australians when they are in need that represents the spirit of mateship that makes us who we are as Australians.

Whilst much media focus has been centred on Queensland, for very good reason, I ask the Senate to reflect on the massive flood that caused extensive damage to the Gascoyne region of my home state of Western Australia on 19 December 2010, only a week before Christmas. The December flood was followed by a secondary flood on 6 January this year—just six weeks ago. In some cases those who managed to protect their property and crops from the December flood suffered severe losses as result of the January flood. Some who suffered inundation in December copped a second barrage of water on 6 January and must have wondered when their luck would change for the better.

The December flood was the worst flood that we have seen in the Gascoyne region in the past 50 years and it saw the town of Gascoyne Junction, located 170 kilometres east of Carnarvon, actually wiped out and the plantation owners and the pastoral stations located along the Gascoyne River lose millions of dollars worth of crops and livestock. The flooding was so severe that many of the buildings on the outlying pastoral stations suffered inundation, and miles of fencing and other pastoral infrastructure has been destroyed. On Bidgemia Station, located 11 kilometres east of the Gascoyne Junction and owned by Lachlan and Jane McTaggart, and which is 1.6 million acres in area, the floodwater engulfed the station home and both Lachlan and his wife, Jane, were forced to
spend the night on the top of a water tank, with their son Hamish and his wife, Jodie, on top of the adjacent water tank. The following day, the McTaggart family were airlifted to safety. However, the plight of their more than 1,500 head of cattle was uppermost in their minds.

On Mullaloo Station, which is located near Gascoyne Junction, the floods ripped trees from the ground whilst fences, windmills and tanks which were part of this vast property were destroyed. The town of Carnarvon, which is located 900 kilometres north of Perth at the mouth of the Gascoyne River, suffered extensive damage which affected in the vicinity of 100 homes and more than 150 plantations, which mainly produced bananas, mangoes and melons. The Carnarvon floods also caused extensive damage to public infrastructure, with the North West Coastal Highway washed away in a number of locations and hundreds of kilometres of the highway’s shoulders and embankments being severely eroded. There is no doubt that it will cost tens of millions of dollars to repair the flood damage to this road system alone. The extent of the damage in the Gascoyne and Upper Murchison region was so widespread that seven areas in the region were declared natural disaster zones. These include Ashburton, Carnarvon, Exmouth, Murchison, Northampton, Shark Bay and the Upper Gascoyne.

As with any natural disaster, the impact is far greater than just the economic and physical loss of property. Whilst houses and their contents are destroyed and businesses are forced to close—and in some cases cannot reopen because of the enormity of the loss and damage—there is significant ongoing trauma suffered by many people from the devastated area which will last until well after the floods recede. Some of the ongoing trauma will be related to the financial pressures that now beset them and the additional pressure related to the fact that many people are unsure if their insurance policies will cover the losses caused by the flooding.

I should advise the Senate that, like the many people who offered their voluntary support to those who were affected by the Brisbane floods, many Western Australians volunteered to assist those affected by the Carnarvon floods. Unlike the greater Brisbane area, which has a population of just over two million people, Carnarvon has a population of approximately 8,000 people. Notwithstanding the differing size of the population, there were many people who lived in the town or who were just visiting the town, because it was Christmas time and people were on holidays, who volunteered to help their fellow Australians in their time of need. In the Brisbane city area the Lord Mayor, Campbell Newman, demonstrated great leadership by encouraging volunteers to assist flood victims and he is now leading the charge to rebuild the city.

In the case of the recent Carnarvon floods it is important to recognise the leadership that was provided by a core group of local people led by the President of the Shire of Carnarvon, Dudley Maslen. Dudley Maslen, who is a former Gascoyne pastoralist and a member of the Western Australian state parliament for the Gascoyne region and surrounding areas, has shown himself to be an outstanding community leader who continues to work tirelessly to ensure the needs of the residents of the town and the needs of the pastoralists and the plantation owners are heard by the relevant authorities. Under the leadership of Dudley Maslen, a number of other state agencies and private organisations worked together to assist the residents of the flood affected Gascoyne region. Mr Maslen ensured that the Carnarvon Civic Centre was designated the region’s evacuation centre, and at one stage at the peak of the flood we had nearly 200 people taking refuge in the
centre. We had magnificent support from personnel from the State Emergency Service, the Shire of Carnarvon and other affected local authorities, the Fire and Emergency Services Authority, the WA police and Main Roads. But, most of all, the volunteers demonstrated by their efforts the characteristic of mateship that distinguishes Australians from others.

It was also pleasing to see the Premier of Western Australia, the Hon. Colin Barnett, visit the region to gain a firsthand appreciation of the extent of the flood damage and to offer support and assess the needs of the people. Following his visit to the region, Premier Barnett requested that the Prime Minister activate a joint Commonwealth-state government assistance package to assist those affected by the floods. This request has been agreed to, so those affected by the flood damage will be able to access some funds to assist them at this difficult time. It is critical that we as a nation give generous support to assist our fellow Australians in their time of need. However, equally important is that the support we offer is properly considered support—that is, tailored to assist our fellow Australians, having regard to their particular circumstances. It is also important to recognise that a one-size-fits-all solution will not address the issues facing different sectors of our Australian community. For example, we must distinguish the support needed by farmers in Victoria to that needed by pastoralists in the north of Western Australia and by residents in Cardwell who have suffered cyclone damage as compared to residents who have suffered flood or fire damage. The cyclone and floods in Queensland, the floods in Victoria, the bushfires in Victoria which are of course still vividly imprinted on our minds, the floods in Carnarvon and the Gascoyne region of Western Australia and indeed the current bushfires in the Perth area demand that we commit ourselves to assisting those in need. We offer our heartfelt sympathy to the families of those who have died or been injured and to those who have suffered as a consequence of these disasters, remembering that there are many people who are relying on us not to forget them in their time of need. With those comments, I support the motion.

Senator WILLIAMS (New South Wales) (6.45 pm)—I also rise on this motion of condolence with regard to the natural disasters that our country has experienced over the last few weeks. My eldest son, David, and his wife Tammy, along with their three-week-old baby boy, live in Cairns, as well as my only daughter, Rebecca. On the Wednesday of the morning that Cyclone Yasi was to arrive in Cairns, it was a frightening experience to talk to the children and to sense the fear in their voices about what was going to happen. Thankfully, all there came through well.

But, in relation to the floods, we saw frightening scenes on television at Toowoomba, Ipswich, Brisbane and out through the river system. The Condamine has been flooded several times this summer—including at St George, as of course my colleague Senator Barnaby Joyce is well aware.

I would also like to refer to northern New South Wales. On 11 January at Tenterfield, just south of the Queensland border on the New England Highway, they experienced some 220 millimetres of rain over several hours, which effectively cut the town in half. Many houses were inundated with water. The Dumaresq Valley flooded, and the damage that has caused to farms down that valley, and the loss of income, has just been huge. Some say it was larger than the 1976 flood; some say it was on par. It was pleasing to note that last week Senator Joe Ludwig, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, visited that area between Tenterfield
and Bonshaw, along with the member for New England, Tony Windsor. All I can say is that the loss of income to the farmers has been huge. One farm I visited, when we went up there to a meeting at Mingoola, had lost 8,000 bales of hay—at $10 for a small bale, that is $80,000; two four-wheel motor-bikes—probably another $10,000; and 200 tonnes of pumpkins—$360,000, at $1,800 a tonne. It was quite amazing to see the damage to the road, the washout of the bridges, the approaches taken out—not two metres long and two metres deep but probably 50 metres long and 10 metres deep, like a river just carving out a whole new river system alongside the bridges. I saw 2,000-litre fuel tanks five metres up in the trees and the pumpkins hanging off the centre pivots like Christmas decorations. The damage has been huge, including hundreds and hundreds of kilometres of fencing. I was doing some quick calculations the other day. Just for a five plain-wire and one barbed-wire fence you are looking at $2,000 per kilometre to replace. The cost is huge, and these people have lost their income for the year. Their concern is, of course, like most on the land: how do they pay the bank?

It was not only the hay area and the irrigation areas but the wineries up there that were affected. I pay a special tribute to Nick De Stefani at Reedy Creek Winery, who coordinated so much in the area. A helicopter came in and evacuated 19 people and then proceeded to drop supplies to those others who were stranded. Nick De Stefani’s winery, Reedy Creek, suffered huge destruction of their grapes—no doubt a huge loss of income for the next 12 months for them. I also visited Zappa winery. Cassegrain Wines also have wineries in the Tenterfield Valley. The loss to these industries has been huge.

I commend those who have done so much to help their neighbours in a time of huge demand, when Mother Nature was certainly very severe on our country. As Dorethea Mackellar would say: a land of droughts and flooding rains. How true that is. The Tenterfield Shire estimates a damage bill of between $2 million and $3 million; the Inverell Shire, damages of around $900,000. We know the infrastructure will get going and will be repaired. But my concern is for the industries along there—the farmers, many of them young farmers. We know the average age of a farmer is around 57 or 58 these days, but these young people have had plenty of setbacks before in their lives. They will need some assistance. Let us hope that some interest rates subsidies of some form are forthcoming to help these people get through their financial troubles. That is probably their greatest concern. As I said, the infrastructure, the roads, will be repaired. The loss of bitumen was amazing—just torn up and washed away. This is in northern New South Wales. Much of the concentration has been on Queensland, where so much damage has been done. There is also Victoria and Western Australia, where there are now fires. Cyclone Yasi in Queensland caused a huge amount of damage to places like Cardwell, Tully, Mission Beach and elsewhere. For the farmers up there, with the banana farms and the sugar farms—especially when sugar is at such a tremendously high world price—it is devastating to see the loss of income.

I will be brief in saying thank you to so many volunteers who helped their fellow Australians at a time of need. We know that all of us in this place support the actions to help these people get back on their feet, the businesses back on their feet and the infrastructure repaired. We do have to give these people some assistance so they can get through their financial woes and be there next year. No doubt that Aussie spirit will help them, but some financial assistance with their interest rates would be of great help. Let us hope that that is forthcoming.
Senator EGGLESTON (Western Australia) (6.51 pm)—As we gather here today, from all corners of Australia, we have all been moved by the torrent of disasters which have swept across the country this summer. With the floods, cyclones and fires, this has been a summer which will be long remembered. I join my senatorial colleagues in expressing my sympathy and extending my condolences to those who have suffered damage, injury or death in these natural disasters.

Like you, Madam Acting Deputy President Crossin, having lived in the Northern Territory, I, having lived in the Pilbara, went through many cyclones and can personally empathise with the cyclone and flood victims. Two cyclones in particular are etched in my memory, these being Cyclone Joan in 1975 and Cyclone Dean in 1980, both of which wrecked my house at the time. According to the US weather service, Cyclone Joan was probably the most severe cyclone to have ever struck the north-west coast of Australia and at that time was one of the biggest storms ever recorded. The wind battered Hedland for over 10 hours, roaring like a train in a tunnel, which I could hear for weeks afterwards any time I closed my eyes. I was a doctor in Port Hedland then, working at the Port Hedland Regional Hospital. I was sent to South Hedland because it was thought that flooding would cut access to the Port Hedland hospital and medical service was needed in South Hedland. This proved very lucky for me as after the cyclone I returned to find my house by the beach in ruins. The whole street resembled a war zone littered with wreckage.

So I understand from personal experience what those who were caught in the natural disasters we have experienced or are currently experiencing are feeling. In Western Australia we are all too aware that we live in a land of extremes, from the ravaging effects of the fires now occurring in the Perth Hills around Kelmscott in Don Randall’s electorate of Canning to the widespread destruction of cyclones and flooding in the Gascoyne region in Barry Haase’s electorate of Durack. As we try to rebuild homes and crops inundated by torrential rain and flooding in Carnarvon, we can relate firsthand to the devastation felt in communities affected by the Queensland floods and Cyclone Yasi.

Apart from damage to the town of Carnarvon and the plantations on the river, as Senator Cash pointed out, it is also important to recognise the impact on outlying pastoral properties in the Gascoyne and Murchison, which have experienced major damage to homesteads, water infrastructure and loss of stock. Visiting the region in January with Barry Haase and Julie Bishop, I found it heartening to see firsthand the steely resilience of the locals, led by shire president Dudley Maslen, when faced with the recurrent flooding of the Gascoyne River.

I also acknowledge the contribution made by Mark Lewis of WA’s Department of Agriculture and Food, who coordinated and managed the restoration of topsoil which had been washed away from the plantations on the Gascoyne River. I also pay tribute to the skilled emergency service workers and generous volunteers who selflessly put their hands up to help neighbours they had never met.

North-west communities held fundraising drives; delivered food, water and fuel supplies; and organised skilled tradesmen to help with the effort to rebuild the damage to Carnarvon and the area around it. I think this is a true insight into how Australians pull together in times of stress and adversity. The largest employer in Carnarvon, Rio Tinto, made a significant contribution to the relief effort, providing labour, equipment and access to flights and aircraft. That was assisted
by other mining companies in the area. Again, I think this shows the true community spirit of Australians in dealing with disasters and other situations in which great hardship occurs.

Dorothea Mackellar once described the beauty and the terror of Australia in her famous poem. How true that description is and will continue to be. Just as Australians have shown great fortitude in the face of present and past natural disasters, so I am sure they will continue to do so in the future. I believe that it is a feature of our national character as Australians to accept the setbacks that nature periodically delivers and then stoically set about going forward to restore and rebuild. And of course, as Senator Williams said, it is always nice to have a little bit of assistance from the federal and state governments in the form of financial grants to assist that process.

Senator BACK (Western Australia) (6.57 pm)—I rise to support the motion of Senator Conroy and those who have spoken before me relating to natural disasters in Australia. It is somewhat ironic that this is in fact the second anniversary of those dreadful, horrific Black Saturday fires in Victoria in 2009. When one does reflect on recent events during this summer in Australia, the time line started with the Carnarvon floods. Then there were the Queensland floods and those in New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania, and the recent effects across to the Northern Territory. Then, as a parting gesture from Cyclone Yasi, there were the dreadful bushfires experienced in the hinterland of Perth, which in fact had their origins in a weather pattern that started with Cyclone Yasi. We reflect in this chamber on the resilience of Australians and on the cost that these disasters will be to our community but also, as others have said, on the fact that this is a pattern we see over the years and one from which we will definitely recover.

Then there were the Carnarvon floods. Twice during this summer the Gascoyne region—not just Carnarvon; the whole Gascoyne region—was affected by flood. The town of Gascoyne Junction was flooded. The hotel that had been flooded in the past to its ceiling was on this occasion flooded past the top of its roof and probably will not be rebuilt. That is a small community, but a very necessary community. The effect on pastoralists in the east Gascoyne region has been dramatic in terms of livestock lost, in fencing lost and in pasture lost. For those participating in horticultural enterprises, there have been severe effects.

We have heard mentioned by my colleagues the impact in Carnarvon. Of the 160 commercial plantations there, 140 were severely affected. For those who are not aware, Carnarvon is the food bowl of Western Australia. Its productivity per hectare is enviable even in contrast to that of the Ord. No doubt one day the Ord will meet that objective, but at the moment Carnarvon is a critically important place. The loss of 140 of those 160 plantations is dramatic. More than one-quarter of a million tonnes of topsoil has been lost. No sooner did the horticulturalists get on their feet than they were the subject of a second severe flood.

I want to now reflect on the Queensland floods. I visited Toowoomba a few times when I was a student at the University of Queensland. I could not comprehend how the city of Toowoomba could have been the subject of such flooding. We saw horrendous photos of vehicles and vans and trees being driven down by the force of the floods. Two or three days after those events we saw things returning to normal. We have heard from others closer than I am to the tragedy of what befell in Grantham and the Lockyer Valley, probably one of the richest horticultural and agricultural areas in the country. All of us have memories. The one that resides...
with me is of the young boy telling the rescuers to look after his young brother on his way to passing away. That was horrific. Then there is the pregnant mother who buried a child and her own parents. How she has survived is absolutely beyond me.

By coincidence, last Wednesday evening I was back in Brisbane for a hearing on Thursday. I was there on the periphery listening and watching as Cyclone Yasi was developing and heading towards the coast. I saw the excellence of the Queensland Premier in her efforts to stay on top of that particular emergency. Her calmness in speaking to the people of her state and to the people of the nation was commendable. She was definitely the person for the moment; there is no doubt about that.

At the same time, out of all this we have seen the excellence and the resourcefulness of people. I heard a lady being interviewed. When driving to her pharmacy she tried to work out what she could do to help. This was in the days leading up to school starting in Queensland. She realised that the kids were not going to have anything when they turned up for school. In the space of 48 hours, she and a group of others were able to get together packages that were given to the schools so that when the children arrived they would have the necessities to help them on day one. Then she thought that if the kids had this problem then so would the teachers. So they turned their attention to the teachers and prepared packages for them so that when they started school they would have something. That demonstrates the resourcefulness and goodwill of Australians.

On Thursday, I listened to the radio and watched the television. Nobody could sleep on Wednesday night. You tried to sleep, you woke up and you turned the TV on just to see where the jolly cyclone was and to see who was being affected. The media coverage was absolutely brilliant. Through them, I heard that the rugby league and rugby union groups in the Brisbane area had come together. It was sign-up weekend last weekend, and there were families saying, ‘We can’t bring our kids in; we can’t sign them up because we do not have the funds, clothing, equipment et cetera.’ I believe that even the St George club in Sydney took the Queensland town of St George and those towns around it and looked after them. That caused me in fact to make contact immediately with the South Fremantle Football Club, of which Senator Sterle and I are both very keen supporters, only to learn that South Fremantle had already raised funds for Carnarvon. That led to some further discussions with the WAFL and the AFL in Queensland. They assured me that they were doing exactly the same for Australian Rules Football. They were wondering why a Western Australian senator was so interested in ensuring that the young kids would be able to sign up. They said: ‘We have already made sure of things. There are no fees. No child should be turned away for lack of any facilities or equipment or money.’

There are two things that I would like to say in concluding. The first is that, as was the case with the Victorian fires and as is the case in all disasters, people must not stay away. As soon as the local community is ready and able to accept visitors and commerce, it is essential that people return. I was in Tasmania not long after the Port Arthur massacre. The businesses in Port Arthur were severely affected for the next three or four years because everybody who went to Tasmania felt the need to stay away from Port Arthur at a time when it was critically important for them to visit. I know that those small communities of Mission Beach, Cardwell and others rely heavily on tourism. I urge Australians to turn within Australia and spend our recreation and tourism dollars in
those places as soon as those communities are able to receive us. I hope tomorrow to speak some more in this chamber about the disastrous fires in Perth.

I want to conclude with a comment that I have made before in this chamber when speaking about disasters in this country. It concerns a four-letter acronym, DEAD. The four letters stand for disaster, expenditure and enquiry, apathy and disaster. All too often in this country, over its history, we have seen disasters followed by enquiries and massive expenditure and, over time, apathy, whether it has been from individuals rebuilding with the same materials in fire-prone areas or people rebuilding in flood-prone areas. We have also seen apathy from local governments who fail to learn the lessons of the past. We have seen the same apathy on the part of state governments, with their failure to legislate, and, dare I say it, we have also seen apathy in federal government. If, after expenditure and enquiry there is apathy, it is absolutely critical that we do not end up with yet another disaster. So let us make sure that, after the summer of 2010-11, it is the resolve of this place that, after the expenditure and the enquiries, we do not see a repeat of the effects that we have seen.

Senator JOHNSTON (Western Australia) (7.08 pm)—May I adopt and support all of the words of support and sympathy from all senators on this motion about the devastation of this summer’s natural disasters, particularly the words of those senators from Queensland, who in the recess over the Christmas period, in December and January, have been through so much; a nightmare. I also support particularly the words of my colleagues from Western Australia Senator Eggleston, Senator Back and Senator Cash. I personally extend my sympathy and support to all of the flood victims, particularly those around Brisbane and in the South-East Queensland region. The nightly sights on my television have been absolutely horrendous and I do not know how those people have got through this as they have. I also want to acknowledge the people of northern New South Wales and Victoria. They have also been the victims of Australia’s weather. Lastly I acknowledge the more recent victims of Cyclone Yasi, in North Queensland.

I now turn to my home state of Western Australia to talk about the floods on the Gascoyne River at Carnarvon and in the Gascoyne region generally. In mid- to late December of 2010, heavy rainfall from a monsoonal low caused major flooding of the Gascoyne River. This river is approximately 100 to 200 metres wide at most points extending out almost 1,000 kilometres into the hinterland of Western Australia. The flooding was around the town of Carnarvon, 900 kilometres north of Perth. The flood was unprecedented in its level, being 7.79 metres. The previous highest flood occurred in 1960-61, measured at 7.62 metres. The flood caused severe damage to a considerable number of plantations, small businesses and residences in Carnarvon and caused devastating damage to the small town of Gascoyne Junction, 170 kilometres east of Carnarvon, and many pastoral stations along the Gascoyne River. Some 105 pastoral stations and 19 remote Indigenous communities were very severely affected, and inestimable stock losses were reported right across the region. This region is almost larger than the state of Victoria.

Other consequences included Carnarvon being completely isolated by road. The Gascoyne River bridge was closed, isolating the people on the north bank of the river. South River Road and the East Carnarvon road were flooded and the North West Coastal Highway was closed. So all of the towns virtually from Shark Bay through to Karratha were isolated. A natural disaster was de-
declared, covering five shires, and a major emergency relief effort was activated by the Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia. Arising from this, many state and local government agencies became immediately involved in an extensive relief effort. Actions taken included approximately 150 people being relocated to temporary accommodation at a relocation centre established at the Carnarvon Civic Centre, in the centre of Carnarvon, as we have heard from Senator Cash. The Department for Child Protection managed the centre. Emergency Services officers travelled to Gascoyne Junction to verify the needs of community members there. Approximately 20 requested to be located to Carnarvon, and DCP assisted with that request. Approximately 20 others chose to remain.

The State Isolated Communities Freight Subsidy Emergency Management Plan was activated by FESA. The plan ensures that disaster victims are not subjected to increased freight costs arising from a disaster. Bear in mind that goods coming in from the East had to do almost 1,000 kilometres more to get into these communities. Flights were arranged to deliver essential food, water and other supplies to Carnarvon. Two helicopters in the region assisted with welfare and supply work. FESA’s volunteers and the Carnarvon Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service assisted in unloading and distributing food and water pallets. FESA contacted isolated communities and stations to determine their needs and distributed essential items to them accordingly. Resupply of essential items was maintained until road delivery services were established. This took some weeks. Managed egress for civilian traffic was continually assessed to ensure access to roads as soon as possible. Additional seats on flights in and out of Carnarvon were made available by Skywest. Skywest reconfigured its cargo flights to allow passengers to be transported back to Perth.

Further heavy rainfall in the Gascoyne catchment occurred in the first week of January, and a second flood, of 6.5 metres, occurred. Damage on this occasion was not extensive, but roads had to be closed and major delays occurred in repairing major infrastructure such as the roads. Since 1960, levee banks have been built around the town of Carnarvon, despite a normally dry Gascoyne River. I should say that, for many years in a row, the Gascoyne River is simply a dry river bed. But increased development and agricultural land use have occurred around the flood plain adjacent to the river. The Gascoyne region is located in the northwest of Western Australia, as I have said. The resident population is 9,865 people. It is concentrated in the key centres of Carnarvon, Exmouth, Denham and Gascoyne Junction. According to the Department of Local Government and Regional Development, gross regional product in the Gascoyne is about $638 million, representing a 0.4 per cent share of the state’s economy. Key industries are agriculture, fishing, mining and tourism. Carnarvon itself has a population of 6,200 persons and supports three main industries: mining, including the salt mine near Lake Macleod operated by Rio Tinto Dampier Salt, which is the town’s largest employer; agriculture, particularly horticulture as well as livestock on nearby pastoral stations; and fishing, particularly in the close-by prawn fishing grounds.

Carnarvon’s agricultural industry relies heavily on the Gascoyne River. The Carnarvon horticultural district is situated on the fertile delta of the Gascoyne River, which provides irrigation for much of the region. Most crops are typically grown on microdrip irrigation using water from below-ground aquifers in the river. The dry subtropical climate, fertile soils and irrigation techniques
used mean that the region is able to produce a wide range of temperate, tropical and subtropical produce across all seasons. The majority of activity is carried out on 170 plantations covering an area of approximately 1,500 hectares. The industry supports significant seasonal employment, often for itinerant workers in harvesting periods. In 2009-10 the gross value of agriculture produced for Carnarvon was $75 million during the year. The most significant crops in volume are bananas, tomatoes, table grapes, capsicums and mangoes.

The pastoral industry is also an important contributor to economic activity in the broader Gascoyne region. There are 80 pastoral stations in the region occupying an average lease size of around 125,600 hectares. The majority of livestock disposals from the Gascoyne area are sheep, cattle and fat lambs. The total value of pastoral industry production in the Gascoyne region in 2007-08 was $22 million, and $6 million for wool. The floods have resulted in extensive losses to horticultural produce, livestock, farm equipment, soil, local infrastructure and private dwellings and businesses. Almost all 170 plantations have suffered severe flood damage.

