INTERNET
Proof and Official Hansards for the House of Representatives, the Senate and committee hearings are available at http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard
For searching purposes use http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au

SITTING DAYS—2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>12, 13, 14, 18, 19, 20, 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>2, 3, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 22, 23, 24, 25, 29, 30, 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>9, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 18, 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>14, 15, 16, 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>11, 12, 13, 14, 25, 26, 27, 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RADIO BROADCASTS
Broadcasts of proceedings of the Parliament can be heard on ABC NewsRadio in the capital cities on:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADELAIDE</td>
<td>972AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRISBANE</td>
<td>936AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CANBERRA</td>
<td>103.9FM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DARWIN</td>
<td>102.5FM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOBART</td>
<td>747AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MELBOURNE</td>
<td>1026AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERTH</td>
<td>585AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SYDNEY</td>
<td>630AM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For information regarding frequencies in other locations please visit http://www.abc.net.au/newsradio/listen/frequencies.htm
FORTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—FIRST PERIOD

Governor-General
His Excellency General the Hon. David John Hurley, AC, DSC, FTSE (Retd)

Senate Office Holders
President—Senator the Hon. Scott Ryan
Deputy President and Chair of Committees—Senator Susan Lines
Temporary Chairs of Committees—Senators Askew, Bernardi, Bilyk, Brockman, Brown, Faruqi, Fawcett, Fierravanti-Wells, Gallacher, Griff, Kitching, Sterle and Stoker
Leader of the Government in the Senate—Senator the Hon. Mathias Cormann
Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate—Senator the Hon. Simon Birmingham
Leader of the Opposition in the Senate—Senator the Hon. Penny Wong
Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate—Senator the Hon. Kristina Keneally
Manager of Government Business in the Senate—Senator the Hon. Anne Ruston
Deputy Manager of Government Business in the Senate—Senator Jonathon Duniam
Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate—Senator Katy Gallagher
Deputy Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate—Senator Kimberley Kitching

Senate Party Leaders and Whips
Leader of the Liberal Party in the Senate—Senator the Hon. Mathias Cormann
Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party in the Senate—Senator the Hon. Simon Birmingham
Leader of The Nationals in the Senate—Senator the Hon. Bridget McKenzie
Deputy Leader of The Nationals in the Senate—Senator the Hon. Matthew Canavan
Leader of the Labor Party in the Senate—Senator the Hon. Penny Wong
Deputy Leader of the Labor Party in the Senate—Senator the Hon. Don Farrell
Leader of the Australian Greens—Senator Richard Di Natale
Deputy Leader of the Australian Greens in the Senate—Senator Larissa Waters
Chief Government Whip—Senator Dean Anthony Smith
Deputy Government Whips—Senators James McGrath and Slade Brockman
The Nationals Whip—Senator Perin Davey
Chief Opposition Whip—Senator Anne Elizabeth Urquhart
Deputy Opposition Whips—Senators Raff Ciccone and Malarndirri McCarthy
Australian Greens Whip—Senator Rachel Siewert

Printed by authority of the Senate
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Senator</th>
<th>State or Territory</th>
<th>Term expires</th>
<th>Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abetz, Hon. Eric</td>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antic, Alexander</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Askew, Wendy(5)</td>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayres, Timothy</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernardi, Cory</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>IND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilyk, Catryna Louise</td>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham, Hon. Simon John</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bragg, Andrew James</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brockman, Slade</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown, Carol Louise</td>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canavan, Hon. Matthew James</td>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>NATS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carr, Hon. Kim John</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash, Hon. Michaela Clare</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandler, Claire</td>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chisholm, Anthony David</td>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ciccone, Raffaele</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colbeck, Hon. Richard Mansell</td>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cormann, Hon. Mathias Hubert Paul</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davey, Perin McGregor</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>NATS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Di Natale, Richard</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>AG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dodson, Patrick</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duniam, Hon. Jonathon Roy</td>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farrell, Donald Edward</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faruqi, Mehreen Saeed</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>AG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fawcett, David Julian</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fierravanti-Wells, Hon. Concetta Anna</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifield, Hon. Mitchell Peter</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallagher, Alexander McEachian</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallagher, Katherine Ruth</td>
<td>ACT</td>
<td></td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green, Nita Louise</td>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griff, Stirling</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanson, Pauline Lee</td>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>PHON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanson-Young, Sarah Coral</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>AG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hughes, Hollie Alexandra</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hume, Hon. Jane</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keneally, Hon. Kristina Kerscher(5)</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitching, Kimberley(1)</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lambie, Jacqui</td>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>JLN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lines, Susan</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McAllister, Jennifer</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCarthy, Malamtdirr Barbara Anne</td>
<td>NT</td>
<td></td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McDonald, Susan Eileen</td>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>NATS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McGrath, Hon. James</td>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McKenzie, Hon. Bridget</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>NATS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McKim, Nicholas James</td>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>AG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McMahon, Samantha Jane</td>
<td>NT</td>
<td></td>
<td>CLP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O'Neill, Deborah Mary</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O'Sullivan, Matthew Anthony</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paterson, James</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senator</td>
<td>State or Territory</td>
<td>Term expires</td>
<td>Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick, Rex Lyall(^{(2)})</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payne, Hon. Marise Ann</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polley, Helen Beatrice</td>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pratt, Louise Clare</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renwick, Gerard</td>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reynolds, Hon. Linda Karen, CSC</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice, Janet Elizabeth</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>AG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberts, Malcolm Ieuan</td>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>PHON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruston, Hon. Anne Sowerby</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan, Hon. Scott Michael</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarr, Paul Martin</td>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seselja, Hon. Zdenko Matthew</td>
<td>ACT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheldon, Anthony Vincent</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siewert, Rachel Mary</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>AG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinodinos, Hon. Arthur, AO</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith, Dean Anthony</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith, Marielle Feuerherdt</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steele-John, Jordon</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>AG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sterle, Glenn</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stoker, Amanda Jane(^{(4)})</td>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urquhart, Anne Elizabeth</td>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Van, David Allan</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walsh, Jess Cecille</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waters, Larissa Joy</td>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>30.6.2025</td>
<td>AG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watt, Murray Patrick</td>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whish-Wilson, Peter Stuart</td>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>AG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wong, Hon. Penelope Ying Yen</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>30.6.2022</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pursuant to section 42 of the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918, the terms of service of the following senators representing the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory expire at the close of the day immediately before the polling day for the next general election of members of the House of Representatives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Territory</th>
<th>Senator</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Senator</th>
<th>Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian Capital Territory</td>
<td>Gallagher, K.R.</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>Seselja, Z.M.</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
<td>McCarthy, M.B.A.</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>McMahon, S.J.</td>
<td>CLP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{(1)}\) Chosen by the Parliament of Victoria to fill a casual vacancy (vice S. Conroy), pursuant to section 15 of the Constitution.

\(^{(2)}\) Chosen by the Parliament of South Australia to fill a casual vacancy (vice N. Xenophon), pursuant to section 15 of the Constitution.

\(^{(3)}\) Chosen by the Parliament of New South Wales to fill a casual vacancy (vice S. Dastyari), pursuant to section 15 of the Constitution.

\(^{(4)}\) Chosen by the Parliament of Queensland to fill a casual vacancy (vice G. Brandis), pursuant to section 15 of the Constitution.

\(^{(5)}\) Vacancy created by the resignation of Senator David Bushby on 21 January 2019.
PARTY ABBREVIATIONS
AG—Australian Greens; ALP—Australian Labor Party;
CA—Centre Alliance; CLP—Country Liberal Party; IND—Independent;
JLN—Jacqui Lambie Network; LNP—Liberal National Party;
LP—Liberal Party of Australia; NATS—The Nationals;
PHON—Pauline Hanson's One Nation

Heads of Parliamentary Departments
Clerk of the Senate—R Pye
Clerk of the House of Representatives—D Elder
Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—R Stefanic
Parliamentary Budget Officer—J Wilkinson
## MORRISON MINISTRY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Minister</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
<td>The Hon. Scott Morrison MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for the Public Service</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Women</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Marise Payne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Cabinet</td>
<td>The Hon. Greg Hunt MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Indigenous Australians</td>
<td>The Hon. Ken Wyatt AM MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister to the Prime Minister and Cabinet</td>
<td>The Hon. Ben Morton MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development</td>
<td>The Hon. Michael McCormack MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Water Resources, Drought, Rural Finance, Natural Disaster and Emergency Management</td>
<td>The Hon. David Littleproud MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Population, Cities and Urban Infrastructure</td>
<td>The Hon. Alan Tudge MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Regional Services, Decentralisation and Local Government</td>
<td>The Hon. Mark Coulton MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Road Safety and Freight Transport</td>
<td>The Hon. Scott Buchholz MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister to the Deputy Prime Minister</td>
<td>The Hon. Andrew Gee MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Regional Development and Territories</td>
<td>The Hon. Nola Marino MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>The Hon. Josh Frydenberg MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Population, Cities and Urban Infrastructure</td>
<td>The Hon. Alan Tudge MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Treasurer</td>
<td>The Hon. Michael Sukkar MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Housing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Superannuation, Financial Services and Financial Technology</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Jane Hume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Finance</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Mathias Cormann</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Vice-President of the Executive Council)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Leader of the Government in the Senate)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Finance, Charities and Electoral Matters</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Zed Seselja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Agriculture</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Bridget McKenzie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Jonathon Duniam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Marise Payne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Simon Birmingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate)</td>
<td>The Hon. Alex Hawke MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for International Development and the Pacific</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Trade and Investment Minister</td>
<td>The Hon. Mark Coulton MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Regional Tourism</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Jonathon Duniam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attorney-General</td>
<td>The Hon. Christian Porter MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Leader of the House)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Industrial Relations</td>
<td>The Hon. Christian Porter MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Health</td>
<td>The Hon. Greg Hunt MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Aged Care and Senior Australians</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Richard Colbeck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Youth and Sport</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Home Affairs</td>
<td>The Hon. Peter Dutton MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Water Resources, Drought, Rural Finance, Natural</td>
<td>The Hon. David Littleproud MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disaster and Emergency Management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs</td>
<td>The Hon. David Coleman MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Customs, Community Safety and Multicultural Affairs</td>
<td>The Hon. Jason Wood MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts</td>
<td>The Hon. Paul Fletcher MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Education</td>
<td>The Hon. Dan Tehan MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Michaelia Cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Vocational Education, Training and Apprenticeships</td>
<td>The Hon. Steve Irons MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Industry, Science and Technology</td>
<td>The Hon. Karen Andrews MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Resources and Northern Australia</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Matthew Canavan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction</td>
<td>The Hon. Angus Taylor MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for the Environment</td>
<td>The Hon. Sussan Ley MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Waste Reduction and Environmental Management</td>
<td>The Hon. Trevor Evans MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Defence</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Linda Reynolds CSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Defence Minister</td>
<td>The Hon. Alex Hawke MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Veterans and Defence Personnel (Deputy Leader of the</td>
<td>The Hon. Darren Chester MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Defence Industry</td>
<td>The Hon. Melissa Price MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Families and Social Services (Manager of Government</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Anne Ruston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business in the Senate)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme</td>
<td>The Hon. Stuart Robert MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Children and Families</td>
<td>The Hon. Michelle Landry MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Community Housing, Homelessness and Community Services</td>
<td>The Hon. Luke Howarth MP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each box represents a portfolio. **Cabinet Ministers are shown in bold type.** As a general rule, there is one department in each portfolio. The title of a department does not necessarily reflect the title of a minister in all cases. Ministers are sworn to administer the portfolio in which they are listed under the 'Minister' column and may also be sworn to administer other portfolios in which they are not listed. Assistant Ministers in italics are designated as Parliamentary Secretaries under the Ministers of State Act 1952.
## SHADOW MINISTRY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Shadow Minister</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leader of the Opposition</strong>&lt;br&gt;Shadow Cabinet Secretary</td>
<td>The Hon. Anthony Albanese MP&lt;br&gt;Senator Jenny McAllister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deputy Leader of the Opposition</strong>&lt;br&gt;Shadow Minister for Defence&lt;br&gt;Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Defence Personnel</td>
<td>The Hon. Richard Marles MP&lt;br&gt;The Hon. Shayne Neumann MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister Assisting for Defence</td>
<td>Pat Conroy MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Defence Industry</td>
<td>Matt Keogh MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Assistant Minister for Defence</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Dr Mike Kelly AM MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leader of the Opposition in the Senate</strong>&lt;br&gt;Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs&lt;br&gt;Shadow Minister for International Development and the Pacific</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Penny Wong&lt;br&gt;Pat Conroy MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Assistant Minister to the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate</strong></td>
<td>Senator Jenny McAllister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate</strong>&lt;br&gt;Shadow Minister for Home Affairs&lt;br&gt;Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Kristina Keneally&lt;br&gt;Andrew Giles MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Multicultural Affairs</td>
<td>Andrew Giles MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Industrial Relations</strong>&lt;br&gt;Shadow Minister for the Arts&lt;br&gt;Manager of Opposition Business in the House of Representatives</td>
<td>The Hon. Tony Burke MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme</strong>&lt;br&gt;Shadow Minister for Government Services&lt;br&gt;Shadow Assistant Minister for Carers</td>
<td>The Hon. Bill Shorten MP&lt;br&gt;Emma McBride MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Education and Training</strong>&lt;br&gt;Shadow Assistant Minister for Education and Training&lt;br&gt;Shadow Assistant Minister for Skills</td>
<td>The Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP&lt;br&gt;Graham Perrett MP&lt;br&gt;Ged Kearney MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Treasurer</strong>&lt;br&gt;Shadow Assistant Treasurer</td>
<td>Dr Jim Chalmers MP&lt;br&gt;Stephen Jones MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Financial Services</td>
<td>The Hon. Dr Andrew Leigh MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Assistant Minister for Treasury</strong>&lt;br&gt;Shadow Assistant Minister for Charities&lt;br&gt;Shadow Assistant Minister for Financial Services</td>
<td>The Hon. Matt Thistlethwaite MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Climate Change and Energy</strong>&lt;br&gt;Deputy Manager of Opposition Business in the House of Representatives</td>
<td>The Hon. Mark Butler MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister Assisting for Climate Change</td>
<td>Pat Conroy MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Health</strong>&lt;br&gt;Shadow Assistant Minister for Mental Health</td>
<td>The Hon. Chris Bowen MP&lt;br&gt;Emma McBride MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Shadow Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Catherine King MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Cities and Urban Infrastructure</td>
<td>Andrew Giles MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Northern Australia</td>
<td>Senator Murray Watt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Disaster and Emergency Management</td>
<td>Senator Murray Watt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Tourism</td>
<td>Senator Carol Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Tasmania</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Northern Australia</td>
<td>The Hon. Warren Snowdon MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Road Safety</td>
<td>Senator Glenn Sterle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Agriculture and Resources</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Joel Fitzgibbon MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Western Australian Resources</td>
<td>Matt Keogh MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Special Minister of State</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Don Farrell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Sport</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Tourism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister Assisting the Leader of the Opposition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Attorney-General</td>
<td>The Hon. Mark Dreyfus QC MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Constitutional Reform</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for the Republic</td>
<td>The Hon. Matt Thistlethwaite MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Communications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Communications</td>
<td>Michelle Rowland MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Cyber Security</td>
<td>Tim Watts MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Finance</td>
<td>Senator Katy Gallagher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for the Public Service</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate</td>
<td>Sen Kimberley Kitching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Government Accountability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Families and Social Services</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Linda Burney MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Indigenous Australians</strong></td>
<td>Senator Patrick Dodson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Reconciliation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous Australians</td>
<td>The Hon. Warren Snowdon MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Indigenous Australians</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Ageing and Seniors</td>
<td>The Hon. Julie Collins MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Women</td>
<td>Ged Kearney MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Aged Care</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Employment and Industry</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Brendan O' Connor MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Science</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Small and Family Business</strong></td>
<td>Clare O'Neil MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Innovation, Technology and the Future of Work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister Assisting for Small and Family</td>
<td>Matt Keogh MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Shadow Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Manufacturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Regional Services, Territories and Local Government</td>
<td>Senator Louise Pratt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Housing and Homelessness</td>
<td>The Hon. Jason Clare MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for External Territories</td>
<td>The Hon. Warren Snowdon MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Early Childhood Education</td>
<td>The Hon. Amanda Rishworth MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Youth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for the Environment and Water</td>
<td>Terri Butler MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for the Environment</td>
<td>Josh Wilson MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Trade</td>
<td>Madeleine King MP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each box represents a portfolio. Shadow Cabinet Ministers are shown in bold type.
CONTENTS

TUESDAY, 30 JULY 2019

Chamber

DOCUMENTS—
  Tabling.........................................................................................................................1

COMMITTEES—
  National Broadband Network Joint Committee—
  National Capital and External Territories Joint Committee—
  Meeting .......................................................................................................................... 1

BILLS—
  Farm Household Support Amendment Bill 2019—
    First Reading ...............................................................................................................1
    Second Reading ......................................................................................................... 1
    Third Reading ..........................................................................................................17
  Health Insurance Amendment (Bonded Medical Programs Reform) Bill 2019—
    Second Reading ...................................................................................................... 18

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE—
  Economy..................................................................................................................... 20
  Employment .................................................................................................................21
  National Security .......................................................................................................22
  Gambling ......................................................................................................................23
  Australian Defence Force ..........................................................................................24
  Employment .................................................................................................................25
  Agriculture Industry ..................................................................................................26
  Newstart Allowance ...................................................................................................27
  Workplace Relations ................................................................................................29
  Association of Southeast Asian Nations .................................................................29
  Pensions and Benefits ..............................................................................................30
  Mining Industry .........................................................................................................31

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS .........................................................................................31

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE—
  Mining Industry .........................................................................................................32

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE: TAKE NOTE OF ANSWERS—
  Economy..................................................................................................................... 32
  Employment .................................................................................................................32
  Workplace Relations ................................................................................................32
  Gambling ......................................................................................................................36

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE: ADDITIONAL ANSWERS—
  Agriculture Industry .................................................................................................37

NOTICES—
  Presentation...................................................................................................................37

DOCUMENTS—
  Department of the Environment and Energy—
    Order for the Production of Documents .....................................................................42

MOTIONS—
  Moon Lake Investments ............................................................................................42
  Mining ..........................................................................................................................44

DOCUMENTS—
  Welfare Reform—
    Order for the Production of Documents ..................................................................46

MOTIONS—
  United Nations Parliamentary Assembly ..................................................................47

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE—
  Family Law ..................................................................................................................47

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS .........................................................................................54

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE—
  Family Law ..................................................................................................................54

DOCUMENTS—
  Consideration ..............................................................................................................55
CONTENTS—continued

BUDGET—
Consideration by Estimates Committees

COMMITTEES—
Economics References Committee—
Report
Law Enforcement Joint Committee—
Public Accounts and Audit Joint Committee—
Membership

BILLS—
Health Insurance Amendment (Bonded Medical Programs Reform) Bill 2019—
Second Reading

FIRST SPEECH

PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION—
Valedictory

ADJOURNMENT—
Valedictory
Hospital Security
Climate Change
Byrne, Mr Neil
Australian Society
Sarcoma Awareness Month
Energy
Royal Flying Doctor Service
Conservative Political Action Conference
Welfare Reform
Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability
Greyhound Racing
Fifield, Senator the Hon. Mitch
The PRESIDENT (Senator the Hon. Scott Ryan) took the chair at 12:00, read prayers and made an acknowledgement of country.

DOCUMENTS
Tabling
The Clerk: I table documents pursuant to statute as listed on the Dynamic Red.

Full details of the documents are recorded in the Journals of the Senate.

COMMITTEES
National Broadband Network Joint Committee
National Capital and External Territories Joint Committee
Meeting
The Clerk: Proposals to meet have been lodged as follows:

National Broadband Network—Joint Standing Committee—private meeting otherwise than in accordance with standing order 33(1) on Thursday, 1 August 2019, from 9.30 am.

National Capital and External Territories—Joint Standing Committee—private meeting otherwise than in accordance with standing order 33(1) on Thursday, 1 August 2019, from 10 am.

The PRESIDENT (12:01): I remind senators that the question may be put on any proposal at the request of any senator.

BILLS
Farm Household Support Amendment Bill 2019
First Reading
Bill received from the House of Representatives.

Senator McKENZIE (Victoria—Minister for Agriculture and Leader of The Nationals in the Senate) (12:01): I move:

That this bill may proceed without formalities and be now read a first time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading
Senator McKENZIE (Victoria—Minister for Agriculture and Leader of The Nationals in the Senate) (12:01): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I seek leave to have the second reading speech incorporated in Hansard.

Leave granted.

The speech read as follows—

The Farm Household Support Amendment Bill 2019 amends the Farm Household Support Act 2014.

The Bill proposes to maintain the temporary increase to the farm assets value limit for Farm Household Assistance at $5 million. It also ensures allowable deductions are applied against the relevant income type for those deductions.

The government recognises the significant contribution of agriculture to the Australian economy and regional communities. We are committed to strengthening the sector to ensure it continues to be profitable, competitive, resilient and sustainable.

The government wants all Australians to prosper, to be able to inject capital into their businesses, save for their retirement, and to support their children to succeed. We also want farmers to have the supports to assess and safeguard their long-term financial security and Farm Household Allowance does this.

It is more than a social security payment – it is a package of assistance comprising income support, ancillary allowances, an independent financial assessment of the farm business, an activity supplement that pays for advice and training, and individualised case management.

To date, Farm Household Allowance has helped nearly 12,000 farmers, and almost 7,000 are receiving the payment now. We have paid more than $330 million in fortnightly payments and related supplements and allowances. Over $43 million of this was in the FHA Supplement which added up to $12,000 per household last financial year.
As this is a support payment Farm Household Allowance is aligned with mainstream social security, unless there are good reasons for departure. The most significant departure is the two tier asset test. Farmers have access to a significantly higher threshold for assets than other payments. This setting recognises that a farmer's biggest asset is their land, but in times of hardship that land is not capable of generating a return that sustains the family.

The book value of a farmer's assets often excludes them from other income support payments, yet they cannot realise those assets for self-support without taking away some, or all, of the longer-term income producing capacity of the farm enterprise.

In September 2018, the government increased its support for farmers and farming communities, by temporarily increasing the threshold for farm assets to $5 million. This was an increase of almost $2.4 million and opened up the program to many more farm households experiencing hardship.

But the government is going one step further, and from 1 July 2019, the farm assets value limit will be retrospectively maintained at $5 million. Farmers and farm households can be assured that the government stands with them and their communities to generate wealth, and build strength, prosperity, and resilience.

The Bill also seeks to amend the treatment of allowable deductions so that they can be claimed against related income – that is, either on-farm or off-farm income earned by a Farm Household Allowance recipient.

Allowable deductions will relate to the income they apply to. That is, allowable deductions associated with on-farm business income will be able to be deducted from that income and off-farm deductions will be associated with off-farm income. The exception is for people in very straitened circumstances who may offset their off-farm income from their on-farm loss. This offset has been available since 1 July 2014 and remains unchanged.

This Bill amends the Farm Household Support Act to ensure allowable deductions can be claimed against the income that they relate to.

These amendments accord with the underlying objective of the Farm Household Allowance program, and help paint as accurate a picture as possible of a recipient's farm enterprise, its viability, and possible options for improvement.

These amendments will not change income thresholds or eligibility for Farm Household Allowance.

In seeking to maintain the farm assets value limit at $5 million and amend the Farm Household Support Act 2014 to ensure allowable deductions can be claimed against related income, this Bill further demonstrates this Government's responsiveness and commitment to the needs of farmers, farming communities, and rural and regional Australia.

Senator STERLE (Western Australia) (12:02): I rise to contribute to the Farm Household Support Amendment Bill 2019. It will maintain the Farm Household Support Act 2014 farm assets value limit at $5 million, and amend the treatment of income from business such that allowable deductions can be claimed against related income—that is, either income from the farm enterprise, which is on-farm income, or income from a business other than the farm enterprise, which is off-farm income that is income earned by a farm household allowance recipient.

Labor is supporting the bill, but it is important for the Senate to note that the changes to the Farm Household Support Act 2014 aim to make access to the farm household allowance easier for drought-affected farmers. In September last year the government actually did increase the assets threshold from $2.6 million to $5 million. This bill maintains that increase. Labor has supported each drought measure the government has put forward over the past six years, including: additional supplementary farm household allowance payments of up to $12,000 for eligible farm household allowance recipients; increasing the farm household allowance extension from three years to four years; increasing the farm asset threshold from $2.6 million to $5 million, which I did mention earlier; and increasing the farm management deposits scheme to $800,000.

This bill is another example of the ad hoc approach this government has taken towards drought support and reform for the past six years. It is why I will be moving the following second reading amendment, to ensure that the Senate is fully aware of the failing of the government, and of its lack of action to assist drought-affected farmers, including those who have experienced difficulty accessing farm household allowance since the scheme commenced in 2014. I move:

At the end of the motion, add:

"but the Senate condemns the Government's lack of action to assist drought-affected farmers including those who have experienced difficulty accessing the Farm Household Allowance since the scheme's commencement in July 2014."

The government has failed to recognise the ongoing difficulty drought-affected farmers are facing when applying to access the farm household allowance.

The allowance was one measure in a suite of measures in the historical intergovernmental agreement, which is termed the IGA, on drought reform that was developed during the 43rd Parliament and signed in May 2013—six years ago—in a bipartisan manner between the then Labor government and the state and territory governments. The inaugural IGA on drought reform was developed via the COAG Standing Council on Primary Industries, which is referred to as SCoPI. The objectives of the agreement are to:

a. assist farm families and primary producers adapt to and prepare for the impacts of increased climate variability
b. encourage farm families and primary producers to adopt self–reliant approaches to manage their business risks

c. ensure that farm families in hardship have access to a household support payment that recognises the special circumstances of farmers

d. ensure that appropriate social support services are accessible to farm families

e. provide a framework for jurisdictions’ responses to needs during periods of drought.

Sadly, however, one of the first acts of the previous Minister for Agriculture—well, one of the previous ministers for agriculture; I forgot that there have been a few of them—Mr Joyce, was to abolish SCoPI. SCoPI brought together federal, state and territory agricultural ministers for regularly scheduled discussions on important issues, such as national drought policy reform, intergovernmental biosecurity arrangements, a foot and mouth disease action plan, and other pest and disease eradication programs. On 17 December 2013 Mr Joyce—I will refer to him as the member for New England—said that he meets with his fellow ministers on an ad hoc basis to discuss those issues probably, likely, once a year. I'm not making this up with. That's what he said. Everyone in this place would agree that drought reform policy is an important policy area that requires more than an ad hoc get together maybe once a year.

The member for New England claimed that the decision to abolish SCoPI was a cost saving measure. The irony of that statement in light of the member for New England's recent comments about how he survives on a salary of only $200,000 plus per annum is absolutely insulting to farmers on the allowance payments. The fact that the member for New England can compare his hardship, which is of his own making, to those on Newstart and those living, essentially, on the farm household allowance payments is another example of, unfortunately, how out of touch the member for New England is.

In turn, so is the current Prime Minister who appointed the member for New England as no less than the drought envoy. I would have to take that on notice. I do not recall them, which we all know very well in this place, the cover-up is usually greater than the crime. We asked: why was there a cover-up? It was because the assistance for farmers back then wasn't working and many farmers today continue to find it difficult to access assistance. It is why we constantly see amendments to the FHA, such as the bill currently before the Senate. The reality is this government has not been focused on progressing drought policy.

During Senate estimates on 24 May 2018 the Labor Party again asked questions about the farm household allowance. We knew that many farmers were still finding it difficult to access the payment. Former Senator Ketter from Queensland asked what can only be described a very simple question about whether, on the basis of the IGA drought reform review, there were 'any emerging themes as to concerns about the drought measures from stakeholders'. The departmental officer at the table came back with, 'I would not characterise them as concerns.' Seriously, for our new senators, get ready for it; this is what actually happens in Senate estimates. Senator Ketter then asked:

Weren't there many farmers who were still finding it difficult to access the payment?

It's a fair question. The departmental official said: 'I would have to take that on notice. I do not recall them.' Someone who is no stranger to this chamber, former Senator O'Sullivan, I have to tell you, was energised by the department's apparent lack of understanding as to what the actual reality for farmers was, saying: 'I can help you. The answer to that is "yes". It is very widespread.'

Unfortunately, it gets worse. The minister at the table—who I have the greatest of respect for—was Senator Ruston, who was also a very, very active member in the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee before she was promoted. I had the privilege of working alongside Senator Ruston, and we know her commitment to rural Australia. She was hamstrung. She had to defend the nonsense of inactive ministers. She was only the minister at the table representing the member for New England. She said:

I will give a little bit of background to where everything is happening at the moment in discussions with the minister and the minister's office about this particular program. I am advised that this issue has only really come to his attention in very recent times.
This was in May 2018.

Post the estimates hearings we saw the government finally acknowledge that there is a problem with the farm household allowance, and they instigated a review in September 2018, with an independent panel appointed to review the farm household allowance program. The report was presented to the government in February 2019—this year—and made six recommendations. I acknowledge you're here, Minister, which is great, because I'm hoping you can answer some of my questions. It made six recommendations to which the government is yet to respond in full. I hope, Senator McKenzie, as the new Minister, that you are across the reality for farmers on the ground. I know you always stand up and talk about them. I'm really looking forward to having the answers on what the position of the government is on those recommendations. Based on the track record of previous agriculture ministers—not you, Senator McKenzie, but previous agriculture ministers—they really like to talk a lot of talk but, unfortunately, as crappy as the saying goes, they're not walking the walk. I couldn't think of anything else. Let's just say there's been so much inaction, and I'm looking forward to someone actually grabbing the reins and steering.

The government needs to take the reality facing drought affected farmers seriously. Six years on, at a recent Bush Summit on 18 July the Prime Minister stated: The recent independent review of the Allowance found that the current arrangements need to be improved to better align with the reality that farming in Australia is very volatile.

Correct. He went on:

It recommended that FHA be available to farming families for four years in every 10 and that's coming before Government and their going to get a very good hearing on that.

Minister Littleproud is working with the industry on the long-term drought strategy and we'll have more to say on that in the coming months.

Farmers should never be used as political footballs. I'm looking forward to hearing the Minister for Agriculture providing information to the Senate as to when the government will respond to all recommendations made in the Farm Household Allowance Review. There are many, many more questions that need to be answered, such as how will the government actually progress the development of drought policy, as promised by the Prime Minister? Also, which minister will attend AGMIN? That is, unfortunately, the one I call the ad hoc committee that replaced SCoPI. Will it be Minister McKenzie? I'm getting a nod. Or will it be Minister Littleproud? I can take it from the nod it will be you, Minister McKenzie?

Senator McKenzie: Yes.

Senator STERLE: And while you're at it, Minister, can you tell us when AGMIN will actually meet? We, Labor, are supporting the bill, as we have done with every other drought assistance initiative. It is not an unfair request to ask the government to at least provide honest, prompt answers to the questions proposed by Labor. I look forward to the government's prompt response. As I did say, Minister, I flagged that I will be moving a second reading amendment, which I am reliably told has been distributed in the Senate.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: You have moved that.

Senator RICE (Victoria) (12:16): I rise to speak to the Farm Household Support Amendment Bill 2019. This bill addresses some of the recommendations around the assets test and income test from the independent review of the farm household allowance that the government commissioned late last year. Firstly, this bill will extend the temporary increase of the on-farm asset limit from $2.685 million to $5 million. The review panel have been quite clear in arguing that increasing this asset limit will open the program to a number of still very financially distressed farm asset holders who have previously been excluded from the farm household allowance. This is particularly businesses in the cropping sector, who carry larger asset levels. The bills digest notes that the extension will mean that about 8,000 farmers will retain eligibility for the scheme. They also note that the government has ignored the recommendations from the review to index the asset limit to CPI. It does make me worried that we will have to have new legislation in this chamber within only a few years, again to adjust the asset limit.

The second thing that this bill does is to separate and decouple on-farm from off-farm allowable income deductions. The complexity around these measures has been overwhelming for many farmers looking to access the scheme. While these changes may help, it is very clear, not only from the review, but from the broader community outcry, that there is still an awful lot of work that needs to be done on improving accessibility to these support payments and simplifying the application and reporting process.

I would like to note here that certain members of this chamber and the other place have been accusing the Greens of hating farmers or hating regional Australia. This is obviously a flat-out lie.
Senator Sterle: I never said that to you.

Senator RICE: No, not you, Senator Sterle. I want to make crystal clear that when good legislation comes through this parliament that supports the need of our farmers and our farming communities, we will support it. And we will be supporting this bill. What we won't support and what we haven't supported is a government committed to driving through laws that rip up the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. What we won't support is laws that rip billions of dollars out of our infrastructure budget, laws that criminalise journalism, laws that criminalise the right to organise and the right to protest, and laws that have been written to score political points off the back of the crisis in our regional communities and are designed to entrench the power of the government and their big business allies. The Greens make no apology for standing up to the government when they want to divide the community, one sector of the community against another.

While the Greens wholeheartedly agree that we need to continue to support farmers experiencing financial hardship, it would be remiss of me not to point out the government's odd and unexplained selectivity when it comes to income support. It's clear from this bill and the adjustment of the deeming rate for pensioners that the government can understand that some Australians really are doing it tough and need some extra support. So I ask why the government is being selectively blind to other Australians needing help. The government is happy to support farmers, and it's happy to support pensioners, but when it is clear that almost 715,000 Australians are struggling to survive on Newstart, on under $40 a day, the government is nowhere to be found. Earlier this month, The Age published a story about Alex Phillips, a Melbourne local who has been living on Newstart for six years. This is how he managed to do it:

In order to maintain the $288 per week rent on his one-bedroom flat, and pay for utilities and food, he turned off his fridge and heating. He lived on two-minute noodles, 65-cent cans of baked beans, packet soups and bread—

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Senator Rice, could you resume your seat, please. Senator McKenzie on a point of order.

Senator McKenzie: We're debating the Farm Household Support Amendment Bill. I know the Greens find it hard to identify with regional Australian farming communities, but the senator has not even been able to spend three minutes focused on our farmers and their needs before resorting to a topic that really is much better suited to her constituency in the city of Melbourne.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: I've been listening carefully to Senator Rice. She is making comparisons around the bill. I do remind senators that, while it is a broad-ranging debate, the debate is around the farm bill, but I believe that Senator Rice has been relevant to date.

Senator RICE: I've been absolutely relevant, Senator McKenzie, in pointing out the selective blindness of the government. We support the government in supporting farmers. The Greens support farmers. But there is selective blindness. There is inequity in the system. We are very happy to support the government in supporting farmers, but we call upon the government to support other people in our community who are doing it tough—people such as Alex Phillips, who can't afford margarine. The article continued:

He showered at the Salvos to save on water and heating and rather than use his washing machine for bed linen, he slept on his couch in an overcoat.

That is how over 700,000 people in Australia, in this richest country in the world, are being forced to live. Everybody in this chamber acknowledges that farmers are doing it tough and that they need support to weather times of drought or financial stress, but so are many, many more Australians. So why does the government give help to some people but not to others? It's baffling. We need an answer from the government. Why are you punishing some Australians while lifting others up? Didn't the Prime Minister declare that he was going to govern for all Australians? What happened to that? We have to stop treating income support payments like a political football. Newstart has not been increased in over 25 years. Both the government and Labor are ignoring people who are living in poverty. If we can afford to give those who are earning the highest incomes in the country a massive tax cut we can afford to increase Newstart as well as supporting our farmers.

While the Greens continued to be deeply concerned about this selective approach to income support, we will be supporting this bill today. Despite the consistent attacks of the government on the Greens for defending good governance and critical political rights and for providing opposition when it pushes its agenda to entrench power for the powerful, we will be supporting this bill, because it is absolutely critical that we provide timely relief for our farming community, particularly those dealing with the record-breaking drought. So I commend this bill to the Senate.

Senator DAVEY (New South Wales—The Nationals Whip in the Senate) (12:24): This isn't my first speech, but this is an issue that is very important in my home region, in the New South Wales southern Riverina, and right
across eastern Australia where this drought is hitting. I and many of my colleagues across regional New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria are all in the grip of this terrible drought.

Last week in this place, we passed legislation establishing the Future Drought Fund. That's a measure to help our farmers and communities better manage, prepare and sustain their businesses in future drought. But this Farm Household Support Amendment Bill is about supporting our farmers now. It's about providing assistance to farmers and their partners right now during this current drought. This drought is the worst on record in the north of my state, New South Wales, and in the south of the state, it is doing its best to equal, if not overtake, the millennium drought. Often I hear people say, 'Drought happens and farmers need to prepare.' I agree with the principle, and so do most farmers I know. But I know farmers who have prepared for seasons of drought—one, two, sometimes even three bad seasons. They store fodder and grain, and they manage their pastures to make sure they don't overgraze. Crop producers evaluate season by season to assess when and what to plant. Irrigators manage their water holdings across seasons where possible. But preparedness can never be indefinite. And, after one bad season, farmers have to reassess and re-evaluate just what they can achieve with the remaining on-farm stores and resources. After two bad years, resources have been pushed to the limit, if not completely depleted. And, after three or four years, as has happened in northern New South Wales, I challenge anyone to be prepared for that. That is why the Nationals have made drought a national priority. That is why we are working in government to invest over $6.3 billion in drought support.

In addition to the Future Drought Fund, which I touched upon before, we are taking other practical steps to support our communities in this current drought. We have the Drought Communities Program, which is an example of how we can stimulate our communities to provide immediate economic stimulus and keep them going through the drought. In my home state of New South Wales, rural and regional communities are seeing the benefit of this program. Fifty-two local government areas are eligible for funding under this program, and councils from all across the state—from Balranald to Bathurst, Carrathool to Cobar, Leeton to Lithgow and many places in between—are delivering infrastructure projects and activities to boost their local economies to support local jobs and address local community needs in a time when we really need the moral support. In the New England area, Armidale Regional Council is improving its local road network and delivering upgrade roads on the Kempsey Road, while Tamworth council is upgrading cattle grids and installing seven new bulk water refill stations. In the north-west, Narrabri Shire Council is undertaking much-needed infrastructure improvements to the racecourse, and Walgett Shire Council is delivering beautification programs in the main streets of both Lightning Ridge and Walgett. All of these projects are injecting money into the local communities to keep those communities alive. But drought-affected communities also feel the pain of their farmers who are struggling to make ends meet. And that is what this bill is for.

This bill is part of the drought assistance package that, like our Drought Communities Program, aims to support farmers and the communities that depend on their agricultural economy, as the flow-on impacts of this ongoing drought really start to hit home. And hit home it will, because a drought as severe as this current drought affects everyone. The Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences is estimating a decline in livestock production, down by six per cent. And while they do optimistically note the better start to the winter cropping season than we've had in a couple of years, they still expect winter cropping production to be down by around 10 per cent below the 10-year average, and production of irrigated crops, particularly broadacre irrigation, is expected to remain very low due to the ongoing conditions. And without a break in the drought, don't expect to have a summer irrigation program across any of New South Wales.

Overall, the forecast shows a decline in the net value of farm production of 12 per cent, and the net farm cash income declining by over eight per cent. Now, this impacts on the capacity of farmers to spend and to employ; and therefore it affects local contractors, local businesses, who all suffer as farmers tighten their belts. And importantly, it affects local productivity, which affects the price that consumers pay for their food at the end of the day. This drought will affect all of us in some way.

As a government, we can't make it rain. We can't make crops grow on dry dirt and we can't make livestock live off air. But, as a government, we can support our farmers so that when it does rain they are still there and they are ready to pick up the pieces and get going again. When that happens, we, in government, have established a restocking and replanting concessional loan through the Regional Investment Corporation so they can immediately rebuild and restore their business, because the hardest thing for a farmer at the end of a drought is if they can't access the funds to get going again. But those concessional loans are dependent on having farm businesses to rebuild, and that's what this bill that is before us today is about. It is designed to help our farmers get through the worst of it so that, at the other end, they are still there and ready to get going again.

Now, we have had the farm household allowance since 2014. Since its introduction, nearly 12,000 farmers have received assistance. Almost 7,000 are receiving payments now. We've paid over $330 million in fortnightly
payments and related supplements and allowances. And while those receiving farm household assistance appreciate the support, we have heard that it's a difficult process. We have heard that some of the policy settings, including eligibility tests and assessment arrangements, aren't quite right, and that's what this bill is about. Where we can make it fairer and easier to access, we are making changes.

In September 2018, then minister David Littleproud, in his capacity as the Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources, appointed an independent panel to undertake a review of the farm household allowance—and on that note, I would like to acknowledge the efforts of panel members, including Michele Lawrence, Georgie Somerset and Professor Robert Slonim. The panel undertook extensive consultation, involving face-to-face and targeted stakeholder engagement, and they spoke to people from a range of organisations and interest groups, including both successful and unsuccessful applicants, farmers and industry groups, government agencies, accountants, bankers, financial counsellors, the Country Women's Association and the Isolated Children Parents Association. I'd like to thank all those who contributed to that review.

The panel's report, which was handed down earlier this year, provides us with a blueprint to rebuild the farm household allowance to ensure the program remains fit for purpose and continues to meet its objectives of providing income support and assisting structural change. While we've already taken some steps to implement the panel's recommendations, including changing the treatment of income from the forced sale of livestock, this bill goes further in progressing those recommendations. The farm household support amendment will maintain the net farm asset thresholds at $5 million, as recommended by the independent panel. It also clarifies the treatment of allowable deductions for the farm household allowance recipients.

The increase to the threshold will give more farmers access to it farm household allowance during times of hardship. It is what farmers have been telling us they need, because it will mean that they do not have to sell their assets and risk taking away some, or all, of their future income-producing capacity from their farm businesses. It also recognises that farm assets can be difficult to sell quickly and during tough times, and often, if they can do so, they do so well below what they're actually worth. It also means that farming businesses, such as cropping businesses, which typically carry larger asset levels, will now be able to access support under the farm household allowance. Businesses carrying larger levels of asset can still experience financial difficulty if they don't have sufficient cashflow, so this reform is particularly important across all agricultural communities.

The bill will also amend the treatment of income from business so allowable deductions can be claimed against related income. That is, allowable deductions associated with on-farm business income will be able to be deducted from that income, while off-farm deductions will be associated with the off-farm income. As a government we have already taken steps to increase the net asset threshold; however, that temporary measure ceased on 30 June. By passing this bill today, we can ensure that it applies retrospectively so all future applicants can access backdated payments to ensure no-one misses out. I urge the Senate today, as we all hope and pray for rain, to pass this bill to stand by our farmers as they struggle through this long, long dry and stand with our farmers so that, when it does rain, as a nation we're ready to rebuild.

Senator ROBERTS (Queensland) (12:36): I rise to speak, as a servant to the people of Queensland and Australia, on the Farm Household Support Amendment Bill 2019. This bill, commendably, formalises arrangements that have already been in place for a year, and extends and broadens other arrangements, so we commend the government for this as this time of need in the bush.

We have some reservations, and, on that matter, Senator Hanson and I will be writing to the minister, as I've told the minister. Firstly, the value of the farm assets will depend, of course, upon the location of the farm. So that's one thing that needs to be considered—a patch of dirt in one area is more valuable than in another area. Secondly, we want the minister to consider, in making regulations, the broadening of the exclusions to remove some of the vital assets and, particularly, to make sure the water licences and water entitlements are not counted in those assets, because those assets—the water entitlements and licences—can fluctuate enormously in price.

We recognise the details in the bill, and we commend the minister for that. There's been a lot of thought that's gone into this and an understanding of farming. We recognise that farmers are asset rich and cash poor, and that goes to the heart of this bill. However, farmers don't like welfare, and farmers are proud and honest people. What we would rather see, in addition to this, is that government fixes its policies so that farmers don't need welfare. We agree with Senator Davey that the government cannot make it rain and the government cannot make crops grow on dry dirt, but welfare wouldn't be necessary if the government stopped locking up land by stealing farmers' property rights without compensation, stopped the high power prices and excessive regulation, and stopped the high water prices.

The bush is inherently a great place for living and for raising families—for example, ask people right across Queensland, New South Wales and, I'm sure, the other states. But with regional centres being such wonderful
communities, we may wonder why the regions are declining. The answer is easy: as I said last night, livelihoods in the rural areas are being gutted. Their productive capacity is being gutted, and what's doing that is Labor and Liberal policies for the last few decades at state and federal level. That economic mismanagement is occurring in several forms.

