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**SITTING DAYS—2014**

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FORTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—THIRD PERIOD

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

Senate Office holders
President—Senator Hon. Stephen Parry
Deputy President and Chair of Committees—Senator Gavin Mark Marshall
Temporary Chairs of Committees—Senators Christopher John Back, Cory Bernardi, Sam Dastyari, Sean Edwards, Alexander McEachian Gallacher, Susan Lines, Deborah Mary O'Neill, Nova Maree Peris AOM, Dean Anthony Smith, Zdenko Matthew Seselja, Glenn Sterle, Peter Stuart Whish-Wilson and John Reginald Williams
Leader of the Government in the Senate—Senator Hon. Eric Abetz
Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate—Senator Hon. George Henry Brandis QC
Leader of the Opposition in the Senate—Senator the Hon Penny Wong
Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate—Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy
Manager of Government Business in the Senate—Senator Hon. Mitchell Peter Fifield
Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate—Senator Claire Moore

Senate Party Leaders and Whips
Leader of the Liberal Party in the Senate—Senator Hon. Eric Abetz
Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party in the Senate—Senator Hon. George Henry Brandis QC
Leader of The Nationals in the Senate—Senator Hon. Nigel Scullion
Deputy Leader of The Nationals in the Senate—Senator Hon. Fiona Nash
Leader of the Opposition in the Senate—Senator the Hon Penny Wong
Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate—Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy
Leader of the Australian Greens—Senator Christine Anne Milne
Leader of the Palmer United Party in the Senate—Senator Glenn Patrick Lazarus
Deputy Leader of the Palmer United Party in the Senate—Senator Jacqui Lambie
Chief Government Whip—Senator David Christopher Bushby
Deputy Government Whips—Senators David Julian Fawcett and Anne Sowerby Ruston
The Nationals Whip—Senator Barry James O'Sullivan
Chief Opposition Whip—Senator Anne McEwen
Deputy Opposition Whips—Senators Catryna Louise Bilyk and Anne Elizabeth Urquhart
Australian Greens Whip—Senator Rachel Siewert
Palmer United Party Whip—Senator Zhenya Wang
Deputy Palmer United Party Whip—Senator Jacqui Lambie

Printed by authority of the Senate
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<td>Abetz, Hon. Eric</td>
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<td>Back, Christopher John</td>
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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.

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(1) Chosen by the Parliament of New South Wales to fill a casual vacancy (vice R. Carr), pursuant to section 15 of the Constitution.

**PARTY ABBREVIATIONS**

AG—Australian Greens; ALP—Australian Labor Party;
AMEP—Australian Motoring Enthusiast Party; CLP—Country Liberal Party;
DLP—Democratic Labour Party; FFP—Family First Party; IND—Independent,
LDP—Liberal Democratic Party; LNP—Liberal National Party; LP—Liberal Party of Australia;
NATS—The Nationals; PUP—Palmer United Party
Heads of Parliamentary Departments
Clerk of the Senate—R Laing
Clerk of the House of Representatives—D Elder
Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—C Mills
Parliamentary Budget Officer—P Bowen
<table>
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<tr>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
<td>The Hon Tony Abbott MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Indigenous Affairs</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Eric Abetz</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister</td>
<td>The Hon Josh Frydenberg MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister</td>
<td>The Hon Alan Tudge MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development</td>
<td>The Hon Warren Truss MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Deputy Prime Minister)</td>
<td>The Hon Jamie Briggs MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Infrastructure and Regional</td>
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<td>Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>The Hon Julie Bishop MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Trade and Investment</td>
<td>The Hon Andrew Robb AO MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Brett Mason</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Employment</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Eric Abetz</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Leader of the Government in the Senate)</td>
<td>The Hon Luke Hartsuyker MP</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Attorney-General</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Senator the Hon George Brandis QC</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Vice-President of the Executive Council)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Justice</td>
<td>The Hon Michael Keenan MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>The Hon Joe Hockey MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Small Business</td>
<td>The Hon Bruce Billson MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acting Assistant Treasurer</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Mathias Cormann</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer</td>
<td>The Hon Steven Ciobo MP</td>
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<td>Minister for Agriculture</td>
<td>The Hon Barnaby Joyce MP</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Education</td>
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<td>Minister for Industry</td>
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<td>The Hon Bob Baldwin MP</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Sport</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Defence</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td><em>Senator the Hon Michael Ronaldson</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td><em>The Hon Darren Chester MP</em></td>
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Tuesday, 26 August 2014

The PRESIDENT (Senator the Hon. Stephen Parry) took the chair at 12:30, read prayers and made an acknowledgement of country.

COMMITTEES

Abbott Government’s Budget Cuts Committee

Meeting

Senator DI NATALE (Victoria) (12:31): by leave—I move:

That the Select Committee into the Abbott Government’s Budget Cuts be authorised to hold a private meeting otherwise than in accordance with standing order 33(1) during the sitting of the Senate today, from 4 pm.

Question agreed to.

BILLS

Health Workforce Australia (Abolition) Bill 2014

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Senator CAMERON (New South Wales) (12:32): I oppose the Health Workforce Australia (Abolition) Bill. The bill is part of the unfair agenda of this government. It is unfair to the Australian public not to develop a long-term strategy to deliver health workforces that can meet the needs of the community. It is another example of the incompetence of this government—something that the public are seeing every day of the week. Day in and day out we see on display the incompetence of the coalition government. The third element to this government is their arrogance—their arrogance that they think they can do anything in the name of the market; that you should not plan for the future of health but should just let the market rip and everything will be okay.

It is interesting to note that the coalition were warned by their own think tanks and their own national secretaries that they should stop being ideological about how they deliver their message to the Australian public. If anything is ideological, it is this approach by the coalition government to dump the Health Workforce Australia organisation. It is a triumph of ideology over the national interest. It is another example of the lies that the coalition took to the Australian people prior to the election—there were to be no cuts to health, no cuts to education, no tax rises. We heard lie after lie from this incompetent, arrogant and unfair government.

It is clear that the public are well aware that they were conned by the then opposition prior to the election. The incompetence and the arrogance abound. You only have to look at the Leader of the Government in the Senate, Senator Abetz. How could you ever trust the coalition government on health issues when the Leader of the Government in the Senate links abortion to breast cancer based on running an ideological line, based on trying to get some of the most extreme groups in the world to look at his approach on these issues? It beggars belief.
that the Leader of the Government in the Senate could be so wrong on an issue or so deliberately political that he would run a line linking breast cancer with abortion. Nobody believes that these days, and for the leader in the Senate and for this rabble of a government to be running those sorts of agendas and those sorts of lines for purely political and ideological purposes is a nonsense.

Then we have Senator Brandis. Senator Brandis has been described as the man with a brain like a planet. Well it is a barren planet—there is nothing growing up there. For him to bring policy to public forums and then not be able to explain that policy is another example of the incompetence of this government. Then there is Treasurer Hockey saying the poor do not drive so they do not have to worry about the petrol excise. How out of touch, how arrogant, how incompetent can this government get? The Minister for Education, Mr Pyne, threatened to cut research funding because this place is opposed to the ideological attacks on higher education. Again we see this arrogance. Then we have Senator Joyce talking this morning about not being able to pay the Defence Force and about not being able to have hospitals, even about closing down hospitals, because of some manufactured budget crisis. On top of that, and clearly against this government's promise that there would be no cuts to health, we get this cut of $100-odd million to Health Workforce Australia.

I am of the view that the public want long-term planning. They want governments to actually have a look at the challenges that the country and governments will face—not just in the short term but in the medium and long term—and to sit down and plan a way forward. What could be more important than planning for the health of all Australians? This issue was looked at by the Productivity Commission. They are not an organisation that I would praise very often, but I think they got it right when they said there was an ad hoc approach to long-term planning for health and that we had to put in place a proper approach to planning. That is why Health Workforce Australia was brought into being. It came from a recommendation of the Productivity Commission, it was discussed and debated by governments of both political persuasions at COAG, and COAG came up with a recommendation in support of the establishment of Health Workforce Australia. COAG did that because they agreed with the Productivity Commission that there had to be a separate independent body sitting down and planning for the future of Australia’s health management issues. The establishment of Health Workforce Australia was a very important initiative of the previous government.

There was a Senate inquiry into the abolition of this organisation. Academic after academic came to that inquiry and indicated that it would be stupidity to move away from having an independent body that examines and analyses the health needs of the country in terms of the health workforce, in terms of health research and in terms of the future needs of the ageing Australian community. They argued that we should not do this. We had the AMA, the College of Surgeons and body after body representing the professional health carers in this country saying that we should not do this. Yet this government, in its arrogance and incompetence, has set about destroying an organisation that is focused wholly and solely on ensuring the health and welfare of Australian citizens.

When does ideology just become too much? When should we be saying that the interests of the Australian community should get a look in with this coalition government? The department, as I understand it, were unhappy with having the work they had been doing moved out of the department to Health Workforce Australia. Labor resisted the department’s
argument that they should maintain control and oversight of this work, because we took the view that the Productivity Commission got it right, and they had identified major flaws, major problems, with this work being done by the department and had recommended that it be handed out to an independent group. That is why we established Health Workforce Australia. We accepted the arguments from the Productivity Commission and we accept the arguments right now of the health professionals and health organisations that came to the Senate inquiry and said: 'Do not do this. It is not in the national interest to get rid of this organisation.'

The problem, as has been identified by the Liberal secretariat, is that this government is dominated by ideology. Ideology dominates this government—not common sense, not the national interest and not what is good for the nation, but whatever the ideology of 'small government' and 'let the market rip' dictates. I can imagine the debate going on in the cabinet room about the socialisation of medicine, about the planning that is taking place by government: 'We should just let the market rip. We do not really need an organisation to look at the skill needs of the health industry. We do not need to look at what the issues are for the Australian public. Just let the market rip, and, by the way, we can probably save $140 million by getting rid of this organisation'—an absolute pittance. It is another budget cut for what? Because they have manufactured this false budget crisis. They have manufactured a lie about the state of the Australian economy, and they are now caught up in their own lie. They are now caught in a position where everything they do has to be about cutting costs, regardless of the impact that it has on the health of individual Australians and regardless of whether we can ensure that we have enough surgeons, that we have enough doctors, and that we have enough nurses and allied health professionals to ensure the health of an ageing Australian community. So ideology triumphed and arrogance triumphed—because they thought they could just get away with it and ram it through. Arrogance dominated and once again we have bad policy because of the arrogant, incompetent position adopted by this government.

Anyone who looked at the record of this government on health would be absolutely appalled. Everyone who understands the health system knows well that preventative medicine is extremely important, that you have to plan for the future and prevent as much ill-health as possible. Yet what has this government done? This government has set about making it even more difficult for ordinary Australians, for poorer Australians, for battling working Australian families, to go to their doctor. They introduced a GP tax, they introduced a PBS co-payment and they set higher safety net thresholds—all designed to cut costs regardless of the implications for the health system in this country. What is more ideologically stupid than that?

I see that Senator Seselja will be speaking in this debate. He should get up and explain why his government is cutting $60.5 million out of health in the ACT. Where is the money going to come from to ensure that decent standards are maintained? How is the ACT government going to deal with that cut? Senator Smith looks as if he is gearing up for a go. Senator Smith, please explain, when you get on your feet, why you are taking $428 million out of the Western Australian health system. These are the challenges that the ideologues have to deal with—the real implications of ideology and stupidity. That is what you have to deal with and you cannot deal with it by including more ideology and more stupidity in your speech. You have to deal with the facts. In Queensland, $952 million is being cut—nearly $1 billion out of the health system in Queensland. That is the result of the actions of this government, who are
incompetent, who do not care and who put their own ideological interests before the national interest. It just beggars belief what this mob are all about.

We have not even been here in parliament for the last five weeks, yet we have still had the experience of watching this government selfdestruct, watching them nark at each other, argue with each other, fight with each other. Senator Macdonald has said—I do not normally quote Senator Macdonald, let me tell you—that the health policies of this unfair government, through this unfair budget, are not just bad but dangerous. When was the last time you heard a backbencher talk about government policy being dangerous? You might criticise your own government's policy from time to time—I have been known to do that myself—but you do not actually pick out a policy and say, 'This policy is dangerous.' The Australian public now have a government that is a danger to their health. They have a government that is a danger to building a decent society in this country. They are a danger to this country's long-established principle of the fair go. Yes, Senator Macdonald, this government is a danger—and not just on one policy issue. They are dangerous, they are incompetent and they are arrogant. What a combination that is!

This government have set about destroying the long-term health workforce planning of this country on the basis of their arrogance, their ignorance and their contempt for both this parliament and the Australian public. Even before this bill has gone through, we have seen the department start to transfer obligations from Health Workforce Australia back into the department—even before this bill has been debated in this house of review. The arrogance beggars belief. Every aspect of this government's operations is riddled with incompetence. No wonder the public are looking askance at this coalition government. No government has ever descended into such a farce, such a rabble, as quickly as this government. The Abbott government is seen as incompetent, the Abbott government is seen as a government that lies and the Abbott government is seen as a government that is not acting in the national interest. This bill is but one small example of the Abbott government putting their ideology before the national interest and before the health needs of this country. Abolishing the body that is looking at the long-term plan for the health needs of this community is one of the most arrogant, ideological and stupid propositions to have come before this parliament in a long time. That is why Labor oppose it—because we stand up for the Australian public and against the coalition's ideology. (Time expired)

Senator SMITH (Western Australia) (12:52): We have just had a very colourful display from Senator Cameron. I congratulate him on his colour but not his substance. Senator Cameron shared with us views about arrogance, incompetence and policy recklessness. Of course, Senator Cameron was speaking from firsthand experience of the former Labor government. It is very high order to talk about farce and rabble. We know that that is really the pot calling the kettle black from Senator Cameron. I would like to contrast my contribution with Senator Cameron's by filling it out with a bit more substance, if I might, Mr Acting Deputy President. I am pleased to have this opportunity to make a contribution to this debate on the Health Workforce Australia (Abolition Bill) 2014 because it gives me an opportunity to highlight some important issues in regional health—issues which are important to the whole nation but particularly to me as a Western Australian senator.

As its name suggests, the bill does seek to abolish Health Workforce Australia, and there is one overarching reason why this government seeks to do that: it is to eliminate some of the
duplication within our health system. It may well come as a surprise to some of those opposite but our country does not have limitless financial resources and nor does our health system. This coalition government's first priority is to invest in front-line services and to improve the country's capacity for medical research. Those are the two most significant challenges that our health system is facing today.

What our health system is not in a position to do is sustain an ever-growing number of bureaucratic bodies that are duplicating or replicating the work already being done at a state level or, indeed, within the Commonwealth Department of Health itself. To put it bluntly, we are not operating in the sort of fiscal environment that permits optional extras. This is not as a result of this government's actions, however. This is the doing of our predecessors, who, having created a budget mess, now sit here and attack any and every effort to fix that problem. Governing is about making choices—and, I might add too, it is about ideology; it is about ideas; and, of course, it is about the allocation of finite economic resources. To be frank, if I have choice between investing a dollar in front-line health services or investing money in office space for health bureaucrats then I will choose, and I am sure many Australians would choose, front-line services every single time. I hope to have confidence that over time the Labor Party and the opposition in this place will recognise the error of their ways. I am not saying this to belittle any of the work done by Health Workforce Australia; the opposite is true.

We remember that Health Workforce Australia was set up and funded for four years by the previous government, but those four years have ended. The budget situation and challenge this government faces is vastly different from that faced by Labor when they were in office in 2007. Labor talked and dreamed big things in health but they were not so good on the delivery. When Health Workforce Australia was established under Labor, it was intended to operate over four years, with financial support coming from both the Commonwealth and the state governments. Here again we see the consequences of Labor's flawed planning and policy processes. The states have not put in any money. The more than $1 billion that has gone into Health Workforce Australia since its establishment has all been federal money. The $550 million that was supposed to come from the states and the territories over those four years never materialised. Why? Because it was another example in a litany of examples of the Rudd government imposing its will in the absence of any cooperation or proper policy discussion and formulation with the states. Health Workforce Australia was established under Kevin Rudd's National Partnership Agreement on Hospital and Health Workforce Reform. It was a four-year agreement that expired in June 2013. Under the national partnership agreement Health Workforce Australia was supposed to act as a national body, working to health ministers to streamline clinical training arrangements and support workforce reform initiatives. In its time Health Workforce Australia did do some important work in research, most particularly through the publication of national health workforce modelling that gave long-term projections of supply and demand for the Australian health workforce. But that work is done now.

The government is now charged with dealing with the challenges that this sort of work identified. In order to do that, we have to invest more in the front line. We do not have the luxury of continuing to support an organisation like Health Workforce Australia to identify problems and fix those problems it identifies. We have a Commonwealth Department of
Health that already has the expertise and capacity to undertake many of the activities that Health Workforce Australia was undertaking. We do not need another layer of bureaucracy sitting between the department and those delivering front-line services. This government, like our predecessors, understands that every additional layer of bureaucracy has the effect of skimming resources from the already limited pool of money. Also in contrast with our political predecessors, this government recognises and respects the roles that the states and territories play in the development and improvement of Australia's health workforce.

We believe that the states—who are closer to the medical professionals and the patients to whom services are being provided—are in a better position to understand the needs of their communities than a federally directed bureaucracy. This is especially true in relation to services provided to regional communities. To my mind, it is doubtful that sustaining offices for a government agency in our capital cities is going to help those living in regional communities experience better and improved health services. It is not going to make it easier for medical students from regional areas to get scholarships so that they can get the high-quality training they need. You provide incentives for regional GP practices to provide matching funds alongside government investment so that regional practices will invest their own money and truly utilise that investment efficiently in infrastructure to help local GPs train the next generation of regional medical practitioners.

I think it is also worth making the point, which is self-evident to me and to coalition senators on this side but apparently not to others, that we do not need a separate federally funded agency to deal with the challenges facing Australia's medical workforce. I would remind the Senate that the federal government does not actually employ doctors and nurses; instead, they are employed through state and territory governments. They are employed through these governments because, as we on this side of the chamber believe, those governments have a better idea of the health needs of the communities they serve than a remote government in a faraway place in Canberra. This is especially true for regional communities across my home state of Western Australia. One size most certainly does not fit all in the delivery of health services across Australia's various jurisdictions.

We heard from the Labor Party, during their contributions to the debate on this bill in the other place—as we will do this afternoon—that the measures contained in this bill will mean the burden is being placed on the states. With the greatest of respect, this signifies a pretty fundamental misreading of how our Federation was designed to work. While the federal government has long been a significant funder of health services in Australia and will continue to be into the future, it is the states' responsibility to make decisions about service delivery. The only 'burden' the states will be shouldering as a result of these changes are the responsibilities they are supposed to already shoulder.

The Commonwealth Department of Health has always worked closely with its state and territory counterparts to find ways of boosting employee productivity, improving retention rates and ensuring the effective allocation of health workforce resources. Nothing contained in this bill will change that arrangement. The Commonwealth Department of Health will continue to work closely with its state and territory counterparts in this area. But what it will not be doing under this government is duplicating that work.

To put it simply: we do not need a separate agency to do that. Continuing to fund that separate agency will simply siphon off money from where it is most needed, and that is in
front-line health services and, most particularly, in front-line regional health services. We need to respect the fact that the various state and territory governments understand their own constituents better than a distant federal government ever will. As the Prime Minister said in relation to the reform of our Federation, we should be doing more to make sure that states and territories are sovereign in their own sphere. Of course, this is especially true in Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory.

So, contrary to some of the claims we have heard from those opposite, the abolition of Health Workforce Australia does not indicate any lack of commitment of Australia's health workforce; instead, the reverse is true. Indeed, the Department of Health advised the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee inquiry into another bill, the Australian Preventive Health Agency (Abolition) Bill 2014, that:

There will continue to be work undertaken by the Department, and in state governments, to develop innovations and reforms to address health workforce challenges, and to support the implementation of those policies.

Key words there: 'There will continue to be work undertaken'. They continue:

The Government remains committed to effective health workforce training, productivity and innovation and will ensure that this work is delivered more efficiently through reducing corporate overheads, and eliminating duplication between HWA and the Department.

The closure of Health Workforce Australia is not a withdrawal of support or resources for our health workforce. By creating efficiencies, by streamlining programs and by reducing bureaucracy we are ensuring that we get better value from the investment in programs to build the health workforce of Australia for tomorrow.

I think in many ways this bill neatly encapsulates a core philosophical difference between the coalition and our political opponents. This government is interested in practical, pragmatic solutions. Labor, when in office, was more interested in press releases. Thus, Labor's automatic response to every challenge is to set up a taxpayer funded agency to look into a problem, without ever stopping to ask itself if the work is already being done—or if it can be done more effectively elsewhere, such as through the states and territories. After all, there is no photo opportunity in making sure that government departments are doing the work they are supposed to be doing. In Labor's view, it is much better to set up a new agency and try to generate some excitement and some publicity to convince the public that you are dealing with an issue. Whether or not that is the most effective use of limited financial resources seems to be a secondary consideration for those opposite.

It was that sort of thinking that lead to the protracted debacle of Labor's GP superclinics—which were first announced in the 2007 election, re-announced in the 2010 election and, by the time of the 2013 election when Labor left office, more than half of them had still not been built. That is what I mean by 'government by press release'. The botched GP superclinics rollout was $650 million into a big, showy program that was designed to shore up Labor's support in marginal electorates around Australia—while, at the same time, Labor reduced funding for subacute hospital beds. The Australian National Audit Office found that fewer than 10 per cent of the GP superclinics that Labor promised in the first round—that is, in the lead up to the 2007 election which Kevin Rudd won—were delivered on time.

As a result of the measures contained in this bill, programs and functions of Health Workforce Australia will be transferred to the Department of Health. That is part and parcel
of this government delivering on its commitment to reduce red tape and streamline programs and get better outcomes. The savings that flow from this bill will support front-line health services and programs.

This leads me to another important point that I would like to make. As a result of the decisions of this government, annual federal assistance to the states for public hospitals will—contrary to what Labor is saying—increase by more than nine per cent every year for the next three years and by more than six per cent in the fourth year. In total, that represents a 40 per cent increase over the next four years. We are increasing funding for states to run public hospitals—remember they, and not the federal government, run the hospitals—by more than $5 million from $13.8 billion in 2013-14 to $18.9 billion in 2017-18. The overall annual health spending will increase by more than $10 billion or 16 per cent from $64.5 billion in 2013-14 to $74.8 billion in 2017-18. Consistent with our commitment to get the budget back into the black, the coalition government is also putting the growth in health spending on a more sustainable trajectory from 2017-18. In spite of the very difficult budget challenge this government inherited from Labor, every year Commonwealth spending on our health system will continue to grow.

Of course, this government has also committed to provide up to 175 grants for rural and remote general practices to expand facilities and to support teaching and training of medical students and registrars. The grants, of up to $300,000, will be provided to successful applicants and require a matched contribution from the practice. This will encourage local practices in regional areas to think about the needs of their communities and plan their future expansions accordingly. This is the sort of initiative I spoke of earlier, when I noted the importance of involving people who are on the ground delivering services rather than having money sucked into another level of bureaucracy and directed away from service delivery. In addition to this, the coalition government has committed to significantly expanding the number of GP training places. GP training places will increase by 300, from 1,200 to 1,500 new places in 2015.

These initiatives and programs have been well received across regional Western Australia. They will create more vocational training opportunities for the workforce, freeing up more junior doctor training positions for new graduates coming through. The Australian General Practice Training program, which the government's commitment will expand, has a distribution target that requires 50 per cent of training to occur in rural and remote locations. This is a health workforce plan that listens to and takes note of the health workforce needs of regional Australia. This is the type of practical assistance that regional communities need.

Furthermore, the government will also invest around $40 million in up to 100 additional medical internships each year in non-traditional settings, including private hospitals in regional areas. This will help to provide additional opportunities for medical students and will also help to reduce some of the pressures on public hospitals for training. Priority will be given to positions and rotations outside major metropolitan centres to expand the capacity of our medical workforce in rural and regional areas.

Then we come to the historic announcement in the budget two months ago that this coalition government will establish a Medical Research Future Fund. The fund will grow to become a $20 billion fund that will boost illness prevention and promote early intervention in a way that will reduce healthcare costs, making our health system more sustainable. The fund
is being established because the government recognises that research is every bit as important as treatment in the creation of a healthier population and in contributing to the long-term sustainability of our health system.

In spite of all this, Labor and the Greens have the audacity to come into this chamber and accuse this coalition government of not caring about health. It is a charge that I and my colleagues reject. It is precisely because we care about health that we are making the difficult decisions with regard to building a sustainable health system for Australia into the future, and the budget is a necessary part of that.

It is important to recognise that we cannot keep doing things as we have been doing them. The business-as-usual approach does not work anymore. It was rejected at the last election, and this government should be given a clear path to try its ideas, to try its reforms and to improve the health outcomes of Australians and, more particularly, of regional Australians. We cannot continue wildly spending public money without asking the tough questions about whether we are getting the maximum value for that spending or whether it would be better directed elsewhere or, indeed, whether it would be better done by someone else. Australia does have a debt and deficit problem. It is a problem that has been recognised by this government, by the Secretary of the Treasury, by the independent Parliamentary Budget Office, by the OECD, by former Labor Prime Ministers Bob Hawke and Paul Keating and by numerous respected independent economic commentators.

Of course, some would prefer to keep their head in the sand. The fact that those opposite are unwilling to face up to the challenge is unfortunate—not surprising, but it is unfortunate—but that is their decision and they will ultimately have to live with its consequences. Meanwhile this government will not be cowered by their cheap, populist politics. We will not shirk our responsibility to get the budget back on an even keel, because that is what we told the people of Australia we would do. More than that, it is the right thing to do, and it is right and proper to act soon and to act quickly. The measures contained in this bill are entirely consistent with this government's overarching commitment to reduce red tape, to reduce inefficiencies, waste and duplication within government and to make sure that valuable taxpayer dollars are actually targeted effectively. (Time expired)

**Senator O'NEILL** (New South Wales) (13:12): I rise with some pleasure and also with some incredible sadness as an Australian to have to speak to the bill that this government has the temerity to put before this place today, the Health Workforce Australia (Abolition) Bill 2014. Australia's health workforce is vital to the wellbeing of this nation. It is not just about individuals feeling well; being well and having the people who are skilled enough to help you stay well and to return you to good health are vital parts of the work of governments.

We know that the health workforce in Australia is under tremendous pressure, partly because of our ageing population and rises in chronic diseases and also because of the reality of increasing community expectations about living a healthy life. The health workforce is rich and diverse. It totals 1.3 million people, made up of 550,000 registered health professionals and 750,000 workers from other health occupations. This is no small entity. The work that it does is no small thing for this country, because a healthy Australia is vital to our national productivity as well. At the last census 6.7 per cent of all employed people in Australia were engaged in a health occupation. This number rose by 22.5 per cent up to 2011 and continues...
to do so. We know that health and planning for the workforce that will support Australians' health are the great works of all levels of government.

One comment I want to make before going to my prepared remarks relates to what we have just heard from Senator Smith: gilding the lily, pretending that what they are delivering here is in line with their promise prior to the election that there would be no cuts to health, when what we are seeing here is a massive cut and no clear indication of where this cut is going, and at the same time an abrogation of the responsibility of the federal government to work systematically and carefully with the states to make sure that we have the doctors, the nurses, the podiatrists, the dieticians, the healthcare workers in all their form that Australia needs. But Senator Smith revealed what might be lying ahead in terms of the white paper that this government is threatening, and that really, really frightens me. We heard him say that the burden of service delivery is placed on the states, and the responsibility of federal government in that mix is something that they are trying to walk away from with this bill. Claiming a duplication of service is a very cheap and very low-level way of thinking about the importance of the workforce that we need to prepare for Australians.

States are certainly responsible for service delivery. That is correct. That is one factual, correct thing that we heard from the senator. But the reality is that something called the GST, instituted by the great hero of the Liberal Party, changed the way in which those states that make up the federation are actually able to acquire money to provide the services that people in the states need. And the reality is that that has changed forever the nature of state-federation relationships. What we see here is a government so fixated on cutting and destroying. It lacks a vision for the future. This failure to actually plan for working people to be available to help Australians when they need health care is an indictment of this government.

I want to make some comments about this notion of duplication that we are hearing about. 'Duplication' is just a cover word that this government is attempting to use to cut down the communication that the federal government needs to have with the states. In the old days that Senator Smith might hark back to, we did not have transport of the kind we have now. People did not fly. People did not move from state to state. People did not shift around the way they do now. But, thankfully, we now have that capacity, and Australians exercise that capacity all the time. The notion that there is no national need to look at the workforce is a very false argument, and it belongs to another time. It is not a forward-looking vision that this government has; it is a backward, miserly vision. It is an absolute abrogation of responsibility in the modern Australia that we live in.

But it is just another expression of this government's backward-looking reality. They are constantly looking in the rear-vision mirror: 'Let's go back to when Federation commenced.' Well, as a woman, I can tell you that I am very glad I am not going back to the days of bearing 10 children and doing the washing by myself out in the bush, completely disconnected to the rest of the world. I like Facebook. I like the future. I like the opportunities of education for my children. I like the thought that Labor was planning for a health workforce that was going to be there to meet my needs, the needs of my family and friends, the needs of people in the community who I represent, the needs of the people of the great state of New South Wales. Labor understood, in our health reform, that it was the federal government that had to step up to take financial responsibility alongside the states. Yet here, within just a few months...
of coming to government, this backward-looking lot decided that they could completely rewrite the impact of the GST on Australia's economic reality and simply absolve themselves of the responsibility for funding and for planning a national workforce for Australia, the nation.