The state's Department of Agriculture and Food does not currently have an official estimate of the impact of the floods on agricultural production; however, one estimate from growers suggests that horticultural production is damaged to the extent of about $60 million. Estimates provided by Main Roads Western Australia say the cost of repairing the 220 kilometre stretch of the North West Coastal Highway is approximately $15 million, with the cost of repairing other roads in the region being a further $15 million. Other losses and repairs have not yet been quantified, but they are extensive.

A national framework known as the natural disaster relief and recovery arrangements specifies the level and types of assistance provided by state and federal governments to victims of natural disasters. Flood victims at Carnarvon are receiving the same assistance under this arrangement as flood victims in Queensland and Victoria, and, at the time of preparing this information, more than flood victims in New South Wales, where no moves have been made to access these funds. Assistance under the Australian natural disaster relief and recovery arrangements provides up to $5,000 for electrical inspections and repairs, up to $10,000 to replace white goods, floor coverings and other household and businesses effects and up to $25,000 for primary producers and small businesses for clean-up and recovery costs. The cost of making these payments is equally shared by the Western Australian and Commonwealth governments. In addition, the WA government has implemented and funded a program to provide plantation owners with topsoil to enable them to resume production as soon as possible, and I want to thank Mr Mark Lewis of the state’s Department of Agriculture and Food for assisting in the provision of that scheme. The Commonwealth has made immediate payments to affected citizens of $1,000 per adult and $400 per child.

Donations to the Perth lord mayor’s relief fund for the Gascoyne River flood have now reached $1.3 million, in addition to $100,000 contributed by the government of Western Australia. Major donations have included $100,000 from Rio Tinto Dampier Salt, $50,000 from Santos, $50,000 from IGA, $20,000 from the City of Perth, $10,000 from Apache Energy and $10,000 from the Commonwealth Bank. These funds will be distributed to Carnarvon and Gascoyne victims based on local advice and decisions.

WA government agencies and the local shires, I am told, will continue to work
closely together to assist flood victims, but the relief available will not come close to covering the losses of those most severely affected, be they in Western Australia or in Queensland.

Most of the business owners who were most seriously affected have commenced the slow and expensive process of returning their operations to production and viability. Most do not have flood insurance as this is unavailable to almost anyone whose business or house is located outside the levee banks in Carnarvon, so many will suffer enormous financial loss arising from the loss of their crops, loss or damage to equipment and plant and delays in restoring their businesses to production. For some, including several plantation owners and the owners of the Gascoyne Junction hotel and store, their businesses are beyond physical and economic restoration.

I will now turn to what has recently happened in the last few days as a result of more than 85-kilometre per hour winds sweeping down from the Darling Range through the outer eastern suburbs of Perth. A total of 68 houses were lost at Kelmscott and Roleystone, in the City of Armadale, with 32 seriously damaged in an out-of-control bushfire. It is still extremely dangerous for many people to return to those houses. This is a very serious disaster for people living in those suburbs in Perth. It was declared a state natural disaster. Eight hundred hectares were damaged in this particular fire, 12 people were hospitalised with smoke inhalation and one firefighter is in hospital after being hit by a fire truck; but, thankfully, nobody has died, to the best of my most recent advice.

We will be able to claim Western Australian natural disaster relief and recovery arrangements and immediate access to funding for families through the Department for Child Protection, giving up to $3,000 to those who have lost their homes and $1,000 for damage. A total of 1,600 people who were subjected to this fire are without power. The state of Victoria provided two type 1 helicopters with 21 Country Fire Authority officers to assist in the management of that particular fire, and I am very thankful to them. The Lord Mayor’s Distress Relief Fund has been set up to take donations for those who have been affected by the fire and, as you can imagine, with 68 houses completely destroyed a lot of people are finding it difficult to find somewhere to stay.

Let me come back to that fire: it is approximately 40 kilometres south of the Red Hill, Brigadoon, Baskerville, Millendon, and Herne Hill fire, which is to the north-east of Perth, requiring 100 people to be evacuated. Two sheds, a water tank and fencing were destroyed over an area of approximately 1,170 hectares. That fire was apparently started by a tree branch falling on electrical infrastructure in the very windy conditions that we all confronted over the past few days. That fire required 100 firefighters to deal with it.

There has been some outstanding work done by our firefighters. I know the Albany firefighters travelled up from Albany to fight the fire at very short notice. Other firefighters from right around Western Australia have been called on to deal with these completely out-of-control and very serious bushfires. I compliment the police. They have had the unhappy task of evacuating people, leaving animals, leaving vehicles, leaving houses to be destroyed by what is, as I have said, a very serious fire. I want to compliment the FESA officials for the way they have dealt with this tragedy. They have had some very unsavoury tasks to perform. The councils involved, local authorities, have done a remarkable job.
I want to also mention Don Randall. It is in his electorate that we have lost the 68 houses. He is obviously not in parliament today; he is assisting with other people, including the local state member, Tony Simpson, helping people to access what funds they can, seeing to provide them with assistance and helping them in any way he can. I lastly want to say that the Victorian Country Fire Authority provided those two helicopters. I thank them most sincerely.

This has been a very serious tragedy for Perth in terms of these out-of-control fires. I am very thankful that nobody has lost their life. There is enormous upset and tragedy for these people who have lost their possessions, in many respects all they ever owned, because they were given very limited knowledge and warning about this fire as it swept down the escarpment on the Darling Range. I am amazed that we have not lost any lives.

I support this motion. It has been a most difficult two months right around Australia with these weather events.

Senator Ryan (Victoria) (7.24 pm)—I stand to speak tonight in support of the motion moved by Senator Conroy and to endorse the comments of my colleagues in this place. Two years ago in my first month in this place the parliament and nation came together to commemorate the tragedy of the Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria—unimaginable weather, a 46 degree day on the outskirts of Melbourne and an initial northerly wind that dramatically changed direction and drove the fires that consumed whole towns. As the nation came together in sympathy and sorrow, it assisted, even if only in a small way, the communities devastated by firestorm that words cannot do justice to.

Today we commemorate other tragedies brought about by our environment, forces that no person or community could predict or plan for. Floods, fires and cyclones are a recurring if tragic feature of our history in this country. This summer every state has been hit by one or another of them. When the floods began in Queensland they did not always reach our television screens. To many the first footage was the extraordinary torrent that ran through Toowoomba, with descriptions of an inland tsunami in the Lockyer Valley that sounded more like a scene from a horror movie than a description of this beautiful part of the world. Just as those of us who have not experienced a bushfire or cyclone cannot imagine it, I cannot even conceive of a wall of water like that 100 kilometres from the ocean.

Then our nation’s attention turned towards Brisbane. The people of our third-largest city under threat from flood had to sit and wait as the water rose through their homes, communities, suburbs and businesses. But they did not simply wait. They worked with each other to save as much as they could, to ensure their neighbours were safe and to ensure that while property might be lost or damaged precious lives were not. I did not experience the Brisbane floods of 1974 but my mother can recall them, as my parents lost many of their belongings as the waters came up through St Lucia up to the very top steps of my grandparents’ Queenslander. For some reason it seems too easy for us to forget such disasters and not to learn the lessons of the past. If we pledge ourselves to one public policy outcome from this summer, it should be to have long memories about these events. The Lord Mayor of Brisbane, Campbell Newman, deserves particular recognition for his ongoing warnings about this possibility. We have learnt from tragic cyclones in Northern Australia over the last few decades. We need to do more to learn from fire and flood.

The generosity of spirit of thousands of volunteers in Brisbane is shown by the foot-
age of them marching in file to buses and working as if they had been trained and drilled for this day. They displayed one of the traits that we constantly see in our communities: people reaching out to help one another when they see their neighbours in need. There are some things that only governments can do but there are also some things that communities do better. Governments should encourage and nurture volunteerism, not seek to supplant, regulate or override it. But all of this falls into insignificance when we consider the human cost. Homes and businesses can be rebuilt, loved ones cannot. The stories of bravery from these disasters will stick with us but this provides little solace for those mourning their family and friends. Like many others, the story of the young boy sacrificing himself for his brother in Queensland will stay with me forever. In Queensland in particular the efforts of members of our defence forces and emergency services need special note. Put simply, there are people alive today due to the efforts of rescue workers and our defence personnel.

While this was happening in Queensland, I would now like to turn to my home state of Victoria, which is also suffering from flooding. Western and northern Victoria were hit by floods more severe than anyone could recall. In more recent days my home city of Melbourne and the surrounding areas have been hit again. The efforts of the communities affected were again extraordinary. Volunteers who had suffered themselves still found time to support others, to rescue people and to assist with the clean-up. I had the privilege of visiting Skipton, Wickliffe and Beaufort with the member for Wannon and a team of Victorian members including the members for Flinders, Dunkley and Aston. As well as assisting with some clean-up tasks, we were privileged to hear their stories. Sadly, some of these people had been hit by flood only months earlier, in September last year. Many had managed to repair and reopen their stores only to be hit again. Thankfully, they were spared from the downpours that hit Victoria this past weekend. But like so many small business people and farmers, they were a determined group. Even then they were worried about how they would rebuild their businesses and operations and in some cases their homes. In one of the most tragic ironies of this past month, the farming community was hoping for a bumper crop to assist recovery from the record drought of recent years. That hope was washed away along with livestock, feed and fences.

Thankfully, the loss of life was avoided due to the extraordinary efforts of Victoria Police, the CFA and in particular the State Emergency Service. I would like to specifically also note the role of two local governments I met which were directly involved in these events—two of many, I should add. Councillor Matt Makin, Mayor of the Corangamite Shire, and Councillor Michael O’Connor, Mayor of the Pyrenees Shire, led their employees and councillors in an extraordinary effort that ensured people were safe, as well as assisting in the immediate aftermath and directing the first stages of the recovery. I should also note the efforts shown by the new Victorian government led by Premier Ted Baillieu and Deputy Premier Peter Ryan, who ensured that every service needed to protect life in the lead-up and immediate aftermath was made available to affected communities.

As I mentioned, yesterday we commemorated the second anniversary of Black Saturday and I think there is a lesson for us in that. In recent months, how many of us have thought of the reconstruction effort in those bushfire communities? In my travels through these communities last year, usually joining the former member for McEwen, the hon-
ourable Fran Bailey, in her passionate crusade on behalf of her constituents, the constant refrain I heard was, ‘Why have we been forgotten?’

The modern media and political cycles move so quickly that it is sometimes too easy for us to forget that rebuilding takes a great deal of time. In some of these communities, more than a year after the fires, there was still not a rebuilt permanent petrol station. There is a lesson for us from this in recovering from the floods. Rebuilding takes time and it is difficult work. It does not happen easily or without the concerted effort of many. Communities are more than buildings; they are the product of people. But even the buildings take time, often more time than we expect. It is too easy for us to assume that it is underway and that it has happened, whereas what it needs is our constant attention to ensure things are actually happening on the ground, responding to community needs and aspirations.

There are just under a hundred communities that have been directly affected by these natural disasters—floods, cyclones and fires. The rebuilding task across these diverse communities will be extraordinarily complex. Two years ago I said:

We should make the commitment now to not let this issue slip from our sight, to not turn our minds from this as time passes and to never forget what these communities have gone through as we stick with them through the difficult months and years to come.

I do not know if I have lived up to that hope myself over the last two years, but I believe it is something to which we should all recommit ourselves today.

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS (New South Wales) (7.31 pm)—I rise to speak on this condolence motion and to express my sympathies to those families who have lost loved ones in the recent natural disasters that have afflicted many Australians across the nation. Many of my colleagues have paid tribute to the efforts of so many to help with the recovery across Australia and with ongoing problems such as those of river communities in my own state of New South Wales. I would like to associate myself with those remarks.

In my contribution this evening, I would like to focus on the mental health aspects of these disasters. Whilst for many the immediate anguish has been very hard, the presence of so many volunteers and helpers has made the task less confronting. However, when everyone is gone and the cold reality of the long haul back is faced, that is when, for many, it will be much harder. I pay tribute to those working on the ground and around the clock providing psychological and emotional support to families and individuals after the devastation, including to the State Emergency Service, Lifeline, the Red Cross, the Salvation Army and the St Vincent de Paul Society. For example, Lifeline counsellors are working with individuals and families affected by the floods in order to help them establish their own personal recovery plans. These plans will guide people in how to recover. The dedication and passion of so many to help is inspiring. Professor Patrick McGorry has been asked by Queensland Health to visit flood affected areas to assist mental health teams dealing with the traumatised victims of these floods.

I would like to thank and recognise the men and women of the Australian Defence Force who, in the true tradition of the great Australian military, have also been working around the clock to render assistance and support after the various disasters. This follows a long tradition of assistance rendered by the military after similar disasters. My husband, who served in the Royal Australian Navy, well remembers Boxing Day 1974 when, as a serving naval officer on HMAS
Melbourne, he and the rest of the crew were recalled from Christmas leave to sail for Darwin after Cyclone Tracy. The Melbourne departed on Boxing Day, crash-sailing from Sydney, carrying vital supplies to assist in what became known as Operation Navy Help Darwin. John recalls arriving on New Year’s Day to utter devastation. HMAS Melbourne was the first aid to arrive in Darwin after Cyclone Tracy and, in the weeks that followed, her crew worked hard at the recovery effort. Indeed this is one of the proud traditions of our military.

Much has been said of the stoicism and resilience of those communities hit by disasters, but even those of greatest fortitude face difficulties in coping. It is vital that services be available to help people to share their feelings and to help them recover. Some may be ready to do so now; some may take some time. It is important that someone be there for them when they are ready to open up and talk about their experiences. Returning to normality is vitally important. To do so involves accepting the support of people who care, taking the time to be with close family and friends and expressing your needs clearly and honestly to family, friends and those in helping professions. But, for many of those in disaster affected communities who do not have families, it may be even harder, because they do not have children and loved ones around them to talk to and share their emotions with. It is maybe much harder to look after yourself in such circumstances. This is especially so for the many more Australians living on their own these days and most particularly for older Australians living on their own. The effect on their self-esteem and confidence will be even more devastating.

From the coalition’s perspective, we are keen to ensure that mental health services remain available in disaster areas, not only to deal with the here and now but most especially to deal with the afterwards, when the immediate focus of media and public attention begins to fade. As people go through the remainder of their lives, they may come across an old photograph or a small memento, and the emotion will overwhelm them. These will be the hardest of times. As I have said to my colleagues, the mental health issue will be one of the issues that will long remain after the physical clean-up is over. As Senator Ryan just reminded us in relation to the fires in Victoria, when everybody and all the help has long gone, it will be very much that emotional resilience and the emotional remnants of the disaster that will still be with people.

I note the announcement by Minister Butler, the Minister for Mental Health and Ageing, of extra funding for flood affected Australians under the Access to Allied Psychological Services initiative. This is encouraging, given that this government has been taking money out of mental health. Indeed at the last budget, with no warning, Minister Roxon, the Minister for Health and Ageing, announced that social workers and occupational therapists would no longer be able to provide Medicare funded services under the Better Access initiative. There was no consultation with the sector, just an arbitrary decision.

As I have travelled around Australia since becoming shadow minister for mental health it has become very clear in many regional and rural areas that the only access people get to mental health support is from social workers and occupational therapists. Thanks to pressure from social workers and occupational therapists and from the coalition at estimates, in November 2010 we saw yet another classic Minister Roxon backdown. After finally consulting with the sector, the initiative was reinstated. Given the current situation, I am sure that many will need to avail themselves of these services, especially
those in the regional and rural areas affected by the disasters.

Disasters like floods, drought and cyclones are part of the history of our great country. Sadly, some of these have been fatal. Many of my colleagues have reminded us of past disasters in our great country. While today is not the time to focus on inappropriate remarks, the recent efforts of the Greens cannot but be condemned. Sadly, though, they are true to form. Senator Brown did not think it was too soon to blame global warming for the deadly Black Saturday fires in Victoria in 2009, when, while the fires were still burning, there he was on Sky News pontificating that:

Global warming is predicted to make this sort of event happen 25 per cent, 50 per cent more.

True to form, Senator Brown did not think it was too soon, with bodies yet to be recovered and funeral services yet to take place, to blame coal miners for the Queensland floods. He stated:

It’s the single biggest cause—burning coal—for climate change and it must take its major share of responsibility for the weather events we are seeing unfolding now.

And, most recently, the ABC reported Senator Milne’s bold assertion that Tropical Cyclone Yasi was caused by climate change when she stated:

This is a tragedy, but it is a tragedy of climate change.

As I indicated, I do not wish to dwell on these remarks today. Suffice to say that, in the middle of such tragic circumstances, this sort of political opportunism is totally inappropriate.

In conclusion, we must hope and pray that those affected by these terrible events receive whatever assistance they need, wherever they find themselves living—in their own home, if it is still standing—in the months and years ahead. I support the motion moved by Senator Conroy.

Senator KROGER (Victoria) (7.40 pm)—When the Commonwealth parliament rose last year, little did we know that Mother Nature would be at her most devastating over the Christmas recess. Floods, cyclones and bushfires have ravaged much of Australia, from the northernmost parts of our country to the southern pastures of Victoria and now across to our fellow countrymen in Western Australia. Australia has a long history of violent weather and the scale of the recent devastation has tested the resilience and power of endurance of the Australian spirit yet again.

We mourn the terrible loss of life. To the families of the 35 mothers, fathers, children or parents who lost their lives in the internal tsunami-like floods in Queensland: we grieve with you. I was in Townsville glued to the television watching the avalanche of water consume parts of Toowoomba and, like many who were not directly affected, seeking updates on the safety and wellbeing of my fellow Australians. It was gut-wrenching watching helplessly as people’s lives were literally washed away.

More recently in Victoria, a family in Shepparton lost their young son in floodwaters and our thoughts are with them. The heartbreak they must feel with their young son’s life being taken in the first flush of his youth cannot be imagined. To the family of the man who exemplified the Australian spirit and was helping out during Cyclone Yasi, falling from the roof during the pelting rain and winds: our heartfelt condolences. And for all those who are currently dealing with the ferocity of fires in the west: our best wishes are with you all. No less than 21 Victorian firefighters and two helicopters are now deployed in Western Australia trying to
stem the ruthless tide of the fire on the
ground.

The nation is behind all of those who are
reeling from the loss of loved ones. We must
make sure that we do everything we can
through the hard days ahead to assist all
those who have been affected. There are no
words to ease the pain—if only there were.
People should not have to stand alone when
dealing with personal trauma, and Aus-
traliens around the country are reaching out to
provide what emotional and practical support
they can. Houses can be rebuilt, roads and
bridges can be reconstructed and water and
energy supplies can be reconnected. Even
whole communities, after considerable effort,
can be put back in place, but we know that
the most important thing in our lives, our
loved ones, can never be replaced.

I am heartened but not surprised to wit-
ness the unprompted generosity and selfless
help Australians have offered their friends,
neighbours and even strangers in times of
need. It is the Australian way—in times of
adversity we stick together and do what we
can to help. No questions asked: we just get
on with the job. It is that thing which has
been defined as mateship, which other na-
tions admire but which we just know as be-
ing Australian. We have seen armies of vol-
unteers cleaning the streets of Brisbane and
other flood-ravaged places. Neighbours took
flood mitigation into their own hands. I am
reminded of the action of a local business-
man in Warracknabeal, in Victoria, Mr Rich-
ard Wilkins, where the Yarriambiack Creek
was threatening to breach its banks and flood
the town. Mr Wilkins took charge and, with
the support of the townsfolk, built a six-
kilometre levee along the creek, which un-
questionably saved the town. There are many
such accounts and to these local Australians:
I salute you.

This is the second flash flooding this year
to affect parts of Victoria. To those who are
doing it tough in Clunes and Creswick: our
prayers are also with you. Many people in
those two beautiful, historic towns have al-
ready waded knee deep in mud trying to re-
store their homes to right and they now face
this soul-destroying task yet again.

Australians have opened their wallets
along with their hearts. I understand that the
Premier’s Disaster Relief Appeal in Queens-
land has raised close to $200 million, high-
lighting the willingness of Australians to
pitch in to support each other in times of
need. This is something our nation indeed
can be, and truly should be, proud of. Aus-
tralians are always there to help out in times of
crisis.

The coalition is fully committed to sup-
porting those who have suffered hardship
and loss. The question is not ‘if’ but how
best to provide resources to rebuild this na-
tion. Given that this government has a poor
track record when it comes to fast spending
that is targeted and has real value for the
community, we must continue to hold it to
account, especially now when we need a fast
and well-targeted response to help flood vic-
tims all over the nation to rebuild their
homes, farms, businesses and communities.
Assistance needs to be fast, competent and
effective. People do not need red tape and
other unnecessary obstacles of inefficient
systems and processes. A key part of recon-
struction must be to do everything we can to
get small business back on its feet in flood-
and cyclone-affected areas.

This is one of the many lessons we have
learned from Black Saturday, the consuming
fire which wreaked a living hell on the peo-
ple of Victoria two years ago and took the
lives of 173 men, women and children. More
than a hundred communities were devastated
and over 2,000 properties destroyed. Today,
two years after the inferno, life is still not back to normal for so many people. Although the clean-up has progressed and there are many signs of returning life, with the natural regeneration of local vegetation, the area is still deeply scarred from the tragedy. In many ways it is still ground zero for those who were directly affected.

I recently drove through Kinglake and Marysville and was disturbed to see how many people still live in sheltered accommodation. I was appalled to see how many construction sites were still unattended too—they were vacant; permits had not been granted—leaving big gaps of nothingness in townships which used to be filled with radiant liveliness. It was sad to witness the destruction which was still there and which might have changed the face of those communities forever.

When you talk to the Black Saturday survivors, you can only be impressed by their resilience and vigour, yet there is still much lingering sadness. It is scandalous when you hear accounts of the stultifying effect of red tape and how it is making it so difficult for people to resume life as they once knew it. There was a lot of goodwill shown to the former Brumby government to provide help; however, there was not always the proficiency to do it. Red tape, excessive bureaucracy and conflicting guidelines have delayed the rebuilding of lives and communities. A lack of grants and loans, particularly business loans, has also held up the recovery.

There is a lot that we can learn from the Victorian example—especially now, when this government is installing the Queensland recovery authority, which, according to the Prime Minister’s own words, will draw on the experiences of the Victorian authority set up in the wake of the 2009 bushfires. I hope that the authority learns from the mistakes made, given that the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority still has more than $100 million of donations unspent some two years after the tragedy. It is worth noting that the Prime Minister has turned to the former New South Wales coalition Premier and federal minister John Fahey to head up the reconstruction authority to ensure that proper processes are put in place. Difficult times are a true test of leadership—something we observed in the way in which the Queensland Premier acquitted herself through the challenges that faced Queensland and in the preparation for the onslaught of Cyclone Yasi. The real test, however, is before her in guiding that state’s recovery through the next couple of years.

I hope that Ms Bligh and the Prime Minister have read the report of the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, published six months ago. It concluded that the emergency coordination during Black Saturday was inadequate. There was a failure to oversee fire warnings, to create state-wide fire plans and a ‘disturbing tendency among senior fire agency personnel—including the chief officers—to consistently allocate responsibility further down the chain of command’. Consequently, one of the report’s key recommendations was to end this system of failure and to install a proper and effective chain of command.

I compliment the Queensland government on their recently introduced changes to the Disaster Management Act 2003 which altered the rules on when to declare a disaster. These amendments made it possible for state-assisted resources to be deployed to an area before a natural disaster actually struck. In Queensland’s final response to the Black Saturday royal commission, emergency services minister Neil Roberts wrote:

Our legislation also already clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of the Minister, local authorities, State Government Agencies and volunteers during disaster events.
It was a promising and encouraging statement; however, there is always room for improvement. Facing Cyclone Yasi, the residents of Tully were advised to seek shelter in a timber hall, which was later flattened by the cyclone, instead of seeking refuge in a brand new, $6.3 million, cyclone-safe sports facility nearby. Thanks to the quick thinking of a local Red Cross volunteer—yet another unsung Australian hero—people were moved to another, safer, building.

In the wake of all these disasters one thing becomes apparent: even the smallest community in Australia must prepare for the worst case and develop an emergency plan that goes hand-in-hand with a functioning chain of command that ultimately assumes all authority. This sounds easy, yet it is not always the case, as the 2009 Victorian bushfires so sadly demonstrated. I am mindful of the many lessons that can be learnt from Black Saturday and should be considered for other recovery efforts. We must discuss measures to reduce the ongoing risk—new dams, better building standards, state insurance cover for infrastructure and building permits, to mention just a few—but most of all we must listen to the affected people on the ground because they know best what it is that they need. We must offer them a one-stop shop with flexible solutions, a minimum of red tape and high standards for value-for-money criteria. With a functioning and powerful chain of command in place this is all possible.

In conclusion, I thank the emergency response teams, the Defence men and women, the police and fire brigade officers, the local authorities and, most of all, the volunteers, who have no collective voice but who are certainly mighty in numbers. Your support to all those in need has been inspirational and I am sure has provided much comfort to the thousands who have been affected.

Senator ADAMS (Western Australia) (7.53 pm)—I rise this evening to contribute to the motion on natural disasters moved by Senator Conroy earlier today. I concur with the comments made by my colleagues regarding the various events which have caused enormous sadness and loss in most states in Australia during the past two months. My thoughts are with those who have lost loved ones during these events.