There are the high electricity prices, artificially inflated by the policies pushed by the Greens, the Labor Party and the Liberal Party. We have a drought, and yet farmers are not planting fodder crops because of electricity prices being so high that it precludes pumping of water. We have water policies that are destroying the productive capacity of the land. We have capricious federal government policies under both the Labor and Liberal parties. We have the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. We have the live cattle export ban under the Labor party. Property rights are being stolen. That was initiated by the Howard government in agreement with the Borbidge National Party government in Queensland, followed by the Beattie government, the Bligh government and the Palaszczuk-Trad government, and, of course, paralleled by Bob Carr's government in New South Wales—all pushing the UN's policies that stole farmers' property rights.

Also I want to make note of a comment from farmer Dan McDonald near Charleville. He told me quite frankly and bluntly—a wonderful family—that every input to his farm is now regulated, which means that we have a nationalised farming sector, and that is the recipe for disaster longer term. We need farmers to be able to use their initiative, their brains and their practicality and apply that to their resources and assets to make a decent livelihood and living. Farmers like Rick Gurnett have known what I'm about to say for many, many years. He knows, like his neighbour Dan McDonald knows, that they're in this mess as a result of federal agreements with UN treaties, protocols, declarations and agreements, such as the 1975 Lima declaration signed by Gough Whitlam's Labor government in 1975, ratified the following year by Whitlam's archenemy, Malcolm Fraser. In 1992, the UN Rio declaration was signed for 21st century global governance by Paul Keating, the Labor prime minister. In 1996, the UN Kyoto protocol was not signed but John Howard publically admitted that he would do everything he could to comply with it, and that included stealing farmers' rights, which I have detailed elsewhere, and which deliberately goes against the constitutional provision for paying compensation to farmers. In 2015, the Abbott and Turnbull government signed the UN Paris agreement, and that was not even an agreement; it was merely a pseudo-arrangement that every nation would do whatever it wanted. And what did we do in this country? We followed the loony Greens' policies and legislated severe restrictions on electricity pricing. We made those cuts to our carbon dioxide output while China, the largest producer of carbon dioxide in the world, said it would consider doing something maybe in 30 years. Meanwhile we're exporting our jobs, our industry, our economy to the Chinese and to others.

Then we also have lunatic policies from the Rudd government, from the Liberal governments, from the Greens. We have carbon farming.

Senator Sterle interjecting—

**Senator ROBERTS:** Ah, I can't forget the Nats. They pushed carbon farming too. That's another leftover Greens' policy. Carbon farming means locking up land and letting the land go feral. Feral animals and noxious weeds take over, and who pays for the cost of that additional management? The neighbouring farmers, and it drives them out of business. So we have a multiplier effect here. Just as Rick Gurnett at Charleville said, just as Marty Bella said in recent months—both echoing what Senator Hanson has said for 23 years—there is an ideological assault on rural Australia due to the UN's Agenda 21. And I've just itemised some of the agreements, protocols, treaties and declarations that have caused that.

Secure property rights are fundamental to freedom yet are destroyed through ignorance, cowardliness and gutlessness. I've had senior ministers in the current government tell me that they understand that John Howard's government stole property rights, but they're not doing anything. So much for today's so-called Liberals! They're ignoring and opposing the classical liberalism of Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich Hayek, Frederic Bastiat and many others. These ministers hero John Howard's government but that's the very government that stole farmers' property rights to implement socialist UN policies. Worse still, as I said a minute ago, they did it in a way that deceitfully bypasses the Constitution to avoid paying farmers compensation. It's why we keep calling for restoration or compensation. These are the real issues.

I want to commend the government, though, for this bill and the provisions. Clearly, thought has gone into this bill, and One Nation is pleased to support it and to work with the Liberal and Labor parties to restore our nation's productive capacity.

**Senator McMAHON** (Northern Territory) (12:44): Please note that this is not my first speech. We often refer to Australia as the lucky country, and I certainly believe we are, but we are not without our challenges. We are known around the world for our magnificent sandy beaches, our stunning wooded high country, our iconic reefs...
and all the other natural wonders we are fortunate to enjoy as part of our backyard. In terms of biomes, our country encompasses the broadest of diversity, from the lush tropics in the north to the harsh, often cold, cliffs of the Great Australian Bight in the south. As a Territorian, I have a particular love for the beauty of our country's vast interior, where desert meets desert and where the notion of finding arable land seems impossible. But, true to the nature of our country and our people, it is possible.

Over the decades, Australians have ventured into remote areas of our great country, and they have established farms on land that is often a hard struggle to make viable. Indeed, I would argue that our famed Aussie tenacity and ingenuity are attributes born of generations of farmers facing great adversity as they fought to survive and thrive in our often harsh land. Adversity is the plight of Aussie farmers. They work their land through fires, floods, droughts and other disasters, with dogged determination and unsurmountable hope. It takes a very special person to be a farmer.

This Farm Household Support Amendment Bill 2019 demonstrates this government's dedication to the needs of farming communities in rural and regional Australia. The bill proposes to maintain the temporary increase of the farm assets value limits for farm household assistance at $5 million. This makes this temporary limit permanent. It also ensures that allowable deductions are applied against the relevant type of income for those deductions.

As a veterinary surgeon, one of my former roles—and that of many of my professional colleagues—was to provide veterinary services to primary producers. Some of these services include disease investigations, addressing production issues, reproductive improvement, genetic improvement, animal welfare, farm biosecurity, assessing management practices, and providing training in skills of management, medications and chemical handling—all of which is designed to improve production and profit to the primary producer. The majority of this work naturally involves animal production enterprises, but often there are also mixed cropping and farming systems. In this role, we see many farmers affected by factors often totally beyond their control. We are all very well aware of the effect of natural disasters and cyclical weather events, such as droughts, fires, floods and storms. There are also many other things that cause hardship and can lead to temporary or permanent loss of income. Some of these include fluctuating prices and loss of market access. With my other hat on, as a mango producer I can tell you the disappointment of seeing what should have been an $80,000 crop reduced to just $2,500 purely due to extreme market forces.

We also know our primary producers are subject to things such as pestilence and disease outbreaks, which can wipe out an entire year's crops or even the enterprise's entire genetic stock. I have seen the impact of this first-hand during the foot-and-mouth outbreak in the UK. I have personally endured the extremely distressing experience of having a woman clinging to me, screaming hysterically that her husband was on their neighbouring farm with a gun pointed to his head at the prospect of having all their animals culled in the disease outbreak response.

It is therefore vitally important that we, as a government and a nation, provide support to our producers in times of need and hardship. They should not be any worse off in terms of social security than any other ordinary Australian.

The farm household allowance is representative of a package of assistance measures that helps our hard-working farmers contend with the financial pressures they are sometimes forced to endure, an obvious example of which is those farmers currently caught in the drought. The key elements of the farm household allowance are income support for up to four cumulative years. At times when farmers do not know, and cannot know, when the drought will break, this support offers them a means by which to continue working the land. But it does more than that. Farmers will also have a sense of security and confidence, allowing them to better focus on their jobs and enjoy times with their families.

This package gives up to $1,500 to complete a farm financial assessment of the farm enterprise by a financial professional. Such assessments provide farmers with the data they need to make informed, strategic decisions in the management of their farms, which is a critical tool in times of hardship. It also provides up to $4,000 for each person in activity supplements, up to 17 one-on-one case management meetings, and things such as a healthcare card and pharmaceutical allowance, rent assistance, telephone allowance and remote area allowance, where applicable. These are things people in the city are entitled to and often, indeed, take for granted. Why should our farmers not enjoy the same support and benefits in times of hardship?

On 1 July 2018 the farm assets value limit was increased to $2.638 million. However, between 1 September 2018 and 30 June 2019, the farm assets value limit was increased on a temporary basis to $5 million. The temporary increase was affected by the amendments to the FHS Act and the Farm Household Support (Farm Assets Value Limit) Minister's Rules 2018. This limit lapsed on 30 June 2019. The amendments will maintain the temporary farm assets value limit at $5 million. This limit acknowledges that farmers cannot easily convert assets for self-support without impacting the ability of their farm business to produce income. Five million dollars might
sound like a lot of assets, but you need to take into account that these assets are not always easy to sell for fair value, particularly during times of adverse events and hardship, and that there are often large liabilities against those assets; and then you have people with no employment, no income and no ability to get back into their chosen profession of farming for many years, or even permanently.

This bill engages and promotes the right to social security enshrined in article 9 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the right to social security. I commend this bill to the Senate.

Senator McDonald (Queensland) (12:53): I rise to speak on the Farm Household Support Amendment Bill 2019. Right across Australia, right now, there are farmers and graziers and small business operators staring down the barrel of another dry winter following no break in the season last summer. These people can be hundreds of kilometres from their small town, or they can be close to a major centre, but in every case they share the same challenge.

There are few more important jobs in this country than farming—growing the food and fibre that feeds this nation and a good part of the world surrounding us. And it's not just farmers; it is those businesses that support farming families. Farmers are under constant attack. They have to sell at wholesale prices and buy at retail prices. Regional and remote businesses pay more for everyday items like fuel and groceries. They pay for additional transport. In addition, no matter how good a farmer can be, you cannot plan for years of extended drought. The farm household bill provides cash to farms, for households to spend in the local communities to support the small businesses who cannot diversify, who cannot attract more consumers.

In my short time in the Senate, I’ve felt privileged to be a part of the federal government that has shown that it not only hears the concerns of primary producers; it listens, but, more importantly, it acts. Already, we’ve seen the passing of the Future Drought Fund bill, we’ve established the National Water Grid and we’re close to enacting tougher punishments on extremist farm trespassers. We’re investing $100 million in beef roads, and Scott Morrison's North Queensland Livestock Industry Recovery Agency represents the government's firm commitment to rebuild the region and help the people of north-west Queensland after floods decimated homes, businesses and cattle stations near my home region of Cloncurry and Julia Creek this year.

The North Queensland Livestock Industry Recovery Agency has already helped more than 1,200 producers and more than 550 small businesses and not-for-profits access grants to get back on their feet. The agency has been ably led by Shane Stone, who comes from the Northern Territory and understands these challenges as well as anyone. But, in the north-west, it was 15 days of rain, cold temperatures and strong winds that had a devastating impact, destroying fences, killing thousands of cattle and devastating families. I was with the Prime Minister when he visited the area even before the floods had receded, and I saw scenes that will stay with me for life. There was little time to dwell on the enormity of this catastrophe, though—what it means not just to those local communities but also to the businesses and jobs that flow away from the regions and into the cities and coastlines of Australia.

The North Queensland Livestock Industry Recovery Agency recently highlighted the case of Nigel and Cat Simmons whose Clarafiel property in McInlay Shire near Julia Creek was affected. They are one example of a family who’ve already made use of the Morrison government $75,000 grant to repair fences and restock livestock, and we are seeing the beneficial flow-on effects of this grant in their local community. The words 'flow-on effect' are very important, because having prosperous farms doesn't just help people on the land; it supports whole towns and districts.

Successful farmers are very important to successful rural and regional towns. It's very fair to say that most profits—if there are any—are really spent very quickly. It's quite rare for primary producers to simply put money in the bank. Usually there is farm maintenance to catch up on that was postponed in the lean years. Maybe it's time to replace the tractor that could have done with replacement a few years ago. They are constantly repairing fences, paying transport companies, bringing in new genetics. Then, maybe, just maybe, there's a little bit of something left over for the family. The small list I just mentioned bears deeper thought, because it also applies to the local tractor salesman, the hardware store, the truck drivers, the stock and station agents and, of course, the clothes shop that all benefit from families and farmers with spare money.

When farmers don't have spare money, it is local regional towns that suffer the most. It is vitally important that we keep people in our regions—that we keep people on farms and stations and we keep people in these regional towns. That is why this bill is so important. This allows farmers to implement long-term plans to improve their business. There is no downside to having a financially sound agricultural sector, and this bill goes some way to ensuring that this is the case.

The farm household allowance was introduced in July 2014 and is part of the government's suite of assistance measures for farmers doing it tough. The farm household allowance is a package of assistance that helps farmers
and their partners who have financial pressures to stay on their feet. It provides income support for up to four cumulative years, which has been incredibly important in this time of extended dry. Most importantly, it allows for up to $1,500 for a financial professional to complete a farm financial assessment of the farm enterprise. In the last term the agriculture minister added more farm financial counsellors. That is critical. I know from running a small business that when times are tough you don't always know where to go for help. To have these people who are well-trained, capable and available is a critical piece of the puzzle, because if you ask for help and assistance early you have a much better chance of surviving. There is up to $4,000 in activity supplements for each person and up to 17 one-on-one case management meetings, in addition to a healthcare card, pharmaceutical allowances, rent assistance, telephone allowance and, where applicable, remote area allowance. The program is uncapped and demand-driven so that there is no chance that anybody who is eligible will miss out. It is my experience that this has been a very important part not just in the floods in Townsville and the north-west of Queensland but in this drought assistance now. People will often say, 'There are other people worse off than me. I don't want to claim this money, because it might mean that somebody else misses out.' That's not the case. It's an important message that we send to farmers across the country: Please do not self-assess. Go and get some advice and get the application in.

The other thing that I really want to draw to the attention of the chamber is that we often talk about farms as being desperate and in need of help. That is of course the case. But what is really important is keeping the young people in these communities, whether it be in the town or on the farm or the station. It is the young people who are bringing incredible innovation and ideas to agriculture. The growth of science- and technology-based solutions that are happening in Australia is truly exciting and world leading. Whether it be geotech, with geosciences; precision agriculture; genetics; and tracking and drone use in more-remote communities, there are truly exciting things happening in the agriculture industry. We lead the world in this place. It is terrifically important that we provide hope to these communities to stay involved and for the young people not just to see their family struggling but to see that this is an industry that is worth staying involved in. As Senator McMahon said, it is an industry that you come to. It is a calling.

I would encourage people to support the passing of this legislation. It provides a raft of measures that are incredibly important. I have heard people on the other side talk about this not being a perfect solution. That's the world we live in. There is never a silver bullet for any of these problems, but what this government has done and what the minister is bringing is another piece of the puzzle, another solution that works to wards a more-efficient, a more financially stable and a more-effective agriculture industry. I am delighted to speak to this bill, and I hope that it will be passed quickly.

Senator Hanson (Queensland) (13:04): I think it's great to have the Farm Household Support Amendment Bill 2019 to help the farming sector. Farmers are the backbone of this country and have gone through many hardships over more than 100-plus years since the country first started farming. We've seen a lot of farmers leave the farming sector. About 20 years ago we had about 125,000 farmers. We are down to around 85,000 to 90,000 farmers at the moment. Because of our extreme weather conditions in this country, we face drought quite often, which affects the farming sector and their families. Just recently in Queensland, we've had the floods. I went up to Julia Creek. I saw the devastation that was created through that, with cattle dead in the corner. They estimate it could have been anything up to around 700,000-plus cattle that actually were killed through that flooding and through the freezing weather conditions afterwards.

Farmers that I have met from travelling around quite extensively over the years and having met the farming sectors—very proud people—would be the last to actually line up wanting a helping hand. They are the backbone and the true salt of this nation. When I went on the Burrumbuttock Hay Run—I have been on it three times—through drought conditions, in Northern Queensland, that we travelled from the borders of New South Wales on a couple of hundred trucks carrying the hay to the farmers. Along the way to the destination and when we arrived, people were lining the streets, waving the trucks on. You could see how pleased they were that these people gave up their time to deliver hay to the farming sector. The queue of cars and trailers—whatever they could pick their hay up on—was kilometres long. I watched some of the old codgers, as they call them, and the farming families. They were so grateful for that helping hand. Some, who would never have queued up to get some hay to feed their animals unless they really had to, had tears running down their cheeks because of gratitude.

This would be no different to the gratitude of receiving a few dollars. That's all it is; it's really just a few dollars. Have a look at the payments that they will be receiving. For a single aged under 22 with no dependant children, you're looking at $462.20. There's an energy supplement of $7 included in that. A partner aged under 22 with dependant children is $507.60 with the energy supplement of $7.70. Let me say that, as of 14 June 2019 more than 11,900 people had received the farming assistance since it was introduced. And there were 6,892 people receiving the farming assistance as at 14 June 2019. Now, remember I said to you that the farming sector is...
about 85,000 to 90,000 farmers in the country so there are not a whole lot of people that are actually out there collecting it. The estimated actual expenditure providing for the farming assistance packages was $163.4 million, but this was estimated to decrease to $59.7 million in 2019-20.

This money is basically only equivalent to Newstart. For people to receive this, to meet the FHA income tax, the claimant must have income below the cut-off point for Newstart allowance or youth allowance—whichever applies. The cut-off point is the point at which a person's Newstart allowance rate is reduced to zero under the Newstart allowance income test. The current income test cut-off for a single Newstart allowance recipient with no children is $1,069.84 per fortnight. For the partner recipient with no children, it is $979 each. So they are going to change the assets test as well. It is going to go from $2.6 million, basically, up to $5 million. I agree with that; so it should be. A farm can be anything from thousands of acres to a few hundred acres, and the house and land is taken in as an asset. That's going to be exempt. But the land value, apart from that, can actually drive up the price of the assets. Then there is farm machinery. As we know, you could be looking at at least $150,000 or $250,000 for a decent tractor or similar farming equipment, like harvesters. These pieces of equipment that they have to buy can cost in excess of hundreds of thousands of dollars. So raising it to $5 million is not unreasonable.

I think that this needs to be changed to take into consideration those farmers who have water licences. Those water licences, especially in time of drought, can be worth hundreds of thousands of dollars—only when in drought. When do these people in the farming sector need that assistance? In times of drought. So, if they hold a water licence, that is going to put them beyond the assets test for being able to get that assistance. If they have to sell their water licence to meet that test, when there are good times, when they can farm, they won't have their water licence. Their farming is going to be destroyed. They won't be able to farm without the water licence. That needs to be taken into consideration. I hope the minister does look at this to extend the assets test to possibly include the water licences, which will be worth a lot of money at the time when they will need that assistance. Other assets that need to be considered include, of course, the cattle or any stock that they may have. It doesn't take much on a farm, especially with the land value, to bring the value up to $5 million. I don't think we're paying out a lot of money. If you have a look at other Australians that receive pensions or Newstart, they can be living in million-dollar mansions on Sydney Harbour or in Melbourne—and I'm not denying them that; that's their home. Because they don't have land around it, their property is worth millions of dollars; yet, if it's a farming sector, we only take out their house and 2½ acres.

In some areas, a lot of these farming properties have been held by families and handed down for generations, and the families can't get assistance because of the asset value of the land. Yet, a lot of places won't allow owners to subdivide or sell off that land so that they can provide for themselves, so they're forced to leave their homes and their communities. I think that needs to be taken into consideration. Some people can't get their healthcare card, and I think that isn't fair. A lot of those in the farming sector cannot get assistance or pensions or healthcare cards because of the price of their properties, and sometimes these properties are worth less than those belonging to people who live in Sydney, Melbourne or even Brisbane, yet those people get those benefits because that's their home. It's the land value that drives up the price.

I need to point out how important it is to assist these people at times, and I know it's not a great sum of money. One story was relayed to me about a family that went through tough times through the droughts. The family had loaded up the cattle to take them to the market. The young boy, who was only 17, loaded up the cattle and was going to take them to market, but they were assessed as being too poor. He had to unload the cattle because they couldn't be transported and taken away through the drought. That same young boy sat around the table with his parents and said he needed a new pair of boots. They said, 'You know we haven't got the money for the boots.' I think it was just the tipping point for that young fellow, because he went around the back of the shed that night and took his own life. This is the devastation that is happening out there. People are actually taking their own lives. They are too proud to ask for a helping hand. The neighbours and the police keep an eye on them. Sometimes we need to look past all these tests.

Another thing here in the bill—I'll just go to the point made here—is that they can only apply for this over a three- or four-year period. Why are we putting a time limit on this? They can only claim this Newstart allowance for three to four years. I can take you to Mount Isa. As I said, I went on the Burrumbutock hay run. They were facing drought for eight years. The whole of New South Wales, I think, just recently was declared a drought state. Most of Queensland is in drought. We're putting restrictions on them. Do we put restrictions on all other Australians—that they can only claim Newstart for a matter of three or four years? Do we put restrictions on pensioners—that they can only claim it for a few years? I'm sorry, it's not right. I don't agree with this.

In principle, I do think the bill is necessary to support our farming sector, but I don't believe it's been well thought out. This is bandaiding again. This is more legislation that is only bandaiding without really going to the heart of the problem on how to deal with it and what's fair and just for all Australians. I hope the government does
look at this. I'm of the opinion that they can actually look at the regulation, including the water licences. Have a really good look at this and at what you can do to improve this bill a little bit to better assist the farming sector. I know they won't be lining up. They are the backbone of this nation. They work extremely hard, but sometimes they need that helping hand. Make sure it's a decent helping hand to ensure that they will be there for the long term, because we need our farmers to provide the food for our nation, and the exports we get from our farming sector keep this country afloat. They do pay their taxes and they work damn hard. I think they are the ones we need to actually stand behind and support. Let's look at this bill and see where we can improve it a little bit to help all Australians.

Senator McGrath (Queensland—Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (13:18): I rise to speak on the Farm Household Support Amendment Bill 2019. Five years ago, the Liberal-National coalition government introduced the farm household allowance program as part of the suite of measures to assist our farmers who were doing it tough. During this time, we've made a number of changes to ensure the program meets the needs of Australian farming families, whether that be putting food on the table, paying household bills or buying school supplies. Today, we are seeking to make further changes to improve the program to ensure it is fit for purpose.

Farmers are unlike any other recipients of government support. They have a full-time business to run, livestock to care for, crops to market and properties to maintain. I know this personally as someone whose parents, grandparents and great-grandparents were farmers. Indeed, in my office, which is just on the other side of this wall here, I have an old milk can from my grandparents' dairy farm. On the wall are cane knives that were used by our family. I do this to make sure I never forget how tough it is being a farmer. I also know this as a senator who spends his life on the road, travelling around regional, rural and remote Queensland. Indeed, just this last weekend, on Friday, I went up to the Tully Show, one of the finest agricultural shows in Queensland, where the Liberal-National Party had a stall. I was able to meet many people there and look at the bananas and the sugar cane that was being judged. I would like to acknowledge all those who were winners in the various contests, and can I thank Andrew Cripps and his parents for all work his family do for the community up there. I should acknowledge Paul Scarr also went to the show on Friday afternoon.

On Saturday, I was out in Hughenden. I think senators will be interested to know that Hughenden is the capital of the Flinders Shire Council. The mayor there is Jane McNamara. I was there representing the government, observing the signing of an agreement between the shire council and a company called CNVM Investments to build a meat processing facility and a feedlot in Hughenden. This is something a lot of people have done a lot of work on over many years. They are doing that because the solution to what is happening in rural, remote and regional Australia is not only what is in this bill here today but also in what councils and businesses are doing out in rural, regional and remote Queensland and Australia. When our farmers are doing well, our regional economies are doing well. When our farmers are doing it tough, not only do our regional economies do it tough, but the cities do tough. We must demonstrate our willingness to make sure they get the hand-up they need.

Before I get into the substance of the bill that's before us here today, I want to look at what else the government are doing to support regional Australia because we have got a vision for regional Australia. We want people to move to and live in regional Australia. We want regional Australia to grow. I say that as someone who lives in regional Australia. I live on the Darling Downs. I live on a patch of dirt, just outside of Warwick. Senator McKenzie, your cabinet colleague Minister Littleproud lives on the other side of Warwick. My office is in another region of Queensland, on the Sunshine Coast. We on this side understand regional Australia because we come from it and we want to grow it. We want to back our regional economies. We want to create new and better-paying jobs and give the families the opportunity to keep on living in regional Australia and stop that drain to the cities.

Just a few weeks ago at the Bush Summit in Dubbo, the Prime Minister announced that the Minister for Agriculture will lead a national plan to enable agriculture, fisheries and forestry to become a $100 billion industry by 2030 and that is pretty exciting—very exciting, actually. The Prime Minister announced the government will establish a House select committee that will look at the future of rural and regional Australia, to be chaired by the member for Barker, Mr Tony Pasin MP. It shows that not only are we delivering but we are thinking about where we want to take rural and regional Australia. That is a very important thing that the government is doing. The committee's work will pull together positive stories from across regional Australia, and its work will be vital in it lead-up to a formal statement from the Deputy Prime Minister to the House of Representatives later this year. The government will announce further details on this committee as time moves on.

The government will continue to invest in our regions through major programs like the $841 million of Building Better Regions Fund and through the launch of Regional Deals, which bring together three tiers of government to build a better future for our regions. I want to talk about the BBRF. It is one of the best programs that any government, in my view, has ever done in Australia's history. It is brilliant at enabling small communities
to get funds to invest sometimes in big projects—up to $10 million—or very small projects, for example, the Wondai Regional Art Gallery. Senator McKenzie, I know you have been there because you popped into a second-hand store and I had been there two days before! The reason we went to Wondai was because the art gallery in Wondai is one of the best regional art galleries in the country. It got a BBRF fund of about $50,000, which the volunteers were able to use to improve the kitchen facilities for that art gallery. Their annual art show is coming on 4 October—for those who are interested.

Back to Hughenden, the government was able to put $5 million into the construction of the Hughenden Recreational Lake. While I was in Hughenden on Saturday, I was able so inspect the lake and see the work that has gone on there. The federal government put money in through BBRF, the state government put some money in and the council put some money in. It is a brilliant facility for a small country town that has been doing it tough. The grey nomads can go there, spend their money and the kids in town will have somewhere to swim.

Now, as announced in the 2019-20 budget, the government is investing in Regional Deals, providing $172 million as part of the Hinkler Regional Deal. For those who know Keith Pitt, he never takes no for an answer, so he's delivered for his communities in Hinkler and the greater Wide Bay region. We have $45 million with the Barkly Regional Deal in the territory, and $3.2 million for the Albury-Wodonga Regional Deal. This will help respond to local priorities and drive productivity in each of those regions.

Something else the government is doing that is close to my heart is the Rural Financial Counselling Service. After my parents had to sell the family farm, dad became one of the first rural financial counsellors in the country. It is something I have lived through and know about. It is a brilliant thing that the governments have been doing at a federal and state level in terms of trying to help farmers stay on the land to make sure they can run their farms as businesses. This assistance provided through the FHA is complemented by the critical Rural Financial Counselling Service. The coalition government has increased the investment in the service to more than $77 million. It is a brilliant investment. Because our farmers are doing it tough, between 1 July 2018 and 30 June 2019 there were over 6,600 active clients, which is an increase of more than 1,700 client from the previous year. That's why last year the Australian government increased the funding by $5 million from $16.7 million to $21.7 million. Rural financial counsellors provide premium, tailored, invaluable support for farmers in helping them identify financial and business options, assisting with negotiations, and providing referrals and helpful information on available support. The support is tailored to each client's need and is entirely confidential. Rural financial counsellors are highly mobile and can visit on-farm and have a meeting in an office or other mutually convenient location.

What is not said often about the financial counselling service is that often it is the opportunity for Mr and Mrs farmer to have that conversation with someone. It isn't just the bloke or his wife; it is both the farmers, having that conversation with someone about how the farm is going financially. There is always this emotional support that goes there, to sit around that table and have a conversation, sometimes just about life. Especially if you're out working on a farm, and you're out on the tractor or whatever, you don't get to speak to humans too often. For those who are listening on their tractors at the moment—they do listen! Senators may have a giggle, but they do listen to us! I will probably get critiqued on the number of 'ums' I have said in this speech—farmers are some of the most informed contributors to public life in Australia, because they spend so much time listening to Senate debates.

In terms of how we're helping those in rural and regional communities, there is also drought support. This has been touched upon by Senator McDonald, and I acknowledge the comments of Senator Hanson before. Helping our farming families and their communities through the drought is a key priority for the Australian government. Something that some people may not be aware of is that there are children in Queensland—I look at the students in the gallery—who are yet to experience rain. They are yet to experience precipitation falling on their heads, so long has been the drought in their home communities. That is a tragedy for them as young Australians and is a tragedy for their communities.

So we know they are doing it tough, and the government's been listening. We always know we can do more, but I think we are doing a good lot at the moment. As part of the government's ongoing, immediate and long-term drought response, the government is providing more than $7 billion in assistance and concessional loans to support those affected by drought. Our support and assistance measures cover a range of areas, including financial assistance, investment in infrastructure, rural and regional mental health, combating weeds and pests, making information easier to access, and improving existing services such as the farm household allowance, which is what this bill is about, and the Rural Financial Counselling Service.

In relation to pests, one of the things that we are particularly good at doing in Queensland is the wild dog fences, in terms of ensuring that farms can be fenced off from the wild dogs. What we are seeing in parts, especially in south-west Queensland, is that sheep are returning to areas where they were driven out from because of the combination of the drought and, more worryingly, because of what wild dogs were doing. For those who
have been behind this program, the wild dog exclusion fencing, it is a brilliant, brilliant program of the government, trying to stop this particular—I won't say invasive species, because everybody loves dogs—but these dogs need to be shot on sight or fenced out from people's properties.

We're providing support to farmers based on preparedness, risk management and support in times of hardship, including drought. It does not depend on where a farmer lives on depend on them being in a particular industry. One of the key investments is through the establishment of the Future Drought Fund, which will provide a secure and sustainable source of funding to strengthen drought resilience. This is making sure that, in the times when it is good, people can make sure they have themselves prepared for when it actually goes bad. Now is the time to fix up the waterways, fix up the dams and fix up that infrastructure that is on people's farms. Following the passage of the Future Drought Fund Bill 2019, $100 million will be invested annually in projects that help Australian farmers and communities to be more prepared for and resilient to the effects of drought.

Now, there are other measures that can assist farmers to stay on the land. Through the Regional Investment Corporation Australian farmers can now access up to $2 million in low-interest loans. That's double the previous limit of $1 million. The government has also doubled the total funding available for low-interest loans in any given year to $500 million. These loans will help farmers in hardship, including those affected by the current drought. The first five years of these loans will remain interest only. Eligible farmers with existing government loans will be able to refinance their loan with the Regional Investment Corporation to access the interest-only period. Recently the government announced additional support for farmers recovering from drought through concessional replanting and restocking loans of up to $200,000, which will be made available through the Regional Investment Corporation.

I'll turn, in the time that is left, to the farm household allowance. The farm household allowance program has a more generous assets test and other special dispensations. The farm household allowance program includes income support for up to four cumulative years, up to $1,500 to have a farm financial assessment of the farm enterprise completed by a financial professional, up to $4,000 for each person in activity supplements and up to 17 one-on-one case management meetings. It also includes a healthcare card, pharmaceutical allowance, rent assistance, telephone allowance and remote area allowance where it's deemed to be applicable. It is uncapped and a demand driven program, ensuring that no-one who is eligible misses out.

Since its commencement, the program has provided support for more than 12,000 Australians and paid more than $340 million. The farm household allowance program is not just a drought measure; it helps all farmers facing financial hardship. But we must ensure that it remains fit for purpose, which is why we are seeking to make a number of improvements to the program. They include extending the program from three to four cumulative years, implementing the supplementary lump sum payments in the 2018-19 financial year, removing the profit from the forced disposal of livestock from the program income test if it is put in a farm management deposit, and simplifying the application form.

Last year, the government temporarily increased the net farm assets test eligibility threshold from $2.6 million to $5 million. This move recognised that, while farmers may have substantial assets, they have no income to meet daily expenses. When you travel around Queensland, this is something that you hear quite often. Farmers have been destocking their properties. They've got no money coming in, they're pulling kids out of school and they're selling off other assets. What that means is that, when it rains—when the good times come again, as they always do—the farmers are unable to restock because they cannot afford to restock, and they are unable to grow their crops because they do not have the money in the bank to make sure that the business can grow.

This move, while recognising that farmers may have substantial assets, as I've said earlier, helps them grow their businesses, and that's very important. As a result of this increase, nearly 280 new recipients have come on to the program, and during the election campaign the Liberal-National coalition government promised to make this change permanent. This was one of the many promises that we made during the election campaign and one of the many promises that we're going to deliver. It formed one of the key components of our election manifesto: supporting farmers in drought.

This bill delivers on that election commitment by amending the Farm Household Support Act 2014 to set the net farm assets threshold at $5 million. This change will allow up to 8,000 more people to access the program above the previous threshold. It means these farmers will not have to sell their assets and risk some or all of the future income-producing capacity of their farm business. It also recognises that farm assets can be difficult to sell quickly and, during tough times, are often sold for less than they're worth. We know that in Queensland. You only have to look at the pages of Country Life in terms of the properties that have appeared a year ago and come back three or six months later. There is no interest in buying these properties, because the properties are drought impacted. We don't want these farmers selling these properties at such a loss that will impact on their ability to retire debt or invest in other businesses.
This bill will also amend the treatment of income from business such that allowable deductions can be claimed against related income—that is, allowable deductions associated with on-farm business income will be able to be deducted from the income, and off-farm deductions will be associated with off-farm income. This clarification is consistent with the policy intent. It will not have any financial consequences for recipients.

The Liberal-National government is providing immediate relief efforts, whether through the farm household allowance or through more direct grants that have been made to councils around the country to support our farmers. I don't want to keep going back to the Flinders Shire Council, but I went to the north-west about six weeks ago and $1 million that had been provided to those drought-impacted councils has been gratefully received by those councils. What is interesting is that—whether it is Longreach, Blackall, Tambo, Winton, Flinders, McKinlay or Richmond—they are all spending their $1 million but they're all spending it in different ways, and that's the best thing. We don't need the federal government telling people how to spend money; those on the ground know what to do with it. This Liberal-National government stands behind farmers in need. We are prepared to provide a genuine, long-term investment in drought resilience and drought-proofing Australia. For that, I commend the bill to the Senate.

Senator BROCKMAN (Western Australia—Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (13:37): I rise just to speak very briefly on the Farm Household Support Amendment Bill 2019. Obviously, it's another opportunity, Senator Sterle, to demonstrate just what this government is doing for the farmers of Australia—in this case, again, the drought-affected farmers of Australia, a topic I have spoken about in this place, it feels like a few times over the last couple of days. It is a very important mechanism by which we enable farming families to stay in their communities, to stay active in those communities, to continue buying the groceries from the local shop, to continue getting their kids into the local school, to not have to leave a particular area to find off-farm income. So the farm household allowance is a very important measure about sustaining and maintaining communities through what is the toughest possible time. I think all in this place need to understand in their bones how tough it is when—sometimes for year on year on year—the way you make your living, your livelihood, is destroyed in front of your eyes, when the livestocks that you have bred and sustained, improved, sometimes over generations, are forced to be sold off, or when the crop withers in the ground.

These times are extraordinarily tough for rural communities, but rural communities are extraordinarily resilient, and they take what the climate throws at them and get on. Western Australia has been blessed with a run of pretty good seasons, in the main. There are always places in Western Australia that don't get the rain that others do, and it's good to see that the system does at least cater for that eventuality. There was always criticism flowing from the Western Australia agricultural community about previous iterations of support for farming communities—the exceptional circumstances was the one I was most involved with when I was with the Pastoralists and Graziers Association. There was the feeling that Western Australia did miss out. Looking down the farm household allowance sheet, there aren't very many receiving farm household allowance in Western Australia, but that is because we have had a run of good seasons. This measure targets assistance to where it is needed, and that is a really fundamental change, a really fundamental part of the government's approach to drought.

Again, I don't want to take up too much of the chamber's time, but I note, with gratitude, the efforts of the government in terms of supporting local government authorities in drought affected areas. Local government is a cornerstone of the bush. It provides a lot of the services and amenities that those in the city take for granted, and in the bush they just would not be there without the local government providing them. Supporting local governments in those communities is a vital way of enabling rural communities to survive and to continue to thrive under what are very difficult circumstances.

Drought isn't the only challenge faced by the bush. I think there are a few other potential problems on the horizon that we also need to start thinking about in the years ahead. There are legal actions against glyphosate, a chemical which is by all scientific analysis known to be a very safe chemical but which has been having a mounting political campaign in other parts of the world. We certainly don't want to see that infect Australia. With the resistance and fear campaigns against modern plant breeding techniques, we need a new green revolution—a green revolution in the agricultural sense I would hasten to add. We need to see the new plant varieties of a future generation that can provide the carbohydrate, the protein and the increasing demand for plant-based protein around the world. We're also seeing a threat in terms of animal activism, which, again, this government has acted swiftly on.

Farmers have the right to undertake their businesses in a safe, secure fashion. They do not deserve to be harassed. They do not deserve to be invaded. They do not deserve to have their property destroyed. They deserve to be able to, as all Australians do, carry on their business as they have for generations.

In conclusion, obviously, I do support this bill. It's a very important part of this government's overall package, a package that includes the Future Drought Fund, a package that includes assistance to local government authority,
and a package that includes support for fodder and support for water infrastructure. This is one part of a much larger jigsaw. I commend the bill to the Senate.

**Senator McKENZIE** (Victoria—Minister for Agriculture and Leader of The Nationals in the Senate) (13:42): In summing up, I would like to thank senators who have contributed to this debate for their very thoughtful contributions. In particular, I would like to thank those senators who have brought their lived experience of either being from a farming community or farmers themselves, and their deep love of regional Australia and the land, to this debate.

Like Senator Hanson, we all recognise that farmers are the backbone of our nation. We are very, very proud of our farming communities. We're proud of the produce that they create and we're proud of the place in which they exist in our economy and in our communities.

This bill demonstrates our government's responsiveness to the needs of farming communities and to rural and regional Australia. It is an election commitment and we are once again delivering on the back of the election promises we made.

The Farm Household Allowance program provides for up to four years of income support, as has been mentioned, so that farmers and their partners can take steps to improve their long-term financial situation. As they are on this payment, they will be supported to look at their farming business and to make tough decisions about whether to change farming practice, so the business is more sustainable going forward or to make the tough decision to enter succession planning to leave the land.

Farmers who are accessing the program are subject to income of on farm and off farm asset thresholds. From 1 September 2018 to 30 June 2019, the on farm assets threshold, known as the farm asset value limit, was temporarily increased from $2.6 million to $5 million. To acknowledge the commentary around today, there is a lot of gear that you use to produce your on-farm income, such as water licences and headers and the like that are expensive. So increasing that threshold permanently to $5 million is absolutely an important part of supporting our farmers.

We also understand that our farmers are asset rich but cash poor and need support to improve their circumstances, particularly if they're experiencing poor climatic conditions. The bill also supports recipients to consider alternative employment or transition away from farming with dignity. The bill clarifies the treatment of deductions and incomes for recipients, and it also goes to a range of other issues, which have been outlined by other senators here today. Essentially, the bill maintains the farm asset value limit at $5 million, clarifies the treatment of deductions and income for recipients and helps farmers and their partners plan for their financial future.

In response to some of the issues raised by Senator Sterle, we have made changes to simplify the application form and process for farmers over this period of time. We've cut the form by a third; it's now five pages shorter. We've grouped together critical eligibility questions at the front so you can very quickly determine whether you're eligible or not. We've actually gone back to farmers to ask if it's user friendly. In response to the issues today, we have obviously had a review. I've read the review; I'm sitting with it, and you'll have a response very shortly from the government. So thank you for continuing to work with us on that.

It does deliver on our election commitment. Our government is resolute in backing Australian farmers to continue to produce their world-class food and fibre. I commend the bill to the Senate.

Question negatived.

Original question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

**Third Reading**

The **ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT** (Senator Gallacher) (13:47): As no amendments to the bill have been circulated and as no senator requires a committee stage, I shall call the minister to move the third reading.

**Senator McKENZIE** (Victoria—Minister for Agriculture and Leader of The Nationals in the Senate) (13:47):

I move:

That the bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.
Health Insurance Amendment (Bonded Medical Programs Reform) Bill 2019
Second Reading

Consideration resumed of the motion:
That this bill be now read a second time.

Senator DEAN SMITH (Western Australia—Chief Government Whip in the Senate) (13:47): Last night I began my contribution on the Health Insurance Amendment (Bonded Medical Programs Reform) Bill, and in those introductory remarks I took a little bit of time to reflect on the very poor performance of the Labor Party in Queensland, most particularly across regional Queensland. But I won't bore the Senate this afternoon with a repetition of that. It's on the record for the public to see—the very, very poor performance by the Labor Party in Queensland. And it demonstrates a much bigger issue—that is, that the election results are a powerful endorsement of the coalition's program for regional Australia.

In the Senate today we've seen two important bills: the Farm Household Support Amendment Bill, which we've just agreed to, and this health amendment bill. They both deal with very important regional issues. There's lots of commentary around what the 18 May election result meant—what it meant for the future, what it might have said about the past, what it might have said about Australians' attitudes to the high-taxing policies of the Labor Party. For me, particularly in a state like Western Australia—and I see Senator Brockman in the chamber with me this afternoon, and Senator Askew, who did an important job returning to the coalition some important seats in Tasmania—above all, the 18 May election result was an endorsement of the coalition's plans and promises for regional Australia.

What we have here this afternoon is an important piece of legislation that will give effect to an important part of the coalition government's Stronger Rural Health Strategy. You might recall that, prior to the election, the coalition committed up to $500 million of taxpayers' money—not its money but taxpayers' money, much of it earned out of regional Australia, I might add—to the Stronger Rural Health Strategy. What we're debating this afternoon is an important element of that strategy which, in short, is to drive better health outcomes for people living in our rural, regional and remote areas by better supporting access to doctors, nurses and other allied health professionals. Why is that important to a senator like me from Western Australia and, indeed, Senator Brockman from Western Australia? Sometimes, Senator Askew, I think people forget that, Tasmania, while it is an original state in our Commonwealth, is predominantly a regional state. It is very regional. I was reflecting last night that it is second only, I think, to Queensland in terms of its regional diversification.

I would just like to read from an article that appeared on PerthNow, which is a Western Australia based publication, published in May of last year, which talked about the importance of access to doctors, nurses and other allied health professionals across regional Western Australia. The story started by saying:

Western Australia has a 'critical shortage' of GPs that is set to worsen, adding more strain on emergency departments and 'poorer health outcomes'.

When I share this with the Senate, it's a powerful demonstration of why the coalition's Stronger Rural Health Strategy is important for every regional community across Australia but particularly for regional communities in Western Australia. It goes on to say:

A new Department of Health report shows there was a shortfall of 534 general practitioners in 2015 and warns the ageing GP workforce is being replaced by millennials who want to work less.

This meant twice as many young doctors, who are opting for a better work-life balance, would need to replace the older ones. The median age of GPs in WA is now 55 and many are facing retirement.

About 500 metropolitan GPs and 134 rural GPs were due to retire by 2021. A shortfall of 774 GPs was expected by then, which would be 974 by 2025.

WA’s GP ratio is 81.5 per 100,000 people compared with the national average of 96.8, making WA the worst performing State. This was based on 'full service equivalents' which estimates total hours of work based on Medicare data.

The article continues:
The report identified 'maldistribution'—
and I'll come back to this point—
of GPs across the State, with most outer metro and several rural areas suffering the lowest ratios, while the wealthy western suburbs were at 'saturation'.

Those are not my words; they are the words of PerthNow. The article goes on:

A poor training system for GPs was making matters worse and was 'insufficient to replace WA’s ageing GP workforce'. WA would have to continue relying on interstate and overseas GPs to fill the gap, the report states.
In sharing that with the Senate this afternoon, the point I am making is that this particular bill—part of a broader strategy known as the Stronger Rural Health Strategy—is necessary and is addressing a very real issue in regional communities across our country and particularly in Western Australia.

By way of background, the 2018-19 federal budget provided a total of $20.2 million over five years to reform the Bonded Medical Programs Scheme and the Medical Rural Bonded Scholarship Scheme. The Bonded Medical Programs Scheme provides a Commonwealth-funded place in a medical course at an Australian university. In return, the participant agrees to work as a doctor for a period of time specifically in a regional, rural or remote location or an area of workforce shortage. This period of work is known as the participant's return of service obligation. It's something we hear a lot about as we travel around regional Western Australia.

As I've already alluded to, reforms to the bonded medical program, which are core elements of this piece of legislation, are part of the 2018-2019 federal budget's $500 million announcement of the Stronger Rural Health Strategy. The strategy aims to implement legislative reforms to increase the number of fully qualified Australian trained doctors working in regional, rural and remote locations and areas of workforce shortage. Importantly, these reforms will create a modern, flexible administrative system with greater capacity for the program to support and target vocationally recognised Australian trained doctors so they will work and stay—and this is an important point. When we're travelling across regional communities and we're listening to what regional communities have to say, they want their doctors to be members of their communities. They want their doctors to be available. They want to know their local doctor as well as they might know their local councillor or their local mayor. I think we've seen for ourselves that when doctors take their families to and have long relationships in regional communities we get much better health outcomes. In Western Australia we've seen some great examples where local shires and other areas have invested very heavily in attracting and retaining good doctors and keeping doctors or other health workforce participants in their communities.