I am proud to be a New South Welshwoman, but I am prouder to be an Australian. And this government is attacking all of the institutions that support us as Australians in its negative, miserly way. What we are facing with this government—and those listening should make no mistake about it—is the end of Australia's health system as we know it. For 40 years, since the inception of Medicare, Australians have really understood and appreciated the fairness of Labor's vision for health. We believe as Australians that it is not how much money you have in your pocket that should determine whether you can go to a doctor or not. We think you should be able to show up with your Medicare card and get the services you need. We believe that that creates a fair Australia. That is what Labor believes. But every single time those opposite have come into government they have attempted to tear down that very essential part of Australia's fabric. They have had a go at Medicare every single time they have come into government. And I thought it was pretty bad before, but it was nothing on what we are seeing this ideologically driven government doing now: tearing apart our universal healthcare system. They want to abolish so many parts of it, attacking it on every level. But how can you possibly stand in this place as a government for Australia and say: 'It's not my responsibility to look after the health workforce for the people of Australia. Sorry: not interested today; let's just hand it over to the states'?

Australians can stand here today, while we fight this legislation and every other bit of disgraceful health legislation that those opposite are bringing into this place this week, proud that we have one of the best health systems in the world. And this ideological war is being waged by those opposite. But Australians are awake to it. They know about that essential, quintessential fairness. People know that the budget that this government brought down absolutely stinks. It is rotten to the core. It is taking away very simple rights from Australians with a lot of gobbledegook talk, but you just cannot fool all the people all the time. They got away with their lies before the election—'no cuts to education, no cuts to health, no changes to the pension'. But look at what we have. In the budget that reveals the truth—cuts to education, cuts to health and changes to the pension. It tears at the very fabric of our country.

Prior to the establishment of Health Workforce Australia, when we were coming off the back of the Howard government, we were faced with a piecemeal approach—that means this state doing a little bit and that state doing a little bit. It resulted in this boom-bust cycle of ad hoc systems—sometimes there were doctors, sometimes there were not; sometimes there were nurses, sometimes there were not; sometimes there were podiatrists, and many times there were not—because nobody was actually doing the work to figure out what was going on. You have to have a look to see what is happening across the nation, not just in one state. The distribution of workers within the health sector before Health Workforce Australia came was absolutely unequal and unfair, and it was worst in the regions and in rural Australia. I see Senator Nash sitting there with major responsibilities in the field of health and with carriage of this piece of legislation—otherwise she probably would not be sitting there. She is a woman from the bush, like the National Party members she sits with—one who should have a big, loud voice seeking equity for that community. And I see my two colleagues here from
Tasmania—Senator Polley and Senator Urquhart—who fought for the establishment of Health Workforce Australia and who understand that, in Tasmania, the people are incredibly disadvantaged in terms of the access they have to health workers.

But that was significantly ameliorated by Labor's investment in delivering a health workforce. We went about improving the training of health professionals nationwide by funding the $1.1 billion National Partnership Agreement on Hospital and Health Workforce Reform. This led to Health Workforce Australia, which was gathered together to create a national body to counter those pressures within the health system and to provide long-term, sustainable solutions. We invested in that for the people of Australia with the money collected under the GST that comes to the federal parliament. We invested $344 million to make sure we were planning the workforce and enabling the universities to be part of that planning; enabling the community to be part of that planning and enabling all of the peak bodies to be part of that planning across the nation. Not within the states, because this is Australia. It is no longer the great state of New South Wales all around the country—this is a federation of states that sends tax to the federal government and has a responsibility for national workforce planning in this critical area.

If we are going to dismantle this national authority, which this miserly, short-sighted government wants to do, we will see a dramatic decline in health care, particularly in those areas that Senator Nash and the other Nationals are representing—particularly in rural and remote communities. And the impact will be felt first amongst the elderly, amongst the disabled and amongst the chronically ill. What we are going to see if this is not managed properly is an incredible impact on our workforce of 1.3 million people and fragmentation of the system—breaking it apart so states fight with one another to bring nurses backwards and forwards. It will do nothing to enhance health outcomes for Australia, and that is at the heart of what is wrong with this government—they have forgotten that politics is about people. They have forgotten that Australia is a country about fairness. They have lost that sense of responsibility to people, and their language reveals it every day. We have had ministers here speaking about education, but you would never know because all they talk about is business, business, business. When they talk about child care, there is no mention of children. And what we are seeing here in the health sector is the same thing: 'health dollars', 'state responsibilities' and the old one-two shuffle—'Let's hide that pea under the thimble and see if we can find where it is, because if we bamboozle them enough, they will never notice.' But the reality is that Australians are too smart for this lot. They have figured them out. There is no capacity for Australians to be conned any more by this government that wants to take away the things that build the nation and enhance people's lives. Those opposite have forgotten about people, but I can tell you that we on this side of the chamber have not. That is why, as bad as it is to have to come in and speak about this matter, I am so proud to be here for Labor and to be fighting for fairness for Australian workers and for those Australians who use the health system. And let us face it—that is every single one of us.

The reality of this government is that they are planning to pull apart a structure. They are going to cut clinical-training funding; they are going to stop talking to the universities; they are going to stop enabling people to plan for the sorts of needs we have right across this country. In my time in the House of Representatives on the standing committee on health, and now as the Chair of the Senate's Select Committee on Health, I have been able to see firsthand
what is going on with this government and the kind of impact this government is determined
to inflict on the Australian people. The last time Tony Abbott was in charge of health he took
a billion dollars out of health. He was responsible for a complete shortfall of doctors and
nurses, and a system of overseas-trained doctors was his solution to that workforce shortage.
In the last parliament we undertook an extensive inquiry into the overseas-trained doctors
scheme, which the AMA themselves said had failed. It was extremely complex: we described
many wonderful doctors, who have come to us from all parts around the world, in trying to
negotiate that system as being 'lost in the labyrinth'. So convoluted and so ridiculous was the
scheme they had set up that it simply did not serve Australians' needs.

When Labor came to power, we invested and invested and invested in massively expanding
the number of training places for doctors, nurses and other health professionals. Only last
week in the Riverina, in Wagga, I met graduates who are coming out of a program where they
have been able to engage rural and regional students and be very successful with them. In
Townsville in particular, just last week regional students were brought in to study at a
regional university and they are doing their placements in regional hospitals. This increases
their capacity to become general specialists. These are things that Labor did to enhance the
workforce. We have a proud record to stand on. We did the hard work. We cleaned up the
mess that saw Australian people compromised, that could have denied Australians medical
service with the likely consequence of ill-health and, potentially, death because there was not
a person trained to do the job that needed to be done.

Today 25 Labor senators will make it clear to the Australian people that there is one party
that stands for the health of all Australians, not just some Australians. There is one party that
will invest in making sure that we have the health workforce required to attend to the needs of
Australians if they get sick. You can look around here today and think about people in your
family. You might say, 'I'm pretty healthy,' but, let me tell you, ill-health might only be an
hour away. It could be an accident, it could be a stroke, it could be that you find out that you
have a chronic illness, it could be that your grandchild is born tomorrow with a disability or it
could be that you get diabetes and you need help with your foot care and you need a
podiatrist. What we are debating here is no esoteric thing about states, the Federation and
1901; we are talking about real Australians who live now and want to live into the future. We
need to keep Health Workforce Australia. This government should have known better, but
they have revealed their true colours. They have shown themselves as the miserly, backward-
looking lot they are.

Senator Di Natale (Victoria) (13:32): I rise today to speak in opposition to the Health
Workforce Australia (Abolition) Bill 2014. Before we go into the substance of the bill, it is
important to try and unpack the problem we are trying to solve. The problem is of a scale that
requires urgent action. We have enormous maldistribution of the health workforce in this
country. If you live in a regional area, there is a good chance you will have difficulty
accessing a GP, a nurse or an allied health professional. When you look at the number of
health professionals per patient, you will see that there is an enormous disparity between
people who live in regional and rural areas and those who live in an urban environment.

We have a situation where it is not just about maldistribution; we also have an ageing
workforce, particularly when you look at the aged-care workforce and the mental health
workforce. The average age of a mental health nurse is the late 40s and for general nursing it
is the mid-40s, and we just do not have the number of graduates available to replace them. If you go to many rural areas, you will find that health professionals, GPs, nurses and others work outside of their scope of practice and are being put in situations that they feel very uncomfortable dealing with because they are simply not trained to be able to deal with some of these complex issues. It is just not fair that somebody living in a regional community should not get access to a decent level of health care in the same way that people who live in cities get access to health care.

The Productivity Commission looked at this problem in 2005. They recognised that we had a huge issue on our hands. We have an enormous problem with the workforce being unevenly distributed. In some settings that workforce is ageing and we simply do not have the number of new graduates on hand to replace them. They did not just look at that problem; they looked at what the Australian government's response was in order to try and deal with it. What they found was extremely worrying. We had a huge degree of fragmentation, a lack of coordination and duplication of medical bodies in a whole range of different jurisdictions, all trying to deal with the problem.

It was in that context that Health Workforce Australia was established. It was established on the back of the act in 2009. It has a very clear mandate to deal with research and data collection to ensure we have information at hand—and one of the problems is that we often do not have that—to do long-term planning to ensure that we provide communities that are struggling with decent access to health care. Part of that is ensuring that there are training opportunities for healthcare professionals in those areas.

I heard Senator Smith talk earlier about the problem being duplication. He is right. The problem is duplication and the response to that was the establishment of Health Workforce Australia, to get a central body to coordinate what is going on. If you think that the department, with all of its competing priorities, will provide the dedicated focus that Health Workforce Australia provided and will carry on that role, you are wrong. It does not have the capacity, the expertise or, in fact, the focus that is necessary to deal with this challenge. That is why we saw the establishment of Health Workforce Australia. It is important that we have a dedicated agency that gets rid of duplication and ensures that we are able to get a much more coordinated approach to the training of our healthcare professionals and ensures that people right across the country get access to decent health care.

One of the responses has been, 'We'd rather invest our money in front-line services.' Senator Smith said that the priority for this government is to invest its money not in organisations like this but in front-line services. The logic of that statement is baffling. You see, the problem is that there are not any front-line services in many of these communities. That is the whole point of Health Workforce Australia. These front-line services just do not exist, they are not there. If you want to get access to specialised medical care, in many communities you cannot get it. The idea of simply taking money away from Health Workforce Australia and investing it in front-line services is a nice line: of course we all want money invested in people who are delivering services on the ground, but when they are not there you have got to do something to address that problem. So it is a policy position that simply does not have any basis in logic. In order to be able to provide front-line services you have got to have the healthcare professionals on the ground in those communities before we can do it—and what we have here is a proposal to make that problem worse rather than better.
This sort of reflects everything that is wrong with this government's priorities. There is a substantial body of work from the Productivity Commission and there are a number of health bodies and organisations that have said to governments repeatedly: 'You've got to do something to fix this. You can't leave it to the department. You've got to have a dedicated focus. You've got to have a workforce agency established to start collecting the data, to do the planning and to do the clinical training that is necessary to fix this over the long term.' But governments say: 'No, we're not going to listen to the experts. We won't listen to the authorities. We'll ignore the Productivity Commission report—because what we have got is a bureaucracy and, if it is a bureaucracy, it must be bad.' But I never hear people complain about the bureaucracy in this place when their cheques are getting paid; I never hear people complaining about the bureaucracy then. There is a narrow ideological view that says: 'We've got an agency over here. It is government funded. It mustn't be doing anything.' There is just this very narrow, blinkered view.

And it gets worse. In health care, there is a view that says: 'If the government is providing insurance for healthcare services through an instrumentality called Medicare, if it is government funded, it must be bad. So what we've got to do is hand it over to the private insurers.' Again, there is a complete absence of evidence to support that proposition. It is a belief system. It is an ideological view that says: 'If governments do it, it's got to be a bad thing. We're going to hand it over to the private sector.' That is why we have now got a recipe for a user-pays system in health care that will take us down the US road to a two-tiered system where there is one level of health care if you can afford private health insurance and another level if you cannot. But it is not just a question of fairness; it is a question of having an efficient health system. We know from all the international evidence that the most efficient way of funding healthcare services is through a universal insurer like Medicare—we have already got one. It means you keep healthcare costs down.

There is often a debate, and tension, between the notion of fairness and the notion of efficiency. In health care we have got a wonderful sweet spot. We can have a fair health system, which we by and large have, and a very efficient one, which we by and large have. But no. 'Ignore the evidence! Let's go down the road of ideology! Let's follow a user-pays model which is a recipe for a less fair and less efficient system!' Of course, the role of planning and coordination comes into that. 'But you can't plan and coordinate. That's a job for the market! Why would we have government bureaucrats planning and coordinating our healthcare workforce when we could use the market to sort it out?' Well, it just does not work in health care because health does not conform with the same principles we see in other areas of the economy where there is an exchange between two people with the same sorts of information from both parties.

The good news in all of this is that the Australian people do not buy it. They do not buy the notion that simply because a government is providing a service it must be bad. They do not buy into the notion that having a government agency, Health Workforce Australia, doing some long-term planning around workforce issues for people, particularly in rural and regional communities, is a bad thing. No, they think that is a good thing. They do not buy the idea that we should have a user-pays system in which private health insurers replace the role of Medicare. They do not like it and they do not buy it. That is the good news.
And that is the reason why we have ended up in this ridiculous debate about the state of our budget, that we are facing ‘a budget emergency’. The rhetoric has now softened. I do not know whether it is an emergency, a graze or what we are talking about at the moment. We end up getting tied up in knots over this stuff. We have heard language around the sustainability of the healthcare system. Well, we have got one of the most sustainable healthcare systems anywhere in the world. It delivers first-rate health care to people right across the country. There are some problems, we could do better, but compared to similar countries we spend lower than the average on health care. Compared to the OECD countries we are trending very, very well.

Healthcare expenditure over the last 10 years has gone up by only a small proportion. In fact, Medicare spending has been stable. Over the next 10 years we are going to see a little increase in healthcare spending, but that does not have to be a bad thing. If that healthcare spending is giving people access to new drugs, new treatments and new technologies that they did not have access to previously, that is a good thing. That is the whole point of having an economy that grows: it gives us the opportunities to access those sorts of things. That is a good thing. It is something we should be proud of and cherish.

Instead we see this government perpetuating the myth that we cannot afford what we have already got and we certainly cannot afford what is coming down the line. It is nonsense. We can afford it. It is a question of priorities. In fact, only this week the Parliamentary Budget Office indicated that healthcare spending is under control: ‘We can do it. It's not a major drama. If you're looking to cut spending, there are a whole range of other areas you should be looking at.’

So it all comes down to this. You can look for savings when it comes to co-payments and you can look at making the system less fair by letting your mates from the private health insurance industry take over the role of Medicare—you can do that in an effort to pinch a few pennies, but it will cost us more in the long run—or you can start tackling some of the fundamental problems we have in our health system, one of which is ensuring that everybody gets access to decent health care. The way you do that is not by dismantling an agency which has the responsibility to get rid of the duplication, to ensure we are much better coordinated across all of the jurisdictions that work in this space, to ensure that we have the data collection, the long-term planning and the clinical training pathways for people who want to work in regional environments. Getting rid of that agency is returning us to the bad old days, which took us to the Productivity Commission review, which said that we have a problem and we have to fix it. This is taking us backwards. It is a retrograde step. It is a sign of a government that will always put ideology ahead of evidence, ahead of common sense and ahead of the interests of a few rather than the interests of the many.

Senator LINES (Western Australia) (13:46): I rise today to question and to speak against the government's decision to abolish Health Workforce Australia. This decision is a clear demonstration of the Abbott government's lack of vision for Australia, its complete failure to plan for the future, its failure to take responsibility for the health of Australians and its ideological hatred of anything that strengthens our universal healthcare system. Health Workforce Australia was our vision, Labor's vision, to establish a national approach to the planning and training of Australia's health workforce. Labor, unlike the Abbott government, wanted to ensure that we planned today for Australia's health needs of the future. Labor
inherited from the last Liberal-National government a piecemeal approach to health workforce planning, a system that responded badly, in an ad hoc way, to peaks and troughs. If the abolition of Health Workforce Australia goes through, health workforce planning will fall back on states and territories.

I would like to illustrate just how ill-equipped my state, under the Barnett Liberal government, is to deal with health workforce planning. I am sure government senators from Western Australia have seen today’s headlines in *The West Australian* newspaper. The Barnett government, 12 months ago, lost our AAA credit rating. In a state where the money flows from mining dollars, a state rich in resources, we saw the Barnett Liberal government lose—just drop, just disappear—through its absolutely poor management, our AAA credit rating. *Today The West Australian* is reporting that the Barnett government is now down to a AA1 credit rating. What a disgrace, what squandering, what mismanagement by the Western Australia Liberal government. The state of Western Australia and our prospects should lead the nation not lag behind. Remember what Prime Minister Abbott said of Mr Barnett? The Prime Minister said that he wanted to be a leader like Mr Barnett. This abolition is going down exactly the same path—no vision, just a plan to abolish Health Workforce Australia, a body set up specifically to look at our future health needs.

To continue on the Western Australian theme for the moment, their take on health in Western Australia is nothing short of a cot case. It is an absolute disgrace. The latest report on our brand-new, fully costed under Labor hospital, the Fiona Stanley Hospital, which should be the showcase of the nation, was published by the Auditor-General in June criticising the Barnett Liberal government for wasting taxpayers’ money, for failing to deliver top-class, world renowned information, communication and technology. You would think with a brand-new hospital, with proper planning by the state government, that we could get that right, but no, we have yet another bungle by the Barnett government over the Fiona Stanley Hospital.

The Auditor-General's June report reveals that the Barnett government, as WA taxpayers know, is making a mess of the Fiona Stanley Hospital and this time with critical information, communication and technology, something that is needed to create a modern, world-class functioning hospital. That one bungle alone—and there have been countless bungles at the Fiona Stanley Hospital—has cost Western Australians $370 million; that is, $370 million just gone, down the drain, because the government clearly has no idea how to run a health system, let alone how to plan for the future needs of our health workforce. The Auditor-General went on to say that the project was poorly planned, managed and monitored. Remember the Prime Minister said he wanted to copy the Barnett government? Well he is copying by abolishing Health Workforce Australia.

The woes with the Fiona Stanley do not stop there. The hospital is complete. It is ready for patients, or it would have been ready had it not been bungled by the Barnett government. When was the hospital completed? In December 2013, almost 12 months ago. It is going to be old by the time it is opened. But when will it get patients? Well, there has been delay after delay after delay and we are now told it will be sometime in 2015. What a disgrace! Imagine how much that is costing the taxpayers of Western Australia. And this is where the Abbott government thinks health workforce planning should sit: back with the states.

The Fiona Stanley Hospital is ready to go but it cannot go. Why can’t it go? Because there are workforce shortages in Western Australia. We have already seen the Barnett government
completely fail to plan for the workforce that is needed at the Fiona Stanley Hospital. Yet the Abbott government and the Prime Minister, who wants to model himself on the bungled Barnett government in Western Australia, believe that somehow the states and territories are better placed to manage health workforce planning. Nobody in their right mind could agree that the Barnett government could plan anything in health, except a massive cost to taxpayers. They can certainly plan that! But they cannot plan workforce issues.

And the bungling of the Barnett government does not just stop at the Fiona Stanley Hospital. It failed to deliver women's reproductive services and family planning to the new Midland hospital. The issue of the lack of women's reproductive technology and family planning was raised by the local community over and over again. It has been a major issue in the Midland area for at least the past three years, possibly longer. Yet earlier this year the Barnett government tried to hoodwink Western Australians, by saying, 'Actually, we weren't aware that women's reproductive technology and family planning services weren't going to be available at the new Midland hospital.' Can you believe that? How could they not have been aware? This just shows that they are absolutely incapable of planning health services and the health workforce in Western Australia. Nevertheless, at this point, no reproductive or family planning services will be undertaken at the eastern suburbs hospital, the new Midland campus, because the government simply ignored it and thought it would go away. They have no capacity to plan.

So how can Western Australians trust that the Barnett government will be able to develop long-term workforce planning? It clearly cannot even manage the services it is currently accountable for. 'Poorly managed'—and that is not the Labor opposition saying that; that is the Auditor-General saying that.

Health Workforce Australia's own record shows the current medical training system is inefficient and it is uneven in its distribution of the medical workforce. We all know this and we know that it particularly affects rural and regional communities. We also know that chronic diseases are on the rise in Australia and are the leading cause of death and disability in Australia. None of this is secret; it is obvious. We have an ageing population, we have chronic diseases occurring, we have workforce shortages and they are much more acute in rural and regional communities.

We know that chronic diseases are associated with a high use of healthcare services and that that puts pressure on our healthcare system in Australia. We also know that there are cost pressures around chronic diseases and that Australia's ageing population, together with chronic diseases, will lead to a greater use of health services. These are services which require a skilled clinical workforce and solid evidence-based workforce planning, not the sort of mismanagement we have seen in Western Australia by the Barnett government.

Work is already underway by Health Workforce Australia. It has already produced Australia's first national long-term projection for doctors, nurses and midwives, with its publication of Health workforce 2025: doctors, nurses and midwives. Why would we want to throw that out? Why would we want to say that we do not want to focus on health workforce planning anymore; we are just going to ignore that and somehow imagine that the Department of Health, with all of its pressures, will be able to dedicate particular resources to focus on this vital issue?
This report, prepared by Health Workforce Australia, is the first ever national report and it identifies Australia's long-term health workforce needs. Health workforce planning is complex; it is not simple. It cannot be left to ill-equipped states and territories. And it certainly cannot be left to the Western Australian Barnett government, which cannot be financially responsible, with the downgrading of its credit rating today. It certainly cannot be left to that government. But it does involve coordinating state and territories. We have seen by the Western Australian example that states just cannot get this right. It should not be left to them.

Health workforce planning needs a focus and Health Workforce Australia provided that focus. That focus will be lost in the Department of Health. The abolition of a specific focus through Health Workforce Australia demonstrates, once again, that the Abbott government has no commitment to health and no plan for Australia's future health needs. It either does not care or expects the issue of workforce planning to happen elsewhere. This is another unfunded throwback to the states and territories. What a shambles!

Where are the Nationals on this issue, supporting the Liberals? They are nowhere to be seen. The Nationals are interested in power, not people. There is already a well-known, well-documented shortage of doctors and nurses in rural areas. What is the Nationals plan? They have no plan. They have deserted the bush and left future workforce need to chance—'Just roll the dice. Let's see what the numbers are. Maybe the states and territories will provide the much-needed long-term planning.' So what will happen? The Abbott government will continue to rely on recruiting our health workforce—

Debate interrupted.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Budget

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (14:00): My question is to the Minister representing the Prime Minister, Senator Abetz. Does the Prime Minister stand by his promise made on the eve of last year's election of no cuts to education, no cuts to health, no change to pensions, no change to the GST and no cuts to the ABC or SBS?

Senator ABETZ (Tasmania—Leader of the Government in the Senate, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Minister for Employment) (14:00): Anybody that would have looked at the budget papers would have seen that there is actually an increase in funding in this budget for health and education.

Opposition senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Order! On my left.

Senator Cameron interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Order! Senator Cameron.

Senator ABETZ: And what I say to those opposite is that when one is confronted with one thousand million dollars' worth of borrowings each and every month simply to fund the interest payments on the borrowings from when Senator Wong was the Minister for Finance, the architect of this debt and deficit trajectory—

Senator Wong: Just say, 'Yes, we broke our promises.'
The PRESIDENT: Order! Senator Wong.

Senator ABETZ: She who was the architect has the audacity to come into this place and then assert that somehow we should not be fixing the problems. Indeed, the Labor Party itself went to the last election saying that the budget had to be brought back into shape. The regrettable thing is that the Labor Party, having said they identify the need, are unwilling to do anything in relation to fixing it.

Senator Conroy: Is it true that George has booked you for a weekly appearance on The Project?

The PRESIDENT: Order! Senator Conroy, your colleague is on her feet waiting for the call.

Senator Moore: Mr President, I rise on a point of order of direct relevance. The question was specifically about election promises. I ask you to draw the attention of the minister to the question.

The PRESIDENT: The minister was being directly relevant. Minister, you have the call.

Senator ABETZ: What Mr Abbott and the coalition promised the Australian people was that we would stop the boats, that we would get rid of the carbon tax. And what we also said was that we would fix the budget mess left to us by the Australian Labor Party. Having had no shame in creating the mess, you would have thought they may at least have had the decency to assist in cleaning up the mess. Clearly, there is no shame with the Labor Party in this area.

Senator Wong: Do you stand by the promise or not?

The PRESIDENT: Order! Senator Wong.

Senator ABETZ: And we are very pleased to confirm that our election commitments are being honoured. (Time expired)

The PRESIDENT: Senator Wong, before I call you for the supplementary question, the noise on the left is terrible. It is only the first question. Senator Wong, you did ask the question and you interjected consistently so could I ask that interjections cease.

Senator Conroy: Are you protecting Eric?

The PRESIDENT: Order! Senator Conroy.

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (14:03): Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. I note the minister's refusal to stand by the promise. I ask him: does the Prime Minister stand by this previous statement from the Prime Minister, 'It is an absolute principle of democracy that governments should not and must not say one thing before an election and do the opposite afterwards'?

Government senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Order! On my right.

Senator ABETZ (Tasmania—Leader of the Government in the Senate, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Minister for Employment) (14:04): Mr President, you have got to love the audacity of the former Minister for Climate Change, who went to an election with Mr Rudd whom she then knifed and knifed again and then knifed Julia Gillard—I forget all the variances in this. But I distinctly remember a very strong
promise: there will be no carbon tax. Indeed, Senator Wong was on the public record telling us why a carbon tax was so bad and then all of a sudden she came in here championing the cause of a carbon tax and voting for it. And then what is worse—

Senator Moore: Mr President, I rise on a point of order: relevance to this particular question. It was about a statement made by the Prime Minister. Senator Abetz was asked to say whether the Prime Minister stands by that statement.

The PRESIDENT: The minister has been addressing the question. I call the minister.

Senator ABETZ: And then when the Labor Party finally had the opportunity of standing by their election promise of not introducing or getting rid of the carbon tax, what did they do? For nine months they held out to stop the repeal of the carbon tax. Of course we stand by our election promises.

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (14:05): Mr President, I rise to ask a further supplementary question. Does the minister stand by the election pledge of ‘no cuts to education’ and ‘no cuts to health’? I also ask: does the Prime Minister stand by his pledge made on 1 September last year, ‘There will be no surprises and no excuses from a coalition government’? Given that this budget is full of surprises and the Treasurer has provided nothing but excuses, has the Prime Minister ensured the Treasurer is aware of this pledge?

Senator ABETZ (Tasmania—Leader of the Government in the Senate, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Minister for Employment) (14:06): It is no surprise to the Australian people that we pledged and committed ourselves and have virtually achieved the stopping of the boats. It will come as no surprise to the Australian people that we pledged and have now delivered—thank you to the new crossbenches—the repeal of the carbon tax, a tax which was destroying family and household budgets, a tax which was destroying jobs whilst doing absolutely nothing for the economy. Similarly, we promised to bring the budget back into shape. We said we would do that and this budget delivers on that fundamental promise. The greatest unfair thing that this parliament can do is levy a debt on future generations because we are unwilling to make the tough decisions today. (Time expired)

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The PRESIDENT (14:07): Order! I draw the attention of honourable senators to the presence in the gallery today of the Rt Hon. Sir Alan Haselhurst MP from the United Kingdom. On behalf of all senators, I wish you a warm welcome to Australia and, in particular, to the Senate.

Honourable senators: Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Ukraine Air Disaster

Senator REYNOLDS (Western Australia) (14:07): My question is to the Minister for Defence, Senator Johnston. Can the minister update the Senate on the support that Defence has provided to Operation Bring Them Home, the whole-of-government response to the tragic loss of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 over Ukraine?
I thank Senator Reynolds for her question. On 18 July, Malaysia Airlines flight MH17, travelling from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur, crashed in circumstances indicative of being shot down by an SA11 surface-to-air missile in Ukraine, near Donetsk, close to the Russian border. There were 298 people on board that aircraft, including 38 Australian citizens and residents. I know I speak on behalf of all senators when I say that our collective hearts went out to, and continue to go out to, the families of the passengers that perished in that atrocious act—an act that shocked the world.

On 21 July this year, the United Nations Security Council voted unanimously to support Australia's resolution for a full and independent investigation into the MH17 disaster—and I pause to thank Foreign Minister Julie Bishop for the decisive and quick action she took to secure that resolution. Ukrainian authorities, along with Australia and other countries whose nationals were victims, agreed that all remains of those victims be repatriated from Kharkiv in Ukraine to the Netherlands and then brought home to their grieving families. The repatriation from Ukraine was completed a week ago, on 19 August. The departure of personnel supporting Operation Bring Them Home from the Netherlands is now in its final completion phase. Two air movement personnel will remain in the Netherlands for a few further days and one liaison officer will remain indefinitely with the Netherlands Ministry of Defence.

Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. Will the minister advise the Senate what Australian Defence Force assets and personnel were deployed as part of Operation Bring Them Home?