As a Western Australian senator, I would like to record the hardship felt by residents living in the Gascoyne region. They had to deal with two floods in three weeks, and, as my Western Australian colleagues have described very graphically, these floods have devastated many pastoral leases and horticultural businesses within the region. I must congratulate Dudley Maslen, the Carnarvon Shire President, and all the fire and emergency people, the CWA and everyone involved in getting people back on their feet, and recognise the fact that Gascoyne Junction was evacuated with no loss of life. That was very, very important. I wish those people all the best in their recovery and hope that we in this place can help to get them back on their feet.

I live in the hills in Perth. Last Friday evening I was very fortunate that the winds, gusting up to 90 kilometres an hour, were not blowing from the west. They were blowing from the east, which probably saved me. My neighbour rang me at 9.30 and said a fire had broken out. It was five kilometres to the west of me. Everything was broadcast on the ABC, who I would like to congratulate. Messages at first were quite mixed and quite confusing but the ABC was very clever in getting Sarah Knight, who had been a rural reporter, on the evening show. She carried the messages every 30 minutes throughout the night to tell people in a very sensible and practical way where things were going.
Unfortunately, as this fire went across Toodyay Road and down the escarpment, it was threatening Red Hill, Herne Hill, Brigadoon and Baskerville in the Swan Valley. This particular area has a large number of two-acre and five-acre hobby farms—a terrific lot of horses there—and people really and truly were trying to get their animals out. With Sarah on the radio guiding the procedures, and the fire and emergency services personnel coming on every half an hour to tell people what to do, it all went very well. As I said, I was very lucky the wind was not blowing back towards me. There were 150 emergency workers working throughout the night and the next day. The Child Protection Agency also had set up a safe haven down in the Swan Valley, which people were able to relocate to. However, they only had one way out and that was to go west; they could not go east. To those people and the volunteers involved in that fire, I do thank them very much for the work that they did.

To complicate things, at 12.30 on Sunday—the day I was flying back to Canberra—the Roleystone-Kelmscott fire broke out. All of the infrastructure—the helicopters and the water bombers—was up to the north and this area at Roleystone and Kelmscott is about 25 kilometres south. Unfortunately a lot of this area has gullies, but beautiful homes, and there is one road in and out. People were given 20 minutes to get out with whatever they had. How no-one lost their life there is absolutely amazing. It shows once again the organisation of our fire and emergency services, the police and all the volunteers who were gathered there. Just looking at the West Australian this morning, you can see the shock and the horror on the faces of those people—64 houses destroyed, 28 buildings really damaged. Having been a farmer I have myself been involved in fires and floods, but I have been lucky—I have not lost my home. My heart goes out to these people in the situation that they are in. I hope that once again we can help them. The City of Armadale has the same problem as the City of Swan. Local governments are set up to cope with these things but not quite when they have impacted on us in this way.

In conclusion, I would like to thank very much the emergency services and anyone who has been involved. I wish all those people well.

Senator RONALDSON (Victoria) (7.59 pm)—I would like to associate myself with the comments of my colleagues on both sides of the chamber on this motion on natural disasters. My Victorian colleagues referred to the Victorian fires two years ago where 173 of our fellow Victorians died. The events of the last three months are well known to all honourable senators.

It is worth remembering that as we talk there are many people in Queensland, Western Australia and Victoria who are still at risk from flood waters. The Victorian flood waters have not gone. The Victoria flood waters are still very much there. I would like to pay tribute to Premier Baillieu and the Deputy Premier of Victoria. They moved quickly and showed a level of expertise and maturity that you may not necessarily see in a very newly elected government. The moved with great speed and Victorians thank them for that. A number of my colleagues—Dan Tehan, John Forrest, Sophie Mirabella and Sharman Stone—worked very closely with their communities. One of my colleagues referred to the towns of Creswick and Clunes, just out of my home town of Ballarat. Certain parts of Creswick have been inundated on three occasions now and of course they are finding it extraordinarily difficult. A lot of the local government areas have responded very quickly. I understand from colleagues that Mayor Matt Makin and his council have worked very, very hard.
We have seen Queensland ravaged by both the floods and the cyclone over two to three weeks, but we have also seen communities supporting communities. We have seen the state government and the state opposition supporting communities. We have seen many of our colleagues on both sides of the political fence supporting their communities. I had the opportunity this morning at our Tuesday party room meeting to speak to the new member for Wright, Scott Buchholz. I spoke to him about what his community has been through and the support the newly elected member was providing to his community. It reminded me that while it is easy for those sitting above this place to attack members and senators about the way we interact with our communities, there are no people closer to their own communities than elected members and senators. We have seen comprehensive evidence of that in Victoria, Western Australia, New South Wales and Queensland over the last month.

I will close on this note: I will not dignify the comments of Senator Brown in this debate, but I can assure Senator Brown that I will have a lot more to say about his comments in due course.

Senator COLBECK (Tasmania) (8.02 pm)—I rise to make my contribution on this motion and to associate myself with the comments of others who have expressed their sincere condolences to those affected by these most extraordinary weather events that have impacted across the country. I note the stark contrast between the fires in Western Australia and the floods in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania—though it was much more of a fleeting event at home than it has been for some, particularly those living along the Murray. To see the images of these events and the impacts on people, one cannot but reflect on the very tragic circumstances that so many people now find themselves in.

The enormity of the weather system that was Cyclone Yasi wrought complete devastation on Far North Queensland. But the positive outcomes for those who had prepared and were able to protect themselves and their properties compared with the utter devastation for some people who were unable to prepare for the impact of the floods is quite dramatic. To see the pictures of that and to hear the stories that have filtered out about the impact on communities, businesses and individuals certainly makes one reflect. I want to add my voice to those who have contributed to this debate in support of the motion.

I want to comment on the extraordinary support from those who came to assist with the clean-up, particularly in Brisbane after the floods when the water receded. It was heartening to see how willing people were to provide a hand to people they did not know. There was an extraordinary level of community support. In some circumstances people flew across the country to come to the aid of their fellow Australians. I was really heartened to find that that occurred in my home state of Tasmania following some very sudden flood events. A family came into my office on the Monday morning afterwards—a lady with a family of four who had spent the weekend living in a car because a metre and a half of water had gone through their house. Their possessions were destroyed.

I do not want to get into a size of disaster debate because that is not appropriate and none of us want to go there, but I do want to place on the record that the good and the bad occurred across Australia out of these events. I cite one example where a business said, ‘The floods have been through and have wiped my business out.’ But on the Monday morning after, they turned up at the site and found people ready to start work. A contractor with his truck and his men turned up and said, ‘I am here for the week to help you re-
construct your business’. Over a couple of weeks the local fire brigade and the local community allowed that business to re-open—thus maintaining employment in that local community, which is so important.

The impact of these weather events on roads and infrastructure has been replicated across the country. An extraordinary weather system hit Australia over this summer. I place on the record my condolences to all of those families and communities who have been impacted by this event. I commend the comments of my colleagues on both sides of the chamber and I commend the motion to the Senate.

The PRESIDENT—As the debate has concluded, I ask honourable senators to stand in silence to signify their assent to the motion.

Question agreed to, honourable senators standing in their places.

NOTICES

Presentation

Senator Boyce to move on the next day of sitting:

That the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services be authorised to hold a private meeting otherwise than in accordance with standing order 33(1) during the sitting of the Senate on Thursday, 10 February 2011, from 11.30 am.

Senator Hurley to move on the next day of sitting:

That the Economics Legislation Committee be authorised to hold private meetings otherwise than in accordance with standing order 33(1) during the sittings of the Senate on Thursday, 10 February, Thursday, 3 March and Thursday, 24 March 2011, from 3 pm to 4 pm.

Senator Bushby to move on the next day of sitting:

That the Economics References Committee be authorised to hold a public meeting during the sitting of the Senate on Wednesday, 9 February 2011, from 6 pm, to take evidence for the committee’s inquiries into competition within the Australian banking sector and the amendments proposed by Senator Cormann on sheet 7010 [Tax Laws Amendment (2010 Measures No. 4) Bill 2010].

Senator Bushby to move on the next day of sitting:

That the Economics References Committee be authorised to hold private meetings otherwise than in accordance with standing order 33(1) during the sittings of the Senate on Thursday, 10 February, Thursday, 3 March and Thursday, 24 March 2011, from 3 pm to 4 pm.

Senator Mark Bishop to move on the next day of sitting:

That the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit be authorised to hold public meetings during the sittings of the Senate as follows:

(a) from 10 am to 1.30 pm on Monday, 28 February 2011 to take evidence for the committee’s inquiry into the review of the Defence major projects report; and
(b) from 11 am to 1 pm on Wednesday, 2 March and Wednesday, 23 March 2011, and from 10 am to 1.30 pm on Monday, 21 March 2011 to take evidence for the committee’s inquiry into the review of Auditor-General’s reports.

Senator Back to move on the next day of sitting:

That the time for the presentation of reports of the Education, Employment and Workplace Relations References Committee be extended as follows:

(a) Industry Skills Councils—to 23 March 2011; and

(b) Primary Schools for the 21st Century program—to 24 March 2011.

Senator Back to move on the next day of sitting:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that:

(i) the Australian Government has entered into separate bilateral agreements with
the states and territories and with Block Grant Authorities (BGAs) in relation to the expenditure of funding granted under the Building the Education Revolution (BER) program,

(ii) the language in the agreements with the states and territories differs from the language in the agreements with the BGAs with respect to the Australian Government’s ability to withhold, suspend or recover monies in the event that the funding is not expended for the purposes of the program and in accordance with the BER Guidelines, and

(iii) the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations indicated at a Senate estimates hearing in October 2010 that the Commonwealth has obtained legal advice that confirms that, notwithstanding the differences in language in the agreements, under each of the two types of agreements the Commonwealth has the power to withhold or recover monies; and

(b) orders that there be laid on the table by the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations, no later than 4 pm on Thursday, 10 February 2011, a copy of the legal advice relied on by the Government to reach this conclusion.

Senator Joyce to move on the next day of sitting:

(1) That the following matter be referred to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee for inquiry and report by 11 May 2011:

The provisions of the Water Act 2007 (the Act), with particular reference to the direction it provides for the development of a Basin Plan, including:

(a) any ambiguities or constraints in the Act which would prevent a Basin Plan from being developed on an equally weighted consideration of economic, social and environmental factors;

(b) the differences in legal interpretations of the Act;

(c) the constitutional power of the Commonwealth to legislate in the area of water;

(d) the role of relevant international agreements and the effect of those on the parts of the Act which direct the Basin Plan to give effect to those agreements and their effect on the Act more generally;

(e) any amendments that would be required to ensure that economic, social and environmental factors are given equally weighted consideration in developing the Basin Plan; and

(f) any other related matter.

(2) That in conducting its inquiry, the committee should consult those with particular legal expertise in the area of water.

Senator Crossin to move on the next day of sitting:

That the time for the presentation of the report of the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee on the provisions of the Sex and Age Discrimination Legislation Amendment Bill 2010 be extended to 22 March 2011.

Senator Hanson-Young to move on the next day of sitting:

That the Senate—

(a) notes the tragic events surrounding Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel 221, which saw the drowning of 30 asylum seekers off the coast of Christmas Island on 15 December 2010;

(b) recognises the impact that this tragedy has had on the community as a whole and, in particular, the community of Christmas Island; and

(c) expresses sympathy and conveys its condolences to the friends and family in Australia and abroad of those who lost their lives.

Senator Hanson-Young to move on the next day of sitting:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that:
(i) the bund at Narrung in South Australia is having a negative impact on the Lower Lakes and, in particular, the Lake Albert community, by restricting fresh water flow, and
(ii) the Lower Lakes community wishes to have the bund removed as an urgent priority;
(b) recognises that:
(i) the community was advised by the South Australian Government at the time the bund was constructed that it was a short-term measure and that the Federal Government would provide funding to facilitate its removal, and
(ii) 3 years on, the bund has still not been removed; and
(c) calls on the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities immediately to investigate this matter.

ADJOURNMENT
Senator CONROY (Victoria—Acting Leader of the Government in the Senate) (8.08 pm)—I move:

That, as a mark of respect to the memory of those who have lost their lives as a result of the recent natural disasters, the Senate do now adjourn.

Question agreed to.

Senate adjourned at 8.08 pm

DOCUMENTS

Tabling
The following documents were tabled by the Clerk:

[A New Tax System (Family Assistance) (Administration) Act—]

Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Administration) Act—Select Legislative Instrument 2010 No. 307—Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Administration) Amendment Regulations 2010 (No. 3) [F2010L03201].
Airspace Act—Airspace Regulations—Instrument No. CASA OAR 179/10—Amendment of instrument CASA OAR 173/10—Determination of airspace and controlled aerodromes etc [F2010L03268].
Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Act—Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Rules Amendment Instrument 2010 (No. 3) [F2010L03318].
Appropriation Act (No. 1) 2005-2006 and Appropriation Act (No. 1) 2008-2009—Determination to Reduce Appropriations Upon Request (No. 3 of 2010-2011) [F2010L03083].
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Select Legislative Instruments 2010 Nos—
294—National Health (Pharmaceuticals and Vaccines – Cost Recovery) Amendment Regulations 2010 (No. 1) [F2010L02952].
295—National Health (Pharmaceutical Benefits) Amendment Regulations 2010 (No. 4) [F2010L02950].
296—National Health (Pharmaceutical Benefits) Amendment Regulations 2010 (No. 5) [F2010L02953].
327—National Health (Pharmaceutical Benefits) Amendment Regulations 2010 (No. 6) [F2010L03077].
Native Title Act—Native Title (Notices) Amendment Determination 2010 (No. 1) [F2010L03001].
Navigation Act—Marine Orders Nos—
8 of 2010—Construction – subdivision and stability, machinery and electrical installation [F2010L03416].
9 of 2010—Ships surveys and certification [F2010L03417].
10 of 2010—High-speed craft [F2010L03418].
Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act—
Northern Territory National Emergency Response (Land Use Approvals) Guidelines 2010 [F2010L03358].
Occupational Health and Safety Act—
Notices Nos—
1 of 2010—Occupational Health and Safety (Definition of Employee) Notice 2010 (1) [F2010L03276].
2 of 2010—Occupational Health and Safety (Definition of Employee) Notice 2010 (2) [F2010L03278].
Parliamentary Entitlements Act—
Parliamentary Entitlements Regulations—Advice of decision to pay assistance under Part 3, dated 21 December 2010 [2].
Primary Industries (Customs) Charges Act—Select Legislative Instruments 2010 Nos—
282—Primary Industries (Customs) Charges Amendment Regulations 2010 (No. 4) [F2010L03019].
308—Primary Industries (Customs) Charges Amendment Regulations 2010 (No. 5) [F2010L03132].
Primary Industries (Excise) Levies Act—
Select Legislative Instruments 2010 Nos—
283—Primary Industries (Excise) Levies Amendment Regulations 2010 (No. 5) [F2010L03045].
284—Primary Industries (Excise) Levies Amendment Regulations 2010 (No. 6) [F2010L03017].
285—Primary Industries (Excise) Levies Amendment Regulations 2010 (No. 7) [F2010L03049].
309—Primary Industries (Excise) Levies Amendment Regulations 2010 (No. 8) [F2010L03130].
310—Primary Industries (Excise) Levies Amendment Regulations 2010 (No. 9) [F2010L03152].

Privacy Act—
Public Interest Determinations Nos—
11—Collection and use of contact details of genetic relatives to enable use or disclosure of genetic information [F2010L03092].
11A—Collection and use of contact details of genetic relative to enable use or disclosure of genetic information [F2010L03091].
11B—Amendments to Public Interest Determinations Nos. 11 and 11A – Collection and use of contact details of genetic relatives to enable use or disclosure of genetic information [F2010L03314].

Tax File Number Guidelines (Amendment No. 1 2010) [F2010L03316].

Private Health Insurance Act—
Private Health Insurance (Benefit Requirements) Amendment Rules 2010 (No. 8) [F2010L03222].
Private Health Insurance (Benefit Requirements) Amendment Rules 2010 (No. 9) [F2010L03240].
Private Health Insurance (Benefit Requirements) Amendment Rules 2011 (No. 1) [F2011L00145].

Private Health Insurance (Complying Product) Amendment Rules 2010 (No. 2) [F2010L01647]—Explanatory Statement [in substitution for explanatory statement tabled with instrument on 22 June 2010].

Private Health Insurance (Complying Product) Amendment Rules 2011 (No. 1) [F2011L00135].

Private Health Insurance (Complying Product) Rules 2010 (No. 2) [F2011L00093].
Private Health Insurance (Insurer Obligations) Amendment Rules 2010 (No. 1) [F2010L02886].

Private Health Insurance (Prostheses) Amendment Rules 2010 (No. 2) [F2011L00092].


Quarantine Act—Quarantine Service Fees Amendment Determination 2010 (No. 1) [F2010L03257].

Radiocommunications Act—
Radiocommunications (Bench Testing by Corrective Services NSW of Mobile Telephone Jamming Device) Exemption Amendment Determination 2010 (No. 1) [F2010L03143].
Radiocommunications (Electromagnetic Radiation – Human Exposure) Amendment Standard 2011 (No. 1) [F2011L00158].
Radiocommunications Licence Conditions (Amateur Licence) Amendment Determination 2010 (No. 1) [F2010L03333].
Radiocommunications (Overseas Amateurs Visiting Australia) Class Licence Variation 2010 (No. 1) [F2010L03339].
Remuneration Tribunal Act—
Determinations—
2010/20: Remuneration and Allowances for Holders of Public Office [F2010L03035].
Select Legislative Instrument 2010 No. 300—Remuneration Tribunal (Members' Fees and Allowances) Amendment Regulations 2010 (No. 1) [F2010L03028].
Renewable Energy (Electricity) Act—
Select Legislative Instruments 2010 Nos—
320—Renewable Energy (Electricity) Amendment Regulations 2010 (No. 8) [F2010L03206].
321—Renewable Energy (Electricity) Amendment Regulations 2010 (No. 9) [F2010L03159].
Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act—Notices Nos—
1 of 2010—Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation (Definition of Employee) Notice 2010 (1) [F2010L03275].
2 of 2010—Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation (Definition of Employee) Notice 2010 (2) [F2010L03277].
Schools Assistance Act—Select Legislative Instrument 2010 No. 292—Schools Assistance Amendment Regulations 2010 (No. 1) [F2010L03046].
Social Security Act—
Social Security (Exempt Lump Sum) (Payments to former residents in South Australian State care) (FaHCSIA) Determination 2010 [F2010L03359].
Social Security Foreign Currency Exchange Rate Determination 2010 (No. 1) [F2010L02747].
Social Security (Administration) Act—
Student Assistance Act—
Student Assistance (Education Institutions and Courses) Amendment Determination 2010 (No. 2) [F2010L03133].
Tax Agent Services Act—Select Legislative Instrument 2010 No. 334—Tax Agent Services Amendment Regulations 2010 (No. 2) [F2010L03183].
Taxation Administration Act—
PAYG withholding—Occasional payroll donations to deductible gift recipients No. 2 [F2010L03246].
Select Legislative Instrument 2010 No. 335—Taxation Administration Amendment Regulations 2010 (No. 4) [F2010L03174].
Telecommunications Act—
Telecommunications (Types of Cabling Work) Amendment Declaration 2010 (No. 1) [F2010L03118].
Therapeutic Goods Act—
Poisons Standard Amendment No. 2 of 2010 [F2010L03274].
Therapeutic Goods (Listing) Notice 2010 (No. 4) [F2010L03305].
Trade Practices Act—
Consumer Protection Notices Nos—
Notice of permanent ban, dated 16 December 1986 [F2010L03293].

10 of 1991—Permanent Ban on Goods [F2010L03294].
17 of 1993—Imposition of a Permanent Ban on Goods [F2010L03295].
7 of 2002—Permanent Ban on Goods [F2010L03296].
7 of 2003—Permanent Ban on Goods [F2010L03297].
2 of 2004—Permanent Ban on Goods [F2010L03298].
4 of 2009—Unsafe Goods Notice [F2010L03279].
19 of 2009—Unsafe Goods Notice [F2010L03280].
25 of 2009—Declaration that Toy-Like Novelty Cigarette Lighters are Unsafe Goods [F2010L03281].
4 of 2010—Permanent Ban on Goods [F2010L03299].
6 of 2010—Declaration that Certain Goods Containing More Than 1% Diethylhexyl Phthalate (DEHP) are Unsafe Goods [F2010L03282].
14 of 2010—Temporary Ban on Goods [F2010L03283].
17 of 2010—Unsafe Goods Notice [F2010L03284].
18 of 2010—Permanent Ban on Goods [F2010L03300].
19 of 2010—Unsafe Goods Notice [F2010L03291].
20 of 2010—Unsafe Goods Notice [F2010L03288].
21 of 2010—Temporary Ban on Goods [F2010L03290].
22 of 2010—Temporary Ban on Goods [F2010L03289].
26 of 2010—Unsafe Goods Notice [F2010L03292].
Microscopic Polyangiitis No. 14 of 2011 [F2010L03262].
Polyarteritis Nodosa No. 11 of 2011 [F2010L03258].
Polyarteritis Nodosa No. 12 of 2011 [F2010L03259].
Sensorineural Hearing Loss No. 5 of 2011 [F2010L03252].
Sensorineural Hearing Loss No. 6 of 2011 [F2010L03254].
Varicocele No. 3 of 2011 [F2010L03250].
Varicocele No. 4 of 2011 [F2010L03251].


Governor-General’s Proclamations—
Commencements of provisions of Acts—
Australian National Preventive Health Agency Act 2010—Sections 3 to 56—1 January 2011 [F2010L03052].
Bankruptcy Legislation Amendment Act 2010—Schedules 1 and 2 and Part 2 of Schedule 4—1 December 2010 [F2010L03074].
Corporations Amendment (No. 1) Act 2010—Schedule 1—13 December 2010 [F2010L03188].
Superannuation Legislation Amendment Act 2010—Items 1 to 5 of Schedule 2—1 December 2010 [F2010L03106].
QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

The following answers to questions were circulated:

Australian Competition and Consumer Commission

(Question No. 2)

Senator Abetz asked the Minister representing the Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation, upon notice, on 1 November 2010:

With reference to the Franchising Consultative Committee (the committee) of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) and given that the ACCC recently sought expressions of interest from members of the community to join the committee:

1. (a) What is the background of those people selected for this role; (b) are the majority legally or professionally qualified; and (c) does the membership include members of the community with frontline experience of working day-to-day in the franchising sector; if not, why not.

2. Can details be provided of the: (a) selection criteria; (b) procedure; and (c) process, used to select the committee members.

3. Was the selection criteria biased towards the legal and professional sectors rather than finding a balanced mix of those attributes and the selection of organisations and people with real experience of how the franchising sector works.

4. Was the ACCC serious about community consultation or is the committee a committee of lawyers specialising in franchising and associated laws.

5. Was the ACCC genuine in its attempt to get an appropriate cross-section of the franchising industry on the committee or is this forum just to give the impression of community consultation.

Senator Wong—The Treasurer has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:

1. (a) The committee is made up of a broad range of industry stakeholders with practical past or present experience in franchising (including as franchisors and franchisees). (b) Of the 15 current members, two are franchisors, three are business advisors, four belong to franchising industry associations, two are academics and four are legal advisors to the franchise sector. Five of the current members are legally qualified. (c) All of the current committee members are experienced in franchising and represent a good cross section of the industry. The current members of the committee are:

Mr Tim Hantke (Franchising Solutions)
The Hon. David Beddall (Franchisee Association of Australia)
Mr Robert Gardini (HWL Ebsworth)
Ms Sue Scanlan (Motor Traders Association of Australia)
Mr Derek Sutherland (Dibbs Barker)
Mr Steve Wright (Franchise Council of Australia)
Ms Chris Baulch (Baker McKenzie)

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Mr Rod White (Yong Corporate Office)
Mr Greg Nathan (Franchising Relationships Institute)
Ms Penny Ward (Baker McKenzie)
Ms Jenny Buchan (University of NSW)
Ms Juana Laucirica (Elders Insurance)
Mr Howard Bellin (IF International)
Ms Lynne Peach (Minter Ellison Lawyers).

(2) Members of the committee are appointed in a two-stage process, outlined below.

Stage 1: In seeking to appoint members the ACCC:

- Inquires about suitability and availability of individuals with experience and/or knowledge about franchising or related fields.
- Invites and receives expressions of interest from existing members.
- Invites and receives expressions of interest from organisations identified by the ACCC as having an interest in the ACCC’s work and/or a particular stakeholder perspective to input that is relevant to the ACCC’s work.

Organisational and individual nominees are asked to provide a short curriculum vitae and a letter briefly addressing the following selection criteria (to the extent they are not addressed in the curriculum vitae provided):

- Commitment to attend biannual meetings.
- Experience in the franchising sector, including experience as a franchisor, franchisee or member of an industry body.
- Current links with the franchising sector that would allow the member to convey current issues of concern to franchisors and franchisees.
- Independence from government interests.
- Interpersonal skills and experience in negotiations.