As I was saying, the reforms will create a modern, flexible administrative system with a greater capacity for the program to support and target vocationally recognised Australian trained doctors so they will work and stay in regional, rural and regional areas. Under these reforms, the minister will have authority to make rules to ensure the bonded medical program remains up to date and responds to the government's workforce distribution requirements. The reformed bonded medical program will ensure a better supported, fully qualified Australian trained workforce is available to address workforce shortages in regional, rural and remote areas. Importantly, this is a legislative initiative by the coalition which is strongly supported by key stakeholders including the Australian Medical Association and the Australian Medical Students' Association. I dare say that across regional Western Australia it also enjoys the very strong support of local government authorities and local councillors.

I might just continue with a brief summation of the broader challenge that we face. This was alluded to in the perthnow article that I cited at the beginning of my contribution. The key challenges are these. The first is that there is an oversupply of GPs in some urban areas of our country while at the same time there are very real shortages in rural, regional and remote areas. Importantly, the need to incentivise non-vocationally recognised doctors to obtain specialist GP qualifications is becoming more and more urgent. Importantly, the need for team based and multidisciplinary primary healthcare responses to Australia's increasingly complex and chronic health needs is as urgent in the metropolitan areas as it is across rural, regional and remote Australia.

These are very important issues. I'm sure this legislation will enjoy the support of the Senate. It gives effect, in part, to the $500 million Stronger Rural Health Strategy that is a very powerful, important initiative of the coalition government—a coalition health initiative that enjoyed strong support and great endorsement in the 18 May election outcome. I think this will help correct some of the inertia around rural workforce issues. When we think about how our health workforce, whether they be doctors, nurses or allied health services, is actually distributed across our country, it will help to address the maldistribution that is occurring and, in the end, it will go a long way towards making sure that the health outcomes of Australians living in rural and regional areas are equal to, if not better than, the health outcomes that Australians in our cities and suburbs enjoy.

The PRESIDENT: It being 45 second until question time, Senator Askew, would you like to commence?

Senator ASKEW (Tasmania) (13:59): I rise today to speak in favour of the Health Insurance Amendment (Bonded Medical Programs Reform) Bill 2019. As you may be aware, health care is a topic of much discussion at the moment in my home state of Tasmania, as alluded to by Senator Dean Smith. The public health system in Tasmania, as in other jurisdictions, is dealing with increasing demand and the increasing costs of delivering medical services. With a population that is aging faster than the rest of the country we have some unique public health challenges. The Morrison government is supporting the Hodgman Tasmanian Liberal government in addressing many of these challenges.

Debate interrupted.
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Economy

Senator WALSH (Victoria) (14:00): My question is to the Minister for Families and Social Services, Senator Ruston. Can the minister confirm the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey released today shows that median household income has decreased under the Liberal-National government? What is the median household income now compared to 2013?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (14:00): I thank the senator for her question. What I can tell the senator following the release of the HILDA report is that this government, the Morrison government, is doing everything that it can to ensure that our economy remains strong. The very first thing we did when we came back after the election in May was pass a series of tax cuts through this place—tax cuts that were designed to make sure that people got more of their own money—money that they had earned—left in their pockets. We also announced over the last period of time a very ambitious—

The PRESIDENT: Senator Wong, on a point of order?

Senator Wong: It was a simple question: what is the median household income now compared to 2013? That's what the minister was asked. She hasn't got a brief. Perhaps she could take it on notice.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Wong, the minister was asked about household income but was also asked an earlier question about the data and its trend over recent years. There were two questions. The minister is entitled to answer either or both of those questions.

Senator RUSTON: I have a great deal of pleasure in advising the house what the HILDA Survey did show. This longitudinal survey of Australian households over the last 17 years actually showed that unemployment picked up in 2017, particularly for women, who saw their employment rate rise—

Senator Watt, on a point of order?

Senator Watt: Mr President, on relevance, again. The minister seems to want to talk about everything in the HILDA report apart from what she was asked about. Can she confirm that median household income has decreased under the Liberal-National government? That's the question.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Watt, that is part of the question. I do remind the minister that there were two parts of the question, both related to household income, and note that she has a minute remaining to answer.

Senator Cormann interjecting—

Senator RUSTON: Thank you very much, Senator Cormann. The reason that it would be higher than it would be under those opposite is that we weren't actually ripping $387 billion out of the pockets—

Senator Watt: Mr President—

The PRESIDENT: 1 anticipate your point of order, Senator Watt. Senator Ruston, I remind you of the nature of the question and ask you to turn to it. Note that you have 47 seconds remaining to answer.

Senator RUSTON: I can advise this chamber that the average disposable household income rose by $527 to $55,000—

The PRESIDENT: Order! Senator Watt?

Senator Watt: Do we need to explain the difference between median and average? We asked about median.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Watt, it's been a while since I studied statistics, but median is a form of average.

Honourable senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Order! It is not a point of order on relevance to specifically ask for a type of answer. I think, in answering that, the minister had turned to the question and was being directly relevant. There's an opportunity after question time to debate this.

Senator RUSTON: But what matters to the people of Australia is that they've actually got more of their own money in their pockets. What matters to them is that they've got a government that's focused on a strong economy. What matters to the people of Australia is the fact that we are a government with a plan to continue to deliver for them. You come in here and give us a lecture about the economy of Australia, when your plan going to the last election was $387 billion of more taxes. I don't know what part of that was going to make a stronger economy for all Australians. But, as I said, average household income has risen—(Time expired)

The PRESIDENT: Senator Walsh, a supplementary question.
**Senator WALSH** (Victoria) (14:04): Can the minister confirm that, after more than a decade of decreasing rates of poverty, the Liberal-National government has overseen an increase in the rate of poverty?

**Senator RUSTON** (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (14:04): Thank you for your follow-up question, Senator. The best way that the Australian government can get people out of poverty is by getting them a job, and we are absolutely focused on creating jobs and creating pathways so that people who want a job can get a job. One thing that I'd say is the ABS data shows that, in real terms, wages are growing. In fact, the sector wages are growing by 2.4 per cent—the highest since December 2014.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Senator Watt on a point of order.

**Senator Watt:** So we're now getting an answer about wages. This question is actually about poverty. Could the minister just try once this week to answer the question?

**The PRESIDENT:** Senator Ruston, this question did specifically mention poverty. I've said before that the introduction of the term 'direct' into the direct relevance test narrowed the previous test, so I ask you to turn to the question. Senator Ruston.

**Senator RUSTON:** Thank you very much, Mr President. As I actually answered in the first part of my answer, in responding to the question: the fact is that on this side of the chamber we understand that the best way to get people out of poverty is to actually get them a job. But not only that. The best way to make sure that we have a country that's strong and that can afford all of the social services that so many Australians depend on is to make sure our economy is strong. And I can assure you that the best way of making the economy strong is not taxing it by $387 billion. *(Time expired)*

**The PRESIDENT:** Senator Walsh, a final supplementary question.

**Senator WALSH** (Victoria) (14:05): Professor Roger Wilkins, co-author of the *Household, income and labour dynamics in Australia* survey, says: ... in the mid-2005-to-2009 range when we saw very large increases in household incomes, but since 2012 there's been basically no growth. Why are Australians worse off now than when the Liberal-National parties came to government in 2013?

**Senator RUSTON** (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (14:06): What I'd like to do now is actually give you my interpretation of the data that was contained in the HILDA report, not somebody else's. What I'd like to advise the chamber is that, as I said, women's employment has increased significantly over the period of the longitudinal survey, including in recent weeks and recent years. Under the coalition are 1.4 million new jobs and a plan to create more. Female workforce participation is at record highs. Workforce participation for those over the age of 65 has also been increased. More than 100,000 young people got a job in 2017-18—

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Senator Wong on a point of order.

**Senator Wong:** The question dealt with this proposition: between '05 and '09 we saw large increases in household incomes but not since 2012—that there's been no growth. The minister was asked a question about why Australians are worse off now than when the coalition came to power in 2013. Now, the minister has had 40 seconds. She has spoken a lot about workforce participation et cetera, but this is a question about the trend in household income under her government.

**The PRESIDENT:** Senator Wong, on the point of order: on the previous question I drew the minister's attention to a very specific question. The nature of the final part of the question that was read out was: 'Why are Australians worse off than'—and it referred to a date. I think the minister is allowed some discretion in being directly relevant to such a broad question. Senator Ruston.

**Senator RUSTON:** Thank you very much, Mr President. In relation to talking about the incomes of households, it's worth noting that the average living standards have increased over the full 17 years of the period of the longitudinal survey. The average disposable household income rose $527, to $55,000—the largest increase— *(Time expired)*

**Employment**

**Senator O'SULLIVAN** (Western Australia) (14:08): My question is to the Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business. Will the minister update the Senate on how the Morrison government is demonstrating it's on the side of local communities by getting more Australians off welfare and into work?

**Senator CASH** (Western Australia—Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business) (14:08): I thank Senator O'Sullivan for the question. I know this is a very personal one for him, given the fantastic work that
he did before coming to this place—in particular, in working with communities and getting those who are on welfare off welfare and into work. I certainly look forward to working with Senator O'Sullivan in this capacity in this portfolio. As Senator Ruston has already stated to the chamber, the Morrison government unashamedly believes that the best form of welfare is a job. This is a side of politics that actually believes in the dignity of work. And, as a government, we have a very, very strong focus on putting in place the right economic framework so that businesses out there can prosper, grow and create more jobs. Almost 1.4 million jobs have been created since we were elected to office. But, at the same time, we have a very strong focus on putting in place the right policies and processes to ensure that people who are on welfare have access to the policies, the programs and the services they need to ensure that we give them the very best opportunity to move off welfare and into work.

In relation to the programs that we have in place, those on the other side criticise them and oppose them every step of the way—the Youth Jobs PaTH program, giving our youth who've never had the opportunity to work an opportunity to undertake an internship; ParentsNext, ensuring that in particular young women whose youngest child will be going to school are prepared for the workforce; and of course our rural apprentices incentive, which the Labor Party like to criticise at every opportunity they get.

This is the side of politics that understands the benefit of work, and we are unashamedly of the belief that the best form of welfare is a job.

The PRESIDENT: Senator O'Sullivan, a supplementary question.

Senator O'SULLIVAN (Western Australia) (14:10): Minister, thank you for that answer. Are there any new approaches the government is exploring to improve on these outcomes?

Senator CASH (Western Australia—Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business) (14:10): The answer is yes. The government understands that we need to continue to focus on and deliver better outcomes for both jobseekers and employers. Therefore government services, employment services, are being transformed. This will result in the delivery of better services to those who are looking for work as well as for people who provide the jobs, for the employers. From 1 July this year through to June 2022 the new model is being trialled in South Australia and New South Wales. This is all about ensuring that jobseekers who are the most ready to work are digitally literate and able to focus on online services. At the same time, it allows the government to reinvest back into those jobseekers who require more assistance. We are focused on getting people off welfare and into work. (Time expired)

The PRESIDENT: Senator O'Sullivan, a final supplementary question.

Senator O'SULLIVAN (Western Australia) (14:11): Could the minister inform the Senate of any broader economic benefits associated with moving people off social services payments and into work?

Senator CASH (Western Australia—Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business) (14:12): Put quite simply, nobody benefits when somebody languishes on welfare. That is why, as a government, we have our plan for a strong economy, which we're implementing. You create jobs by ensuring a strong economy. Those jobs are then able to be taken up by people who are on welfare. Again, we unashamedly believe that the best form of welfare is a job, and the economy under us has created almost 1.4 million jobs since we were elected to office.

But, more than that, welfare dependency in Australia under the coalition government is the lowest it has been in 30 years. As you know, when you get people off welfare and into work they stop taking from the system as a benefiter of welfare and they start giving to the system as a taxpayer. There are so many other benefits to getting people off welfare and into work, and we will continue to focus on that.

National Security

Senator KENEALLY (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (14:13): My question is to the Minister representing the Minister for Home Affairs, Senator Cash. When classified ASIO advice was leaked in February, ASIO Director-General Duncan Lewis said that when classified advice is leaked 'it undermines all that we stand for'. Given the strength of the Director-General's view, why did the AFP discontinue its investigation?

Senator CASH (Western Australia—Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business) (14:13): As Senator Keneally would know, the Australian Federal Police conduct their investigations and carry out their operations independent from government, and the AFP considers this matter finalised.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Keneally, a supplementary question.

Senator KENEALLY (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (14:13): Former AFP Commissioner Andrew Colvin said:

... we didn't actually commence an investigation, because we immediately saw that the prospects of a successful investigation or prosecution were limited.
But given that FOI documents released today reveal that only 10 people in the Department of Home Affairs plus the minister had access to this confidential advice, does the minister agree that the prospects of prosecution are limited?

Senator CASH (Western Australia—Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business) (14:14): Again, I would refer to my previous answer.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Keneally, a final supplementary question.

Senator KENEALLY (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (14:14): In response to the leak, Minister Dutton said, 'I haven't leaked anything.' The minister also said, 'Nobody is above the law, and the police have a job to do under the law.' That means only 10 people are left. Will the minister now commit to reopening the investigation?

Senator CASH (Western Australia—Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business) (14:14): In response to that question, I again refer to my answer to the initial question.

Gambling

Senator DI NATALE (Victoria—Leader of the Australian Greens) (14:15): My question is to the Leader of the Government representing the Prime Minister. Minister, in recent days we've heard allegations of serious corruption involving two federal ministers and one federal MP pressuring the Department of Home Affairs to allow international high rollers with criminal connections to bring bags of laundered money straight from the airport to gamble at Crown Casino. Minister, who are these three members of parliament and has the Prime Minister questioned them about their involvement? If not, why not?

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:16): Firstly, I would caution Senator Di Natale from what appears to be an attempt to be both the police officer charging as well as the judge, jury and executioner all at the same time. Obviously it is the case that the Australian government takes all allegations of illegal activity very seriously. Everyone must abide by Australian law. This is particularly the case for any members of our law enforcement, immigration or customs authorities. The Attorney-General announced earlier today, of course, that he will refer this matter that Senator Di Natale has raised in relation to Crown Casino for consideration under section 18 of the Law Enforcement Integrity Commission Act 2006 for inquiry. Obviously we are not pre-empting their findings, but the Attorney-General has considered the allegations that have been raised in the media reporting, and particularly—

The PRESIDENT: Senator Di Natale, on a point of order?

Senator Di Natale: Mr President, I kept the preamble short and the question was very specific. I asked who were the three members of parliament and whether the Prime Minister had questioned them about their involvement.

The PRESIDENT: I remind senators: the preamble may have been short, Senator Di Natale, but the minister is being directly relevant to the question as asked. I'm going to start asking senators to not use points of order repeatedly simply as a chance to restate a preferred part of the question. By all means highlight it, but at least make a link to direct relevance, please, and do not just restate a preferred part of the question.

Senator CORMANN: I answered a very specific question yesterday in relation to visa processing. I pointed out that there is actually no discretion in relation to the application of laws in relation to assessments of character, health and various other relevant grounds. As I was about to indicate to the chamber, the Attorney-General considered the allegations that have been raised in the media reporting, particularly as they touch upon allegations which are either directly relatable to or potentially relatable to Commonwealth officers, and it was his view that there were sufficient concerns raised to warrant further investigations, which is why he has referred this matter to the law enforcement Integrity Commissioner. In the circumstances it wouldn't be appropriate, of course, for me to make any further comments in relation to these matters. It is now, obviously, a matter for ACLEI to further consider.

Senator DI NATALE (Victoria—Leader of the Australian Greens) (14:18): You're right, Minister: the Attorney-General has indeed requested that the Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity examine this case. But we both know that they don't have the capacity to investigate politicians. Minister, hasn't it been referred to ACLEI specifically because they can't investigate politicians? Minister, isn't this just more evidence of a protection racket for ministers in your government, and isn't this why we need a national anticorruption watchdog?

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:19): I reject the premise of the question. I would just point out that,
in relation to visa facilitation, the Department of Home Affairs has absolutely no evidence of visas being rubberstamped or of requirements being waived for visa applicants supported by Crown Casino. No waivers to Australia's visa requirements have been provided. Departmental officers apply the same legal criteria to all visa applications in accordance with the Migration Act. There is no discretion for officers to depart from these requirements.

Visa applicants' individual circumstances are assessed against all legal requirements, including in relation to national security, character and health. No-one is exempt from these requirements. In relation to the integrity of Australian Border Force and visa staff, all staff are expected to uphold the highest standards of integrity and professionalism, at all times. A range of controls are in place to prevent, detect and respond to internal fraud, corruption and serious misconduct. The acting secretary is aware of allegations of inappropriate conduct by an ABF officer. It would be inappropriate for me to comment on the matter. (Time expired)

**Senator DI NATALE** (Victoria—Leader of the Australian Greens) (14:20): In the past, Liberals—it must be said, with the support of the Labor Party—have joined to shut down inquiries into money laundering, tampering with poker machines, covering up abuse within their own premises. Minister, isn't the reason that you've shut down these inquiries—and, again, have not referred this to the appropriate channels—because Crown Casino donates hundreds of thousands of dollars to both parties and employs former ministers, like Minister Coonan and Minister Arbì, as an insurance policy against scrutiny? (Time expired)

**Senator CORMANN** (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:20): I completely and utterly reject the premise of this question. And I reject the proposition that no appropriate action has been taken. The Attorney-General, as I've indicated, has referred these matters to the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity.

**The PRESIDENT:** Senator Bernardi, on a point of order.

**Senator Bernardi:** President, I have a point of order that Senator McKim is being very disorderly and interjecting. It's even more disorderly because he's not in his own seat. Could you ask him to go back to his own seat so he can interject appropriately, or to cease and desist?

**The PRESIDENT:** It would be inappropriate for me to ask someone to interject appropriately. There should be no interjections, and people should seek to make contributions from their seat.

**Australian Defence Force**

**Senator PATRICK** (South Australia) (14:21): My question is to the shareholder minister for ASC, Senator Cormann. Minister. Did you not tell the Senate FPA legislation committee on 23 May 2018 that no decision had been made to shift Collins class submarine full-cycle dockings from ASC, in South Australia, to WA? If no decision had been taken by government, why then did Admiral Sammut, head of the submarine program, write on 29 September 2017 to advise Naval Group that in designing the Future Submarine construction yard, at Osborne, they should assume, 'The land occupied by ASC submarines would be made available to Naval Group following this 2024 FCD to allow for further development of the submarine construction yard, inclusive of access to the Port Adelaide River'? Minister, is ASC aware of Admiral Sammut's written advice that the land they occupy for Collins full-cycle dockings has been promised to Naval Group from 2024?

**Senator CORMANN** (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:22): Firstly, I'm not personally aware of the quote that you've just read out, but, I will ask ASC whether they are aware of the quote that you've just read out. What I can say substantively is that I absolutely stand by what I said at Senate estimates at the time, and that is that no decision has been made in relation to full-cycle docking for the Collins class submarine.

The government is seeking expert advice, which is, I think, something that I've confirmed during Senate estimates as well, to inform options associated with full-cycle docking—given the significant additional workload and the 12 Attack class submarines that will, of course, be built in years to come as a result of decisions, the $90 billion in additional investment, that we are making under our government. So no decision has been made and I've, again, discussed these matters with Senator Reynolds in more recent times. We expect that this is a matter that will come for a decision to government later in the year.

**The PRESIDENT:** Senator Patrick, a supplementary question.

**Senator PATRICK** (South Australia) (14:23): Minister, if no decision of government has been made, how is Admiral Sammut promising the site to Naval Group for its construction yard? I mean, this is a serious move. There will be significant costs involved. There will be the depletion of corporate knowledge. Don't you think that this move can be simply ruled out on the basis it'll harm national security?
Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:24): Because we are so focused on our national interests and making the right decisions by the Australian people, the public interest and our national security interest, we are going through a proper process. That why we are seeking and obtaining appropriate expert advice. Again, I substantively stand by what I've previously said, and that is that no decision has been made. Ultimately, this will be cabinet-level decision taken in the national interest in the context, of course, of a historic record investment in our defence capability as a nation moving forward.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Patrick, a final supplementary question.

Senator PATRICK (South Australia) (14:25): Minister, in an FOI asking for the incoming government brief relating to shipbuilding for Defence, there's a secret sealed section that hasn't been released to me entitled 'Western Australia'. What secret deal has been done? I know that Minister Price, Minister Reynolds and you are from WA. Has a promise been made to the WA government that full-cycle dockings will go to Western Australia?

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:25): The answer to the last question is no. In relation to the other matters, I'm not the Minister for Defence, so it won't surprise you to hear that I haven't had access to the secret sealed section either. But I can also inform the senator that the great state of Western Australia is part of the Commonwealth of Australia and that, thankfully, our defence forces are quite focused on defending the great state of Western Australia as part of their commitment to our national defence and our national security. So I'm very relieved that our defence forces are focused on what is required to be done to keep Australians in Western Australia safe and secure, in the same way as, of course—

The PRESIDENT: Senator Patrick on point of order?

Senator Patrick: It is a simple question: have you done a deal with the government of Western Australia to shift full-cycle dockings there?

The PRESIDENT: Senator Patrick, you restated the last part of your question. The minister, I understand, had addressed that at the start and was being directly relevant to the remainder of the question.

Senator CORMANN: I could not have been more explicit and more unequivocal. There has been no deal. We are making these judgements based on the national interest. No decision has been made. We will make the decision not on political grounds but on national security and public interest grounds.

Employment

Senator CICCONE (Victoria—Deputy Opposition Whip in the Senate) (14:26): My question is to the Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, Senator Cash. In March this year, the minister's leader in the Senate, Senator Cormann, explained that wages growth is low under the government's watch because 'that is a deliberate design feature of our economic architecture.' Minister, does it remain the Morrison government's policy to see wages stagnant and household incomes go backwards in real terms?

Senator CASH (Western Australia—Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business) (14:27): I thank Senator Ciccone for the question and I reject the premise of the question. But what this government does understand and, in particular, what Senator Cormann, as the outstanding Minister for Finance who, along the with Treasurer and now Prime Minister, will deliver a surplus budget, which is something those on the other side have not seen for many, many decades—the one thing Senator Cormann understands is that the way that you do lift wages in Australia—

Senator Cormann: is to have business be more successful.

Senator CASH: correct. As he said, it is to have business be more successful. As our colleagues know on this side, when businesses are more successful, they create more jobs for Australians. When there are more jobs—

The PRESIDENT: Order! Senator Watt on a point of order?

Senator Watt: I'm sorry but again on relevance. The question was very clear: does it remain the government's policy to see wages stagnate and household incomes go backwards in real terms? That's the question.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Watt, it's a very broadly worded question.

Opposition senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Order! This is time for the opposition. If it stops interjecting, I'll make a ruling. Senator Watt, it was a very broadly worded question. I consider the minister to be directly relevant if the minister is talking about wages policy, and I believe she was at that point. I'm listening very carefully.

Senator CASH: As I was saying, what Senator Cormann does understand is that governments need to put in place the right economic framework so that businesses can prosper, grow and create more jobs for Australians,
which is exactly what this government is doing. Since we were elected to office, the economy under us has created almost 1.4 million jobs. We now have record employment in Australia. We also have the participation rate in Australia at a record high for the second month going. What we will never do to the Australian people is take more money out of their pockets, because that is exactly what the Labor Party were going to do. They talk about slow wages growth—

The PRESIDENT: Order, Senator Cash. Senator Watt on a point of order.

Senator Watt: Are we going to get one answer today about wages? We haven't had it here. We haven't had it from Senator Ruston.

The PRESIDENT: I take it you're raising a point of order on direct relevance. Again, I ask senators to draw a point when they make a point of order. Senator Cash, you've been reminded of the question. You have 28 seconds remaining to answer.

Senator CASH: I rejected the premise of the question outright and I said that what Senator Cormann does understand—what all of us on this side understand—is that the way you increase wages in this country is by having a strong economy. One of the benefits of a strong economy is the creation of more jobs. When the economy creates more jobs, there's less unemployment, and guess what? There's competition for the jobs that are actually out there, which ultimately puts pressure on wages. (Time expired)

The PRESIDENT: Senator Ciccone, a supplementary question.

Senator CICCONE (Victoria—Deputy Opposition Whip in the Senate) (14:30): After almost six years of stagnant wages growth and a floundering economy under your government's watch, why do you continue to support cuts to penalty rates to some of Australia's lowest-paid workers?

Senator CASH (Western Australia—Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business) (14:30): Senator Ciccone, I know you won't here in the last parliament, and we're going to have to now go through this again.

Opposition senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Order on my left! One of your colleagues is on his feet seeking a point of order.

Senator Ciccone: On a point of order, I was here in the last parliament; I was here in March.

Senator CASH: Wonderful to have you standing up and asking a question, then, Senator Ciccone! But you would then recall that the decision to actually cut penalty rates in this country was a decision of the Fair Work Commission. The Fair Work Commission, and in particular the president of the Fair Work Commission, was actually appointed by your former Leader of the Opposition Mr Bill Shorten. In fact, many Labor Party members have been part of unions that have done deals with big employers to cut the penalty rates of the relevant employees. So I completely reject the premise of the question. We on this side are focused on growing our economy, because when you grow the economy you create more jobs and you lower unemployment, and that is how wages will ultimately rise.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Ciccone, a final supplementary question.

Senator CICCONE (Victoria—Deputy Opposition Whip in the Senate) (14:32): Why are Australians worse off now than when the Liberal and National parties came to government in 2013?

Senator CASH (Western Australia—Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business) (14:32): Again, Senator Ciccone, I completely reject the premise of your question. Almost four million Australians have now lodged their tax returns, and do you know why they've done that? It is because the first piece of legislation that we passed when we were elected to office were the tax cuts for the Australian people that we took to the election, which the Australian people voted for. They will always be better off under a coalition government, in particular when it comes to employment. On this side of the chamber, we understand that it is employers that create jobs, not governments. We put in place the economic framework, and the economic framework under us is leading to a stronger economy. There are more jobs for people who are out there putting their hands up and saying, 'We want to work.'

Agriculture Industry

Senator McDonALD (Queensland) (14:33): My question is to the Minister for Agriculture. The Australian agricultural industry is leading the world in innovation and providing best practice in efficiencies, technology and sustainability. Can the minister update the Senate on how the government is demonstrating it's on the side of our local farming communities?

Senator McKENZIE (Victoria—Minister for Agriculture and Leader of The Nationals in the Senate) (14:33): On this side of the chamber, we are excited about agriculture—the beef industry, the lamb industry, the rice
industry, the dairy industry, the horticulture industry. We recognise the huge opportunity to grow Australian agriculture to reach its potential, despite the current challenges, because our farmers are world class. We're a government who are on their side, who want to enable them to do what they do best: producing the very best food and fibre in the world. Agriculture drives rural and regional economies and supports local communities. It drives our national prosperity and it always has. Supporting farmers is not just in the Nationals' interest; it's in the national interest.

Today the Senate passed the farm household allowance and, since our victory on 18 May, we've already delivered on our election commitment and secured the $5 billion Future Drought Fund in the face of resistance from those opposite. We are progressing our tough new penalties to help protect farmers from the real threat of activists invading their farms, damaging their property, stealing their animals, and harassing and intimidating their staff. Farmers have the right to farm and to feel safe, and workers have the right to go to work and be safe and free from harassment and intimidation. This side of politics recognises that farm invasions are more than civil disobedience, Senator Di Natale and Senator Rice—through you, Mr President. We know that farmers are terrified and some have been driven from their industry. What the Greens wants to see is that we're no longer farming in this country; we're only farming vegan produce rather than farming livestock.

Honourable senators interjecting—

Senator McKENZIE: I'm sorry, your senators said it here and outside of this place, that they do not want to see the farming of livestock. This side of politics wants to see more farmers in local communities, not less.

The PRESIDENT: Senator McDonald, a supplementary question.

Senator MCDONALD (Queensland) (14:35): What are the specific steps the government is taking to ensure the agricultural industry hits its $100 billion target by 2030?

Senator McKENZIE (Victoria—Minister for Agriculture and Leader of The Nationals in the Senate) (14:35): As announced recently by the Prime Minister in Dubbo, our government is backing Australian agriculture's desire to grow to a $100 billion industry by 2030. The National Farmers Federation says it's possible and it's a goal worth fighting for. Our total farm production has already increased by around 25 per cent over the last six years, and we'll drive further growth through getting more of our agricultural produce to overseas markets; strengthening biosecurity that underpins 'Brand Australia', which is so valuable to that export proposition; reforming our research and development and innovation sector, making sure that the $1 billion investment we do make as a federal government finds profit at the farm gate; ensuring connectivity; and making sure there's an appropriate skilled workforce available when and where our farmers need it. We want to make sure our farmers succeed and that rural and regional communities that depend on agriculture succeed with them.

The PRESIDENT: Senator McDonald, a final supplementary question.

Senator MCDONALD (Queensland) (14:36): Can the minister outline any risks associated to the prosperity of Australian farmers?

Senator McKENZIE (Victoria—Minister for Agriculture and Leader of The Nationals in the Senate) (14:36): Yes, I can, Senator McDonald. While we've sided with farmers from day one, the support for farmers from those opposite has been lukewarm at best. Some would say it's colder than a Canberra winter.

Senator Sterle interjecting—

Senator McKENZIE: Sorry, Senator Sterle—through you, Mr President—it actually has. There's a phrase that the press gallery has been using about the response of those opposite to the government's agenda. It's about complaining, making a noise and then, at the end of the day, voting for the proposition. We would seek that you actually support our agenda rather than bitch and moan about it. When Labor is given a chance to side with farmers and stand up to activists, we get more of the same flip-flop. Our message is: just get on with it. Save us the heartache and save our ears from bleeding. If you're going to vote for our legislation to support farmers, say it up-front and get on with it. The Australian public sent a strong message at the ballot box, and that was to back our regions.

Newstart Allowance

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (14:37): My question is to the Minister for Families and Social Services, Senator Ruston. Minister, a constituent wrote to me about their experience living on Newstart:

I'm 59 years old on Newstart, living in a tent with my two dogs because I can't afford to live anywhere else.

Another constituent wrote to me saying:

My husband is nearly 64. I'm 61. We are both on Newstart. Life is tough, going through our savings. We deserve better.
Minister, if an increase in Newstart is off the government's agenda, what is your response to these people who are struggling to get by on Newstart?

**Senator RUSTON** (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (14:38): I thank Senator Siewert for her question. No-one has ever said it would be easy to live without a job, but one of the things that we have said as this government is that our very highest priority is to say to anybody who is living on Newstart that we will do everything that we can in the power of this government to get them off Newstart and to find them a job. We have never, ever said that Newstart was supposed to be a wage or a salary replacement. We have never said that. It is a safety net. And, in Australia, when it comes to our social welfare system, we enjoy probably one of the strongest safety nets of any country in the world. But this social welfare system is funded by the taxpayers of Australia, and we have an obligation to the taxpayers of Australia to make sure that we continue to manage it in a sustainable way. And this extends to the responsibility to those taxpayers, because we must never forget in this place—governments do not have money; only taxpayers have money. The taxpayers make available, through their taxation, the money that we use for a very comprehensive social welfare system.

But my absolute focus, as the Minister for Families and Social Services, is to make sure that this system is both fair and sustainable so that, for anybody at all in Australia who finds themselves in a situation where they need the support of their government, through taxpayer funds, to look after them in times when they need a little bit of help, our system is sustainable not just today but into the future so that future generations will always know that that safety net exists for them should they find themselves in hard times. So to anybody out there who is on Newstart: you can be absolutely assured that the highest priority of the Morrison government is to create jobs but also—

Honourable senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Order. I remind senators that even interjections can't use unparliamentary language. I'm not sure if I heard correctly, but just be careful about interjections as well. Senator Siewert, a supplementary question.

**Senator SIEWERT** (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (14:40): In June there were 159,700 job advertisements. There were 711,500 unemployed workers. How can you get a job when there aren't enough jobs? How is that sustainable?

**Senator RUSTON** (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (14:41): Thank you very much. One of the things I'd probably point out to Senator Siewert is that the creation of jobs has been one of the great success stories of this government—1.3 million new jobs. But I suppose one of the most pertinent points in the creation of these new jobs is that a lot them have been the creation of full-time jobs and not part-time jobs, and we've seen a significant movement of people out of part-time work and into full-time work. The agenda that we went to this election with was a government that had a plan to create more jobs. It is absolutely incumbent on any government to create jobs. A strong economy creates jobs, which allows people to be able to get off Newstart and into a job. So I think that our track record in terms of job creation and our plans for job creation into the future send a very strong message to the people who are on Newstart, people who are doing it tough, and we recognise that.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Siewert, a final supplementary question?

**Senator SIEWERT** (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (14:42): Through you, President, to the minister: Minister, have you or the government, the Liberal Party, had any discussions with the National Party about their proposal to link an increase to Newstart to the cashless debit card or income management? Can you categorically rule out that any increase that you might, in your heart, decide to give will not be linked to the cashless debit card?

**Senator RUSTON** (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (14:42): What I can assure the senator is that the policy of the coalition government in relation to Newstart, and our focus on finding people on Newstart a job, has not changed. In relation to the cashless debit card, which is currently being trialled in four sites—and I thank you very much for your continued engagement in making that program as good as we possibly can make it and better than it already is—I can assure you that our policy in relation to the benefits that are being delivered to the communities in which the cashless debit card is currently being trialled has not changed either. We believe that the benefits that have been generated in these communities—lower incidences of alcohol and drug abuse, lower instances of domestic violence, and the fact that children are now attending school—are very, very strong points for why this government should continue to pursue the benefits of the cashless debit card. But at the same time our overarching policy is always to create more jobs for more Australians.
Workplace Relations

Senator SHELDON (New South Wales) (14:43): My question is to the Minister representing the Minister for Industrial Relations, Senator Payne. In 2016 the Fair Work Ombudsman report on the widespread theft of wages at 7-Eleven found that the level of penalties and limited investigative powers contributed to an environment of noncompliance. How much has the government reduced wage theft since the ombudsman’s report three years ago?

Senator PAYNE (New South Wales—Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Women) (14:44): I have some information from the minister here, and those aspects of Senator Sheldon's question which I can't answer directly I'll take on notice and return to the Senate with further information. But it is fair to say that the coalition government has made it quite clear that we don't have any tolerance for exploitation in Australian workplaces, and we have taken definitive action to protect vulnerable workers.

For example, we accepted, in principle, all 22 recommendations of the Migrant Workers’ Taskforce, and are building in measures already introduced to protect vulnerable workers. In our 2019-20 budget, the government also committed over $10 million, almost $11 million, to enhance the capability of the Fair Work Ombudsman to crack down on law-breaking by unscrupulous businesses, and that's on top of the coalition having provided the Fair Work Ombudsman with greater powers and over $34 million in funding over the past couple of years to focus on protecting vulnerable workers. That increase in funding will allow the Fair Work Ombudsman to continue to level the playing field for law-abiding employers by taking strong action against those who exploit their workers. It also means the Fair Work Ombudsman will be better able to meet the information and education needs of both migrant workers and employers, ensuring the migrant worker community also better understands their workplace rights.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Sheldon, a supplementary question.

Senator SHELDON (New South Wales) (14:45): This month it has been revealed that jewellery chain Michael Hill has underpaid workers by up to $25 million over the last six years. Why has the government allowed continued wage theft from Australian workers?

Senator PAYNE (New South Wales—Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Women) (14:46): The government would of course reject that sort of exploitation of workers, as I said right at the beginning of my first answer. We continue to work with the Fair Work Ombudsman, and encourage and support the Fair Work Ombudsman, in their efforts to address these very serious issues. It is actually worth noting that the point at which the Labor Party left office in 2013 saw the Fair Work Ombudsman's funding cut by 17 per cent and their staffing by 20 per cent. We have increased that, as I said in my answer to the first question. We have increased that to enable the ombudsman to continue to level the playing field, as I said, for law-abiding employers, to ensure that we can take strong action against employers who do exploit their workers, like the example that Senator Sheldon gave.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Sheldon, final supplementary question.

Senator SHELDON (New South Wales) (14:47): Why aren't addressing stagnant wages, decreasing median household income and rampant wage theft priorities for this government?

Senator Cash interjecting—

Senator PAYNE (New South Wales—Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Women) (14:47): I agree with Senator Cash. I absolutely reject the premise of Senator Sheldon's question, because it is ridiculous to suggest that. In delivering a stronger economy, as this government is doing; delivering the level of job creation that this government is doing; and delivering the personal income tax benefits, as this government is doing, we are absolutely focused on supporting the workers in this country. I reject the premise of Senator Sheldon's question.

Association of Southeast Asian Nations

Senator ASKEW (Tasmania) (14:47): My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Could the minister please update the Senate on the government's priorities in enhancing Australia's relationships in the Indo-Pacific region?

Senator PAYNE (New South Wales—Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Women) (14:48): I thank Senator Askew very much for her question, because this government recognises that Australia's values and interests are best served by an Indo-Pacific region that is open, prosperous and inclusive, and where the rights of all states are respected. To help promote those goals, I am travelling this week to attend ASEAN related and foreign ministers’ meetings in Bangkok. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations has an absolutely central role in supporting a rules based regional order. It has helped to underpin regional stability and prosperity for over 50 years.
Australia is ASEAN's oldest external partner. We are celebrating 45 years of diplomatic relations, and the government remain committed to strengthening our engagement with ASEAN. Both the East Asia Summit and the ASEAN Regional Forum provide opportunities to bolster what are already strong and growing economic ties. Our two-way trade relationship with ASEAN countries last year was worth $121 billion. These are fora which present Australia with opportunities to register our views on a range of regional security and diplomatic issues, including the important denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula; stability in the South China Sea; both the regional and human rights challenges of the Rohingya crisis; and, of course, countering terrorism and violent extremism.

We warmly welcome the adoption of the ASEAN Outlook On The Indo-Pacific. It is a statement from ASEAN that sends a very powerful signal about the member countries' commitment to international rules and norms, and it strengthens ASEAN's position at the centre of the region's most important architecture. So I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to take up these meetings this week and also to meet with a number of counterparts in a bilateral context to further commit to our deepening relationships in the region.

**The PRESIDENT:** Senator Askew, a supplementary question?

**Senator ASKEW** (Tasmania) (14:50): Could the minister advise how Australia will use the ASEAN-Australia Post Ministerial Conference to further Australia's priorities with ASEAN?

**Senator PAYNE** (New South Wales—Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Women) (14:50): Again, I thank Senator Askew for her question. We will be co-chairing, with Malaysia, the ASEAN-Australia Post Ministerial Conference, where I'll be able to discuss our shared commitment, as I said, to enhance relationships, including through support for ASEAN's outlook on the Indo-Pacific. It is a chance for us to welcome agreement on a new ASEAN-Australia plan of action, which will cover 2020-24, and also to advocate for ASEAN-Australia leaders summits, which is a priority for Australia.

The post ministerial conference will give us a chance to update our counterparts on regional initiatives that complement Thailand's focus as the 2019 ASEAN chair, including on connectivity, on cyber and on border management. It's a very valuable opportunity to highlight the strength of the ASEAN-Australia relationship and to progress implementation of the outcomes from the very successful 2018 ASEAN-Australia Special Summit, which was held in Sydney.

**The PRESIDENT:** Senator Askew, a final supplementary question?

**Senator ASKEW** (Tasmania) (14:51): Could the minister also advise how Australia is working with ASEAN partners to counter transnational crime?

**Senator PAYNE** (New South Wales—Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Women) (14:51): That is a very important question. Countering transnational crime is one of Thailand's key priorities, and they are the current ASEAN chair. As part of the visit this week I want to demonstrate our strong support for that issue, so, as well as co-sponsoring a proposed East Asia Summit leaders statement, there will also be some important announcements I will be able to make on Australia's behalf.

I'm going to co-host a joint ministerial launch of the new ASEAN-Australia counter trafficking investment with Thai and Malaysian counterparts and the Secretary-General of ASEAN. That will enable us to highlight Australia's status as a very valued and longstanding partner for ASEAN and our shared commitment to countering human trafficking as well as other transnational crimes. I look forward to announcing a new investment, which targets transnational crime in the Mekong subregion, because our priority is to work with our regional partners—those I've named and others—to enhance border security and to counter transnational crime through that strengthened cooperation.

**Pensions and Benefits**

**Senator CAROL BROWN** (Tasmania) (14:52): My question is to the Minister representing the Minister for Government Services, Senator Ruston. In May, Anastasia McCardel—the mother of Bruce McCardel, who was in receipt of a disability pension until he died in November last year—received a call from a Centrelink officer and was told her son, Bruce McCardel, owed a debt of $6,744.52. Ms McCardel has said: I wanted to know how they thought Bruce would have worked his way through his paperwork when he actually was dead. What advice can the minister give Ms McCardel?

**Senator RUSTON** (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (14:53): I thank the senator for her question. Obviously, it would be inappropriate for me to make any comment about an individual case in this place. However, I am more than happy to take the matter on notice and provide the senator with a response after I've had discussions with the minister responsible for the Department of Human Services, Minister Robert, in the other place. However, I will not be making any public comments about a particular case in this case.
The PRESIDENT: Senator Brown, a supplementary question?

Senator CAROL BROWN (Tasmania) (14:53): I have a first supplementary question. Ms McCardel has said that the Centrelink officer:

… made out that I was responsible for those payments.

Does the minister consider Ms McCardel responsible for payments made to her deceased son?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (14:54): I do refer to my answer to the previous question. I am more than happy to take the question on notice and discuss with it my colleague in the other place, Minister Robert, because I don't believe it's appropriate for me to stand in this place and make a comment on a particular case on an allegation that you have made, but I am more than happy to take the matter up with Ms McCardel directly.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Brown, a final supplementary question?

Senator CAROL BROWN (Tasmania) (14:54): The government's robo-debt scheme is seriously malfunctioning with inaccuracy, cruel enforcement measures and a lack of oversight. When will the government stop targeting vulnerable Australians and admit that its harsh and unfair robo-debt scheme has failed?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (14:54): I thank the senator for her follow-up question. Without being specific about any particular cases, which I have indicated that I will not be prepared to do, broadly speaking, as the Minister for Families and Social Services, my focus is not on debt recovery. My focus is on two things. One is to make sure that my policies are developed in such a way so that people don't incur debt in the first place. The other is in providing a fair and sustainable social welfare system going into the future. This also includes ensuring that people get what they deserve and what they are entitled to. When somebody does receive a payment for which they are not entitled, there is a reasonable expectation in this place and a reasonable expectation in the wider Australian community that we will recover that debt. In certain circumstances, there is an argument where we are more than happy to speak to individuals who have specific circumstances to assist them through difficult times. 

(Time expired)

Mining Industry

Senator McMAHON (Northern Territory) (14:56): My question is to the Minister for Resources and Northern Australia. Could the minister update the Senate on any recent developments that could deliver further development of the gas industry and support local communities by ensuring long-term gas supply?

Senator CANAVAN (Queensland—Minister for Resources and Northern Australia and Deputy Leader of The Nationals in the Senate) (14:56): I thank Senator McMahon for that question and recognise her strong interest in seeing the Northern Territory develop. I know, as a regular traveller to the Territory, that it has been a difficult couple of years there, particularly in Darwin, with the wind-down of the very large INPEX project. The federal government is doing everything we can to bring new investment to the Northern Territory and more job opportunities there.

That's why it is great news that last week the Northern Territory government provided its first approvals for drilling in the Beetaloo Sub-basin, which is a part of the larger McArthur Basin. It is one of the most exciting resource opportunities in the nation. It is very exciting because it is Australia's first major shale, oil and gas project in Australia. Many would of us would have seen the great opportunities that have been provided in the United States as a result of the development of their shale resources. We have not yet developed any major shale resources here in Australia, but this first one could be very exciting for our nation. Our geologists estimate that the Beetaloo Sub-basin is as big as the Permian Basin in Texas, which has underpinned their resource development.

While there is still a lot of work to be done in exploring and assessing the quality of this resource, a lot of people are very excited.