Defence resources assigned to this operation involved some 280 Defence personnel, as well as two RAAF C17 Globemaster aircraft, with planning and support staff operating from the Eindhoven air base in the Netherlands. A third C17 Globemaster and an Airbus A330 Multi Role Tanker Transport aircraft flew logistic flights to and from Eindhoven; however, they were not force-assigned as such. Defence planning and liaison staff also worked with their Dutch and Malaysian partners in The Hague. Defence liaison, communication and support staff supported the international mission in Ukraine. A seven-person strategic aeromedical evacuation team and a seven-person surgical team were integrated with Dutch forces. Defence also pre-positioned personnel in Europe with our Dutch partners in the Netherlands to ensure that we were postured for a range of contingencies on the ground in Ukraine.

Mr President, I ask a further supplementary question. Will the minister further advise the Senate how Australian Defence Force personnel contributed to the repatriation of the victims of flight MH17 from the Netherlands?

I would like to pay tribute to all of the Defence personnel who took part in this very sombre and important repatriation ceremony for the victims. In the words of Flight Lieutenant David Whyte:

The first phase of getting the bodies from the train cargo area at Kharkiv to the Eindhoven military base was more than a transitional moment that eased the images of disgraceful looting and disrespect of the passenger remains to that of a dignified welcome …

Many families of victims who attended the four ceremonies on the tarmac came on board to meet the Australian flight crews to see the place where their loved ones briefly lay.
I want to thank our flight crews, on behalf of all Australians, for their unending compassion and absolute professionalism in this difficult task. This could not have been an easy task. There were 80 children on board the aircraft, and many of our personnel are themselves parents. We expect great things from our personnel, but I think we need at times to pause and appreciate the enormity of the tasks we often set them. I thank them all.

Honourable senators: Hear, hear!

Education Funding

Senator KIM CARR (Victoria) (14:12): My question is to the Minister representing the Prime Minister, Senator Abetz. I refer to the Prime Minister's pre-election promise that there would be no cuts to education. Can the minister confirm that the Minister for Education said on Sunday that he wanted a reduction in Commonwealth university grants, by 20 per cent—

Senator Cormann interjecting—

Senator KIM CARR: and, given that the budget slashed $30 billion—

Senator Wong interjecting—

Senator KIM CARR: from schools over the next decade and cut more than $5 billion from higher education, will the minister now admit that the Prime Minister has well and truly broken his promise?

Senator ABETZ (Tasmania—Leader of the Government in the Senate, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Minister for Employment) (14:12): Mr President, because of the ongoing interjections by the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, I only got a little bit of the question, but the bit of the question that I did get I understand related to our policy in relation to tertiary education. I simply say that putting out another 80,000 places for universities to take up, giving extra opportunities to young Australians to be educated at university, is a hallmark decision of this government.

Senator Lines: If you're stinking rich.

Senator ABETZ: And somebody foolishly interjects and says, 'Stinking rich.' This sort of class warfare is indicative of the Labor Party. I simply ask them this very simple question: do you honestly believe the 'stinking rich', to use that term, are not at university already? Who do you think is going to benefit from the 80,000 extra places? It will be those from the lower socioeconomic groupings in our nation that currently do not get the opportunity to do so. I would have thought the alleged champions of the working class would have embraced this policy as something which would open the door for another 80,000 of our young Australians to access a tertiary education—because we know that, if you go to university and get a degree, there is every likelihood that throughout your life as an earner you will earn $1 million more than somebody without a university degree. We are opening up that opportunity to another 80,000 per annum. I think everybody in Australia should be embracing that approach. (Time expired)

Senator KIM CARR (Victoria) (14:15): Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. I ask the minister: did the Prime Minister say there would be no cuts to education? Has he broken that promise? Despite the Prime Minister's pre-election promise to 'ensure the continuation of the current arrangements of university funding', the government's higher education changes will mean $100,000-degrees and real rates of interest on HECS debts.
Doesn't this also constitute a broken promise? Does this not indicate that low-income families will be seriously disadvantaged? (Time expired)

Senator ABETZ (Tasmania—Leader of the Government in the Senate, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Minister for Employment) (14:15): There were a lot of questions there. I think a very simple answer to each and every one of them would be no. I invite Senator Carr to have a look at the comments of, I think, ANU Vice-Chancellor Ian Chubb—and somebody will correct me if I am wrong—who said that the concept of a $100,000 university degree is not a likelihood in any way, shape or form.

Further, I indicate that, on average, there will be an increase in funding for schools of 8.7 per cent in 2014-15, 8.9 per cent in 2015-16, 8.9 per cent in 2016-17 and 6.6 per cent in 2017-18. Schooling is a fundamental part of a child's journey in life. It is an important springboard, and we are increasing— (Time expired)

Senator KIM CARR (Victoria) (14:16): Mr President, I ask a further supplementary question. I once again refer to the Prime Minister's promise to 'ensure the continuation of the current arrangements of university funding'. Does the Prime Minister's refusal today to rule out blackmailing the Senate by cutting university research funding mean we are now on the path to yet another broken promise?

Senator ABETZ (Tasmania—Leader of the Government in the Senate, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Minister for Employment) (14:17): Once again, the answer is no. I also indicate to the honourable senator that we are not engaged in the game of blackmailing anybody. We know that that is a Labor Party tactic. They engage in it each and every day of their lives—between their factions and with their unions. That is part and parcel of their make-up.

Senator Wong interjecting—

Senator ABETZ: I say to the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, who is continually interjecting, that that is not part and parcel of our game plan. Our game plan is to explain to the Australian people how grossly unfair it is to leave a legacy of debt and deficit to the next generation and to not take the important initiatives that are necessary today to ensure that we can overcome what would otherwise be some huge problems we would face in the future. We are seeking to establish a safe and secure Australia. That is what we are on about.

Renewable Energy

Senator MILNE (Tasmania—Leader of the Australian Greens) (14:18): My question is to the Minister representing the Prime Minister, Senator Abetz. Minister, before the 2013 federal election Prime Minister Abbott said: … we have no plans to change the renewable energy target.

Minister Hunt said:

We also agree on the renewable energy target and one of the things we do not want to do is to become a party where there's this wild sovereign risk …

Senator Birmingham said he supported a 41,000 gigawatt-hour target. Now that the Prime Minister has made it clear that he wants to either abolish or massively reduce the renewable energy target, do you now admit that the Prime Minister and the Liberal Party lied to the Australian community at the 2013 election about the renewable energy target?
Senator ABETZ (Tasmania—Leader of the Government in the Senate, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Minister for Employment) (14:19): You have to admire the absolute front of the Labor-Greens alliance in this place. Talking about broken promises are the Labor Party, the architects of the carbon tax—and now we have the leader of the Australian Greens seeking to lecture us about sovereign risk. What audacity is coming out of the mouth of the leader of the Australian Greens.

Senator Milne: Mr President, I rise on a point of order on relevance. I asked a direct question about the renewable energy target and the lie that the Prime Minister told.

The PRESIDENT: The minister has only been answering the question for a quarter of his time. I did hear the minister address part of your question in that short time. The minister has the call.

Senator ABETZ: As I am sure all listeners to the program—this Senate broadcast—would understand, Senator Milne actually used the words 'sovereign risk'. In relation to the renewable energy target, I indicate—

Opposition senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Pause the clock. Order on my left.

Senator ABETZ: In the legislation that established the renewable energy target there was the requirement for a review to be undertaken. That review is being undertaken as we speak. It will, in due course, report to government. We will ascertain what that report has to say and, like any good government, we will consider that report and determine what the appropriate approach is for the future of the Australian people.

Senator MILNE (Tasmania—Leader of the Australian Greens) (14:21): Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. The Prime Minister has given the Australian people one reason for destroying the renewable energy target, and that is to reduce electricity bills. I ask the minister: given that there are now half a dozen reports, including the ACIL Allen report, showing electricity prices will be lower if the RET is left unchanged, what is the Prime Minister's reason now for destroying the renewable energy target?

Senator ABETZ (Tasmania—Leader of the Government in the Senate, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Minister for Employment) (14:21): There is an assertion in the question that, of course, has absolutely no foundation. The government has made no decision in this area; it is awaiting a report. It will consider the report and then determine its approach.

It makes sense when you have a report of this nature that there will be a number of submissions to the committee or to the review panel. It stands to reason that there will be views expressed that differ. That is why you have a panel of this nature, to try to determine what the appropriate approach will be for the future benefit of our nation and for the future benefit of the Australian people. That is what motivates us and that is what will drive our approach to this issue.

Senator MILNE (Tasmania—Leader of the Australian Greens) (14:22): Mr President, I ask a further supplementary question. With Suntech pulling out of research and development in Australia and Silex pulling out of the Mildura concentrated solar plant because of massive sovereign risk and uncertainty generated by the government, why is the government fuelling that uncertainty by refusing to release the Warburton review? When will it be released?
Senator ABETZ (Tasmania—Leader of the Government in the Senate, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Public Service and Minister for Employment) (14:23): I cannot assist the honourable senator as to the date of the release, but as is the wont with these reports the government will consider the report when it is ready to respond to it. It will release the report and respond to it. Let us be very clear in relation to this and other matters. You can point to the odd situation here and there. We know what the carbon tax did to this nation and we finally got rid of it, thanks to Palmer United, the DLP, the Liberal Democrats, Senator Xenophon, Family First, the LNP, the National Party and the Liberals. There was a great meeting of the minds on that issue and that did a great service for the Australian people in reducing the cost of living and protecting jobs. That is what motivates us and that is what will keep motivating us in relation to our approach on this issue.

Budget

Senator EDWARDS (South Australia) (14:24): My question also is to the Leader of the Government in the Senate, Senator Abetz. Is the minister aware of any independent warnings about the need to repair the budget and can he detail to the Senate some of the costs of failure to undertake this repair?

Senator ABETZ (Tasmania—Leader of the Government in the Senate, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Minister for Employment) (14:24): I thank Senator Edwards for his question and acknowledge his role as the Chair of the Senate Economics Legislation Committee. At the last election both the coalition and Labor committed to getting the budget back under control. At that time, both sides of politics claimed to understand that if action was not taken the task would just get bigger and more difficult. Only last week the Governor of the Reserve Bank gave his view. He said that the economic situation is:

… not catastrophic today, but it is going to be a medium-term issue if we do not address it—

and—

There is ample evidence around the world of countries which do not have this conversation until it is very late and then it is a very hard one to have …

The reason we need to get the budget back under control is that Labor left a legacy of debt and deficit. We are borrowing $1 billion per month just to pay the interest on the debt they racked up in their six years of government. By getting the budget under control now, we can ensure a better future for tomorrow. Failing to take action today will result in less money in the future for roads, schools, universities and hospitals. That would be unfair.

I say to senators: if you do support jobs and if you do support schools and universities, hospitals and roads, then support our budget strategy. Look at the benefits of repealing the carbon tax: electricity prices are nine per cent lower than they otherwise would have been and gas prices are seven per cent lower. That is real help to families, manufacturing, small business and agriculture. The truth is that if we do not act now, if we let debt and deficit spiral out of control, then we will be saddling— (Time expired)

Senator EDWARDS (South Australia) (14:27): Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. Can the minister advise the Senate of any other independent warning about the risk of not taking action to repair the budget?
Senator ABETZ (Tasmania—Leader of the Government in the Senate, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Minister for Employment) (14:27): Just last week the Parliamentary Budget Office, for one, reported:

... there are risks to the economic outlook over the medium term due to uncertainties in the international outlook and as the Australian economy transitions out of the resources investment boom ...

They went on to say:

These risks reinforce the need for fiscal consolidation in order to establish a fiscal buffer against the possibility of adverse economic shocks.

I simply say to those opposite: what happens if there is another financial shock when Australia has huge levels of debt and deficit and no cash in the bank? Unless action is taken now we will have very little insulation from a future financial shock. It makes good sense for all Australians that we take action now to ensure that Australia remains in the best possible position to deal with any global uncertainty. (Time expired)

Senator EDWARDS (South Australia) (14:28): Mr President, I ask a further supplementary question. Is the minister aware of the views of the Australian people on the need to repair the budget and of any alternative response to these views?

Senator ABETZ (Tasmania—Leader of the Government in the Senate, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Minister for Employment) (14:28): We have had the warnings from the Reserve Bank and the Parliamentary Budget Office. Labor have chosen to ignore those warnings, but can I remind them that it might be a good idea to take note of their own polling. Labor's own pollster found that 'poor economic management and a legacy of debt and deficit were key factors in Labor’s defeat'. If Labor do not want to listen to the experts of the Reserve Bank and the budget office, so be it, but I thought they might at least want to listen to their own pollster. To make matters worse, Labor are actually opposing $5 billion worth of their very own savings that they took to the last election. That is how irresponsible, that is how unfair, the Australian Labor Party are. The voters of Australia are now seeing Labor reinforcing their reputation as the economic vandals of this country. (Time expired)

Health

Senator DI NATALE (Victoria) (14:29): My question is to the Minister representing the Minister for Health. I refer the minister to comments from the Prime Minister on 20 August that our health system is 'becoming unsustainable'. Just last week the Parliamentary Budget Office's spending projections undermined any claim of spiralling health costs, noting that medical benefits account for just 1.8 per cent in government spending over the next decade. Furthermore, a Senate committee inquiry into out-of-pocket costs for health care in Australia heard evidence from a range of experts, including Director of the Centre of Health Economics at Monash University, Professor Jeff Richardson, who stated, 'Assertions that health spending in Australia is unsustainable cannot be justified by economic analysis.' Likewise, Brian Owler said, 'There is no evidence that our healthcare system is unsustainable.' Will the minister accept the advice of experts in its own department, or will the minister continue to misrepresent the state of health spending in Australia?
Senator NASH (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of The Nationals in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Health) (14:31): I think it is very important that we look at the facts. You cannot look at the fact that Medicare expenditure 10 years ago was $8 billion and it has increased to $19 billion today and say that that is anything other than a significant increase. Over the next 10 years the MBS expenditure will increase to $34 billion. That is unsustainable. The taxpayers of this nation deserve better than what we saw from the previous Labor government, which did not in any way, shape or form address the future sustainability of our health system. We will consider the report from the Senate committee in due course, but we are absolutely determined to ensure that Australia has a health service that is sustainable into the future.

Senator DI NATALE (Victoria) (14:32): Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. The same Senate inquiry found that out-of-pocket healthcare costs are already a significant barrier to treatment, and result in many people deferring treatment. Does the minister accept that making it more expensive for people to see their GP to get a blood test or to fill a prescription, by increasing co-payments, will make a bad problem worse, or does she agree with the Prime Minister that co-payments just ensure that people really value their health care?

Senator NASH (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of The Nationals in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Health) (14:32): In answer to that question, it should firstly be noted that a large proportion of the out-of-pocket costs in Australia result from patient choice in services that are not funded by the government. Indeed, particularly relating to rural and regional Australia, the evidence shows that there is not a significant difference in bulk-billing rates or average out-of-pocket costs between people in major cities and those in rural and regional areas.

We have seen nothing but opposition from those sitting on the other side of the chamber. They are getting in the way of this government's attempt to improve the delivery of health services and to make it sustainable. There are 263 million free services going out each year, and it is not sustainable. Providing four out of five services for free is not sustainable. This government, unlike the previous Labor government—(Time expired)

Senator DI NATALE (Victoria) (14:33): Mr President, I ask a further supplementary question. I refer to reports this morning that the government is considering a single safety net for Medicare and PBS costs. Given that the Senate inquiry into out-of-pocket costs also recommended combining the Medicare and PBS safety nets into one safety net to help people meet large out-of-pocket costs, will the government now commit to adopting this recommendation?

Senator NASH (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of The Nationals in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Health) (14:34): As I indicated to the Senate earlier, the government will in due course consider the report and the recommendations from the report. What we will be doing is taking steps, unlike the previous Labor government, to ensure that we have a sustainable health system into the future. The previous Labor government may have been prepared to be irresponsible when it came to the spending of taxpayers' dollars and irresponsible when it came to planning the future of the delivery of health services for people in this country; this government is not. We will take the hard decisions to ensure that we have a sustainable health system into the future.
Mental Health

Senator WANG (Western Australia—Palmer United Party Whip in the Senate) (14:35): In the past 12 months nine fly-in fly-out workers have committed suicide in the Pilbara while living away from home. The parliament of Western Australia has launched an inquiry to examine issues behind those tragic deaths. Given that there are many interstate FIFO workers, I believe their mental health is in our nation's interest. Will the minister look into this issue?

Senator NASH (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of The Nationals in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Health) (14:35): Indeed, I can indicate to the senator that mental health issues, particularly as they relate to areas like fly-in fly-out, are being considered. That is why we have tasked the Mental Health Reform Commission to look into this in detail. There are significant issues when it comes to mental health, particularly in rural and regional areas, and I can assure the senator that we are giving this the deepest consideration.

Senator WANG (Western Australia—Palmer United Party Whip in the Senate) (14:36): Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. I refer to a committee report into the use of fly-in fly-out workforce practices in regional Australia, which was tabled on 13 February 2013. Paragraph 4.47 relates to health issues and led to recommendation 8. Will a comprehensive health policy response be formulated?

Senator NASH (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of The Nationals in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Health) (14:36): I can indicate to the senator that, of course, those recommendations will be responded to in due course, but the Senate should in no way think that this government is anything other than incredibly focused on mental health and what needs to be done from a policy sense to ensure that we can improve those conditions. I am from a regional area. I spend a significant amount of time in rural and regional areas. This is an issue that is raised with me consistently. Again, I can assure the senator of our very grave consideration of these issues.

Senator WANG (Western Australia—Palmer United Party Whip in the Senate) (14:37): Mr President, I ask a further supplementary question. Can the minister provide a time frame for the government's response, which I think is long overdue?

Senator NASH (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of The Nationals in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Health) (14:37): I cannot indicate a specific date to the senator, but I can certainly undertake to get back to the senator and, again, give the assurance that it will be done in as timely a manner as possible.

National Security

Senator FAWCETT (South Australia—Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (14:37): My question is to the Attorney-General, Senator Brandis.

Senator Cameron: Come on down, George. Come on down.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Senator FAWCETT: Can the Attorney-General update the Senate on what the government is doing in response to the threat posed to Australia by the conflict in Syria and Iraq?

Senator BRANDIS (Queensland—Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council, Minister for Arts and Attorney-General) (14:38): Thank
you, Senator Fawcett. I want to acknowledge your deep interest in and knowledge about this area of policy. It is not an exaggeration to say that the risk posed by—

**Senator Conroy:** Someone has stolen George. That was humble!

**Senator BRANDIS:** I thought, Senator Conroy, that this was a matter that the opposition might take seriously. It is not an exaggeration to say that the risk of returning foreign fighters, in particular those who joined terrorist organisations such as ISIL, is the greatest national security threat that Australia has faced in many years. The government has already introduced legislation—the National Security Legislation Amendment Bill—giving effect to the recommendations of the bipartisan Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security to strengthen the ability of the Australian intelligence community to counter threats arising from terrorism.

On 5 August, the Prime Minister, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and I announced a further set of measures to build Australia's resilience and capability in defending itself from the threat of terrorism. Those measures included the investment of an additional $630 million over the next four years, which will provide funding certainty for the agencies involved in counter-terrorism, in particular ASIO, the AFP, ASIS, ONA and the Customs and Border Protection Service.

The funding responds to the reduced expenditure on those agencies since 2009 and supports new programs to bolster monitoring and disruption activities in Australia and overseas. In addition to finding a range of new counter-terrorism measures, the government will as well introduce a second tranche of laws shortly to boost our counter-terrorism legislative framework.

**Senator FAWCETT** (South Australia—Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (14:40): Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. Can the Attorney-General inform the Senate as to why these legislative changes and this enhanced approach are required?

**Senator BRANDIS** (Queensland—Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council, Minister for Arts and Attorney-General) (14:40): It is necessary in order to keep Australians safe. I cannot stress enough that this problem is not a problem that exists only on the other side of the world; it has its origins in our own suburbs. The escalating terrorist situation in Iraq and Syria poses an increasing threat, unlike any other that this country has experienced, to the security of Australians both at home and overseas.

The number of Australians involved in the Syria and Iraq conflicts is significantly higher than in previous foreign conflicts. We know, for instance, that of the 30 Australians who fought and trained with extremist groups in the conflict zones between 1990 and 2010 in Pakistan and Afghanistan, 25 returned and eight were convicted of terrorism related offences. By comparison, ASIO advises us that today there are some 60 Australians involved in foreign fighting. *(Time expired)*

**Senator FAWCETT** (South Australia—Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (14:41): Mr President, I ask a further supplementary question. Can the Attorney-General advise the Senate of the importance of senior community leaders working to reduce the threat of harm to Australians?

**Senator BRANDIS** (Queensland—Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council, Minister for Arts and Attorney-General) (14:41): Yes, I
Australia's Muslim community, in particular their leaders, play a critical role in helping these communities to acknowledge the devastating events in the Middle East, to understand the dangers of becoming involved in the conflict and to identify the legal and effective means of providing support to those who are suffering. As the Prime Minister said this morning:

There are no stronger members of 'Team Australia' than the overwhelming majority of the Muslim community.

To support that community engagement, the Prime Minister and I this morning announced the expenditure of an additional $64 million of measures to counter violent extremism and radicalisation. Those measures include $13.4 million being invested in community efforts to strengthen community engagement programs, with an emphasis on preventing young Australians becoming involved with extremists. That expands the previous programs and reflects the lessons learnt from them. (Time expired)

**Budget**

**Senator BILYK** (Tasmania—Deputy Opposition Whip in the Senate) (14:42): My question is to the Minister representing the Prime Minister, Senator Abetz. I refer to the Prime Minister's pre-election promise that there would be no cuts to health. How can the minister claim that this government has not broken its promise, given the most recent budget has cut more than $50 billion from hospitals over the next decade?

**Senator ABETZ** (Tasmania—Leader of the Government in the Senate, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Minister for Employment) (14:43): The telltale comment was in the last bit of Senator Bilyk's question.

**Senator Cormann:** Over the next decade.

**Senator ABETZ:** Exactly right, Senator Cormann—over the next decade. Everyone accepts that, whilst Labor made these wild and rash promises, there was never any funding base to those claims. So what the Labor Party do—in their traditional style—if they think they are going to lose office is make extravagant promises. They have a scorched-earth policy and they promise all this money without any revenue base. Then when we say that the trajectory is completely and utterly unsustainable, they accuse us of harsh cuts. That is when they did not have a funding base.

**Senator Kim Carr:** You said, 'No cuts!'

*Honourable senators interjecting—*

**The PRESIDENT:** Order on my right. Order on my left.

**Senator ABETZ:** What is unfair is when a government on its way out makes these hoax promises in a desperate bid to get re-elected, knowing full well that its promises at the time and into the future would all be funded by ongoing and extended borrowings. Indeed, Senator Bilyk and her government had us on a trajectory to $667,000 million worth of debt, which would have translated into an interest bill of literally thousands of millions of dollars per month just to pay the interest on the loans. Just imagine—$1,000 million, just one month's interest payment, could have built a brand-new teaching hospital in Hobart, our home state. Your profligacy has denied us that opportunity. (Time expired)

**Senator BILYK** (Tasmania—Deputy Opposition Whip in the Senate) (14:45): Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. I refer to the Prime Minister's pre-election promise
that there will be no new taxes. I also refer to the introduction of a $7 GP tax, which has been described by senior Liberal Senator Ian Macdonald as 'dangerous'. If the coalition's own backbench has recognised the danger of this new tax, why will the government not do the same and abandon this measure?

**Senator ABETZ** (Tasmania—Leader of the Government in the Senate, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Minister for Employment) (14:45): The greatest Labor Prime Minister in Australian history, Bob Hawke, championed a co-contribution for Medicare. Let us never forget that. The Labor Party's shadow Assistant Treasurer, Dr Andrew Leigh, in one of his more lucid and honest moments when he was writing his book, acknowledged the importance of having a co-contribution for visits to GPs. We know that the co-contribution is something that the responsible people in the Labor Party know needs to occur, but they are too scared to tell the Australian people the truth. That is why former Prime Minister Bob Hawke, to his credit, said we need this. That is why in opposition Dr Andrew Leigh, the shadow Assistant Treasurer for the Labor Party, has said the same thing. *(Time expired)*

**Senator BILYK** (Tasmania—Deputy Opposition Whip in the Senate) (14:46): Mr President, I ask a second supplementary question. Given that this government has slashed more than $50 billion from hospitals and proposed a $7 GP tax and a $5 prescription fee, does the minister agree that it is Australians who are paying for the government's broken promises?

**Senator ABETZ** (Tasmania—Leader of the Government in the Senate, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Minister for Employment) (14:47): The Australian people are paying for the profligacy of the six years when Labor had control of the budget. In relation to Senator Bilyk's very wild assertions, I simply invite her to bring in the budget papers and table the page where those assertions are supported. I suggest to her she will be unable to do so. As a result, I invite Senator Bilyk to be responsible, tell the truth to the Australian people and, having created the huge financial mess that we now find ourselves in, be decent enough to assist us in cleaning up that mess. They have delayed the repeal of the carbon tax by nine months and we know that if they were re-elected they would reintroduce the carbon tax and put that impost back on Australian families. We will not go down that track. *(Time expired)*

**Refugees**

**Senator McGrath** (Queensland) (14:48): My question is to the Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, Senator Cash. Can the minister update the Senate on the government's recent commitment to refugees in Syria and Iraq who are facing persecution and violence at the hands of terrorists like the so-called Islamic State, or ISIS?

**Senator Cash** (Western Australia—Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women) (14:48): I thank Senator McGrath for his question. I am pleased to advise the Senate that people affected by the humanitarian crises in Iraq and Syria will be the primary beneficiaries of the success of the government's strong border protection policies, with 4,400 resettlement places being set aside in the Australian government's 2014-15 Refugee and Humanitarian Program. In 2014-15 the cabinet has committed a minimum of 2,200 places for Iraqis, including ethnic and religious minorities fleeing from violence in northern Iraq to neighbouring countries. This government has also committed a minimum of 2,200 places for Syrians, including those now living in
desperate conditions in countries including Lebanon. A further medium-term commitment has been made to accept at least 4,500 Syrians over the next three years.

The fact of the matter is that this government's policies under Operation Sovereign Borders have not only stopped the deaths at sea—1,200 deaths at sea under the former government's policies—but also allowed us to return those valuable and precious places in our Humanitarian Settlement Services program to those people who are most in need. We will continue our commitment under this government to use our refugee and special humanitarian program to assist those who are affected by the conflict in Iraq and Syria, and with the continued violence in these countries the Australian government is dedicated to ensuring that its humanitarian and resettlement program reaches those who are most in need.

Senator McGrath (Queensland) (14:50): Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. Can the minister advise the Senate how the coalition government's strong and overwhelmingly successful border protection measures have allowed Australia to offer this additional support?

Senator Cash (Western Australia—Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women) (14:50): The undeniable truth, although it is often denied on the other side, is that when you have strong border protection policies in place you as a government determine who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come—unlike the former government, which quite happily rolled back the proven border protection policies of the former Howard government and quite literally outsourced management of Australia's very precious Refugee and Humanitarian Program to the people smugglers. We all know what the results of that were. In excess of 50,000 people came here illegally and 29,000 of them were dumped into the community with no processing, 1,200 people died at sea—confirmed deaths; we do not know the number of those not confirmed—and, in addition, 14,500 places in our refugee program were given to those who came here illegally as opposed to those who are languishing in camps.

Senator McGrath (Queensland) (14:51): Mr President, I ask a further supplementary question. Can the minister advise the Senate why it is important to ensure Australia maintains a well-regulated and orderly humanitarian and refugee resettlement program?

Senator Cash (Western Australia—Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women) (14:52): The commitment that this government has been able to make to those in Iraq and those in Syria is clearly highlighting the humanitarian dividend that comes into play when you restore integrity to our borders. The policies implemented by the former government ensured that only those who had the means and the opportunity to pay were given a protection visa in Australia. What we, on this side, are doing is restoring fairness and integrity to our borders. So long as Australia, under this government, maintains strong border protection policies, we will never again turn our backs on those refugees who apply for a protection visa through the legal channels. It is a fact that places in our refugee program are precious, and therefore the government must ensure that those places go to those who are most in need.
Paid Parental Leave

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (14:53): My question is to the Minister representing the Prime Minister, Senator Abetz. I refer to the Prime Minister's signature policy, the Paid Parental Leave scheme. What will the scheme cost?

Senator ABETZ (Tasmania—Leader of the Government in the Senate, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Minister for Employment) (14:53): The signature policy of the government, of course, was the repeal of the carbon tax; let us make no bones about it. I will not allow Senator Wong to try to put words into the government's mouth. Indeed, we went to the election saying that we would stop the boats, repeal the carbon tax, restore the budget and stop the waste.

Let us put all this into context. We did go to the election seeking support from the Australian people for a paid parental leave scheme which was designed to assist with population growth, with productivity and with participation—fundamentally, vitally important issues. Indeed, for example, any comparative study of the female participation rate in the workforce in Canada as opposed to in Australia shows the sort of differential that we as a nation should seek to overcome, given that we know that as we speak at the moment there are currently five taxpayers for every pensioner, and by 2050 that will have changed to about 2½ taxpayers—

Senator Wong: Mr President, I rise on a point of order. This is all very interesting, but there was only one question asked and that was, 'What will the scheme cost?' That is the only question that was asked.

The PRESIDENT: You did ask that question in the context of paid parental leave being a signature policy. Senator Abetz has been addressing that portion of the question. I remind the minister of the question.

Senator ABETZ: Thank you, Mr President. The point I was making was the cost of not having the Paid Parental Leave scheme. That is why, when you look around the world and see the consequences of good policy and greater female participation in the workforce, you can see the economic activity that will grow and the benefits for all Australians of that greater participation rate in the Australian economy.