Stage 2: Following receipt of applications the ACCC assesses applications against the full set of criteria set out above. The ACCC aims to achieve a balance and variety of interests and perspectives among the membership of the committee.

A call for expression of interest along with the selection documentation was also publicly advertised on the ACCC’s website.

(3) The selection criteria was not biased toward any specific industry or business group. The requirements were kept broad, and could be applied to any individual involved in the franchising community.

(4) The ACCC aims to achieve a balanced cross section of the community when selecting members for the committee. Expressions of interest were not restricted to any specific business category. Of the 15 current members, only four are lawyers.

(5) The ACCC aims to achieve a balanced cross section of the community when selecting members for the committee. Expressions of interest were not restricted to any specific business category. All of the current committee members are experienced in franchising and represent a good cross section of the industry. Of the 15 current members, two are franchisors, three are business advisors, four belong to franchising industry associations, two are academics and four are legal advisors to the franchise sector.
China

(Question No. 8)

Senator Bob Brown asked the Minister representing the Minister for Foreign Affairs, upon notice, on 28 September 2010:

(1) Since 2007, has the department or any embassy received any complaints from Australian citizens who have alleged that they have been illegally detained, endured extended questioning and assaulted while in China.

(2) (a) What actions has the Government undertaken to investigate any such complaints; and (b) what are the outcomes of any investigations.

(3) Has the Government raised the issue with Chinese officials in Australia or in China; if so, have any commitments been made by China to ensure Australian citizens have access to consular or legal assistance if detained or arrested by police in China.

Senator Conroy—The Minister for Foreign Affairs has provided the answer to the honourable senator’s question:

(1) Yes, please see details outlined below.

(2) The following outlines Government action taken in relation to the cases raised with us:

(a) Guangzhou Consular District:

(i) The Australian Consulate General in Guangzhou received reports from an Australian man in October 2007 that he and his wife (who is also an Australian citizen) had been placed under house arrest for 11 days. The Australian Consulate General in Guangzhou raised the allegations with local Chinese authorities as soon as they were reported to the Consulate General. Between October 2007 and March 2008 the Australian Consulate General in Guangzhou made five formal representations to local Chinese authorities about the matter. Our embassy in Beijing also raised the matter with China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Beijing. Chinese authorities advised that as the Australian and his wife had not entered China on Australian travel documents, they were not willing to respond to the Consulate General’s representations.

(b) Shanghai Consular District:

(i) An Australian man claimed that he had been illegally detained and subjected to extended questioning in Shanghai in June 2010. DFAT Canberra alerted the Australian Consulate General in Shanghai after the claims were raised in ministerial correspondence. Post raised the matter with the Shanghai Municipal Public Security Bureau (PSB), who argued that the man had engaged in behaviour at the Shanghai World Expo which was deemed inappropriate. The PSB said they had acted in accordance with local Chinese law, noting that the man had been questioned by the PSB, had the duration of his visa stay shortened and was subsequently deported. The PSB said the man was not arrested, imprisoned nor detained. The PSB claimed that, following questioning, the man agreed to depart China voluntarily and was taken to the airport by public security officers.

(ii) An Australian woman claimed to have been detained on 30 April 2010 by local Chinese authorities in Shanghai, mistreated and deported on 2 May 2010. Our Consulate General in Shanghai raised the matter with the Shanghai Entry and Exit Bureau, and the Shanghai PSB. Our embassy in Beijing also raised the matter with China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Beijing. Shanghai authorities said that the woman had been given an administrative warning and counselled after she was found to have engaged in activities that disturbed public order. Shanghai authorities said that the woman agreed to depart China voluntarily after authorities had reduced the duration of her visa. The PSB argued that the woman had not formally been detained.
(c) Hong Kong Consular District:
(i) An Australian woman was arrested in November 2009 in accordance with local law and held for less than one day. She claimed she was not provided with food and water. Australian consular officials asked police to provide the woman with food and water, which they arranged immediately. Australian consular officials provided information on how the woman could lodge a formal complaint against police. The woman did not request any further action by Australian consular officials.

(ii) An Australian woman arrested in accordance with local law in Hong Kong in October 2008 alleged that she was not provided with food and water while in police detention. The woman refused to accept food and water from police when it was offered to her in the presence of Australian consular officers. The woman did not ask consular officials to pursue her complaints further.

(iii) An Australian woman arrested in Hong Kong in accordance with local law in September 2008 claimed to have been subjected to verbal, non-physical abuse by Hong Kong police. Post provided information on how to lodge a complaint against police but was not asked to pursue the issue further.

(iv) An Australian man detained in Hong Kong in July 2007 initially claimed to have been beaten by Hong Kong police. Following inquiries by Australian consular officials, the man said that he had not been beaten but rather treated roughly while being handcuffed by police. The man told consular officials that he did not want to make a formal complaint against the Hong Kong police and that he did not want consular officials to pursue the matter further.

(v) An Australian woman was arrested in accordance with local law in Hong Kong in January 2007. She claimed to have been assaulted by a police officer. The woman did not request consular officials to pursue the allegations.

(d) Macau Consular District:
(i) In December 2009 an Australian man was detained in various hotel rooms, but not by authorities (detainers were suspected loan sharks) in Macau. The man requested that consular officials not inform Macau authorities. There were no allegations of violence.

(ii) An Australian man said that in April 2007 he was handcuffed to a chair for three days by local police and not allowed to eat or sleep during this time. The man said he was provided with a court-appointed lawyer, who asked him to state that he had a gambling problem and that he had used a fake credit card to get money for gambling. The man claims he was so tired and confused by this time that he agreed and pleaded guilty when he was taken to court. The man said police had hit him on the legs to get him to give them the names of the people involved in the scam and he said he could not provide this information. Consular officers asked the man to make a written statement so that the matter could be taken up with the relevant authorities. The man did not wish to pursue the matter.

(e) Beijing Consular District:
(i) There have been no cases reported in the Beijing consular district since 2007.

(3) The Australia-China Consular Agreement was signed on 8 September 1999 and entered into force on 15 September 2000 (note: this agreement applies only to mainland China and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) but not the Macau SAR). The agreement provides for annual consultations to review the consular relationship, including issues of concern to either party. Under the terms of the agreement, China has committed to notifying Australian consular officials of an arrest or detention of an Australian citizen within three days and to ensuring that a consular visit occurs within two days after that. The agreement also commits Chinese authorities to providing reasons for the detention of an Australian citizen and the details of any charges. The Australian
government has consistently raised individual consular cases and issues of concern, including in relation to notification and consular access, during annual Australia-China consular consultations.

In addition to raising issues during the bilateral consular consultations, we have also consistently raised with China cases we have become aware of, at the time we have become aware of them, where Chinese authorities appear not to have met their obligations under the Consular Agreement. Where appropriate, such matters have also been raised at ministerial and senior official level on a number of occasions.

When these issues have been raised, China has reiterated its commitment to the terms of the Consular Agreement and assured us that it will continue to abide by those commitments.

Pursuant to the terms of the Australia-China Consular Agreement, the Australian Government proposes to raise issues of consular access and notification with China at the next round of bilateral Consular Consultations, which are currently scheduled to be held in October 2010.

**Biosafety**

*(Question No. 11)*

Senator Siewert asked the Minister representing the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, upon notice, on 28 September 2010:

With reference to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (the protocol):

(1) Why has Australia not ratified the protocol to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

(2) Will Australia consider ratifying the protocol before the Meeting of Parties in Nagoya, Japan, from 11 October to 15 October 2010; if so, what will be the process; if not, why not.

(3) Has the issue of biosafety (the safe transfer, handling and use of living modified organisms resulting from modern biotechnology that may have adverse effects on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity) been considered during the development of the national biodiversity strategy; if so, when and in what way.

(4) (a) Which agency is responsible for reviewing and regulating biosafety in relation to biological diversity in Australia; and (b) what role does the department have in this matter.

Senator Conroy—The Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:

(1) Australia has not ratified the Protocol as doing so would not provide any additional environmental or human health benefits for Australia. The range of domestic policies and measures already in place, including the Gene Technology Act 2000, Quarantine Act 1908 and the Imported Food Control Act 1992, ensure a high level of protection for the environment and human health. Although a non-party, Australia still participates actively in the Protocol and voluntarily reported on its domestic regime to the Protocol Secretariat in 2007.

(2) Officials regularly consider and monitor the implications of the Protocol and related negotiations for our national interests, and continued to do so in the lead up to and during the Meeting of the Parties in October 2010. Australia does work with like-minded countries to ensure that the Protocol is workable and consistent with other international obligations. However, no formal review of Australia’s decision not to ratify the Protocol is currently underway.

(3) The issue of biosafety was considered during the development of Australia’s Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010–2030. The strategy states:

> “Potential threats are associated with the introduction of organisms resulting from biotechnology and other new techniques used in plant and animal breeding (e.g. genetically modified organisms). These also require ongoing, scientifically-based management.”
Biosafety is one of several biosecurity issues considered in the strategy. The strategy notes that:

“The Australian, state and territory governments are developing a framework of common principles and guidelines to enable biosecurity arrangements to be applied consistently across Australia... The aim is to bring together all biosecurity activities being undertaken by the Australian government, state and territory governments, industry, landholders and other key stakeholders in primary production and the environment. The framework will cover all invasive plants, animals and diseases of terrestrial, aquatic and marine environments that could be harmful to primary industries, the natural and built environments, and biodiversity.”

(4) (a) The Department of Health and Ageing is responsible for gene technology regulation through the Gene Technology Act 2000. The Act regulates dealings with genetically modified organisms in Australia to protect human health and the environment and is administered by an independent statutory office holder, the Gene Technology Regulator. The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety applies to ‘living modified organisms’. Living modified organisms are equivalent to genetically modified organisms in the Australian regulatory context.

Under section 50 of the Act, the Gene Technology Regulator must seek advice from the Environment Minister, among others, on matters relevant to the preparation of a risk assessment and risk management plan for the intentional release of a genetically modified organism into the environment.

(b) The Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities prepares advice for the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities to consider in advising the Gene Technology Regulator on the intentional release of a genetically modified organism into the environment.

Climate Change and Energy Efficiency: Staffing
(Question No. 17)

Senator Humphries asked the Minister representing the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, upon notice, on 28 September 2010:

With reference to the department and all agencies in the Minister’s portfolio, how many redundancies were there for each of the following financial years:

(a) 2007-08;
(b) 2008-09; and
(c) 2009-10 to date.

Senator Wong—The Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:

The Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency has had no redundancies in each of the following financial years:

(a) 2007-08;
(b) 2008-09; and
(c) 2009-10.
Climate Change and Energy Efficiency: Staffing
(Question No. 18)

Senator Humphries asked the Minister representing the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, upon notice, on 28 September 2010:

With reference to the department and all agencies in the Minister’s portfolio, how many involuntary redundancies were there for each of the following financial years:

(a) 2007-08;
(b) 2008-09; and
(c) 2009-10 to date.

Senator Wong—The Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:

The Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency has had no involuntary redundancies in each of the following financial years:

(a) 2007-08;
(b) 2008-09; and
(c) 2009-10.

Prime Minister and Cabinet: Accommodation
(Question No. 19)

Senator Humphries asked the Minister representing the Prime Minister, upon notice, on 28 September 2010:

Do any of the departments or agencies within the Ministers portfolio consider that new or additional office accommodation may be required in the next 2 years; if so, would that accommodation be provided in Canberra; and if so, approximately how many staff are estimated to need accommodation in the new or additional offices.

Senator Chris Evans—The Prime Minister has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:

I am advised that as at 8 November 2010 departments and agencies in my portfolio are planning additional office accommodation in the next two years as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>New or Additional Office Accommodation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department of the Prime Minister and</td>
<td>Office accommodation for the CHOGM Taskforce in Perth to accommodate approximately 80 staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabinet</td>
<td>Other than the above, PM&amp;C has not made any decisions concerning new or additional office accommodation for the next two years. While there are changes to the department’s structure resulting from the machinery of government changes following the 2010 election, it is too early to determine if any new or additional accommodation will be required.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office of the Official Secretary to</td>
<td>NIL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Governor-General</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Office of National Assessments</td>
<td>The Office of National Assessments has a building refurbishment program being undertaken in Barton with occupancy expected in June 2011. No additional accommodation requirements will be required over and above that being provided under the current program.</td>
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Arts: Accommodation  
(Question No. 23)

Senator Humphries asked the Minister representing the Minister for the Arts, upon notice, on 28 September 2010:
Do any of the departments or agencies within the Ministers portfolio consider that new or additional office accommodation may be required in the next 2 years; if so, would that accommodation be provided in Canberra; and if so, approximately how many staff are estimated to need accommodation in the new or additional offices.

Senator Arbib—The Minister for the Arts has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:
I am advised that as at 8 November 2010 departments and agencies in my portfolio are planning additional office accommodation in the next two years as follows:

| Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet | Information on accommodation requirements for the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet is provided in the response to Question No.19. |
| Museum of Democracy at Old Parliament House | NIL |

Foreign Affairs and Trade: Accommodation  
(Question Nos 24 and 34)

Senator Humphries asked the Minister representing the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, upon notice, on 28 September 2010:
Do any of the departments or agencies within the Minister’s portfolio consider that new or additional office accommodation may be required in the next 2 years; if so, would that accommodation be provided in Canberra; and if so, approximately how many staff are estimated to need accommodation in the new or additional offices.

Senator Conroy—The Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Trade have provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:
The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio is responsible for the provision of embassy and related representational accommodation at more than 100 locations in over 80 countries. This accommodation is subject to ongoing variation to meet the changing operational requirements of Australian Government agencies represented at posts.
With the exception of AusAID, departments and agencies within the Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio do not currently anticipate that new or additional office accommodation will be required in Australia in the next two years. AusAID advise that additional office space may be required in Canberra, but do not have an estimate of the number of staff that may require additional accommodation.

Immigration and Citizenship: Accommodation  
(Question No. 25)

Senator Humphries asked the Minister representing the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, upon notice, on 29 September 2010:
Do any of the departments or agencies within the Minister’s portfolio consider that new or additional office accommodation may be required in the next 2 years; if so, would that accommodation be provided in Canberra; if so approximately how many staff are estimated to need accommodation in the new or additional offices.
Senator Carr—The Minister for Immigration and Citizenship has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:
The department may require new office accommodation in the next two years. The department has four leases in Sydney locations which expire during 2012 and 2013. A decision on renewal of these leases or seeking new office accommodation in Sydney will be made in coming months. It is unlikely that the decision will result in leasing additional office accommodation. It is also doubtful that any new accommodation will be provided in Canberra.
As part of the overall offshore accommodation strategy, the department is co-located with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. There are a number of planned moves to new or refurbished office accommodation offshore in the next 2 years. It is unlikely that these moves will result in additional accommodation for the department.

Climate Change and Energy Efficiency: Accommodation
(Question No. 35)

Senator Humphries asked the Minister representing the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, upon notice, on 28 September 2010:
Do any of the departments or agencies within the Minister’s portfolio consider that new or additional office accommodation may be required in the next 2 years; if so, would that accommodation be provided in Canberra; and if so, approximately how many staff are estimated to need accommodation in the new or additional offices.

Senator Wong—The Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:
The Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency (the Department) has entered into an agreement for lease for premises to be built at New Acton (Civic West). Under the agreement the construction of the building and the fitout will be completed by October 2012. The area to be leased will be capable of accommodating 750 staff.
The Department is investigating options to accommodate the Garnaut Climate Change Review in Melbourne for a period of up to six months. The space will accommodate up to 10 staff members.
There are currently no other requirements for new or additional office accommodation for either the Department or its portfolio agencies, and at this stage it is not anticipated that there will be a need for additional office space in the next 2 years.

Social Inclusion: Accommodation
(Question No. 36)

Senator Humphries asked the Minister representing the Minister for Social Inclusion, upon notice, on 28 September 2010:
Do any of the departments or agencies within the Ministers portfolio consider that new or additional office accommodation may be required in the next 2 years; if so, would that accommodation be provided in Canberra; and if so, approximately how many staff are estimated to need accommodation in the new or additional offices.

Senator Arbib—The Minister for Social Inclusion has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:
I am advised that as at 8 November 2010 departments and agencies in my portfolio are planning additional office accommodation in the next two years as follows:
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Information on accommodation requirements for the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet is provided in the response to Question No.19.

Australian Institute of Family Studies

NIL

**Privacy and Freedom of Information: Accommodation**

*(Question No. 38)*

Senator Humphries asked the Minister representing the Minister for Privacy and Freedom of Information, upon notice, on 28 September 2010:

Do any of the departments or agencies within the Ministers portfolio consider that new or additional office accommodation may be required in the next 2 years; if so, would that accommodation be provided in Canberra; and if so, approximately how many staff are estimated to need accommodation in the new or additional offices.

Senator Ludwig—The Minister for Privacy and Freedom of Information has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:

I am advised that as at 8 November 2010 departments and agencies in my portfolio are planning additional office accommodation in the next two years as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Information on accommodation requirements for the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet is provided in the response to Question No.19.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Archives of Australia</td>
<td>The National Archives of Australia is hoping to achieve co-location arrangements with the State Records of South Australia in their Leigh Street, Adelaide accommodation by April 2011 and with the Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office in their Hobart office by May 2012.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office of the Australian Information Commissioner</td>
<td>Office accommodation has been procured for the existing Sydney office of OAIC, as the current lease expires on 30 June 2011. The Sydney office of OAIC will continue to be jointly located with the Australian Human Rights Commission.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sport: Accommodation**

*(Question No. 42)*

Senator Humphries asked the Minister for Sport, upon notice, on 28 September 2010:

Do any of the departments or agencies within the Ministers portfolio consider that new or additional office accommodation may be required in the next 2 years; if so, would that accommodation be provided in Canberra; and if so, approximately how many staff are estimated to need accommodation in the new or additional offices.

Senator Arbib—The answer to the honourable senators question is as follows:

I am advised that as at 8 November 2010 departments and agencies in my portfolio are planning additional office accommodation in the next two years as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Information on accommodation requirements for the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet is provided in the response to Question No.19.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority</td>
<td>NIL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity in the Senate: Accommodation
(Question No. 52)

Senator Humphries asked the Minister representing the Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity, upon notice, on 28 September 2010:

Do any of the departments or agencies within the Ministers portfolio consider that new or additional office accommodation may be required in the next 2 years; if so, would that accommodation be provided in Canberra; and if so, approximately how many staff are estimated to need accommodation in the new or additional offices.

Senator Wong—The Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:

I am advised that as at 8 November 2010 departments and agencies in my portfolio are planning additional office accommodation in the next two years as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Information on accommodation requirements for the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet is provided in the response to Question No.19.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet</td>
<td>The lease on the Sydney office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman is due for renewal and the office is considering whether it will stay in the same location or acquire new accommodation in Sydney.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman</td>
<td>NIL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office of the Inspector General of Intelligence and Security</td>
<td>NIL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Public Service Commission</td>
<td>NIL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian National Audit Office</td>
<td>NIL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Veteran’s Affairs
(Question No. 55)

Senator Johnston asked the Minister representing the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, upon notice, on 28 September 2010.

With reference to the Consultation paper for the review of war caused disabilities and pharmaceutical costs, released on 7 May 2010:

1. (a) How many contractors were engaged in the preparation of the report; (b) what is the value of these contracts; and (c) how were the contractors selected.

2. How many disability pensioners are also pensioners with qualifying service under the Veterans’ Entitlements Act 1986.

3. What is the breakdown of disability pensioners with qualifying service (by age, conflict and rate of disability pension) who will be eligible under the Government’s two options which are listed as recommendations in the paper.

4. How many veterans on a disability pension receive what was the Pharmaceutical Allowance which is now paid as the Veterans’ Supplement.

5. How many veterans reached the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme Safety Net for more than 60 scripts in 2009.
(6) If the department keeps a record of the number of veterans who reach the Safety Net by month, what is the breakdown of veterans reaching the Safety Net by month in 2009.

Senator Chris Evans—The Minister for Veterans’ Affairs has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:

(1) One contractor has been engaged to work alongside departmental staff to contribute to the Review and assist in the preparation of the report. The cost of the contractor since commencing work in October 2009 to 31 August 2010 is $109,558. The contractor was engaged through a recruitment agency under departmental panel arrangements.

(2) The Department’s systems database identifies 79,871 veterans who are disability pensioners and have qualifying service as at 10 September 2010.

It is important to note that while disability pension status is readily identifiable, there is no single ‘indicator’ to identify veterans who have Qualifying Service (QS). The majority can be identified through entitlements received that are only provided to veterans with QS (specifically this is Age or Invalidity Service Pensioners, or Gold Card holders aged 70 years or more). However, there is also a group of mainly younger veterans who, based on assumptions regarding their deployment, may have QS. Assessment of these particular veterans would not occur until requested by the veteran to determine their eligibility to pension entitlements, usually when approaching retirement age.

(3) The following tables set out the information requested:

Table 1 - Veterans with disability pension and qualifying service by DP rate and Age Group.

Table 2 - Veterans with disability pension and qualifying service by DP rate and Conflict.

Table 1 - Veterans with DP and QS by Age Group (as at 10 September 2010)

| Rate | 10  | 15  | 20  | 25  | 30  | 35  | 40  | 45  | 50  | 55  | 60  | 65  | 70  | 75  | 80  | 85  | 90 or over | Grand Total |
|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|------------|
| Under 55 | 315 | 97  | 610 | 327 | 196 | 184 | 236 | 983 |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 426 | 3,374     |
| 55 - 59  |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 15  |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 554 | 4,234     |
| 60 - 64  |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 20  |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 1,007| 3,384     |
| 65 - 69  |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 25  |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 31   | 112       |
| 70 - 74  |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 30  |     |     |     |     |     |     | 31   | 18        |
| 75 - 79  |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 35  |     |     |     |     |     |     | 3     |
| 80 - 84  |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 40  |     |     |     |     |     |     | 1,007 |
| 85 - 89  |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 45  |     |     |     |     |     | 31   |
| 90 or over|     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 50  |     |     |     | 1,350 |
| Grand Total| 3,488| 2,123| 20,295| 10,256| 4,732| 3,727| 5,214| 22,060| 7,976| 79,871|

BLI - Blinded
EDA - Extreme Disablement Adjustment
INT - Intermediate
TPI - Totally & Permanently Incapacitated
TTI - Temporarily Totally Incapacitated

* indicates 10 or less veterans in cohort - Totals are representative of entire cohort

Data source - DVA Adhoc Information System

**Table 2 - Veterans with DP and QS by conflict (as at 10 September 2010)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict</th>
<th>Current DP Rate</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>25</th>
<th>30</th>
<th>35</th>
<th>40</th>
<th>45</th>
<th>50</th>
<th>55</th>
<th>60</th>
<th>65</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Second World War</td>
<td>3,552</td>
<td>1,622</td>
<td>1,537</td>
<td>1,537</td>
<td>2,067</td>
<td>2,452</td>
<td>2,098</td>
<td>1,854</td>
<td>1,847</td>
<td>2,167</td>
<td>4,950</td>
<td>3,861</td>
<td>3,817</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea, Malaya &amp; FESR</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>524</td>
<td>668</td>
<td>807</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>564</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>1,023</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>524</td>
<td>668</td>
<td>807</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>564</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gulf War</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Timor</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>164</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War on Terror</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War in Iraq (2003)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Operational Areas</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>54</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peacekeeping Forces</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peacetime/Serving Member</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (includes unknown)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,374</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>3,384</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>4,234</td>
<td>4,950</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3,861</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3,817</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2 (cont’d) - Veterans with DP and QS by conflict (as at 10 September 2010)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict</th>
<th>Current DP Rate</th>
<th>70</th>
<th>75</th>
<th>80</th>
<th>85</th>
<th>90</th>
<th>95</th>
<th>100</th>
<th>100</th>
<th>100</th>
<th>100</th>
<th>100</th>
<th>100</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Second World War</td>
<td>1,533</td>
<td>2,040</td>
<td>1,966</td>
<td>1,966</td>
<td>2,677</td>
<td>3,481</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>1,847</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2,167</td>
<td>9,046</td>
<td>9,046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea, Malaya &amp; FESR</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>1,634</td>
<td>1,232</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,847</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2,167</td>
<td>9,046</td>
<td>9,046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>677</td>
<td>859</td>
<td>1,062</td>
<td>2,677</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20,107</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>32,151</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gulf War</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Timor</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>320</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2,130</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War on Terror</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>195</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War in Iraq (2003)</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>758</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Operational Areas</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peacekeeping Forces</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>178</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peacetime/Serving Member</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>827</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (includes unknown)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>67</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>102</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,799</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3,643</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3,770</td>
<td>10,727</td>
<td>9,046</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>25,078</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>79,871</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BLI - Blinded
EDA - Extreme Disablement Adjustment
INT - Intermediate
TPI - Totally & Permanently Incapacitated
TTI - Temporarily Totally Incapacitated

* indicates 10 or less veterans in cohort - Totals are representative of entire cohort

Data source - DVA Adhoc Information System

(4) The number of veterans in receipt of both disability pension and veterans’ supplement was 43,860 as at 2 October 2010.
Veterans supplement is generally paid to DVA treatment card holders who are not eligible for the Pension supplement. Veterans supplement recipients mainly comprise veterans on disability pension who are not in receipt of service pension, and some widows and orphans on the war widows and orphans pension.