It is great to see the Territory government doing that. It has great opportunities not just for the Northern Territory as a whole but also for local industries in this region, around that area and around the Daly Waters area. I caught up with the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association this week, who I think are in the gallery today. I see Chris Nott from the NTCA. We will need to make sure that any investment that comes from this exploration also benefits that industry as well, in terms of better infrastructure, greater opportunities, more jobs, a greater critical mass in our Northern Territory and cheaper energy as well.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The PRESIDENT: I would just like to acknowledge former Senator Baume in the gallery. I welcome him back to the Senate.
Honourable senators: Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Mining Industry

The PRESIDENT: Senator McMahon, a supplementary question?

Senator McMAHON (Northern Territory) (14:58): What is the gas potential of the Northern Territory? How will this important industry create more jobs in the Top End?

Senator CANAVAN (Queensland—Minister for Resources and Northern Australia and Deputy Leader of The Nationals in the Senate) (14:58): People who are smarter than me have estimated that something like 178,000 petajoules of gas is potentially there in the Beetaloo Sub-basin. What does it mean? To lay people like myself and probably most of the people listening or watching at the moment, that means there is around 200 years of supply. Around 200 years of east coast supply is potentially there in the Beetaloo Sub-basin. It is a huge resource. Estimates are that there would be something in the order of 6,500 jobs. It would have a real income impact of $2.8 billion for the Northern Territory and around $9 billion Australia for a whole. I want to play up here that it is not just the benefits to the Northern Territory. There are potentially liquids in the basin as well. We haven't really exploited a major liquid fuel basin since the Bass Strait in the 1960s. We have declining liquid fuel security. Opportunities like this are essential to help us secure our energy needs for Australia and secure the safety of our nation as well.

The PRESIDENT: Senator McMahon, a final supplementary question?

Senator McMAHON (Northern Territory) (14:59): What more can be done to meet Australia's long-term gas needs and reduce gas prices for Australian households and businesses?

Senator CANAVAN (Queensland—Minister for Resources and Northern Australia and Deputy Leader of The Nationals in the Senate) (14:59): The best thing that can be done is to get more supply. If we want to get energy prices down we have to get more supply of gas, electricity, or whatever the particular target may be, and that's what I'm focused on as resources minister to increase supply of these resources. That is why the federal government has supported the development of the Beetaloo Basin with an $8.4 million investment to help facilitate the approvals and ongoing works there in that region, that's something we announced in the last few months.

We have also signed a memorandum of understanding with the Northern Territory government to make sure we work together in the development of this resource for the benefit of Australia. In particular, we would love to see the development not just of a oil and gas industry onshore in the Northern Territory, but also the use of that oil and gas in places like Darwin where there's enormous potential to grow a manufacturing industry, with the fantastic Asian-facing port they have there in the Northern Territory. It's a very exciting development and the federal government is working in lock step with Northern Territorians to see development in their interests.

Senator Cormann: I ask that further questions be placed on the Notice Paper.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE: TAKE NOTE OF ANSWERS

Economy

Employment

Workplace Relations

Senator CICCONE (Victoria—Deputy Opposition Whip in the Senate) (15:01): I move:

That the Senate take note of the answers given by the Minister for Families and Social Services (Senator Ruston), the Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business (Senator Cash) and the Minister for Foreign Affairs (Senator Payne) to questions without notice asked by Senators Walsh, Ciccone and Sheldon today relating to household income, poverty and wages.

Early this afternoon a number of us senators had the pleasure of asking ministers across the bench about the state of our economy and also about the word that the government continues to refuse to use, which is wages—and I know Senator Watt also made mention of it a couple of times in his points of order.

I want to set the record straight about wages in Australia. Wages growth nationally had been at or below 2.5 per cent for almost the last five years. Real medium household incomes have declined by almost $500 in the latest year, according to the HILDA Survey released today. The percentage of the population living in relative poverty has increased to 10.4 per cent and more than one million Australians are underemployed. On top of that, we have over 700,000 Australians who are underemployed and youth unemployment is at a staggering 12 per cent. To top all that off, penalty rates continue to be cut under this government's watch.
As a former union official at the SDA, I know that the cuts to penalty rates have had a major impact on many retail workers, especially those in the hospitality sector that I know a number of other senators in this place had also previously represented. Those costs may not be a lot for many people in this place, but I know that it does matter to many of those members and retail workers where they've lost between $2,000 to $6,000 every year. Some will argue that that is good. It is good for business, because it will allow employers to employ more people. But recent research from the University of Wollongong shows the complete opposite. In fact, the number of shifts that have been offered under the recent cuts to penalty rates has not produced any extra jobs. In fact, earlier this year the council of small business chief executive, Peter Strong, described the cuts to penalty rates as a waste of time. He stated that, 'Not one single job will be created.'

Some will also argue that the world is changing and that it's becoming increasingly normal to work on Sundays. But surely the argument in favour of a robust and competitive environment, and providing compensation to workers, is something that must be reflected, especially when you are doing irregular hours outside of the normal Monday to Friday, nine to five workplace.

Regardless of what will be argued, and no doubt there will be others who will argue against this, for those who do work on Sundays and rely on those penalty rates they cannot survive. They definitely do need the lost wages that they were earning before the 2017 Fair Work Commission decision.

To top it all off, we've also had the Reserve Bank of Australia recently come out and say that, 'Our economy is weak.' Wages are stagnant and consumption growth is weak, and this has resulted in a sluggish growth in the economy under the coalition's watch. To quote the central bank, 'Wages growth has remained at record lows and the GDP growth has been well below trend over the year to the March quarter.' This is one of the other reasons the RBA has given: growth in household disposable income has remained low, and this has contributed to low growth in consumption, which was also well below average.

So, the Reserve Bank of Australia is also stating the obvious: wages are low, the economy is slow, yet the government, on the other side, seems to think there are no issues on how things are tracking. The RBA has also remarked that the growth in business investment was 'weaker than expected' and that the retail and transportation sectors had experienced well-below conditions. The government has vacated the field when it comes to fixing this mess—and it's made the mess, thanks to the policies set by the now Prime Minister and former Treasurer.

On top of stagnant wages growth, our unemployment level is also not looking too crash hot. Earlier this month, figures released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics showed that both unemployment and underemployment remain too high. Economic growth is slowing, and serious structural issues in the labour market continue under this government, with an increase in insecure work, soaring unemployment and growing levels of youth employment to top it off. (Time expired)

Senator SESELJA (Australian Capital Territory—Assistant Minister for Finance, Charities and Electoral Matters) (15:06): It's great to be able to respond to Senator Ciccone's motion to take note of answers. I want to pick up a couple of the points he made. I thought it was extraordinary, coming from a Labor senator, that he would decide that he wanted to talk about unemployment, because we know what the record of the Labor Party has been, not just when they were last in government but also the time before that and every time they're in government. We see unemployment going up under the Labor Party and unemployment coming down under coalition governments, and we've seen that again in recent years. We've seen strong employment growth under this Liberal-National government. It hasn't been helped by the Labor Party and those opposite. We haven't been helped in our quest to grow the economy, whether it is free trade agreements, whether it is cutting taxes, whether it is cutting red tape for small business or whether it is things like the instant asset write-off.

On most of those measures, it must be said, we have had either resistance or downright hostility from the Labor Party. We saw their attitude when it came to tax cuts. They talk about middle-income earners, middle-income families working hard. What is the Labor Party's attitude to middle-income families? Well, they think they should be paying more tax, and we saw that during the debate in this place and in the House of Representatives. We saw the sort of Vicar of Dibley approach from Anthony Albanese: the 'No, no, no, no, no, no—yes' approach, where they were against the tax cuts, until we had the number in the Senate, and then they were in favour of them. That's the Labor Party's view of cutting taxes for middle-income earners and middle-income families. It is, 'No, no, no, no, no, no—yes.' When did the 'yes' come? The 'yes' came when we had 39 votes here in the Senate, and they thought they might jump on the bandwagon; they didn't want to be voting against something that was going to go through anyway.

But in their heart of hearts, they don't support middle-income earners. And as they've been reflecting on their election loss and the disaster that was their election campaign, there have been more sensible voices in the Labor Party saying: 'Gee, maybe we didn't understand the aspirations of Australians. Maybe we didn't understand that...
when Australians work hard and sometimes make $80,000, $90,000 or $100,000 a year and are raising a family then in fact those people are not rich.’ No, those people are not rich. They are in fact hardworking Australians, trying to get ahead for their families. And what is the Labor Party's prescription? What did they take to the community for them? Well, it was higher income taxes and, for those who saved for their retirements, paying more tax when it came to the retiree tax.

But I want to focus on one aspect that I don't think has had enough attention. If you look at the analysis of who particularly rejected the Labor Party, whether in places like Queensland or in other parts of the country, it was in many low- and middle-income households and seats with many low- and middle-income earners and a higher proportion of renters. I wonder why that was. One of the other approaches of the Labor Party, when it came to middle-income earners and middle-income families, was to increase rents. They went to the people of Australia with a tax on houses which would have seen the rents of ordinary working Australians going up.

**Senator Bilyk:** That's rubbish.

**Senator SESELJA:** No, it's not rubbish. Senator Bilyk can say that it's rubbish all she likes but, when it came to Labor's housing tax, every analyst pointed out that higher rents would have been the outcome. SQM, who I think did some of the numbers, went city by city on what we would see in increases in rents. We saw them across the board. Under Labor's policy, rents in Perth would have gone up by $73 a week. In Brisbane, it was $91 a week. In Darwin, we would have had $15 extra a week. In Melbourne, it was $65 extra a week. It would have been $50 a week extra in Sydney, $56 a week extra in Adelaide and $44 a week extra in Hobart. In Canberra, it was around $56 extra a week. The prescription of the Labor Party was higher taxes on income, higher taxes on capital such as housing and higher taxes on those who had saved for their retirements. That doesn't help middle-income earners. It doesn't help people get out of poverty. All it does is crush their aspiration. It sees less jobs. Every time the Labor Party is in government there are fewer jobs, a slower economy and higher taxes, and ordinary Australians do it tough.

We're not going to be lectured to by the Labor Party. Wages growth is starting to pick up. It's starting to pick up through a range of factors which we've been working on. There is more work to do, but the prescription of $387 billion in higher taxes— *(Time expired)*

**Senator KITCHING** *(Victoria)* *(15:11):* This is not necessarily in order of their cruelty or ineptitude or their dismissive attitude towards the struggles of Australian workers. Why do I say that? Let me go to the Smith Family, a very well-known charitable foundation that looks after people who have disadvantaged circumstances. On their website, they detail individual cases. They have some sort of some of the children in Australia and the disadvantage in which they're living. The case I'm going to tell you of is about Alice.

From the moment they are born, there's an increased risk of disadvantaged children falling through the cracks. They often miss out on early learning experiences and opportunities that other children receive. When they start school, they're already behind. One in three children from Australia's most disadvantaged communities do not meet one or more key developmental milestones when they start school. Not all children get an equal start in life. Alice is just one of the one in six Australian children who are living in disadvantage today. Some families have experienced many generations of disadvantage. For others, there might be a recent change in health, employment or family relationship which has affected them so badly they are no longer able to meet the daily costs of living. With limited financial resources, the day-to-day life of a family changes significantly.

If the parents are working, they are more likely to be working irregular hours in insecure work. We know that in the last two terms of this government and in the beginning of this, its third term, they are more likely to be working irregular hours due to insecure work or travelling long distances for work. This puts pressure on other family members, including children, to keep the household running. Let's think about that. A primary-school-age child, like Alice, is having to help keep a household running. Teenagers may have to work to supplement the family income, leaving them with little or no time to study and with no-one there to help them if they're struggling with school work. Why? Again, their parents are working long, irregular hours.

With so much focus on just getting by, many of these kids don't have something as simple as a school bag, a complete uniform or the school books they need to make the most of their education. School excursions and activities become an impossible luxury. This singles them out amongst their peers, and they also have to deal with that—the fact that other children that they're at school with know that they can't go on the school excursion. They're often teased or left out by other students because they don't fit in.

We now have the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia survey, released today, showing that household medium income under this six-year government has flatlined. Yet, instead of looking at ways to increase the real wages of working Australians this government is more comfortable going back to their pet loves of attacking unions and low-paid workers. The HILDA report noted that since 2012 there has been basically no
growth, and this comes after a preceding period which saw very large increases in household incomes. There has been basically no growth in household income. Day after day, in every appearance, we see this government engage. They tie themselves in knots trying to defend the systematic robbing of workers' incomes and entitlements.

We've seen in the last few years under this government an increase in wage theft. We've seen it with Domino's Pizza, Michael Hill jewellers, 7-Eleven, Lush cosmetics group, Super Retail Group and, of course, more recently and infamously, George Calombaris. It finally took this government $7.8 million in unpaid workers' wages to actually consider that, yes, a $200,000 penalty was a bit light on. But let's remember also that—and I'll finish with this—Scott Morrison declared, when he was Treasurer, that record low-wage growth is the biggest challenge facing the Australian economy. (Time expired)

Senator FIERRAYANTI-WELLS (New South Wales) (15:16): I rise to respond to some of the comments that have been made and in particular to some of the comments that Senator Kitching has made in relation to the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia, the HILDA, survey. Can I remind those opposite that since the election we have delivered on our promise to build a better tax system and provide more tax relief to hardworking Australians. Not only have we delivered immediate tax relief for more than 10 million Australians but we've also provided structural reform that tackles the thief of bracket creep. That is good for the economy, for jobs and for confidence. And we have been focused on job creation. As Senator Cash reminded the Senate earlier, more than 1.3 million jobs have been created since we were elected, which is about 240,000 jobs a year, compared to just over 150,000 on average during the time when those opposite were in government.

We know the HILDA survey is a longitudinal study of Australian households, and it's been following the same households and individuals every year since 2011. There are some very important points that have come out of this year's survey. It shows that employment has picked up, especially for women. It's at the highest level ever since the survey. As I've indicated in relation to job creation in our economy, that is also. When you drill down into the survey, it shows that the female workforce participation is also at a record high, and so is participation of those aged 65 and over. More than 100,000 young Australians got a job in 2017, and this is the best financial year result on record.

This survey shows little net change in income inequality. It also finds that reliance on welfare is substantially lower. Indeed, under the coalition welfare payments, as a share of the working age population, are the lowest in a generation. It shows that the proportion of the population below the relative poverty lines has fluctuated over time, but in broad terms they are trending downwards. This is especially true since 2017 when over 12 per cent of the population was in relative poverty and by 2016 the proportion in poverty had fallen to 9.6 per cent.

It's quite hypocritical of those opposite to come in here. Senator Seselja reminded us of the record of those opposite. Those opposite can't quite accept that they lost the election. Why did they lose the election? They lost the election because the population rejected the dud policies of those opposite. They went to the election on a negative gearing policy, where you were asserting that ordinary Australians on $85,000 were somehow the top end of town—the classic Labor class warfare—and on franking credits, when you were going out there to hit hardworking retirees, and on assaulting the coal industry. No wonder that in New South Wales the swing against Joel Fitzgibbon was the largest in the state—almost 10 per cent. It was because of what you were doing.

Of course there were the quite Australians, that silent majority. They rejected your policies. They remembered the six years of fiscal vandalism when you were last sitting on the Treasury benches again, because of what you were proposing. One only has to look at what Senator Seselja referred to as 'the disasters'. Let's look at some of those disasters. In some seats, you had swings of five to 10 per cent. Hello! Does that not tell you something? Does that not tell you that the recipe that you were offering the Australian public was the wrong one? That's why they voted to return the coalition to government.

Senator SHELDON (New South Wales) (15:21): This is not my first speech. In 2015, as reported by the SMH's article '7-Eleven: a sweatshop on every corner', 7-Eleven underpaid by substantial amounts of money. They were paying as little as $10 an hour. A student from India with three degrees Mr Pendem came to Australia in 2011 and worked at three different stores under four franchisees in the Gold Coast region. Pendem still has nightmares from his time working at 7-Eleven, as reported. He worked long shifts of up to 16 hours without a proper break. He was robbed twice in the space of 18 hours by a man in a balaclava brandishing a long, serrated knife. Both times his boss scolded him for not fighting back to stop the robber taking $180. He says he recalled his boss saying: 'You should fight or throw the till at him—something, punch him. Why did you give him the money?'

Pendem was paid $10 an hour one store and $14 an hour at another store—which was well below the award rate of $24 an hour—including not being paid penalty rates. At the time, the employment minister Senator Cash said that this was 'a deplorable act' in the Sydney Morning Herald. On 13 June 2017, she said that the Turnbull government was providing the necessary resourcing and policies to ensure that it was not repeated. Again, today,
she said that there was no tolerance for exploitation, yet we've seen $25 million stolen by Michael Hill jewellers. We've seen celebrity chefs steal $8 million. Another celebrity chef stole nearly $1.6 million in just one year.

Wage theft is rampant under this government. They have one law for everybody else and another law for workers. If you walked into your business and went to the safe or the till that Mr Pendem talked about and stole $10 or $20 or $50 or $25 million, you would be in jail. You would not be allowed to run a business. You would not be allowed to work. You'd be taken out of society. You'd be held to account. After time and time again declaring it was serious about wage theft, including today, this government has done so little. It is rampant. Under this government, it is now a business model.

Poverty in this country is on the increase—insecure jobs, poorly paid job, jobs without rights. In this country, $6 billion in superannuation is owed. In New South Wales alone, over $2 billion is owed to people in underpayments and nonpayments of superannuation. It's billions upon billions of dollars. Where's the ensuring integrity bill for wage theft? Where's the ensuring integrity bill for Michael Hill jewellers? Where's the ensuring integrity bill for Caltex? For Domino's? Where are our billions of dollars that have been stolen out of this economy by people that are thieving and stealing from people in this economy?

Australians work hard in this country. They on the other side mightn't think that, because they're worried about the people that turn around and steal the money. They're the ones that are turning around and saying they are not going to hold them account. They're the ones saying, 'The business model won't be broken under our watch.' Quite clearly, this government is about a culture war.

To be lectured about a class war—what sort of class war is it when you take billions upon billions of dollars away from people in this country? That's the class war. What's the class war when you turn around and say to working Australians, 'Your representatives are the ones that are the problem,' not us, not the people we're defending, not the business community, those ones in the business community that are stealing. They are also robbing from decent businesses, from the many hardworking business people out there that pay the right money, that turn around and pay superannuation. What's happening on their watch? (Time expired)

Question agreed to.

Gambling

Senator DI NATALE (Victoria—Leader of the Australian Greens) (15:26): I move:

That the Senate take note of an answer given by the Minister for Finance (Senator Cormann) to a question without notice asked today.

In recent days, we've heard allegations of the most serious kind, allegations of blatant corruption involving members of this place—two ministers; one federal MP—and we heard from the former Border Force Commissioner that he was encouraged by members of parliament to help fast track visas and airport entry into Australia. That was entry for people who were known as international high rollers, people with bags of cash that they can spend gambling at Crown Casino. There were allegations of money being laundered, allegations of people who have very clear connections to criminal syndicates.

Just think about this. What we have is an allegation that members of this parliament were pressuring officials to fast track the entry of criminals into Australia so they could gamble at Crown Casino. We've heard allegations that they made pit stops on the way to Crown Casino—for sex workers, for drugs. These are people who have been facilitated into Australia by members of this government. Those allegations are being made by very senior members of the department. You think about that and compare it to the treatment of innocent people who have committed no crime, who come to this country seeking protection. They are people who are facing persecution and torture. We say they're not welcome here. We turn our backs on them. Worse still, we lock them up. We incarcerate them. We torture them. Yet what we're saying to people who are connected to international criminal activity is: 'Welcome do to Australia. Show us your money and you're in the door. We'll make a pit stop as well on the way to the casino, to indulge you, because you've got some cash in your wallet.'

It is everything that stinks about politics in this country. And today, to the great shame of the Labor Party, they backed in the Liberals by refusing to support an inquiry that would uncover what is going on with ministers of this government. We saw the Attorney-General refer this off to the Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity. How convenient! How very convenient to refer this off to a body that has no mandate to investigate the activity of ministers of the Crown, to refer this off to a body that can't look at some of the most senior public officials in the country. They've tried to take the heat out of the issue by sending it off to a committee, making sure that it can't look at where the action really is, and hoping that it disappears off the front pages. Well, we're not going to let that happen. We are going to pursue this until the people who are responsible have answered questions.
If there's any more evidence required for why we need a national anticorruption watchdog, this is it. We need a national anticorruption commission with broad based powers that can call in people to investigate these matters. But, instead, what have we got? We've got the cosy club. We've got a protection racket being run by both sides of politics. And Crown are smart about this. Of course Crown are smart. What do Crown do? They recruit people from both sides of politics. Crown are the retirement home for former Labor and Liberal members of parliament. If you're a Labor or a Liberal minister, you're put out to pasture on a good paddock at Crown Casino, out there spruiking for the industry, as an insurance policy so that when these sorts of allegations come up what we get is silence, a diversion, the classic bait-and-switch tactic that we saw earlier today. It's hardly a surprise. When hundreds of thousands of dollars in donations from the gambling industry is funnelled into the pockets of both sides of politics, what do you expect? It's a great investment. I don't call that a bet; I call it an investment—investing in both sides of politics so that they can continue to do what they do without scrutiny or transparency.

This is a dark day in Australian politics. Again, what we see is everything that's wrong right now, with both sides running a protection racket for an industry while ignoring vulnerable people.

Question agreed to.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE: ADDITIONAL ANSWERS

Agriculture Industry

Senator McKenzie (Victoria—Minister for Agriculture and Leader of The Nationals in the Senate) (15:32): In answering a question in question time, I made an unparliamentary remark that I would seek it withdraw. I'd like to apologise to the Senate. What I should have said was 'whingeing'. Thank you.

The President: Thank you, Senator McKenzie. I didn't hear that at the time. I appreciate that correction and withdrawal.

NOTICES

Presentation

Senator McCarthy to move on the next day of sitting:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that 23 August 2019 marks 53 years since the Gurindji people, led by Mr Lingiari, walked off Wave Hill station in the Northern Territory to protest their work and living conditions;
(b) recognises that the actions of the Gurindji, which began as a fight for wage justice, led to the recognition of Indigenous land rights;
(c) acknowledges 23 August 2019 as a day of significance in modern Australian history; and
(d) extends best wishes for the Freedom Festival that will be held at Kalkaringi from 23–25 August 2019, to celebrate and remember the remarkable achievements of the Gurindji and their supporters.

Senator McKenzie to move on the next day of sitting:

That the following bill be introduced: A Bill for an Act to provide for the appointment of an Inspector-General of Live Animal Exports, and for related purposes. Inspector-General of Live Animal Exports Bill 2019.

Senator Sheldon to move on the next day of sitting:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that:

(i) there is a worsening crisis in New South Wales (NSW) public hospitals, with regard to the safety of patients and staff; last year alone there were 465 assaults in NSW hospitals, and
(ii) on 1 August 2019, 22,000 health workers will take industrial action as part of their campaign to improve safety and staffing conditions in NSW public hospitals; and
(b) supports the Health Service Union in its endeavours for greater protection for patients and staff at NSW public hospitals;
(c) calls on the NSW Government to work with health workers to deliver these requests.

Senator Faruqi to move on the next day of sitting:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that:

(i) seventy-six percent of school enrolment growth in the 5 years to 2018 was in public schools,
(ii) across Australia, public schools have the greatest need for infrastructure such as classrooms, libraries, science labs or sporting facilities,
(iii) the Federal Government has established a $1.9 billion Capital Grants Program, that is reserved for private schools,
(iv) the only access public schools have to Federal infrastructure funding is the Local Schools Community Fund, which consists of a one-off allocation of $200,000 to each electorate, which will be shared with private schools and will fall well short of the needs of public schools, and

(v) public school students deserve world-class facilities; and

(b) calls on the Federal Government to establish a capital works fund dedicated to public schools of at least $300 million per year.

Senator Faruqi to move on the next day of sitting:

That there be laid on the table by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, by no later than 9.30 am on 1 August 2019, all draft and final versions, produced since July 2018, of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's climate change action strategy for the foreign aid program.

Senator Di Natale to move on the next day of sitting—

(1) That a select committee, to be known as the Select Committee into Jobs for the Future in Regional Areas, be established to inquire and report on the following matters:

(a) new industries and employment opportunities that can be created in and around thermal coal mining communities and regions:

   (i) as automated mining and transport technologies replace jobs over coming years, and

   (ii) as domestic production and exports decline to keep global warming to levels safe for human life at or below 1.5 degrees;

(b) the number of existing jobs in regional areas in clean energy technology and ecological services and their future significance;

(c) lessons learned from structural adjustments in the automotive, manufacturing and forestry industries and energy privatisation and their impact on labour markets and local economies;

(d) the importance of long-term planning to support the diversification of supply chain industries and local economies;

(e) measures to guide the transition into new industries and employment, including:

   (i) community infrastructure to attract investment and job creation,

   (ii) the need for a public authority to manage the transition,

   (iii) meaningful community consultation to guide the transition, and

   (iv) the role of vocational education providers, including TAFE, in enabling reskilling and retraining;

(f) the use of renewable resources in Northern Australia to build a clean energy export industry to export into Asia; and

(g) any related matters.

(2) That the committee present its final report on or before 4 December 2019.

(3) That the committee consist of 5 senators as follows:

   (a) 2 nominated by the Leader of the Government in the Senate;

   (b) 2 nominated by the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate; and

   (c) 1 nominated the Leader of the Australian Greens.

(4) That:

   (a) participating members may be appointed to the committee on the nomination of the Leader of the Government in the Senate, the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate or any minority party or independent senator; and

   (b) participating members may participate in hearings of evidence and deliberations of the committee, and have all the rights of members of the committee, but may not vote on any questions before the committee.

(5) If a member of the committee is unable to attend a meeting of the committee, that member may in writing to the chair of the committee appoint a participating member to act as a substitute member of the committee at that meeting, and if the member is incapacitated or unavailable, a letter to the chair of a committee appointing a participating member to act as a substitute member of the committee may be signed on behalf of the member by the leader or whip of the party or group on whose nomination the member was appointed to the committee.

(6) That the committee may proceed to the dispatch of business notwithstanding that not all members have been duly nominated and appointed and notwithstanding any vacancy.

(7) That the committee elect as chair the member nominated by the Leader of the Australian Greens and as deputy chair a member nominated by the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate.

(8) That the deputy chair shall act as chair when the chair is absent from a meeting of the committee or the position of chair is temporarily vacant.

(9) That the chair, or the deputy chair when acting as chair, may appoint another member of the committee to act as chair during the temporary absence of both the chair and deputy chair at a meeting of the committee.

(10) That 3 members of the committee constitute a quorum of the committee.
(11) That, in the event of an equally divided vote, the chair, or the deputy chair when acting as chair, have a casting vote.

(12) That the committee have power to appoint subcommittees consisting of 3 or more of its members, and to refer to any such subcommittee any of the matters which the committee is empowered to examine.

(13) That the committee and any subcommittee have power to send for and examine persons and documents, to move from place to place, to sit in public or in private, notwithstanding any prorogation of the Parliament or dissolution of the House of Representatives, and have leave to report from time to time its proceedings, the evidence taken and such interim recommendations as it may deem fit.

(14) That the committee be provided with all necessary staff, facilities and resources and be empowered to appoint persons with specialist knowledge for the purposes of the committee with the approval of the President.

(15) That the committee be empowered to print from day to day such documents and evidence as may be ordered by it, and a daily Hansard be published of such proceedings as take place in public.

**Senator Waters** to move on the next day of sitting:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that:

(i) the ability to secure finance and insurance is a crucial step in the development of large-scale resources projects, providing protection for developers, government and the community,

(ii) Suncorp last week, announced that it would no longer invest in, finance or insure new thermal coal mines and power plants, and will not underwrite any existing thermal coal projects after 2025,

(iii) QBE Insurance announced in March that, from 1 July 2019, it would no longer directly invest in or insure new thermal coal projects and would stop underwriting existing operations from 2030,

(iv) all Australian–based insurance companies have now effectively committed to removing coal from their investment portfolios, and

(v) many major multi-national re-insurance providers, including Allianz, AXA, Swiss Re, Munich Re and Zurich, have also restricted investment in, and underwriting of, thermal coal projects; and

(b) calls on the Federal Government to:

(i) pay attention to the financial signals and recognise that thermal coal projects are increasingly unviable, and

(ii) commit to action to progress a rapid and just transition to clean and renewable energy sources for a low-carbon economy.

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

That the Senate—

(a) notes that:

(i) the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission has released the final report in its Digital Platforms Inquiry, and

(ii) it has emphasised the importance of the public broadcasters and recommended stable and adequate funding “in recognition of their role in addressing the risk of under-provision of public interest journalism that generates broad benefits to society”; and

(b) calls on the Federal Government to:

(i) move from triennial to quinennial funding cycles for the public broadcasters,

(ii) fully restore the cuts to funding since 2014, and

(iii) guarantee a minimum level of funding across the quinennial cycles.

**Senator Hanson** to move on the next day of sitting:

That the Senate—

(a) acknowledges that:

(i) the family is the basis of society and, in most cases, the best place to raise children,

(ii) policies that encourage the formation of stable families should be supported,

(iii) the freedom to choose whether a parent can stay at home or pursue work is vital to the formation of stable families, and

(iv) families would benefit if married couples were given the choice to file their income tax returns separately, or to file a joint tax return, a practice known as income splitting; and

(b) calls on the Senate to debate the benefits of giving married couples the option to prepare and file joint income returns;

(c) calls on the Federal Government to cost a change to the income tax system which would permit joint filing of tax returns by married couples.

**Senators Patrick** and **Lambie** to move on the next day of sitting:
That the following matter be referred to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee for inquiry and report by 28 February 2020:

(a) accusations of Crown Casino's links to organised crime, money laundering, improper activity by consular officials, tampering with poker machines, and domestic violence and drug trafficking on Crown property, including:
   (i) the allegations raised in the House of Representatives on 18 October 2017 by the Member for Clark (the then-Member for Denison), Mr Andrew Wilkie, concerning Crown Casino,
   (ii) Mr Wilkie's referral to the Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission on 24 July 2019 of the Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation and Victoria Police, and
   (iii) reports by Nine newspapers and 60 Minutes in July 2019 concerning alleged criminal activity and misconduct involving Crown Casino;
(b) the actions taken or omissions made by state and federal agencies in responding to these allegations, and in particular the actions of the Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation and the Victoria Police;
(c) the relationship between Crown Casino and governments, including the role of former members of state and federal parliaments; and
(d) any related matters.

Senator Seselja to move on the next day of sitting:

That, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, the following proposed work be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for consideration and report as soon as reasonably possible:

- Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation's Sydney Consolidation Project
- Australian Taxation Office proposed fit-out of leased premises in Moonee Ponds, Victoria
- National Museum of Australia Proposed Gallery Development Stage 1: Life in Australia
- Department of Defence, Point Wilson Waterside Infrastructure Remediation Project, Point Wilson, Victoria

Senator McKim to move on the next day of sitting—

(1) That a select committee, to be known as the Select Committee on Integrity, be established to inquire into and report on the integrity of government administration, with particular reference to:
   (a) the adequacy and performance of existing integrity measures including, but not limited to:
(i) the Statement of Ministerial Standards, and
(ii) the Lobbyist Code and Register of Lobbyists;
(b) the funding, functions and performance of Commonwealth integrity agencies;
(c) the adequacy of government responses to Senate committee reports;
(d) the adequacy of government responses to Senate orders for the production of documents;
(e) the operation of the Commonwealth Procurement Framework;
(f) the administration of the Freedom of Information Act 1982 legislation;
(g) any proposals to strengthen the integrity of government administration; and
(h) any related matters.
(2) That the committee present its final report on or before the third sitting day of 2021.
(3) That the committee consist of 8 senators, as follows:
   (a) 2 nominated by the Leader of the Government in the Senate;
   (b) 2 nominated by the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate;
   (c) 1 nominated by the Leader of the Australian Greens; and
   (d) 3 nominated by minor party and independent senators.
(4) That:
   (a) participating members may be appointed to the committee on the nomination of the Leader of the Government in the Senate, the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate or any minority party or independent senator; and
   (b) participating members may participate in hearings of evidence and deliberations of the committee, and have all the rights of members of the committee, but may not vote on any questions before the committee.
(5) That 4 members of the committee constitute a quorum of the committee.
(6) That the committee may proceed to the dispatch of business notwithstanding that not all members have been duly nominated and appointed and notwithstanding any vacancy.
(7) That the committee elect as chair one of the members nominated by the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and as deputy chair one of the members nominated by the Leader of the Australian Greens or by minor party and independent senators.
(8) That the deputy chair shall act chair when the chair is absent from a meeting of the committee or the position of chair is temporarily vacant.
(9) That, in the event of an equality of voting, the chair, or the deputy chair when acting as chair, have a casting vote.
(10) That the committee have power to appoint subcommittees consisting of 3 or more of its members, and to refer to any such subcommittee any of the matters which the committee is empowered to consider.
(11) That the committee and any subcommittee have power to send for and examine persons and documents, to move from place to place, to sit in public or in private, notwithstanding any prorogation of the Parliament or dissolution of the House of Representatives, and have leave to report from time to time its proceedings and the evidence taken and such interim recommendations as it may deem fit.
(12) That the committee be provided with all necessary staff, facilities and resources and be empowered to appoint persons with specialist knowledge for the purposes of the committee with the approval of the President.
(13) That the committee be empowered to print from day to day such papers and evidence as may be ordered by it, and a daily Hansard be published of such proceedings as take place in public.

Senator Waters to move on the next day of sitting:
(1) That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent this resolution having effect.
(2) That the Landholders' Right to Refuses (Gas and Coal) Bill 2015 be restored to the Notice Paper and consideration of the bill resume at the stage reached in the 45th Parliament.

Senator Siewert to move on the next day of sitting:
That the Senate—
(a) notes that:
(i) the majority of ParentsNext participants are women,
(ii) the Australian Human Rights Commission has stated that ParentsNext is not compatible with human rights, and
(iii) despite recommendations in the report of the Community Affairs References Committee inquiry into ParentsNext (the Senate inquiry), some participants are still being misled into believing that privacy waivers are compulsory, and pressured into signing them or risk loss of their income;
(b) recognises that the overwhelming evidence presented to the Senate inquiry into the program recommended that ParentsNext not continue in its current form; and
(c) calls on the Federal Government to urgently sanction providers who are pressuring program participants into signing privacy waivers, and implement the recommendations of the Senate inquiry.

**Senator Siewert** to move on the next day of sitting:
That the following matter be referred to the Community Affairs References Committee for inquiry and report by 4 December 2019:

Centrelink’s compliance program, with specific reference to:
(a) the ongoing impact of the Federal Government’s automated debt collection processes upon current and past income support recipients;
(b) data-matching techniques used by Centrelink, including limitations and uncertainties of data-matching techniques and error-handling processes;
(c) the handling of under-payment errors, including the number of payments identified and made through data-matching following an under-payment error;
(d) the use of real-time wages data and other techniques to prevent overpayment;
(e) the capacity and adequacy of Centrelink and the Department of Human Services to deliver the program, including the use of contract staff and the impact of staff performance targets on the program;
(f) the error rates in the issuing of initial letters and debt notices, the causes of these errors and what steps are routinely taken when errors are identified;
(g) the procedures that have been put in place to prevent future errors;
(h) the number of initial letters and debt notices sent out and the number of debts that have been recovered;
(i) the review process and appeals process for debt notices, including the number of reviews and appeals undertaken;
(j) the use and legality of the debt collection processes used by Centrelink and the Department of Human Services;
(k) the use of debt collectors in the compliance program; and
(l) the cost of the compliance program to date, including the projected and actual amount raised from the program.

**DOCUMENTS**

**Department of the Environment and Energy**

**Order for the Production of Documents**

**Senator RICE** (Victoria) (15:33): I move:

That there be laid on the table by the Minister representing the Minister for the Environment, by no later than 9am on 31 July 2019, the following documents as listed on the "indexed list of files created between 1 January and 30 June 2018" by the Department of the Environment and Energy:

(a) 18/003561 – [Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation / Strategic Initiatives / New South Wales] Field Work Trip Plans – NSW;
(b) 18/004410 – [Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation / Strategic Initiatives / New South Wales] Monaro Farm Visit and Engagement; and

Question agreed to.

**MOTIONS**

**Moon Lake Investments**

**Senator WHISH-WILSON** (Tasmania) (15:33): I move:

(1) That the Senate—
(a) notes that:
   (i) on 23 February 2016, the then Treasurer, the Honourable Scott Morrison MP, announced his decision to approve the acquisition of the land and assets of the Tasmanian Land Company (TLC), including the Van Diemen’s Land (VDL) Company, by Moon Lake Investments,
   (ii) in announcing the approval, the then Treasurer noted the commitment by Moon Lake to create an additional 95 jobs and to invest an additional $100 million into VDL farms, including for ecological restoration; and that, given these considerations, inter alia, he was satisfied that Moon Lake’s acquisition of TLC was not contrary to the national interest,
   (iii) in June 2019, the media reported extracts of a letter written by senior managers at VDL to Moon Lake seeking indemnity from any animal welfare or workplace health and safety loss or damage, and citing inadequate repairs and maintenance as the reason for this request, and
   (iv) Moon Lake has reportedly invested less than $20 million of the promised additional $100 million into VDL farms; and
(b) calls upon the Treasurer to impose a new condition on Moon Lake, under section 74 of the Foreign Acquisitions and Takeovers Act 1975, compelling the company to:

(i) make public the details on how it intends to invest the outstanding amount of the promised $100 million into VDL farms by 31 August 2019, and

(ii) invest the outstanding amount of the promised $100 million into VDL farms by 31 July 2021.

(2) That a message be sent to the House of Representatives seeking its concurrence in this resolution.

Senator DUNIAM (Tasmania—Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries and Assistant Minister for Regional Tourism) (15:33): I seek leave to make a short statement.

The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

Senator DUNIAM: The Treasurer's powers under the Foreign Acquisitions and Takeovers Act 1975 do not extend to compelling the public disclosure of this information.

Senator WHISH-WILSON (Tasmania) (15:34): I seek leave to make a short statement.

The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

Senator WHISH-WILSON: When our current Prime Minister was Treasurer and he announced the details of this sale, he said it was in the public interest because Moon Lake Investments had made an undertaking that they would spend $100 million on this iconic business and piece of land in Tasmania's north-west, indeed the biggest dairy in the country. They have not met those undertakings. Indeed, there have been leaked allegations—very serious allegations—by the staff of the company asking to be indemnified against underinvestment in the business and the potential ramifications that has for animal welfare issues and cruelty on the farm, not to mention underinvestment in Tasmanian devil environmental mitigation and the employment of locals in your neck of the woods, Senator Duniam.

This is not good enough. Our foreign investment laws aren't worth the paper they're written on if they're not enforceable. It is possible for this to be enforced. There is a pathway forward there. I ask the Senate to support this motion.

The PRESIDENT: The question is that the motion moved by Senator Whish-Wilson be agreed to.

The Senate divided. [15:39]

(Ayes ................... 12
Noes ................... 39
Majority ............... 27)

AYES

Di Natale, R
Hanson, P
Lambie, J
Rice, J
Siewert, R (teller)
Waters, LJ

Faruqi, M
Hanson-Young, SC
McKim, NJ
Roberts, M
Steele-John, J
Whish-Wilson, PS

NOES

Abetz, E
Askew, W
Bernardi, C
Brockman, S
Ciccone, R
Davey, P
Farrell, D
Gallagher, AM
Green, N
Kitching, K
McDonald, S
McMahon, S
Paterson, J
Remnick, G
Ryan, SM
Seselja, Z
Smith, DA
Stoker, AJ
Van, D

Antic, A
Ayres, T
Bragg, AJ
Chandler, C
Colbeck, R
Duniam, J
Fierravanti-Wells, C
Gallagher, KR
Hume, J
McAllister, J
McGrath, J
O'Sullivan, MA
Pratt, LC
Ruston, A
Scarr, P
Sheldon, A
Smith, M
Urquhart, AE (teller)
Walsh, J
Question negatived.

**Mining**

**Senator DEAN SMITH** (Western Australia—Chief Government Whip in the Senate) (15:42): At the request of Senators McDonald, Rennick, McGrath, Scarr and Stoker, I move:

That the Senate—

(a) notes:

(i) that the vast majority of Queenslanders support the Carmichael Mine and opening of the Galilee Basin, and

(ii) the billions of dollars in royalties that the resources sector delivers to Queensland (Qld), building roads, schools and hospitals for all Queenslanders; and

(b) condemns the actions and hypocrisy of extremist protestors, including:

(i) a husband and wife who, despite being arrested nine times combined, blocked trucks leaving a concrete business that had urgent works to complete at a local nursing home,

(ii) a 20 year old unemployed protestor who, despite growing up and living in his family's lavish waterside mansion on the Sunshine Coast, glued himself to a Brisbane central business district road, causing disruptions for tens of thousands of Qld workers,

(iii) the numerous protestors who have attacked and disrupted small businesses which have contracts for the construction of the Carmichael Mine and are employing hard-working Queenslanders, and

(iv) the comments made by Brisbane City Council Greens councillor, Cr Jonathan Sri, who has praised the “effective tactics” used by the Extinction Rebellion protestors, noting particularly that “As a politician I'm telling you that supporting disruptive civil disobedience and general strikes is probably your best option”.

**Senator WATERS** (Queensland) (15:42): Mr President, I seek leave to make a short statement.

The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

**Senator WATERS:** This is another Adani-sponsored motion by the coalition. It has so many falsities in it that it's hard to know where to start. It asserts that the majority of Queenslanders support the opening up of the Galilee. They actually support real, clean energy jobs that won't make them sick with black lung, will help keep power bills down and will save what's left of the reef. The motion then talks about billions of dollars in royalties. Adani has been given a royalty holiday, as well as all of the fossil fuel subsidies that you provide them, along with their mates. It goes to show what those donations that are made by the fossil fuel sector to both sides of parliament can buy you. This motion condemns Queenslanders, who are protesting in demand for a safe climate and begging this government to listen to climate science. Instead of condemning your own constituents, why don't you actually seek some scientific briefings? Please, take action on the climate crisis before it's too late for all of us.

**Senator WATT** (Queensland) (15:43): Mr President, I seek leave to make a short statement.

The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

**Senator WATT:** Unfortunately, this is yet another example of the culture war that the Senate has become for the extremes of the political debate, being the far right of the LNP on the one hand and the far left of the Greens on the other hand. Last week we saw it with the Greens moving their culture war motions, and now we have the LNP doing the same thing. The only people who lose out of this and the only victims in this are coal communities and coalmining workers. We know that it is the LNP that has condemned coalmining workers to poor mining safety, casualisation and labour hire. They are keeping their living standards low. And we know that it's the Greens who want to shut down all coalmining, denying those communities of their livelihoods as well. These issues are important. They deserve better than stunt motions from both extremes of parliament. We don't support unlawful protests, but we do recognise a role for civil disobedience. That's why we ask that the motion be split.

**Senator ROBERTS** (Queensland) (15:45): I seek leave, Mr President, to make a short statement.

The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

**Senator ROBERTS:** One of the first things I did in 2016 after becoming a senator was ask Adani what it needed to get the project going. We checked the water, we checked the farmers and we checked the Indigenous. We will be supporting this motion because of the primacy of energy; humanitarian grounds, because it will drag hundreds of millions of people out of poverty in India; it will enable business with India that has been destroyed because of the policies of the Greens; it'll open the Galilee Basin, which will do wonders for the state and the
country. After years of Greens lies with emotive nonsense, we commend the LNP senators for standing up for our state.

Senator Watt interjecting—
Senator McAllister interjecting—
Senator McKim interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Order, Senators McKim, McAllister and Watt! Senator Watt, take a breath when I say your name. Senator Siewert.

Senator Siewert: On a point of order: could you please ask Senator Roberts to withdraw his accusing the Greens of lying. It is unparliamentary.

The PRESIDENT: I didn't hear that. I was consulting one of the managers at the time about splitting the motion. It is unparliamentary to accuse a senator of lying, but it is not necessarily—

Senator ROBERTS: I withdraw.

The PRESIDENT: I remind senators that the rule is strictly about alluding to other senators. The question is that paragraph (a) of matter No. 61 be agreed to.