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (14:55): Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. I again refer to the Prime Minister's Paid Parental Leave scheme and I again ask: what will the scheme cost?

Senator ABETZ (Tasmania—Leader of the Government in the Senate, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Minister for Employment) (14:56): If the senator had read her budget papers she would be aware that those funds are in the contingency reserve, and we will not be announcing the full detail until such time—

Senator Kim Carr: How much? How much?

Senator ABETZ: If you want an answer, listen. If you just want to listen to your own voice, go outside somewhere and talk to yourself. The people of Australia do want to know, and they will know the costings of this when we introduce the legislation and when we have the final design of the package. Until such time as we have the final design of the package, we will not be able to provide a definitive answer to that question. Senator Wong, as a former
finance minister, actually knows that to be the truth. Senator Wong knows that to be the fact and is simply playing games. *(Time expired)*

**Senator WONG** (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (14:57): Mr President, I ask a further supplementary question. I again refer to the Prime Minister's Paid Parental Leave scheme, which was first announced by the Prime Minister two elections ago. Why is the minister refusing to reveal to the Australian people and to his backbench the full cost of this Prime Minister's Paid Parental Leave scheme?

**Senator ABETZ** (Tasmania—Leader of the Government in the Senate, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Minister for Employment) (14:57): Senator Wong and her colleagues tried to canvass all this through the Senate estimates. If I might say, Senator Cormann, in particular, was able to explain in exasperating detail to Senator Wong all the circumstances surrounding the development of the policy. Senator Wong, as a former finance minister, actually knows about the contingency reserve. She actually knows that you develop a policy and, once it is developed, that is when you put a figure on it—not like Labor, that says, 'Let's throw money at something,' and thinks, 'How do we spend all this?' We actually go through things step by step in a methodical, purposeful manner. Overall we believe that a paid parental leave scheme will be good for our nation's productivity, for female participation and for population. That is why we support it.

**Higher Education**

**Senator McKENZIE** (Victoria) (14:58): My question is to the Minister for Human Services, representing the Minister for Education, Senator Payne. Will the minister explain to the Senate how the government's higher education reforms create opportunities for more Australian students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds?

**Senator PAYNE** (New South Wales—Minister for Human Services) (14:59): I thank Senator McKenzie for her extensive interest in this area. What we have with our higher education reform package is a very fair and balanced package which is going to spread opportunity for students and also ensure that as a nation Australia is not left behind in the global tertiary education competition. For the first time ever, all Australian undergraduate students in registered higher education institutions will be supported for all accredited courses—their higher education diplomas, their advanced diplomas, their associate degrees and their bachelor degrees. That support will be available for students whether they choose to study at universities, at TAFEs or at private colleges. That means over 80,000 additional students a year, as Senator Abetz said earlier in question time, will be supported by the Commonwealth by 2018 as part of these far-reaching reforms.

It is no wonder our higher education reform package has been widely welcomed, including of course by the South Australian Labor government—as I think I have mentioned in the chamber before. These courses are disproportionately undertaken by students who come from low-SES backgrounds. At the moment, under the system which the government inherited from those opposite—who did not address this issue at all—many of those students either cannot get a place or have to pay more for a Commonwealth supported undergraduate place. Our reform package is going to address that problem. We are going to support Australian students in choosing and getting ready for the course that is right for them. We have also created the HECS-style trade support loans for apprentices to support Australian students in
choosing and succeeding on the path that is right for them, as well as creating opportunities for students through diplomas and other qualifications.

Senator Cameron interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Order, Senator Cameron!

Senator PAYNE: I know those opposite do not want to have that opportunity extended across the student population. I know they are not interested—but we are. (Time expired)

Senator McKENZIE (Victoria) (15:01): Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. Can the minister explain to the Senate how initiatives in the government's reform package for universities provide direct benefits for students who are the first in their family to go to university or who may be less prepared for university?

Senator PAYNE (New South Wales—Minister for Human Services) (15:01): This is a very important aspect of the government's reform package.

Senator Cameron interjecting—

Senator PAYNE: As I indicated earlier, the provision of Commonwealth supported places to all students of higher education diplomas, of advanced diplomas and of associate degrees in all registered higher education institutions creates great opportunities for tens of thousands of students, students the government cares about and those opposite—as evidenced by Senator Cameron's behaviour—do not. It includes students who are first-in-family university students and those who are less prepared for university. These government reforms will provide unprecedented support for their pathways, enabling them to get to university and to stay there, whether it is in diploma programs or other routes that they choose. The evidence set out in the Kemp-Norton report is compelling. It shows that pathway programs do an exceptional job. (Time expired)

Senator McKENZIE (Victoria) (15:02): Mr President, I ask a further supplementary question. Will the minister advise the Senate what other benefits will flow to students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds from the government's proposed higher education reforms?

Senator PAYNE (New South Wales—Minister for Human Services) (15:02): As well as being interested in the pathway programs I was just talking about, which are very valuable, in asking that question Senator McKenzie is showing an interest in the creation of the Commonwealth scholarships. These scholarships are going to provide strong support—with living costs and in other ways—for students from low-socioeconomic status backgrounds. That will include a lot of Indigenous students and students from rural and regional Australia, as well as other students from more challenged environments.

We are taking other steps in this space as well. We are abolishing the 20 per cent loan fee for VET FEE-HELP. We believe that will help around 80,000 students, saving them on average around $1,600. Let us not forget that no student has to pay a dollar up-front or to repay their HELP loan until they are earning $50,000. Let us also not forget that those opposite made massive cuts to higher education. Over their term, those cuts totalled $6.6 billion, including $2.8 billion on just one day. (Time expired)

Senator Abetz: Mr President, I ask that further questions be placed on the Notice Paper.
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE: TAKE NOTE OF ANSWERS

Answers to Questions

Senator KIM CARR (Victoria) (15:04): I move:

That the Senate take note of the answers given by ministers to questions without notice asked by Opposition senators today.

People who invoke absolute principles should take great care to stand by them. If they do not, they will be exposed as people whose words simply cannot be trusted, people for whom principles and promises ultimately mean nothing. The Prime Minister of this country now stands exposed for his failure to live up to a little sermon that he preached in August last year. I bring his words to the Senate's attention once more:

It is an absolute principle of democracy that governments should not and must not say one thing before an election and do the opposite afterwards. Nothing could be more calculated to bring our democracy into disrepute and alienate the citizenry of Australia from their government than if governments were to establish by precedent that they could say one thing before an election and do the opposite afterwards.

Senator Conroy: Who said that?

Senator KIM CARR: The Prime Minister of Australia said that. Mr Abbott said that. He did not mince his words. He said this was the standard for democratic governments and he has conspicuously failed to live up to that standard. The Prime Minister and his government have set a great precedent—a precedent that he warned against. Before the last election, he declared emphatically and without any ambiguity whatsoever that there would be: no cuts to education, no cuts to health, no changes to pensions, no change to the GST, and no cuts to the ABC or SBS. Just in case anyone missed the point, he later went on to say that there would be 'no surprises and no excuses' from a coalition government. The people who trusted this Prime Minister were certainly in for a very big surprise—first, when the government unveiled its list of spending cuts in the Commission of Audit's report and then in the budget, when it announced the cuts that it wanted to make. There were indeed massive cuts to education. There were cuts to health, changes to pensions, cuts to the ABC and cuts to SBS. There are $50 billion worth of cuts to hospitals, a $7 GP tax and a $5 prescription fee. There are $30 billion worth of cuts to schools over the next decade and more than $5 billion to universities, with the very real prospect of $100,000 degrees. Changes in indexation will see cuts to the value of pensions over time. There is a one per cent cut in funding to the ABC and SBS. These are cuts that the Prime Minister said—remember?—he would not make.

The government have evasively claimed that there are no cuts to schools—and we heard it again today. They have got more front than Myers to come into this chamber and say that they are not really cutting at all! The Prime Minister and his colleagues have failed to persuade the Australian premiers that that is the case. The government have failed to persuade the Australian people that that is the case. And, of course, we know that the budget has been completely and totally discredited in the eyes of the public right across this nation.

The Australian people know that this budget is fundamentally unfair because it places the greatest of all burdens upon the most disadvantaged members of our community. The budget cuts into higher education have abandoned the ideal of equality of opportunity—the fair go that Australians have had traditionally come to see as their right to expect. These cuts mean that we will no longer have the view that, if you have ability and are prepared to work hard,
you can get a decent education in this country. What this government has done is reimposed the great Menzies tradition which said that, if you came from a well-off family, you enjoyed the opportunities of privilege being continued. The whole principle of this government's approach to higher education is to entrench privilege, to entrench wealth and to entrench opportunities for those who already have a disproportionate share of those opportunities. Families will be forced to make choices, all right! They will have to choose: do they take out a second mortgage—(Time expired)

Senator BIRMINGHAM (South Australia—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment) (15:09): If those opposite want to have a debate about promises and commitments delivered, well, bring it on. I welcome it. I welcome it warmly because our government went to the election with some very key promises and commitments. This was very obvious to all. We said we would axe the carbon tax, and we have axed the carbon tax. We said we would stop the flow of illegal arrivals and stop the boats, and we are stopping the boats. We said we would build the roads of the 21st century, and we are building those roads. We are starting construction and we are delivering across cities around Australia. We said we would fix Labor's debt and deficit disaster, and that is exactly what our budget seeks to do: to take responsibility for the failures of those opposite, to take responsibility for the mess they left us and this country in, to get on with the job of fixing what needs to be fixed and to make the difficult decisions to do so.

We hear a lot of bluff and bluster from those opposite, and none more so perhaps than from Senator Carr. They go on and claim and talk about the cuts that are allegedly made in this budget. We have taken difficult decisions in this budget—

Opposition senators interjecting—

Senator BIRMINGHAM: but not those that are represented or claimed by those opposite like Senator Carr or those who carp like seagulls from the back row. The truth is that Commonwealth funding for public hospitals, contrary to what Senator Carr says, goes up nine per cent this year, nine per cent next year, nine per cent the year after that and six per cent in the final year of the forward estimates. Commonwealth funding for school education—

Senator Lines: Cut!

Senator BIRMINGHAM: goes up eight per cent this year, eight per cent next year, eight per cent the year after that and six per cent in the final year. The seagull cannot do maths! In my home state, as is the case, of course, across the rest of the country, total Commonwealth funding for public hospitals and schools goes up 30 per cent over the four years of the forward estimates—up and up and up. Far from Labor's claims, Labor's lies of cuts, funding is going up for hospitals. Funding is going up for schools. As Senator Bushby rightly points out, not just in nominal terms but in real terms—real funding growth for hospitals and real funding growth for schools. That is because our government knows they are priority areas for expenditure. So we have made sure that we can continue to fund those increases whilst taking difficult decisions elsewhere across the budget to bring us back towards surplus.

Now 'surplus'—there is a word that I challenge any of those opposite to mention in this debate. I challenge those opposite to use the word 'surplus'. It seems as if the Labor Party have abandoned all sense of fiscal or economic responsibility. They have given up completely on the idea that we should drive the budget back to balance, back to surplus. The problem with it...
is that they are leaving a legacy of disaster for future generations. Their failure to accept responsibility for the debt they created under their watch, through their policies, creates a disaster which future generations will bear the burden of. We on this side are not willing to stand by and do nothing, like those opposite. We are getting on with implementing our budget. We have delivered a range of savings measures already, and we wish we could get all of them through this place. We are amazed at the fact that the Labor Party are blocking even $5 billion worth of savings measures that they themselves proposed when they were in government.

_Senator Lines interjecting—_

_Senator BIRMINGHAM:_ The seagull signed onto those savings measures when she was in government, yet now of course is voting with the Labor Party to oppose them. It is a remarkable turn of events.

_Senator O'Neill:_ Mr Deputy President, I rise on a point of order. I think the senator behind me deserves her correct title to be used in this instance.

_Senator Abetz:_ How did she know who was being referred to?

_The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:_ Senator Abetz, please!

_Opposition senators interjecting—_

_The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:_ If the chamber could come to order! There have been a lot of interjections from both sides. Senator Birmingham, you have the call.

_Senator BIRMINGHAM:_ Thank you, Mr Deputy President. Indeed, if those opposite wish to identify themselves in relation to the interjections made and the remarks that I have made in response, well, good luck to them. But this is a serious matter. Australians are paying at present $1 billion a month in interest on Labor's debt. That situation will only get worse and will cost future generations more. The time to act is now, and the Labor Party should accept responsibility for the mess that they made and start to help to clean it up. (Time expired)

_Senator GALLACHER_ (South Australia) (15:15): I rise to take note of answers from Senator Abetz to questions from the opposition. In doing so, I seek leave to address a reply from Senator Abetz, who invited Senator Bilyk to table budget papers to support her claims. I seek leave to table Senate budget estimates 3 to 5 June 2014, question No. 41 and the subsequent answer to that question.

_Senator Abetz:_ That is not the budget paper, but by all means table it.

_The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:_ Is leave granted?

Leave granted.

_Senator GALLACHER:_ Clearly, there is some merit in this and some substantiating information going to the meat of Senator Bilyk's question. As Senator Abetz invited some evidence to go to that question, we are only too happy to oblige.

Basically this whole debate has been: 'Was a series of commitments made pre-election and were they honoured?' Clearly, no-one in Australian electorates believes that the commitments that the Hon. Tony Abbott made pre-election have been honoured. The answer we hear from the other side is: 'The budget deficit'. They have the job of selling that to Australian electorates. If they want to get a co-payment up, they have the job of convincing the
crossbenchers, the electorates and the Australian Labor Party to accept. Good luck. I do not think it is going to happen.

On Mr Hockey, let's have a quick glance at a few of the headlines. The West Australian, under the headline 'Hockey drives home tax', says:

Queensland Liberal Senator Ian Macdonald said people in regional areas did not have the alternative of public transport.

Even people on the government side are against these proposals. Then we have under 'Smokin' Joe fuels angry tax backlash':

South Australian Liberal Senator Cory Bernardi said his poorer constituents tended to spend more as a percentage of their income on transport and basic essential items, adding: "I don't think it's in the national interest to have new taxes or higher taxes."

These are some of the things that this Prime Minister promised not to do. Then we have headlines from The Australian Financial Review: 'Liberals tell Hockey to sharpen up his act'—not us; the Liberals. The article under that headline says:

One senior MP said: 'It's bad enough he makes mistakes but his selfish determination to keep making them is worrying.

Another MP said there was growing "lament" among the backbench "about so many of the top echelon".

Those are not comments from this side of the chamber; those are comments, fully published, from the other side of the chamber—and some of them had the gumption, if you like, to put their name to these comments, but others did not.

Even if you are just a casual observer of the media, you can see that they have an incredibly difficult task at hand—a series of commitments made; a series of commitments not honoured; throw in the budget emergency; take out the budget emergency. If Senator Cormann is the answer, God help us—what was the question? On Sunday morning he was alleged to be doing 2½ jobs—not one but 2½ jobs. Senator Sinodinos—self-inflicted onto the bench—stood aside as Assistant Treasurer and Senator Mathias Cormann picked up his job. But then they go on to say that he is picking up half of Hockey's job as well—that the Hon. Joseph Hockey, the Treasurer, has abdicated half of his role to Senator Cormann.

Mr Hockey thinks people do not like him. Well, I have got news for him: he is the Treasurer. I have been a Secretary/Treasurer. You are not supposed to be liked; you are supposed to make sure that people act prudently in fiscal propriety. If you are looking for people to love you, you are in the wrong job. Mr Hockey has gone missing. I saw a tweet the other day that cracked the whole room up: 'God there's a lot of traffic on the road. There must be a lot of rich people out this morning.' The reality is that he made an incredible gaffe.

Why is the fuel tax so clearly abhorrent? The reason is that in the country you are paying $1.70 and $1.80 a litre—service stations are making 33c and 35c a litre—and another cent or two on top of it means you cannot drive. (Time expired)

Senator SMITH (Western Australia) (15:20): While we can debate the popularity of the government, have no fear, Senator Gallacher: the Labor Party is deeply unpopular and there is no love between Australian electorates and the Labor Party—as demonstrated by the last federal election results. We are here this afternoon having a debate about promises and
commitments and about the honouring of those commitments. But let us reflect for a moment on why we are here. Why are we in this place today having a discussion about budget deficits and, dare I say—words that have been erased from the Labor lexicon—budget surpluses? We are here because Labor wanted to do the exact same thing that we are doing and that we will do—Labor, too, wanted to get the budget back into surplus.

While we are talking about honouring commitments and saying one thing and doing another, let us have a look at what Labor said about budget surpluses. In 2008-09, in his first budget speech, Wayne Swan claimed that he would deliver 'a surplus built on disciplined spending.' Let us think about words, commitments and honouring those commitments. What was the result? It was $27 billion worth of deficit. In Wayne Swan's 2009-10 budget night address, he told Australians that the nation was on a path to surplus by 2015-16. What was the result? The result was $54.5 billion worth of deficit. In staying with today's theme 'honouring your commitments and saying what you mean', I note that for the 2010-11 budget, Kevin Rudd's final budget, the Treasurer said that Labor's program would see the budget return to surplus in three years time. What was the result? The result was $47.5 billion worth of deficit. It is very rich indeed for opposition senators, Labor senators, to come to this place and talk about promises kept.

But the story does not finish there. In the 2011-12 budget, the first budget under Julia Gillard, the Treasurer's speech claimed, 'We will be back in the black by 2012-13, as promised.' What was the result? It was $43.4 billion worth of deficit. In the 2012-13 budget, the year of truly magical thinking on the part of the former Treasurer, Wayne Swan said, 'This budget delivers a surplus this year and surpluses each year after that.' What was the result? It delivered a deficit of $18.8 billion.

I have one more point to demonstrate the theme, if I need to. In the 2013-14 budget, Labor's final budget, the message echoed exactly the same theme as previous years, and Wayne Swan said in the budget speech, 'This budget sets a sensible pathway to surplus.' Of course, we know the history. The coalition comes to office and inherits a $47 billion debt.

The message is a simple one. You will hear us talk about budget surpluses; you will not hear the word 'surplus' from their mouths. The challenge for our country is a real one. Time is against us. If I might just add this sombre note: what the events of MH17 have taught us is that just as our country is not immune from the events in faraway places, so too this country will not be immune should an economic calamity visit itself upon the global economy. More importantly, this country is not ready; this country is not prepared—so, when I hear the opposition talk about unfairness and inequity, I think that is an unfair outcome. That is an outcome we should be concerned about. *(Time expired)*

**Senator LINES** (Western Australia) (15:25): I rise to take note of answers to questions asked today by Labor of various government ministers about the budget. I thought for a moment that we were on the adjournment debate, because all we have heard about from the government is everything except the budget; they do not want to talk about the budget. Over the last five weeks, they have made gaffe after gaffe about all sorts of issues: whether it is, 'Poor people do not drive,' whether it is, 'Women do not do science degrees,' whether it is about women, cancer and abortion—they have gone on and on.

Today, Labor sought to ask proper questions to scrutinise the government's harsh, cruel budget in this place. What did the government do? For the whole of question time—and
indeed afterwards—they simply tried to avoid scrutiny. The Australian public is not fooled by the government, and the Australian public has worked out for itself that the government's budget is so harsh and so cruel that there is barely a person in this country who is not impacted. What did the government promise? There were all those lies they told before the election: 'We won't cut health,' 'We won't cut education,' and, 'There will be no cuts to pensions'—and we have seen the complete reverse of that. It does not matter what type of spin they try and put on this and whether they try to avoid things by having a go at Labor. We have just heard Senator Smith, from Western Australia—where today the Barnett Liberal government has again dropped our credit rating—go on and on about 'Labor this' and 'Labor that'.

Let me remind him that the coalition are in government, that it is their budget that is under scrutiny and that it is the role of the opposition to scrutinise their budget. The Australian people have also been scrutinising the budget, a budget where we were promised 'no cuts to health' and yet that is what we have seen: big cuts to health and education worth $80 million. Where did the GP tax come from? It was a thought bubble from a former Howard government adviser that Australians were somehow overusing their GP services. Where is the proof of that? Where is the research? Where are the academic papers on that? There are none. The Abbott government have been very good at simply making it up. Recently we have had Senator Cormann putting a new spin on it. They are a little bit like a baseball team that is losing. First we had Mr Hockey try and sell the budget. He got a big fail. 'Next batter up!'

Then we had Senator Brandis try and sell aspects of their policy around racial discrimination in this country. He got a big fail and was sent back to the bench. Then we had Senator Abetz on TV embarrass the government to the point where the Prime Minister had to pull him into line. So he is back on the bench. Now we have Senator Cormann batting for team Abbott, trying to sell their ridiculously harsh and cruel budget that no-one in this country, except themselves, seem to be hoodwinked about.

The GP tax, the tax on prescriptions, the tax on other health services: where is the research on that? There is nothing to indicate that Australians are overusing GPs. In actual fact, what GPs do in this country is act as a gatekeeper to additional services. I do not know how many times is too many times for the government; maybe if you go to a GP more than 10 times in a year that is too many. But maybe there are underlying reasons that people are visiting their GP; maybe there are mental health issues; maybe there are family issues. But no; the government does not want to do its homework and actually ask GPs what is going on.

Today the government will give itself a slap on the back and say, 'Well done, government; we avoided scrutiny on our budget.' Well, you are wrong, because the Australian public have given you a big 'fail' for your budget. They are not hoodwinked. You can sit in this chamber and carry on about Labor and about this and that—and anything else you care to do—and not answer questions about the budget, but no-one is fooled except yourselves. It is time to look in the mirror and realise that your budget is gone. (Time expired)

Question agreed to.

Renewable Energy

Senator MILNE (Tasmania—Leader of the Australian Greens) (15:30): I move:

That the Senate take note of the answer given by the Minister for Employment (Senator Abetz) to a question without notice asked by Senator Milne today relating to the Renewable Energy Target.
Before the election the Prime Minister told Australians that he supported the renewable energy target. In fact, he went further than that, saying, 'We have no plans to change the renewable energy target.' Minister Greg Hunt said, 'We also agree on the renewable energy target' and:

One of the things we don't want to do is to become a party where there is this wild sovereign risk where you are, where businesses take steps to their detriment on the basis of a pledge and a policy of government.

Senator Birmingham, just before the election, said that the coalition supported the fixed renewable energy target of 41,000 gigawatt hours in 2020. And it has all turned out to be a pack of lies. That is all you could say—that the Abbott government has now created such uncertainty in the renewable energy sector that billions of dollars worth of investment are now stalled and on the sidelines and existing projects are under severe threat. Infigen Energy came out only a week or so ago warning of significant asset write-down because of the uncertainty. Not only will new investments not be made but current investments are under pressure. Suntech came out yesterday cancelling research and development in Australia in the solar energy sector and Silex cancelled its concentrated solar plant at Mildura, all because the Abbott government decided to destroy the renewable energy target—any confidence in renewable energy—in favour of the fossil fuel sector. This is an absolute broken promise and it is a breach of trust.

I was at a meeting in Petrie, the marginal seat in Queensland, the other night. It is held by half a per cent by the coalition—500 votes. Five hundred votes will change Petrie. And there were more than 500 people in the room, and they all feel totally betrayed by the Prime Minister, by the Minister for the Environment, by all the Liberals who went there. And do you know that the local Liberal member did not have the courage to actually stand up and face those people? He refused to come to the meeting. What is more, Mr President, there we have Senator Abetz, you and Senator Bushby in Tasmania saying, 'Oh, yes, we support the renewable energy target,' knowing, as you absolutely do, that you have stalled and destroyed renewable energy investment. And no state has suffered or will suffer more than our own state of Tasmania, where our renewable energy has a competitive advantage, where destroying the renewable energy target undermines investment. And that is on top of the millions that Hydro Tasmania is going to lose—to go from a profit of $240 million down to $20 million. That is a loss of more than $220 million in one year because of what you have done.

Senator Abetz, the people of Tasmania know that, but the people of Australia also know that you have sold them out on the renewable energy target. The excuse the Prime Minister has used—'Oh, it's about power prices'—has been blown out of the water by all the reports, including ACIL Allen, your own consultants, saying that the renewable energy target brings down power prices in the long run. There are no excuses except that your mates at the big end of town want you to prop up coal fired power stations. That is all this is about. And you are destroying jobs and investments. So, for the Prime Minister to say, 'Australia is open for business,' is a joke. Australia is not open for the clean energy economy. Australia is not open for research and development in renewable energy technology. Australia is going to destroy jobs, destroy investment, shut down businesses in the future in the new energy economy so that you can prop up for a bit longer the old polluters who are driving global warming. It is an utter disgrace. You have absolutely breached the trust of the Australian people on renewable
energy, and they know it—and they will change their votes on this issue, especially in marginal seats around the country.

_Senator Ian Macdonald interjecting_—

_Senator MILNE:_ You watch Petrie, Senator Macdonald.

Question agreed to.

**CONDOLENCES**

**Ukraine Air Disaster**

_Senator ABETZ_ (Tasmania—Leader of the Government in the Senate, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Minister for Employment) (15:35): by leave—I move:

That the Senate records its deep regret at the deaths on 18 July 2014 AEST of 298 passengers and crew on Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17, and tenders its profound sympathy to their families in their bereavement.

On behalf of the government, I offer sincere condolences to all the affected families and communities, both here in Australia and overseas. Today this parliament expresses its sympathy to its own and the world community who suffered such senseless loss at the hands of criminals. When a civilian airliner is shot down out of the sky on a routine commercial route with a loss of 298 innocent lives, our repulsion of this act of naked barbarism is absolute. There is, and there was, no justification for this act. The initial denials and the blame transfer that was mounted immediately after that dastardly event on 18 July brought no credit whatsoever to those involved and cruelly exacerbated the pain and anguish suffered by those bereaved. As a nation, we have especially grieved for those 38 people on that aircraft who called Australia home. Whether Australian citizens or residents or students studying here, their lives were extinguished in this act of senseless terrorist violence.

We have also joined with the Dutch and Malaysian communities and the other affected international communities to share in their sense of loss. While today we express our sympathies, let us not mince words—this airliner was not a legitimate target in any sense. Nor were any of those on board—they were innocent people travelling for work, for business, as holidaymakers or as members of the crew. They were entitled to safe passage across this airspace—safe passage that was outrageously and savagely violated. Anyone tempted to even fleetingly think otherwise about the unspeakable nature of this act needs only to look at the anguish on the faces of those left in its wake.

Each of those people whose lives were prematurely ended that day is equally valued. We all felt the pain of those who lost loved ones. We were especially inspired, however, by the courage and strength shown in the aftermath by Rin and Anthony Maslin from Perth, whose three beautiful children died together with their grandfather as they came home from a happy holiday abroad. And to see members of the grieving families come forward with our nation's leaders to add a sprig of wattle to the wonderful wreath of our national flower at the national memorial service at St Patrick's Cathedral in Melbourne was unforgettable. All of these families showed in their terrible loss a strength of character and a determination in allowing us as a nation to share in their private grief.

On behalf of the Australian people, I extend my deep gratitude to the members of the Australian Defence Force, the Australian Federal Police, seconded state police and forensic
officers, the officers of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and other Commonwealth government agencies, and the Prime Minister's special envoy, Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston, for the dedicated efforts to secure the site and to work with our international partners, including especially the government of the Netherlands, to locate the remains of those on board and repatriate them.

The shooting down of this aircraft was an act of unspeakable evil—let us make no bones about that—but, as we think of those on board that plane, let us not allow the manner of their deaths to overshadow their lives. The achievements of the 298 passengers and crew of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 were undoubtedly many, their potential unfathomable, their future robbed from them and from us, especially the young.

Today the Senate pauses to reflect on the contribution they each made to our nation and our world, and on the lives they lived, and to give thanks for them. We will seek justice for the deceased, but today we pause to reflect and give thanks for their lives and to express solidarity with the bereaved. We assure them of our thoughts and prayers as they face the future, and we will be with them as they face that future.

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (15:41): I rise on behalf of the opposition to support this condolence motion. Our message to the families and friends of the victims of this tragedy is this: Australians are thinking of you, Australians know your pain, and Australians stand in sympathy with you in this time of bereavement. We all know the death of a loved one opens up a terrible void—a sense of loss, heartache, sadness and grief. When the death is due to ill health or accident it is bad enough, but when we lose someone in a senseless act of violence—here, an act of murder—the grief is compounded and the pain is all that much harder to bear. When the numbers of people losing their lives mount so high, the shock and dismay for all is magnified further. The shooting down of MH17 on 17 July this year was an unthinkable tragedy and a heinous crime. A Boeing 777 flying high above the Earth, travelling from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur, carrying men, women and children going about their business—travelling abroad on holidays and work, returning home to loved ones—was hit and destroyed by a missile fired from the ground, 10 kilometres below. And every soul on board that jet aircraft perished—298 people: 283 passengers and 15 crew. Some 30 of those who lost their lives were Australians and people who call this country home.

These people were a cross-section of Australia—schoolteachers, doctors, office workers, retirees, small business owners, public servants, a real estate agent, an award-winning novelist, a gym instructor, a Catholic nun and several young children. They were the kind of people who make Australia what it is—a diverse nation of hardworking yet easygoing people; people who love to travel and who have an open-minded approach to the world. They were coming home after taking family holidays, attending weddings and visiting relatives in Europe. And their stories break our hearts—the Sydney nun coming back to Australia after a retreat in France, a Perth man flying home with his grandchildren and the Melbourne family of five who all lost their lives.