(5) The Department is currently upgrading its management information system for Medicare supplied pharmaceutical data, and as a result 2009 pharmaceutical safety net data is not yet available. This work will be completed by the end of 2010. However, based on an extrapolation of 2008 safety net data, it is estimated that approximately 60,000 veterans reached the safety net threshold of 60 scripts in 2009. For partnered veterans within this group, pharmaceutical consumption by the veteran’s family counts towards reaching the 60 scripts threshold.

(6) Based on an extrapolation of 2008 safety net data, the table below shows an estimate of the number of veterans reaching the safety net by month.

Veterans reaching safety net by month in 2009 (estimated)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>No. of veterans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>2,971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>6,283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>7,928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>9,032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>8,053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>7,495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>6,724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>5,335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>5,014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>59,754</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Financial Services and Superannuation

(Question No. 58)

Senator Johnston asked the Minister representing the Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation, upon notice, on 1 November 2010:

Where a bank decides to enter into possession itself under its securities (rather than appointing an external administrator), what is the decision process on this, and why, for example, is a receiver not appointed.

Senator Wong—The Treasurer has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:

The Corporations Act 2001 does not merely regulate the conduct of receivers but also controllers. A controller is anyone else who (whether or not as agent) is in possession, or has control, of company property for the purpose of enforcing a charge. While possession may be granted by Court order, generally the right to take possession of property pursuant to a charge or to appoint a receiver arises by virtue of the terms of the contracts between lenders and borrowers. There were previously significant taxation and regulatory differences between appointing a controller or receiver. Law reform over the last 20 years has largely negated these factors. The decision of a financial institution to appoint a receiver or controller is generally a commercial decision for the institution.
Financial Services and Superannuation

(Question No. 60)

Senator Johnston asked the Minister representing the Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation, upon notice, on 17 November 2010:

Is there a prescription in recovery of securities procedures that employee entitlements are given a higher priority in respect of any fixed and floating charge security a bank holds (not including fixed mortgage security); if so, what is the current prescribed process.

Senator Wong—The Treasurer has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:

The Corporations Act provides that in any corporate receivership or controllership most employee claims are given priority over any floating charges. They do not have priority over fixed charges granted in favour of a creditor.

As part of the Government’s announced Protecting Worker’s Entitlements Package, the ranking of employee creditors in personal insolvencies will be improved to bring their ranking into line with the priority given to employee creditors in corporate insolvencies.

Financial Services and Superannuation

(Question No. 65)

Senator Johnston asked the Minister representing the Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation, upon notice, on 28 September 2010:

Do bank staff have the same level of training and experience as insolvency practitioners to deal with all matters where the bank acts in its own right as mortgagee in possession.

Senator Wong—The Treasurer has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:

Under the National Consumer Credit Protection Act 2009, holders of an Australian credit license must ensure its representatives (such as their employees, directors and credit representatives, and persons who act on their behalf) are adequately trained, and are competent to engage in the credit activities authorised by the licence. This would include employees of banks who collect debts on behalf of the bank.

The Corporations Act 2001, the common law and the terms of any contract under which they are appointed impose obligations upon any person appointed as a controller of company property. For example, they are obliged to take all reasonable care to sell property at market price, or in the absence of a market price, the best price that is reasonably obtainable.

Breach of these duties may result in the person being civilly liable. A controller who does not comply with their obligations is liable to be removed by the Court.

It is therefore in the interests of any creditor taking possession of company property pursuant to a charge to ensure that any employees engaged in doing so are appropriately skilled and experienced.

Financial Services and Superannuation

(Question Nos 72 and 73)

Senator Johnston asked the Minister representing the Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation, upon notice, on 28 September 2010:

Are staff in the recovery area of banks and lending institutions permitted to be remunerated on their performance in recovering securities.
Senator Wong—The Treasurer has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:

The law does not impose any specific restriction on the terms and conditions of any performance bonuses that a financial institution may pay to its staff in relation to any debt collection activities.

Under the National Consumer Credit Protection Act 2009, holders of an Australian credit license must ensure its representatives (such as their employees, directors and credit representatives, and persons who act on their behalf) are adequately trained, and are competent to engage in the credit activities authorised by the licence. This would include employees of banks who collect debts on behalf of the bank.

Regulation of third party debt collectors remains the responsibility of the states. Debt collectors are therefore exempted from licensing requirements, to avoid dual licensing.


The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission and the Australian Securities and Investments Commission have jointly published debt collection guidelines for collectors and creditors. This was recently updated in May 2010 and sets out the Commonwealth laws that contribute to responsible debt collection; and the approach taken by the relevant regulators.

Defence: Staffing
(Question No. 99)

Senator Johnston asked the Minister representing the Minister for Defence, upon notice, on 28 September 2010:

With reference to the White Paper and the Strategic Reform Program (SRP) ‘Indicative Workforce Implications - Civilian Workforce’: For the period 1 July 2009 to 30 June 2010, how many full-time equivalent Australian Public Service staff or contractors were employed on White Paper/SRP initiatives.

Senator Chris Evans—The Minister for Defence has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:

The Government provisioned an additional net White Paper/SRP civilian personnel workforce of 927 (including full-time equivalent Australian Public Service staff and contractors) for 2009 to 2010 under the White Paper, as reflected in “The Strategic Reform Program: Making it Happen”.

This workforce has been allocated across all Defence Groups to implement a range of White Paper initiatives including the Defence Capability Plan.

These Australian Public Service personnel ranged from junior to senior officers on an as needed basis according to the particular White Paper initiatives being actioned.

Because of the breadth and depth of the White Paper initiatives, the number of personnel varied throughout the specified period and it is not possible to provide a specific total referenced to each White Paper initiative.

The workforce data detailed below is based on approved allocations at the time of publication and reflects full-time equivalent average numbers. Over the period 1 July 2009 to 30 June 2010, Defence was employing 20,878 full-time equivalent civilian personnel which is 1,410 below the 2009 to 2010 indicative allocation of 22,288.
### White Paper and Strategic Reform Program Indicative Workforce Implications

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### Civilian Workforce (Australian Public Service and Contractors)

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QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Defence: Programs
(Question Nos 114 to 116)

Senator Johnston asked the Minister representing the Minister for Defence, upon notice, on 28 September 2010:
For the period 1 January to 30 June 2010, for each agency within the responsibility of the Minister/Parliamentary Secretary:
(a) what communications programs were undertaken or were planned to be undertaken; and
(b) what was the total spend in each communications program.

Senator Chris Evans—The Minister for Defence has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:
(a) and (b) - During the period 1 January to 30 June 2010, the following agencies undertook or were planned to undertake communications programs. Each agencies expenditure for each communications program is listed.

Defence Science and Personnel
Navy job specific advertising, $4,098,539
Army and Army Reserve job specific advertising, $7,367,166
Air Force job specific advertising, $1,927,714
Education advertising for Tri-Service Education, Sponsored Undergraduate positions and Professional Graduate Health and Engineering positions, $1,305,934
Multicultural recruitment, $288,378

Intelligence and Security
Spatial Industry Day (in conjunction with the Victorian Government), $2,178.86
Cyber Security Operations Centre Opening, $9,171.33
Graduate Recruitment Campaigns (DSD and DIGO), $317,000

Defence Science and Technology Organisation
Pacific 2010, $68,375
Science Meets Parliament, $6,000
Oceans 10, $15,334.70
Eureka Prize, $28,000

Defence Support Group
Cultana Expansion Project, $52,862
Defence Work Experience Program, National Careers and Employment Expo, $28,557

People Strategies and Policy
Defence Graduate Development Program advertising, $10,450

Army
Development of “A Wounded Digger” website, $29,568
Specialised media training, $6,000
Brochures for Army Personnel Co-ordination Detachment Commanders, $933
Army Brand and Style Guide, $80,000
Facebook advertising, $20 including GST per day
Executive Corporate Management Branch
Oceans 10, $15,334.70
Defence Export Control Office Outreach Program, $72,403
Reserve and Employer Support Campaign, $738,382

Vice Chief of Defence Force Group
Reserve and Employer Support Campaign, $495,000

Defence: Helicopters
(Question No. 131)

Senator Johnston asked the Minister representing the Minister for Defence, upon notice, on 28 September 2010:

(1) When will the final decision be made to ‘introduce 46 new MRH-90 helicopters as a pooled fleet shared between the Royal Australian Navy and the Australian Army to replace the Navy’s Sea Kings and Army’s general troop lift Black Hawk fleets’ (Defence White Paper 2009, p. 72, paragraph 9.17).

(2) When will the first of these helicopters be delivered and fully operational?

(3) What type or variant of the MRH-90 has been recommended for purchase?

(4) What will be the expected purchase price of the 46 new MRH-90 helicopters?

(5) What will be the total cost of through-life support and operating costs of the MRH-90 over a 30 year operating life?

Senator Chris Evans—the Minister for Defence Materiel has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:

(1) Government granted Second Pass Approval in August 2004 for the purchase of 12 Multi Role Helicopters (MRH90) under AIR 9000 Phase 2, and April 2006 for the purchase of an additional 34 MRH90 under Air 9000 Phases 4 and 6. The contract for Phase 2 was signed in June 2005 while Phases 4 and 6 contracts were signed in June 2006. These helicopters will be nominally split with 40 allocated to Army and six to Navy. The support systems will include an electronic warfare self protection support system, a ground mission management system, a software support centre, an instrumented system with telemetry capable of being installed into three instrument-capable aircraft, two full flight and mission simulators and facilities infrastructure at Townsville, Oakey, Brisbane and Nowra.

(2) The first two MRH90 aircraft were accepted in December 2007 and the first Australian assembled MRH90 aircraft was accepted in December 2008. As at 11 October 2010, 13 aircraft have been delivered and accepted. The final aircraft is contracted and scheduled for delivery in June 2014.

(3) The MRH90 is the Australian variant of the Troop Transport Helicopter (TTH) version of the NH Industry (NHI) NH90 helicopter.

(4) As outlined in the 2010-11 Portfolio Budget Statements, the total approved Air 9000 Phases 2, 4 and 6 project expenditure is $3.755 billion (December 2010 constant dollars).

(5) Until a capability matures it is always difficult to quantify platform sustainment costs over a 30 year operating life. However, current estimates indicate that through-life support and operating costs may be around $4.7 billion (December 2010 constant dollars).
Financial Services and Superannuation  
(Question No. 156)

Senator Abetz asked the Minister representing the Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation, upon notice, on 1 November 2010:

1. When was the AMAT Materials Engineering Pty Ltd report first forwarded by the Melbourne office of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) to its Canberra office.

2. When, and at which office, did the ACCC receive: (a) the AMAT Materials Engineering Pty Ltd report; (b) the first HRL Technology report; and (c) the second HRL Technology report.

3. When did the ACCC decide not to pursue the matter.

4. When was this decision communicated to Mr Groombridge.

5. What was the reason for the ACCC not wanting to make these reports available to Mr Groombridge.

6. When were each of the AMAT Materials Engineering Pty Ltd report and the first and second HRL Technology reports received by the (a) Melbourne office; and (b) the Canberra office, of the ACCC.

7. Did the ACCC receive a response to its letter to the Giant Bicycle Company, dated 29 November 2005; if so, when was this received.

8. (a) Why was ‘seriousness’ expressed in this letter; and (b) why was this not expressed in the ACCC’s letter to the Parliamentary Secretary, dated 13 December 2005.

9. With reference to the AMAT Materials Engineering Pty Ltd report: (a) who commissioned it; (b) when was it commissioned; and (c) for what purpose was it commissioned.

10. Did the ACCC ever advise the Commonwealth Ombudsman of the existence of the ACCC’s letter to the Parliamentary Secretary, dated 13 December 2005; if so: (a) by whom; and (b) when.

11. Was the Commonwealth Ombudsman advised of the existence of the ACCC’s letter to the Giant Bicycle Company, dated 22 December 2005, advising that no further action would be taken.

12. Did the ACCC assert to the Commonwealth Ombudsman that the particular part of the bicycle in question had been examined by two bicycle specialists; if so: (a) on what basis was this claim made; and (b) what was the expertise of these specialists that allowed the ACCC to describe them as such.

13. Were the two tests referred to above undertaken by the Giant Bicycle Company’s agents; if so, on what basis is it asserted that the tests were independent.

14. Does the ACCC have a copy of these assessments in written form.

15. Does the ACCC believe that Mr Groombridge received a copy of these assessments; if so, why and when did the ACCC come to that belief.

16. Did the ACCC ever receive a copy of a letter from Mr Groombridge requesting a signed copy of both or either of these assessments.

17. Did the ACCC receive a formal report from Consumer Affairs and Fair Trading in Tasmania; if so, when was it received.

18. What expertise exists in the ACCC to counter the HRL Technology report.

19. With reference to the correspondence sent to the ACCC by Mr Groombridge, dated 4 August 2009, enclosing a copy of his report, and in relation to the statements in his report alleged by the ACCC to be false and/or misleading, does the ACCC acknowledge that: (a) the same statements appear in ACCC correspondence; and (b) those statements appearing in ACCC correspondence are false and/or misleading; if not, what evidence can the ACCC provide to refute the allegations.
Senator Wong—The Treasurer has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:

(1) It appears that a copy of the AMAT Materials Engineering Pty Ltd report was transferred from the ACCC’s Melbourne Office to the ACCC’s Canberra Office by internal mail. Internal mail receipts are not date stamped. Thus the date that a copy of the AMAT Materials Engineering Pty Ltd report was forwarded from the ACCC’s Melbourne Office to the ACCC’s Canberra Office cannot be ascertained from available records.

(2) A copy of the AMAT Materials Engineering Pty Ltd report was received by the ACCC’s Melbourne Office on 21 December 2005. A copy of the HRL Technology Compliance Assessment report was received by the ACCC’s Melbourne Office on 22 November 2005. A copy of the HRL Technology Engineering Evaluation report was received by the ACCC’s Melbourne Office on 1 December 2005.

(3) The ACCC decided there was no evidence of a breach of the mandatory safety standard for pedal bicycles between 22 November and 25 November 2005. The ACCC’s Melbourne Office indicated that it had decided not to pursue the matter further with the supplier in a letter dated 22 December 2005. Further consideration of whether there was any possible case for the mandatory safety standard to include design or performance requirements for bicycle suspension forks more generally was undertaken by ACCC’s Canberra Office.

(4) Advice indicating that the investigation into any breach of the mandatory standard was concluded and that Mr Groombridge should pursue his concerns privately was communicated in a letter dated 25 November 2005.

(5) The reports were the property of another party and were provided to the ACCC on a confidential basis as part of voluntary assistance to the ACCC in its enquiries. These reports were the subject of a valid FOI request by Mr Groombridge in August 2007 and released in full to the applicant on 31 October 2007 following consultation with the third party who had no objection to the release of the reports to Mr Groombridge.

(6) Please refer to the responses to Questions 1 and 2. It appears that copies of each of these three reports were transferred from the ACCC Melbourne Office to the ACCC Canberra Office by internal mail. Internal mail receipts are not date stamped and hence the dates of the transfers cannot be ascertained from available records.

(7) Giant Bicycle Company’s letter of 21 December 2005 providing a copy of the AMAT Materials Engineering Pty Ltd report was taken as a form of response to the ACCC’s letter of 29 November 2005.

(8) Choices of words and expressions in the ACCC’s letter of 29 November 2005 were matters for the author and would be based on information available to the author at the time. Any correspondence containing product safety policy advice to the Parliamentary Secretary is generally settled by the area of the ACCC with that functional responsibility. The content of such advice is based on available information and professional assessments where required.

(9) The ACCC understands that the AMAT report was commissioned by Giant Bicycle Company. Its timing and purpose are matters for that organisation.

(10) The ACCC advised the Commonwealth Ombudsman that it held files and documents regarding Ministerial issues in a letter dated 19 March 2009.

(11) All files relating to the original investigation conducted by the Melbourne office of the ACCC were made available to the Commonwealth Ombudsman by the ACCC on 19 March 2009.
(12) Yes. The ACCC understands that the two examiners were bicycle retailers in Tasmania. This information was provided by both the then Office of Consumer Affairs Tasmania and the supplier, and was accepted in good faith. Details of the specific expertise of these persons are not known.

(13) The ACCC is unaware of any relationship between the bicycle examiners and Giant Bicycle Company.

(14) No.

(15) The ACCC understands that Mr Groombridge did receive copies of these assessments. This understanding is based on information received from the then Office of Consumer Affairs Tasmania in 2005.

(16) The ACCC has not identified any record of a letter received from Mr Groombridge requesting copies of these assessments.

(17) The ACCC has no record of a formal report from Consumer Affairs and Fair Trading Tasmania in respect of the examinations of the bicycle.

(18) The ACCC has had representatives on the Standards Australia Technical Committee for Pedal Bicycles for many years and has staff with technical qualifications, including science and engineering.

(19) As noted in the ACCC’s response of 4 September 2009 to Mr Groombridge, parts of ACCC correspondence are selectively quoted in Mr Groombridge’s document. Written material which is not in its context can be misleading.

**Kalimantan Forests and Climate Partnership**

*(Question Nos 159 and 160)*

Senator Milne asked the Minister representing the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Trade, upon notice, on 1 October 2010:

(1) (a) How have local communities been informed about the Kalimantan Forests and Climate Partnership (KFCP); (b) who was informed; and (c) what feedback has been received on the proposed project.

(2) Has there been a land tenure assessment performed on the land to be covered by the project; if so, what was the result of that assessment; if not, why not.

(3) Has there been an attempt to gain the free, prior and informed consent of local Indigenous and forest dependent communities in relation to the project.

(4) (a) Has the Government undertaken any contingency planning for KFCP in the event that it is not possible for country parties to agree on the inclusion of reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); and (b) is it anticipated that KFCP will became part of the voluntary carbon market.

(5) (a) Does KFCP propose plantations as reforestation and an alternative source of income for local communities; and (b) is there anything in the design of KFCP that prevents plantations from being recognised for carbon credits.

(6) Given that in its submissions to the UNFCCC in 2008 on KFCP, the Australian Government discussed the need to restrict forest conversion within Central Kalimantan at a province-wide level, can details be provided of (a) what restrictions are currently in place in relation to forest conversion; and (b) what plans are in place for forest conversion across the province.
Senator Conroy—The Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Trade have provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:

(1) (a) Australia is supporting Indonesia in its efforts to reduce emissions from deforestation. The Kalimantan Forests and Climate Partnership (KFCP) is a key element of the Indonesia Australia Forest Carbon Partnership which is a leading international partnership on reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries (REDD+).

The KFCP was designed, and is being implemented, in close consultation with local communities and is linked with pre-existing initiatives in peatland planning and conservation in Central Kalimantan. Since mid-2009, the KFCP has worked through village facilitators (13 of whom are posted in villages which are home to the great majority of people in the project area) to explain the objectives of KFCP, gather community views about the project, understand the social and economic circumstances of the local communities, and develop options for alternative incomes for the local people (including improved management of smallholder rubber plantations in areas where agriculture is already practiced and on forest conservation activities). Key elements of the implementation will be undertaken by local NGOs (CARE and Borneo Orangutan Survival) who have long-term relationships and knowledge of the area.

(b) The KFCP was designed in partnership with Indonesian officials at national, provincial and local level. Village heads and customary leaders were also consulted in the design phase. The early implementation phase of the KFCP includes a communications component to provide further information on the objectives and approaches of the KFCP.

(c) Community representatives have been receptive to the KFCP on the basis that they retain equitable access to forest resources and to incentive-based payments.

(2) An assessment of customary rights and other forms of local land tenure was completed in the design phase in 2009. Land tenure remains a very complex issue and further information about local land tenure and property rights will continue to be collected during the implementation phase.

(3) The KFCP was designed in partnership with Indonesian officials at national, provincial and local level, as well as village heads and customary leaders. There has been extensive and ongoing consultation with the local communities, and facilitators have been posted in 13 villages which house the majority of people in the project area.

(4) (a) and (b) Australia continues actively to support the inclusion of REDD+ in a future international climate change agreement. As a REDD+ demonstration activity, the priority of the KFCP is to trial how REDD+ can work in practice, and to inform the UNFCCC negotiating process on REDD+.

The KFCP will test approaches to meeting possible future UNFCCC requirements for a REDD+ market mechanism. There has been significant progress on REDD+ in the UNFCCC negotiations, including recent agreement in the Copenhagen Accord on the need to immediately establish a mechanism for REDD+.

(5) (a) and (b) The KFCP will undertake reforestation as part of efforts to rehabilitate and stabilise existing areas of degraded peat swamp forest to help prevent further forest degradation and deforestation. Reforestation will be undertaken using native species. The KFCP will also support local livelihood activities, such as improved management of smallholder rubber plantations in areas where agriculture is already practiced. The KFCP will not support industrial plantations. As part of trialling approaches to REDD+ the KFCP will estimate and monitor changes in emissions and removals of greenhouse gases.

(6) (a) and (b) Australia will continue to work with Indonesia on these issues, however, restrictions and planning relating to forest conversion are the responsibility of the Government of Indonesia, with whom the joint UNFCCC submission on the KFCP was made, through its legislation and decision making processes.
Commonwealth Scientific and Research Organisation

(Question No. 166)

Senator Abetz asked the Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, upon notice, on 18 October 2010:
In regard to the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO); For the past 18 months, what was the amount spent on entertaining by the CSIRO: (a) Chief Executive Officer; and (b) ICT Centre Director.

Senator Carr—The answer to the honourable senator’s question is as follows:
For the past 18 month period (18 April 2009 to 18 October 2010), the amount spent on entertaining by the following CSIRO positions were:
(a) Chief Executive: $789.60
(b) ICT Centre Director: $11,250.01
*Figures are GST inclusive

Defence: Anglesea Barracks

(Question No. 167)

Senator Abetz asked the Minister representing the Minister for Defence, upon notice, on 18 October 2010:
In regard to Anglesea Barracks in Hobart, for each of the following calendar years 2007, 2008, 2009 and for 2010 to date:
(1) How many uniformed personnel were based at Anglesea Barracks?
(2) How many public servants (non-uniformed personnel) were based at Anglesea Barracks?
(3) How many people are currently employed at Anglesea Barracks?
(4) What services, roles and jobs have been transferred to other barracks or officers from Anglesea Barracks?

Senator Chris Evans—The Minister for Defence has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:
Defence’s Workforce reporting activities are based on financial years rather than calendar years. This provides the link with the annual reporting cycle and our financial and workforce guidance. Accordingly, the following data is provided.

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>As at 28 October 2010</th>
<th>As at 1 July 2009</th>
<th>As at 1 July 2008</th>
<th>As at 1 July 2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Permanent Navy</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent Army</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent Air Force</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Reserves</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>343</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(2)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>As at 28 October 2010</th>
<th>As at 1 July 2009</th>
<th>As at 1 July 2008</th>
<th>As at 1 July 2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50 APS personnel</td>
<td>52 APS personnel</td>
<td>60 APS personnel</td>
<td>62 APS personnel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(3) As at 28 October 2010, 342 personnel are currently employed at Anglesea Barracks.
(4) In 2008 the Land Warfare Centre Tasmania closed due to a national restructure of training functions carried out by the Land Warfare Centre. Ten Army members were posted to other units, and two Australian Public Service (APS) employees were redeployed. Approximately 50 reserve staff who worked at the Centre were tasked to other duties.

In 2009 the Defence Support – Tasmania and Defence Support – Southern Victoria regions amalgamated to form the Defence Support – Victoria and Tasmania region, as part of the Defence Support Operations national reform program. This has resulted in the transfer of some internal Defence Support functions and business management services previously provided by the Tasmanian regional office to the Victorian regional office in Melbourne. As a result of these changes, two regional management APS positions were made redundant in 2009. One military position was redefined, but remained in Tasmania. Six business management positions were also made redundant. In most cases staff have been redeployed within Anglesea Barracks.

Finance and Deregulation: Funding
(Question No. 169)

Senator Cormann asked the Minister for Finance and Deregulation, upon notice, on 25 October 2010:

With reference to the claim, 'In the past three budgets, we've made $83.6 billion in savings to meet the cost of key reforms…' made by the Minister in The Australian on 2 October 2010, can a detailed breakdown, including a clear differentiation of revenue measures from spending cuts, be provided of all elements that make up the $83.6 billion in budget savings.

Senator Wong—The answer to the honourable senator’s question is as follows:

The savings figure of $83.6 billion can be derived from tables which appear in Statement 3: Fiscal Strategy and Outlook, in Budget Paper No. 1 for the 2008-09, 2009-10 and 2010-11 financial years. For ease of comparison, the savings elements of these tables are produced below (Table 1). Attachments 1-3 provide a further derivation of these figures, and a breakdown between revenue and expenditure reduction measures.