The Senate divided. [15:48]
(The President—Senator Ryan)

Ayes ....................44
Noes ....................9
Majority ...............35

AYES

Abetz, E
Askew, W
Bernardi, C
Brockman, S
Chandler, C
Ciccone, R
Davey, P
Fawcett, DJ
Gallacher, AM
Green, N
Hume, J
McAllister, J
McGrath, J
O'Sullivan, MA
Pratt, LC
Roberts, M
Ryan, SM
Seselja, Z
Sinodinos, A (teller)
Smith, M
Urquhart, AE
Walsh, J
Antic, A
Ayres, T
Bragg, AJ
Canavan, MJ
Chisholm, A
Colbeck, R
Duniam, J
Fierravanti-Wells, C
Gallagher, KR
Hanson, P
Lambie, J
McDonald, S
McMahon, S
Paterson, J
Rennick, G
Ruston, A
Scarr, P
Sheldon, A
Smith, DA
Stoker, AJ
Van, D
Watt, M

NOES

Di Natale, R
Hanson-Young, SC
Rice, J
Steele-John, J
Whish-Wilson, PS
Faruqi, M
McKim, NJ
Siewert, R (teller)
Waters, LJ

Question agreed to.

The PRESIDENT (15:55): The question is that paragraph (b) of motion No. 61 be agreed to.

The Senate divided. [15:55]
(The President—Senator Ryan)

Ayes ....................32
Noes ....................29
Majority ...............3
**AYES**

Antic, A  
Bernardi, C  
Bragg, A J  
Canavan, MJ  
Colbeck, R  
Duniam, J  
Fierravanti-Wells, C  
Lambie, J  
McGrath, J  
McMahon, S  
Paterson, J  
Reynick, G  
Ruston, A  
Scarr, P  
Sinodinos, A  
Stoker, AJ

**NOES**

Ayres, T  
Bilyk, CL  
Brown, CL  
Chisholm, A  
Di Natale, R  
Faruqi, M  
Gallagher, KR  
Hanson-Young, SC  
Lines, S  
McKim, NJ  
Rice, J  
Siewert, R  
Steele-John, J  
Urquhart, AE (teller)  
Waters, LJ  
Whish-Wilson, PS

**PAIRS**

Abetz, E  
Cash, MC  
Cormann, M  
Fifield, MP  
Hughes, H  
Reynolds, L  
McCarthy, M  
Farrell, D  
Cormann, M  
Wong, P  
Hughes, H  
Polley, H  
Reynolds, L  
Keneally, KK

Question agreed to.

**DOCUMENTS**

**Welfare Reform**

**Order for the Production of Documents**

**Senator SIEWERT** (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (15:57): I move:

That there be laid on the table by the Minister for Families and Social Services, by 1 August 2019, a list of the people and organisations who form part of the Cashless Debit Card community reference groups, in each of the Cashless Debit Card trial sites.

**Senator DUNIAM** (Tasmania—Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries and Assistant Minister for Regional Tourism) (15:57): I seek leave to make a short statement.

The **PRESIDENT**: Leave is granted for one minute.

**Senator DUNIAM**: Releasing a list of the people and organisations who form the CDC community reference groups may breach their privacy and place undue community pressure on individuals.

The **PRESIDENT**: The question is that motion No. 60 be agreed to.

The Senate divided. [15:59]

(The President—Senator Ryan)

Ayes ...................... 30
Noes ......................32
Majority ................2

AYES

Ayres, T
Brown, CL
Chisholm, A
Di Natale, R
Faruqi, M
Gallagher, KR
Hanson-Young, SC
Lambie, J
McAllister, J
Pratt, LC
Sheldon, A
Smith, M
Sterle, G
Walsh, J
Watt, M

Bilyk, CL
Carr, KJ
Ciccone, R
Dodson, P
Gallacher, AM
Green, N
Kitching, K
Lines, S
McKim, NJ
Rice, J
Siewert, R
Steele-John, J
Urquhart, AE (teller)
Whish-Wilson, PS

NOES

Antic, A
Bernardi, C
Bragg, A J
Canavan, MJ
Colbeck, R
Duniam, J
Ferrvanti-Wells, C
Hume, J
McGrath, J
McMahon, S
Paterson, J
Rennick, G
Ruston, A
Scarr, P
Sinodinos, A
Stoker, AJ

Askew, W
Birmingham, SJ
Brockman, S
Chandler, C
davey, P
Fawcett, DJ
Hanson, P
McKenzie, B
O’Sullivan, MA
Payne, MA
Roberts, M
Ryan, SM
Seselja, Z
Smith, DA (teller)
Van, D

PAIRS

Farrell, D
Keneally, KK
McCarthy, M
O’Neill, D
Polley, H
Wong, P

Cash, MC
Reynolds, L
Abetz, E
 Fifield, MP
Hughes, H
Cormann, M

Question negatived.

MOTIONS

United Nations Parliamentary Assembly

Senator DI NATALE (Victoria—Leader of the Australian Greens) (16:01): I ask that general business notice of motion No. 62 standing in my name for today relating to the establishment of the United Nations Parliamentary Assembly be taken as a formal motion.

The PRESIDENT: Is there any objection to this motion being taken as formal? There is. That concludes the discovery of formal business.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Family Law

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Sterle) (16:02): Order! I inform the Senate that at 8.30 am today seven proposals were received in accordance with standing order 75. The question of which proposal would be submitted to the Senate was determined by lot. As a result, I inform the Senate that the following letter has been received from Senator Roberts:
Pursuant to standing order 75, I propose that the following matter of public importance be submitted to the Senate for discussion:

That Australia's failed family law system is contributing to up to 21 male suicides and one female murder a week, and must be urgently fixed.

Is the proposal supported?

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

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT: I understand that informal arrangements have been made to allocate specific times to each of the speakers in today's debate. With the concurrence of the Senate, I shall ask the clerks to set the clocks accordingly.

Senator ROBERTS (Queensland) (16:03): As a servant to the people of Queensland and Australia, I want to speak on this matter of public importance, that Australia's failed family law system is contributing to at least 21 male suicides and one female murder a week, and must be urgently fixed. One Nation is deeply concerned about the large number of avoidable deaths through suicide and homicide that are directly related to the broken system of family law that currently is a blight on the Australian legal system.

Men on the tail end of broken relationships are at the end of their tether when they have limited or no access to their children as the result of the confusion, excessive costs and long delays that are a feature of the family law system in most of Australia. Many of these men are not able to cope and become further victims of this oppressive system by taking their own lives as a final solution to the unbearable processes of marital breakdown and the forced tribulations of dealing with the family law court.

There are multiple issues raised in this matter for discussion, ranging through the financial dramas of property settlements and child support, custody, guardianship and issues related to access to any children of the relationship. It is this latter issue that often leads to the most grief for fathers when the courts seem to take an often biased view of the father's needs and accept often unsubstantiated allegations aimed at limiting the father's access to his children.

The current system is broken, and it needs to be fixed. The Australian Law Reform Commission, in their recently released report, has suggested that the Family Court merge with the Federal Circuit Court so that all these issues can be dealt with at the same place. The current practices of the Family Court have resulted in lengthy delays, dragging out an already-flawed process. It can take up to 18 months or beyond to get to trial in the Family Court, and even longer to receive a decision of the court. Damaged relationships are being destroyed by the time and expense of resolving disputes in the Family Court. Domestic violence orders, sought often through the state systems, are given out in many instances on the basis of fabricated complaints made for the specific purpose of being used as a weapon to deny fathers access to their kids. Money-grubbing lawyers acting for women do this for leverage against fathers in divorce proceedings, either for revenge or to get more money in the property split.

Don't get me wrong: we recognise that domestic violence is real. But it operates in both directions. The Australian Law Reform Commission, in their recently released report, has suggested that the Family Court merge with the Federal Circuit Court so that all these issues can be dealt with at the same place. The current practices of the Family Court have resulted in lengthy delays, dragging out an already-flawed process. It can take up to 18 months or beyond to get to trial in the Federal Circuit Court—around $30,000. An example of a more-efficient system is the Family Court of Western Australia—a state court, separate from the Family Court of Australia. The model as operating in Western Australia is considered much more efficient, utilising magistrates with wide-ranging family-oriented powers. In that state there is a three-month turnaround on decisions, and the system is much cheaper in operation. User satisfaction is high there, too.

Suicide is a terrible cause of death of men and women in Australia, but mostly of men. Of 1,966 coroner-certified suicides in 2017, where psychosocial factors contribute, 1,465 were of men and 501 of women. Suicide is the leading cause of death of people under the age of 45, with the number of men committing suicide three times that of females. There were 420 persons who suicided as a direct connection with disruption of family by separation or divorce. This is too many people who have taken their own lives because of the broken family law system that could not relieve their pain. These numbers are shameful. They relate to real people who should be still alive, whose needs for help were not met. The system needs to be fixed.

Then there are the stories of true violence as a result of anger, generated in the area of domestic violence and not effectively dealt with through the Family Court. These were homicides—deliberate killing. In 2018 there were 375 reported homicides in Australia. Of these 375 murders, 140 related to domestic violence break downs; 75 women were killed as a result of family breakdown. However, 65 deaths were of males. Where are the protections that should have prevented these terrible deaths—children left without a parent? Parents losing their adult children? These problems are so widespread. What about the grandmothers losing their daughters and their sons? Every time I go into the community I hear it as a major concern for people in the street and at all levels of our community. A better family law system will support and protect those who are affected by family violence and those vulnerable to its intrusive and coercive decisions. One Nation supports a complete review of the family law
system to ensure an end to the unnecessary deaths through suicides and murder in the context of broken family relationships.

Senator CHANDLER (Tasmania) (16:08): I rise today to speak on this matter of public importance as tabled by Senator Roberts regarding the family law system and in doing so I highlight that this matter touches on three very important issues close to my heart and close to the hearts of many Australians and indeed close to the hearts of this government. This government recognises that separation from a partner and a family breakdown can be among the most stressful and difficult circumstances in people's lives. As part of our constant consideration of these incredibly important issues and their interaction, if Senator Roberts could provide the government with the source of his statement, that would be greatly appreciated.

The first of the issues that Senator Roberts's matter of public importance touches on is that of mental health and ensuring that Australians who are suffering from mental health issues have the best possible access to care. The second of these is our family law system, and I intend to outline today just how the Morrison coalition government is strengthening and simplifying our family law system. And the third and perhaps most important issue is domestic and family violence. Again, I rise today to outline what our government is doing to both support these individuals and families who may have experienced domestic violence and, more importantly, invest in preventative measures and initiatives to ensure that domestic violence doesn't occur in the first place.

The Morrison government has made the mental health of Australians a priority. The tragedy of suicide touches far too many Australian families and, as Senator Roberts outlined, it is the leading cause of death of our young people. The statistics he mentioned in his speech just then are tragic. It is absolutely tragic that this many people are taking their lives each year. We as a government take the mental health of Australians very seriously and, more than any other previous government, we are seeking to safeguard the mental wellbeing of Australians so that we don't see these statistics climb.

We're delivering more frontline services that meet the specific needs of local communities through a record $1.45 billion investment in our primary health networks. We are providing long-term support for local psychologists, mental health nurses and social workers, ensuring that the right services are available in the right place and at the right time. In addition to our historic mental health package in the 2019-20 budget, the government has invested $79 million over the next four years in a range of national suicide prevention leadership and support activities and programs, including those that focus on Australian men who may be at high risk of suicide, as outlined by Senator Roberts. These projects include specific regional approaches to suicide prevention and are being implemented by primary health networks as part of their responsibilities for providing locally tailored mental health and suicide prevention support projects. They include at-risk and hard-to-reach groups.

Might I say, coming from Tasmania, it pleases me greatly to see this government taking so seriously the mental health of those people living in the regions. I have seen all too often in my own state just what the impact of mental health can be on a small community, particularly in the tragic event that a suicide occurs and the ripple effect that can have not only on the family impacted but also on the friends. In a small local area it's only magnified. So I'm very happy to see we're making progress in this area.

The government is also funding the implementation and evaluation of 12 suicide prevention trials in identified priority areas, again being led by primary health networks, to improve our understanding of what strategies are most effective in preventing suicide at a local level and for at-risk populations. Further, we are improving accessibility to mental health services by funding a range of telephone and online digital mental health services, either free of charge or at a low cost. These range from telephone and web counselling services through to web based treatment programs and peer forums. These include specific services for men.

In raising that today, as Senator Roberts said, we are seeing more often that mental health is impacting on young people. We know that young people are very connected people. They will not necessarily go to the doctor and have a face to face if they're having mental health problems, but sometimes something as simple as being able to pick up the phone or send a text message to someone and say, 'I'm not coping right now; I need a bit of a hand,' is really valuable. So I'm really happy that we are investing in both those traditional ways of dealing with mental health issues but also in some more technologically savvy ways. I think that is a really important way to reach out to young people struggling with their mental health.

The second issue that Senator Roberts touched on in his speech was family law reform. I have a law degree and firmly believe, through my study of the law, that it is only ever effective when the law is easily understood and when it can be easily navigated by those people who need to use it. So it's absolutely valid for us to be discussing today some of the troubles that people might have in navigating the family law system. This coalition government is committed to ongoing improvements to our family law system, to ensure that they help families separate in a safe, supportive and timely way.
Indeed, we have already committed to delivering a structural reform of the federal family law courts to help end the unnecessary costs and delays for thousands of Australian families that arise from a split federal Family Court system. This will allow families to have their matters dealt with as efficiently as possible and under a single set of rules and procedures. They will reduce the backlog of matters before the family law courts and drive timely, cheaper and more consistent resolution of disputes for Australian families. Our reform will create, in effect, a single point of entry into the family law jurisdiction of the Federal Court system and create a consistent pathway for Australian families to have their family law disputes dealt with in the Federal Court. With any hope, this vitally needed structural reform will allow many more additional family law cases to be resolved each and every year.

Not only has the government made a real commitment to review the court system that deals with family law matters but we also commissioned the first comprehensive review of the family law framework in more than 40 years. That review is currently under careful consideration by this government and front of mind in that consideration is how we can ensure the family law system works for Australian families, keeps them safe, and, as I said, allows for efficient and timely separations.

Above and beyond this review of the family law framework, you don't have to look far to see the efforts this government has taken to assist families that are separating. To date, this has included the establishment and extension of specialist domestic violence units and health justice partnerships; providing legal and social support assistance to vulnerable women experiencing family violence; establishing and extending the family advocacy and support services which provide duty lawyers at family law courts and provide services to families affected by violence; $50 million over four years for family law property mediation as part of the Women's Economic Security Package; $11 million to improve information sharing between the family law, family violence and child protection agencies, including the co-location of state and territory family safety officials in family law courts; prohibiting perpetrators of family violence from cross-examining their victims in family law proceedings—I think this is quite an important one; and providing $7 million to legal aid commissions to represent affected parties. These measures are on top of the $160 million per year for family law services to support people with family law disputes outside of court.

No-one ever plans for a family break-up, but unfortunately a sad fact of life is that almost 50 per cent of families do separate at some time. We owe it to Australians to make what is already an undeniably difficult and sometimes traumatic process just that little bit easier, be it by simplifying the system by which law is administered or, indeed, reviewing the law itself.

Third—and I will try to address this as rapidly as possible, although it is a very important issue that would require far more time than I have today—is family violence. This government recognises that family and relationship breakdowns can be amongst the most stressful and difficult circumstances in people's lives, not just for the adults concerned but particularly for the children. One of the first events I attended as a senator earlier this month was the launch of a new publication by Huon Domestic Violence Service—a fantastic support service based in the Huon Valley, where I grew up. At this event, I was pleased to be able to launch the new Red Flags booklet on behalf of the Huon Domestic Violence Service. At the event, I heard a number of very touching contributions by those who have experienced family violence. There is so much that this government is doing to tackle the scourge of domestic violence and particularly violence against women. We have one clear policy on this issue: absolute, irrefutable zero tolerance for violence against women and their children. Women and their children have the right to be safe in their homes, in their communities, in their workplaces, but of course we know from watching the news each night that this doesn't always happen.

Even if only one person dies per year as a result of domestic violence and associated mental health issues, that is still one person too many. I understand that and the Morrison coalition government understands that. That's why we're implementing the policies and initiatives I've mentioned here today, plus so much more, to ensure that we prevent, address and end the scourge that domestic violence is in our society. Saving lives and ensuring families remain as they should be is simply too important to ignore. *(Time expired)*

**Senator WATT** (Queensland) (16:18): Labor agrees that there are significant problems with the current family law system which have led to unacceptable delays for vulnerable families and particularly for children. There are many factors which have contributed to this current state of affairs. They include the government's failure over the last six years to reappoint judges in a timely manner, ever growing funding shortages in legal assistance services and a number of inefficiencies in the family law system. There's no doubt that things have to change. Labor's priority is making sure that change is done right and for the right reasons.

The Attorney-General spent most of the past year pursuing legislation that would have abolished the Family Court system in this country altogether. This legislation was introduced without any consultation with the community or the legal profession. I know from personal experience of dealing with members of the legal
profession and other members of the community who work in the field of family law and domestic and family violence that the legislation paid no regard to major concerns from members of the community.

Incredibly, the government tried to push these half-baked and damaging reforms through the parliament before the completion of a landmark review into the family law system by the Australian Law Reform Commission. That report is the most comprehensive review of the family law system in four decades, but the government appeared to be intent on ignoring it before the election. They have shown little interest in that report since the election. The ALRC has made 60 recommendations for reform, including that the resolution of family law disputes eventually be returned to the states and territories. As we finalise our position, Labor will carefully consider each of those recommendations in consultation with the many stakeholder groups inside the family law system, including Australian families whose have been through the existing system, family lawyers and judges. The Family Court of Australia was established by the Whitlam Labor government over four decades ago. Ensuring that the Family Court system works for Australian families is and always will be a priority for Labor.

I have listened to the contributions from other speakers in this debate. I do agree with one point that Senator Roberts made. That is that suicide, including male suicide, is a big problem in this country. That is something that deserves a proper response. I would like to think that in this term of government—its third term of government—this government might finally take some action to address the skyrocketing rates of suicide in our community.

I have to say that I profoundly disagree with the comments of Senator Roberts in relation to domestic and family violence. I profoundly disagree with Senator Roberts' repeated attempts to pretend that the experience of domestic and family violence of men and women is the same. This is a false equivalence, and it is dangerous. I have no doubt, and I know for a fact, that there are instances where men are the victims of domestic and family violence. But any fair assessment, based on the empirical evidence that Senator Roberts claims to care about, shows that far more women and children are affected by domestic violence and are the victims of domestic violence where the perpetrator is a male. If Senator Roberts is in any doubt about that fact, I invite him to join me to meet with the number of domestic and family violence services that I have worked with closely on the Gold Coast, in Brisbane, in Central Queensland and in North Queensland. I want to pay tribute to the incredible work that those services do, often without anywhere near the kind of resourcing that they need to cope with the influx of women and children fleeing domestic violence. I want to pay tribute to them for their efforts.

Domestic and family violence is a serious problem in our community, no matter how many times we talk about it. Men have a particular responsibility for changing the culture and for stopping domestic violence. There is no doubt that men are by far the major perpetrators of domestic and family violence. It's incumbent upon all male senators in this chamber to take particular responsibility and to show leadership to make sure that men stop doing it. It does Senator Roberts and men generally no favours to have One Nation continually perpetrate myths that the impact of domestic and family violence is the same on women as it is with men. They are vastly different. The sooner that One Nation can stop perpetrating these myths the better.

Senator DAVEY (New South Wales—The Nationals Whip in the Senate) (16:23): In rising to speak on this matter of public importance, I note that this is not my first speech. I thank Senator Roberts for raising the issues of our family law system, as well as suicide and women's safety, and providing me with an opportunity to highlight to the Senate what the Liberal-National coalition government is doing with respect to these issues. The coalition government is committed to ongoing improvements to the family law system to ensure that they help families separate in a safe, supportive and, importantly, timely way.

In 2017, the coalition government directed the Australian Law Reform Commission to conduct the first comprehensive review into the family law system since the commencement of the Family Law Act in 1976. That's the first comprehensive review in over 40 years. That review, released in April this year, contained 60 recommendations for the family law system. That's a big ask. We are carefully considering their wide-ranging recommendations across the whole family law system. As a government, we are intent on ensuring that the system works for Australian families in order to keep them safe and to allow for efficient and timely separations.

This government has already committed to delivering structural reform in the federal family law courts to help end the unnecessary costs and delay for thousands of Australian families that arise from a split in the family and Federal Court systems. This reform aims to allow families to have their matters dealt with as efficiently as possible and under a single set of rules and principles. The goal is to improve the family law system, reduce the backlog of matters before the family law courts and drive timely, cheaper and more consistent resolution of family disputes. It is estimated that these structural reforms have the potential, in time, to allow thousands of additional cases every year to be resolved. The Federal and Family Court of Australia will become in effect a single point of entry into the family law jurisdiction to the Federal Court system and create a consistent pathway for Australian families in having their family law disputes dealt with in the federal courts.
Thousands of families every year are involved in proceedings, and this issue touches on many lives. Thankfully, I've not had to go through the Family Court system myself, but we all know someone who has. This is not just an issue of evil husbands or greedy wives; this is an issue of friends, brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews—everyone—who is touched and caught up in the legal wrangling of the Family Court system.

Our government is committed to improving this system. This is clear from a range of significant measures that the coalition government has taken in recent years. We've established and extended the family advocacy and support services, providing duty lawyers at family law courts to provide services to families affected particularly by family violence. We've established and now extended specialist domestic violence units and health justice partnerships, which provide legal and social support assistance to vulnerable women experiencing family violence. These recent measures are on top of $160 million per year for family law services to support people with family law disputes outside of the court. These services include counselling and education programs and were accessed by 70,000 men and 86,000 women last year alone.

White Ribbon Australia estimates that, on average, one woman a week is murdered by a current or former partner, often after a history of domestic violence, so it's very important that this issue is raised here today. Women have the right to be safe in their homes, in their communities, in their workplaces and online. Since coming to government in 2013 the Nationals, in coalition with the Liberal Party, have invested $840 million to address domestic violence.

Our government has zero tolerance for domestic violence in any form—be it against men or women. Yes, Senator Roberts, I am aware of men who suffer at the hands of domestic violence, but, as Senator Watt quite rightly pointed out, women vastly outnumber men when it comes to domestic violence issues. To this end, in March this year our government committed $328 million to delivering the fourth action plan to reduce violence against women and their children. This funding includes improvements to build on frontline services to keep women and children safe; prevention strategies to help eradicate domestic violence and family violence in our homes, workplaces, communities and clubs; support and prevention measures for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, funded under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy; providing safe places for people impacted by domestic and family violence; and the important 1800RESPECT helpline, which is the National Sexual Assault, Domestic and Family Violence Counselling Service.

Senator Roberts also made the link between the family law system and mental health and suicide. I acknowledge that mental health issues contribute to family breakdowns and family breakdowns in turn contribute to mental health issues. It can't be gilded over. The coalition government has also made the mental health of Australians a priority. The tragedy of suicide touches far too many lives in our nation. It is the leading cause of death in our young people, and that's particularly true in our regional and remote areas. The National Rural Health Alliance estimates that male youth suicide in rural, regional and remote areas occurs at almost twice the rate as in metropolitan areas. It is something that is particularly close to my heart. As the Nationals senator for New South Wales, I represent some of the most isolated communities in our state, and I know all too well that those living in our rural communities encounter barriers in accessing services that those living in the cities do not. Just like those who live in the city, those living in the regions experience symptoms of mental illness. However, they are more likely to struggle to find the right support, because there are fewer mental health practitioners in the country, and long delays can result. While we do have good telehealth services, sometimes that's not adequate for the seriousness that is mental illness.

Since coming into government in 2013, the coalition has done more than any previous government to safeguard the mental wellbeing of Australians, with an estimated $5.3 billion expected to be spent by the Commonwealth on mental health care this year alone. We are delivering more frontline services to meet the specific needs of local communities through a record $1.45 billion investment in our primary health networks. We are providing long-term support for local psychologists, mental health nurses and social workers, ensuring that the right services are available at the right place at the right time. The coalition government is also funding a range of telephone and online digital mental health services, either free of charge or at a very low cost. They range from telephone and web counselling to web-based treatment programs and peer forums—and sometimes in the regions that's all you can get.

I am especially proud of the work that this government is doing to address the mental health needs of those living in rural and regional Australia. The government is funding the implementation and evaluation of 12 suicide prevention trial sites in identified priority areas. These are being led by primary health networks and are targeting at-risk populations, including men, veterans, young people and Indigenous communities. I'm proud to say that in my home state of New South Wales these trial sites are located in regional areas. On the North Coast we've got the Clarence Valley, Tweed, Byron, Lismore and Kempsey communities, and in western New South Wales there is Bourke, Brewarrina, Cobar, Grenfell and Walgett. All these communities seriously need the assistance.
Because of the complexity of suicide, this government recognises that a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work. I'm proud of the work we are doing with our primary health networks to address suicide in our rural communities. The government is committed to keeping Australians safe in all areas of their lives, regardless of their circumstances. That is why we will continue to work on family law reform. (Time expired)

Senator HANSON (Queensland) (16:33): I am so pleased that this matter of public importance is here to be debated on the floor of parliament, and it is One Nation that is driving this matter of family law reform in Australia. When I was first elected in 1996 it was the most important issue that came across my desk. Here I find myself elected again in 2016, and nothing has changed. If anything, it is worse. Australia's failed family law system is contributing to up to 21 male suicides and one female murder a week. These people are often dying lonely, depressed and frustrated and are left broke by today's dangerously hurtful family law system.

These are the non-custodial parents, predominantly male, who cannot see their children. And I do not take away from the females, the women, at all, because there are a lot of women out there who are not custodial parents of their children. But it is predominantly males who are the non-custodial parents.

I received a letter last week from a Queensland based advocate and support agency called End All Domestic Violence, who partner with the Australian Brotherhood of Fathers, who were denied the ability to support their client, a father who had no previous criminal history—nor did he have any prior involvement with the court system—while he was attending the Cleveland Court House on 24 July this year. I think most of us know how uncomfortable it is on your first day of work, being in an unfamiliar environment, all alone. So just imagine how difficult it is being a bloke, or a woman, on their own in a court environment, pleading their innocence in DVOS and other family law matters. I have to ask: was the gentleman targeted just for being male? The question has to be asked. To the legal aid worker, Linda Debenham, I say: shame on you. Shame on you for rejecting having a support person in a meeting with the person you are meant to help support.

There are many reasons why I have advocated a royal commission into family law. The pathetic domestic violence orders are just one of them, and I'm tired of the vexatious complaints that are lodged with the police because the non-custodial parent wants, in one instance, simply to speak to their kids over the phone or on Facebook. That warrants a domestic violence order against that person, just because they want to speak on the phone to their kids—pleading, begging! This is nothing but spiteful and inconsiderate.

I know this feeling because, for years, my own son faced these destructive allegations in an attempt to stop him having access to his young son. My ex-daughter-in-law claimed to police that my son was outside her home in Townsville, which led to a DVO being taken out against him. That was despite him being sick and on the Gold Coast, some 1,000 kilometres away. He was forced to defend himself, at enormous expense, and was dragged through the courts. She also falsely alleged—a soul-crushing claim—that my son had sexually abused his boy. Again, the false claim was designed to stop him having any connection with his son. No charges were brought against my son.

These are just a few small examples of the efforts some spiteful, inconsiderate parents will go to in order to prevent the non-custodial parent seeing their kids. It shows you how lies and perjury are leading to the failure of Australia's family law system and contributing to the death of 21 men by suicide and the murder of one woman each week.

When the tables were turned in my own son's family law case, and the court revealed the perjury by my ex-daughter-in-law, there was no punishment. There is no deterrent whatsoever. When the court reporter, whose evidence is taken very seriously by the court, suggested my son be given custody of his boy, his ex-wife was inconsolable to the point where they stopped proceedings and adjourned the case for another three months. Isn't it funny what happens when the shoe's on the other foot? Here was this spiteful partner who thought she could prevent the father from having anything to do with their child until he was a teenager—a child who is now five years old, and she has been stopping him from seeing his son since the child was 15 months old. Isn't it exceptional that, when the mother faced the same outcome she wanted to inflict on my son, she couldn't handle the thought?

How do you think the men feel about the reality of not being able to see their kids? This is what leaves them depressed, frustrated and unable to focus on a bright future. It's what leads to the thoughts of suicide—being ripped away from their own child's lives. We encourage men to be a part of every element of their children's lives. We don't think twice about the dad being in the birthing suite of the hospital. We actively encourage men to take paternity leave.

Loving, well-grounded children love both parents. Our family law system that we in this place have created is killing dads, leading to the murder of women and hurting millions of kids in the process. It takes a mother and a father to give life to a child, but when divorce takes place our system prevents equal parenting. The legislation
clearly states fifty-fifty custody between parents upon divorce, but it's at the discretion of the judge. This has to end. The halls of this parliament should be haunted by the deaths of so many non-custodial parents. Family law deaths are not acceptable and have reached epidemic proportions. Family law is slowly killing good people, and I for one will move heaven and hell to get through to the lazy minds and do-nothing attitudes of many you in this parliament when it comes to family law matters.

Child support is part of the problem of the suicide of 21 men a week and the murder of one woman a week. We're seeing men unable to afford a fresh start in this out-of-touch child support regime. One immediate change we should be implementing is a quarantine on overtime earnings and of secondary wages over 38 hours already worked. If a parent chooses to put in the hard yards to better themselves or start a new family, what right does an ex-partner have to their money? Give these people an opportunity to move forward in their lives. Give them hope.

I must talk about grandparents. I'm one. Grandparents out there want to see their grandchildren and are denied that right. I make a plea to those mums and dads out there, if they are the custodial parent. Please think that at one stage you loved each other enough to bring a child into the world. That child does not belong to the one parent alone. That child has a right to both parents, and those parents have a right to see their children. If your spitefulness and hatred is because you don't want to see that person anymore, why deny the child the right to see their parent? Every child only ever has one mum and one dad. The kids today are probably so mixed up in their heads because there are so many divorces and families splitting up. Family units are broken. Yet break ups continue to happen, and the children have to deal with this. We can all work together and acknowledge this. Go your separate ways, but don't do this to the children. They are the ones who are suffering with this.

In this parliament quite recently, Labor were prepared to attack Angus Taylor, because he has a property, over his asking the department about natural grasses. I'm telling you now that I'm speaking directly to the Attorney-General with regard to family law. I've stated my case in this parliament; I am directly related with it. I'm affected by this and I will continue to raise the questions. I hope that you don't believe that you have the right to actually come down on me like a ton of bricks because I'm asking questions on behalf of the many constituents in this country who are just looking for a fair go and the right to see their children.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Sterle) (16:43): I'd like to acknowledge the presence in the President's gallery of the former senator Bill Heffernan—nowadays, just plain Heffo. Good on you, mate.

Honourable senators: Hear, hear!

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Family Law

Consideration resumed.

Senator DEAN SMITH (Western Australia—Chief Government Whip in the Senate) (16:43): Former Senator Heffernan is a formidable member of the audience for anyone, but I'm sure that the new senator from New South Wales, Hollie Hughes, will impress everyone very shortly with her first speech. On behalf of all of your coalition Senate colleagues, Hollie, we wish you all the very best for your first speech.

I've been asked to make a contribution this afternoon on Senator Hanson's matter of public importance. For those who are paying attention to the radio and those who are listening or arriving in the galleries, the matter before us today is:

That Australia's failed family law system is contributing up to 21 male suicides and one female murder a week, and must be urgently fixed.

While some of us in the Senate chamber this afternoon might disagree with some of the points that have been made, no-one would disagree with the theme of what Senator Hanson and Senator Roberts have sought to bring to the attention of the Senate, which is a very, very important issue.

Everyone is part of a family. Those of us that are parents or aunts and uncles know that family trauma, family violence, can leave very damaging consequences for children who have to witness that, children who have to grow up in that particular environment.

I do want to challenge the comments of the Labor Senator Watt, because I do believe the coalition government is acting on this issue. I want to talk briefly in a few moments about what we have been doing to reform the family law system and also to reflect on the fact that it was the former coalition Senate leader George Brandis who initiated the first review into Australia's family law system since 1970. Senator Hanson, you beat me to it. I was just about to acknowledge your advocacy on that important point. I think that Senator Brandis, with his eminent legal qualifications, is someone that we could trust stewarding that particular review. And now, with Christian
Porter in the Attorney-General's portfolio, I'm someone that has a high degree of confidence that the member for Pearce, Mr Porter, will be able to shepherd those necessary reforms through the parliament, though, I'm also sure that the Attorney-General, Christian Porter, will bring his own forensic legal eye to those particular issues and will advance those ones that he thinks are genuinely in the interests of women and men, but also children, in the family law system.

To begin, I thought it important to restate some important statistics because I think it does remind us in the Senate chamber this afternoon of the gravity of the situation that we're dealing with, particularly in regard to women, but, of course, not exclusively, and that's the point that Senator Hanson has been making in her motion. I want to share with the Senate a number of statistics which I think continue to bring home the urgency and the significance of the matter which we're all trying to grapple with.

One of the statistics that stands out to me is that on average one woman a week is murdered by her current or former partner. One in four women have experienced emotional abuse by a current or former partner since the age of 15. One in five women have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15. Eighty-five per cent of Australian women have been sexually harassed. Almost 40 per cent of women continue to experience violence from their partner while temporarily separated. One in six women have experienced stalking since the age of 15. And statistics indicate that domestic violence rates are higher in rural and regional areas than they are in metropolitan areas.

I'm someone who doesn't believe that our country is broken. I'm someone who is proud of Australia, proud of what it's achieved and very, very optimistic. I think you can be someone that has that optimism for our country but also recognise that there are pockets where we need to do better and there are pockets where we need to have the courage to call these things out, like you have Senator Hanson and Senator Roberts, like Senator Watt did in his own way and like Senator Perin Davey, the New South Wales National Party senator, did.

The point that I do want to make is that it's not right to suggest the coalition government hasn't been doing anything. It's not right to suggest that this matter isn't top of mind for coalition senators like myself and Senator Brockman, who's in the chamber. I want to identify six initiatives specifically in regard to the family law system that demonstrate that the coalition can be trusted to shepherd, to steward, some of the reforms that have been proposed by the Australian Law Reform Commission. You can trust the coalition to shepherd those that we think are necessary, because we have been doing things already. Let me list what I think are the six most prominent things. The coalition is responsible for having established, and now extended, specialist domestic violence units and health justice partnerships to the tune of almost $32 million over four years, which provide important legal and social support assistance for vulnerable women experiencing family violence. I think that is a worthy and necessary initiative. We've established an extended family advocacy and support services to the tune of almost $23 million over three years, which provide duty lawyers at family law courts to provide services to families affected by family violence. We've provided $50 million over four years for family law property mediation as part of the Women's Economic Security Package, a package that the former member for Higgins Kelly O'Dwyer brought to the parliament. We've provided $11 million to improve information sharing between the family law, family violence and child protection units, including the co-location of state and territory family state officials in family law courts. In addition to that, we prohibited perpetrators of family violence from cross-examining their victims in family law proceedings and provided $7 million to legal aid commissions to represent affected parties. Finally, there was $10.7 million over four years for the family law courts to employ up to 17 additional qualified social workers and psychologists as family consultants.

Before we move onto Senator Hughes' first speech, can I make this final point: what Senator Hanson says in regards to grandparents is absolutely correct. Those people who know of the suite of issues that I'm interested in as a Western Australian senator knows that I'm particularly interested in the issue of grandparent carers. A constant theme that is shared with me by those grandparent carers is the difficulty they have accessing the family law system to secure the guardianship, the custodianship, of their grandchildren who, without the care of their grandparents, would be put in harm's way because of the mental health issues and the drug and alcohol abuse that their children unfortunately have to confront. This is a worthy issue. It's been a worthy debate this afternoon. I will leave my remarks at that.

**The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Sterle):** The time for the discussion has expired.

**DOCUMENTS**

**Consideration**

The following documents were considered:
Documents tabled earlier today (see entry no. 2) were considered as follows:
Motion to take note of documents nos 1 and 2 moved by Senator O'Neill. Consideration to resume on Thursday at general business.

BUDGET

Consideration by Estimates Committees

Senator DEAN SMITH (Western Australia—Chief Government Whip in the Senate) (16:52): I present additional information received by committees relating to estimates.

*The document was unavailable at the time of publishing.*

COMMITTEES

Economics References Committee

Report

Senator O'NEILL (New South Wales) (16:52): At the request of the Chair of the Economics References Committee, Senator Gallacher, I present a report on matters referred to the committee during the previous parliament.

Ordered that the report be adopted.

Law Enforcement Joint Committee

Public Accounts and Audit Joint Committee

Membership

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Sterle) (16:53): The President has received letters requesting changes in the membership of committees.

Senator O'NEILL (New South Wales) (16:53): by leave—I move:

Law Enforcement—Joint Statutory Committee—

Discharged—Senator Fierravanti-Wells

Appointed—Senator Antic

Public Accounts and Audit—Joint Statutory Committee—

Appointed—Senator Patrick

Question agreed to.

BILLS

Health Insurance Amendment (Bonded Medical Programs Reform) Bill 2019

Second Reading

Consideration resumed of the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Senator ASKEW (Tasmania) (16:54): I rise to continue my contribution on the Health Insurance Amendment (Bonded Medical Programs Reform) Bill 2019 from earlier today. As I mentioned earlier, health care is a topic of much discussion, at the moment, in my home state of Tasmania. The public health system in Tasmania, as in other jurisdictions, is dealing with increasing demand and costs in delivering medical services. With a population that is ageing faster than the rest of the country, we have some unique public health challenges.

The Morrison government is supporting the Hodgman Tasmanian Liberal government in addressing these challenges. We are also getting close to the completion of the state's biggest ever health infrastructure project with the redevelopment of the Royal Hobart Hospital. When this project is completed, shortly, it will mean increased bed capacity, more operating and procedure rooms, and state-of-the-art facilities for all Tasmanians.

The increase in health infrastructure was led by the previous Tasmanian Minister for Health, the Hon. Michael Ferguson MP, who, over the last five years as Tasmanian health minister, delivered more than 1,000 additional health staff, opened 130 hospitals beds, secured the future of the Mersey Community Hospital and oversaw redevelopment of each of the state's major hospitals.

Earlier this year the Hon. Sarah Courtney MP took the reins as the health minister. In her first few weeks she's already met staff and patients, to hear their stories firsthand. She has talked to hundreds of frontline staff about the real challenges they face. She has spoken with patients who have had nothing but praise for the hardworking staff in Tasmania's public health system and the wonderful care they provide.

As a nation we face an increasing demand for public health services and an ever-increasing rise in the cost of medical services. As mentioned by Senators Brockman and Smith, in their contributions on the Western
Tuesday, 30 July 2019  

CHAMBER

Australian experience, Tasmania also has many towns that find it difficult to attract and keep their general practitioners. The Morrison government is addressing these needs. In rural, regional and remote Australia, including Tasmania, we need to recruit and retain doctors in our local communities. This recruitment and retention of doctors is even more vital as we increase the capacity of the Tasmanian health system and open more beds.

The Health Insurance Amendment (Bonded Medical Programs Reform) Bill 2019 is one of the strong coalition government responses, as part of the $550 million investment into the stronger rural health strategy, which responds to the national challenge of ensuring primary health care is accessible and available to all Australians, no matter where they live. In the 2018-19 federal budget, the coalition government provided $20.2 million over four years to reform the bonded medical programs by consolidating them into a single framework. The bonded medical programs provide a Commonwealth funded place in a medical course at an Australian university. In return, the participant agrees to work as a doctor, for a period of time, in a rural, regional or remote location or area of workforce shortage. This is known as a ‘return of service obligation’.

There are two individual schemes currently in place. The Medical Rural Bonded Scholarship Scheme, which commenced in 2001 and was closed to new entrants at the end of the 2015 academic year. The scheme provided up to 100 Commonwealth supported places each year, in a medical course, at an Australian university with an attached scholarship. Participants signed a contract requiring them to work as a doctor in a rural or remote area for six years once they attain fellowship. The other scheme is the Bonded Medical Places Scheme, which commenced in 2004. It provides a Commonwealth supported place, in a medical course, at an Australian university to a participant, in exchange for agreement to work in an underserviced area for a length of time equivalent to the length of their medical degree.

This bill will amend the Health Insurance Act 1973 by introducing a statutory scheme to administer the reformed bonded medical programs from 1 January 2020. It will help increase the number of fully qualified Australian trained doctors working in regional, rural and remote locations and areas of workforce shortage across the country. This bill will provide modern, streamlined administrative requirements and will provide clarity and flexibility on the program, with greater capacity for the program to support Australian doctors to move and be retrained in regional, rural and remote Australia, with more options as to when, where and how the return of service obligation can be completed, and with stronger professional support for doctors. There are currently 9,406 program participants studying at medical school or in prevocational training under the older programs. The bonded medical places—

Debate interrupted.

FIRST SPEECH

The PRESIDENT (17:00): Pursuant to order, I now call Senator Hughes to make her first speech. I ask that the usual courtesies be extended to her.

Senator HUGHES (New South Wales) (17:00): I’d like to acknowledge that we’re meeting today on the traditional lands of the Ngunawal people. I acknowledge them as custodians and traditional owners of this land and I extend my respects to elders past and present.

I am so deeply humbled to stand here in this chamber as a newly elected Australian senator representing the state of New South Wales and the Liberal Party of Australia. My journey to this place began 44 years ago. Of all the political leaders to share a birthday with, it turned out I was fated to share mine with Abraham Lincoln. I’m sure none of us in the class of 2019 would claim to be heirs to Lincoln, but, standing here in this great parliament, we all feel the power of his words—his description of democracy that has never been bettered, ‘Government of the people, by the people, for the people;’ his conviction that democracy has to be protected—it has to be worked for, fought for and sacrificed for; and his strong belief, one that I share, that politics is about empowering individuals, not engineering society.

Today I think of the founders and builders of our own Australian democracy—politicians inside this parliament but also countless everyday Australians outside it—and I make this observation: until relatively recently, that history of our country, and so many others, has been told as the history of great men. Of course, our Australian democracy has indeed been shaped by great men—too many to name—from our own founding fathers through to Menzies, Hawke and Howard. But our history is also every bit as much the story of strong women, from pioneering parliamentarians who have served with such distinction here to the women in every community around the nation who work and fight and sacrifice every day for a better life for themselves and their family.

In my own personal story, strong women loom large. I’m thinking of Thelma McQuillan, my maternal grandmother, who, judging by every wartime mini-drama ever made, committed the sin of all sins by conceiving a
baby out of wedlock. But, unlike many women at the time who feared social castigation and in spite of immense pressure, Thelma did not give up her baby. She kept him and raised him with the fierce love that we knew her for.

Thelma went on to marry my grandfather Charles—Chicka—who raised baby John as his own. That strength and steely determination was passed down to my own mother, June. Whilst Mum cannot be here today—the toll of severe dementia—I've never known a woman so strong and so selfless. You see, when my mum married my dad, Dennis Nolan, 50 years ago this past March, mum was a flight attendant. It was then both a legal requirement and an accepted part of society for women to resign from their jobs once they got married. In one generation, our society has moved from a place where women had to remain 'available' if they wanted to have a job to where a woman who is both married and has children can be elected to the Australian Senate. I pay tribute to all the women, and especially all the mums, serving in Australian parliaments today, like my friends Lucy Wicks and Susan Ley in the other place.

Having a family was very important to my parents and I grew up knowing how desperately I was wanted. I was my mother's eighth pregnancy. My beautiful mum lost seven babies before me, all at different stages and some not early. My parents were in the planning process of adoption when I became determined to make an appearance on Abraham Lincoln's birthday. I like to think it was a sign of early political ambition! My mum and dad went on to welcome two more babies into their lives after me, my brothers Tim and Sam. After a lot of heartbreak, they finally got the family they tried so hard for, and my brothers and I could not have been more loved.

Without the fortitude of these women, without their strength at times when it would have been easier to conform to patriarchal norms, I would not be the person I am today, and nor would I be standing here before you. Strong women form the core of my being. But while I had these amazingly strong women in my life, I do have to confess up to being my father's daughter. We're alike in almost every way—temperament and love. In this highly critical world, we must never lose sight of the real meaning of friendship, plus demonstrations of understanding the importance of real, tangible, unconditional friendship and love.

Strong women form the core of my being. But while I had these amazingly strong women in my life, I do have to confess up to being my father's daughter. We're alike in almost every way—temperament and love. In this highly critical world, we must never lose sight of the real meaning of friendship, plus demonstrations of understanding the importance of real, tangible, unconditional friendship and love.