With this condolence motion, together we express grief for those who have died and sympathy for our fellow Australians whose lives have been changed forever by this event. We also express grief for those from other nations who died on board MH17—193 Dutch nationals, a frightening death toll for that nation, which included a leading clinical researcher
coming to Australia for the international AIDS conference and a member of the Netherlands Senate. Australia has a sizeable Dutch community, and for them the loss of so many Australian and Dutch citizens is a double blow. There were also on board 43 Malaysian nationals, including the 15 members of the plane's flight crew, and people from many other countries, including the United Kingdom, Indonesia, New Zealand, the Philippines and Canada. This motion offers condolences to all those affected, both here and overseas.

Six weeks after the shooting down of MH17, this event remains shocking, distressing, painful and almost impossible to fathom. For the relatives and friends of those who died, it will be etched into their psyches and it will rend their hearts for the rest of their lives. That is why it is important that we think of them. We struggle, with them, to understand this calamity. We respect and admire their courage and dignity. We stand by them in their grief.

On behalf of the opposition, I would also like to acknowledge the actions taken by the Prime Minister and the government, including the Minister for Foreign Affairs, in responding to this tragedy on behalf of the nation. I reiterate the pledge by our opposition leader, Mr Shorten, to support the government's efforts to help the families and friends, to investigate the shooting down of this aircraft and to seek justice for the victims.

I also place on record our acknowledgement of the role of officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in providing consular assistance and support to persons affected by this tragedy and of the Australian Federal Police and other personnel involved in the recovery mission and investigation, including the former Chief of the Defence Force, Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston.

I conclude by again expressing our most profound sympathy to those who have lost their loved ones. Amidst the grief that seems without limit our words seem small, but our sincerity is not. This Senate, this parliament and this nation mourn with you.

Senator MILNE (Tasmania—Leader of the Australian Greens) (15:46): I, too, rise today on behalf of the Australian Greens to join with my Senate colleagues on all sides of politics to extend condolences to all those who have been affected by the MH17 tragedy. Two hundred and ninety-eight lives were lost and, as has been said, 38 of those people either were Australian citizens or lived here. Our hearts go out to their families and friends, and we send them our love and support. We join with the opposition in offering our support to whatever the government can do to support those families and communities in their bereavement.

I think I speak for everyone when I say that, with air travel now within the reach of so many people, when looking at this disaster happening to a passenger flight like that coming back from Europe, from Amsterdam, you think: 'It could have been any one of us. It could have been people we know. It could have been our own families who were involved.' In the Greens movement, of course, so many environmental groups are based in Amsterdam, so you just immediately think you could have known someone on that flight.

The other thing that made it so heart-rending for Australians were the personal stories. We started to get the details of the children, the scientists who Senator Wong talked about and the Catholic nun who died. I heard that the family that lost the three children were being brought home by their grandfather. The first question you ask yourself is: how would I cope in the same circumstances? How would I cope with that tragedy? People's hearts went out on that score.
The other thing that was so awful for Australians and, I think, everyone around the world was every night seeing ordinary objects on the TV footage to which you could relate immediately—the broken suitcases, children's toys and clothing. Then we heard stories about wallets having been taken out of purses and that mobile phones had been taken and that people were answering those phones. There was a recognition of desecration in this tragedy, that people were actually looting. That was shocking too. You think: how is this happening? What is going wrong in our world that this can have occurred in the first place—that a passenger plane can be shot down—and then the wreckage not treated in a way that (a) respects the people who have died and (b) enables the investigators to properly assess what has occurred?

I too want to acknowledge on behalf of the Australian Greens the work of the Australian government, the Prime Minister and the foreign minister, Julie Bishop, who worked tirelessly with our allies to ensure the international community got access to the site as quickly as possible, notwithstanding, again, the horror and disappointment that the fighting came close to the site and so the recovery mission was not as successful as it could have been had that level of respect been given. I also want to acknowledge that six of those on board were prominent HIV-AIDS researchers and advocates travelling to Melbourne for an international conference that we were hosting. We have to make sure here in Australia and around the world that we continue to work hard to ensure that their legacy lives on in the global effort to combat HIV-AIDS. We need to recognise that we must continue that work because it is important for the world but also out of respect for the people who have lost their lives in this scenario.

I finally want to thank all those who worked tirelessly at the crash site to try to piece together crucial evidence. What a terrible and difficult job that was for the people involved, especially the Federal Police on the ground. I also want to acknowledge the work of the consular officials around the world in doing their level best to keep families and friends informed on the status of the situation and to offer as much support as they could. The professionalism of our public servants in that regard, both from the police and the department, is something we all want to acknowledge. With those words, I join with everyone in the parliament in expressing our condolences in relation to this tragedy.

Senator SCULLION (Northern Territory—Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Leader of The Nationals in the Senate) (15:51): As the leader of the Nationals in this place, I also rise to support the condolence motion on the deaths that occurred on Malaysia Airlines flight MH17. This government has been significantly involved in helping Australians with their grief. We declared Thursday, 7 August 2014 to be a national day of mourning to honour the victims of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17. On that day, flags on all government buildings, both here and overseas, were flown at half-mast in respect for the loss. A national memorial service took place at St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne, on 7 August to honour all those who lost their lives and to seek to support those who had been bereaved. The Governor-General, the presiding officers of parliament, members of cabinet, representatives of the federal opposition, members of the diplomatic corps and members of the public signed the Commonwealth of Australia condolence book in support and sympathy for the families of those tragically killed on flight MH17. There were 298 innocent people on that aircraft. As the Prime Minister said, their deaths offend our sense of justice. We think especially of the
Australian families and friends of the 38 men, women and children who called Australia home. There are still so many questions with answers that, at this stage, no-one appears able to give.

As a senator from the Northern Territory, I can tell you that there is a lot of grief, particularly for one of our young teachers in an Indigenous school. At the recent Garma festival she was remembered. I say now, as I said then, I would like to acknowledge and share everyone’s sadness at the death of Emma Bell, the homelands teacher at Maningrida College, who perished on flight MH17. I would particularly like to thank and acknowledge the honouring of her by the Maningrida people with a skin name, for adopting her into a Maningrida family and particularly for the smoking ceremony that helped her family and friends grieve her passing. I thank you for that. I know Emma wanted a better future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and I would like to acknowledge her important work in that area.

There are many ways of grieving across this country, but we all join as one, just as the parliament is doing here today, to console each other and those directly affected by this tragedy. Australia contributed significantly to a Dutch-led multinational police mission to the crash site of MH17. There was much danger and great risk involved before the team had to pull out. I add my acknowledgements to those of the leader of the Greens in acknowledging the particular circumstances under which that work was conducted.

Australia was there when needed with courage and determination to recover our own. More than 100 Australian officials from various agencies were deployed to Ukraine and the Netherlands to support Operation Bring Them Home. The Prime Minister’s special envoy, Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston, was there as was our Governor-General, His Excellency General the Hon. Sir Peter Cosgrove, who was present for the arrival of both the Dutch and the Australian aircraft bringing the remains of our lost country men, women and children to the Netherlands.

The crash of flight MH17 was a crash through decency and humanity. It was a crash of cowardice and hate. But it was no accident that consumed the lives of children and other civilians. It was murder. It was the murder of 298 innocent people. It was a murder that shocked a world that appears to be hardened to recent atrocities. On behalf of the National Party, I pass my condolences on to those affected by this tragic and unnecessary loss of life.

**Senator LAZARUS** (Queensland—Leader of the Palmer United Party in the Senate) (15:55): I also rise, on behalf of the Palmer United Party, to offer our deepest sympathies to those lost on and affected by the loss of flight MH17. Some 283 passengers and 15 crew were taken from us in this tragic and shocking event. While we grieve we know many of you have had your lives torn apart and that you will forever mourn the loss of loved ones as a result of this vile, evil and sinister act.

I would like to thank personally Prime Minister Tony Abbott and the foreign minister, Julie Bishop, for their persistence in ensuring our people are brought home to enable closure for the grieving and to ensure our people are properly farewelled with dignity and with the respect they deserve. This is the Australian way and we are grateful to your dedication in representing the interests of all Australians in such an honourable way.
I would like to finish by saying that the world must work even harder to stop this ever happening again. Good must conquer all.

Senator XENOPHON (South Australia) (15:56): I endorse the remarks made by my colleagues in relation to this condolence motion for those lost in the tragedy of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17. My most heartfelt sympathies and condolences go to the families and friends of the Australians who perished on that flight, to all of the 298 souls who were senselessly killed and to the families who were left behind. In particular, who could not be moved by the 'hell beyond hell', as described by the parents of Mo, Evie and Otis Maslin, who lost their three children in the tragedy. It is absolutely heart-wrenching. Somehow they, the victims' families, must find the strength to go on. We must help them in any way we can. Those poor people aboard MH17 could have been any one of us until the moment they lost their lives. To find yourself on board a commercial flight crossing high above eastern Ukraine was unremarkable. Since the start of the unrest in Ukraine many thousands of travellers have made that journey. But for the callous actions of the rebels and their Russian backers, many more would no doubt have done so.

I commend the actions of the government in moving as swiftly as possible to secure the site of the fall of the wreckage and to take steps to repatriate the remains of the fallen. The desecration of the victims adds to the disgust at what has occurred. I commend the tireless efforts of the Prime Minister and the foreign minister, no doubt echoed by all Australians, in the face of this unprecedented challenge. I also commend the bipartisanship shown by the opposition leader and the shadow foreign minister in relation to this tragedy. It reflected national unity and an outpouring of compassion amongst Australians for those who died and for those who mourn them.

Today we remember those who died and we comfort their loved ones, but I hope one day we will hear more in this place about progress made towards holding the perpetrators of this outrage accountable for their crime. There is unfinished business to attend to, but first we must repatriate the remains. I support and commend the government using its resources, its alliances and its diplomacy and to continue to use its place on the United Nations Security Council to pursue justice for the families and for those lost. I can also say that following this tragedy a field in eastern Ukraine will forever be part of our hearts. I support this motion and I commend the Australian government for the actions it has taken.

Question agreed to, honourable senators standing in their places.

PETITIONS

The Clerk: A petition has been lodged for presentation as follows:

Australian National Flag

To the Honourable the President and Members of the Senate in Parliament assembled

The petition of the undersigned shows:

We believe that the current flag has served Australia well and will continue to do so in the future and represents a true manifestation of the Nation's history.

Your petitioners request that the Senate:

Oppose any change in the design or colour of the AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL FLAG.

CHAMBER
by Senator Ronaldson (from five citizens)

Petition received.

NOTICES

Presentation

Senator LEYONHJELM (New South Wales) (16:00): I give notice of my intention to amend business of the Senate notices of motion Nos 1 and 2, standing in my name for today, proposing that certain primary industry regulations be disallowed, as follows:

(1) After "That", insert "items 1 to 6 (hard onions) and 7 and 8 (mangoes) of the Schedule of".
(2) After "That", insert "items 1 and 2 (mushrooms), 3 to 7 (hard onions) and 8 and 9 (mangoes) of the Schedule of".

I seek leave to make a short statement about the notice of motion I have just given.

Leave granted.

Senator LEYONHJELM: For the information of senators, I intend to amend the notices of the disallowance motions so that the items of the schedules relating to the different products—namely mushrooms, onions and mangoes—are readily identifiable. This does not narrow the scope of the disallowance motions. I will move the amended motions on 24 September 2014.

Senator Macdonald to move:

That the time for the presentation of the report of the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee on the Recognition of Foreign Marriages Bill 2014 be extended to 25 September 2014.

Senator Ruston to move:

That the time for the presentation of the report of the Environment and Communications Legislation Committee on its inquiry into Australia Post be extended to 24 September 2014.

Senator Fawcett to move:

That the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services be authorised to hold private meetings otherwise than in accordance with standing order 33(1) during the sittings of the Senate from 11.30 am, as follows:
(a) Monday, 1 September 2014;
(b) Monday, 22 September 2014;
(c) Monday, 27 October 2014; and
(d) Monday, 24 November 2014.

Senator Fawcett to move:

That the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade be authorised to hold public meetings during the sittings of the Senate, as follows:
(a) on Monday, 1 September 2014, from 5.30 pm to 6.30 pm;
(b) on Tuesday, 2 September 2014, from 12.45 pm to 2 pm;
(c) on Wednesday, 3 September 2014, from 11 am to noon, and from 1 pm to 2 pm;
(d) on Tuesday, 23 September 2014, from 12.45 pm to 2 pm; and
(e) on Tuesday, 30 September 2014, from 12.45 pm to 2 pm.
Senator Urquhart to move:
That the time for the presentation of the report of the Environment and Communications References Committee on its inquiry into Australia’s environment be extended to the third last sitting day in June 2015.

Senator Urquhart to move:
That the time for the presentation of the report of the Environment and Communications References Committee on its inquiry into the Great Barrier Reef be extended to 3 September 2014.

Senator Lundy to move:
That the time for the presentation of the report of the Finance and Public Administration References Committee on its inquiry into violence against women be extended to 2 March 2015.

Senator Gallacher to move:
That the time for the presentation of the report of the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee on its inquiry into abuse in Defence be extended to 30 October 2014.

Senator O’Neill to move:
That the Select Committee on Health be authorised to hold a public meeting during the sitting of the Senate on Thursday, 28 August 2014.

Senator Dastyari to move:
That the Joint Standing Committee on Migration be authorised to hold a public meeting during the sitting of the Senate on Wednesday, 3 September 2014, from 9.30 am to 11 am, to take evidence for the committee’s inquiry into the Business Innovation and Investment Program.

Senator Peris to move:
That the Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples be authorised to hold private meetings otherwise than in accordance with standing order 33(1) during the sittings of the Senate from 10.30 am, as follows:
(a) Wednesday, 3 September 2014;
(b) Wednesday, 1 October 2014;
(c) Wednesday, 29 October 2014; and
(d) Wednesday, 3 December 2014.

Senator Milne to move:
That there be laid on the table by the Minister representing the Prime Minister (Senator Abetz), no later than noon on 28 August 2014, the final report into the Renewable Energy Target prepared by the Government’s hand-picked review panel.

Senator Milne to move:
That there be laid on the table by the Minister representing the Treasurer (Senator Cormann), no later than noon on 28 August 2014, the distributional and cameo analysis of the impact of prospective policy measures contained in the 2014-15 Budget, and any other material prepared for the household budget breakdown that has appeared in the appendix of each Budget overview since 2004-05.

Senator Milne to move:
That the following bill be introduced: A Bill for an Act to amend the law relating to taxation, and for related purposes. Mining Subsidies Legislation Amendment (Raising Revenue) Bill 2014.
Senator Cameron to move:


Fifteen sitting days remain, including today, to resolve the motion or the instrument will be deemed to have been disallowed.

Senator Rhiannon to move:

That the Senate—

(a) notes:

(i) higher education is an important sector that allows for intellectual development and increased job opportunity,

(ii) independent student unions and organisations play a crucial role in the higher education sector particularly in supporting at-risk students and increasing student engagement,

(iii) independent student unions and organisations can play a crucial role in local economies in regional areas, through the provision of jobs and support frameworks for students and young people, and

(iv) Macquarie University currently receives more than $6 million in funding from student fees via the Student Services and Amenities Fee and none of this revenue is provided to independent student unions or directed toward services in democratic consultation with students; and

(b) calls on Macquarie University to:

(i) cease its legal action against the Macquarie University Postgraduate Representative Association and its board members,

(ii) remove any freeze on the Macquarie University Postgraduate Representative Association’s bank accounts, and

(iii) support independent and democratically run student unions.

Senator Wright to move:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that a disproportionately high number of completed suicides and suicide attempts involve men in rural areas; and

(b) calls on the Government to implement the key recommendations of the Community Affairs References Committee report The hidden toll: Suicide in Australia, including:

(i) funding a national suicide prevention and awareness campaign, to run for at least 5 years, and

(ii) targeted measures to help prevent the incidence of suicide among high-risk groups in regional Australia.

Senator Lambie to move:

That the following bill be introduced: A Bill for an Act to continue the Nation Building Program Roads to Recovery Program, and for related purposes. Land Transport Infrastructure Amendment (Continuing Roads to Recovery) Bill 2014.

Senator Xenophon to move:

That there be laid on the table by the Attorney-General, no later than 4 pm on 25 September 2014, the following information:

(a) the numbers of any past or present federal, state or territory Members of Parliament (specifying which Parliament, and House of Parliament they represent) who have been subject to authorisations
under sections 178, 179 and/or 180 of the  
\textit{Telecommunications (Interception and Access) Act 1979}  
between 1 January 2008 and 25 August 2014, for investigations involving alleged breaches of sections  
70 and/or 79 of the  \textit{Crimes Act (1914)}, section 85 of the Queensland Criminal Code, section 81 of the  
Western Australian Criminal Code, section 110 of the Tasmanian Criminal Code, section 153 of the  
Australian Capital Territory Crimes Act and section 76 of the Northern Territory Criminal Code Act,  
and any equivalent offence in the state of South Australia;  

(b) the names of any past or present federal, state or territory Members of Parliament (specifying which  
Parliament and House of Parliament they represent) who have been subject to surveillance device orders  
under the  \textit{Surveillance Devices Act 2004 (Cth)} between 1 January 2008 and 25 August 2014 for  
investigations involving alleged breaches of sections 70 and/or 79 of the  \textit{Crimes Act (1914)}, section 85  
of the Queensland Criminal Code, section 81 of the Western Australian Criminal Code, section 110 of the  
Tasmanian Criminal Code, section 153 of the Australian Capital Territory Crimes Act and section 76 of the  
Northern Territory Criminal Code Act, and any equivalent offence in the state of South Australia;  

(c) the number of authorisations and/or orders that were applicable to each Member of Parliament  
(specifying which Parliament, and House of Parliament they represent); and  

(d) the dates for which each order and/or authorisation was valid, and the dates on which each order or  
authorisation was carried out.  

\textbf{Senator Siewert} to move:  
That the Senate—  

(a) acknowledges:  

(i) the support Family and Early Learning Centres provide to children and families around Australia,  
and  

(ii) the contribution of these centres to closing the gap on early childhood learning outcomes;  

(b) notes:  

(i) the funding for these centres ceased with the expiry of the Council of Australian Governments’  
National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development on 30 June 2014, and  

(ii) that centres are having to suspend services and not renew contracts with staff as a result of  
funding uncertainty; and  

(c) calls on the Federal Government to guarantee funding for these important centres now and into the  
future.  

\textbf{Senator Siewert} to move:  
That the Senate—  

(a) notes that:  

(i) it is Hearing Awareness Week from 24 August to 30 August 2014,  

(ii) the theme for this year is ‘How Loud is Too Loud’,  

(iii) approximately 3.5 million Australians suffer from hearing loss or impairment, and  

(iv) exposure to noise is a known cause of one-third of the cases of hearing loss;  

(b) acknowledges that:  

(i) hearing loss disproportionately affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and  

(ii) ear disease and hearing impairment in Aboriginal children in Australia is one of the biggest  
barriers to educational success for these children; and  

(c) calls on the Federal Government to make Aboriginal ear disease a national priority and recognise it  
as a chronic disease in the Closing the Gap Strategy.
Senator Waters to move:

That the Senate—
(a) notes that the Minister for the Environment (Mr Hunt) has claimed on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s program *4 Corners* to have drawn a ‘line in the sand’ on offshore dumping from capital dredging in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park; and
(b) calls on the Minister to confirm his commitment applies to plans for offshore dumping in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park from capital dredging which have been applied for but not yet approved.

Senator Ludlam to move:

That the Senate—
(a) notes that:
(i) the Government has not yet provided a definition of ‘metadata’ to be retained under the proposed mandatory data retention scheme, and
(ii) media reports on 26 August 2014 suggested that the Attorney-General’s department has provided a definition in a document provided to the telecommunications industry; and
(b) orders that there be laid on the table, by the Attorney-General, no later than noon on Wednesday, 3 September 2014:
(i) the definition of ‘metadata’ as defined by the Government’s proposal on mandatory data retention, and
(ii) a copy of the document distributed to the telecommunications industry within the past week which discusses this policy.

Senator Leyonhjelm to move (contingent on the President presenting a report of the Auditor-General on any day or notifying the Senate that such a report had been presented under standing order 166):

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent the senator moving a motion to take note of the report and any senator speaking to it for not more than 10 minutes, with the total time for the debate not to exceed 60 minutes.

Senator Leyonhjelm to move (contingent on the Senate on any day concluding its consideration of any item of business and prior to the Senate proceeding to the consideration of another item of business):

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent the senator moving a motion relating to the conduct of the business of the Senate or to provide for the consideration of any matter.

Senator Leyonhjelm to move (contingent on the Senate proceeding to the consideration of government documents):

That so much of the standing orders relating to the consideration of government documents be suspended as would prevent the senator moving a motion relating to the order in which the documents are called on by the President.

Senator Leyonhjelm to move (contingent on a minister moving a motion that a bill be considered an urgent bill):

That so much of standing order 142 be suspended as would prevent debate taking place on the motion.

Senator Leyonhjelm to move (contingent on a minister moving a motion to specify time to be allotted to the consideration of a bill, or any stage of a bill):
That so much of standing order 142 be suspended as would prevent the motion being debated without limitation of time and each senator speaking for the time allotted by standing orders.

Senator Leyonhjelm to move (contingent on the chair declaring that the time allotted for the consideration of a bill, or any stage of a bill, has expired):
That so much of standing order 142 be suspended as would prevent further consideration of the bill, or the stage of the bill, without limitation of time or for a specified period.

Senator Leyonhjelm to move (contingent on the moving of a motion to debate a matter of urgency under standing order 75):
That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent a senator moving an amendment to the motion.

Senator Leyonhjelm to move (contingent on the President proceeding to the placing of business on any day):
That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent the senator moving a motion relating to the order of business on the Notice Paper.

Senator Leyonhjelm to move (contingent on a minister at question time on any day asking that further questions be placed on notice):
That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent the senator moving a motion that, at question time on any day, questions may be put to ministers until 28 questions, including supplementary questions, have been asked and answered.

Senator Leyonhjelm to move (contingent on any senator being refused leave to make a statement to the Senate):
That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent that senator making that statement.

Senator Leyonhjelm to move (contingent on any senator being refused leave to table a document in the Senate):
That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent the senator moving that the document be tabled.

BUSINESS
Rearrangement

Senator FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (16:01): by leave—I move:
That consideration of the business before the Senate on the following days be interrupted at approximately 5 pm, but not so as to interrupt a senator speaking, to enable senators to make their first speeches without any question before the chair, as follows:
(a) Tuesday, 26 August 2014—Senators Ketter and Bullock;
(b) Wednesday, 27 August 2014—Senator Rice;
(c) Tuesday, 2 September 2014—Senator Lazarus;
(d) Wednesday, 3 September 2014—Senators Day and Lambie; and
(e) Tuesday, 23 September 2014—Senator Wang.
Question agreed to.
Consideration of Legislation

Senator FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (16:02): I move:

That the following general business orders of the day be considered on Thursday, 28 August 2014 under the temporary order relating to the consideration of private senators’ bills:
No. 29 Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment Bill 2014.
No. 30 Privacy Amendment (Privacy Alerts) Bill 2014.
Question agreed to.

COMMITTEES

Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

Meeting

Senator BUSHBY (Tasmania—Chief Government Whip in the Senate) (16:02): by leave—At the request of the Chair of the Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee, Senator Bernardi, I move:

That the order of the Senate agreed to on 15 July 2014 authorising the Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee to hold a private briefing during the sitting of the Senate on Wednesday, 27 August 2014 be varied by omitting "3.30 pm" and substituting "3.15 pm".
Question agreed to.

Community Affairs Legislation Committee

Reporting Date

Senator BUSHBY (Tasmania—Chief Government Whip in the Senate) (16:03): by leave—At the request of the Chair of the Community Affairs Legislation Committee, Senator Seselja, I move:

That the time for the presentation of reports of the Community Affairs Legislation Committee on the provisions of the Business Services Wage Assessment Tool Payment Scheme Bill 2014 and a related bill, and on the provisions of the National Health Amendment (Pharmaceutical Benefits) Bill 2014 be extended to 27 August 2014.
Question agreed to.

Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Joint Committee

Meeting

Senator BUSHBY (Tasmania—Chief Government Whip in the Senate) (16:03): by leave—I move:

That the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade be authorised to hold public meetings during the sitting of the Senate on Wednesday, 27 August 2014, from 11 am to noon, and from 1 pm to 2 pm.
Question agreed to.

Migration Committee

Meeting

Senator BUSHBY (Tasmania—Chief Government Whip in the Senate) (16:04): by leave—I move:
That the Joint Standing Committee on Migration be authorised to hold a public meeting during the sitting of the Senate on Wednesday, 27 August 2014, from 9.30 am to 11 am, to take evidence for the committee's inquiry into the Business Innovation and Investment Programme.

Question agreed to.

NOTICES

Postponement

The following items of business were postponed:

Business of the Senate notices of motion nos 1 to 3 standing in the name of Senator Leyonhjelm for today, proposing the disallowance of instruments, postponed till 24 September 2014.

Business of the Senate notice of motion no. 4 standing in the name of Senator Dastyari for today, proposing the disallowance of items 1 to 27 inclusive and item 30 of the Corporations Amendment (Streamlining Future of Financial Advice) Regulation 2014, postponed till 27 August 2014.

General business notices of motion nos 351 and 352 standing in the name of Senator Bernardi for today, relating to the Select Committee on the National Broadband Network and to the proposed establishment of a joint select committee on the National Broadband Network, postponed till 30 September 2014.

General business notice of motion no. 356 standing in the name of the Leader of the Palmer United Party in the Senate (Senator Lazarus) for today, proposing the establishment of a select committee into certain aspects of Queensland Government administration, postponed till 28 August 2014.

MOTIONS

Agriculture: Animal Rights Activism

Senator McKENZIE (Victoria) (16:05): I, and also on behalf of Senator Back, seek leave to amend general business notice of motion No. 366.

Leave granted.

Senator McKENZIE: I move the motion as amended:

That the Senate—

(a) notes with concern that:
   (i) the activities of vigilantes on private farm property, and the covert filming of operations, is trespassing and is illegal, and
   (ii) such activities are distressing to the animals, staff and owners, and disrupt the operation of legitimate businesses;

(b) acknowledges the risk of such activities introducing biosecurity threats through the spread of disease that can be detrimental to animals and the viability of farm businesses;

(c) condemns such illegal actions;

(d) calls on vigilantes to respect the laws, and present any animal mistreatment allegations immediately and directly to authorities; and

(e) acknowledges the strong animal husbandry skills of Australian farmers and does not tolerate animal cruelty in any form.

Senator RHIANNON (New South Wales) (16:05): I seek leave to make a short statement.

The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.
Senator RHIANNON: Good animal husbandry practices do not invite the need for whistleblowers. Extreme animal cruelty and neglect is occurring in Australia. These incidents are often witnessed and sometimes condoned by the perpetrators’ work colleagues, business operators and industry representatives. These people then become complicit in perpetrating animal cruelty by not reporting such abuse. Governments stand complicit with these people for allowing it to happen.

The Greens support enforceable, mandatory reporting, investigation and prosecution of animal cruelty, with legal protection for whistleblowers. The Greens are also calling for ongoing audits and investigations independent of industry interests. Animal abuse and neglect is never okay and should never be ignored or excused on any level. We should all support legitimate animal husbandry practices that do not perpetrate animal mistreatment that most Australians, farmers and nonfarmers alike, abhor and condemn.

The PRESIDENT: The question is that the motion moved by Senator McKenzie be agreed to.

The Senate divided. [16:11]

(The President—Senator Parry)

Ayes ..................... 43
Noes ..................... 10
Majority ................ 33

AYES

Back, CJ
Bilyk, CL
Bullock, J.W.
Canavan, M.J.
Day, R.J.
Fawcett, DJ
Gallacher, AM
Lambie, J
Leyonhjelm, DE
Ludwig, JW
Macdonald, ID
Mason, B
McKenzie, B
Moore, CM
O’Neill, DM
Parry, S
Peris, N
Ruston, A
Singh, LM
Smith, D
Urquahart, AE
Williams, JR

NOES

Di Natale, R
Ludlam, S
Rhiannon, L

Hanson-Young, SC
Milne, C
Rice, J
Question agreed to.

COMMITTEES

Economics References Committee

Meeting

Senator URQUHART (Tasmania—Deputy Opposition Whip in the Senate) (16:13): by leave—At the request of the Chair of the Senate Economics References Committee, Senator Dastyari, I move:

That the Economics References Committee be authorised to hold a private meeting otherwise than in accordance with standing order 33(1) during the sitting of the Senate on Wednesday, 27 August 2014.

Question agreed to.

NOTICES

Withdrawal

Senator URQUHART (Tasmania—Deputy Opposition Whip in the Senate) (16:14): At the request of Senator Faulkner, pursuant to notice given at the last day of sitting on behalf of the Regulations and Ordinances Committee, I now withdraw general business notice of motion No. 320, standing in the name of Senator Faulkner, for 2 September 2014, proposing an amendment to standing order 17.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Budget

The PRESIDENT (16:14): A letter has been received from Senator Moore:

Pursuant to standing order 75, I propose that the following matter of public importance be submitted to the Senate for discussion:

The Abbott Government's unfair budget based on broken promises and twisted priorities.

Is the proposal supported?

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

The 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 clock accordingly.