Table 1
Savings Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference Document</th>
<th>2008-09 $m</th>
<th>2009-10 $m</th>
<th>2010-11 $m</th>
<th>2011-12 $m</th>
<th>2012-13 $m</th>
<th>2013-14 $m</th>
<th>Total $m</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008-09 BP1: S3, Table 2, page 3-6</td>
<td>7,257</td>
<td>7,176</td>
<td>9,450</td>
<td>9,440</td>
<td>33,323</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10 BP1: S3, Table 2, page 3-7</td>
<td>2,496</td>
<td>5,630</td>
<td>6,438</td>
<td>8,006</td>
<td>22,570</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-11 BP1: S3, Table 3, page 3-7</td>
<td>1,684</td>
<td>4,862</td>
<td>4,446</td>
<td>16,693</td>
<td>27,685</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Total</td>
<td>83,578</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It should be noted that Table 1 only considers the savings impact across the Budget year and forward estimates in each respective Budget. For example, savings announced in the 2008-09 Budget (and included in the savings figure of $83.6 billion) do not include ongoing savings in 2012-13 and 2013-14 (see Table 1). Likewise, savings announced in the 2009-10 Budget do not include ongoing savings in 2013-14. Further, when the savings for the year before each Budget are included, additional 2008-09 savings of $89 million (2009-10 Budget Paper 1: Statement 3, Table 2, page 3-7 refers) and 2009-10 savings of $466 million (2010-11 Budget Paper 1: Statement 3, Table 3, page 3-7 refers) are generated (all figures in underlying cash terms).
It should be noted that the savings included in the $83.6 billion estimate are as reported in the relevant Budget papers.

Attachment 1

The following table presents a breakdown of the savings and revenue measures as detailed in 2008-09 Budget Paper 2.

Savings measures for the 2008-09 Budget

All figures presented in underlying cash terms

| NB: Additional footnotes listed at end of table |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Revenue Measures (net)</th>
<th>2008-09</th>
<th>2009-10</th>
<th>2010-11</th>
<th>2011-12</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal income tax cuts — tax plan for Australia’s future</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,150</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>2,160</td>
<td>5,310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crude Oil Excise - Condensate</td>
<td>559</td>
<td>625</td>
<td>625</td>
<td>625</td>
<td>2,436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excise and customs duty - increased rates on ‘other excisable beverages’</td>
<td>583</td>
<td>652</td>
<td>728</td>
<td>813</td>
<td>2,775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased funding for the Australian Taxation Office compliance dividend</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>708</td>
<td>717</td>
<td>1,723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depreciation of computer software</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>681</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>1,314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fringe benefits tax - meal cards</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing the luxury car tax</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fringe benefits tax - exemption for eligible work-related items</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in the Passenger Movement Charge</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visa Application Charge - increase</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - Australia Post Special Dividend</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee share schemes - election requirements</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal - Revenue Measures</td>
<td>1,788</td>
<td>3,538</td>
<td>5,413</td>
<td>5,377</td>
<td>16,118</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Expenditure Reduction Measures (net)</th>
<th>2008-09</th>
<th>2009-10</th>
<th>2010-11</th>
<th>2011-12</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - Efficiency Dividend</td>
<td>412</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>416</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>1,663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - Access Card</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>998</td>
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<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - Australia Connected - cancellation of the OPEL contract</td>
<td>634</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>860</td>
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<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - Skills for the Future - work skills vouchers</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>762</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - Corporations Payments to the States - termination</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>747</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
## QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

### Major Expenditure Reduction Measures (net)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>2008-09 $m</th>
<th>2009-10 $m</th>
<th>2010-11 $m</th>
<th>2011-12 $m</th>
<th>Total $m</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Better targeting and delivery of the Baby Bonus</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>734</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - Commercial Ready</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - Fraud and compliance - assessments to verify income or assets</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - Better targeting and delivery of Family Tax Benefit</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>585</td>
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<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - Adjusting the funding for specific health programs</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>503</td>
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<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - Heavy vehicle road user charging</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - Realising Our Potential - National Literacy and Numeracy Vouchers Program</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - Dental treatment - enhanced Medicare items for patients with chronic conditions and complex conditions</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Means-testing of government support - expanded definitions of income to include certain ‘salary sacrificed’ contributions to superannuation</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>445</td>
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<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - Health and Medical Investment Fund</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - A Fairer and Flexible Workplace Relations System</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishment of 2008-09 Defence operations reserve to fund overseas operations</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal income tax — increasing the Medicare levy surcharge thresholds</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - Employment Services for 2009-10 to 2011-12</td>
<td>-57</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - Medibank Private Limited - not proceeding with the sale</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - Goods and services tax compensation to the States for small business concession - recovery of overpayments</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>-10</td>
<td>-10</td>
<td>-10</td>
<td>256</td>
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<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - Regional Partnerships</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>225</td>
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</table>
## QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

**Major Expenditure Reduction Measures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>2008-09 $m</th>
<th>2009-10 $m</th>
<th>2010-11 $m</th>
<th>2011-12 $m</th>
<th>Total $m</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - Child Care Benefit - remove the minimum rate</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - Growing Regions Programme</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - clinical training for enrolled nurses</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - Australian Industry Productivity Centres</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - Advancing Australia</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - Protecting Australian Families Online</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - Ministerial and Opposition Staff - 30 per cent reduction</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - Practice Incentives Program - new e-Health incentive payment for General Practitioners</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - Chemotherapy Drugs - more efficient arrangements</td>
<td>-6</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - Medicare Benefits Schedule - rationalise funding provided for multiple pathology tests performed on a single sample</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - Australian Technical Colleges - rationalisation</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - Realising Our Potential - Summer Schools for Teachers Program</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternity Immunisation Allowance - eligibility change</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - Commonwealth Seniors Health Card - adjusted taxable income test</td>
<td>-13</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - Fraud and Compliance - Commonwealth Seniors Health Card compliance reviews</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Economic Management - Medicare Benefits Schedule - increase compliance audits</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal - Expenditure Reduction Measures</td>
<td>3,884</td>
<td>3,397</td>
<td>3,520</td>
<td>3,534</td>
<td>14,333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td>5,672</td>
<td>6,935</td>
<td>8,933</td>
<td>8,911</td>
<td>30,451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Savings Measures</td>
<td>1,585</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>517</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>2,872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Savings Measures</td>
<td>7,257</td>
<td>7,176</td>
<td>9,450</td>
<td>9,440</td>
<td>33,323</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Other Savings Measures” includes a number of smaller revenue and expenditure reduction measures (under $75 million over four years). Details of these measures may be found in the 2008-09 Budget Paper 2.

Items classified (ie revenue or expenditure reduction) on basis of presentation in Budget Paper 2.

Tables presented in underlying cash terms, profiles may differ from those presented in Budget Paper 2 which are presented in expense terms.

Discrepancies in totals due to rounding.

Data is presented in net terms for each measure, that is the costs associated with administering the measures are included in the above figures.

Attachment 2

The following table presents a breakdown of the savings and revenue measures as detailed in 2009-10 Budget Paper 2.

Savings measures for the 2009-10 Budget

All figures presented in underlying cash terms

| NB: Additional footnotes listed at end of table |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Revenue Measures (net)</th>
<th>2009-10</th>
<th>2010-11</th>
<th>2011-12</th>
<th>2012-13</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superannuation - contributing to sustainable retirement income reform by reducing the concessional contributions caps</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>623</td>
<td>704</td>
<td>808</td>
<td>2,755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving fairness and integrity in the tax system - tightening access to non-commercial business losses</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>698</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving fairness and integrity in the tax system - better targeting the income tax exemption for employment income earned by Australians working overseas</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visa Application Charges - Increase</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superannuation - payment of small and insoluble lost accounts to unclaimed monies</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving fairness and integrity in the tax system - better targeting the concessions for Employee Share Schemes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving fairness and integrity in the tax system - extending the tax file number withholding arrangements to closely held trusts</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing the taxation definition of beer and wine</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual indexation of ASIC fees</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal - Revenue Measures</td>
<td>744</td>
<td>1,627</td>
<td>1,478</td>
<td>1,464</td>
<td>5,310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Expenditure Reduction Measures (net)</td>
<td>2009-10 $m</td>
<td>2010-11 $m</td>
<td>2011-12 $m</td>
<td>2012-13 $m</td>
<td>Total $m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defence savings in the forward estimates period</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>1,700</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private health insurance - fair and sustainable support for the future</td>
<td>-125</td>
<td>695</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>681</td>
<td>1,902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Innovation and Higher Education System for the 21st Century - Student Income Support - Youth Allowance workforce participation criteria</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>552</td>
<td>562</td>
<td>573</td>
<td>1,820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform of family payments - pause to indexation of upper income thresholds of FTB-A, FTB-B and Baby Bonus</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>1,262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure and sustainable pensions - tighten the income test taper</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>1,232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superannuation - contributing to sustainable retirement income reform by temporarily reducing the Government co-contribution</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>1,145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform of family payments - Family Tax Benefit Part A (FTB-A) - removing the link to pension indexation</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>493</td>
<td>1,010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Innovation and Higher Education System for the 21st Century - Student Income Support - abolition of Commonwealth Education Costs Scholarships and Commonwealth Accommodation Scholarships programs</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic compliance - managing taxation compliance risks related to Australia’s economic recovery</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>518</td>
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<tr>
<td>An Innovation and Higher Education System for the 21st Century - Learning and Teaching Performance Fund - redirect funding</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicare Benefits Schedule - capping Extended Medicare Safety Net benefits for items with excessive fees</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal finances - rationalising payments - state cellar door subsidy savings</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicare Benefits Schedule - capping Extended Medicare Safety Net benefits for items with excessive fees - obstetrics services</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicare Benefits Schedule - ensuring the appropriate use of clinical procedures and adjusting to modern technologies Strategic compliance - promoting a level playing field for small business</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
## QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

**Major Expenditure Reduction Measures (net)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spend</th>
<th>2009-10</th>
<th>2010-11</th>
<th>2011-12</th>
<th>2012-13</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medicare Benefits Schedule - diagnostic imaging and pathology services - changes to fees for fully depreciated diagnostic imaging equipment</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>129</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform of Australian Apprenticeships Incentive Funding - Abolish Apprenticeship Training (Fee) Voucher</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Loans Program - better targeting Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme - extending the therapeutic group premium policy</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraud and compliance - increased Centrelink compliance review activity</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Better Health Initiative - further efficiency</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Innovation and Higher Education System for the 21st Century – Workplace Productivity Program</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal - Expenditure Reduction Measures</strong></td>
<td>773</td>
<td>3,030</td>
<td>3,847</td>
<td>5,964</td>
<td>13,614</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td>1,517</td>
<td>4,657</td>
<td>5,325</td>
<td>7,428</td>
<td>18,924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Savings Measures</strong></td>
<td>979</td>
<td>973</td>
<td>1,113</td>
<td>578</td>
<td>3,646</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Savings Measures</strong></td>
<td>2,496</td>
<td>5,630</td>
<td>6,438</td>
<td>8,006</td>
<td>22,570</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Other Savings Measures* includes a number of smaller revenue and expenditure reduction measures (under $75 million over four years). Details of these measures may be found in the 2009-10 Budget Paper 2.

Denotes expenditure reduction item containing a significant revenue component.

Items classified (ie revenue or expenditure reduction) on basis of presentation in Budget Paper 2.

Tables presented in underlying cash terms, profiles may differ from those presented in Budget Paper 2 which are presented in expense terms.

Discrepancies in totals due to rounding.

Data is presented in net terms for each measure, that is the costs associated with administering the measures are included in the above figures.

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**Attachment 3**

The following table presents a breakdown of the savings and revenue measures as detailed in 2010-11 Budget Paper 2.

**Savings measures for the 2010-11 Budget**

All figures presented in underlying cash terms

NB: Additional footnotes listed at end of table
### QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

#### Major Revenue Measures (net)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>2010-11 $m</th>
<th>2011-12 $m</th>
<th>2012-13 $m</th>
<th>2013-14 $m</th>
<th>Total $m</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stronger, fairer, simpler tax reform - resource super profits tax</td>
<td>-8</td>
<td>-34</td>
<td>2,962</td>
<td>8,973</td>
<td>11,894</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Health and Hospitals Network - Prevention - increasing the excise and excise-equivalent customs duty on tobacco products</td>
<td>1,130</td>
<td>1,170</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>1,250</td>
<td>4,750</td>
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<tr>
<td>GST compliance program - working together to improve voluntary compliance</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>1,130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme - deferral</td>
<td>-382</td>
<td>1,748</td>
<td>-2,644</td>
<td>1,807</td>
<td>530 #</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stronger, fairer, simpler tax reform - growth dividend</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consolidation - non-membership equity interests</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal income tax - increase in the net medical expenses tax offset claim threshold</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuel tax - amending the arrangements for fuel ethanol</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATO compliance program - dealing with the cash economy</td>
<td>-8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>112</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal - Revenue Measures</strong></td>
<td>1,034</td>
<td>3,488</td>
<td>2,340</td>
<td>13,068</td>
<td>19,932</td>
</tr>
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</table>

#### Major Expenditure Reduction Measures (net)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>2010-11 $m</th>
<th>2011-12 $m</th>
<th>2012-13 $m</th>
<th>2013-14 $m</th>
<th>Total $m</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme - further pricing reform</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>513</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>1,271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas development assistance — GNI methodology change</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>1,026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills for Sustainable Growth [All savings elements]</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>604</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reprogramming of funding to better align with Defence's requirements</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>-52</td>
<td>-80</td>
<td>657</td>
<td>521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth Community Pharmacy Agreement Superannuation Co-contribution [All savings elements]</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>483</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Capacity Assessment - more efficient and accurate assessments for Disability Support Pension and employment services</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water for the Future</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Car Innovation Fund - reduction in funding</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superannuation - permanent reduction to the superannuation co-contribution matching rate and maximum payable</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>160</td>
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<tr>
<td>Australian Customs and Border Protection Service - efficiencies</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**
Major Expenditure Reduction Measures (net)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2010-11</th>
<th>2011-12</th>
<th>2012-13</th>
<th>2013-14</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department of Health and Ageing grant programs - reprioritisation</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Care Rebate - return the annual cap of $7,500 and pause indexation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preventable Admissions and Improved Community Care program</td>
<td>-8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring for our Country - reducing duplication</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal - Expenditure Reduction Measures</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>864</td>
<td>1,444</td>
<td>2,859</td>
<td>5,689</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td>1,557</td>
<td>4,352</td>
<td>3,784</td>
<td>15,927</td>
<td>25,621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Savings Measures</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>662</td>
<td>766</td>
<td>2,064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Savings Measures</td>
<td>1,684</td>
<td>4,862</td>
<td>4,446</td>
<td>16,693</td>
<td>27,685</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Other Savings Measures” includes a number of smaller revenue and expenditure reduction measures (under $75 million over four years). Details of these measures may be found in the 2010-11 Budget Paper 2.

Denotes revenue item containing a significant expenditure reduction component.

Items presented (i.e. revenue or expenditure reduction) on basis of presentation in Budget Paper 2.

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Discrepancies in totals due to rounding.

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Firearms

(Question No. 175)

Senator Bob Brown asked the Minister representing the Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Justice, upon notice, on 28 October 2010:

In 1996 at the Australasian Police Ministers’ Council, all Australian governments agreed to a 10-point plan for the regulation of firearms, and in 2002, agreed to a national agreement on handguns. Since those agreements, all jurisdictions have either introduced new legislation or amended existing legislation to comply with the plans. Given this:

(1) Which jurisdictions are not in full compliance with the 1996 plan or the 2002 agreement and, for each jurisdiction can a list be provided of the areas where compliance is lacking or a resolution has not been fully implemented.

(2) Is there any work underway to ensure full national uniformity of gun laws and regulations as per the 1996 plan and 2002 agreement; if so, can details be provided; if not, why not.

Senator Ludwig—The Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Justice has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:

(1) The implementation of the 1996 plan and the 2002 agreement is a matter for each jurisdiction. States and Territories have implemented key elements of the agreements through a range of legislative and administrative arrangements. These include:

- a common basis for classifying firearms;
prohibitions on fully and semi automatic long arms, with their use restricted primarily to military, police or government purposes;
prohibitions on sporting shooters possessing, owning, using, purchasing or importing high powered, concealable handguns;
mandatory registration of all firearms on State and Territory firearms registry systems;
mandatory licensing of all firearm owners; and
strict licensing requirements, including age limitations, undertaking firearms safety training, and compliance with firearm storage standards.

Questions about the detailed implementation of these measures should be directed to State and Territory Governments.

Representatives from each of the Australian jurisdictions meet regularly to exchange information on the operation and interoperability of national firearms laws, and to identify and remedy any possible areas of weakness or inconsistency. This work is done by the Firearms and Weapons Policy Working Group, which reports to the Ministerial Council for Police and Emergency Management – Police.

Commonwealth Grants Commission

(Question Nos 176 and 177)

Senator Birmingham asked the Minister representing the Treasurer and the Minister for Finance and Deregulation, upon notice, on 28 October 2010:

(1) Is advice from the South Australian Treasury, as reported in The Advertiser of 28 October 2010, correct inasmuch as Commonwealth funding of $228 million towards Adelaide’s desalination plant will result in a reduction in the goods and services tax (GST) grant to the South Australian Government; if so, by how much is the GST grant to South Australia reduced.

(2) Is it accurate to suggest this $228 million Commonwealth payment is actually only worth $16 million to the South Australian Government; if not, why not.

(3) Do other Commonwealth grants, such as for the Lower Lakes and Coorong Recovery Project, similarly result in a reduction in GST funding; if so, why; if not, why not.

Senator Wong—The Treasurer has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:

(1) The Commonwealth Grants Commission (CGC) recommends the distribution of the GST among the States and Territories (the States) in accordance with the principle of horizontal fiscal equalisation (HFE). This aims to give each state the same fiscal capacity to deliver services, and the associated infrastructure, to its residents at the same standard.

In assessing a State’s fiscal capacity the CGC has regard to its revenue raising capacity, including its own source revenues (such as State taxes) and other Commonwealth transfers, and its expenditure needs.

Along with other Commonwealth transfers (subject to a limited number of exclusions), payments under the Water for the Future program, such as for the Adelaide desalination plant, are included in the CGC’s assessments as they increase a state’s fiscal capacity.

Given the number of factors that are taken into account by the CGC it is not possible to be definitive about the impact of South Australia’s increased fiscal capacity on its share of the GST.

Overall, South Australia is a net beneficiary of the arrangements for the distribution of the GST. It receives a greater than equal per capita share of the GST, and more GST funding per person than Western Australia, Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria.
(2) No. Additional Commonwealth funding, such as that provided for the Water for the Future program increases the capacity of the states to deliver services.

(3) The Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations, agreed to by all governments, provides that, unless directed otherwise, the CGC is to have regard to all Commonwealth payments to the States, including funding for the Lower Lakes and Coorong Recovery Project, in making its assessment of States’ fiscal capacities.

### Australian Taxation Office

(Question No. 178)

Senator Cormann asked the Minister representing the Treasurer, upon notice, on 3 November 2010:

Given that earlier in 2010 the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) agreed with the Commonwealth Ombudsman to institute a new system for greater checks and balances for ATO use of their ‘wallet access power’ (power to enter premises without a bench warrant):

1. Is the new system fully operational.
2. What has been the total number of decisions made under the new system to 31 October 2010.
3. Is data on the new system recorded; if so, when and where will it be published.
4. Will the new system be reviewed; if so, when.

Senator Wong—The Treasurer has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:

1. All agreed enhancements to the ATO’s access without notice approaches have been implemented with the exception of the agreed case management system changes to identify when access powers are used that will be delivered around March 2011.

   In the meantime, the ATO continues to document the use of access without notice powers within the taxpayer case records in the centralised case management system. The ATO will continue to manually extract information on the use of these powers prior to the systems change being made.

2. In the Commissioner’s recently released Annual Report 2009-10, the ATO has disclosed that it used its access without notice powers on 10 occasions.

   Furthermore, in the period from 1 July to 31 October 2010, the ATO used these powers on 4 additional occasions.

3. Yes. Data is recorded in the ATO’s case management system. The March 2011 systems change will make data extraction easier for ongoing reporting on the use of these powers in the Commissioner’s Annual Report.

4. The ATO will conduct a review of its use of access without notice powers in consultation with key stakeholders. The review will be lead by a senior tax officer (SES Band 2 Deputy Commissioner) and will be completed by 31 January 2011.

### Taxation

(Question No. 179)

Senator Cormann asked the Minister representing the Treasurer, upon notice, on 3 November 2010:

In regard to the tax treatment of rural trusts and the withdrawal of Taxation Ruling 95/29 (TR 95/29):

1. How many farm businesses use trust arrangements to help structure their business affairs.
2. How many farm businesses are likely to be impacted by the withdrawal of TR 95/29.
3. What will be the revenue impact of the withdrawal of TR 95/29 over the forward estimates.
(4) Has the Minister, the Treasury, or the Commissioner of Taxation considered legislative amendment to rectify the change in tax law flowing from the case Bamford v Commissioner of Taxation and reflected in the withdrawal of TR 95/29; if not, why not.

Senator Wong—The Treasurer has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:

(1) The table below provides information on the number of trusts reporting to have income from primary production. Data for the 2009-10 financial year is not yet available as there are trust returns yet to be lodged.

Table 1: Trusts reporting business income from primary production:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial year</th>
<th>2006-07</th>
<th>2007-08</th>
<th>2008-09</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trusts</td>
<td>25,110</td>
<td>25,340</td>
<td>23,244</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(2) The withdrawal of Taxation Ruling TR 95/29 Income tax: Division 16 - applicability of averaging provisions to beneficiaries of trust estates carrying on a business of primary production will only affect primary producers who are beneficiaries of a trust, where the trust carries on the primary production activity and where the trust is in a loss position for trust law purposes. The Australian Taxation Office does not have specific data on the number of trusts that have losses for trust law purposes. However, data is available on the number of trusts with primary production income reporting to be in a net loss position. There is likely to be a strong correlation between the number of trusts with trust law losses and the number of trusts with tax law losses.

Table 2: Trusts with primary production income reporting to be in a net loss position.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial year</th>
<th>2006-07</th>
<th>2007-08</th>
<th>2008-09</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trusts w/net losses</td>
<td>8,346</td>
<td>7,935</td>
<td>7,841</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No beneficiaries will lose primary producer status as a result of the lodgment of the 2009-10 financial year trust returns, as the Australian Taxation Office withdrew Taxation Ruling TR 95/29 with effect from the 2010-11 financial year.

(3) The Government has not sought costings of the revenue impact of the withdrawal of Taxation Ruling TR 95/29.

(4) The Government is aware of the potential ramifications of the High Court’s decision in the case Bamford v Commissioner of Taxation [2010] HCA 10 and the Australian Taxation Office’s withdrawal of Taxation Ruling TR 95/29 for beneficiaries of trusts carrying on a primary production business. The Government is sympathetic to the concerns of those affected and is examining options to address these concerns and ensure that the provisions operate appropriately.

Taxation

(Question No. 185)

Senator Cormann asked the Minister representing the Treasurer, upon notice, on 3 November 2010:

In regard to small business trusts and Taxation Ruling 2010/3 (TR 2010/3):

(1) Did the Commissioner of Taxation consult with the department on the intended scope of operation of Division 7A prior to the issue of the Commissioner’s draft ruling on unpaid present entitlements in late 2009, or in the release of TR 2010/3.

(2) What consultation with industry took place prior to the release of TR 2010/3.

(3) Is the Government considering amending Division 7A to clarify the operation of these rules in relation to unpaid present entitlements so that small business trusts are not disadvantaged by TR 2010/3.
(4) Has any consultation with industry canvassed the possibility of amendments to Division 7A to counteract the impact of TR 2010/3.

(5) What are the revenue implications of TR 2010/3 over the forward estimates.

(6) Has the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) investigated the impact of TR 2010/3 on small business; if so, what was the outcome of this assessment; if not, why not.

(7) Has the Treasurer or the department considered the rationale for TR 2010/3; if so, does the Treasurer agree with that rationale.

(8) Is the ATO considering a test case to assess the validity of TR 2010/3; if not, why not.

Senator Wong—The Treasurer has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:

(1) Yes, the ATO did consult with Treasury on the intended scope of operation of Division 7A prior to the issue of both the ATO’s draft ruling on unpaid present entitlements TR 2009/D8 and the release of TR 2010/3 Income Tax: Division 7A loans: trust entitlements.

(2) The ATO commenced consultation with tax professionals and representatives of peak professional and legal bodies in February 2009. Consultation continued, through various consultative forums including the Division 7A working group and via submissions on the draft ruling, released on 16 December 2009. The ATO gave detailed consideration to the 41 submissions received in respect of the draft ruling and also invited representatives from peak professional bodies to make submissions to the public rulings panel prior to the publication of TR 2010/3 in June 2010.

Tax professionals were consulted, again through the Division 7A working group and via submissions on the draft practice statement, in the process to publish practice statement PS LA 2010/4, released on 14 October 2010.

(3) The Government is not currently considering amending the Division 7A rules in relation to unpaid present entitlements.

(4) Throughout the various ATO consultation processes that culminated in the publication of TR 2010/3 and practice statement PS LA 2010/4, the issue of possible legislative amendment was not raised in any meaningful way with the ATO. However, industry has made the Government aware of its concerns with TR 2010/3. Treasury has not canvassed with industry the possibility of amendments to Division 7A to counteract the impact of TR 2010/3.