My family history meant my own pregnancies were often hard fought and anxious, but three times I have been blessed to hold my own newborn babies, Millie, Fred and Rupert. Everything changes in that moment you meet your baby for the first time. You know your life has new meaning. Your perspective shifts forever and for the better. Millie, Fred and Rupert, who are here today, are the greatest blessings in me and my husband Stewart's life. I am here today because of my parents and grandparents. I rise today determined to make the most of every second in this place because of my children. The strengths and perseverance that they have shown me give me all the purpose I could ever need, and I hope they see the same resilience in me.

I want to take some time today to reflect on another strong woman whose influence has helped shape my path to this place. A woman who had the strength to dissent, to ignore what the hierarchy insisted upon and to resist calls for her to know her place, even to the point of imprisonment. A woman who knew, even 400 years ago, that women in time will come to do much. That woman was Mary Ward, founder of the Loreto order and ever present at John XXIII College in Perth and Loreto Kirribilli in Sydney where I went to school, Mary Ward fiercely believed in the education of girls and the enabling of young women to do anything a young man can do. When you grow up with the legacy of Mary Ward as your educational philosophy it never occurs to you that you can't or won't. I was encouraged throughout my childhood and education to strive to be the best I could be and never feel constrained by my gender or anything really for that matter.

As I embark on my term in the Senate, I bring with me an amazing network of strong Loreto women who support and encourage me no matter what. Women such as Shayne Miller, Belinda Bremner, Lisa Whibley, Susannah Lawrence, Anna Chandler, Amanda Rawnsley, Mary-Lou Jarvis, Aerin Gordon Heinrich and, of course, Deb Gordon. In this highly critical, often viciously judgemental, online world we must never lose sight of the importance of real, tangible, unconditional friendship and love.

For those of you not to benefit from Mary Ward's teachings, but who have shown me the true meaning of friendship, plus demonstrations of understanding the importance of dissent: Lucy Purcell, Susan Adamson, Lisa McGee, Victoria Bertie, Edwina Vine and Paula Richardson thank you for always being there.

Along with the example of Mary Ward, the other great philosophy I bring with me to the Senate is, of course, grounded in the timeless values of the Liberal Party. The belief in equality of opportunity, free enterprise and reward for hard work.

I joined the party in 2002 and ever since then it has given me the priceless chance to put my personal beliefs into political action, as well as the chance to meet incredible party members and inspirational party leaders. Serendipitously, one of those leaders was a certain Scott Morrison, who saw me working on a local campaign with my then mentor, Rhondda Vanzella, and brought me into campaign headquarters first for the 2003 New South
Wales state election and then for the brilliant 2004 federal campaign. It's my great privilege, 15 years later, to serve under Scott as Prime Minister and as part of a government determined to do the right thing, create opportunity and secure prosperity for the quiet Australians.

Elections bring people together like no other experience in politics. And I have been fortunate to work with some amazing state and federal directors and campaign teams who remain colleagues and friends to this day: Mark Neeham, Tony Nutt, Chris Stone and Andrew Hirst, Louise De Domenico, Jarrod Lomas, Luke Nayna, Mitch Redford, Alicia McCumstie, Vincent Woolcock, Susan Leithhead and Reg Chamberlain. Particularly, I have been blessed by friendships with three people that have included births, deaths, marriages and everything in between. To Alex Hawke, Nick Campbell and Bill Heffernan: the three of you have been with me since the beginning and are here with me today. Your support has been unwavering and words really cannot fully convey the weight of my thanks. I tried to think of some of the many words of wisdom that Bill has passed on to me over the years. Unfortunately, none of it was repeatable here is this place!

To Scott Farlow, Taylor Martin, Natasha Maclaren-Jones, Damien Jones, Tobias Lehmann, Dean Shachar, Simon Fontana, Chantelle Fornari-Orsmond, Penny Fischer, Yvonne Keane and Joe Tannous: I'm so very grateful to these people and so many others—too many to name—in the party and the organisation for your presence in my life over the years. Thank you to Danielle Blaine, a former federal executive colleague, a mentor and, more importantly, a friend, for always believing in me.

To my friends who have become family—Michael Tiyce, Lee Furlong, Adla Coure, Marie Simone, Marie Sutton, Kent Johns and Anne-Marie Elias—you provide support and humour whilst always demonstrating a sense of community and the importance of giving back. A huge thank you for all the support from the Salt & Shein Team. It means so much that all of you are here today. Whilst politics can be adversarial, at times relationships across the political divide can become some of the most important. To my lovely friend of 15 years, the member for Oxley, Milton Dick: what a journey it has been for both of us since that young political leaders trip in 2004. I have no doubt that our friendship will remain strong, boosted by the fact you sit in the other place!

All of you here in the chamber, have played a part, in one way or another, in helping me to stand before you today. As we all know, my journey to the Senate has been anything but typical. In the immortal words of Sir Paul McCartney, it really has been a long and winding road. The door it has led to—the door to this chamber—is one of many that I thought might never open to me. Now that I'm here, I am determined to use every minute in this place to strive to open doors for Australians. For those Australians who feel that their road to help is just too long and winding and especially for those whose voices are going unheard in our national and political debate, these are the Australians who I came here to represent.

I am proud to be part of a Liberal team that is dedicated to strengthening our nation with a strong, forward-looking economic agenda that is focused on the aspirations of all Australians. But there are two areas I am deeply passionate about, that are very close to my heart and that I will pour my blood, sweat and tears into. The first is drought assistance and regional economies. The second is autism and disability support. Fortuitously for me, I get to work for a Prime Minister who has promoted the NDIS portfolio to cabinet, ensuring it is now a national priority, as well as bringing the importance of our country communities to the forefront of the national debate. To come into this chamber sharing my passions with the Prime Minister's priorities gives me even more drive to work as hard as I can for him, for families, for the quiet Australians and for everyone.

Let's start with the drought. This crisis, occurring in many parts of regional Australia, seeps into every aspect of rural life, the way water would be sucked into every skerrick of a dry creek bed. I have experienced this firsthand in own family. Stewart, myself and our three kids spent over a decade on the land, running a farm services business, helping to harvest and being involved in the local community in a multitude of ways. We would be making a little money one year and smashed by a flood the next. We were always trying to do the best we could to make it work. Stewart was out on his harvester for long hours, away for months every year, as he chased the work.

Like so many other Australians on the land, we struggled along and we kept it all together, until climate and fate dealt us a double blow. First, sustained drought devastated our small business and then my mother's decline accentuated the need for us to be closer than a 10-hour car ride away. It was incredibly difficult, seeing everything we worked so hard for gone, but we have each other, our health and three wonderful kids. We're rebuilding, trying to start again, in many ways.

So many others don't have that same option, and this is the real tragedy of drought—the businesses reliant on agriculture which don't have land based assets as a safety net, businesses that for too long have been left out and allowed to fail. Yes, it's the market, but, once they're gone, they're gone. Grass grows when it rains; businesses don't reopen. Towns wither and die, and it becomes so much harder to provide essential services to those left behind. There are businesses such as Mick and Zeleh Cikota's Econo Lodge Moree, expanding in the face of
drought, supporting a town that is facing a third year with no winter crop; or Print Anything, which Georgie and Roly King run across three country towns all impacted by drought.

Farmers are the backbone of regional economies, but families are the lifeblood of the towns that centre around them. They are resilient and determined, but they need our help. They need Liberal government help. They need this parliament's help.

I've always fought for families in rural and remote New South Wales, whether it was securing the return of QantasLink services to Moree through a community led campaign, along with the indefatigable Lou Gall and Gig Moses, or establishing a rurally focused charity for special needs families. As a senator for New South Wales I will continue to fight for our farmers and the communities that depend on them; to honour their relentless efforts, not with sympathetic words but with real action—not bandaid solutions but policies that create long-lasting, positive change.

We need a big, bold, optimistic vision for the economic future of our primary industries. We need a plan to droughtproof agriculture without destroying our stunning natural environment. How good would it be if we could repurpose our existing infrastructure—like the NBN, which encapsulates regional Australia—to provide families with a secure income in places where they are primarily dependent on agriculture? We are a nation of innovative, smart thinkers. We can figure this out. For those farmers who are agile enough to adapt to change and harness new technology, I will work hard to bolster their visions, rather than cutting a blank cheque for those who simply aren't willing to do the work.

I'm determined to build on my personal experience, my years of advocacy, and my legacy as chair of both the Liberal state and federal rural and regional committees, and use the platform this great chamber provides to be that strong, loud, voice—that thunderous fighting spirit—for my country constituents.

I also intend to use my voice in this place to speak up for another community, one our family unexpectedly joined over seven years ago, when my gorgeous son Fred was diagnosed with autism. Fred is the light of our family's life in so many ways. Whether it's all the developmental milestones he's passed, when doctors said he wouldn't; his love of Godzilla, New York and San Francisco, old-fashioned media; or just he and I watching David Attenborough specials, there is no-one more loved, or who brings more love to this world, than our 'Freddo Frog'. And, while we did not choose to become part of such a large club as the autism community, we have found it to be one united by a great passion and determination to succeed. These children and adults work so hard every day just to get by. They don't ask for much. They just look to us in government to provide an easier path forward for them.

I am a huge supporter of the NDIS. I am a huge believer in the NDIS. It has given us a significant infrastructure and building block from which all in the disability community can receive much more significant support. But there is a lot more work to be done to make it truly fit for purpose. And we need to remember as parliamentarians, as Australians, that the NDIS is for all of us. Whether it is as the parent of a child with autism, whether it is due to a loved one being injured in a car accident, the NDIS is here for all of us at any given moment, and that's why we should all be invested in it. That's why we should all make sure that we get it right as we move into the future.

In 2013, I established the Country Autism Network. It is a charity to assist rural and regional families and help them find their way through the autism maze. At the beginning of this year we were asked to partner—and I say 'we' because I'm no longer on the board of the organisation—with Surfers Healing, a charity originally founded in the US by Izzy Paskowitz, former world champion surfer and father of Isaiah, who has autism. Izzy discovered early in the piece that one way to keep Isaiah calm was to take him out on the water, and since he started this charity it has taken thousands upon thousands upon thousands of children surfing all around the world. Surfers Healing has a committee in Australia run by Steph Smith, Sean Tobin and Belinda Hitchcock, and they do the most outstanding job. They asked to partner with Country Autism Network, as they require an Australian charity to work through. They partnered with us and they gave me the privilege and the honour of taking close to 800 autistic kids surfing at the beginning of this year. If you ever want to see the personification of joy, I suggest you take up the opportunity, especially for those colleagues in New South Wales and Queensland. They do an absolutely outstanding job in the way that they work.

I do want to acknowledge some of the amazing autism families that I have had the chance to work with and to witness the amazing efforts that they put not only into their own children but also into the community as a whole, particularly Sam and James Best and Benison O'Reilly, who literally wrote The Australian Autism Handbook, Charmaine and Jack Fraser, David and James Langford—I'm going to forget someone now because this is not written down—and Viv and Isabel Hodgson. There are just so many wonderful, wonderful people who make such a difference every single day to not only their own child's life but so many other lives around them.
I was lucky enough to get some of them together the other week. One of the things that we talked about was our experience at diagnosis. Even though we all thought we were kind of past that—we're all quite a few years into the journey—we established that one thing that has stayed with all of us was the darkness that we all felt. The one thing that stuck with us from that time of diagnosis, at the beginning, was the isolation and fear that you felt. And when you do finally pick up the phone and make a phone call, the last thing you need is red tape. The last thing you need is reams and reams of paperwork and challenging situations to get the assistance you need. We need to do better at that. We need to do better at the beginning, because that is where we can help, and it's where we can change the trajectory for these children as we go forward.

With that, thank you everyone. It's been an amazing journey. I wouldn't be here today if it weren't for so many of the people in this room. Luckily, I talk about autism all the time! I will wrap up more formally. If my journey to this parliament has taught me anything it's that Australians are deeply resilient, inventive and optimistic. We have the capacity to shape the brightest of futures. As Australia's representatives in this great democracy, it's our responsibility to walk alongside our fellow Australians—to hear them, to support them and to empower them.

My long and winding road to the Senate would not have been possible without the support and friendship of so many of the people that I've touched on in this speech, none more so than my incredible husband. What a ride it's been! Stewart, hopefully we see a little more of the bright side for a while, but your humour, resilience and dependability has seen our family through it all. I love you. My incredible parents; my children, who light up my life; the strong women who surround me, support me and inspire me—Aerin Gordon Heinrich, Hannah Monaghan, Amy Lehmann, Jane Beer, Candice Steffensen, Abbey Neeham and Callum Gurney; my amazing team—we'll just clock this up for a story later on!; the Liberal Party colleagues, whose values I share and whom I've worked alongside for so long; the rural and regional communities; the families and carers of autistic children; and the many others I've had the privilege of meeting—everything leading up to this point only makes me more determined to honour your belief in me for as long as I have the privilege and responsibility of serving in this place. As your representative in the Senate, I will never lose sight of where I come from, who I represent and why I'm here: to keep travelling the long road, to keep opening doors, to keep fighting, to keep speaking up, and to play my part here for a better Australia and a stronger democracy. Thank you.

The PRESIDENT: We have a number of people waiting to make their first speech. I ask senators to resume their seats as quickly as possible. I thank senators for their courtesies.

FIRST SPEECH

Senator AYRES (New South Wales) (17:33): 'A Senator's first speech is daunting,' I had in my first line, but it's not as daunting, I think, as what Senator Hughes just faced. I want to congratulate her for what you could describe as courage under fire. I want to use my comments today to set out how my life experiences shapes my approach to democracy and equity, and to point out the challenge that inequality poses to our democratic system and some of the principles that will drive my work in the Senate.

I want to begin by acknowledging the Ngunawal people, traditional owners of the land where this parliament meets, and—given that this is my first speech—acknowledge First Nations all around Australia. No other nation can boast 65,000 years of continuous history, culture and custodianship of its lands.

Australia is, as the Governor-General said, a work in progress. We should embrace this continent's grand history of culture, of art and language, of music, of dance, of governance and of songlines. Aboriginal languages are Australian languages. Indigenous art is at the core of Australian art. And continued First Nation custodianship enriches our nation. I want to acknowledge and pay respects to Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander elders past, present and emerging and, in particular, to my Labor colleagues the Hon. Linda Burney MP and Senators McCarthy and Dodson.

The Uluru statement sets out a course for the nation toward reconciliation and advancement of the First Australians. I wholeheartedly embrace it and the opportunity to make change possible. Voice, treaty, truth: simple, powerful demands. Clarity of purpose is vital, if Australia is to grow together. That the voice to parliament has been so wilfully misrepresented so early should be a source of shame.

Makarrata, the coming together after injustice through the telling of truth, is as Galarrwuy Yunupingu said, a gift to the nation. He said it's:

… a fire that we hope burns bright for Australia.

Truth is powerful. Let the truth of the history of invasion, conquest, resistance and living together be told. It should build a foundation for all Australians to come together with a common heritage and share a set of national values for our future. Truth matters.
I will never forget hearing Troy Cassar-Daley's 'Shadows on the Hill' for the first time. Cassar-Daley's song describes a massacre of Aboriginal men, women and children that happened on the Glen Innes to Grafton road, near where I grew up. I heard it while preparing a speech about Armidale Aboriginal Labor legend Pat Dixon for NAIDOC week. Pat Dixon's family was from Bellbrook, Sugarloaf Mountain country, just 60 kilometres south of the Glen Innes to Grafton road. The accounts of violence and cruelty there matched the horror of the song. It hit me like a steam train. Truth-telling matters. It should change the way all Australians relate to their history and their relationships with the people around them.

I am a product of country NSW, of public education and of the Australian labour movement. I grew up in northern NSW, the eldest son of Roberta and John. My mum was a public school teacher dedicated to teaching kids with special learning needs. She later wrote a doctorate about equity in education, particularly for First Nation kids. Dad jackarooed as a young man. He became a principal research scientist for the NSW Department of Primary Industries. He's maintained a deep connection with rural Australia for his whole life.

I really feel at home in New England, where antecedents of my family have lived for 180 years. It's the landscape depicted in Tom Roberts' masterpiece Bailed Up: which features my ancestor 'Silent' Bob Bates, as he was called—no doubt because he was noisy. He was the coach driver in a robbery near Tenterfield. It's an extraordinary masterpiece in the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Bob is buried in the cemetery in Glen Innes. The dry grass, the pale eucalypts and the range country depicted in that painting give way to some of the best agricultural land in the country.

All of my early life was farm life, until I was fifteen, on two small beef cattle properties in northern New South Wales. I loved riding, fencing and cattle work—all the aspects of farm life. I absorbed the books and the poets that celebrated and romanticised country working life. Up until I was 15, that is what I thought I would do with my whole life. Ultimately, farming life didn't work out for the young Ayres family. Farming is unforgiving, particularly for small, family operations. We moved to what I then saw as a big country town—Glen Innes, population 7,000. It was Glen Innes High School that opened my eyes to the world of literature, of thinking about politics, of history and of how the forces of economics, class, gender and power have shaped Australian society. Country town life was crucial to forming my sense of social justice, of pragmatic social responsibility and of commitment to equality and egalitarianism. The sense of place, the love of country and the environment and the stark social and economic divisions of country towns are all crucial to my outlook and will drive my work in the Senate.

Twenty-eight per cent of Australians live outside of the major cities. The political system has not served them very well. The average income in my home town is 40 per cent lower than the national average. Over one-third of households make less than $650 a week. Employment is lower than the national average, and unemployment is much higher. It is significantly worse for Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islanders. The political, economic, environmental and technological developments of the last 40 years have shaped social forces that have unravelled regional communities.

The shift of wealth from ordinary people to very wealthy individuals and corporations has hit these communities hard. Family farms give way to big corporations and mining interests, and jobs are offshored as economic activity is increasingly concentrated in the big cities. The rural labouring and blue collar manufacturing jobs that once delivered middle incomes and dignity to working class Australians in the regions have withered away. The growth of new jobs in the big cities in finance and services has not been matched in country towns. The growth of unemployment, as well as low-value, casual and contingent work in these communities has robbed people of opportunity, dignity and the chance at a decent standard of living.

Worse than just standing by while these social forces have wreaked havoc in these communities, government has in fact been the enabler of social and economic destruction. The government have closed train lines, scaled back hospitals, shut TAFEs, starved local councils of funds and privatised services. They sacked public servants, nurses, TAFE teachers and the people who help young Australians find work, who fixed roads and helped build on-farm productivity. All of our political parties have failed to defend and advance these communities. Labor can, and should, do better at representing and listening to the people who live in country towns.

Labor has a proud legacy of sending country people to state and federal parliament with a mandate for change and reform for regional communities. But there is something more cultural and more sentimental that I am reaching for here. Firstly, it is nostalgia for the bonds of solidarity, the shared experience of country town life and community, family, the ordinary and the dignity of country life and work. So much of this has unraveled over the last 40 years, as waves of failed trickle-down economics, globalisation and technology swept away old certainties and as power, wealth and opportunity have retreated back to the capital cities.
Secondly, it is the history of the Australian labour movement—of Tom Mann, Miles Franklin, Henry Lawson, land reform, the Eureka Stockade and Vincent Lingiari at Wave Hill—and the struggle between oppressive governments, vested interests and capital on one hand and the unions and ordinary courageous Australians on the other that have lifted these communities up over centuries and been the real builder of Australian nationhood. Henry Lawson called it the struggle between the old dead tree and the young tree green, and that is the central struggle for our common future.

Thirdly, it is the politics of place: a sense of Australian egalitarianism that is firmly rooted in the soil, landscape and sky of the bush. Some of these values—of dignity, solidarity, family, work, defiance of authority and resilience—are universal. Some are unique to the history and story of the Australian labour movement in rural and regional Australia, but they are all fundamental to our national story.

In the first sitting week of this 46th Parliament, this chamber passed a piece of legislation that will have far-reaching consequences for Australia and the fiscal capacity of the Australian government. Labor voted for the package after our amendments failed. Labor will not stand in the way of the tax cuts for low-income earners, which we promised at the election in May. These tax cuts will flow through to cleaners, factory workers and part-time workers across Australia—the kind of people who I represented as an union official. I believe that that was the correct approach and that it was both pragmatic and principled. However, stage 3 of the tax cuts for higher income earners guts the future fiscal capacity of the Commonwealth. They are a fiscal time bomb set for 2025. Stage 3 will demand extreme cuts, belying a commitment to austerity—the radical reduction in public services in the United Kingdom and other countries in Western Europe imposed by the EU's self-defeating response to the global financial crisis.

The Labor Party must oppose austerity, which is an inevitable result of these cuts. It is the opposite of what the Australian people demand from their government. When Campbell Newman sacked thousands of public servants, the people of Queensland sacked him. The 2014 budget was so unpopular it ended the prime ministership of Tony Abbott. After the vote on the tax cuts, I received an email from Josephite nun Sister Jan Barnett. She asked me the right question: what kind of society do we wish our economic relationships to serve and how might we realise that society? Government must serve all Australians and put the economy at the service society, not the other way round. An active government large enough to support its priorities, allocated to the right areas, can more than any other force make our country fairer, more productive, more democratic and stronger—an active state that reaches every Australian and gives them the support they need and treats them seriously as citizens rather than customers or taxpayers; an active state that prioritises the poorest in this country, that takes care of the vulnerable and helps the unemployed back into work and not into destitution.

I'm proud to support the calls to raise the Newstart payment. Yesterday the Prime Minister described raising Newstart as 'unfunded empathy'. It's a grotesque, cowardly and dishonest comment. It's an insult to the one million Australians trapped in poverty and unemployment by the current rate. This raise is unfunded only because his government refuses to find it, presumably to defend his fragile promise of a surplus. It reveals, I believe, a deeper, darker malice behind this Prime Minister and his government. A cruel, pea heart beats inside the government refuses to fund it, presumably to defend his fragile promise of a surplus. It reveals, I believe, a deeper, darker malice behind this Prime Minister and his government. It will demand extreme cuts, belying a commitment to austerity—the radical reduction in public services in the United Kingdom and other countries in Western Europe imposed by the EU's self-defeating response to the global financial crisis.

I've been an activist in the labour movement and in the public debate on these matters. It has occasionally attracted controversy. I will continue to be active and build in the arguments for a revenue strategy that supports an active social democratic state that works for all Australians. I am, as I said, a product of the Australian labour movement. Growing up in Glen Innes, I met some of the older shearers and rural workers—some of them complete ratbags! They were veterans of strikes and struggle. They brought to life the stories and the poetry of Henry Lawson and Ion Idriess, the songs of Slim Dusty, the ethos of mateship and resilience, defiance of authority and a culture of unionism that I love. As a 1980s Glen Innes schoolboy subscriber to the Australian Financial Review—there weren't many of them!—and The Bulletin, which was a terrific magazine, I followed the ACTU ALP accord. I understood that it was an extraordinary effort by the unions and Labor to reconstruct a new Australia.

I studied industrial relations at the University of Sydney and was determined to work in and rebuild the movement that was capable of changing Australia and improving the lives of ordinary Australians. I enrolled as a cadet in the ACTU's Organising Works program and met many of the men and women who are heroes of mine—great union leaders like Tom and Audrey McDonald, Tas Bull, Laurie Carmichael and Jennie George. I learned so much from the wisdom of hundreds of union delegates and older officials who showed me how to organise, how
to win for workers and how to deal with the big productivity and distributional challenges in Australian workplaces. They were men and women like Harry Delaney, Mark Hoban, Pat Johnston, Steve Dixon, Jim O'Neil and dozens more across all sorts of great unions.

The little town of Batlow is at the heart of the Australian apple industry. In World War II, men in the packing and canning factories were displaced by women and, after the war, the women stayed. Everybody in the canning factory and in the packing houses in Batlow were in the union, and the mostly female workforce elected some of the shrewdest, toughest and bravest women union leaders I have met.

There is no mayor in Batlow, but in many respects Jenny Dowell, the formidable AMWU leader, ran the show. For decades, she led campaigns to save the cannery from closure, marshalled the strength of the union to defend decent permanent seasonal work for women and she made sure that everyone had their say at work and in the town. Pity the supervisor who disrespected a woman on the canning line. The democratic aspect of this was crucial. Batlow women and men had real democratic control over their working lives and the local economy.

Australian unions are a public good. While they collectively bargain for nearly two million union members, union activity lifts living standards for millions more Australians and their families. The international evidence is confounding for the anti-union ideologues opposite. Strong unions with effective collective bargaining rights deliver higher productivity, higher wages and higher employment. It makes sense and it fits with my experience for 25 years in Australian workplaces.

But the case for unions in Australia—for a legal, political and institutional framework that facilitates union activity—goes beyond the equity and economic case for unions. Why in Australia do democratic rights stop at the factory gate? Why can't farm workers, childcare workers, nurses or cleaners practise democracy at work? Participation, deliberation, decision-making, representation, conflict and resolution are all deeply democratic activities, and our democracy is diminished when those rights are restricted. Democracy is stronger when ordinary people, everybody, practice it. It's stronger when citizens learn democratic skills at work—to listen to each other, to weigh the strengths of alternative arguments, to speak up and to get involved.

Unions fit alongside other institutions and organisations that provide opportunities for Australians to practise democracy. Parents and citizens groups, environmental groups, cooperatives, women's groups and sporting clubs all offer opportunities for democratic advancement and enlargement. Attacking Australian unions and the disintegration of other democratic institutions hollows out our democracy.

It's been the honour of my working life to contribute to this cause. These are challenging times for the Australian union movement. Free, democratic unions are a central institution of Australian democracy and I will defend them here.

I'm delighted to have been elected to the Australian Senate and am deeply aware of the honour and responsibility of this office—the privilege of working for all Australians. But I'm also acutely aware of our diminished standing among Australian people. In the last decade, satisfaction in Australian democracy has collapsed. We may have avoided the economic recession of the GFC, but the crisis lingers in the heart of our economy. Ten years later, Australians are going backwards. Median household income has declined. Living standards have stagnated. One in 10 households now lives in poverty. For all of the government's rhetoric, Australians are now working harder for less.

I saw this firsthand as a union official. Australia lost 25 per cent of its manufacturing workforce between 2012 and 2016. That loss is felt most acutely in our outer suburbs and regions. Discontent with our democracy is not shared equally. The poorest 25 per cent of Australians are three times more likely to be dissatisfied with democracy than the richest 25 per cent. Our democratic crisis has occurred as Australia has become less equal. Australians in our regions, in outer metropolitan suburbs and in country towns feel like politics does not include them. Their faith in democracy has declined as their communities have unravelled.

It's hard to feel part of our democracy if you can't pay your bills or if you can't get a good job. Who cares about parliament if you don't know what shifts you will get from week to week? Our democratic crisis is not unique. Australia is not immune from a global drift towards authoritarianism, intolerance and, alarmingly, fascism. It's representatives have found their way into this chamber. The seeds of fascism have always been sown in exclusion, inequality and uncertainty. We shouldn't mince words here—it's too important for our democracy. Extreme right wing parties in Australia closely resemble the fascist parties in Europe. They are a threat to Australian democracy. There should be no room for accommodation or preference deals.

The challenges that the political Left faces in this historical moment are immense. This crisis has demolished social democratic parties across the Western world, and at the last election the Australian Labor Party received the lowest primary vote in a century. I refuse to submit to pessimism. Our party has survived schisms and devastating
losses. Indeed, our party was founded in the wake of brutal repression—of shearsers and dock workers and the recession of the 1890s. We must maintain our purpose through a renewed commitment to a democracy that includes everybody because our democracy is diminished by bigotry and exclusion. It is unable to reach its full expression if there is injustice, or inherited privilege, or inequality, or poverty, or discrimination on the basis of sex or sexuality, or when our regions are impoverished and alienated. Labor will build a platform that brings Australians together and rejects the politics of division and fear. I'm absolutely committed to a Labor victory in 2022.

Acknowledgements

Of course, I am not a country kid anymore. I've made my life in the city and now count the community of Darlington and Redfern as my home. I want to thank the many people in that wonderful community for their support and for their encouragement.

To the AMWU, my union: thank you for the opportunity to serve as an official and leader for 23 years. It's a great union. It represents thousands of Australians in all sorts of workplaces right across the country, creating, making and maintaining all over Australia. I want to place on record my deep appreciation to Paul Bastian for his support, occasionally blunt advice and friendship for all of that time. He is the most decent, courageous and authentic union leader I know. Thanks also to Peter Cozens, Glenn Thompson and the branch secretaries of the AMWU across Australia.

Special thanks go to the members, delegates and officials of the New South Wales Branch of the AMWU. They have taught me, put up with my idiosyncrasies and supported me for a long time. Their new secretary, Steve Murphy, is an emerging and inspirational industrial leader who has a lot to offer the trade union movement.

I want to thank the many others in the trade unions who have offered their support and worked with me to make the union movement stronger: Natalie Lang and Linda White from the Australian Services Union, and Natalie's predecessor Sally McManus; the team at the Finance Sector Union, Julia Angrisano, Bec Reilly, Nathan Rees and former New South Wales Secretary Geoff Derrick; Jo Schofield and Mel Gaffield and the wonderful officials and delegates from United Voice—best of luck with the new merger; I regard it as a critical development in the rebuild of private sector unions in this country—Vanessa Seagrove, the Assistant Secretary of Unions NSW, and Martin Cartwright, old friends who I've worked with for a very long time. To the party officials who I've worked closely with over the last few years, Paul Erickson and George Simon and George's predecessor Rose Jackson, and the members and activists of the New South Wales ALP and the New South Wales Branch for supporting me into this job—I won't let you down.

I want to acknowledge Tanya Plibersek for her support, advice and wisdom. I often think: 'What would Tanya do?' It is not a bad way to approach ethical and decent decision-making. She's a valued friend. Senator Jenny McAllister and her husband, my old friend John Graham MLC—thanks for everything, for your unstinting support and constant friendship.

While I am on the subject of old friends, Verity Firth and her husband Matthew Ches are two of the most decent people I know, and the place where I go for friendship, love and support—thanks.

Thanks also to Doug Cameron for 25 years of leadership and for his kindness to me over the last few years. He's shown me what it takes to be an effective, principled and progressive Labor senator. He is also now on Twitter, which is a very worrying development indeed. It does mean that I will never need to ask Doug what he thinks.

Anthony Albanese MP: he now has the toughest job in Australian politics, but I think he will make a great Australian Labor Prime Minister. He has the guts, the capacity and the ideas that Australia needs right now. Thanks for all of your support, advice and mentoring over 25 years of friendship.

To the Cooper family, Clare: thanks for all your care and commitment to our family.

To my Dad, Dr John Ayres: I couldn't ask for anything more, I couldn't possibly thank you enough, and I couldn't put it in words that are appropriate anyway. I know that right now both of us wish that my beautiful Mum was here with us today as well.

Family is the most important thing, and I love my little family. Meeting Rae Cooper is the best thing that has ever happened to me. Convincing her to let me take her out was the wisest thing I have ever done. You are my best friend, the real source of my better ideas, an inspiration for me and a wonderful example and beautiful mother to our two kids. We are very fortunate to have you.

Matilda and D'Arcy: I'm so proud of you and the young adults that you are growing to be. I hope that my time in the parliament makes you proud and that it contributes to making a better, fairer Australia for both of you. Thank you, Mr President.
FIRST SPEECH

The PRESIDENT (18:05): Pursuant to order, I will now ask Senator O'Sullivan to come forward and make his first speech, and I ask senators to observe the usual courtesies.

Senator O'SULLIVAN (Western Australia) (18:05): Mr President, as this is my first speech, may I start by congratulating you on being elected as President of the Senate. I’d also like to congratulate my fellow Western Australian Senators elected at the 18 May election: Senators Linda Reynolds, Patrick Dodson, Slade Brockman, Louise Pratt and Jordon Steele-John. Together we have the immense privilege of representing Western Australia, and I look forward to working with you to deliver for the great state of Western Australia.

Like all senators, standing here in this place has to be one of the greatest honours one could ever experience. It’s difficult to describe just how I feel. For those who have known me for a long time, and some of you are here, you know just how passionate I am about this nation—the potential of our place in the broader world, and the potential of our people.

For all that Australia represents, and for the opportunity it provides, we truly are a blessed nation. Western Australia has been home to six generations of my family. It’s terrific to have my parents, my amazing wife and my beautiful children with me here today. I’ll have more to say about them later; but Amy and Sam, this is dad’s work! All of us in this place are here to work for you and every other kid like you in this country.

Mr President, my great grandparents, Michael and Kathleen Kilrain, migrated to Australia and seized an opportunity created by the Group Settlement Scheme in Manjimup in the great south west of Western Australia. The Group Settlement Scheme was an assisted migration scheme, which operated in Western Australia from the early 1920s. It was engineered by Premier James Mitchell to provide a labour force to open up large tracts of agricultural land and create a dairy export industry.

Like the other settlers in group seven, Michael and his bride were provided with 100 acres of heavily wooded land and a small interest-free loan to get started. My great grandparents used that loan to purchase a cow, a bucket and an axe. They got to work with other settlers to clear the land, build the fences and dams and, together, they also built a school to educate the local children.

It was an impossible task. This was tall timber country—mostly karri and jarrah—and many of the settlers failed. And after a royal commission into the scheme, it was abandoned. But Michael, unlike many in the scheme, had farming experience back in Ireland and, through their strength and effort, he and future generations were able to make it a success and purchased the surrounding properties, and the farm is still in the family today.

Mick and Sarah O'Sullivan, my other great grandparents, worked and raised their children in Manjimup too. Mick was one of the first foresters appointed by the government. His job was to implement the Forests Act. He would take his horse and sulky deep into the forests, camp for nights on end and mark out the trees which needed to be preserved. He was pro-development, but knew it had to be done in a sustainable way. As a child, my father would tell me the stories of his parents and grandparents, and I would be absolutely mesmerised. These stories were to light a fire in my imagination and became a visceral part of my own thinking and imagination.

The virtues of hard work and determination, personal responsibility, reward for effort, working with and giving back to community, the importance of family and family values have guided my life and my career. These are the values that led me to the Liberal Party.

Upon leaving school, I completed an apprenticeship in electronics and communications. Those familiar with Perth would have seen the Central Area Transit, CAT, buses running around the CBD. Well, my claim to fame is that I installed the passenger information system in those buses back in 1996. You would walk up and press the button on the bus stops and it would tell you when the next bus would arrive. In fact, I had the rather poetic experience of attending the declaration of polls at the AEC offices last month and then stepping out onto Hay Street to catch the bus back up to West Perth. And even though I could see the bus coming down the road, I just had to press that button—and the good news is that some 23 years later, it’s still working.

While working in that trade, I was volunteering in my local church youth group, and I soon realised that I much preferred to work with people rather than with an oscilloscope and soldering iron. So for the next eight years I worked as a youth worker across a number of churches and community organisations. It was fulfilling work, but it was tough, because I was exposed to some very challenging circumstances that a lot of young people find themselves in. It was a defining experience which enabled me to work with young people that maybe didn’t have the best start at life. Along with the other youth leaders, I was able see the influence that you can have as a role model and mentor to young people in those developing and vulnerable years.
My faith is an integral part of my life. I am a Christian, and I believe and affirm the Apostles' Creed. In my late 20s, I seriously considered studying theology and becoming a minister of religion. But, while my faith was, and still is, a very important part of my life, I came to the realisation that being a pastor wasn't the right path for me.

In 2008, a friend of mine told me about philanthropists Andrew and Nicola Forrest and their foundation Minderoo, or the Australian Children's Trust as it was known then. I learnt that the foundation's motto was 'Give a man a fish, you feed him for a day; teach him how to fish, you feed him for a lifetime.'

And this just jumped out at me. You see, I kind of felt like in my work I'd been handing out a lot of fish. Now, there is nothing wrong with that—in fact, if you're going to go fishing you often need to have had a feed before you go. So I don't take anything away from those wonderful charities and organisations that provide such important welfare services to our community. But, for me, I wanted to be a part of something that could help people break free from the cycle of welfare and teach them how to fish. So I took up work with the Forrests, where we started Generation One, an initiative to create employment for Indigenous Australians.

In a defining moment, on an early project with Generation One I had reason to be in Fitzroy Crossing in the Kimberley. While I was there, a huge storm broke out and it rained so much that it turned Fitzroy Crossing into an island. The roads and all the communications were cut off. So over that weekend, with some spare time on my hands, I walked down to the football oval and made conversation with a small group of Indigenous teenage boys. After a brief kick of the footy, I asked them what they wanted to do when they finished school, and they looked at me like I was from another planet. They said: 'School? We don't go to school.' I said, 'Well what do you want to do when you get a little older?' They said, 'We'll just go on CDEP'—essentially the work for the dole program, as it was called at the time.

These were smart, funny, athletic kids that ought to not have their aspirations cut so short, yet they couldn't see much more for their life than a life of welfare dependency. That conversation was the turning point for me. I knew exactly what I wanted to do—give kids like these hope and aspiration.

So cue Generation One, an initiative to create employment for 50,000 Indigenous Australians. The program worked by turning the training and employment services system on its head. Typically, an unemployed person would go to Centrelink to register for Newstart. Centrelink would send them off to an employment service provider—or a jobactive as they are now known. The service provider would enrol them in a course and then hope for the best that they would get a job. By and large this is kind of still how it operates today, but, more often than not, the training is just training for training's sake.

The problem is that jobseekers cycle in and out of courses with no job to show for it at the end. It's often said, that Indigenous job seekers in particular have more certificates than there are TAFE colleges, to wallpaper their hallways with. Or as my friend Jeremy Donovan, who is sitting in the gallery today, says, more tickets than a raffle book.

We have to fix how service providers are incentivised. This, to me, seems to be the genesis of the problem. The jobactive contract is the second-largest procurement of government services, second only to defence. It's a $7 billion industry, and I know the government is committed to further reforms, and I look forward to contributing to it, because failure in this policy area is not an option. The training for training's sake issue not only wastes an enormous amount of taxpayers' dollars but it completely depletes the trainee of any sense of pride and aspiration.

Under GenerationOne, we started with an employer who had a job, designed the training around their requirements and guaranteed the individual a job before they commenced training.

For some time Fortescue Metals had been running this model quite successfully in the Pilbara, so I thought: let's see if we can get it working here in Fitzroy Crossing.

We found an employer with 12 civil and mining works jobs available. We designed the training course and went about recruiting.

It was made clear at the start of the program that the expectations would be high. We needed the participants to turn up on time, every single day, and they had to be fully competent across all the units before they could graduate.

And boy did these fellas rise to the occasion. They knew it would be tough, but they wanted to take it on.

Several months later, we held a graduation ceremony where all the families were able to attend. We gave each of the graduates a certificate and a fishing rod, not because of the plentiful barra in the Fitzroy River but to remind them that their training and their job were setting them up for life.

There was one particular family that I noticed. I could tell by looking at them just how proud they were of their father. Now, I had no idea of the effect that this conversation I was about to have with them would have on me and on my own life. But it profoundly impacted me.
I went up to them and congratulated them. I spoke to the gentleman and I spoke to his family. I said to his wife, "You must be so proud." She said, "More than you could possibly understand.'

She then told me her husband had been on course after course. He'd been through drug and alcohol rehab and all sorts of counselling. He'd been in and out of jail and nothing was working.

She then said, "It was only a few months ago, on Christmas Eve, that we sat down together and I said to him, "With the way things are going, this is likely to be our last Christmas together.'" It was not because they were going to separate, but because it wouldn't be too long before the drugs or the alcohol, or quite possibly suicide, would take him.

She said: 'You came up here, you and your team, and you told us there were these jobs and that you believed in these fellas and that they could rise to the challenge. And now I've seen the transformation in my husband. He turned up 30 min early every single day. It was tough, but he was up for it because he knew the commitment was there. And now we're looking forward to next Christmas and many more to follow.'

You see, employment won't change everything, but without it nothing will change.

This model, originally pioneered by Fortescue Metals Group and trialed in Fitzroy Crossing, became a template for the Vocational Training and Employment Centres (VTEC) program.

As a Liberal, I'm extremely proud the coalition government committed over $40 million to roll out 29 VTECs across Australia. Today, as a direct result of this, over 10,000 long-term, disadvantaged jobseekers have moved off welfare and into work. Not only that, the data shows that over 70 per cent of these jobseekers were still in work some six months later.

We say that the best form of welfare is a job. I've been privileged to see the reality and practical effect of this on countless lives.

When you lift people up so that they can see over the horizon, when they earn their first pay cheque, when they see that they can independently support their family and take part in all the advantages that life in the 21st century enables, the transformation is truly amazing. This is why I'm proud to be part of a government that has created 1.3 million jobs since coming into office.

Those familiar with my background know I'm a big supporter of the cashless debit card, having spent many years working with technology companies and policymakers to develop the platform.

In 2015 I spent much of my time in Canberra, lobbying for its introduction, and later worked with the trial communities to make sure it had the best opportunity to succeed.

It's a critical tool to help communities deal with the devastating effects of alcohol, gambling and drug abuse.

I'd like to see a wider rollout into other vulnerable communities across Australia. But for that to happen we have to invest in the further development of the technology.

It's important that this tool becomes a tool of empowerment, and with item-level blocking on the card, rather than the current merchant-level blocking, we'll be able to see that happen.

I'm also a passionate advocate for early childhood development. As a nation, I believe we need to apply resources to initiatives we know will achieve game-changing results for children and the communities in which they belong.

Fostering and investing in resilience targeted initiatives for young people is critical to prepare them for the rapidly changing world in which we live. We know a child's early experiences have a significant impact on the elemental structures and development of their brains. The evidence around this is well established, as is our understanding of the multiplier effect on the investment we make in this area.

As those in this place would have heard my colleagues say many times before, Western Australia is the state with endless potential, but we also have a great deal of work to do to ensure that we fully realise it. The experiences I've had through my professional life are why I'm so passionate about pursuing industrial opportunities for Western Australia. My singular focus in this place will be on job and productivity-enhancing initiatives which benefit not just the Western Australian and national economy but individuals and the communities in which they live.

Western Australia has the unique and deepening economic and cultural relationships with nations in our near region. We're also on the same time zone, plus or minus two hours, with 60 per cent of the global population and have overlapping business hours with key markets in Europe, the US, the Middle East and Asia. And despite Perth being an isolated city, we're also Australia's gateway to the great cities of the world, including London, for which we have former Premier Barnett to thank. China and India, along with nations on their periphery, have growing
middle classes. People for the first time are seeking to explore the world and grow individual wealth. There are also key markets on our doorstep for new inbound investment and tourism opportunities.

As a state, we're leading the nation and, in many cases, the world in research and development for processing and refining lithium and rare earths; in ground-breaking technology for the resources industry; and in building the agriculture industry of the future. But it is clear to me we need to do more. The establishment of critical raw minerals lists by both the United States and the European Union present a key opportunity for Australia to move past the mining stage and into the refining and development of new battery technologies. We have a clear logistical advantage by having a large portion of global lithium and rare earth deposits and a burgeoning share of global research and development happening right on our doorstep.

Western Australia is without a doubt a global leader in automation, remote operations and processing technology, which has been pioneered by our resources sector. These advances in technology mean we can continue to grow this critical industry in a sustainable and responsible way in the face of fierce global competition. They are also opening the door to new partnerships across complimentary industries seeking to exploit the advantages of automation and remote operations in harsh environments both above us in space and below us in the deep sea.

It would be remiss of me not to expand on the potential of Western Australia's agricultural industry. Firstly, I am proud to be part of a government that's committed to growing the value of our national agriculture industry to $100 billion by 2030. As a state, we can position ourselves to contribute significantly to this goal, particularly in our northwest, both by leveraging current infrastructure such as the Ord River Irrigation Scheme and reviewing how we can unlock water resources in our north which can be put to work for the agriculture industry in a way that is sustainable and cost-effective.

Despite our large size of around one-third of the Australian continent, the spread and scope of economic opportunity does not match the spread of our population, with around 92 per cent of Western Australians living in the city and southwest. It's time we restart the discussion of not only how we grow the economy in regional and remote Western Australia but how we ensure this growth delivers employment, opportunities and practical development outcomes for the communities in which it occurs. We need to develop a vision in the same spirit of those great Western Australians who came before us who weren't afraid to think big and be bold.

My great-grandparents Michael and Kathleen Kilrain, with their farm in Manjimup, and Mick and Sarah O'Sullivan, who played a significant role in conserving our old growth forests, are great examples of the everyday Western Australians who have built our great state. Add to this statesmen such as John Forrest and CY O'Connor, with the Fremantle port and Goldfields Water Supply Scheme, and David Brand and Charles Court, who worked with the Menzies government to first open and then develop our iron ore sector. It is the efforts of those who have walked before us — no matter how grand or minor their legacy — which has culminated in Western Australia becoming the economic powerhouse that it is today.