Senator BILYK (Tasmania—Deputy Opposition Whip in the Senate) (16:15): The Australian people are looking at the government they elected just last September and are suffering the largest collective buyers' remorse this country has ever seen. Australians are opposed to this unfair and unjust budget. It is not what they were promised, and they are angry. Australians believe in a fair go. They believe in not kicking people when they are down, but this is precisely what this budget does. It is completely and utterly un-Australian. The people of this country are thankful that the Senate is here to prevent some of the most
cruel and heartless cuts, because they did not vote for those broken promises, they did not vote for those attacks on the most vulnerable in our community and they did not vote for the destruction of the principle of universal health care. They did not vote for higher university fees, to leave young jobless people destitute, to cut pensions, to slash jobs at the ABC and CSIRO, to cut superannuation for low-income earners and to promote hate speech. The people are vehemently unhappy that the coalition lied its way into government and it is serving the narrow self-interest of its friends rather than concentrating on what is best for the Australian people.

The Prime Minister and those opposite should be utterly ashamed. All of us in this place remember Mr Abbott's promise live on SBS before the election that there would be 'No cuts to education, no cuts to health, no changes to pensions, no changes to GST, no cuts to the ABC or SBS under any government I lead'. The words are pretty clear and unambiguous but they are now seen to be hollow and worthless. The cuts to health are remarkable in not only their scope but also their lack of foresight. The Parliamentary Budget Office has confirmed the Abbott government is ripping another $23.3 billion out of health over the next decade with its GP tax, cuts to Medicare rebates and hikes in medicine prices. This is on top of the more than $50 billion the Abbott government has already ripped out of public hospitals, taking its total health cuts over the next decade to around $75 billion.

Unfortunately Mr Abbott's $7 GP tax is going to affect people in my home state of Tasmania the most. The President of the AMA recently said in answers to my questioning during a Senate inquiry:

We know that Tasmania has a higher burden of chronic disease, has higher smoking rates, and we need to do more to encourage preventative health care and chronic disease management. And that’s why I think the co-payment will affect Tasmanians more than it affects people in other jurisdictions.

These changes will lead to poorer health outcomes and increased waiting lists and time spent in emergency departments, and they will ultimately cost the hospital system significantly more money. This is not what the Tasmanian people were promised. Mr Hutchinson, the member for Lyons in the other place, did not tell Tasmanians before the election that $1.1 billion would be ripped out of the state's hospitals over the next decade. Mr Hutchinson did not tell Tasmanians that $9.9 million would be ripped away from training nursing and allied health students in Tasmania. It is disappointing that Mr Hutchinson, Mr Nikolic, Mr Whiteley and the Tasmanian Liberal senators in this place have failed to stand up for health services in their state. Unfortunately the only public statement of note Mr Whiteley has made lately is his suggestion that Tasmanians should sell the Hydro—a beloved Tasmanian government asset that gave Tasmanians a dividend of almost $200 million last year.

Australian parents, particularly in Tasmania, are extremely disappointed with this Abbott government. Despite promising a unity ticket with Labor on school funding before the election, Tony Abbott's budget failed to fund the vital fifth and sixth years of the Gonski reforms. Tasmanian schools will lose $682 million, the biggest ever funding cut to education in Tasmania. Every school will suffer and be dragged backwards at a time when parents, teachers and students were promised improvements. These savage cuts will leave the average school $3.2 million worse off, and rob every student of $1,000 in individual support per year. This will particularly hurt small rural schools, particularly in the electorate of Lyons. They
have also repeatedly and unsuccessfully tried to axe the schoolkids bonus, which would further hurt around 33,000 families in Tasmania with more than 57,000 school-aged children.

The Abbott government have also broken their promise on the ABC, because they have cut $35 million over four years from the ABC over the forward estimates as well as axing the Australia Network. In addition, they have cut $8 million over four years from SBS. Members of the coalition are calling for the ABC to be sold. I am sure that is because having public broadcasters that act independently and truthfully does not suit the interests of the coalition. Or are they seen as a threat to the media moguls that supported Mr Abbott getting into government?

Mr Abbott repeatedly promised the Australian people that a coalition government would not increase taxes. However, they have already passed tax increases—sorry, 'temporary budget repair levies'—and now they want to increase the fuel tax, a regressive tax measure that will once again hurt those that are least well-off in our society.

What is even worse than their cruel and unfair budget is the disastrous way that they are trying to sell it—not only to the Australian people but also to this place. The claim by the Treasurer, Mr Hockey, a couple of weeks ago that the 'poorest people either don't have cars or actually don't drive very far' just goes to show how out of touch this government is. People on low incomes are highly dependent on their cars. Their vehicles are often aging, and need more maintenance, but they are vital for people on low incomes to get to their jobs, do their shopping and go to the doctor. Statistics show that on average those on lower incomes need to travel further by private vehicle to get to their jobs, both in the city and particularly in regional Australia, which has poorer public transport and lower incomes. In rural and regional Tasmania there is often no bus service at all. Even in the urban centres of Tasmania, there are limited services at night and on weekends and public holidays. Maybe coalition senators, particularly the Nationals, need to explain to the elitist Sydney North Shore Treasurer what life in regional Australia is like—or even where regional Australia is. The coalition have arrogantly tried to force this budget through this place. Having failed with that strategy, they sent Mr Hockey on a trip through the country to gain the support of crossbenchers. We all know what limited success he had. Just this weekend, Senator Cormann threatened the Australian people with more tax hikes as 'the only alternative to balance the books'.

We all know that the coalition's priorities are absolutely twisted. Nowhere—absolutely nowhere—did this government say before the election that they would cut Newstart for six months for people under 30. At a time when there are five job applicants for every vacancy, not only do they want to shift the blame onto the unemployed for not having a job but they want them to starve, lose their home and not actually have the physical means to apply for jobs or to enter training. While they are consigning a generation of Australia's youth to poverty, they want to give millionaires on large incomes $50,000 to have children. You really have to wonder whether they even understand how the real world works. What are tens or hundreds of thousands of young people meant to do when they cannot afford to pay their rent or buy their food? I ask those on the other side whether they thought about this at all. Not everyone has the luxury of moving back in with their parents on Sydney's North Shore or Melbourne's inner east, or of using their mates to get jobs for their children.

This government is out of touch and out of control. It keeps attacking those on low incomes while providing increased support to those on high incomes. This budget disproportionately
affects those on lower incomes. The combined effect of this budget is that an average low-income family loses $844 per year in disposable income, while middle-income earners forgo $492 and a high-income family is down by $517. Not only are lower income families paying more in absolute terms; it represents an extremely significant loss of disposable income, which will drive families to the wall. This government is a train wreck. It is completely out of control.

Senator MASON (Queensland—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs) (16:24): Let me keep this simple: in 2007, when the Labor Party, under Kevin Rudd, won the election, they inherited the best fiscal position in the history of this nation. In 2007, when Labor won the election, they inherited the best fiscal position in our entire federal history. Just six years later, the coalition government, elected in September last year, inherited the worst ever fiscal position of an incoming government in the history of this nation. We left Labor with the best fiscal legacy, and they returned the favour by leaving us the worst. That is a fact. That is the background; let us just keep it simple.

I heard a lot of debate during the winter recess about whether there is a budget emergency. The Labor Party and the Greens say that there is not a budget emergency. It is true that there are many nations in the developed world with far greater GDP-to-debt ratios. The emergency is the trajectory. It is not the great problem today, tomorrow or even next week; that is not the emergency. The bleeding has started but does not become terminal for another decade or so. The trajectory is the emergency. The debt trap is what will kill our children's futures.

We know from Treasury figures that there was a $180 billion deficit when the coalition came to government. If you just take the current forecast expenditure over the next 10 years, that will rise to $667 billion. That is $667 thousand million if we do nothing—if we do not add anything and we simply pay the bills and accept the structural deficit as it now is. The Labor Party claim that they assisted in getting Australia through the global financial crisis, but their great failing is not that; it is to leave this country with shocking structural debt.

What will a deficit of $667 billion in 10 years time mean? Well, at the moment we are paying about $1 billion a month in interest and we are borrowing the interest payments. In 10 years time, the interest payments will be $3 billion a month—that is, $36 billion a year. That is at current forecasts with no further expenditures. That is the legacy that this lot left us. They created the problem and we are trying to fix it up. Within a decade, every Australian man, woman and child will owe $25,000. I am not making this up; these are Treasury forecasts. This is the debt trap left by the Labor Party. Within 10 years, we will be shackled, swallowed up and strangled by structural debt.

For the Labor Party, the issue is: do they still believe in balancing budgets? I do not know. Mr Swan used to talk about balancing the budgets. He never did balance the budget, but he said he believed in it. When is the last time, Acting Deputy President, you heard the Labor Party, Mr Shorten or Mr Bowen come out unequivocally saying that they believe in balanced budgets? Do they have the rectitude and fiscal discipline to bring back a budget surplus ever again? They have not for the last 25 years. We do not even know anymore if the Labor Party believe in balancing the budget. If they do not, that means an enormous change in Australian political culture—because up until recently we always have. In short, what it will mean is this: that the Labor Party are no longer prepared—if they do not believe in balancing budgets—to make tough decisions today so our children do not wear the cost tomorrow. It
will mean that our children and our grandchildren, most of whom cannot vote, will be paying for our current consumption—for our health, our education and our welfare. I will make you a bet that we will not hear the Australian Labor Party make an unequivocal commitment to balancing budgets. They will always be equivocal. Any commitment they make will be fractured—because they cannot make that sort of commitment. They have not done it for 25 years and they do not have the fiscal discipline to do it.

I notice the MPI uses the word 'unfair'. The Labor Party likes to talk about social justice. Is it just to ask future generations—our children and our grandchildren, many of whom cannot vote and many of whom are yet to be born—to pay for our health, education and welfare? We on this side say that is outrageous. If we have to cut back on health, education and welfare, so be it. It is just so diabolically wrong to ask our children to pay. Sure, it is an economic disaster—but it is also morally corrupt. It is morally corrupt to ask our children to pay for our lifestyle. It is so wrong, yet the Labor Party cannot make an unequivocal commitment to balance the budget. It is pathetic.

At least Senator Xenophon today had some ideas about how he thinks we should balance the budget. I do not agree with him, but at least Senator Xenophon has put forward some proposals. The Labor Party and the Greens have come up with nothing. You would think that, given the fact that Labor created the problem, they would try to come up with a solution. Given that they created the problem—the huge projected debt, the $667 billion of projected debt within 10 years—you would think that they would come up with an answer or a solution. Have they done that? No, they just whinge all the time and say it is terrible.

If we do not act, this nation will—not tomorrow, not the next day, not even a year from now and not necessarily even five years from now—go into inevitable decline. That is what will happen to this country. It will become another western European economy: high debt and big government, with everyone running to government for solutions. In those countries, every ratbag in town, every rent seeker, goes to government seeking handouts. Is that the sort of country we want?

Our country, our parliament—and this is the emergency—has to make the decision within the next 10 years. After that, it will be too late. I hear Mr Shorten say, 'We are going to go for growth.' That is the old social democratic get-out-of-jail-free card—hoping to hell the economy grows fast enough to fund more expenditure. If it does not, what do you have? You have western Europe, where their GNP from January, February and March of each year goes towards paying the interest bill on their debt. That is what this lot have set in train.

I am not suggesting this is going to happen tomorrow. I have never said that. But this is the great economic and, even more so, moral challenge that confronts this nation in this parliament. All I can do—I can stand here and debate all day and all night; I can debate for the whole year or for the next 10 years—is simply ask if the Labor Party are still committed to equity, fairness and social justice. If they do not want to force our kids to pay for our debt, why do they not come up with some solutions? We will not hear anything constructive from them today and we will not even hear a commitment to balance budgets in the future. That is the great failure of social democracy here in Australia and in Europe.

**Senator SIEWERT** (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (16:34): I strongly agree with the words in this MPI—the government's budget is unfair and it is based on broken promises. 'No, we are not going to have an impact on people with disability.' 'No, we will not
reduce pensions. 'No, we will not make all sorts of cuts to Medicare.' Who was Medicare's best friend? That is right. That was our Prime Minister, back when he was the Leader of the Opposition. He was supposed to be Medicare's best friend. What a load of nonsense!

This budget is unfair. It is based on broken promises and twisted priorities. The priorities are so twisted that they are picking on the most disadvantaged in our community—and they are not doing that unknowingly; they are doing it on purpose. They got the figures that showed that the greatest impact of this budget would be on those who can least afford it. Even if we had not seen those figures, we would know that. You only have to read through the budget and then sit through day after day of Senate committee hearings into these measures to know that they are unfair and that the priorities are twisted.

What sort of government picks on the most vulnerable in its community? An unfair government that has twisted priorities. Why pick on the most vulnerable? Why bring in measures that you know will hurt the most disadvantaged? That is exactly what they are doing. Last week I sat through a day and a half of inquiries into the government's two social security bills. Those two bills bring in over 20 measures that unfairly pick on the most disadvantaged. When you look at that, you have to ask: are the government so bad at policy that they could not work this out? Are there such bad policymakers? Did they not do Politics 101 and look at the impacts of their measures? Or did they know that they were picking on the most disadvantaged? It is probably a combination of both, to be fair, because it is bad policy.

We know now that they know the figures. They know they are picking on the most disadvantaged. It is bad policy because it is going to have the most significant consequences for, and perverse outcomes on, these people—young unemployed people under the age of 30. As somebody said in the inquiry last week, it is 'infantising' 30-year-olds. They are not youth anymore, yet this is the way the government is treating them. The government is perhaps assuming that they will be living at home with mum and dad—but many of them have probably left home and many of them are from disadvantaged backgrounds. Dropping them onto no income support is actually going to make them even more disadvantaged. They are going to lose their rent assistance. So here you have young people who have been struggling to get their life back on track and they are on income support. Some of the people we are talking about have managed to get their life back on track, find accommodation and get rent assistance; but, as soon as they lose income support, they are going to lose that rent assistance. This will dump them into homelessness again, providing another barrier to their employment. This is just one of the measures that the social security bills attack.

Then there is the indexation of pensions for people with a disability, those on the age pension and single parents—because we need to have yet another go at single parents! Twisted priorities, yes! We have already seen single parents dumped onto Newstart by the Howard government and then by the Gillard government. We have seen the pensioner's education supplement taken away and then fortunately given back. But it is going to be taken away again. The pensioner education supplement is also going to be taken away from people with disabilities. These are the people who the government seems to think do not want to work. There are 17,000 people accessing that payment to improve their qualifications so that they can find work—the very thing this government says is one of its priorities. The broken promise that is the lowering of indexation of pensions will have an $80-a-week impact on a pensioner. You go for the most disadvantaged. (Time expired)
Senator CAROL BROWN (Tasmania) (16:39): I too would like to make a contribution in the matter of public importance debate here today on the Abbott government's unfair budget based on broken promises and twisted priorities. In Senator Mason's contribution to this debate, he talked about keeping it simple. He said, 'Let's keep it simple.' Well, I will remind Senator Mason and those senators who are here listening to this debate of what the Prime Minister said during the federal election campaign. He said:

I want to be known as a Prime Minister who keeps commitments.

... ... ...

I will do what I say we will do.

It is pretty simple. It is very, very simple. Many people, many electors, out in the community took Mr Abbott at his word when he said there would be no cuts to pensions, no cuts to education and no cuts to the ABC or SBS. They took him at his word when he said that he wanted to be a Prime Minister who keeps his commitments. On budget night they found out that he was not that Prime Minister who kept his promises. He was not that Prime Minister who kept his commitments. What we saw on budget night was a budget full of broken promises, a budget full of twisted priorities. And who was the budget aimed at? It was aimed at, as Senator Siewert said in her contribution, those easy targets—those least able to afford it or defend themselves, those already struggling to make ends meet. They are who this government has targeted.

In his contribution, Senator Mason also talked about people seeking handouts. Let us have a look at who Senator Mason is actually referring to when he talks about people seeking handouts. When he talks about the cuts to the age pension, he is talking about pensioners seeking handouts. This is what has happened in the Abbott budget. This is their very first budget and it is a complete and utter breach of faith with the community. To those who voted for this government, it is a breach of faith. The community have woken up to it. They do not like this budget. They do not want this budget. They want this government to do as they said they would do, and that is to keep their commitments. It is what the Labor Party intend to do. We intend to keep this government to account and to highlight day after day the promises they made.

Let us have a look at the cuts to the age pension. We have just had a report from the Parliamentary Budget Office, and its projections of government spending over the medium term confirm massive cuts through the budget. It has confirmed the true extent of the Abbott government's massive cuts to the age pension, family payments, disability support pension and carers pension. The Parliamentary Budget Office report shows that the cuts include $23 billion to the age pension, $40 billion to family payments, $8 billion to the disability support pension and a $3 billion hit to the carers support pension. When we talk about the pension indexation system and the changes that this government wants to make to it, we know that a single pensioner on a maximum rate—and let us understand what that actually means; it means around $20,000 a year—would be around $1,500 a year worse off than they are today. That is a massive amount of money for a pensioner. And it is not just the indexation; it is all the other bits and pieces that this government are proposing not only through their budget but also through other pieces of legislation, where they are tightening up measures and seeking to exclude people from accessing more payments and more support and making it even harder.
This is just one measure that I am talking about here today. There are so many measures in this budget that are so unfair. That is why the community have not accepted what this government wants to do—because it is unfair and because it is a massive breach of faith by this government with the people of Australia. It is a breach of faith with the Tasmanian people, the people I represent. They too took Mr Abbott at his word when he said that there would be no cuts to education, health and pensions. They took him at his word. They believed him. They no longer do. The government have a real problem, and it is not just the budget—it is also one of credibility, and they brought it on themselves. They had been in government for no longer than a few months when they set about breaking some of the most fundamental promises that they made to the community. Then they come in here and say, 'We did this because we have to fix a budget problem.' They have changed their rhetoric on that time and time again. One week it is a crisis and another it is, 'We're managing it.'

They chose the easiest targets in the community. They did not do the hard work. They did not do the heavy lifting. They just said: 'There's a group of people who are easy targets. We'll make these changes and we'll get this through. We can't be bothered to actually do what we are here to do'—and that is to keep their commitments and do what the Prime Minister said that he would do. He wants to be the Prime Minister who keeps commitments, who will do what he says he will do. Well, he is not and he has not—and it is about time that he stood up and accepted that this budget is harsh and unfair. (Time expired)

Senator SESELJA (Australian Capital Territory) (16:47): In 2007 when the Labor Party came to office they inherited the best set of books that any incoming government has ever inherited in Australia's history. That is a fact. When the Labor Party left office and the coalition came to office in 2013, we inherited the worst set of books for an incoming government in Australia's history. That is the legacy and the fundamental difference that we are dealing with here.

We had a coalition government that delivered surpluses, that delivered tax reform, that left money in the bank and that paid off all the debt—and in six short years the Labor Party managed to undo all of that good work and in fact make it far worse than even when the coalition came to government in 1996. That is what we are dealing with in this budget. That is the legacy that we are seeking to address. The vandals on the other side in the Labor Party, who were so reckless with our finances, do not see the fact that they created the problem in the last six years and now, as we seek to fix the mess that they left us and the legacy that they left the Australian people, they are doing everything that they can to prevent us fixing the mess. They are doing everything they possibly can to stop us.

The fundamental debate that we are having between the government and opposition at the moment is: 'Do you believe in fiscal responsibility? Do you believe in getting the books under control and getting the budget under control for the sake of future generations?' That is the question that is before the Australian parliament at the moment as we debate all of these various measures: 'Do you believe in that or do you believe that endless deficits are okay?' The evidence from Europe is that when you allow endless deficits to happen—it does not happen immediately but when you allow them year after year after year—something has to give. The medicine that we have seen in Europe is something that we do not want to go anywhere near. That is what we need to avoid.
Senator Bilyk started by talking about buyer's remorse and the like. There is an interesting thing about some of the polling that we have seen in today's Newspoll. As the coalition deals with a tough budget that is, of course, difficult—and there are some people who are concerned with us. But notwithstanding the tough budget and the difficult changes that the coalition is seeking to make, the Labor Party are stranded—it appears, from today's Newspoll—exactly where they were at the last election when they had one of the biggest losses in their history. Their primary vote remains almost identical to where it was at that time.

*Senator Dastyari interjecting—*

**Senator SESELJA:** Senator Dastyari seems happy with a 34 per cent primary. The fact is that the Labor Party have not learnt that one of the main reasons they were tossed out of office was that they were economic vandals.

*Senator Dastyari interjecting—*

**Senator SESELJA:** You were not there but your party were economic vandals, Senator Dastyari—and that is what you have left us.

**The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Whish-Wilson):** Senator Seselja, please direct your comments through the chair. Senator Dastyari, interjections are disorderly.

**Senator SESELJA:** That is why Graham Richardson has been giving advice to his own party and has said:

I haven’t met anyone outside of the parliamentary Labor Party who believes that Labor was spot on with its last four budgets.

He went on to say:

Every minute of the day Australians are discussing the size of our debt and the problems we will bequeath our children unless we live within our means.

That is a fact. Unless we live within our means, we will be bequeathing our children something that we do not want to bequeath them—more debt, more deficit, higher taxes, fewer services and some serious issues should we face the next crisis. The next crisis will come. The next global economic challenge will come. Will it come next year? Will it come in five years time? Will it come in 10 years time? Nobody knows. We know that when we balance the books and look after the budget as we should, we are much better placed to deal with the challenges that will inevitably face our nation. This is a moral issue as to what legacy we leave our children and grandchildren. You cannot put your head in the sand and say, 'No, no, 16 years of consecutive deficits is okay.' It is not okay. As we have heard from the Parliamentary Budget Officer, 'It is time to start coming out of debt and deficit, otherwise the longer you leave it the more exposed you become and the harder it is to wind it back.' Have we not seen that from around the world, when governments lose control of their finances? Have we not seen how hard it is to wind it back when you do not do the work now?

We have heard recently the comments of Glenn Stevens that this is not a severe budget. This is not a severe budget; it is getting spending under control gradually. Surely as a nation that is what we should be looking to do. We do not see massive cuts in expenditure. In fact we see continued growth in expenditure, but we see a slowing in that growth. Surely that is a sensible way to go rather than the recklessness advocated by those on the other side.
The Labor Party were reckless when they were in government and now they are being reckless in opposition. They are fundamentally saying to the Australian people that fiscal discipline and balanced budgets no longer matter. They have absolutely no alternative plan to bring the budget back into surplus. We have set out a plan to limit spending growth and invest in infrastructure. The Labor Party's plan, apparently, is to see spending growth continue to rise unsustainably, and the moral issue for them is: do they want to leave that to their grandchildren? Do you want to leave it to your children and grandchildren to pay off your debt? It is the height of irresponsibility for you to wreck the budget for six years and then come into opposition and oppose every measure that is about fixing your problems and your legacy. That is what the Labor Party are saying to the Australian people. They take no responsibility for the last six years and they take no responsibility for the task of fixing the problems that they created.

To finish where I started, the Labor Party inherited the best set of books that any opposition has ever inherited, and they left us with the worst set of books that any incoming government has inherited. That is their legacy. We have taken on the task of fixing that legacy. It is time that the Labor Party got out of the way.

Senator RHIANNON (New South Wales) (16:55): This budget is a shocker. Even 106 days after Treasurer Hockey unveiled the damaging details of the 2014-15 budget, community anger is still hot. Who can remember when a budget resulted in such ongoing concern, upset and real anger: the town hall meetings, the rallies, the protests, the occupations? I congratulate those who have organised those events. This Sunday there will be another round of national protests, with the march in August. These are events that senators and MPs in this place should really be well aware of, because this budget symbolises the dishonesty of the Abbott government. Just take the budget changes to higher education, for example, since they illustrate this so clearly. Not one aspect of this extreme plan was announced before the election.

We heard from the then Leader of the Opposition, Mr Abbott, that there would be no increases in fees, no cuts, no changes at all to the funding arrangements for our universities. Now we see what the plan is. The direct opposite is what the government are now wheeling out. Talk about broken promises—here we have it writ large. Mr Abbott and Mr Pyne really are being gutless with the Australian people in the way they handle this. We are seeing that the member for Warringah, well-known for his bullying tactics in many ways, does not have the courage to honestly detail the changes that the government are bringing forward with higher education. They did not have the courage to do that before the election. There were so many opportunities where Mr Pyne was put on the spot about what these higher education changes will mean for students, for the very fabric of our society in terms of higher education and what it can deliver. He tries to present it in a rosy way, when in fact it is extremely damaging.

Minister Pyne told the Insiders that his plan for changes to interest rates on student loans—really a market-based form—would only impact enrolled students; whereas, if he had looked at his own government website before he made that comment, he could have been honest with the Australian public. The website showed that all students and graduates with a debt would be impacted. Again it is still something that he has not corrected to this day. Another area where we see Minister Pyne being deeply misleading is with regard to the impact that this will
have on graduates, particularly on people who have to survive on low incomes—women and other people who go in and out of the workforce. With this form of compound interest, those people will pay so much more. It is a debt burden that many of them will not pay off, not just in their working life but for the rest of their life. These are measures that are simply unacceptable and that this government refuses to acknowledge and be frank about. So it is not surprising that the minister goes to such lengths to misrepresent the proposed changes to higher education. Public higher education will be decimated if the Liberal-National government gets its way. This is one of the many areas in this budget that we need to defeat in its entirety. And the cost of university degrees could be as high as $100,000. That is not a figure plucked out of the air. You can work that out when you look at what overseas students sometimes pay and at how the system is currently running.

We hear Minister Pyne bark out his insults that students should pay their way—and then there is that ultimate insult from the minister, 'Well, it's not your left kidney, so what's your problem?' It is sadly not surprising how insensitive he is and how abusive he is, but it certainly reminds us what the essence of this budget is. Yes, it is correct that graduates have a better chance of finding work than those who did not have the opportunity to go to university, and yes, it is true that graduates will earn more money, but what the minister fails to include in his comments is the large amounts of tax that those graduates are paying. That is how they are contributing to their higher education costs. The dishonesty here is extreme. The higher education package should not be passed in its current form, and it really reminds us how wrong this budget is. (Time expired)

Debate interrupted.

FIRST SPEECH

The PRESIDENT (17:01): Order! Before I call Senator Ketter, I remind honourable senators that this is his first speech; therefore, I ask that the usual courtesies be extended to him.

Senator KETTER (Queensland) (17:01): I would firstly like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we meet today. And to you, Mr President, I offer my belated congratulations on your election on 7 July.

It is such a great honour to have been elected as a senator for Queensland. I am now in the ninth week of my term, and I take this opportunity once again to thank the people of Queensland for the trust they placed in me, and the Australian Labor Party, and to say how humbled I am to be able to serve the people in our nation's parliament and to work with all honourable senators for the good of our country.

John F Kennedy once famously said, 'The only reason to give a speech is to change the world.' With that ambit claim, I wish to start on a matter that is less lofty but nevertheless very personal to me: the pronunciation of my surname. It is 'Ketter', with an E, not 'Katter', with an A. With all due respect to the honourable member for Kennedy, that vowel is very important to me! I mention this in passing because, since my election, I have been appreciative of the earnest attempts by various parliamentary officials to correctly pronounce the surname of this humble backbench senator. This is just a small illustration of the fact that the qualities of courtesy, dignity and respect do pervade the operation of this place, contrary to the
perceptions created by the somewhat robust exchanges during the daily one hour of question time.

In delivering this speech, I have the opportunity of setting out what sort of politician I would like to be and what I would like to achieve. I have come to the conclusion that from this time on my work starts and finishes with the fundamental principles of dignity and respect, which are both the means and the ends. The preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states:

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world …

On the principle of dignity, I will have more to say later.

I am deeply conscious that the electoral success I have enjoyed is due to the hard work of so many people. No-one has played a greater role in this than my wife, Eleanor. I gratefully acknowledge the many sacrifices that she has made over our 28 years together and thank her for her steadfast love and support. Due to my frequent absences, she has borne much of the responsibility for the raising of our four beautiful children: Catherine, Victoria, William and Laura. I acknowledge our girls, who are in the gallery tonight, and I am grateful for their love, patience and support. I am very grateful to my parents, Ron and Judy, for the many sacrifices they made which enabled me and my younger brothers, Luke and Paul, and my sister, Genevieve, to have the benefit of a Catholic education. I have tried in my own imperfect way to live by the values that were instilled in us, such as belief in God and the dignity of the human person.

The ongoing support of my parents enabled me to go on to complete a Bachelor of Commerce degree at the University of Queensland. In the months following graduation I did not have a clear view as to the career path I should take. I will always be indebted to my grandfather, Bill Thornton, for suggesting that I consider working for a trade union. Bill Thornton is an extraordinary man. He is 99 years old and he is here tonight with my uncle, Brother Neville Thornton. Bill initially resisted my invitation to be here. He did not want to be a bother to anyone. I am very grateful to Neville for making it happen and for his presence tonight.

Bill Thornton is a former meatworker and long-time official of the Federated Clerks Union of Australia who found his life's work in fighting against the forces of communism. Bill, and many other good people who lived through the post-World War II era in Australia, put aside other interests and aspirations and joined what it is said the editor of Ben Chifley's speeches described as the battle for the 'soul of Australia', which was fought out mainly in the ALP and in the union movement. I am grateful to Bill for his life's work and for his sterling advice to me.