(5) The revenue implications of TR 2010/3 have not been costed.

(6) The Commissioner is aware of the importance of the issue to small businesses. In recognition of the impact of the view adopted in TR 2010/3, the Commissioner recently issued practice statement PS LA 2010/4. This practice statement provides administrative concessions and practical solutions to the issues relating to the provision of finance for small businesses that operate through trusts.

Broadly, the practice statement provides for two self corrective options and outlines three methodologies that the ATO believe are examples of a commercial return on the investment the private company is taken to have made in the trust. This practice statement has been welcomed by tax professionals.

(7) Treasury considers that TR 2010/3 is not inconsistent with the general policy rationale for Division 7A, which treats certain private company loans and payments to shareholders (or a shareholder’s associate) as deemed dividends if the company has a distributable surplus (broadly, that is realised or unrealised profits).

(8) Although the ATO is confident that the view contained in TR 2010/3 is an accurate interpretation of the law, they have been working with members of various professional bodies to identify a suitable test case as a way of providing judicial certainty on the view expressed by the Commissioner in TR 2010/3.
Australian Taxation Office
(Question No. 186)

Senator Cormann asked the Minister representing the Treasurer, upon notice, on 3 November 2010:
In regard to the deemed value of unexercised options from employee share schemes:
(1) Is the Treasurer aware of the practice by which the Australian Taxation Office is taxing vested options (unexercised) at a deemed rate (under Division 83A of the Income Tax Assessment Act 1997) even when those options may expire with no financial benefit to the taxpayer.
(2) How much windfall tax has been raised through this deeming of value in respect of unexercised options in each of the 2009-10 and 2010-11 financial years.
(3) Does the Treasurer believe that taxing the deemed value of vested, but unexercised, options reflects the current state of taxation law in Australia; if so, will the Treasurer be acting to rectify this unfair practice.

Senator Wong—The Treasurer has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:
Following recent changes to the taxation of employee share schemes, any discount to the market value of employee share scheme interests (ESS interests) provided to employees is taxed upfront (that is, on acquisition), as it forms part of the employee’s remuneration and is no different in substance to any other non-cash benefit provided to an employee. That means that the discount must be included in an employee’s assessable income for that income year.
However, two tax concessions are available that vary this treatment:
• a $1,000 tax exemption is available to taxpayers participating in an employee share scheme who pay tax upfront, if they have a taxable income (after adjustments) of $180,000 or less, and the employee and the scheme meet certain conditions.
• a deferred concession where:
  - the relevant ESS interests must be acquired at a discount under an employee share scheme, relate to ordinary shares and be subject to a real risk of forfeiture; or
  - the relevant ESS interests must be acquired under a salary sacrifice arrangement, and the employee must receive no more than $5,000 worth of shares under those arrangements in an income year.
The deferred tax concession is often available in respect of options because a genuine risk of forfeiture exists.
Under the previous law, options were taxed (amongst other triggers) at exercise, with a maximum tax deferral period of ten years.
Following the recent changes to employee share schemes, the taxing point for options was moved forward to when there are no longer any genuine restrictions on the disposal or exercise of the option (or on the underlying share if it were to be exercised), or when the employee ceases employment in respect of which they acquired the right, with a maximum deferral period of seven years. Hence, the taxing point is the point at which the taxpayer can take some action to realise the benefit. It does not matter whether or not they chose to do so. This is consistent with the tax treatment of shares under employee share schemes.
However, the new law also provides for a refund of tax paid in relation to discounted ESS interests in certain circumstances where those interests are forfeited and the employee has already been taxed on the discount at an earlier time.
Specifically, the new law is taken never to have applied in relation to an ESS interest (resulting in a refund of any previously paid income tax) where:

- an amount of employee share scheme discount has been or would be included in the employee’s assessable income;
- the employee has either forfeited the ESS interest or, in the case of a right, the employee has lost the right without having disposed of or exercised it; and
- the forfeiture or loss is not the result of a choice made by the individual (except when that choice was to cease employment), and nor is it the result of a condition of the scheme that has the direct effect of wholly or partly protecting the employee from a fall in the market value of the ESS interest (and thus protecting the employee from market risk).

As such, no income tax collected under employee share scheme rules would be considered a ‘windfall’ tax, as employees are never taxed on more than the market value of the remuneration benefit they receive. This is especially so, given that in cases where the benefit is forfeited, the employee is often entitled to a refund of any tax already paid.

There is no time limit on amending an assessment to exclude an amount from a taxpayer’s assessable income for a share interest which is forfeited, or for a right which was lost without being exercised.

Taxing options when there are no longer any real restrictions, rather than at exercise, ensures that taxpayers cannot seek to undermine the integrity changes proposed to the refund rules.

Further, deferring the taxing of options to exercise discriminates also against shares, protects the individual against downside market risk, provides for poor governance outcomes, as well as resulting in excessive concessionality and Commonwealth subsidies to corporate remuneration.

The changes to employee share schemes were made following extensive consultation with the sector, and have been broadly supported by the Productivity Commission’s report into executive remuneration and the Board of Taxation’s Review into Employee Share Schemes (which included a review of the valuation rules).

It is appropriate to tax employees on all their remuneration, regardless of the form it is received (cash or as a non-cash benefit).

ESS tax return data for the 2009-10 and 2010-11 financial years is not yet available.

Finally, in regard to valuation rules, the general rule is that any ESS interests be valued at market value (according to ordinary concepts). However, employees may choose to adopt a value calculated by reference tables so as to minimise their compliance costs.

Fair Work Ombudsman
(Question No. 187)

Senator Abetz asked the Minister for Finance and Deregulation, upon notice, on 4 November 2010:

With reference to the answer to question on notice no. 149:

(1) Given that bank accounts are ‘swept’ overnight, is it not possible to trace the amount of interest earned in relation to each account that is swept.

(2) Does the Government agree that for true wage justice to be obtained for those that have been underpaid, it is appropriate for the Government to be paid interest on the amounts held for the underpaid.

Senator Wong—The answer to the honourable senator’s question is as follows:

(1) The daily balances of individual agency bank accounts are swept overnight to the Australian Government’s group of Official Public Accounts (OPA), which is held with the Reserve Bank of Aus-
All public money contributed from individual agency bank accounts to the OPA is aggregated. From the aggregated sum, amounts are either held at-call or invested in term deposits. Money held at-call earns interest daily at the Reserve Bank’s cash rate, while money in term deposits earns varying interest rates. There is no mechanism to trace the contributions from individual agency bank accounts to the aggregate amount that is held at-call or that is invested in term deposits. Therefore, no mechanism exists to tie the daily contributions from individual agency bank accounts to an interest earning rate.

The Government ensures that employee entitlements provided under the workplace laws are protected through a range of measures, including the compliance activities undertaken by the Office of the Fair Work Ombudsman (OFWO). These measures aim to ensure employees receive their correct entitlements. Some compliance activities by the OFWO result in the Commonwealth receiving outstanding wages and other entitlements from the employers. When this occurs the OFWO takes steps to trace the ex-employees and pay them the monies recovered for them. Any interest earned on monies residing with the Commonwealth goes towards the Commonwealth’s expenses, including the expenses relating to the recovery of the unpaid wages and the tracing of the eligible recipients.

**Ministerial Council on Mineral and Petroleum Resources**

(Question No. 189)

Senator Ludlam asked the Minister representing the Minister for Resources and Energy, upon notice, on 10 November 2010:

(1) When will the Ministerial Council on Mineral and Petroleum Resources (MCMPR) Strategic Framework for abandoned mine management be released.

(2) Has the MCMPR abandoned mine working group has been disbanded; if so: (a) when; (b) why was it disbanded; and (c) how will the Government coordinate a consistent and coordinated approach to abandoned mines without a national body.

(3) Why has the Commonwealth ignored recommendations drafted in the MCMPR Strategic Framework for an abandoned mines management paper to set up a national body to develop a consistent and coordinated national approach to managing abandoned mines.

(4) Why do some jurisdictions set the required rehabilitation bond at less than the estimated cost of rehabilitation, for example, in Western Australia the bond is only required to be set at 25 per cent of the estimated final cost.

(5) How can the rehabilitation of a uranium mine site be guaranteed when state jurisdictions do not set the security bond at 100 per cent of the estimated clean-up cost.

(6) What percentage of the projected cost of rehabilitation of a uranium mine site is required to be set down as a bond in the Northern Territory.

(7) What method does the Commonwealth use to ensure available funds for the rehabilitation of uranium mine sites in the Northern Territory.

(8) Has the Federal Government taken an audit of all abandoned mines in the Northern Territory.

(9) Has the Federal Government undertaken an audit of abandoned mines in each Australian state and territory.

(10) How does the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999 guarantee the rehabilitation of uranium mine sites.

Senator Sherry—The Minister for Resources and Energy has provided the following answer to the honorable senator’s question:
(1) Formal approval from the Ministerial Council on Mineral and Petroleum Resources (MCMPR) Ministers for the Strategic Framework for Managing Abandoned Mines is expected by the end of 2010. Once approval has been granted, the document will be published and released in 2011.

(2) The MCMPR Abandoned Mines Working Group has not been disbanded and continues to work towards a consistent and coordinated approach to abandoned mines management in Australia.

(3) The Draft Abandoned Mines Discussion Paper - Towards a National Approach to Abandoned Mines Management developed by the MCMPR Abandoned Mines Working Group recommended that an advisory committee be convened to identify issues and risks common to abandoned mine sites throughout Australia. This recommendation will be examined following release of the Strategic Framework.

(4) The states and territories are responsible for the management of abandoned mines within their jurisdictions. Each jurisdiction has processes and legislation in place to prioritise and manage its abandoned mines and to set the amounts required for rehabilitation bonds. Details of specific standards and processes should be obtained by direct inquiry to the relevant jurisdiction.

(5) Rehabilitation of mine sites (uranium or otherwise) falls within the jurisdiction of the states under their own legislation. The Commonwealth has jurisdiction over uranium mined in the Northern Territory under the Atomic Energy Act 1953. Under this Act, the operating uranium mine, owned by Energy Resources of Australia (ERA), is required to provide the Commonwealth with a security bond of 100% of the cost of rehabilitation.

(6) The Northern Territory requires a 100% security bond for all mines.

(7) Currently, the only uranium mine in the Northern Territory is Ranger, operated by Energy Resources of Australia (ERA). ERA is required to provide the Commonwealth an Annual Plan of Rehabilitation describing the works required to rehabilitate the mine. The Supervising Scientist’s Division, the Northern Territory Government and the Northern Land Council need to review and accept the Plan before it is referred to the Minister for Resources and Energy. Once accepted by the Commonwealth Minister, the Commonwealth appoints an independent assessor to evaluate the cost of implementing the proposed plan, and based on this the Minister determines an appropriate amount. The 100% bond figure is adjusted with each subsequent annual plan.

(8) During the 1970s and 1980s, the Federal Government conducted several reviews of the conditions of abandoned uranium mines in the Northern Territory. These resulted in remedial works at Rum Jungle between 1983 - 1986 and hazard reduction works at Rum Jungle Creek South, and in the Adelaide River, South Alligator River and Westmoreland uranium provinces between 1990 - 1993. The Northern Territory Government is responsible for managing all other abandoned mines within the Territory therefore the Federal Government has not conducted an audit of these sites.

(9) The Federal Government has not conducted an audit for abandoned mines in Australia this is a matter for each state and territory.

(10) States are responsible for the rehabilitation of mining sites. Each state has built into their respective Mining Acts provisions for a bond to be held to secure rehabilitation in case of sudden mine closure. Under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999 (EPBC Act) uranium mining is considered a nuclear action. As such, uranium projects must be referred to the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities for assessment under the Act.

Foreign Investment Review Board

(Question No. 190)

Senator Bob Brown asked the Minister representing the Treasurer, upon notice, on 11 November 2010:
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(1) Has the Foreign Investment Review Board (FIRB) received inquiries or applications for foreign investment in the Aurukun bauxite mine in Queensland in the past year.

(2) Has the FIRB received inquiries or applications for foreign investment in any other bauxite or alumina refining facilities in the past year.

(3) Has the FIRB received inquiries or applications from BHP Billiton on behalf of a joint partner or investor concerning bauxite or alumina refining investments.

Senator Wong—The Treasurer has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:

(1) (2) and (3) Consistent with the long standing practice of Treasurers, I am not able to comment on whether the Foreign Investment Review Board (FIRB) has received those inquiries or applications mentioned in this question because of the general commercial confidentiality of the FIRB’s information on specific cases.

Airservices Australia
(Question No. 191)

Senator Bob Brown asked the Minister representing the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, upon notice, on 11 November 2010:

(1) Given that according to the 2009–10 annual report of Airservices Australia, Airservices Pacific did not rebid for the contract to operate control towers in the United States: (a) how long did Airservices Pacific hold the United States of America (US) control tower contract; and (b) why did it decide not to rebid for the contract when it expired in 2010.

(2) (a) How much money did Airservices Australia via Airservices Pacific earn from this US contract; and (b) what was the total cost of establishing and running Airservices Pacific over the duration of the bid, operation and wind-up of the US contract.

(3) Is Airservices Pacific still in existence; if so, what activities is it undertaking or planning to undertake.

(4) If Airservices Pacific has been disbanded, why was this decision taken.

Senator Conroy—The Minister for Infrastructure and Transport has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question, based on advice from Airservices Australia:

(1) (a) Upon expiry on 31 January 2010, the contract was held for five years and one month. (b) Airservices Australia decided not to rebid due to a change in strategic direction.

(2) (a) Total revenue to Airservices Pacific was US$14.6m. (b) Total operating costs were US$14.2m.

(3) Airservices Pacific is currently undertaking administrative activities in preparation for the wind-up of the company. No further operational activities are planned.

(4) The decision to wind-up the company was made because Airservices Australia has advised that it has no future intentions to undertake activities in the US air traffic control market.

Electricity Prices
(Question No. 192)

Senator Milne asked the Minister representing the Minister for Resources and Energy, upon notice, on 11 November 2010:

(1) (a) How much have electricity prices increased in the past 10 years for each Australian state and territory in both percentage and dollar terms; and (b) what do these electricity prices include with respect to percentage of retail costs, network upgrades, distribution, production, labour etc.
(2) (a) How are electricity prices expected to increase over the next 10 years for each Australian state and territory in both percentage and dollar terms; and (b) what do these projected electricity price increases include with respect to percentage of retail costs, network upgrades, production, distribution, labour etc.

(3) The report by the Australian Energy Regulator (AER) titled, Victorian electricity distribution businesses comparative performance report 2008 (the report), shows that over the past 10 year period all of Victoria’s electricity distributors made revenue above that which was forecast, with a few small exceptions (refer to Figure 1.1 on page 2 of the report). Given that forecasting determines electricity prices charged to consumers, and in almost all instances consumers are paying above real costs, what price reductions can Victorian electricity consumers expect to see in the future, particularly in light of following quote from the report:

Controls on the distributors’ prices are fixed for the 2006-10 regulatory period. However, if a distributor outperforms the financial assumptions underpinning the price controls, it may retain some of the resulting increase in profits. The setting of price controls for the next regulatory period (2011–15) will consider any cost reductions and other efficiency gains made by the distributors during 2006-10.

(4) (a) Given the recent devastating bushfires in Victoria, what role is the AER, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission or any other federal body taking to regulate the electricity distribution network upgrades that are necessary to keep our communities safe, given these distribution companies are levying fees from consumers to reportedly undertake these upgrades; and (b) how can Australian electricity consumers be assured that an increase in electricity pricing results in an increase in the reliability and supply of electricity through grid assets, given distribution companies such as SP AusNet made profits in the 2009-10 financial year in the order of A$209 million, up 17.9 per cent on the 2008-09 financial year.

Senator Sherry—The Minister for Resources and Energy has provided the following answer to the honorable senator’s question:

(1) (a) There is little systematic publication of the actual prices paid by electricity retail customers. Also, consumers have access to a range of tariffs, including regulated standing offer contracts and non-regulated negotiated market contracts making it difficult to ascertain representative actual prices paid by consumers across jurisdictions.

The Australian Energy Regulator’s (AER) State of the Energy Market 2009 report see: www.accc.gov.au/content/index.phtml?itemId=904614 provides estimates of average retail electricity prices for households over the period 1999/00 to 2008/09. This data is presented in a graph in Figure 7.10 of the AER’s report. It is important to note that the AER’s graph should be treated as indicative only of retail prices, rather than the actual prices paid by consumers.

(b) Table 4.2 from the AER’s State of the Energy Market 2010 report see: www.accc.gov.au/content/index.phtml/itemId/961581 provides a breakdown of these household electricity prices into the major cost components.

(2) (a) There is limited data publicly available on possible future increases in retail electricity prices. Some data is available where determinations have been made by jurisdictional regulators, however these determinations only extend over a period of one to three years. The most up-to-date data from these determinations by jurisdictional regulators are summarised in Table 4.3 of the AER’s State of the Energy Market 2010 report see: www.accc.gov.au/content/index.phtml/itemId/961581. This data is available as percentage increases in these determinations, rather than in dollar terms. Further information can be derived from the determinations of these regulators which can be found on their respective websites.
(b) The main driver behind recent price rises has been increases in network charges especially for distribution networks. This is due to the need for significant capital investment in new and ageing network infrastructure to meet demand and to ensure a reliable supply for consumers. This is particularly highlighted by recent price determinations by NSW and Queensland regulators.

(3) The AER released on 29 October 2010 its final determination for Victoria’s electricity distribution network service providers (DNSPs). The AER’s determination sets a cap on the revenues or prices that Victorian DNSPs (Jemena, SP AusNet, Citipower, Powercor and United Energy) can recover for the provision of electricity distribution services from 1 January 2011 to 31 December 2015. Further detail on the AER’s determination for Victorian DNSPs can found on the AER’s website see: www.aer.gov.au/content/index.phtml/itemId/740791.

(4) (a) The Council of Australian Governments’ Australian Energy Market Agreement (AEMA) sets out the responsibilities of energy market institutions and the roles and responsibilities of the Commonwealth and participating jurisdictions. With respect to roles and responsibilities, the AEMA states that matters relating to technical or safety authorisations for distribution businesses remain explicitly State and Territory functions, to which bushfire mitigation applies. Separate regulatory arrangements apply in WA and the NT, but in each case bushfire mitigation remains the responsibility of the relevant jurisdiction.

Distribution (and transmission) network businesses are responsible for maintaining electricity assets in accordance with the technical and safety standards set by the states and territories, including with respect to bushfire mitigation.

In all states and territories other than Western Australia and the Northern Territory, the AER is responsible for economic regulation and compliance with the National Electricity Rules (NER). This includes making regulatory determinations with respect to the revenue that regulated network service providers in the jurisdictions can earn over a 5 year regulatory period.

In addition to undertaking its functions in a manner consistent with the National Electricity Law (NEL), the AER also needs to have regard to matters prescribed by the NER which include the relevant health, safety, environmental and social legislation applying to the electricity distribution industry. In other words, while the AER is not responsible for determining the technical and safety obligations and requirements which are imposed on DNSPs by the States and Territories, compliance with these jurisdiction based requirements is a relevant consideration in any determination, including those that relate to bushfire mitigation. Separate regulatory arrangements apply in Western Australia and the Northern Territory, but in both cases network business compliance with technical and safety requirements is also a relevant consideration in making the revenue determinations.

Furthermore, the Ministerial Council on Energy (MCE) has recently agreed to the Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) on Energy Supply Industry Safety. The IGA formalises cooperation between governments on the creation of a harmonised safety framework for the energy supply industry. In particular, this will facilitate greater labour mobility within and between state and territory transmission and distribution networks in response to an emergency.

(4) (b) Details on the reliability outcomes of Australian electricity markets are provided in the AER’s State of the Energy Market report.
Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service
(Question No. 193)

Senator Siewert asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, upon notice, on 11 November 2010:

With reference to the Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (ASEL) that are administered by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) and cover the entire live export chain from farm to wharf:

(1) How many AQIS staff are currently dedicated to administering and enforcing the ASEL across all ports in Western Australia.

(2) What is the total number of live animals exported and live animal shipments that have left Western Australian ports since July 2005 when the ASEL came into effect.

(3) At how many of these loadings was AQIS present.

(4) Since 2005, how many cases has AQIS reported for non-compliance with the ASEL.

Senator Ludwig—The answer to the honourable senator’s question is as follows:

(1) At the time the question was asked there was 2.7 full time equivalent staff based in Western Australia dedicated to administering and enforcing ASEL across all ports. Recruitment currently underway will increase this to 3.7 full time equivalent staff. It should also be noted that the port of Wyndham is serviced by staff from Darwin when required.

(2) There have been a total of 17,821,778 head of livestock exported on 1,124 shipments (including air shipments) from Western Australian ports since July 2005.

(3) AQIS has been present at intermittent periods during the loading of all livestock consignments since 2005.

(4) AQIS does not formally report on non-compliance with the ASEL. However, AQIS addresses potential and actual non-compliance with ASEL on a case by case basis and action is taken where required.

Tobacco Products
(Question No. 204)

Senator Abetz asked the Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, upon notice, on 16 November 2010:

(1) What are the intellectual property (IP) implications of plain packaging of tobacco products?

(2) Is it correct that plain packaging may not be consistent with Australia’s IP treaty obligations?

(3) Is it correct that IP Australia has advised the Government that plain packaging would make it easier for counterfeit products to be produced and supplied on the market.

(4) Has the Minister been advised that plain packaging of tobacco products may be seen by trademark owners as a restriction on the ability to use their marks; if so:

(a) where did that advice come from;

(b) what was that advice; and

(c) what are the implications

Senator Carr—The answer to the honourable senator’s question is as follows:

(1) Plain packaging will involve regulating the use of trade marks on tobacco products. This measure will not remove any existing trade mark registrations, nor affect the registrability of future trade marks.
(2) No. The relevant treaty, the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property (TRIPs) Agreement, allows for regulating the use of trade marks when it is justified and reasonable to do so.

(3) Yes. IP Australia advised the Government that plain packaging might increase the potential for the counterfeiting of tobacco products. However, IP Australia did not estimate the level of any likely rise.

(4) Yes.
(a) The advice came from IP Australia.
(b) The advice was that the use of trade marks can be restricted by Government when it is justified and reasonable to do so, for instance to address a public health issue.
(c) The implications are that the Government will be able to restrict the way a trade mark can be used when it is justified and reasonable to do so.

**Fair Work Ombudsman**

(Question No. 205)

Senator Abetz asked the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations, upon notice, on 16 November 2010:

With reference to the Fair Work Ombudsman annual report for 2009-10:

(1) Given that the Fair Work Ombudsman signed the annual report to the Minister on 27 September 2010, when was it received in the Minister’s office.

(2) Page vi of the annual report advises that expanded translation material for employers from culturally linguistic and diverse communities to cover 26 languages was one of the performance snapshots. Can the 26 languages be listed.

(3) In relation to the last line on page 14 of the annual report, do the small business operators self identify as being small business ‘with fewer than 15 employees’ or are they specifically asked.

(4) What campaigns has the Fair Work Ombudsman undertaken in relation to advising employers in relation to their rights.

(5) In tables 3 and 4 on pages 24 and 25 of the annual report respectively, the numbers in reference to the Australian Capital Territory seem disproportionately high to the population and business activity: (a) does the Australian capital territory also service complaints from New South Wales; if so, how many; and (b) are any of the other state jurisdictions an amalgam of another state’s or territory’s figures, for example does the South Australian figure include Northern Territory complaints; if so, can an analysis be provided.

(6) In relation to the task undertaken by the small business education unit, does it provide assistance only to small business; if so: (a) how is that defined; (b) what definition is used; (c) on what basis is that definition used.

**Senator Chris Evans**—The answer to the honourable senator’s question is as follows:

(1) Parliamentary Document Records indicate that the report was received by the Minister’s office on 1 October 2010 with the accompanying brief signed by the Minister on 6 October 2010.

(2) Arabic, Chinese, Croatian, Dari, Filipino, Greek, Hindi, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Macedonian, Nepali, Persian, Portuguese, Russian, Serbian, Sinhalese, Somali, Spanish, Tamil, Thai, Tongan, Turkish, Urdu, Vietnamese.

(3) The survey participants were specifically asked.

(4) The Fair Work Ombudsman undertakes a range of activities to educate employers about their workplace rights and obligations. The Fair Work Ombudsman’s Annual Report highlights these activities - see pages 14 to 20 & 27 to 30 for some examples.

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(5) The primary reason for the inflated figure for complaints finalised by the ACT office in the annual report is that it includes investigations conducted by teams within the Fair Work Ombudsman which provide national compliance services and these are reported through the ACT. The majority of these include complaints resolved by the National Assisted Voluntary Resolution function.

Fair Work Inspectors from the Canberra regional office do investigate complaints against NSW employers located in the Canberra region, including the South Coast of NSW, Southern Tablelands of NSW and adjacent areas. The number of investigations finalised by Fair Work Inspectors located at the Canberra regional office is 373. This includes approximately 91 investigations relating to NSW employers, 8 from other states and 23 investigations where the location of the employer was not reported.