For the next generation, our water, our resources, our people and our passion to get things done hold the key to this future. We have a great deal of work to do. It remains true that if you scratch any Western Australian deep enough, you'll find a federalist; if you scratch even deeper, you'll probably find a secessionist. As the 97th senator for Western Australia since Federation, I come to this place with a full appreciation of the intent of the Senate as envisaged by our founding fathers. In this place, I'll always remain a Western Australian first.

Canberra is a long way from Perth, and it's an even longer way from some of our regional centres. Granted, we now have a much shorter travel time than our delegates who travelled to the Federation conferences in 1800's by coastal steamer, but it remains my job as a Senator for our great state to ensure communities right across WA, no matter how far away they are, do not feel disconnected from our decision-making processes. It's a critical part of our Westminster system: every Australian has equality of access to our democracy. I'm doing my part to ensure this continues to be the case for Western Australia.

As a member of this place I'm going to have a singular focus on ensuring both Western Australia and its people are able to reach their full potential. The best way we can achieve this is through incentives, big and bold thinking, sound economic management, careful and minimal regulation, job-enabling and wealth-creating legislation and a good, traditional Liberal government.

Like all of my colleagues, I have not arrived here simply by my own efforts. I've received an enormous amount of support, firstly to the Liberal party: President Fay Duda and Director Sam Calabrese, what an amazing campaign you ran in WA. We returned each of our 11 Liberal-held seats, won three Senate seats and, with the extraordinary efforts of our lower house candidates—who are behind me here today—we achieved the highest state-wide lower house and Senate primary results in the nation.
To all of our volunteers, I simply would not be here without you. As insufficient as it is, thank you. Thank you to all my WA colleagues, ably led by Senator Mathias Cormann—I’ve been humbled by his support. Team WA is a united and disciplined team and I’m very proud to be part of it.

I’ll also express my sincere appreciation for the Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, whose energy and vision inspired the nation. To my TCC brothers, Aaron, Brad, Gareth and their wives, we’ve remained best friend since primary school and I’ll forever be grateful. To all of those who have played a role in mentoring me at various stages of my life—some of them are here today: Brad, David, Bruce, Ken, Court, Joe, Nick, Ben, Andrew and Nicola—I sincerely appreciate your generosity belief and confidence.

Now, to my family. Firstly, to my wife's parents, you've been my mum and dad for pretty much half of my life, almost, come December—that's right. You are the kindest most sincere people I know and I'm truly blessed to have you in my life. To my mum and dad and nanna, I'm completely indebted to you. You've never stopped believing. And my siblings, Simon and Sarah, you've made great sacrifices. You've been the perfect example for our lives. Your love and support has provided me with the confidence to aim high. To the absolute loves of my life—my beautiful wife, Montanique, my daughter, Amy and my son, Sam: you are my inspiration. Babe, we’ve been married 20 years this December and you have not aged a bit, but me, on the other hand—well. I can honestly say I love you as much today as I did back then. Your selfless love and your unrelenting commitment to our marriage and our children is something that I know will carry me through in this new chapter of our lives. To Amy and Sam, I'm so proud of you. I'm so proud of who you're growing up to be. You definitely get your good looks from your mother, but you need to know that whilst I'm going to be spending a lot of time over here in the east, you'll never be a far from my heart and my mind. I love you.

Finally, to the people of Western Australia: you’ve placed your confidence in me to deliver for you. The real work starts now, and I will not let you down. Thank you.

The PRESIDENT: I take this opportunity to acknowledge, in the President's gallery, the Premier of South Australia, Mr Stephen Marshall. Welcome to the Senate.

PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION

Valedictory

The PRESIDENT (18:33): Pursuant to order, the Senate will now move to valedictory statements.

Senator FIFIELD (Victoria) (18:33): Colleagues and friends, doesn't it go by in the blink of an eye? It was a little over 15 years ago that I rose to speak for the first time in this great chamber. I did so as the 487th senator to serve in this place since Federation. This struck me at the time as being a pretty small number, but since I arrived 120 senators have left this place. I cite these figures to highlight that, while ours may be a select group, our custodianship is transitory. To be chosen by your party peers to be their flag-bearer, to be endorsed by the voters, to be afforded a platform and resources to pursue the national interest, there are few greater privileges. Today, for me, represents the culmination of a decade and a half in the Senate, and the drawing of stumps on a parliamentary and a ministerial career. But today also represents for me the conclusion of 31 years in full-time professional politics and 23 years working in this building.

It was as a student at Sydney university in 1985 that my commitment to the Liberal cause was formalised through joining the Sydney University Liberal Club. But it wasn't long before there was political drama. The Liberal club candidate for SRC president, Michael Hughes, was challenged for SRC president by another Liberal club member, Joe Hockey, who was running on a rival college ticket. Now, Joe won, and one thing the Sydney University Liberal Club could not tolerate was a winner! So there was only one thing to do: we voted to expel Joe from the Liberal club! Odd as it may seem, Joe still doesn't find this funny! But, colleagues, Joe has been a great servant of the nation and a wonderful ambassador to the United States, and our friend and colleague Senator Sinodinos will shortly make his own distinguished contribution in that role.

Colleagues, in the 15 years after university, I was fortunate to learn about good government, good policy and good politics through working for some great parliamentarians: Bruce Baird, in the first four reforming years of the Greiner government; John Anderson, in the character-forming years of the Hewson opposition; Alan Brown, in the first four barnstorming years of the Kennett government; and Peter Costello, in the first eight landmark years of the Howard government. However, all the while, I was first and foremost an active grassroots party member.

The retirement in 2004 of another former deputy Senate leader and communications minister, Richard Alston, presented the opportunity for me to serve in this place. I came into parliament determined to fight for individual liberty and a smaller footprint for government. In about my second party-room meeting in this place, I saw an opportunity to present my case. Colleagues in the party room were pushing for the establishment of a
Tuesday, 30 July 2019

Commonwealth community small grants program. I saw my opportunity. I sought the leader's call and sprang to my feet, arguing that surely there had to be limits to areas of government involvement—that surely this wasn't core government business. I'd barely opened my mouth before I was drowned out by House colleagues shouting out: 'Sit down. Shut up. What would a senator know?' I was quickly introduced to the regard in which senators are held by our House colleagues. But I've always consoled myself with the fact that at least we in the Senate can read!

It was through the pursuit of another issue that I soon learnt the influence that a single backbencher can have within the forums of the party. The issue was a symbolic one for Liberals: voluntary student unionism, or VSU. If we believe in voluntary unionism in the workplace, why not on campus? So, over 2004 and 2005, I decided to get to my feet at every second party-room meeting and ask Prime Minister John Howard why he wasn't legislating VSU. Each time I rose to my feet I could see that Prime Minister Howard was getting more and more agitated and irritable. Strangely enough, I only took encouragement from this! Anyway, it was successful; VSU was legislated—only to be reversed, regretfully, by the Rudd government. But this exercise taught me you didn't have to hold ministerial office to achieve an outcome. In this business, it's 90 per cent about persistence.

I applied this approach to another cause of which I became a champion: securing funding to establish the first non-metropolitan medical school in Victoria, at Deakin University in Geelong. My advice to Vice Chancellor Sally Walker and the dean, John Catford, was to be charmingly persistent. This is also sometimes known as stalking! The plan was for the Deakin team to be present wherever PM Howard, Treasurer Costello, Health Minister Abbott and Education Minister Nelson were. None of these four ministers could turn around at a public or private event anywhere in Australia without seeing someone from Deakin smiling at them. In the end, the only way to make Deakin go away was to say yes. I call this type of lobbying 'the Deakin model'!

In 2009, opposition leader Turnbull appointed me to be on the front bench, where I had the great privilege of serving as the shadow minister for disabilities and, subsequently, as minister. I had no background in disabilities. I didn't know anyone with a significant disability; I didn't know any carers. I have to say, my eyes were opened to the raw deal Australians with disabilities received—support was determined not by need but by how you acquired your disability. This had to change, and the NDIS was the answer. I acknowledge Bruce Bonyhady, John Walsh, Ara Creswell and Milly Parker, who all have lived experience of the issues and who educated me. I thank them. I was very proud in opposition to carry my colleagues with me to elevate disability and the NDIS beyond partisanship. In that spirit, I acknowledge Bill Shorten's role in championing the NDIS when I was his shadow. Then, as the minister for disabilities in government from 2013, I had the responsibility to lay the foundations of the NDIS. I thank Tony Abbott for embracing NDIS bipartisanship as opposition leader and for being an NDIS champion as Prime Minister.

My approach in this place has never been partisanship for the sake of partisanship. It should only ever be partisanship with a purpose: partisanship that helps highlight an important philosophical difference is good, partisanship that helps make clear a stark policy choice is good, but partisanship should never be gratuitous. I've tried to abide by this. I took the same approach as minister for aged care, where I was able to introduce genuine choice for the first time for those receiving care at home. I particularly acknowledge my then aged-care adviser, Pat Sparrow, and consumer advocate Ian Yates for their wise counsel.

My next brief was as Minister for Communications and Minister for the Arts, where I took satisfaction in legislating the dismantling of the old 'princes of print' and 'queens of screen' arrangements that predated the internet and tied the hands of Australian media, preventing scale and the ability to compete with the global giants. But this was not easy. There was the double hurdle of securing support across the media industry and across the Senate. Success was only possible because of a constructive Senate crossbench and due to the willingness of Australia's media leaders to look beyond their own legitimate organisational interests to the wider welfare of the industry.

In particular, I acknowledge the roles played by Peter Tonagh, Harold Mitchell, Campbell Reid, Georgia-Kate Schubert, Greg Hywood, Joan Warner, Grant Blackely, Adam Lang, Ryan Stokes, Hugh Marks, Paul Anderson, Annabelle Herd, Kerry Stokes, Peter Costello and, of course, my then broadcasting adviser, Luke Tobin, without whom success would not have been achieved. But, on this matter, I could not have got to first base without the backing and encouragement of then Prime Minister Turnbull.

I should also mention that part of this grand media bargain was a commitment to examine content issues and the role of digital platforms. So, as part of the media reform package I commissioned with then Treasurer Morrison the ACCC Digital Platforms Inquiry, which has just handed down its report. This will provide the context for this important work to be pursued. I acknowledge Graham Burke for his wise counsel in this area.
I am proud, through my roles as Minister for Communications and Minister for the Arts, not only to have helped give Australian media organisations a fighting chance but to have overseen the near completion of the NBN through the Herculean efforts of the whole NBN team, especially Ziggy Switowski, Bill Morrow and Stephen Rue. Again, it should be acknowledged that the architect of the NBN revival, one of the great Australian corporate turnarounds, was my predecessor as the minister, Malcolm Turnbull.

As minister, I also had the opportunity to put in place the building blocks for a tougher approach to online regulation, to prepare the way for the 5G revolution and to boost support for Australian contemporary music and our national collecting institutions. Just to give one example of how seriously I took my support for Australian music, I want to breach cabinet confidentiality for a moment. When I was taking Ita Buttrose forward to cabinet to be the Chair of the ABC, I detailed Ita's qualifications and concluded by saying, 'Colleagues, you should know that Ita's appointment enjoys the strong support of Jimmy Barnes and Cold Chisel.' Mathias, who was on my left, said, 'I don't understand. What do you mean?' I responded, 'Okay, for the new arrivals,' and I proceeded to sing to cabinet the Cold Chisel tribute song 'Ita'.

**Government senators:** Do it! Do it!

**Senator FIFIELD:** 'Ita's tongue never touches her lips'—no, I won't. Get thee behind me, Satan! I'm pretty sure that I'm the first minister since Federation to sing in support of their cab sub. So, Fletch, it's over to you.

But, more broadly, my aim for the arts was to bring a period of stability, and I thank all of those in the arts portfolio for teaching me that the arts are not an optional extra; they're core to how we live. The arts help us to better understand our past, make sense of the present and be better prepared for the future. To our nation's artists: thank you for helping us all to see things, feel things and think things that we otherwise would not have had the opportunity to do. I see in the gallery a passionate arts minister, the Premier of South Australia, Steve Marshall, who is a good friend and an inspiring leader. It is great to see you, Steve.

One of my great and perverse joys in this place has been having responsibility for chamber management for the coalition in opposition and in government for a decade. I say 'perverse' because it's not exactly everyone's idea of fun. We all know that, unlike those in the other place, we senators are genuine legislators. We read legislation. We draft amendments, we move amendments and we negotiate. To be at the heart of that as Senate manager was to be in the engine room of parliamentary democracy. For the record, during my tenure, the government secured the passage of 731 bills in the Senate.

If I could, I would leave a few messages as I depart. Firstly, the ordinary norms of human engagement should apply in politics. Too often in our business they're left at the door. You can't have as your starting point where you want someone to be or where you think they should be. You've got to have as your starting point where they are, respect that and then work back from there. When you do that, you can get good outcomes. Secondly, there are some commentators whose thesis is that the system of politics in Australia is broken, that it's not possible to achieve reform anymore and that the press, the 24/7 media cycle, hung chambers and new quasi-political groups make it all too hard. I could not disagree more. How challenges manifest themselves certainly changes, but the essence of politics is the same. Our core business is advocacy. Our core business is persuasion: to stake out some territory on an issue, to make a case, to argue it and to carry people along with you. The extent to which political practitioners fail to achieve their objectives is a failure of persuasion and of advocacy. So I encourage all my colleagues to reject the thesis that the system is broken and to embrace core business.

In closing, I thank the Prime Minister for his unstinting support of me as a minister and for his invitation to me to continue to serve as communications and arts minister. I thank him for the opportunity for a new avenue of service through his announced intention to recommend to the Governor-General my appointment as the next ambassador and permanent representative of Australia to the United Nations. I wish him and the government well. His will be a great prime ministership.

I've been extremely fortunate during my 15 years in the Senate. I've served for a decade on the front bench, for six of those years as a member of the leadership group, serving as Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate and as Manager of Government Business in the Senate, and for six years as a minister, serving as Minister for Communications, Minister for the Arts, minister for disabilities and minister for aged care. What has been achieved through these commissions would not have been possible without the support of my coalition colleagues, the dedicated members of the Australian Public Service, the Senate chamber department and the hard work of my wonderful personal staff. I thank the Senate staff through the Clerk, Richard Pye, and I thank the APS through my most recent secretary, Mike Mrdak.

But I do want to highlight my personal staff. Those who serve in the offices of senators and ministers make a commitment well beyond the professional, and I thank them. I've had close to 100 personal staff pass through my office over the years. Those in recent times have taken to referring to themselves as Fife4Life. I thank all my staff,
and I do so through those who've served as my chiefs of staff: my final COS, Luke Tobin, so committed he's worked for me on three separate occasions, in opposition and government, between the ages of 21 and 35; and to my other COSs, Luke Coleman, Richard Windeyer, Darren Disney, Craig Bosworth and Robert McMahon. Thank you, through you, to the entire team over the years.

I acknowledge my two longest serving members of staff: Sarah Bridger, the 'Master of the Senate', who, in opposition and government, for 10 years told me and Mathias what to do—Sarah, you can take great pride in the legislative success and in your disability policy work in opposition; and Lorraine Sayers, for always being there, right up to the very end, and for the extra support she provided to my family. Thank you.

But there is one other staff member I want to mention—a Labor staffer who works for Linda Burney, following stints with Richo, Ros Kelly and Laurie Brereton. I speak of my Aunt, Di Ford. I've always had someone from the other side looking over me and out for me. Thank you, Di, for being in the gallery tonight.

To serve the community in the Australian Senate and in the cabinet is an honour, which is only possible due to the faith party members have placed in me to represent their values, party members who seek nothing other than better outcomes for their nation. Emblematic, are people like the late Norm and Joyce Loader; the late Ben and Patti Sanders; the late Thelma Mansfield; the late Willis Parton and his wife, Val. Without these great Liberals who nursed me to political maturity, I would not have had the opportunity to serve.

I thank my colleagues for their friendship and support and for all they have done and will continue to do for the nation. I've served under great Senate Leaders: Robert Hill, Nick Minchin, Eric Abetz, George Brandis and Mathias Cormann. To Mathias: we've been a great legislative team and a great partnership. Together we've achieved many great policy outcomes in opposition and in government. You've been an extraordinary legislator and leader. You've been a great friend. I'll miss you, but I know the shop will continue to be in good hands.

Simon Birmingham: I escorted you into the chamber and you've been a steady friend through some good times and some difficult times. Thank you. Michaela Cash: you're a good buddy. You're Tonka tough. Thank you for your friendship and support. Marise Payne: my oldest friend in this place, dating back to my time in the New South Wales division. You walked me into the chamber. Always a friend. You are a great prosecutor of our national interest, and I look forward to continuing to work with you and for you.

James Paterson: a great friend who, along with his wife Lydia, served on my staff. James and Lydia, you are reason for optimism about our party's future. And James, if we couldn't have Lydia in the Senate, you'll do. Dean Smith: we've known each other for a long time, and you've been my communications and arts partner as backbench committee chair. You share in the success we've had in the portfolio. Cory: we may be separated brethren, but we're brethren nonetheless. I'll always think fondly, particularly, of the times we had in opposition with Brett Mason and Stephen Parry.

President Ryan: we've had some twists and some turns, but we've always been heading in the same direction. Thank you for your friendship. Speaker Smith: my great mate, who guided me through the Victorian party when I moved from New South Wales 27 years ago. You've been a constant friend, backstop and counsellor. Thank you. And it's great to have Josh in the gallery. You've become a good friend. Thank you for your leadership in Victoria.

These roles are not possible without the support and sacrifices of family. I thank mine, to whom I owe everything. I thank my brothers, Scott and Matt, for putting up with an absent brother. But I hope Mum and Dad would be proud.

The last decade and a half in the Senate has been immensely rewarding and a great privilege, but this is the right time for me and my family to look to a new opportunity of service.

I thank my daughter, Ruby, who was three when I entered the Senate. She interjected in my first speech when she heard her name. Ruby is now 18 and has become a wonderful woman—I must confess, in the absence of my parenting. I'm so proud of you, Ruby, and I thank you for being more loving and understanding than I deserve.

And my seven-year-old son, Harry, who's in the gallery today: Harry, we're about to embark upon a great adventure, and your mum and I are just so very proud of you.

And my partner, Mari: thank you for your love, for your unfailing support and for your endless patience. The only mistakes I've made are the ones where I haven't listened to you!

Colleagues, for me the work goes on, but in a different forum. I look forward with relish to continuing to serve the nation in a new capacity. I thank my colleagues for the courtesy extended to me tonight. Best wishes to you all. Good luck, and thank you.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (18:59): I am very sad, Senator Fifield, that we had to wait until this day to hear your brilliant impersonation of the Leader of the Government in the Senate. I would have liked to have heard more of that.
Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (18:59): I've heard it on more than one occasion, Madam Deputy President. Senator Mitch Fifield is one of my closest and dearest friends and colleagues in this parliament. He has served Victoria and Australia with distinction, great honour and integrity. We knew of each other but didn't know each other all that well when we both were working as staffers in the Howard government. Mitch was the senior political adviser to one of the absolute giants of Australian politics—our then Treasurer, Peter Costello—having worked for senior politicians, state and federal, over a 15-year period. I was working for another great Australian—Senator Chris Ellison—who was in the outer ministry. From that perspective, we all greatly admired Mitch as someone who had reached the great heights of political staffing.

When I arrived in the Senate back in June 2007, during the final months of the Howard government, Mitch had already served as a senator for Victoria for about three years. He had already secured significant policy reform to the benefit of students all around Australia—voluntary student unionism. It was during the many policy battles in opposition that we became very close friends. Politics is the battle of ideas. In opposition it is as much about the battle to help shape the future policy direction of your own team as it is about fighting against or seeking to improve bad policy proposals from the other side. It's fair to say that Mitch and I worked very closely on both.

Our work together—and I'm sure Senator Wong remembers this fondly—on the Senate Select Committee on Fuel and Energy and later on the Senate Select Committee on the Scrutiny of New Taxes, scrutinising and passing policy judgements and political judgements on Labor's Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, the resource superprofits tax, the mineral resources rent tax and student services and amenities fees, was the time when we forged a very strong and trusting bond of friendship. Ever since those days together in the opposition trenches we waged many a policy battle. We were successful in quite a number of them, although not all. It helped shape our policy agenda at the time and, indeed, for a period into government.

Whenever there was time at the end of a sitting day we would quietly celebrate or commiserate over dinner or drinks, solving those problems in the world that were still left to be solved at the end of another day—and there would be the occasional poking fun at me with my accent and the occasional song. As the shadow minister for disabilities, carers and the voluntary sector, Mitch was absolutely instrumental and the driving force behind ensuring that the coalition offered strong and unwavering bipartisan support for the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Coming into government as the minister responsible for the NDIS, he led the charge to put the rollout of that important scheme, which was to provide more appropriate support to people across Australia with disabilities and their families, on a solid foundation trajectory for the future. That responsibility was described in one independent review as like building a plane in flight.

Having helped lay the foundation for the NDIS, Mitch helped address the chronic unmet need of a group of people who had been unsupported for decades. When the coalition formed government in 2013 the scheme only continued to gain momentum under Mitch's guidance. There continues to be more work to be done, of course—it is a massive reform undertaking—but Mitch made a significant strategic contribution to this scheme from opposition and ensured we continued to build the momentum and deliver this reform in practice in government. Today the NDIS remains as much a priority for the government as it was then.

As communications minister Mitch has overseen, together with his fellow shareholder minister I would like to think, the near completion of the National Broadband Network. When the coalition inherited the NBN in 2013 barely 50,000 premises were connected to the fixed network. Today more than 10 million homes and businesses can connect, giving them fast and reliable broadband and connecting them to the world around them. Much of this progress has occurred under Mitch's guidance. Millions of Australians are better off as a result.

In 2017, under Mitch's guidance, the coalition delivered the biggest reforms to Australian media laws in nearly three decades, giving new life to legislation not updated since the 20th century and strengthening Australia's media industry. These were reforms that many said would never pass, but Mitch got it done. Thanks to Mitch, Australians of all ages who use the internet do so under a stronger regime so that Australians have a safer and more positive experiences online.

One of his greatest passions as a minister was his role as Minister for the Arts. Mitch, as Minister for the Arts, was highly regarded by the arts community for bringing funding stability to the sector and also for attending hundreds and hundreds of concerts and exhibitions and, on occasions, giving his own concerts. I attended those too. Combining time served in opposition and government, he would have to be one of the longest serving managers of opposition and government business. We did work closely together for many, many years in trying to get our legislative reform agenda through the Senate, as a government, or trying to block the bad policy reforms and bad legislation being put forward on occasion by the other side when they were in government. Mitch was incredibly well-organised and exceptionally effective in that role. We were a great team.
Throughout our time together in the Senate, we haven't always ended up on the same side in relation to contested ballots on key positions. In fact, on a number of occasions, we didn't. I can honestly say that it never, ever has affected our friendship, which has been built over many years on deep and unwavering trust. That is because, even when we ended up making different judgements, we were always totally honest, open and up-front with each other about what we were doing and why. We both totally respected that the other was making their judgement based on what they felt was the right way forward.

I have to say that I feel very safe knowing that Senator Fifield will soon become Ambassador Fifield, representing Australia at the United Nations. All Australians can have great confidence and trust that his judgements and his actions as our representative on all matters arising before the UN from time to time will be very sound. Serving with Mitch in the leadership group of our parliamentary party in his roles as manager and deputy leader was a real privilege. He is a very experienced and skilled politician, with sound judgement and great integrity. He is also great fun and has a great sense of humour. He can be a great singer—or not—and is an all-round very good friend. I should correct that: he is always a good singer! I will really miss you, Mitch, and do sincerely hope that over the years we can continue to bridge the geographical divide and remain in close touch and remain good friends.

Mitch, in your first speech in the Senate on 12 May 2004, you said about your predecessor, Richard Alston, that he was a great servant of his party, the state of Victoria and the nation. You have been all of that in spades. You have served your party, your state and your nation with distinction and with great grace, as a determined and convicted politician, carving out a legacy that you and your family can and should be proud of. To Mitch, Mari, Ruby and Harry, good luck with your next adventures. You will be missed in this place, but I am sure we will continue to meet and enjoy each other's company in other places around the world in the future. Best of luck.

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (19:08): I rise on behalf of the Opposition to acknowledge the departure of Senator Fifield and to make a short contribution on his valedictory. I want to start with an apology. You see, for most of the time that Senator Fifield was Manager of Government Business in the Senate—in the life of the Abbott, Turnbull and Morrison governments—I have been Leader of the Opposition in the Senate. That means he's borne the brunt of the many attempts we have made to strike a blow for government accountability in this place. I have to confess that, on occasions, he's probably been the recipient of a serve from me.

Whether it be motions, committee references, short statements, OPDs, selection of bills reports or amendments—but especially those suspensions of standing orders that drop at 9.28 am on a Wednesday morning—he has copped the lot. I will not say that I have never seen him flustered, but to his credit he is not one to lose his cool. He said tonight in his remarks that partisanship should have a purpose and should not be gratuitous. That has been the approach he has taken. Of course, I do hasten to add that all of those actions in the chamber were entirely justified!

Senator Fifield has come a long way from his time as an advisor to Peter Costello, famously ironing his shirts—and my ribbing about that, which he's always taken in very good grace. He entered this place in 2004, following the resignation of Richard Alston. In his first speech, and also in his valedictory tonight, he spoke about those in his family who identify with the Labor side of politics. Throughout our time together in the Senate, we haven't always ended up on the same side in relation to contested ballots on key positions. In fact, on a number of occasions, we didn't. I can honestly say that it never, ever has affected our friendship, which has been built over many years on deep and unwavering trust. That is because, even when we ended up making different judgements, we were always totally honest, open and up-front with each other about what we were doing and why. We both totally respected that the other was making their judgement based on what they felt was the right way forward.

I have to say that I feel very safe knowing that Senator Fifield will soon become Ambassador Fifield, representing Australia at the United Nations. All Australians can have great confidence and trust that his judgements and his actions as our representative on all matters arising before the UN from time to time will be very sound. Serving with Mitch in the leadership group of our parliamentary party in his roles as manager and deputy leader was a real privilege. He is a very experienced and skilled politician, with sound judgement and great integrity. He is also great fun and has a great sense of humour. He can be a great singer—or not—and is an all-round very good friend. I should correct that: he is always a good singer! I will really miss you, Mitch, and do sincerely hope that over the years we can continue to bridge the geographical divide and remain in close touch and remain good friends.

Mitch, in your first speech in the Senate on 12 May 2004, you said about your predecessor, Richard Alston, that he was a great servant of his party, the state of Victoria and the nation. You have been all of that in spades. You have served your party, your state and your nation with distinction and with great grace, as a determined and convicted politician, carving out a legacy that you and your family can and should be proud of. To Mitch, Mari, Ruby and Harry, good luck with your next adventures. You will be missed in this place, but I am sure we will continue to meet and enjoy each other's company in other places around the world in the future. Best of luck.

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (19:08): I rise on behalf of the Opposition to acknowledge the departure of Senator Fifield and to make a short contribution on his valedictory. I want to start with an apology. You see, for most of the time that Senator Fifield was Manager of Government Business in the Senate—in the life of the Abbott, Turnbull and Morrison governments—I have been Leader of the Opposition in the Senate. That means he's borne the brunt of the many attempts we have made to strike a blow for government accountability in this place. I have to confess that, on occasions, he's probably been the recipient of a serve from me.

Whether it be motions, committee references, short statements, OPDs, selection of bills reports or amendments—but especially those suspensions of standing orders that drop at 9.28 am on a Wednesday morning—he has copped the lot. I will not say that I have never seen him flustered, but to his credit he is not one to lose his cool. He said tonight in his remarks that partisanship should have a purpose and should not be gratuitous. That has been the approach he has taken. Of course, I do hasten to add that all of those actions in the chamber were entirely justified!

Senator Fifield has come a long way from his time as an advisor to Peter Costello, famously ironing his shirts—and my ribbing about that, which he's always taken in very good grace. He entered this place in 2004, following the resignation of Richard Alston. In his first speech, and also in his valedictory tonight, he spoke about those in his family who identify with the Labor side of politics. Throughout our time together in the Senate, we haven't always ended up on the same side in relation to contested ballots on key positions. In fact, on a number of occasions, we didn't. I can honestly say that it never, ever has affected our friendship, which has been built over many years on deep and unwavering trust. That is because, even when we ended up making different judgements, we were always totally honest, open and up-front with each other about what we were doing and why. We both totally respected that the other was making their judgement based on what they felt was the right way forward.

I have to say that I feel very safe knowing that Senator Fifield will soon become Ambassador Fifield, representing Australia at the United Nations. All Australians can have great confidence and trust that his judgements and his actions as our representative on all matters arising before the UN from time to time will be very sound. Serving with Mitch in the leadership group of our parliamentary party in his roles as manager and deputy leader was a real privilege. He is a very experienced and skilled politician, with sound judgement and great integrity. He is also great fun and has a great sense of humour. He can be a great singer—or not—and is an all-round very good friend. I should correct that: he is always a good singer! I will really miss you, Mitch, and do sincerely hope that over the years we can continue to bridge the geographical divide and remain in close touch and remain good friends.

Mitch, in your first speech in the Senate on 12 May 2004, you said about your predecessor, Richard Alston, that he was a great servant of his party, the state of Victoria and the nation. You have been all of that in spades. You have served your party, your state and your nation with distinction and with great grace, as a determined and convicted politician, carving out a legacy that you and your family can and should be proud of. To Mitch, Mari, Ruby and Harry, good luck with your next adventures. You will be missed in this place, but I am sure we will continue to meet and enjoy each other's company in other places around the world in the future. Best of luck.

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (19:08): I rise on behalf of the Opposition to acknowledge the departure of Senator Fifield and to make a short contribution on his valedictory. I want to start with an apology. You see, for most of the time that Senator Fifield was Manager of Government Business in the Senate—in the life of the Abbott, Turnbull and Morrison governments—I have been Leader of the Opposition in the Senate. That means he's borne the brunt of the many attempts we have made to strike a blow for government accountability in this place. I have to confess that, on occasions, he's probably been the recipient of a serve from me.

Whether it be motions, committee references, short statements, OPDs, selection of bills reports or amendments—but especially those suspensions of standing orders that drop at 9.28 am on a Wednesday morning—he has copped the lot. I will not say that I have never seen him flustered, but to his credit he is not one to lose his cool. He said tonight in his remarks that partisanship should have a purpose and should not be gratuitous. That has been the approach he has taken. Of course, I do hasten to add that all of those actions in the chamber were entirely justified!

Senator Fifield has come a long way from his time as an advisor to Peter Costello, famously ironing his shirts—and my ribbing about that, which he's always taken in very good grace. He entered this place in 2004, following the resignation of Richard Alston. In his first speech, and also in his valedictory tonight, he spoke about those in his family who identify with the Labor side of politics. He included a particular mention of an aunt and uncle who were political staffers in the Whitlam, Hawke and Keating governments and a grandfather with two decades of service to the Printing and Kindred Industries Union. Senator Fifield, it's not too late! There is a better path!

Following the defeat of the Howard government in '07, he assumed shadow executive roles from 2009, entering the full shadow ministry the following year with responsibility for disabilities, carers and the voluntary sector. He held those roles during the period that encompassed the development and enactment of the NDIS. The National Disability Insurance Scheme was a signature legislative achievement of the 43rd Parliament, and it passed with bipartisan support. Senator Fifield deserves acknowledgement for the role he played in the development of the coalition's position in this area during this defining time and for ensuring its passage through this place. In government, Senator Fifield was appointed Minister for Communications and the Arts, again following in the footsteps of Richard Alston. Thankfully, he did bring a much needed touch of diversity to the government frontbench, sporting the longest-held summer beard we've ever seen!

Senator Fifield's public service will clearly not end when he hands in his resignation from the Senate. Like the man he replaced, he moves to a position as a diplomat, beginning a new chapter as Australia's ambassador to the UN in New York. This is a hugely important role. It's not one of those postings that you imagine to be a twirl around the cocktail circuit. It is a place where serious business is conducted by some of the world's most senior diplomats. The agenda is vast, the relationships are complex, and it is a place for workhorses rather than show ponies. Perhaps Senator Fifield may think back to his days here as breezy by contrast.
Whilst it is easy to criticise the UN, it is important to remember how much we need it and how much it supports Australia's interests. Australia played a key role in the founding of the United Nations. As a substantial power but not a super power, the UN can be a hugely valuable tool in our diplomatic toolkit when we engage wisely and constructively. Key bilateral relationships are heavily influenced by how we operate in the multilateral world of the United Nations. How we work with the other 192 member states of the UN can serve or harm our national interests. So Senator Fifield will be carrying on a vital Australian legacy. He is fortunate to join a UN mission that is highly accomplished and that has served Australia well, earning us a valuable seat on the Security Council, which was critical in our response to the tragic and dreadful downing of MH17. More recently, they have earned us a seat on the Human Rights Council. As Australians, must build the future by living up to the leadership we have demonstrated in the past through our commitment to the multilateral rules based order, to the United Nations and its agencies, to the ideals, principles and values which these represent.

Senator Fifield reflected today on his career. He spoke of his time here as 'custodianship'. It is an observation unblinked by ego and respectful of our democracy, an observation which reflects well upon him. Senator Fifield, on behalf of the opposition, I thank you for your service to this Senate. I wish you and your family well and, I particularly wish you well as a representative of Australia in the world.

Senator McKenzie (Victoria—Minister for Agriculture and Leader of The Nationals in the Senate) (19:13): I rise as Leader of the Nationals in the Senate to pay respect to Senator Fifield, his contribution to parliament, his contribution to rural and regional Australia and, indeed, his contribution to our home state of Victoria. He's had a long and distinguished career in this place, and others have made great reflection on that. He's represented our great state of Victoria for 15 years, with more than five years as minister and three in cabinet. I don't think Mitch would stand here today and profess a great depth of knowledge and affinity per se with rural and regional Australia, but his portfolio positions have contributed immensely to the growth and development, the security and safety, the education and health outcomes of rural and regional Australia, and I want to thank him very, very much for that, particularly in his role as communications minister.

He made mention in his speech that one of the great things he recalls over his 15 years is being able to make a difference from the backbench. Mitch was the minister that allowed me to make a difference from the backbench too, with the changes to the ABC around rural and regional positions on the board, ensuring greater accountability of service provision and changes to the charter. So, thank you, Mitch. It's true that the Senate is the chamber that can allow senators to make a difference, no matter where they sit.

Together we also delivered a $220 million Stronger Regional Digital Connectivity Package, which brings our government's total commitment to over 1,000 new base stations. I know, during this parliament, other ministers will be rolling out the work that Mitch and I were able to get through the last budget. I want to thank you for that support, also for rural and regional communities, the difference it will make in their lives.

We inherited a bit of a mess with the NBN, and, Mitch, you've played a significant role in what's been quite a remarkable turnaround story. You were there for the launch of the NBN's Sky Muster satellite service, which has been a significant improvement on our previous satellite services, to be available across the country.

I've always enjoyed sharing the Senate chamber with another eighties music tragic. You're not only okay to dance with but you're okay to sing with too. I'm reliably informed that Mitch's singing proficiency has led to him being affectionately known as 'Mitch with the perfect pitch'. And I think many senators on this side of the chamber will definitely miss the countless late-night sitting parties held out here in our coalition room, where there was a certain DJ, with a certain mix, that had to fight Senator Parry sometimes for use of the speaker. But really, Mitch, that was a great mechanism for developing a team and keeping our spirits high. As a coalition we've really come to the fore on that.

He does have an affinity, though. He was quoted as saying he has a particular fondness for north-east Victoria, where I grew up, having lived for a time on a farm at Ghin Ghin near Yea. Well done! Good. See? It is there. We searched high and wide for reference to the regions. I think one other issue that Mitch and I, and the National Party, have always appreciated is the importance of having a strong coalition and the need to have a strong National Party and a strong separate but loving Liberal Party, in terms of delivering for our communities and for our state. We've been in furious agreement with that, so thank you for your support always.

After the rush has gone, I hope you find a little more time. Oh, he's thinking! Always believe in your soul. You've got the power to know. You're indestructible. All the best from the National Party, Mitch.

Senator Hanson-Young (South Australia) (19:18): I rise tonight on behalf of the Australian Greens to give my congratulations to Senator Fifield for a long career in this place and moving on to bigger and better things as the ambassador to the UN. One thing I am always struck with, in talking to people outside this place, is how
shocked they are to hear that people from different sides of politics actually get along, that we can talk to each other, that we can work with each other, that sometimes what you see in question time is not the reality.

Mitch, I think you have really shown in this place that it doesn't matter what side of politics a person comes from; if they've got a good idea, if they're willing to engage, then you will participate and have that conversation. I thank you. There have been many times where I have had a bee in my bonnet and you've been prepared to listen. But it's really about making this place more cooperative, generally. You see that with your team, and I have witnessed it with how you engage with people right across the political spectrum in this place. I know as communications and arts minister you loved that portfolio dearly and you did some great things. I didn't agree with it all but being able to work on some things together was incredibly satisfying.

In your speech just now you have spoken about not being partisan just for the sake of it, not being oppositional for the sake of being oppositional. I think for all of us that's an important message to hear and an important thing to continue to do in our daily lives in this place in how we work with each other. This place works when we respect each other, when we engage in ideas and lively debate and when we are able to cooperate with the workings of this chamber.

You have always been able to be straight with people. I think that's what's made you good at your job in terms of managing the business in this place. We heard Mathias reference that in terms of your own relationship, but I think from this side of the chamber we've always appreciated your honesty and directness, even if it wasn't exactly what we always wanted.

I'm looking forward to seeing you operate in the UN and doing everything you can for global climate action. I will be sure to be writing some notes for you!

On a personal note, you're a lot of fun. Again, with this idea that politics is broken, I think we as politicians need to be a bit more open. You don't have to be oppositional all of the time. We actually get along in this place because we're all humans. We're all here for the same purpose and that's to contribute to our country to make things better. We might have different opinions about how that is done. But having that debate, having that respect and having a bit of a fun as we do it is what makes politics much better in this country.

Thank you, Mitch. We're going to miss you on this side. I look forward to seeing what comes out of the UN over the next couple of years.

Senator BIRMINGHAM (South Australia—Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment and Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate) (19:22): Mitch, tonight we heard the type of thoughtfulness, perspective, calm, dignity and good humour that has made you a valued friend and colleague to so many across this place—so many, indeed, as you said over the last 15 years. But particularly to your colleagues here and to those of us who have had the great pleasure of serving with you for so much of those 15 years.

As you reflected, I took my first steps into this place through those doors over there with you standing on one side of me and with Senator Payne standing on the other side. Two greater colleagues I could not have chosen. Great friends to start with and throughout.

As you also noted, we've had our ups and downs while we have been in here as we have dealt with the political travails of what has been a tumultuous time in this place. But we've found the importance of what, I think, we dubbed 'public coffee'. I can recall on one of those occasions when we were voting for opposite leaders in the Liberal party room—something that happened more times than I would have liked—we decided the best way to make sure that the world knew that we could overcome such things. We went and plonked ourselves down as Aussies and had cup of coffee together. We made sure that those difficulties could be put behind us, that we could keep working together and that others knew that as well. Of course, that's part of the calm dignity and sense of perspective that you have brought to all of your roles, including the way in which you work with each of us.

We've also had the oddity of job switching in this place, that is as you became the deputy leader I became the manager, and as I became the deputy leader you returned to being the manager. But, again, we managed to make sure that in all of those changes it was about the sense of cooperation, calm and working with one another to get the best possible outcomes for the team, for the government and, ultimately, for the country. That is what you have sought to do with such distinctation through your portfolios.

You have rightly reflected on an amazing and incredible contribution to the NDIS and it's establishment. In your time as the shadow minister, I can well recall you privately chatting to us as the Productivity Commission was doing its work. They had handed down their draft report about the potential need for a national insurance scheme. As you were grappling with that portfolio and thinking about where to take it, you would privately say to many of us that you thought this was a direction the country had to go in and a direction that the coalition had to embrace. It's to your credit that you managed to make sure that, at the time, that support was there in the leadership of our party and across the parliamentary ranks of the coalition. Many thousands of Australian families
and many millions of lives will be improved over the years to come thanks to that work on the NDIS that you and so many others, whom you generously acknowledged, led.

I also know that, when it came to the step up to cabinet after Malcolm Turnbull became the Prime Minister, there was bit of a toss-up between the last couple of cabinet appointments—who would be the education minister and who would be the communications minister. I understand Senator Sinodinos may be able to shed more light on this than I. I’m not sure that either of us got to choose, but we landed in our respective roles. Whether the nation's schools would rather have had Mitch Fifield, who knows? Perhaps they would have. But you went on in communications to achieve the landmark reform in relation to media ownership, and we congratulate you so much for that.

In the arts role, I remain disappointed that you missed the opportunity that your calling laid out to embed karaoke across Australia as a firm part of our national culture! Perhaps, as education minister, you could have embedded it into the curriculum instead. However, I can recall that with Senator Pratt and others we found ourselves at a karaoke bar in Kyoto, Japan, once formalities were done. Indeed, I just leant across to Marise before and said, 'What was the name of that upstairs karaoke joint in Kingston that went out of business many years ago?'

Senator Fifield: Bogarts.

Senator BIRMINGHAM: Bogarts! Marise said Graphix.

Senator Fifield: It was Graphix before.

Senator BIRMINGHAM: That's right. Both, indeed, are correct, depending on the vintage that we reflect on. Many great times were had. Unfortunately, they went out of business, no doubt thanks to the heavy load of ministerial office and our inability to duck out to Bogarts, or Graphix, as often as perhaps we did in past lives. You've always been such great fun. But, when the fun ends, you were back there getting on with the job. We know that's what you'll do in New York. Whilst my portfolio means I look to Geneva a little more than New York, the nation will look to you to represent us ably and admirably, and we have no doubt you will do so. Thanks for your friendship. Thanks for being such a great colleague. We look forward to working closely with you in a different role for many years to come.

ADJOURNMENT

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (19:28): Order! I propose the question:

That the Senate do now adjourn.

Valedictory

Senator BROCKMAN (Western Australia—Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (19:28): It would be absolutely remiss of me not to say a few remarks about Senator Fifield in this adjournment debate. Unfortunately, I've only had the privilege of serving in the Senate with Senator Fifield for two years—something that I do sincerely regret. I was a staffer here in a previous life, and one thing always stood out to me about Senator Fifield as he and Senator Cormann undertook some of their journeys through the Senate Select Committee on Scrutiny of New Taxes. An essential quality of Mitch was that he treated everyone equally. Whether you were, as I was then, a humble staffer or whether you were someone aspiring to a senior ministerial role, Mitch took everyone on the same basis. He treated you with courtesy and respect and always listened to what you had to say, which is something I, as a very new and inexperienced staffer, always respected greatly.

Mitch, I've always thought of you as being the reasonable man. My wife, Rebecca, asked me once, not long after we had just met, 'Apart from Mathias, who would you work for in parliament?' I thought for a long time. And this is no reflection on anybody else on this side of the chamber, but the only name I could come up with was Mitch Fifield. Mitch, you are the quintessential reasonable man. You have values, you have views. You prosecute them, but you always do so with a very good heart. I thank you for your service.

Hospital Security

Senator SHELDON (New South Wales) (19:30): This is not my first speech. I rise tonight to highlight the safety crisis at New South Wales public hospitals as a result of a failure of the state coalition government to invest in adequate staffing and training for hospital security. Last year alone there were 465 assaults at New South Wales hospitals, and the numbers are rising. Our hospitals have never been more dangerous, both for the staff and for the community that relies on them. At the Nepean Hospital in 2016, an incident occurred that almost cost the life of a local police officer and a health worker. It was an incident that saw a police officer and a hospital security guard shot, resulting in a serious condition, an incident that prompted a New South Wales government review.

One after another, months of deliberations came back with an insulting recommendation for only 15 additional hospital security guards across the state, and no recommendations of increased training or support for security
guards to deal with the increase in assaults. Yet, year after year and incident after incident, and despite repeated calls for action by health workers, the New South Wales government has done little. That's why this Thursday close to 22,000 health workers are taking industrial action—action voted upon and supported by over 500 rank-and-file representatives at a recent meeting. The Health Services Union secretary, Gerard Hayes, is leading this fight. Let me put on record my support for these workers, and I call on the New South Wales government to work with the Health Services Union to increase security staffing levels and provide specialist training to these workers at New South Wales public hospitals.