I offered myself for employment at the Queensland Shop Assistants Union in 1982 and was fortunate enough to be accepted by the then branch secretary, John Hogg, who set me to work initially as a research officer and subsequently in a stint of warehouse organising. In 1992 I became first assistant secretary. I rounded out my education with a Bachelor of Arts degree, majoring in economics, which I undertook part-time at the University of Queensland. It was there that I encountered Dr Richard Stavely, whose lectures transcended the dismal science of economics and entered the thought-provoking realm of political philosophy. When John Hogg was elected as a senator for Queensland in 1996, I was elected by the Queensland members of
the Shop Distributive and Allied Employees Association, or SDA, as state secretary. I am indebted to John for the trust he placed in me and the guidance he provided.

I am a proud unionist, and it is of great concern to me that unions today attract much unfair criticism. The trade union movement has made a remarkable contribution to the fabric of Australian society. Unionists have upheld the dignity of men and women in the workplace and have carried the spirit of the fair go from the shop floor to the floor of parliament. I note that before me there have been two officials from the shop assistants union in Queensland who have gone on to become senators for Queensland. In fact, in both cases those former union officials went on to serve as President of the Senate. I have already mentioned John Hogg, who is well known to most of us. The other was a colourful character by the name of Gordon Brown, who was a senator for 33 years from August 1932 and who served as President between September 1943 and March 1951. I am spurred on by the noteworthy contributions my predecessors have made.

Successful unions rely on the commitment and support of their members and activists. In my time with the SDA our union placed great emphasis on appointing and training members to take on the roles of union delegates and workplace health and safety representatives. I want to take this important opportunity to record my appreciation of the many hundreds of ordinary members of the SDA who agreed to take on these roles within our union. The term 'shop steward' has certain connotations to people of my generation, but to me it is a title given to the selfless people who put up their hands to help out those in their workplaces who, for a variety of reasons, are more vulnerable to mistreatment. And they do this for no financial gain for themselves—often making their own lives more stressful than they would otherwise be.

In this country we pride ourselves on the great Australian spirit of voluntary community service—we quite rightly celebrate the volunteers of the surf lifesaving movement and the rural fire brigades, to name but a few. But in my experience we do not do enough to recognise the contribution of rank and file union members who take on the role of being the face of their union in the workplace on a daily basis and who are committed to ensuring that other great Australian principle, the fair go, is upheld. It seems to me there is something very noble about those people who go out of their way to uphold the dignity of others in the workplace, whether it be by just listening and providing moral support or by negotiating with line management to assist with resolving local workplace issues.

This leads me to draw attention to the importance of the role the trade union movement has played and continues to play not only in our country but throughout the world—not merely because it is a movement to which I have devoted much of my working life but because of its significance in the struggle for social justice, freedom and democracy. For support of this proposition we need look no further than the teachings of the Christian church. In 1991 the 6th Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia affirmed (a) the role trade unions and professional associations play in protecting those who are weaker in society and (b) the need for people to stand together in solidarity against injustice and the need for Christians to express their discipleship in trade unions and professional associations as one way in which church and work life connect and influence each other. The Catholic church's official Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church 2004 states:

The Magisterium recognizes the fundamental role played by labour unions, whose existence is connected with the right to form associations or unions to defend the vital interests of workers...
employed in the various professions. Unions 'grew up from the struggle of the workers—workers in
general but especially the industrial workers—to protect their just rights vis-a-vis the entrepreneurs and
the owners of the means of production.' Such organizations, while pursuing their specific purpose with
regard to the common good, are a positive influence for social order and solidarity, and are therefore an
indispensable element of social life.

On the international stage, the key role played by trade unions in protecting and advancing
democracy was most dramatically illustrated in the tremendous social and political upheavals
which took place in eastern Europe commencing at the end of the 1980s. Under the leadership
of then SDA national president, the late Jim Maher, the union provided financial and moral
support to Solidarnosc, the Polish union and social movement, which was operating under
martial law and political repression during the 1980s. The SDA sponsored several visits to
Australia by Solidarity leaders in that decade. In an interview in 2008, Jim stated that he was
particularly proud of the fact the union played a significant role financially and physically.
The fall of the communist regime and the rise of Solidarity under Lech Walesa led to Jim
receiving the Polish Commander's Cross—at the time, that country's highest civilian award. In
1988 Jim Maher received the Order of Australia for his contribution to Australian and
international trade unionism. Jim said: 'I don't take great personal credit for that. It was
recognition for what the union had done.' It is widely held that the example set by Solidarity
inspired the cause of freedom throughout the remainder of the countries of the eastern bloc,
which culminated in the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the
early 1990s. I acknowledge and welcome the Polish Ambassador to Australia, His Excellency
Pawel Milewski.

During my 32 years with the SDA I worked with many fine individuals, too numerous to
name here. However, I do wish to acknowledge the contribution of SDA national secretary
Joe de Bruyn, who is here in the gallery. Joe's intellect, integrity and work ethic over more
than 30 years have earned him great respect across the political divide. I am indebted to Joe
for the wisdom he always sought to impart through his engaging humour. I am also grateful to
former SDA national president and former senator Don Farrell and his wife, Nimfa, for their
friendship and support. Don's departure this year was a great loss to the Senate, and I
acknowledge Don and Nimfa in the gallery tonight. I also acknowledge the presence of
Gerard Dwyer and Peter Malinauskas.

I wish my successor in the role of SDA Queensland branch secretary, Chris Gazenbeek,
who is also in the gallery, and his team every success as they continue the vital work of the
union. Just as I am proud of the achievements of the industrial wing of the labour movement,
I am also proud of the contribution of the political wing in embedding the concept of the fair
go in Australian society. What is the fair go if it is not a recognition of the dignity of each
individual person. I believe the essential work of government is to support Australian families
and to ensure that, as far as possible, families are able to operate effectively. Article 16(3) of
the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states:

The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by
society and the State.

The family is the basic building block in our society, and there is research to suggest that
well-functioning families yield not only a productivity benefit to the economy but also social
benefits, such as reduced rates of crime and drug dependency.
Labor in government has a proud record of looking after the interests of Australian families. It has achieved this over many years by establishing a fair industrial relations system and a fair social welfare safety net, at the same time pursuing policies that lead to job creation and sensible economic growth. Over the last 100 years, Labor has focused on real support for families. The first form of Commonwealth financial assistance to families, the maternity allowance, was an initiative of the 1912 Fisher government. It was intended as an antipoverty measure. Bob Hawke's pledge on child poverty in 1987 led to a reduction by 1989 in the number of children living in poverty of between 43 and 47 per cent. Another study found that, between 1995 and 2000, child poverty fell in Australia by more than any other OECD country, with Australia moving from the sixth highest rate of child poverty to 16th.

I am a strong supporter of the Australian industrial relations system, which ensures a fair go for workers. The defeat of the appalling Work Choices legislation and the establishment of the Fair Work Act are proud Labor achievements. I wish to single out our world-class occupational superannuation system as a crowning achievement of Labor's industrial and political wings. I will support improvements which further enhance the capacity of Australian workers to retire with financial security and dignity.

I am proud of the economic record of Labor in office. The Hawke government's reform of the financial system and the floating of the dollar set the scene for 23 years of continuous economic growth. The creation of over 900,000 jobs over five years, the handling of the global financial crisis and the retention of the AAA credit rating are noteworthy Labor achievements.

I believe that Australians deserve a fair share of the natural wealth of our country. While Queensland's tourist, agricultural, construction and resources industries are important, I see further diversification, particularly in the knowledge based economy, as being vital to the prosperity of future generations.

I am deeply conscious of the fact that I stand here before you today because so many of the people of Queensland at the last federal election placed their faith in the Australian Labor Party. I wish to congratulate my Labor colleague Senator Claire Moore on her re-election and pay tribute to former senator Mark Furner for his significant contribution. Last year, Mark was gracious enough to offer this rookie politician the opportunity to campaign with him in the lead-up to the 2013 election. The centrepiece of our campaign was a road trip from Brisbane to Cairns, stopping off at various locations in between, including Hervey Bay, Gladstone, Mackay, Bowen and Townsville. Mark and I worked hard together, and I will never forget the friendship and support of the many party members with whom we engaged in those communities. I look forward to continuing those bonds in the years ahead.

I am also grateful for the support I have received over the years from many other quarters within the party, especially Bill Ludwig, Wayne Swan, who I acknowledged earlier, Con Sciacca, Brian Kildmartin, Ben Swan and Peter Biagini. I particularly acknowledge Craig Emerson, Anthony Chisholm, Shayne Neumann and Jim Chalmers, who are here tonight. I also thank the staff in my office—Kerri, Jasmine, Lucy, Jennilyn and Bart.

Turning to the future, as a father of four, I have recently had reason to become concerned about the political future of the Australia I know and love. Australia is one of the oldest continuous democracies in the world and, yet, according to the Lowy Institute Poll 2014, just 60 per cent of Australians believe that 'democracy is preferable to any other kind of
government'. Even more concerning, only 42 per cent of 18- to 29-year-olds agree that democracy is preferable to any other kind of government, and a third of this age group say that 'in some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable'.

This research suggests that it is not so much that Australians support a more authoritarian system; it is that they are disenchanted with the way Australian politics is currently conducted. I believe that the troubling findings of this research are a wake-up call for all of us who would desire an enduring, vibrant democracy in this country. I do not have the answer to this vexed issue, but I do know that unless we tackle this issue together—through discussion and education and not lectures—for future generations we risk losing the gains which we have made in relation to fairness and equity in our society. I also suspect that the more we stick to the principles of dignity and respect in public life the better off we will be.

Mr President, I started my address by quoting JFK and his challenge to change the world. Like you, I am a politician, and words and speeches are the tools of our trade. I may not have changed the world tonight but, for the sake of my children and their generation, I intend to keep trying, one speech at a time.

**FIRST SPEECH**

The PRESIDENT (17:23): Before I call Senator Bullock, I remind honourable senators that this is his first speech; therefore, I ask that the usual courtesies be extended to him.

Senator BULLOCK (Western Australia) (17:23): Thank you, Mr President. Allow me at the outset to apologise for my tardiness in delivering this first speech. Few senators can have delayed their first speech until after they had contested two elections. I can only say in my defence that, although I am to blame for many things, this was not my fault. Late though I am, it would be churlish of me to fail to congratulate the government on their election last year. That said, I need to record my dismay at some of the aspects of the approach of the government as it closes on its first year in office.

While we all want to return the budget to balance, it is simply unjust to impose the greatest burden on those who can least afford it. The government proposes that the burden should fall on the sick, particularly the frail aged, through the $7 co-payment and increasing the cost of drugs under the PBS; on the elderly, by failing to allow pensions to rise proportionate with wages and by increasing the retirement age to 70; on struggling families, by restricting the application of family tax benefit part B and abolishing the schoolkids bonus; on the unemployed, by making people under 30 wait six months before receiving unemployment benefits; on motorists, by increasing the excise on petrol; and on workers saving for retirement, by imposing a 15 per cent tax on the super contributions for those earning under $37,000 a year and deferring increases in the superannuation guarantee; and it proposes to make a profit from students by borrowing at one rate and lending to students at a higher rate and to increase the cost of tertiary education by deregulating fees. Against this, higher income earners will pay a higher marginal rate of tax. But while it is proposed that the cost to working people will be permanent the higher tax rate is only to be temporary. I am advised that Treasury analysis shows and the government knew before budget day that low-income families, who can by definition least afford it, would lose $844 a year in disposable income as result of budget measures, while a high-income family after the tax changes would lose only $517 a year. Government senators could benefit from a couple of years organising for the
shop assistants' union, to gain some understanding of the financial pressures on the average Australian family.

I have enjoyed 37 years of such experience, but before touching on that I need to acknowledge some of the many whose lives and example will have a bearing on my approach to the task ahead. Firstly, I want to pay my respect to the finest politician I have known, the late senator Brian Harradine. I first heard Brian speak in 1976 and was immediately inspired. He was a man of principle, a man of faith, a man determined to make a stand for the values he held dear. In that speech Brian focused more on his union work than on his then new role as a senator. There is no doubt that his words bore upon my decision to work with the shop assistants' union, the SDA, when that opportunity arose in the following year. In 1979 I joined Brian on the SDA national council, and for over a quarter of a century it was my privilege to spend a week with him each October in the union's national council meeting. I am proud to regard him as having been a friend. He and I slipped away for lunch in 2006 on the day he was awarded life membership of the SDA. That he was immensely moved by this award demonstrated to me the extent to which serving the interests of shop assistants had remained a priority in his life. Brian Harradine was a great Labor senator.

Secondly, I wish to acknowledge my debt to my parents, Alf and Beulah Bullock. Alf was a toolmaker who lived simply, minded his own affairs, worked with his hands and was dependent on nobody. He strove to make the world a better place by dint of the example of his life. In the 25 years I knew him, never once did I see him fall short of the standards of behaviour which he espoused. In this regard I am constantly embarrassed by my own shortcomings and my failure to be the person I know I should be. As for my mother, Beulah was the epitome of unconditional love.

I also wish to pay tribute to my old school headmaster, Mr James Wilson Hogg MBE, who personified what it was to be a gentleman and made this a condition to which to aspire, and to my old friend Associate Professor of Traditional and Modern Philosophy David Stove. David not only possessed a fine intellect and remarkable wit but was an even more impressively humble human being. He often remarked that he did not know what he would have done for a living if he had not had the opportunity to lecture in philosophy. With far more justification, I am amazed that I have been able to earn a living simply by encouraging people to treat others as they would wish to be treated—especially as this is not even an original idea.

This opportunity to live a life of service was given to me by the best person it has ever been my good fortune to know, Joe de Bruyn. Joe came to Sydney in 1977 to stop the shop assistants' union falling under communist control and to establish the NSW branch of the SDA. Joe recruited me, among many others, to that task. I intended only to stay until the branch was on its feet but ultimately stayed for 37 years. Joe became national secretary in 1978 and will retire from that position later this year. One reason I am here is that I cannot imagine working for the union without him. I have the deepest respect for Joe de Bruyn.

Under Joe's leadership the SDA became and remains Australia's largest trade union. Its membership is predominately young, female and non-full-time. That makes our segment of the workforce most vulnerable to exploitation. Workers in retail have no leverage. As individuals they are price takers. Market power lies with their employers. Without organisation, without someone to argue effectively in their interest, these workers are condemned to the bottom of the labour market. Their inability to negotiate fair wages and
conditions on their own behalf makes a nonsense of any system of individual contracts of employment that ludicrously pretends that employer and employee bargain on equal terms. Without representation the employee can only expect to receive what the employer deigns to grant them.

Yet in Australia it is often reported that our shop assistants are the best paid in the world. As a result, retail workers who would otherwise languish on rates that would condemn them to a life of subsistence can take their place as full members of society, albeit of modest means, complete with the dignity which is their birthright as human beings.

The standard of living of retail workers in Australian owes nothing to the operation of the market but to a distortion in the market. That distortion in the market is the SDA. The resultant improvement in living standards is something about which everyone associated with the union—secretary, organisers, delegates and members—can be justifiably proud. Whether it be wages, rosters, REST Superannuation, family friendly provisions, health and safety or any of the myriad protections afforded by our enterprise agreements, the SDA have done an outstanding job for our members. We have achieved this through the merit of our arguments, through honesty and commitment, always with respect for and compliance with the law and without the industrial muscle to be able to rely on industrial action. The SDA is a model of how an effective union should operate.

The union movement exists to advance the interests of working people, the majority of whom, whether unionised or not, whether they recognise it or not, owe their standard of living to the efforts of the trade union movement. Industrial work, however, can only achieve so much. That is why unions formed the Labor Party. The Labor Party is our party and indeed can only remain a labour party for so long as the union movement maintains a significant influence within it.

I have been an active member of the Labor Party since 1978 and I can assure you that the ALP is a wonderful party. The ALP is a party of tolerance. It is a broad church that tolerates and encourages members with a wide range of social and economic views. It tolerates me. It has allowed me to take a place here. It has done so for two reasons. Firstly, I have an unshakable commitment to the role of the trade union movement in advocating the interests of working people and their families, particularly the interests of the low paid. Secondly, I accept the rules. Among these, one critical rule is: always vote consistent with caucus decisions. That means you can anticipate that I will always vote in accordance with the position adopted by the Labor caucus, even when, as I expect will sometimes be the case, I disagree with it. This rule would constitute an unacceptable restriction were it not for another great attribute of the Labor Party—pragmatism. Labor understands that there are issues of principle that people of principle could not accept as being able to be determined by majority vote of caucus. That is why Labor has adopted the conscience vote. Conscience voting covers a range of issues, including for example, matters of life and death—and in these I will always advocate the right to life—and issues related to marriage. Labor had a conscience vote on no fault divorce in 1974. I am sorry I missed that division! Related questions attracted a conscience vote in 1957, 1959 and 1961. Other issues such as gambling and hotel opening hours have been held to be conscience issues in some states, so the concept is a moving feast. I am inclined to argue for the widest application possible of the operation of individual
conscience consistent with maintaining the level of solidarity necessary to advance the interests of working people.

So, in most matters at least, my vote is determined by caucus. My opinions, however, are my own and when confronted with the temptation to share them my practice has been to yield to it! Having raised the subject of tolerance and given that Senator Day seems likely to raise issues to which tolerance will be a relevant consideration, I am going to yield to the temptation to share some views. I do not need to be tolerant to support the right of people to express views with which I agree. On the contrary, tolerance is displayed in upholding the right of people to express views with which I disagree. A tolerant society is one prepared to uphold the precious right of free speech, provided such speech does not intimidate or incite the injury of others.

Today, tolerance appears in some quarters to be a misunderstood concept. The politically correct place tolerance on a pedestal among virtues but hold that it requires that all sincerely held views—provided that they are not politically incorrect—be held to be equally valid with respect to the holder of them. This is not tolerance but rather a flawed doctrine of moral equivalence. To be tolerant of your views I do not need to pretend that you are just as right as I am but rather to accept that you have a perfect right to hold a view I believe to be wrong, even if I find your view offensive.

In speculating about matters that may come before the Senate I am probably getting ahead of myself. There has been extensive public comment as to the circumstances that led me to be here with respect to which some response deserves to be given. It is tempting to give a blow by blow account of the events leading to my preselection, if only to set the record straight. The temptation to examine in depth the internal operations of the Labor Party has proven to be irresistible to some within the party and is a source of continuing fascination for the media. After consideration I have concluded that such indulgence does little to advance the interests of those whom Labor is pledged to represent and, as a result, I will restrict my response to matters related to my own circumstances and motivation.

I did not expect to be here. Six years ago next month, like my father before me, I suffered a severe heart attack. Having then recently been re-elected to a further four-year term as secretary of the SDA I believed that I had an obligation, if I was able, to serve out that term and use it to prepare a successor to take up the heavy responsibility of caring for the interests of Western Australian shop assistants. As I lay for a week in intensive care, I planned to retire on 6 April 2012, the day I would reach exactly the age at which my father died, and a day that coincidentally was his birthday.

During 2011, however, another concern began to play heavily on my mind. Considering the popularity of the then Labor government and the medium-term trend in Labor's primary vote in Western Australia I began to worry that Labor might only secure one Senate seat at the 2013 election. If that were to happen who would stand up for the interests of Western Australian shop assistants? I prayed about this. I reluctantly concluded that I had to run. After years of hard work for the union, I was looking forward to retirement. My health was uncertain. Nevertheless, I began my campaign. With everyone to whom I spoke I shared my fear that Labor might secure only one senator and I asked for their support to head Labor's ticket. When it came to the crunch, I won the support of 109 out of the 170 delegates who
voted in the preselection. This result was unprecedented, overwhelming and, at least in my view, miraculous.

Union delegates make up half of the Labor Party. I wish to record my thanks to my friends in the SDA, Stephen Price, the AWU delegates and former TWU Secretary Jim McGiveron and his delegates. These are all long-term supporters. In particular, I need to thank Dave Kelly and Carolyn Smith from United Voice, who went out on a limb in their circle by placing their faith in me. The other half of the party is comprised of branch delegates. I could not have achieved the majority I did without the support of dozens of individual branch delegates who cast their lot in my favour. I will always be indebted to you for the confidence which you showed in me.

I am naturally disappointed that my worst fears have been realised and that the re-run Senate ballot delivered only one Labor senator from Western Australia. Former senator Louise Pratt was a tireless and competent advocate of the causes which she espoused. She earned universal respect and the loyal support of a good many party members. When it came to a contest between me and Louise, I—not unnaturally—backed myself, but I share with the rest of Labor the sadness that Louise was not able to get across the line.

It remains for me now to explain what sort of a senator I hope to be. Firstly, I intend to be a senator for shop assistants. Before the election, I was asked by *The West Australian*'s Andrew Probyn whether my first loyalty was to the ALP or the union. In response, I said that I would always look at legislation from the perspective of its impact on shop assistants. If that meant I was union first, so be it. Thirty-seven years of representing shop assistants cannot be lightly set aside and nor should it be. It is this understanding of and concern for the interests of working people which I feel best equips me to take my place here.

Secondly, I intend to be a senator for Western Australia. The Senate is the states house and I intend to stand up for the interests of my state. Philosophically, this is a position with which I am most comfortable. I believe in the principle of subsidiarity and of having the responsibility for making the decisions as close to those affected by the decisions as possible, while having regard for the need for efficient implementation. In this way, decision makers are most likely to be held to account for the consequences of their decisions, and citizens are most likely to regard themselves as true participants in the democratic process with a real say over the decisions that affect them.

Achieving this will entail a reversal of the trend towards the centralisation of power in Canberra, which—in my observation—has been an almost constant feature of the last 40 years. I was most disappointed at the 2009 ALP National Conference to read in *Batellines* that our current Prime Minister advocated assuming control over the Mersey Community Hospital in Devonport. It is this meddling in state affairs, this quest for a moment of political glory, that results in the duplication of responsibility, additional cost to government and additional cost of compliance and red tape. It generally makes it harder for the voter to determine who is responsible for decisions, who to blame and who to trust to make things better. Trusting big brother in Canberra frightens me.

I will not repeat those arguments made by Senator McGrath in his first speech, in which he advocated that all health and industrial services be left to state governments, subject to the provision of adequate funding from Canberra. I not only agree with these arguments but put them to him a week before the July sitting. As to the GST, the injustice of the current
arrangements with respect to the distribution of this tax—to which Western Australians make such a significant contribution and receive so little benefit—is a disgrace which the government immediately needs to address.

More broadly, I hope to espouse the values of mainstream Australia and to give voice to my beliefs. I believe in the inherent value and dignity of every human life. I believe in a fair go and a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. I believe in capitalism and in fostering enterprise, risk and reward as a means of delivering economic growth and prosperity. I believe in a level of regulation to offer protection for the weak against the powerful and to limit the excesses of capitalism and destructive greed. I believe in the right of citizens to act collectively for their mutual benefit and particularly in their right to form unions and negotiate collectively.

I believe that the family based on marriage is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the state as the best means of caring for the next generation and providing for welfare. I believe in equality of opportunity made possible by the provision of decent health, education and social support. I believe in the responsibility of government to provide adequate defence for the nation. I believe that all Australians should stand equal before the law and the rule of law as essential to a society of ordered liberty.

I believe in democracy, the constitutional monarchy, freedom of speech and freedom of religion. I believe in Jesus Christ and the right of people of religious conviction to express their views in the public square. While these beliefs may not excite some self-proclaimed progressives, I am always dismayed when they are characterised—as they sometimes are—as extreme. I cannot accept this. On the contrary, I believe that Labor's stocks will rise proportionately as they are seen to embrace the views of what I believe to be the majority of our people.

In the course of this speech, I have given an explanation of the factors which have led me to be here and of the sorts of issues which are likely to attract my attention. I have, however, left the best to last. There would be no possibility that I would have shown the resolve required to overcome the obstacles to achieving this position without the support of my wife, Helen. For over 20 years, Helen has continued to believe that I am smarter than I really am, more competent than I really am and more capable than I really am. She remains stubbornly blind to all of the evidence to the contrary. I can only assume that this is love and I know that—in spite of all of my flaws, which are obvious to me—I love her back.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Budget

Debate resumed.

Senator STERLE (Western Australia) (17:47): I look forward to making my contribution to this matter of public importance: the Abbott government's unfair budget based on broken promises and twisted priorities. It should come as absolutely no surprise to every senator in this chamber that I spend a heap of time—in fact, not as much as I would like to—in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. The reason why I spend a lot of time in the Kimberley region of Western Australia is that it is where I cut my teeth as a truckie, making my living from 1980, and I have an absolute passion for whatever I can do to address Aboriginal disadvantage.
I was contacted about six or seven weeks ago by Sarah Cleaves, the manager of the Baya Gawiy Children and Family Centre in Fitzroy Crossing. Sarah wrote to me and then I rang Sarah back. She told me that the former Labor government constructed a number—about 38 in all—family and early childhood centres across the regions, but in the Kimberley and the Pilbara there were no less than four built: one in Roebourne, one in Fitzroy Crossing, one in Halls Creek and one in Kununurra. For a range of reasons, these centres have been absolutely successful. These centres have been successful in delivering a number of outcomes to not only Aboriginal children but also white kids who live there.

I want to walk you through, in particular, Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek. For those of you who have no idea, Fitzroy Crossing is a long way from nowhere, stuck between the towns of Derby and Kununurra, which are government centres in the Kimberley, and Halls Creek is 300 kilometres to the east of Fitzroy. Its closest town is Kununurra, 350 kilometres away. These family centres are not only creches or early childhood centres; they also offer community services and functions, and importantly they deliver the opportunity for allied health services. Aboriginal people and white people of the Kimberley can have their children in these centres during the day, but there is also the ability for speech therapists and allied health visitors to come, grab a room and address some issues that the children may have or work with the children. There are not only two-year-old tiddlers; there are also three-year-olds and four-year-olds. Also, very importantly, after-school service delivery is given and the centres do not charge for that.

We talk about the cruel cuts in the budget. The Abbott razor gang has decided that these centres will no longer be financed by the taxpayer, courtesy of the Commonwealth. These centres rely on the $900,000 to operate each year because they are not in Perth, not in Canberra and not in Melbourne; Halls Creek and Fitzroy are not Sydney. People do not have the ability to jump three or four streets into the next suburb to go to another childcare facility. These are the only facilities in town, whether it is Baya Gawiy in Fitzroy or the Little Nuggets Early Learning Centre in Halls Creek. This unfair decision by the Abbott razor gang to completely stop the funding beggars belief beyond me, and I have a passion to deliver whatever I can to close the gap. We need to do everything we can to give not only Aboriginal children but white kids as well in remote and regional Australia the opportunity for a decent education, plus the allied health benefits that come with it, plus the community benefits that flow on from these centres.

I only have a couple of minutes left and, believe me, I could go for hours on this.

Senator Edwards: Please do.

Senator STERLE: I know that comes as a shock to you, Senator Edwards. In fact, if you are lucky enough, you should join me one day and meet some Aboriginal people and some Kimberley people. It may enlighten you.

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Seselja): Senator Sterle, I would ask you to address your comments through the chair.

Senator STERLE: Through you, Mr Acting Deputy President, I have changed my mind—I don't want him anywhere near me! I was in the United States when Andrew Forrest launched his Indigenous jobs and training review, but I caught bits and pieces of it. The first thing I did when I visited Roebourne, Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek and Kununurra was to
meet with my Aboriginal mates from the corporations and Aboriginal progressive leaders in Aboriginal communities throughout the Kimberley as well as going to these early childhood and family centres. They wanted me to know very clearly that they are absolutely and completely gobsmacked by this government's decision to cease the funding of these early childhood and family centres. They wanted to make sure I knew that the first recommendation from Mr Forrest's Indigenous jobs and training review goes to early childhood.

I want to quote a couple of lines from Mr Forrest's report. He recommends:

That all governments prioritise investment in early childhood, from conception to three years of age.

That ticks the boxes in these early childhood and family centres in the Kimberley, in the Pilbara and in Roebourne. He goes on to say:

Governments must work jointly to agree on, and put into effect within 12 months, a new approach that includes progressive investment to implement integrated early childhood services and to dramatically improve attendance.

It will come as no shock to some on the other side that this is what is already being done through these early childhood and family centres in these remote and out-of-the-way centres—particularly in Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek, which are absolutely miles from anywhere, where these are the only infrastructure facility that provides this. Mr Forrest goes on to say:

In order for young children to be school-ready when they enter formal schooling, governments will need to work jointly to coordinate and deliver intensive prenatal and holistic preventative early childhood services in target communities.

But this is already being done. This is not new. I welcome Mr Forrest's report but this is what is already happening at these early childhood and family centres in the Kimberley, in Fitzroy Crossing, in Roebourne, in Halls Creek and in Kununurra.

I plead with the Abbott government: if you cease funding these vital facilities in towns like Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek, you are condemning Aboriginal kids who have no other option, and the white kids who are lucky enough to be there because their parents are working, to a life of absolute disadvantage. There is nowhere else these kids can go. I witnessed two of the cutest kids I have seen, two Aboriginal kids, who were asleep while the others were playing. They were asleep because they do not get that quality sleep at home. They rely on this very vital facility. I urge the government to overturn their decision.

Senator EDWARDS (South Australia) (17:55): It gives me great pleasure to rise and talk about this matter of public importance that Senator Moore and her Labor Party colleagues have brought to this chamber. In fact, it is 1,563 days since the then Labor government first promised a budget surplus—and they went on to deliver none. So 1,563 days ago was the first time a Labor Treasurer uttered the words: 'We will deliver a surplus.' At that time, in 2007, the Labor government inherited a set of books that were in the best condition of any inherited books of a change of government in this nation's history. And then tragically, in 2013, just six years later, we inherited the worst set of books delivered to a changing, incoming government. So how can you sit there, as shrill as ever, admonishing this government for trying to get the economic train back on its tracks?