The figures provided in the annual report for finalised investigations in other states and territories are not an amalgam of another state or territory’s figures.

(6) The small business education unit does not apply a strict definition of a small business for the provision of its services. The programs and services run by the unit are tailored to the needs of small business, and made available to any business that seeks such services.

Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations: Awards

(Question No. 206)

Senator Abetz asked the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations, upon notice, on 16 November 2010:

(1) Are apprentices referred to as employees for the purposes of the Fair Work Act and modern awards.
(2) Are apprentices referred to as employees under the various states’ legislation which is being transitioned.
(3) Given that all state awards will be replaced by modern awards from 1 January 2011, does this mean that apprentices employed will be covered by the modern award or will they remain under the state award for the duration of their apprenticeship.
(4) When referred state awards are replaced by modern awards on 1 January 2011: (a) are there provisions for the phasing in as occurred with the monetary obligations in 2010; if so, please outline; or (b) are the modern awards implemented in their entirety from 1 January 2011.

Senator Chris Evans—The answer to the honourable senator’s question is as follows:

(1) The Fair Work Act 2009 (the FW Act) applies to national system employers and their employees. Modern awards operate in relation to national system employers and their employees within the scope of industries and occupations specified in modern award coverage terms.

An apprentice who is employed (that is, engaged to perform work in return for payment) by a national system employer is a national system employee for the purposes of the FW Act. The fact that a person is undertaking an apprenticeship does not prevent that person from being an employee: Rowe v Capital Territory Health Commission (1982) 62 FLR 383.

(2) All States apart from Western Australia referred power to the Commonwealth to extend the definitions of national system employer and national system employee in the FW Act, to amend the FW Act in relation to the subject matter dealt with by the Act and to make transitional arrangements for ‘incoming’ employers and employees from State systems. The States’ referral Acts did not differentiate between apprentices who are employees and other types of employees.

(3) Fair Work Australia’s (FWA) recent decision ([2010] FWAFB 8558) about transitional provisions for Division 2B State referral awards (Div 2B awards) provides that while Div 2B awards terminate on 31 December 2010, their terms will be preserved and continue to apply to relevant employees until 31 January 2011.
From 1 February 2011, apprentices covered by Div 2B awards will transfer to a modern award and commence an incremental transition towards pay rates provided in that modern award. However, item 36A of Schedule 3A to the *Fair Work (Transitional Provisions and Consequential Amendments) Act 2009* (T&C Act) provides that the provisions of Queensland Div 2B awards relating to the minimum terms and conditions of apprentices and trainees do not terminate on 31 December 2010. They continue to apply indefinitely and are not subject to this decision.

FWA's recent decision about transitional provisions provides that from 1 February 2011 the transitional provisions in modern awards will apply to employees covered by Div 2B awards in the same manner they apply to employees formerly covered by Notional Agreements Preserving State Awards (NAPSA). A NAPSA was a federal instrument derived from the state award that applied to employees of constitutional corporations that were brought into the national workplace relations system from 27 March 2006.

The model transitional provisions applying to NAPSA employees provide that phasing towards modern award rates of pay will occur over a five year period in 20 per cent increments, one each year (commencing 1 July 2010 and ending on 30 June 2014). Phasing for Div 2B employees will commence on 1 February 2010 consistent with the first phasing step that applied to NAPSA employees from 1 July 2010, also ending on 30 June 2014.

FWA set out a number of exceptions to its decision. These include where the minimum wage, loading or penalty rate in a Div 2B award is lower than the corresponding modern award provision, but the equivalent NAPSA provisions, applying to other national system employees is higher than the modern award, the employee will move straight to the modern award rate, rather than transitioning in increments. Conversely, where the Div 2B award rate is higher than the modern award rate, but the NAPSA rate is lower, the employer will be required to not pay less than the modern award rate.

**Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme**

(4) **TFES**

**Senator Abetz** asked the Minister representing the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, upon notice, on 16 November 2010:

(1) With reference to the Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme, are skins and hides listed as qualifying on the Australian New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification list for the purposes of the Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme; if so, under which category.

(2) Given that all skins from Tasmania are ultimately destined for export, what manufacturing is undertaken by the skins taken from Tasmania to Melbourne for TQM [Total Quality Meats], HW Greenham & Sons Pty Ltd, and Swift Australia who appear to qualify for the Tasmanian Freight Equalisation subsidies.

(3) Is a simple additional process of preserving a skin to enable its ongoing export deemed to be manufacturing.

**Senator Carr**—The Minister for Infrastructure and Transport has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:

(1) Under the Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme (TFES), goods shipped northbound to the mainland are eligible if they are listed in Schedule 1 of the TFES Ministerial Directions. Schedule 1 includes “hides, skins and furskins” listed under commodity code 02950. The ANZSIC is used to determine whether businesses are eligible to claim under the southbound component of the scheme.

(2) The Tasmanian-sourced hides and skins which have received TFES assistance have been sent to a number of mainland-based businesses for further processing. Centrelink has asked these mainland-based businesses what processing occurs. The businesses state that they undertake significant
manufacturing processes (trimming, cutting, de-fleshing, wet-blue) before exporting the hides and skins.

(3) Yes, if the predominant activity of the business is chemically preserving skins.

**Governor-General: Special Purpose Flights**

*(Question No. 208)*

*Senator Ronaldson* asked the Minister representing the Prime Minister, upon notice, on 17 November 2010:

For all VIP flights requested by the Governor-General and listed in the Department of Defence document, Special purpose flights schedule for the period 1 July 2009 to 30 June 2010:

(1) For each passenger travelling, can a list be provided itemising: (a) their full name and title; (b) their position and/or classification; (c) the reason for travel; and (d) the date and destination of travel.

(2) For each individual flight, can the following information be provided: (a) its date and destination, and (b) a complete passenger list.

*Senator Chris Evans*—The Prime Minister has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:

I am advised that:

(1) Details of VIP flights requested by the Governor-General between 1 July and 31 December 2009 were provided in the response to Senate Question on Notice No. 2911.

The flights requested by the Governor-General between 1 January and 30 June 2010 were all to enable her, usually accompanied by Mr Michael Bryce, to undertake official business in places outside Canberra. Full details of the Governor-General’s activities during each visit are published in the Governor-General’s Program section of the Office of the Official Secretary to the Governor-General (OOSGG) website at www.gg.gov.au.

Staff of the OOSGG and military Aides de Camp (whose names appear in Table 1 below) accompanied the Governor-General on flights over the period to provide logistic, administrative and/or policy support during her visits, as directed by the Official Secretary.

The non-OOSGG persons listed in Table 2 below provided official support services to the Governor-General when she travelled overseas.

Table 3 below provides details of persons who travelled as guests of the Governor-General at her invitation.

Table 1: OOSGG staff and Aides de Camp who travelled from 1 January to 30 June 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME (a)</th>
<th>POSITION (b)</th>
<th>REASON FOR TRAVEL (c)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brady, Mr Stephen</td>
<td>Official Secretary to the Governor-General</td>
<td>Official duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burke, Flight Lieutenant Renee</td>
<td>Aide de Camp to the Governor-General</td>
<td>Official duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bywaters, Lieutenant Phillip</td>
<td>Senior Executive Assistant</td>
<td>Official duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooper-Sande, Ms Caroline</td>
<td>Senior Communications &amp; Media Adviser</td>
<td>Official duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evered, Mr Stephen</td>
<td>Senior Chef</td>
<td>Official duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraser, Mr Mark</td>
<td>Deputy Official Secretary to the Governor-General</td>
<td>Official duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groves, Mr Sam</td>
<td>Communications &amp; Media Adviser</td>
<td>Official duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howell, Ms Janine</td>
<td>Invitations Officer</td>
<td>Official duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson, Captain Tim</td>
<td>Aide de Camp to the Governor-General</td>
<td>Official duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King, Mr Roger</td>
<td>Household attendant</td>
<td>Official duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAME (a)</td>
<td>POSITION (b)</td>
<td>REASON FOR TRAVEL (c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leake, Ms Sally</td>
<td>Manager, Strategic Program Planning</td>
<td>Official duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mace, Ms Lynette</td>
<td>Assistant Manager Household Operations</td>
<td>Official duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McConnell, Mr Mark</td>
<td>Manager Household Operations</td>
<td>Official duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McKenzie, Mr Nathan</td>
<td>Senior Events Adviser</td>
<td>Official duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morris, Ms Bronwyn</td>
<td>Executive Administrative Assistant</td>
<td>Official duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nibaldi, Lieutenant Rebecca</td>
<td>Aide de Camp to the Governor-General</td>
<td>Official duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O’Grady, Ms Pamela</td>
<td>Director, Executive and Protocol Branch</td>
<td>Official duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prendergast, Ms Sharon</td>
<td>Director, Honours and Awards Branch</td>
<td>Official duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schaefer, Mr Ryan</td>
<td>Household attendant</td>
<td>Official duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singer, Mr Paul</td>
<td>Senior Operations Adviser</td>
<td>Official duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith, Ms Maree</td>
<td>Invitations Officer</td>
<td>Official duties</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: non-OOSGG support persons who travelled from 1 January to 30 June 2010*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME (a)</th>
<th>POSITION (b)</th>
<th>DATE OF TRAVEL (d)</th>
<th>REASON FOR TRAVEL (c)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Killer, Dr Graeme</td>
<td>Consultant physician</td>
<td>16 April, 17 April, 23 April, 25</td>
<td>Medical support for overseas visit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>April, 27 April, 29 April, 30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>April, 1 May, 5 June, 6 June, 9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>June, 12 June and 13 June 2010</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldie, Wing Commander Darren</td>
<td>Staff Officer VIP Operations, 34 Squadron</td>
<td>16 April, 17 April, 23 April, 25</td>
<td>RAAF support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>April, 27 April, 29 April, 30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>April, 1 May, 5 June, 6 June, 9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>June, 12 June and 13 June 2010</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: guests travelling at the invitation of the Governor-General from 1 January to 30 June 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME (a)</th>
<th>POSITION (b)</th>
<th>DATE OF TRAVEL (d)</th>
<th>REASON FOR TRAVEL (c)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amorim Dias, Mr Jose</td>
<td>Chief of Protocol, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Timor-Leste</td>
<td>18-19 March 2010</td>
<td>During a short secondment to Government House, accompanied the Governor-General on an official visit to Perth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doyle, Mr Peter</td>
<td>Australian Ambassador to Turkey</td>
<td>25 April, 27 April 2010</td>
<td>Accompanied the Governor-General at ANZAC Day services in Gallipoli, and during the Istanbul and Ankara segments of her official visit to Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee, Ms Jennifer</td>
<td>Spouse of Australian Ambassador to Turkey</td>
<td>25 April, 27 April 2010</td>
<td>Accompanied the Governor-General at ANZAC Day services in Gallipoli, and during the Istanbul and Ankara segments of her official visit to Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAME (a)</td>
<td>POSITION (b)</td>
<td>DATE OF TRAVEL (d)</td>
<td>REASON FOR TRAVEL (c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanier, Mr Nigel</td>
<td>First Secretary, Australian Embassy Turkey</td>
<td>25 April, 27 April 2010</td>
<td>Accompanied the Governor-General at ANZAC Day services in Gallipoli, and during the Istanbul and Ankara segments of her official visit to Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliktas, Dr Oytun</td>
<td>Interpreter, Australian Embassy Ankara</td>
<td>25 April, 27 April 2010</td>
<td>Accompanied the Governor-General at ANZAC Day services in Gallipoli, and during the Istanbul and Ankara segments of her official visit to Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ozge, Mr Oguz</td>
<td>Turkish Ambassador to Australia</td>
<td>25 April, 27 April 2010</td>
<td>Accompanied the Governor-General at ANZAC Day services in Gallipoli, and during the Istanbul and Ankara segments of her official visit to Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ozge, Mrs Mehtap</td>
<td>Spouse of Turkish Ambassador to Australia</td>
<td>25 April, 27 April 2010</td>
<td>Accompanied the Governor-General at ANZAC Day services in Gallipoli, and during the Istanbul and Ankara segments of her official visit to Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onart, Mr M</td>
<td>Chief of Protocol, Turkish Foreign Ministry</td>
<td>25 April, 27 April 2010</td>
<td>Accompanied the Governor-General at ANZAC Day services in Gallipoli, and during the Istanbul and Ankara segments of her official visit to Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atas, Mr A</td>
<td>Turkish security officer</td>
<td>25 April, 27 April 2010</td>
<td>Accompanied the Governor-General at ANZAC Day services in Gallipoli, and during the Istanbul and Ankara segments of her official visit to Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten, Ms G</td>
<td>Turkish security officer</td>
<td>25 April, 27 April 2010</td>
<td>Accompanied the Governor-General at ANZAC Day services in Gallipoli, and during the Istanbul and Ankara segments of her official visit to Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bai, Dr Xuemei</td>
<td>Senior Principal Research Scientist, Sustainable Ecosystems Division, CSIRO</td>
<td>5 June, 6 June, 9 June, 12 June, 13 June 2010</td>
<td>Member of ‘The Sisters’ delegation which accompanied the Governor-General during many of her official engagements in China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown, Ms Larissa</td>
<td>Founder and Executive Director Centre for Sustainability Leadership</td>
<td>6 June, 9 June, 12 June, 13 June 2010</td>
<td>Member of ‘The Sisters’ delegation which accompanied the Governor-General during many of her official engagements in China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cretney, Dr Erika</td>
<td>Senior Research Officer, Immunology Division, Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research</td>
<td>6 June, 9 June, 12 June, 13 June 2010</td>
<td>Member of ‘The Sisters’ delegation which accompanied the Governor-General during many of her official engagements in China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAME (a)</td>
<td>POSITION (b)</td>
<td>DATE OF TRAVEL (d)</td>
<td>REASON FOR TRAVEL (c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lemerle, Prof Deirdre</td>
<td>Director EH Graham Centre for Agricultural Innovation</td>
<td>6 June, 9 June 2010</td>
<td>Member of ‘The Sisters’ delegation which accompanied the Governor-General during many of her official engagements in China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sahajwalla, Prof Veena</td>
<td>Director Centre for Sustainable Materials Research and Technology, University of New South Wales</td>
<td>6 June, 9 June, 12 June, 13 June 2010</td>
<td>Member of ‘The Sisters’ delegation which accompanied the Governor-General during many of her official engagements in China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vasilakis, Ms Nikki</td>
<td>Classical violinist</td>
<td>9 June, 12 June, 13 June 2010</td>
<td>Member of ‘The Sisters’ delegation which accompanied the Governor-General during many of her official engagements in China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhao, Ms Juliet</td>
<td>Interpreter</td>
<td>6 June, 9 June 2010</td>
<td>Interpreted for the Governor-General during her official visit to China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raby, Dr Geoff</td>
<td>Australian Ambassador to China</td>
<td>9 June 2010</td>
<td>Accompanied the Governor-General during the Shanghai and Beijing segments of her official visit to China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jianguo, Mr S</td>
<td>Chinese Foreign Ministry official</td>
<td>9 June 2010</td>
<td>Accompanied the Governor-General during the Shanghai and Beijing segments of her official visit to China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yaodong, Mr Z</td>
<td>Chinese Foreign Ministry official</td>
<td>9 June 2010</td>
<td>Accompanied the Governor-General during the Shanghai and Beijing segments of her official visit to China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yong, Mr Zhang</td>
<td>Chinese security officer</td>
<td>9 June 2010</td>
<td>Accompanied the Governor-General during the Shanghai and Beijing segments of her official visit to China</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(2) The date and destination of each flight requested by the Governor-General during the period from 1 January to 30 June 2010, and the passenger list in respect of each flight, are provided in the Schedule of Special Purpose Flights prepared by the Department of Defence for the period and tabled.

**International Labour Organisation**

(Question No. 209)

Senator Abetz asked the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations, upon notice, on 17 November 2010:

With reference to International Labour Organisation [ILO] Convention 181 (the Convention) relating to abandoning or restrictive or prohibitive policy towards private employment agencies and on the understanding that the Convention came into force in 1997:

(1) Did the Convention come into being in 1997; if not when did it come in to being?

(2) Which countries have signed the Convention?
(3) Has Australia considered becoming a signatory; if so, at what stage of the process is Australia at in determining whether or not to become a signatory?

(4) If a determination has been made not to become a signatory to the Convention, can reasons be provided for that decision and/or determination?

Senator Chris Evans—The answer to the honourable senator’s question is as follows:


(2) The following countries have ratified Convention 181: Albania, Algeria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Ethiopia, Finland, Georgia, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Lithuania, Republic of Moldova, Morocco, Netherlands, Panama, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Suriname and Uruguay.

(3) and (4) Preliminary consideration was given in 1998 to the suitability for ratification of Convention 181 and several other ILO Conventions by Commonwealth, state and territory officials responsible for ILO matters (known as ILO Technical Officers). In accordance with the protocol at the time, the outcomes of the Technical Officers’ meeting were considered by the Departments of Labour Standing Committee which recommended to the Labour Ministers’ Council that five Conventions be prioritised for further consideration. Convention 181 was not one of the five Conventions selected. Since that time Convention 181 has not been identified as a target for ratification by Australia.

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry: Pet Food**

(Question No. 211)

Senator Colbeck asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, upon notice, on 18 November 2010:

Given that the Primary Industries Ministerial Council (PIMC) ‘agreed to the establishment of a working group of officials to examine the need for additional mechanisms to manage the safety of imported and domestically produced pet food’ (PIMC Communiqué of 21 May 2009):

(1) Can a list be provided of the members of the working group.

(2) Can a list be provided of the dates and locations of meetings by the working group from its inception to November 2010.

(3) Can comprehensive details be provided of the actions of this working group from its inception to November 2010, addressing, with direct reference, the progress of the working group’s terms of reference as agreed at the PMIC meeting on 21 May 2009.

(4) Can an explanation be provided as to why the working group did not consult with ‘government, industry and relevant stakeholders and make an initial report in November 2009’ as was stated in the terms of reference.

(5) Can an explanation be provided as to why no PIMC Communiqué has listed the progress or even made a reference to the working group since the Communiqué of 21 May 2009.

(6) Can the status of the working group be clarified and whether it will ever address the terms of reference as set on 21 May 2009.

Senator Ludwig—The answer to the honourable senator’s question is as follows:

(1) The membership of the working group is as follows:

- the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry as chair;
- two state or territory agricultural or primary industry agencies (Victoria and New South Wales) to act on behalf of all jurisdictions;
- the Pet Food Industry Association of Australia;

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
The terms of reference also included membership from the Meat Standards Committee, however this committee had been disbanded before the working group was convened.

(2) To the end of November 2010, the working group met three times by teleconference; on 5 August 2009, 11 September 2009 and 22 June 2010.

(3) The working group has had discussions on appropriate regulatory models, or combinations thereof, for the pet food industry segments, having regard to such factors as the nature of hazards and the risk of market failure. The group has commenced work on a comprehensive discussion paper on these points.

(4) Government, industry and relevant stakeholders have been consulted through their membership of the working group. Around the same time as the working group first convened, the Pet Food Industry Association of Australia committed to upgrade its Code of Practice for the Manufacturing and Marketing of Pet Food into an Australian Standard through the Standards Australia process. PIMC members have recently agreed out-of-session to allow the working group to continue its work in parallel with the process of development of the Australian Standard, but with an extended reporting deadline that allows the outcome of the Standards Australia process to be considered.

(5) A PIMC communiqué on the working group has not been issued since its inception because the matter has not been considered by PIMC in-session.

(6) The working group is next scheduled to meet on 13 December 2010 and it is expected to report to PIMC in 2011 against its terms of reference.

**National Oceanic Atmosphere Administration**

(Question No. 212)

**Senator Abetz** asked the Minister representing the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, upon notice, on 22 November 2010:

(1) Is it correct that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s siting requirements for temperature and weather measurements provide that the thermometer must be at least 100 feet (30 metres) from any paved or concrete surface in a level open clearing, with ground covers typical of the region.

(2) Is there a similar requirement in Australia; if so, what are the requirements in Australia and who audits their compliance in Australia.

**Senator Wong**—The Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:

(1) Yes, this is the siting recommendation, as specified in the United States National Weather Service Observing Handbook No. 2 (July 1989), and relates to the positioning of the instrument shelter.

(2) The Bureau of Meteorology follows World Meteorological Organization guidelines in relation to the installation and maintenance of its observation networks.

For a standard Bureau staffed observing station, the Bureau’s Observation Specification recommends that the instrument enclosure is a 17 metres by 17 metres square enclosure in the middle of a 30 metres by 30 metres square buffer zone aligned in the true North-South direction. I am advised that all Bureau staffed sites comply with these guidelines.
The Bureau also undertakes a routine program of site inspections and maintains detailed records of all sites. For the vast majority of observing stations, internal audits are undertaken by Bureau Inspectors and staff in the Bureau’s Data Quality and Improvement Section. External reviews of the Bureau’s operations have made reference to the high quality of Bureau practices and procedures.

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry: Pet Food**

*(Question No. 214)*

**Senator Siewert** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, upon notice, on 22 November 2010:

(1) Can a list be provided of all the pet food import licences issued over the past 3 years which list irradiation as the method of rendering it quarantine safe.

(2) What percentage of all pet food import licences issued over the past 3 years list irradiation as the method of rendering it quarantine safe.

**Senator Ludwig**—The answer to the honourable senator’s question is as follows:

(1) A list of all pet (i.e. cat and dog) food import permits issued over the past 3 years that stipulate gamma irradiation as a condition of import is unable to be provided as this information is commercial-in-confidence. However, 603 permits for pet food have been issued since 22 November 2007 and 73 of these permits list irradiation as a condition of import.

Please note that of the 73 permits that list irradiation as a condition of import, 7 of these permits were suspended in 2009 when AQIS withdrew gamma irradiation as a treatment option for imported pet food fed to cats.

(2) Of the 603 permits issued for pet food over the past 3 years, approximately 12% list irradiation as a condition of import.

**Indigenous Health: Programs**

*(Question No. 215)*

**Senator Siewert** asked the Minister representing the Minister for Indigenous Health, upon notice, on 22 November 2010:

With reference to the $46 million National Rural and Remote Health Infrastructure Program:

(1) From this program, how many Not-for-Profit Aboriginal Medical Services (AMSs) have been allocated funds so far?

(2) Has any funding been quarantined/set-aside for Not-for-Profit AMSs.

(3) What role, if any, does the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) have on the tender panel or in tender process.

(4) If NACCHO is not involved on the tender panel what Aboriginal representation is there on the tender panel; if none, why not.

(5) How many AMSs across Australia have been identified as needing capital works projects.

(6) Which, if any, AMSs have had non-compliance and access issues noted by the ‘Building Code of Australia’ and the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 which are yet to be resolved.

**Senator Ludwig**—The Minister for Indigenous Health has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:

(1) Six Not-for-Profit Aboriginal Medical Services (AMSs) have been allocated funds from the National Rural and Remote Health Infrastructure Program.
(2) No. Funding from this program is not quarantined or set aside for any sector.

(3) The National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) does not have a role on the tender panel or in the tender process.

(4) The Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health within the Department of Health and Ageing, is represented on the National Assessment Panel.

(5) The National Rural and Remote Health Infrastructure Program does not perform needs identification, rather, applications are sought and assessed against criteria.

(6) For AMS applications approved under the National Rural and Remote Health Infrastructure Program, there are no issues unresolved in regards to the ‘Building Code of Australia’ or the Disability Discrimination Act 1992.

**Defence: Stationery**

(Question No. 233)

Senator Humphries asked the Minister representing the Minister for Defence and Defence Materiel and the Minister representing the Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, upon notice, on 29 November 2010:

Since 14 September 2010, for each Minister and any Parliamentary Secretaries in their portfolio:

(1) What has been the total amount spent on stationery and publications, including a breakdown of all spending?

(2) What has been the total amount spent on printing ministerial letterhead?

(3) What is the grams per square metre [GSM] of the ministerial letterhead?

(4) Is the letterhead carbon neutral?

Senator Chris Evans—The Minister for Defence has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:

(1) The table below provides a breakdown of spending on stationery and publications, for each office from 14 September 2010 to 30 November 2010.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Office</th>
<th>Stationery</th>
<th>Publications</th>
<th>Total Expenditure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Defence</td>
<td>$4,140.56</td>
<td>$3,172.74</td>
<td>$7,313.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Defence Science and Personnel</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>$1,193.65</td>
<td>$1,193.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Defence Materiel</td>
<td>$6,961.85</td>
<td>$2,410.26</td>
<td>$9,372.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Defence</td>
<td>$635.49</td>
<td>$1,193.65</td>
<td>$1,829.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(2) The table below provides a breakdown of spending on ministerial letterhead, for each office from 14 September 2010 to 30 November 2010.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Office</th>
<th>Expenditure on ministerial letterhead</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Defence</td>
<td>$ 469.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Defence Science and Personnel</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Defence Materiel</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Defence</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(3) Ministerial letterhead printed to date is 110 grams per square metre. Following the transition to a new product, all future ministerial letterhead will be 104 grams per square metre.

(4) Ministerial letterhead printed to date is not carbon neutral. Future ministerial letterheads will be printed on paper which is manufactured carbon neutral.