Our health workers deserve no less. These workers care for their patients. They are tired of being ignored. Thursday's action is a considered decision of workers who deserve better—workers like paramedic Tess Oxley, at Campbelltown Hospital, who, fearing for a patient's and her own safety, was forced to load a patient back into the ambulance, unable to admit them because of an erratic patient and an unguarded emergency department. Ms Oxley was right when she told her story to 9News:

We shouldn't have to be worried about having our back turned to somebody else - that we're going to get pushed, that we're going to get punched, that we're going to get spat on.

And there are workers like a local Western Sydney father who has worked at security at Westmead for over 25 years. He says that he and his colleagues are 'understaffed, under-resourced, unable to deal appropriately with the explosion of assaults and violence in our hospitals'.

No-one, especially these frontline workers, security staff and paramedics, deserve to feel unsafe at work. It is not just about safety; it's about quality of care. I wish the best for this campaign. It's in the interests of all New South Welshmen and also in the interests of good governance. Congratulations on their action.

Climate Change

Senator DI NATALE (Victoria—Leader of the Australian Greens) (19:34): I rise to use my privileged place as Leader of the Australian Greens and senator in this national parliament to outline why Australia must join the 888 jurisdictions around the world to declare that our nation is in a climate emergency. It's not just about future generations anymore. The layers of change unfolding upon our natural world is happening so much quicker than what was imagined even a year ago. It's not just about the rapid extinction of species or about people living in distant Bangladesh flood plains or shrinking Pacific islands; this is about the here and the now. It's about us. It's about protecting our lives. It's about protecting our communities, our families and all those who we care about.

We are seeing records breaking every week in all corners of the world. These impacts we're witnessing don't even include the coal, oil and gas that is being dug up right now and burned at this very moment. We will pay for that down the track. Never in human history has the world produced more greenhouse, trapping, gases than we have right now. Australia's pollution has never been higher than it is today. If I'm being honest, it scares the hell out of me, and it scares the hell out of a lot of people who are paying attention to the scientists—those people who have our best interests at heart.

We humans have found ourselves in crisis. We've found ourselves in situations of emergency where everything else has dropped away and we've had a single-minded focus on keeping ourselves, our loved ones and even strangers out of danger. This is what we have to do right now: to prevent the breakdown of ecosystems, the collapse of entire towns and cities and the disappearance of many simple, everyday things that we cherish. From our rivers that carry water into the regions to our pristine coastlines to our public hospitals, we wine regions and even our city sewage systems, a climate breakdown will fundamentally alter all of it. We will only save ourselves from this emergency with a single-minded focus. What does that mean? That means we can't open one more coal mine. We can't drill one more gas well. If we do that, we burst open our carbon budget. That means saying no to the Adani coal mine in Queensland and no to Santos and Jemena in the Northern Territory's Beetaloo Basin. That means saying no to Equinor drilling for oil in the Great Australian Bight, South Australia.

But a climate emergency also means saying yes. It means saying yes to ensuring that people are looked after and that not a single person employed in the coal industry will be left in the pits, unemployed. It means saying yes to long-term planning so that not one coal worker is thrown into poorly paid, insecure work. It means saying yes to unleashing hundreds of thousands of new jobs in industries right across the country, particularly in regional areas. They could be jobs in construction, engineering, processing, manufacturing, research, innovation, smart transport, carbon farming, forest and mine restoration and clean export industries—the list goes on and on and on. We have so much to gain if we mobilise with the urgency that this emergency demands of us, and we have everything to lose if we don't.

We humans have an amazing capacity to adapt. We can stop this spiralling disaster in its tracks. That's why Adam Bandt is committed to introducing a declaration into the House of government this year. Our members, right across the country, have committed to mobilising the community to support such a declaration. Tonight I am
calling on all Australians who care about this country, who care about this fragile blue planet we all inhabit, who care about their families—their children and their loved ones—to join us in this campaign. Collect signatures. Pass resolutions in your workplace or your local community group. Lobby your local council. Pressure your local MP to support the declaration of a climate emergency. It's only people power that will change the world. In the coming months, we can create a wave of pressure that every single politician in this place will not be able to ignore.

**Byrne, Mr Neil**

*Senator PRATT* (Western Australia) (19:39): Tonight I pay tribute to a dear friend and mentor of mine and many in the Western Australian labour movement: Neil Byrne, who passed away on 13 July. He was a well-respected and much-loved member of the union movement and the Labor Party in Western Australia. He was a progressive thinker so much ahead of his time. He was a passionate advocate for equal rights, particularly for equal pay and for women. He had dedicated his life to the working and living conditions of all Australians.

He started his apprenticeship as a fitter at the East Perth Power Station back in the early 1950s. More recently, in a history project on the East Perth Power Station, Neil was recounting the feeling of the time and place as it was. He spoke of it being dirty, dusty, hot, wet and cold but he also said how proud they were to have worked there. He spoke of how there was a sense of responsibility for keeping the lights on even when they thought they needed to take industrial action.

He joined the Amalgamated Engineering Union in 1956, which is now the AMWU. He became a well-known and very much-loved figure in the union. He began working for the union, becoming its education officer and occupational health officer until his retirement in 1997. Following his retirement, Neil was dedicated to preserving the history of working people in Western Australia. He served as the president of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History in WA for more than 20 years. He was particularly passionate about the history of east Perth and its power station and the Midland Railway Workshops.

He's been honoured a number of times. In 1996, he received the AMWU’s highest honour, the Gold Award of Merit, and was awarded a life membership of the Australian Labor Party back in 1999. Friends within the AMWU got together and set up a library a number of years ago named after him to honour his commitment to education. He worked tirelessly for the Labor Party, working on the same booth at every election as booth captain at Nollamara Primary School for more than 30 years. He was active in the development of policy and served as a delegate to the Trades and Labor Council of Western Australia and the ALP state conferences and executive.

He did all this but throughout this—and it was wonderful to hear his family speak at his funeral—he was also very much a family man. They never felt neglected by his activism. He was absolutely dedicated to his wife, Maureen; his four daughters, Dorelle, Jenni, Wendy and Sheridan; and has nine grandchildren. Many of us in the labour movement hold an enormous gratitude of debt to Neil and his family. I'd like to thank Neil's family for sharing him with us. We are so fortunate that he had a passion for labour history, bring alive the voices, activism and lives of working people in the state of Western Australia—voices that might otherwise have been lost.

When I last spoke to him, I reminded him that he has been a big part of bringing forward new generations inside the labour movement, that so many of us stand on his strong but slight shoulders and that he helped so many of us commit to a bigger cause by being an example, by talking about issues and ideas, by sharing labour history and by always being there. Vale Neil Byrne.

**Australian Society**

*Senator McKIM* (Tasmania) (19:44): My condolences to Senator Pratt and other people in the Western Australian labour movement. I speak tonight to the people of this country who feel despair about the state of politics in Australia and who can see little or no hope for the next three years. My message to those people is: do not let the nihilism and short-sightedness of the current parliament win. I acknowledge that's not a simple task because, for many decades now, we've been taught to think of ourselves not as members of society and not as the results of nature and evolution but as consumers, as property owners, as shareholders and as slaves in service to the economy when actually the economy should serve us and nature.

The result of this is a loss of commons, those public things we all treasure. They have been systematically run down. From our beautiful environment being trashed to public health and public education being left to wither and to wages going backwards while corporate profits soar, these are all symptoms of the same disease. That disease is called neoliberalism, laissez faire capitalism or, as many are now accurately describing it, late-stage disaster capitalism.

Instead of fixing the fundamental problems, there are too many in this place who are happy to break us down and set us against each other. They want to blame migrants for homelessness, they want to blame First Nations
people for the effects of colonialism, they want to blame the unemployed for an economy that's not delivering enough meaningful work to anywhere near enough people, they want to blame refugees for the conflicts they are fleeing and they want us to believe that the problems of the downtrodden are the fault of the downtrodden, not the fault of those walking all over their backs. We can't simply wait for three years and hope for a better outcome at the next election. We have to come together, we have to mobilise and we have to fight for the things that we believe in.

I want people to know a terrible secret about this place: most members of this parliament are terrified of the public. They rely on the public being disengaged from the political process to succeed, but in that secret lies a great weapon for the public to fight back and to fight back against the erosion of the social contract that underpins so much of what we value as a people and a community. The great news is that people are fighting back. For every act of bastardry in this place, there are thousands of acts of compassion and solidarity that make life better and more bearable for others. That might be something small, like just helping a neighbour out with something they need, or it might be something really big, like going to a rally to defend our climate on behalf of our children and grandchildren or even joining the Greens' campaign for this parliament to declare a climate emergency.

Every single day, the people of Australia are showing decency and they are showing, in fact, a fair bit more decency than this parliament often shows. It is on those people, the people who we're supposed to represent in this place, that our future depends. They will eventually win. They will eventually overcome the greed and toxicity of this place, and they will demand better from all of us.

Sarcoma Awareness Month

Senator CICCONE (Victoria—Deputy Opposition Whip in the Senate) (19:48): July is Sarcoma Awareness Month. I would like to take this brief opportunity to draw the attention of the Senate to the critical need that exists in the area of sarcoma treatment and research. A sarcoma is a rare and complex form of cancer. It can occur anywhere in the body, such as in bone and cartilage, as well as in soft tissue like fat, muscle and even blood vessels. Whilst sarcoma makes up only one per cent of all adult cancers, it has a particularly high prevalence in young people. It accounts for about 20 per cent of cancers in childhood and is one of the most common forms of cancer in children.

A sarcoma is often misdiagnosed, usually mistaken for a benign lump, a sporting injury or as just growing pains in children. Alarmingly, because of the rare nature of sarcomas, there is significantly less funding for research to help fund and find better treatment options for patients and to help one day find a cure. The research is desperately needed. There are over 80 different types of sarcoma. While the survival rate is relatively high, at 67 per cent for soft tissue sarcomas and 70 per cent for bone sarcomas, there remains limited therapy options and poor outcomes for metastatic sarcoma.

During this Sarcoma Awareness Month, the team at the Australia and New Zealand Sarcoma Association have been working hard to raise money for research and educating the community about these cancers. All across the community and on social media, patients, friends and supporters have been responding to the call to go yellow for sarcoma awareness. For this reason, and because of the advocacy of many friends, including one of mine, Julijana Todorovic, I'm wearing a yellow tie and I have also turned all my social media yellow today.

We might not hear about sarcoma very often in the media. It might not attract the kind of awareness and support that other cancers do. It could even be something you could, for your whole life, never hear about. But it is a challenging illness that causes significant stress and upheaval in the lives of many Australian families.

Today I call on my colleagues here in this place and in the other place, as well as members of the community, to chip in and donate a few dollars to help researchers develop better treatments. Hopefully, one day we will find a cure for sarcoma. To donate visit www.sarcoma.org.au. I thank the Senate for tonight's opportunity to express the critical need for money and other donations for the treatment and research of sarcoma.

Energy

Senator ROBERTS (Queensland) (19:51): As a servant to the people of Queensland and Australia, I want to discuss an issue that is dear to a lot of people in Queensland—our energy prices. I want to discuss the madness we are going through, and I want to contradict and refute the previous Greens speaker, who said that most members of parliament are disengaged. We are not disengaged; we are engaged not only with the people but with reality. Let me show you how.

Neurum Creek, near Brisbane, flows into the Brisbane River, and then the Brisbane River is dammed at Lake Wivenhoe. That supplies water to around 2½ million people in Brisbane, Logan, the Gold Coast, Ipswich and Beenleigh, and also Toowoomba, I believe, but I'm not sure on that. It's a beautiful valley around Neurum Creek.
A Chinese company wants to install a 10-kilometre-long solar industrial complex. Let's not beat around the bush. It's not a farm; it's a solar industrial complex. Leaching out of those panels will be cadmium and lead, going into Neurum Creek, the Brisbane River, Wivenhoe Dam and the homes of those 2.5 million people.

Firstly, there's a flood depth there, in a very serious flood, of around seven meters. Secondly, there is currently high-productivity land, rich farming land not only on the slopes, where there's wonderful beef cattle grazing, but on the creek valley floor, where the land is tillable. They're wanting to take that high-productivity agricultural land and convert it to a low-productivity, low-density solar industrial complex. They're destroying the land. They're creating an eyesore. They're creating a toxic hazard.

Thirdly, they're also using our thermal coal—steaming coal—in China to generate electricity for making these atrocious solar panels and wind turbines, and they're using our coking coal to make the steel for the wind turbines. So they're using our raw materials. They're using our steaming coal, they're using it without any subsidies and they're generating cheap electricity. We, on the other hand, are using our steaming coal in this country and generating expensive electricity because of the ridiculous subsidies on the so-called renewables, which are really intermittent.

And then the Chinese company buys its solar panels and installs them here in Neurum Creek—that's their proposal. And get this: we pay them subsidies to do that here on our land. We pay them subsidies! That raises the price of our electricity and makes us less competitive with the Chinese. So we're exporting jobs. The Chinese are just being very, very smart. There's nothing wrong with what they're doing. They're complying with our ridiculous laws that are driven by the lunatic Greens, the Labor Party, the Liberal Party and the National Party. China is benefiting enormously commercially. Our stupidity is what gives them this leverage.

In 1942 we were in a Labor government federally and Darwin was bombed. John Curtin, the famous Labor Prime Minister, did not send the Japanese a cheque saying, ‘You need a helping hand from the Australian taxpayers to help destroy our country and we'll help you pay for your bombs,’ but that is what we're doing. We're giving the Chinese a subsidy to help destroy our country.

Then we consider the other lunacy that's going on. We have a Renewable Energy Target that's ridiculous. First of all, it's destroying our electricity sector in terms of reliability and in terms of asynchronous power, and it's adding enormously to cost, further destroying our competitiveness. We have gold-plated networks that are further destroying our competitiveness, because of the way they're set-up. We have a retail sector that has given guaranteed returns—again, destroying our electricity prices. We have a national electricity market which is really a national electricity racket.

And to top it off, under competitive federalism the state governments were responsible for electricity. That drove downward pressure on prices and gave us reliability. The world's cheapest electricity is from our coal. Under the current system we have privatised, or corporatised, electricity generators and they're set over by a board that wants to maximise profit, which drives up the price of electricity. This is insane.

One Nation will interact with people. We will help protect all people, not just the farmers who have come to us, not just the landowners and not just the electricity users but all patriotic Australians wanting our country back. There is no data for a climate emergency. We face a political and sovereignty emergency. (Time expired).

Royal Flying Doctor Service

Senator McDonald (Queensland) (19:57): Everyone who lives in remote Australia loves the Royal Flying Doctor Service, but they hope they never need them. However, the reality of living and working on the land, and even travelling for work or holidays through our great outback, means contact with this amazing service is more common than hoped.

The service was founded in 1928 by Reverend John Flynn and was born in my hometown of Cloncurry in north-west Queensland. Flynn's great achievement grew from a seed planted by a young World War I pilot called John Clifford Peel. In 1917, Lieutenant Peel, aware of Flynn's work in remote Australia, wrote to the reverend suggesting that the flying machines he was manning to take life in France could also be used to save life in the outback. Sadly, just over one year later the 24-year-old Peel and his plane went missing in France. But his dream was realised 10 years later when the Reverend Flynn starting the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

Australia's past is littered with examples of young visionaries launching history changing ideas and Lieutenant Clifford Peel deserves a place in that pantheon of the greats. Indeed, I believe Australia's youth of today still harvest the spirit, the daring and the courage to confront and overcome problems, especially those in remote Australia.

On Saturday night, I attended the Royal Flying Doctor Services 'Wings of Life' ball. The RFDS is helping someone every two minutes of every day whether it is treating people, conducting telehealth consultations or
flying to save a life. More than 88,000 people used the telehealth service last year. More than 1,600 nurse, GP and
dental clinics were held across Australia. Pilots flew nearly 27 million kilometres, which is the equivalent of 34
trips to the moon and back. And more than 75,000 patients were transported to hospital by road, including tourists
who were hurt in car and other accidents on their big adventure in the outback. Thankfully though Mount Isa Base
senior medical officer, Don Bowley, who I spoke to on Saturday night, said that it had been a good year so far
because there hadn't been so many tourist accidents. I hope that trend lasts a long time.

Country and regional people are used to doing it tough. When something out of the ordinary comes, they can be
confident that expert, friendly help is close at hand. There are plenty of great things about living on the land, away
from the hustle and bustle of city life, where the stars shine brighter and the people are friendlier. That is why so
many people are happiest amongst the dust, the flies, the bad roads, the poor phone reception and the lack of
amenities. They know there's a trade-off and it's a trade-off they're happy to make, but one of the big downsides of
this deal is the lack of high-end or even low-end medical care that is available. I've known bushmen who've
partially severed a finger and worked on because it took hours to get into town. Others might put up with a
toothache for months before finally seeking professional help. Bush remedies are usually the first port of call
when calamity strikes, but there are some ailments that even the toughest can't handle on their own, and this is
where the RFDS get involved. If they need to be called, you know things must be serious. When I was a child we
didn't use phones, of course—this was before everyone had a phone—we used the radio network. It was a very
public medical consultation. Everybody used to tune in to listen to how their neighbours were dealing with issues
that I'm sure none of us would normally like to share with the greater Gulf region.

The Flying Doctor Service couldn't exist without public donations and the help of an army of volunteers. The
gala dinner that I attended in Brisbane on Saturday recognised its Local Hero Awards. I'd like to acknowledge
them in this house. Val Marlow has been at the forefront of fundraising with the Brisbane Flying Doctors
auxiliary for over 30 years, working at events and conducting tours of the Brisbane base. Carolyn Saffron of
Bundaberg has, for over a decade, worked tirelessly for the town's RFDS auxiliary. She's the committee president
and can always be found at market stalls, sausage sizzles and fundraising functions. In Kowanyama, in western
Cape York, David Durst and Raphael Lansen make themselves available to refuel the RFDS aircraft 24 hours a
day, seven days a week, and help load patients. Nine hundred and seventy kilometres west of Brisbane, Elizabeth
Marchant and Georgie Walker raise funds by hosting a barbecue every month at the Royal Hotel Eromanga. They
also pick up the flying doctor nurses from the airport and give them smoko. Elizabeth also manages the care of the
local RFDS clinic building and helps buy medical supplies. She can't remember when they started doing this, but
it was some time ago.

Winton's Sandy Gillies works as the executive manager for the Western Queensland Primary Health Network,
and her local knowledge was instrumental in ensuring those worst affected by recent floods in that area received
the help and the care they needed. It was the Mount Isa quartet, Jim Lillicrapp, Simon Steele, and Robert and
Belinda Worlein, who were the first responders to a boating accident at Lake Julius on Christmas Eve last year.
Their fast, calm, caring and skilful assistance meant that the family involved in the accident were able to receive
the best quality care as quickly as possible, and they are clear that the terrible outcome that would have happened
without this care was avoided.

In Central Queensland, Alison Hodda has been one of the most hardworking and dedicated fundraisers,
supporting the RFDS for almost 25 years. She volunteers at events in Biloela and across the Banana Shire and
sells cross-stitch craft to raise funds. Further south, Andrea Crothers, Tessa Dimond, Annie Jones and Jess Weber
have joined forces to raise over $55,000 for the service through the Golden Acres Ball in St George, 440
kilometres west of Brisbane. In my home area of North Queensland, the Richmond Field Days and Turf Club
Committee have raised thousands of dollars for the RFDS, supported health checks and raised awareness for the
service in their local community. One couple who help drive the committee's success are club secretary, Patsy
Fox, and her husband, David, who were instrumental in the disaster response when the Queensland floods
devastated the region this year. The pair set up a disaster management centre at Richmond Airport and provided
shelter, safety and peace of mind to those affected. These people and so many others deserve our respect and
gratitude for keeping this important service intact.

I just have to tell you that on Saturday night they announced the finalist of this group of these incredible
volunteers, and it was the Mount Isa quartet. They are called the Lake Julius Jewels—I think that's right. They
won the award for this year for the most outstanding service to the Royal Flying Doctor Service. I urge everyone
to support this lifesaving work and to remember that without it the tyranny of distance in outback Australia would
be that little bit further. They truly make a huge difference.
Conservative Political Action Conference

Senator KENEALLY (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (20:05): In less than 10 days time a political conference is descending on Sydney. It's called the Conservative Political Action Conference, otherwise known as CPAC. CPAC is an annual event in the United States, attended by conservative activists and politicians. They're now branching into Australia. This local event is hosted by the American Conservative Union and another group called LibertyWorks. If you want to know more about who's behind these groups, good luck to you. The American Conservative Union and LibertyWorks do not disclose the names of the businesses, the organisations or the individuals who fund them or what they stand for, so we don't know much more about why these groups have chosen to branch into Australia or seek to influence Australian politics.

CPAC Australia is also sponsored by the Menzies Research Centre, the Liberal Party's think tank, and Advance Australia, that conservative group who is best known for their distasteful, inappropriate and sexualised video targeting the member for Warringah, Ms Zali Steggall, in the other place during the recent election campaign and the Institute of Public Affairs—naturally!

I have always welcomed political debate. I have chosen a career where I get to engage with people who have different views to me, such as Senator McGrath. However, there is a difference between engaging in political debate and spewing vitriolic bile. There is a difference between meeting up at a political conference and associating with racists. And there is a difference between listening to political leaders and influencers and giving a platform to hate speech. And while CPAC may have an innocent name, it is definitely not innocent by nature.

I'd like to highlight that both the member for Hughes, Craig Kelly, and our Senator Amanda Stoker, a Liberal senator from this place, are scheduled to be speaking at this event. I also note Warren Mundine, who the Prime Minister handpicked to be the Liberal candidate in Gilmore, is attending and speaking along with the Liberal candidate Jacinta Price. That's their prerogative if they want to do that. But I would like to bring to the Senate's attention the company these Liberal members of parliament will be keeping, associating with and sharing the stage with next week. The speaker's list is a who's who of right-wing extremism, with numerous guests having long records of attacks on women, on gay and lesbian people, on Islam as well as having links to anti-Semitism.

Let's start with Raheem Kassam, one of the headline speakers at CPAC. Mr Kassam is described as 'a British political activist' according to CPAC's website. However, the organisers of the event chose to omit the details of what Mr Kassam thinks being an activist is. Mr Kassam has an extensive history of vilifying people on the grounds of their race, religion, sexuality and gender. He has described the Koran, the holy book of the Muslim faith, as 'fundamentally evil'. Mr Kassam has campaigned for 'limited migration' against what he describes as 'large-scale Muslim immigration'. He has regularly attacked the LGBTI community with homophobic and transphobic comments on social media. And, there's this one: after the Scottish National Party leader Nicola Sturgeon suffered a miscarriage, Mr Kassam tweeted:

Can someone just, like … tape Nicola Sturgeon’s mouth shut? And her legs, so she can’t reproduce.

The question is simple: why is the home affairs minister allowing this individual into the country? Section 501 of the Migration Act exists so that the minister has the power to refuse the visa of an individual of such a character. The minister can refuse a visa if there is a significant risk that an individual would 'vilify a segment of the Australian community', 'incite discord' or 'represent danger' to them during their time in Australia. We should not allow a career bigot—a person who spreads hate speech about Muslims, about women and about gay and lesbian people—to enter our country with the express intent of undermining equity and equality. If the home affairs minister allows Raheem Kassam into the country, he is encouraging a cascade of intolerance to continue at CPAC's talkfest of hate.

Another speaker taking to the stage is Matt Schlapp. He is Chair of the American Conservative Union, the people behind the event. He is a self-described 'lover' of the National Rifle Association. He has defended the chief of the NRA for saying, 'People who want gun control hate freedom.' Mr Schlapp said that, having a Republican politician of colour in the role of chairman of the Republican National Convention in the United States was 'the wrong thing to do'. Regrettably, that is not Mr Schlapp's only instance of racist dog whistling. This is yet another speaker those opposite are willing to share a stage with.

The speakers at CPAC and their views don't stop there. US Congressman Mark Meadows is taking the stage. He has advocated conspiracy theories about US President Barack Obama being born in Kenya and in 2012 he vowed to send the then President home to Kenya. Those were his words—'I will send the President home to Kenya.' The congressman opposes any restrictions on gun purchases and opposes gun registries that would list detailed information about firearm ownership. Late last year Mr Meadows, the US Congressman, was fined $40,000 for failing to deal with sexual harassment allegations in his office. He was also recently accused of using an African American public servant as a racist prop. Yes, he's slated for speaking at CPAC.
US Congressman Matt Gaetz is also welcome at CPAC. He is best known for inviting Holocaust denier Charles C Johnson to the 2018 state of the union address in the United States. The person Gaetz invited, Johnson, was permanently banned from Twitter in 2015 after asking for help ‘taking out’ a black-lives-matter activist. In 2017 he denied that over six million Jewish people were killed in the Holocaust. Congressman Gaetz apologised later for providing the ticket to Mr Johnson. To quote the US lawmaker, he said, 'Mr Johnson showed up at my door.' Apparently you just have to show up at the congressman’s door and you get to go to the state of the union address. At the same time, Congressman Gaetz insisted that Johnson was not a Holocaust denier—‘He's not a white supremacist.’ How does he know, if he just showed up at his door? For heaven's sake. These are the people.

Congressman Gaetz is also currently under investigation by the House ethics committee in the US for intimidating a witness. He's a lifetime member of the NRA—a commonality for these speakers—and says that the open carrying of weapons is a right granted not by government but by God. These are the people attending this event and speaking at it.

I would like to know if Senator Stoker is comfortable sharing the stage with these people. If Senator Stoker cancelled her CPAC appearance it would not be the first time she has withdrawn from such a commitment. In May, during the federal election, the senator was billed to join the Sunshine Coast Safe Communities group. Much like CPAC, it is innocent by name but not by nature. They describe Muslims as ‘incompatible people’ and Islam as 'the destroyer of multiculturalism'. The senator did cancel because she had the flu. I wouldn't fault her for cancelling her appearance at CPAC. I would say that it would take a lot more than the flu to keep the member for Hughes off the stage.

This is a test for the Prime Minister, Scott Morrison. Is he comfortable with his members of parliament sharing the stage with people like this? Will the Prime Minister direct them not to attend? Will he step in and show leadership?

In John Howard's time the Liberal Party was a broad church, but boy are the sands shifting now.

This is not political activism, this is the normalisation of extreme right wing in Australia. And why is Nick Cater from the Menzies institute allowing a once reputable institution to be behind this ugly intolerance. Australians will be uncomfortable with this. The question is: who in the Liberal Party will stand up? Will it be the Prime Minister? Will it be the Treasurer, Josh Frydenberg? Will it be the Attorney-General, Christian Porter? Senator Payne and Senator Birmingham: are they comfortable with this type of conference and their colleagues standing up?

I can't speak for Robert Menzies but I have to think that the founder of the Liberal Party would be turning in his grave at what this party and the institute in his name have become.

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Stoker): Thank you for your contribution, Senator Keneally. Senator Siewert.

Welfare Reform

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (20:15): I rise tonight to speak on the lived experiences of the people currently subjected to the cashless debit card trials in the East Kimberley, Ceduna, Goldfields and Hinkler regions. While the government continues to try and argue that the trial is having a positive impact on these communities, I have heard countless experiences from individuals on the card and the negative effect it is having on their daily lives. Tonight I will share with you some of these experiences. These experiences document the raw on-the-ground effects of a program that unfairly stigmatises, isolates and controls people on income support.

Firstly, for many there is a sense of shame with being on the card. Many are embarrassed at being part of the program that is unfairly linked with alcohol and drug dependency. One constituent told me:

I have never done drugs in my life, I don't gamble and I don't drink alcohol. Within the first few times of using this card, I faced my first real problem, public shaming, where one of the old EFTPOS machines was not working properly and two tradies behind me said, 'Look, it's one of those junkie cards.' Immediately I broke down and started to cry and ran out of the store. I have never been subject to such public humiliation in my life which sent me into a spiral where I didn't want to use my card again. Anxiety attacks got so bad I was vomiting and I lost 3.5 kilos in a week.

One father of two sons told me of his experience:

I'm an adult that managed perfectly fine before the card was introduced. I don't drink. I don't do drugs of any kind, and I certainly make sure my sons are catered for.

After being a father for 15 years my boys have never gone without anything until now. My eldest son has been bullied and ridiculed at school because another student saw me using the card. He is now known as 'the son of a crackhead'. His pocket money that he works his backside off for is now cashless because the 20 per cent I'm 'allowed' is for second-hand items, such as uniforms, emergencies or just a good bargain that would benefit my children.
I now can't take my youngest son to the bowling alley on the weekend. It's something he really enjoys and looks forward to as I only get him on weekends due to school. Now I can't use the card there as they sell alcohol.

I didn't sign up for this card or its discriminatory policies. It was forced on me and my children against my will and now me and my children have to go without and completely rearrange a schedule that worked for many years. It is an absolute joke.

Many participants have shared with me how their mental health has suffered whilst being on the card. We must not underestimate how shameful it is to have something or someone take control of your finances the way the card does, to have a constant fear that your card will be declined at a store or rent won't be paid on time. One correspondent told me:

Being placed on the card has destroyed my mental health. The terror of not having control over when my bills will be paid, or the assurance of my bank being a reliable institution, means that even when I fall asleep despite my pain, it's often interrupted by nightmares.

The restrictive nature of the card strips participants of their financial freedom, causing undue additional stress. These are people who are already finding it tough and are now being forced to jump through the hoops of Indue in order to manage their own budgets. One trial participant articulated this to me:

The card is making life more difficult. If I want to pay bills early I need to ask permission. If I want to pay extra rent I need to ask permission. When I can't pay bills early I can't even move the money into a separate savings account to make sure I don't spend it. I have to pay my rent, then watch the account closely for days because payments get bounced back.

Recently, I went to my rego 3 months early but MainRoads wouldn't take my money. I asked Indue to put the money into a different safe account until I'm allowed to pay the bill, but nope they told me just don't spend the money.

The loss of financial freedom is very devastating for many. This card is patronising and paternalistic and punishes some of the most vulnerable members of our community. When you're on income support, you live from payment to payment. Many feel they are unable to effectively save for the future or provide the support they need for the children on this card.

Another participant shared this experience:

Being the sole parent of my two children without child support due to being victim of domestic abuse the card was an additional kick in the guts for me and added further to my anxiety and depression.

I also suffer (and will continue to suffer) from early stage bowel cancer (severe FAP with cancerous tumours) and will spend the rest of my life maintaining my health including multiple surgeries and living with life altering issues including incontinence and a stoma.

I'm only 27.

On top of that I have a child with suspected Autism and is diagnosed severely developmentally delayed and attends early intervention programs and specialists.

With the card I cannot save or provide my children with any future support (trust or inheritance) if in the likely event something will happen to me.

There is also great anxiety in the community for those who are yet to be placed on the card because of the impact it will have on their ability to manage their already tight budgets. Somebody also articulated this to me:

I fear it. I've managed to keep my family afloat by haggling, price shopping and using every trick I know.

Every financial advisor has asked me how I'm doing it on the funds I have available, but now the government wants to tell me how to budget. A government that gets more in debt every year wants to limit my bag of tricks.

It's hard enough to survive, if we get this, I don't think we'll be able to anymore.

These are just some of the accounts that I have received in relation to the cashless debit card. Tomorrow we will be dealing with legislation around the wellbeing exemption and the opt-out provisions. I doubt I'll have time even in my 20 minutes available tomorrow to express the absolute failures of this card and to express all of what I've heard from the many people who have been forced onto this card in those four regions around this country. These are the people that the government never talks to when they go into communities. When they go into communities to see how the card's working, they talk to businesses.

Today the Senate did not support my motion to try to find out who's on the community reference groups in these communities. These are the committees that the government goes to to get their advice about what's going on in the community and how good the card is. Businesses are on them. The people the government hand picks are on them. Social service organisations are on them. Are there participants on the card? Who knows? The government is refusing to let the community know who's on those committees. The same goes for the community panels. These panels are deciding people's futures and whether they'll be 80 per cent quarantined. If you're really good and nice, you may get it reduced to, say, 50 per cent by people who you may know who are walking down the street—or who you may in fact be having an argument with. But, again, nobody in the community knows and no-one outside the community knows, because the government's keeping that secret as well.
This is an ideological experiment against people who have done nothing wrong, other than being wrong, in the government's eyes, because they can't find a job. The government blames people for not being able to find a job and then, as I've just articulated, links them to drugs, alcohol and gambling. I've also heard accounts from people who have been spat on in the street and regularly told they're on the druggie card. They try to hide it when they go to use the EFTPOS. By using your hand, you can mostly cover up the grey of the card. Everybody knows what an Indue card looks like in those four communities. Everybody knows that it means that you're on income support.

It's an appalling way to treat people who are already trying to survive on payments that keep them below the poverty line. We know Newstart is below the poverty line. Let's rub it in a little bit more by forcing people to be subject to denigration and stigmatisation by being on this card! This card needs to be abandoned. Newstart needs to be increased. Let's start treating people with dignity.

Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability

Senator STEELE-JOHN (Western Australia) (20:25): The issue of the establishment of a Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability has been something upon which the community have been campaigning for decades. Report after report would be published. Our friends and colleagues would come to harm and would die, and their names would be listed. We, as disabled people, would attend funeral after funeral and weep together with the small consolation that, at some point in the future, the story would be told and we would have an opportunity to speak our truth and be heard.

The effort to bring this into being took the combined might of over 60 organisations across Australia campaigning relentlessly for half a decade. I want to pay tribute also to Senator Rachel Siewert, who is in the chamber tonight, for the work that she did over all of those years to help that campaign go forward. Finally, earlier this year, we succeeded together. It is one of the great honours of my life to have been able to sit shoulder to shoulder with disabled people as we descended upon this place and forced the major parties to listen to the urgent need for justice. It was a moment of profound joy and relief to think that, upon the announcement of that royal commission, my community—the four million of us across Australia—now held within our tired, blistered hands the tool with which we may liberate ourselves from the darkness of abuse that has been in our lives for so long and that is in our lives still.

That joy so quickly turned to frustration and anger as we realised that a government who had promised us consultation on the appointment of those who would lead the investigation had, in fact, appointed people to that process who had significant and unmanageable conflicts of interest and who had previously occupied senior roles in the very systems and bureaucracies that had failed, despite their good intentions, and led us to harm and led us to death. We were stunned. We couldn't believe it. At the very moment where we thought that justice was at hand and where we could breathe freely in the knowledge that there was a process now to take on this work and that the efforts wouldn't just be ours to move forward, we were made to fight again as we realised that the integrity of this process, and our ability to trust it, had been put in jeopardy. But we are disabled people, and, if we are used to one thing, we are used to fighting to be heard, and so fight we did, and fight we have. We came back together and the very organisations who had called for a royal commission, who had celebrated its establishment, now called again, one week today, for the removal of John Ryan and Barbara Bennett. Friends and colleagues from all over the country called ministers, called journalists and sounded the alarm. A friend of mine from Western Australia was making calls last night from her hospital bed. This has been a week of high emotion for my community, and I am not immune to that emotion nor that frustration.

John Ryan, in his role as former director of contemporary residential options for the New South Wales department of community services, was indeed responsible for a program designed to support disabled people to exit large institutional settings that were often the place of their abuse. This program had many successes and many people were successfully removed from these settings. However, this program also experienced profound failures. As is clearly outlined in a New South Wales Ombudsman report into preventable deaths, two individuals passed away and a third was seriously injured due to dehydration after participating in that program.

In my attempt to bring attention to this issue, to highlight the broader conflict of interest that Mr Ryan has as a long-serving public servant in New South Wales, I have twice now incorrectly named the individuals involved in that process, both in the media and in this chamber. For those mistakes, I sincerely and unreservedly apologise. In public life, I believe that when you make a mistake, you listen and you own it. And after a week of Australia's peak bodies for disability calling for action, it is listening that this government must now do, because the realities of these conflicts of interest are not going away. They cannot be swept under the carpet or brushed aside as insignificant.

Disabled people, our organisations, our advocates and our supporters won't be silent anymore. Our lives have been shaped by institutional failures and the unwillingness of the others to listen when we speak. As inconvenient
as it may be for some in place who want to get on with other things that they feel are more important, the
disability community alongside the Greens, the Labor Party and the crossbench will continue to fight for the royal
commission that we know disabled people need, not the one politicians and bureaucrats think we should have. I
thank the chamber for its time.

Greyhound Racing

Senator FARUQI (New South Wales) (20:33): Tonight I am speaking about one of my many passions:
animals, in particular, greyhounds. Since 2018 hundreds of Australian greyhounds have been rescued from the
infamous Yat Yuen greyhound racing track at Macau, known as the Canidrome. This track has been described by
GREY2K as a death camp for dogs, where tens of thousands of greyhounds, including from Australia, have been
crushed or raced to death over the last 50 years.

I foreshadowed tonight that I will be tabling a list of the names of 497 Australian greyhounds that have been
rescued. This list contains the name, ear brand and microchip number of these 497 greyhounds from Australia that
survived the cruelty of greyhound racing and were rescued by the amazing and persistent work of Albano Martins
and the Animas Society for the Protection of Animals, Macau, who worked so hard to rescue so many dogs. I'm
sure that times the task must have seemed hopeless, but they and others achieved what seemed impossible. The way
the Macau community rallied against entrenched gambling and racing interests was incredible to watch.

Rescuing these beautiful animals has been a truly international effort; 39 organisations from around the world
have re-homed the surviving dogs, including Hong Kong, Macau, Italy, the United Kingdom, the United States,
Germany, France and many others, including seven organisations in Australia. These people, many of them
volunteers, are the ones who put their blood, sweat, tears and money into rescuing these dogs, while those who are
responsible—the Australian government and the Australian greyhound racing industry—have stood by and done
nothing.

I have to say, the dogs on this list are the lucky ones that survived and have been re-homed. Perhaps we will
never know how many others were raced to death. A leaked document I obtained in 2018 showed that between the
start of 2013 and the end of 2015 about 941 greyhounds were approved for export that would likely end up at the
Canidrome. There are still hundreds of greyhounds exported from Australia, as well as their progeny, who remain
at risk of being killed. Individuals and groups like Kerry Elliman of Candy Cane Rescue and Liang Xiaodan of
Plush Bear's Shelter in China are rescuing these greyhounds from meat trucks and giving them a second chance at
life—again, at great cost and great time, and with no support from the Australian government.

I am tabling this document because two things must happen now. First, there must be accountability for those
who allowed the export of greyhounds to places with minimal animal welfare standards, where they were
subjected to extreme cruel conditions. Greyhounds Australasia must look at this list and take meaningful action to
ensure that everyone involved in this monstrous crime is prosecuted. All the evidence—the names, the ear tags, the
microchip numbers—are right here.

I've been following some of the very half-hearted investigations that have been happening in greyhound racing
jurisdictions, including in New South Wales. Many of the owners feign ignorance and say they didn't know where
their dog was going. This is isn't good enough. For people who love to lecture us on how much they love their
dogs, there is remarkable indifference to where they ended up. I'm not aware of a single case of a greyhound
owner whose dog was sent to Macau trying to bring it home, because these dogs are just disposable property to
the greyhound racing industry. Much stronger action must be taken.

Secondly, we must ensure that this never happens again. To be clear, the Australian Greens do not support the
greyhound racing industry and believe that it is inherently cruel, in whatever country it operates in. Accordingly,
as a matter of policy we oppose all greyhound exports, and we want to see greyhound racing shut down. But I
recognise that at the very least we must never allow what happened to these greyhounds to happen ever again, and
that means stopping the export of greyhounds to countries without animal welfare standards. Although the number
of greyhounds being exported has declined in recent years, thanks to community pressure, the reality is that it
could start up tomorrow, and history could repeat itself. The government at the very least needs to stop issuing
export permits to countries with minimal animal welfare standards. And I'm really glad the Minister for
Agriculture, Senator McKenzie, is in the chamber tonight, because I want to say this sincerely to you: I know that
we may not agree on many things, but I hope this is something we can take action on. Previous attempts to stop
these exports have failed, reportedly because previous ministers thought it would be too much red tape. But this is
really not good enough. It is unacceptable to respond like that, because as legislators we have the responsibility to
ensure animal welfare wherever we can. Even the greyhound racing industry wants us to take action on this.
I am currently drafting the legislation, and I hope to introduce that legislation to parliament, to stop the export of greyhounds to countries with really lax animal welfare standards. I really hope the government can support this, because we do have a choice. We can make some positive steps in this parliament to improve animal welfare.

I seek leave to table a document which is a list of Australian greyhounds rescued from the Macau Canidrome.

Leave granted.

**Fifield, Senator the Hon. Mitch**

**Senator PATERSON (Victoria) (20:40):** I rise to make some valedictory remarks about my friend, my mentor and my colleague Senator Mitch Fifield. Neither he or I could have known when, at age 19 as a precocious university student, I wandered into his office for my first day of my first real job that one day we would be colleagues here in this place. As Mitch talked about in his speech already tonight, my wife also worked for him at a different time—I stress, not at the same time. There was no interoffice romance. Given that you're in the camera shot, Mitch, please don't nod too vigorously when I say this, but I suspect she was a better staffer for you than I ever was. In fact, I say that with confidence, because once in this place Mitch gave me what a HR consultant would call a '360 degree review' of my performance at pace while walking down the corridor.

In politics sometimes we ask our staff to do menial things, but one menial task that I performed for Mitch had much wider significance. I delivered his resignation letter to the then Leader of the Opposition, Malcolm Turnbull, from the Liberal Party frontbench in 2009. I was later to issue the joint media release between himself, Senator Cormann and former Senator Brett Mason announcing that resignation from the frontbench. The year 2009 was a very significant year in Liberal Party history, and personally a very formative year for me. I think it's safe to say it shaped my views about politics and the Liberal Party, and they have stayed with me ever since.

Senator Fifield, Senator Cormann and former Senator Mason were the first three members of the then shadow ministry to resign over a point of principle, which was the opposition leader's plan to support Kevin Rudd's emissions trading scheme. When they did so they had no idea how events would flow from there. It's easy, with the benefit of hindsight and history, to look back at that time and say that they were on the right side of history and made the right call, because they were soon joined by many other colleagues who resigned from the frontbench. Ultimately, the party's position on that issue changed and, indeed, the leader changed. But there was no guarantee that that was going to be the case at that time. I think they showed remarkable courage and foresight, as three young, ambitious and up-and-coming frontbenchers who had only recently got their first stints on the frontbench, to put all that at risk on a point of principle. At the time they crossed the floor and voted against Kevin Rudd's emissions trading scheme time and time again on a very historic day in the Senate.

For that courage, I think the Liberal Party owes those three particular senators a great debt of gratitude, because, I believe, history would be very different if Mitch, Mathias and Brett did not take the stand they did at that time. It was an honour to work for Mitch while he did that and to observe the courage he showed under such immense pressure.

It was another of Mitch's achievements, though, that I appreciated on an even more personal level as a university student. In my first year of university, the old system of compulsory student unionism was still in place. At the University of Melbourne, in my first year, I paid a $450 compulsory fee to be a member of the student union, against my will, and it then took that money and spent it in a way that was against my values. In subsequent years, after Mitch and others successfully legislated VSU, the fee, no longer being compulsory, miraculously dropped to $100. It's amazing what the absence of compulsion—and the incentives that gives to an institution—can do. Sadly, as Mitch already noted in his contribution tonight, with the election of the Rudd government, that policy of voluntary student unionism was abolished, and a form of compulsory student unionism was reintroduced, with a new fee, to be capped at $250, and in my final year of university I was forced to pay that capped $250 fee—again, no surprise that the union sought to take as much as it could from students. It remains a matter of unresolved, unfinished business of this parliament that I hope we return to, so we can return to those glory days that Mitch and others helped achieve.

Mitch is going on to greater things at the UN, and I want to set out a KPI that I've given to him privately. He is of course going to be Australia's version of Nikki Haley at the UN, and so I expect to see from him a number of sassy pro-Israel speeches at the UN that quickly go viral on social media and across cable news in the United States and around the world! I have great confidence that Australia's values will be ably and forthrightly represented by Senator Fifield over there in New York.

Mitch, thank you for your support for me and for your friendship. Thank you for your service to our great home state of Victoria. Thank you for your service to our wonderful Liberal Party. You leave a great legacy of which you and your family can be very proud, and I feel very honoured to have had this brief time overlapping with yours here in this place.
Senate adjourned at 20:46