I thank Senator Moore for the opportunity to speak on the coalition's economic action plan—a strategy that is now repairing the damage that I have just spoken about, that reckless
economic management. We are now putting in place the settings for a strong and prosperous economy. The Australian people get that. They know that we are better managers of finances and they understand. You on the other side are of course more intent on whipping up little sections of the community by not representing truthfully the actual budget position.

The damage that was going to be inflicted with the budget that was handed down by you in May 2013, prior to the election—reading the polls, reading the tea leaves, you laid a series of landmines—included a projected hit to the budget of $166 billion worth of gross debt. That damage included accumulated deficits of $123 billion. That damage included an interest bill that is now $1 billion per month, $1,000 million a month. We have heard a lot about that. Even in taking note of questions today, we heard about what could be built for $1,000 million a month. We could build a teaching hospital in Hobart. We could build half of the Adelaide Hospital and pay cash for it within two months. That is the effect of debt on this country. Sadly, Labor's damage also included 200,000 more unemployed Australians. All of this was under Labor's watch.

The coalition government is getting the budget back under control. It was elected to do this. The government has already created around $15 billion worth of savings over the forward estimates through measures implemented without the need for legislation. We continue to prosecute structural reforms which will have the biggest impact on the budget over the medium to long term. The structural reforms include the reintroduction of the fuel indexation changes, to welfare and a modest GP co-payment. In my seat of Wakefield in South Australia we know very well the legacy of Labor's economic mismanagement. Under Labor, teen unemployment rose from 19.6 per cent to 27.3 per cent. There were 55,000 more Australians unemployed after six years of Labor. The government is adjusting the relationship between government revenue and government spending, so that it is sustainable. In other words, as businesses large and small know, as do families across this nation, we are ensuring that Australia lives within its means.

Whether they run businesses or manage family budgets, Australians know that money coming in must not be exceeded by money going out. This is a concept which completely escapes those opposite. Instead, we are engaged in this cheap, political exchange with the most serious of issues. This is about the right of future Australians, indeed our own children, to enjoy a standard of living which is not inhibited by having to service their parents' debt. We cannot lay down on mismanagement of our nation's economic finances.

On the basis of Senator Moore's question, it would appear Senator Moore and her party must hold a very loose grip on the concept of fairness. While it is hardly fair to knowingly saddle our children with our debt, the debt of living beyond our means, it is hardly fair for their children to inherit the interest bill. It just would not be fair for the government to maintain Labor's status quo, which is why we are moving and why Australians are growing to understand the reason we are going to fix this nation's structural economic woes.

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Bernardi): I advise honourable senators that the time allotted for this debate has expired.
PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Senator DASTYARI (New South Wales) (18:02): I seek leave to make a personal explanation.

Leave granted.

Senator DASTYARI: I rise to give a personal explanation relating to comments attributed to me by Kate McClymont and Linton Besser on page 273 of their book *He who must be Obeid*. I apologise unreservedly to both Kate McClymont and Kristina Keneally for wrongly leaving the impression that Kristina's relationship with Mr Eddie Obeid was anything other than the normal interaction between a party leader and a backbench MP. I note the strong statements Kristina Keneally has made in many forums reiterating her shock and dismay at the various revelations about the conduct of Mr Obeid and others.

DOCUMENTS

Tabling

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Bernardi) (18:03): Pursuant to standing orders 38 and 166, I present documents listed on today's Order of Business at item 15 presented since the Senate last met.

The list read as follows—

Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme—Progress report—Implementation and administration of the National Disability Insurance Scheme. [Received 29 July 2014]

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee—Report—Implications of the restriction on the use of fenthion on Australia's horticultural industry. [Received 31 July 2014]

Community Affairs References Committee—Interim report—Out-of-pocket costs in Australian healthcare. [Received 8 August 2014]

Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee—Report—Migration Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 1) 2014 [Provisions]. [Received 21 August 2014]

Community Affairs References Committee—Report—Out-of-pocket costs in Australian healthcare. [Received 22 August 2014]

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee—Report—Review of the citrus industry in Australia, dated December 2013. [Received 4 August 2014]

Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee—Report—Australia's overseas aid and development assistance program, dated March 2014. [Received 12 August 2014]

National Broadband Network—Select Committee—Interim report, dated July 2014. [Received 13 August 2014]

Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee—Report—Framework and operation of subclass 457 visas, Enterprise Migration Agreements and Regional Migration Agreements, dated June 2013. [Received 20 August 2014]

Department of Defence—Special purpose flights—Schedule for the period 1 July to 31 December 2013. [Received 18 July 2014]

Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency—Report for 2013-14. [Received 29 July 2014]

National Broadband Network Public Policy Processes—Independent audit—Report for the period April 2008 to May 2010. [Received 4 August 2014]

Gene Technology Regulator—Quarterly report for the period 1 January to 31 March 2014. [Received 13 August 2014]

National Broadband Network Co Limited—Corporate governance review, dated 8 August 2014. [Received 13 August 2014]

Fair Work (Building Industry) Act 2012—Commonwealth Ombudsman’s report for 2013-14 on reviews conducted under Division 3. [Received 22 August 2014]

Administration—Australian Defence Force Boots Tender—Order for Production of Documents—Letter to the President of the Senate from the Minister for Defence (Senator Johnston), dated 18 July 2014. [Received 18 July 2014]

Ordered that the committee reports be printed.

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Bernardi) (18:03): In accordance with the usual practice and with the concurrence of the Senate, government responses will be incorporated in Hansard.

The responses read as follows—

Australian Government response to the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee report:

Review of the Citrus Industry in Australia August 2014

Review of the citrus industry in Australia

Report of the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee

Government Response

The Australian Government welcomes the Committee’s report on the Review of the citrus industry in Australia and would like to thank the Committee for the time and effort it has put into the inquiry.

Response to recommendations

Recommendation 1

2.88 The committee recommends that the industry review its structure and introduce changes that provide all growers and other stakeholders with a more democratic and regionally representative peak industry body, finding an equitable balance between the need for industry ‘presence’ in terms of production volumes, and allowing small participants a meaningful say in the direction of their industry, and to provide for consistency on the selection of regional advisory bodies.

The Government notes the recommendation

The government recognises the importance of having representative peak industry bodies that provide effective industry leadership. The structure of peak industry bodies and their regional representation is a matter for industry.
Recommendation 2

2.89 The committee recommends that the industry work with DAFF and the LRS towards a compulsory registration system for growers and develop a central database of growers— with data including their locations, contact details, area under citrus cultivation, and varieties and volumes of citrus grown—to facilitate:

- industry planning
- industry policy development
- communication of research outcomes funded by levy payers; and
- communication with growers in biosecurity emergencies

and that this database be in the custody of a body independent from the current representative bodies (such as DAFF) until such a time as issues of equitable national and regional representation are resolved.

The Government does not agree to the recommendation

The Committee has suggested a compulsory registration scheme and central database of citrus growers would serve a number of purposes. The government considers it would be appropriate for these to be addressed through other means.

Industry planning and policy development are industry responsibilities, therefore, industry representative bodies (IRBs) should be responsible for facilitating communication with citrus growers. It is appropriate that engagement in planning and policy development is voluntary. It is likely that IRBs already hold certain information about growers who are members of the bodies. IRBs undertaking planning and policy development activities can utilise other means, such as industry events or media, to encourage citrus growers to engage in these activities if they choose to do so.

Levy funded research services are provided to the industry by Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL). HAL is able to use research levy funds to facilitate the dissemination, adoption and commercialisation of research outcomes to levy payers. HAL prepares an annual report on its activities for the citrus industry and interested growers can also obtain reports about the outcomes from individual projects.

Communication in biosecurity emergencies can be achieved through existing means such as grower organisations or the media.

The existing citrus levy legislative framework cannot be used to collect or distribute the suggested data. In most instances, levy and other relevant information are collected from an intermediary, such as a market agent or exporter, and there is no direct contact with growers. Levy related information collected by the Department of Agriculture (formerly DAFF) does not include information relating to individual growers. The establishment and maintenance of a compulsory grower database would require new legislation and new funding from appropriate sources. The custody of such a database and its maintenance should be the responsibility of industry. Compulsory registration would increase the regulatory burden on the citrus industry.

Recommendation 3

2.90 The committee recommends that the industry works with HAL to address apparent conflicts of interest by having directors and/or employees of CAL on the Citrus IAC and IAC Technical Reference Committee.

The Government notes this recommendation

The government notes the progress that Citrus Australia Limited (CAL) and Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL) have made on this issue including a revised IAC membership structure of nine members, six of whom are not PIB directors, executive officers or employees of CAL, and the appointment of an independent governance officer to the citrus IAC.
The Deed of Agreement 2010–2014 (the Deed) between HAL and the Commonwealth requires an independent review of the performance of HAL. The Deed contains the standard terms of reference for the performance review and provides for additional matters to be included as required. Additional matters that were considered as part of the HAL performance review, which reported on 9 May 2014, include the HAL model of industry service delivery, and the constitution that underpins the model, against the benchmark of good governance under the Deed. The response to Recommendation 4 (see below) details the standard terms of reference and the additional matters that were addressed by the review.

**Recommendation 4**

2.91 The committee recommends that, as part of its review, HAL considers a membership structure which removes potential conflicts of interest in the allocation of funds to research projects.

The Government agrees to the recommendation

The independent performance review of HAL considered the structure of the horticulture levy system and the HAL model of industry service delivery. This included HAL’s membership structure. The performance review report was released on 9 May 2014. The report contains nine recommendations, including that HAL transition from its current membership structure, in which horticulture peak industry bodies are the company’s members, to a new membership structure, in which farmer levy payers are the company’s members. The government has received the report and acknowledged that it meets the review’s terms of reference. The government is considering the review findings and recommendations. The terms of reference for the performance review were:

**Standard review**

The Performance Review shall cover:

1. The performance of HAL in meeting its obligations under the Deed as the Industry Services Body for the provision of marketing and research and development services to the industry
2. HAL’s implementation of strategic, annual operational, risk management, fraud control and intellectual property plans and its effectiveness in meeting the priorities, targets and budgets set out in those plans
3. The efficiency with which HAL carried out those plans
4. The delivery of the benefits to the industry and the community in general as foreshadowed by those plans

**Additional matters**

In addition, the Performance Review shall cover:

5. The HAL model of industry service delivery and its underpinning in the Constitution against the benchmark of good governance practice under cl 4.1 of the Deed, including but not limited to:

(a) HAL’s membership whereby PIBs, rather than individual levy payers, are the members as is the case with other industry-owned RDCs.

(b) The regulation of PIBs and other industry representative bodies under the HAL model; the nature and transparency of their direct and indirect funding arrangements with HAL; and their accountability to their own members and levy payers for their performance in consulting with levy payers and in spending industry and government funds, including the delivery of planned outcomes.

(c) The operation of the IACs, including independence from the PIB/IRB and the extent and effectiveness of control by the HAL Board.

(d) The influence of PIBs/IRBs on decision-making by HAL’s Board, management and the IACs.

(e) The capacity of the HAL model to deliver services in an efficient, effective and transparent manner to provide value for money to levy payers and corporate members.
(f) Identifying alternative models to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of HAL's service delivery, transparency and accountability in HAL's funding arrangements.

6. The efficiency of the levy structure for the horticulture sector (in which many individual commodities maintain separate independent levy rates and collection mechanisms) and the process by which levies are conceived, implemented, collected and expensed.

Recommendation 5
3.120 The committee believes that DAFF needs to be more responsive to the needs, and more understanding of the capabilities, of the industry. Therefore, the committee recommends that, in its negotiations for market access on behalf of the Australian citrus industry, DAFF consult more closely with industry across the supply chain regarding protocols and work to better align protocols in new or emerging markets with existing/established markets.

The Government agrees to the recommendation

The Department of Agriculture (formerly DAFF) has been actively pursuing improvements to the consultation arrangements with Australian horticultural industries, particularly in terms of the processes to identify priority projects for market access negotiation.

There have been considerable achievements to date with the movement to more informed (evidence-based) analysis of market access applications and the strengthening of the engagement of industry in the strategies underpinning Australia's approaches, and the subsequent negotiations, to gain, improve or maintain access. The primary forum for advice to the department regarding the horticultural sector's priorities for market access is the Office of Horticultural Market Access, which is an industry project, funded by Horticulture Australia Limited from industry levies and matching Australian Government payments.

In addition, with the formulation of the Horticulture Export Industry Consultative Committee (HEICC), the citrus industry has the opportunity to assist with the establishment of process reforms and standards to further promote efficiencies in the export pathways.

Under HEICC the department has established a program to assist industry evaluate its ambitions for the markets, including those technical and policy hurdles which it faces in both Australia and in their targeted markets. The department encourages the citrus industry through CAL to be an active participant in these processes with its peers.

The previous recommendations that relate to the capacity of CAL to consolidate the views of the sector are also highly relevant to this recommendation. The citrus sector is extremely diverse with differing fruits, production systems, scale, pest health status, market sectors, etc. A well-structured representative system to bring together the competing interests of the sector would allow the industry to more effectively participate in the existing consultation processes on market access.

Recommendation 6
3.121 The committee recommends that the Australian Government put more resources into finalising trade agreements with export destinations for Australian citrus, particularly those with considerable potential such as China.

The Government agrees in principle to the recommendation

The government is committed to securing high-quality, comprehensive trade agreements that produce tangible benefits for agricultural producers and exporters, including the citrus industry.

The government committed at the 2013 federal election to increase resources from within the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to fast-track the conclusion of free trade agreements. Senior Australian government ministers and officials intensified discussions with their Chinese, Korean, Japanese and Trans-Pacific Partnership counterparts and achieved significant progress, including the conclusion of bilateral trade agreements with Korea and Japan.
The Korea-Australia free trade agreement, once it comes into force, will deliver many benefits to Australian industries and exporters, including the citrus industry. It is a strong and liberalising agreement for agriculture that protects and promotes our competitive position in the Korean market. It will secure improved market access through elimination of very high tariffs on a wide range of exports, including oranges, lemons, limes, grapefruit and fruit juices. The agreement includes strong outcomes on citrus which will support Australia's competitive position in the Korean market, including for oranges, Australia's largest citrus export. Details of the agreement are available at http://www.dfat.gov.au/fta/kafta/.

The Japan-Australia Economic Partnership Agreement will provide a liberalising outcome for fruits and juices, including citrus, resulting in tariff elimination on the vast majority of Australian horticulture exports to Japan. The agreement is currently undergoing legal verification and will become public once this process has been completed.

**Recommendation 7**  
3.122 The committee recommends that the Australian Government encourage small and emerging citrus exporters by addressing the costs of compliance and establishment registration charges.

**The Government notes the recommendation**

The Government will provide $15.0 million over four years to support small exporters in sectors where there are specific export certification registration charges.

Funding will be provided in 2014-15 to provide eligible small exporters with a rebate of 50 per cent of their export certification registration costs, up to a maximum of $5,000. From 2015-16, funding will be provided for projects that directly benefit small exporters, particularly projects to improve market access. The Government will consult the small exporter sectors on the projects to be considered. This measure delivers on the Government's election commitment.

In accordance with the Government's cost recovery policy, the Department of Agriculture is obliged to recover the costs of providing export certification and inspection services. The horticulture export program within the department provided services that support the A$197.2 million value of exports from the citrus sector in 2013.

The charges currently paid by registered export establishment enables the department to undertake a number of vital services for citrus exporters including:

- management of export conditions, publishing and maintenance of export cases on the Manual of Importing Country Requirements (MICO), development of operational workplans that outline the requirements to meet importing country protocols;
- export accreditation and audit of the export pathway from growers and packhouses through to treatment facilities and registered establishments to ensure compliance with importing country requirements;
- facilitate operational audits and inspectors from importing countries;
- liaison and communication with peak bodies to facilitate export compliance and process operational changes;
- liaison with importing countries to resolve phytosanitary and inspection/certification issues;
- contribution to market access negotiations on operational issues, including harmonisation of interstate trade;
- assist in the selection of market priorities, with a focus on market readiness;
- technical/operational advice to authorised officers; and
- secretariat for the HEICC, which has representatives from the major horticulture export industries.
Recommendation 8
3.123 The committee recommends that the Australian Government take steps to discourage the dumping of imported fruit juice concentrate, and reverse the onus of proof onto importing countries to ensure local Australian citrus growers are not discouraged from bringing cases to the relevant authorities—for example, the Anti-Dumping Commission.

The Government notes the recommendation
The government’s election commitments include proposals to strengthen Australia’s anti-dumping regime. These commitments are aimed at ensuring Australian industries and businesses have access to a more efficient and more effective anti-dumping regime. Any changes would need to be mindful of Australia’s international obligations, including relevant WTO agreements.

Recommendation 9
4.116 The committee recommends that the Commonwealth and state governments continue to support the National Fruit Fly Strategy with a view to implementing key recommendations which would reduce the cost and effort to growers and industry of managing fruit fly.

The Government agrees in principle to the recommendation
The government has long supported the development and implementation of the National Fruit Fly Strategy (NFFS) and the NFFS Implementation Plan. The government provided both financial and in-kind contributions to develop the NFFS and the Implementation Plan. This includes direct funding towards the 15 key projects identified in the NFFS Implementation Plan that are designed to facilitate an enhanced and sustainable national approach to the management of economically important fruit flies. Successful implementation of the NFFS is contingent on a commitment from industries that produce fruit fly host goods to identify, fund, and undertake research that contributes to the understanding of fruit fly biology and management relevant to their sector. The government has committed to support these activities, both through matching industry funding for qualifying research and development activities undertaken through Horticulture Australia Limited, and through the provision of technical expertise and experience. The government has also committed funding to support the National Fruit Fly Strategy Advisory Committee, which will involve governments and industry, to oversee the implementation of the National Fruit Fly Strategy.

Recommendation 10
4.117 The committee recommends that, in conjunction and consultation with horticultural industries, the Australian Government consider the introduction of a national fruit fly levy across all industries associated with host material, to help fund the implementation of the National Fruit Fly Strategy.

The Government notes the recommendation
The government agrees that all industries that are affected by, or that contribute to fruit fly pressures through the production of host material should contribute to the national efforts to develop and implement effective management practices.

Many industries already have in place levy arrangements for responses under the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed (EPPRD), as well as research and development levies. The Australian Government will consider any request by industries to investigate whether these levies could also be applied to broader biosecurity issues, including fruit fly, or whether a specific fruit fly levy is a more appropriate option. For this approach to be successful, fruit fly affected industries would need to agree to such a levy and set them at a level which ensures sustainable funding.
Recommendation 11

4.118 The Committee recommends that an integrated approach be taken to the management of fruit fly at both a national and regional level, to ensure that regionally-specific fruit fly issues (for example, South Australia being fruit fly free, New South Wales and Victoria dealing with Queensland fruit fly and Western Australia dealing with Mediterranean fruit fly) are managed appropriately.

The Government agrees to the recommendation

As noted in submissions and in evidence provided to the committee by a number of parties, the management of fruit flies as a pest of horticulture has local, regional and national aspects. Factors including local and regional conditions and host crop varieties can influence the strategies required for successful management of fruit fly.

Experience in managing fruit flies as well as research capacity for investigating and developing new management strategies is spread between industries, private enterprises and governments. The state and territory governments also have a key role in managing the regulatory systems that support Australia’s favourable fruit fly status. It is because of this that the Australian Government has provided support to the National Fruit Fly Strategy Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee will bring together industry representatives, researchers, and quarantine regulators to identify key management and research needs, and assist in communicating and implementing a co-ordinated approach with industry and other regional and state government organisations. Strong industry representation on the Advisory Committee will be critical for its success and to ensure that future management strategies for fruit fly include components relevant to all affected industries and regions.

Recommendation 12

4.119 The committee recommends that the Australian citrus industry and DAFF take immediate steps to ensure updated contingency plans are in place to effectively manage incursions of diseases such as HLB (and its vectors) and citrus canker, and ensuring this is adequately funded.

The Government notes the recommendation

The development of contingency plans is a step within the broader industry biosecurity process that includes the development of crop specific Industry Biosecurity Plans, Pest Fact Sheets and Diagnostic Protocols. Recognising that biosecurity is a shared responsibility, these are developed as a primary function of Plant Health Australia, a non-profit company that is a tripartite partnership between the Government, state and territory governments, and potentially affected plant industries.

Plant Health Australia has developed the Australian Emergency Plant Pest Response Plan, PLANTPLAN, which is the current preparedness and response guidelines for any incursion of an exotic pest or disease that would affect a plant industry. PLANTPLAN is constantly reviewed and regularly updated. PLANTPLAN can be applied to any plant pest incursion and is supported by nationally developed and agreed diagnostic protocols and response procedures.

The development of pest-specific contingency plans provides additional information to supplement PLANTPLAN, but does not supersede it. In the case of the pest-specific contingency plan for Huanglongbing and its vectors, it was developed as a specified project using citrus industry levies and funded through Horticulture Australia Limited with matching funding from the Australian Government. Should the citrus industry consider that the current contingency plan requires updating or that any pertinent matters are not sufficiently addressed in the plan or through other resources, the industry should seek to address this through Plant Health Australia. The government would support any necessary efforts to update industry biosecurity plans and contingency plans, including support by matching funding through Horticulture Australia Limited projects and provision of technical expertise where required.
Additional Comments By Nick Xenophon

**Recommendation 1**
The current 'user pays' approach for small and emerging agricultural exporters be scrapped and replaced with a sliding scale in order to encourage growth in export markets, particularly niche markets.

**The Government notes the recommendation which is aligned to recommendation 7 above**

**Recommendation 2**
That competition laws be amended to provide for a divestiture power to break up a company where there is evidence of anti-competitive conduct, including the imposition of unreasonable contract terms.

**The Government notes the recommendation**
The government considers it important that Australia's competition laws remain robust and effective into the future. To achieve this, the government has announced a 'root and branch' review of the competition framework.

The review will be an independent examination of how the competition framework is working, whether it is keeping up with emerging trends, and looking beyond the competition framework to identify impediments to competition with the goal of improving the living standards of all Australians.

As part of this, the review will have capacity to consider how key markets, such as groceries, have evolved with a view to promoting efficient, competitive outcomes and fair business dealings.

**Recommendation 3**
The Federal Government initiate an overhaul of Australia's country of origin food labelling laws to provide truthful and useful information to consumers.

**The Government notes the recommendation**
The government is aware that Australian consumers want clear and accurate labelling to help them identify and buy food grown and processed in Australia. The government is also aware that country of origin claims on food labels may be confusing to consumers. However, any changes to current laws would require agreement at the Commonwealth, state and territory levels. As a first step in developing clearer country of origin labelling for food, a government working group is considering activities to improve consumer and industry understanding of country of origin labelling and other actions to develop clearer labelling options.

The Department of Industry and the Treasury co-chair this inter-agency working group. It is tasked with implementing the Council of Australian Governments Legislative and Governance Forum on Food Regulation response to **Recommendation 42** of the Review of Food Labelling Law and Policy (2011). That response effectively requested agencies to review and clarify guidance material on country of origin labelling and, if necessary, conduct an education campaign. Members of the working group include the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), Department of Agriculture, Department of Health, Food Standards Australia New Zealand, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Australian Customs and Border Protection Service.

To address possible consumer confusion, the ACCC has released a fact sheet titled 'Where does your food come from'. This factsheet explains to consumers how they can support Australian primary producers and Australian food manufacturing jobs. Revised industry guidelines, 'Country of origin claims and the Australian Consumer Law', were also released by the ACCC on 15 April 2014. These guidelines will help businesses to understand and comply with the Australian Consumer Law provisions relating to country of origin claims.
In addition, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture and Industry is undertaking an inquiry into country of origin labelling for food. The Committee is looking into the current system to see if it can identify any gaps or compliance limitations, or any improvements that could be made.

**Recommendation 4**
Amend the Customs Act 1901 reverse the onus of proof so as to require an importer to prove the imported goods have not been dumped or subsidized for export.

*TThe Government does not agree to the recommendation*

The government's election commitments include proposals to strengthen Australia's anti-dumping regime. These commitments are aimed at ensuring Australian industries and businesses have access to a more efficient and more effective anti-dumping regime. Any changes would need to be mindful of Australia's international obligations, including relevant WTO agreements.

**Recommendation 5**
That imported juice of concentrate containing any level of carbendazim be banned.

*TThe Government does not agree to the recommendation*

Food Standards Australia New Zealand assessed the safety of carbendazim residues in orange juice in 2012 and recommended amending the maximum residue limit from 10 mg/kg to 0.2 mg/kg. The Legislative and Governance Forum on Food Regulation subsequently approved the inclusion of this lower MRL in the Australian New Zealand Food Standards Code. Carbendazim is an approved agricultural chemical used safely on a range of food commodities in Australia.

From 18 January 2014, importers are expected to source orange juice and orange juice concentrate that comply with the new requirements. The Department of Agriculture tests imported orange juice for compliance with the food standards code and publicly reports on the results of the testing program. State and territory jurisdictions have responsibility for ensuring that all food, including imported food, meets the requirements of the food standards code at the point of sale.

*Australian Government response to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee report:
Australia's overseas aid and development assistance program
August 2014*

**Recommendation 1**
The committee recommends the Australian Government release an overarching policy framework for Australia's aid program as part of the May 2014 budget process.

*Agreed.*


**Recommendation 2**
The committee recommends the Australian Government undertake a white paper process to refine the long term strategic objectives of Australia's aid program and identify measures to achieve these objectives.

*Not agreed.*

The Government has established the strategic long term objectives for Australia's aid program in a new development policy, *Australian aid: promoting prosperity, reducing poverty, enhancing stability*, which was released on 18 June 2014.
The Government's new performance framework, Making Performance Count: enhancing the accountability and effectiveness of Australian aid, was released with the new development policy on 18 June 2014 and provides assurance that the aid program is effective, achieving results and value-for-money. A key principle underlying the framework is that funding at all levels of the aid program will be informed by progress against a rigorous set of targets and performance benchmarks.

Recommendation 3
The committee recommends the Australian Government maintain its commitment to increase the funding by the Consumer Price Index in 2014-15.
Not agreed.

The Government has stabilised the Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget at around $5 billion ($5.032 billion in 2014-15), with projected growth from 2016-17 in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

Recommendation 4
The committee recommends that, in future years, the Australian Government ensures that Australia's ODA/GNI ratio does not fall below 0.33.
Not agreed.

As stated prior to the election, the Government will not commit to a prescriptive, time-bound target for ODA as a percentage of GNI. The Government has stabilised the ODA budget at around $5 billion, with projected growth from 2016-17 in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

Recommendation 5
The committee recommends the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs develop a bipartisan agreement for the long term funding of Australia's overseas aid and development assistance program to achieve the ODA/GNI target of 0.5 per cent by 2024-25.
Not agreed.

As stated prior to the election, the Government will not commit to a prescriptive, time-bound target for ODA as a percentage of GNI. The Treasury's Submission to the Inquiry examined the problems for budgeting caused by targeting a specific ODA percentage of GNI. The Government is committed to deliver an aid program that is predictable, affordable and effective. Setting an ODA/GNI target to be achieved by a specific date is neither predictable nor necessarily affordable, given significant fluctuations in projected GNI.

Recommendation 6
The committee recommends that the Australian Government promote the interests of developing countries in the Asia Pacific in the post-2015 development agenda discussions.
Agreed.

The geographic focus of Australia's aid program is the Indo-Pacific region. We have many shared interests with the developing countries of that region. We will promote those shared interests in the post-2015 development agenda discussions in accordance with the recently released new development policy, Australian aid: promoting prosperity, reducing poverty, enhancing stability.

Recommendation 7
The committee recommends that the Australian Government reverse funding cuts made to Pacific nations in the 2014-15 budget.
Not agreed.

The Government will maintain flexibility in its budget decisions.
The 2014-15 Budget estimate for total ODA for the Pacific is $1,152.7 million, compared with the estimated outcome for 2013-14 of $1,062.6 million.

**Recommendation 8**
The committee recommends that the Australian Government reintroduce and support legislation to enable Australia to become a member of the African Development Bank Group.

*Not agreed.*
The Government has advised the President of the African Development Bank Group that it will not pursue Australian membership of the African Development Bank and the African Development Fund. This decision was taken in the context of a tight fiscal environment and contributes to savings from the aid budget. The geographic focus of the Australia's aid program is the Indo-Pacific region. However, Australia will continue to help sub-Saharan Africa achieve its development priorities, focusing on support for productive sectors which can contribute to economic growth and poverty reduction.

Recommendations 9 and 10
The committee recommends that the Australian Government renew the Medical Research Strategy and expand funding for the program to $50 million per annum.

The committee recommends that the Medical Research Strategy should:
- have a broader remit to include all research relevant to the major health challenges in developing countries, including early and product development and operational/field research; and
- continue to have priority focus on product development partnerships.

*Not agreed.*
The Government's new development policy, *Australian aid: promoting prosperity, reducing poverty, enhancing stability,* provides strategic direction for medical research in the context of the aid program. In 2014-15, the Government has committed $30 million of the aid program to health and medical research. This is the most we have ever invested in this area in a single year.

**Recommendation 11**
The committee recommends that the Australian Government establish an interdepartmental taskforce, chaired by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, to develop a global health research and development strategy.

*Not agreed.*
The Government's new development policy, *Australian aid: promoting prosperity, reducing poverty, enhancing stability,* provides strategic direction for medical research in the context of the aid program. The Department will continue to consult with other interested agencies, both within and outside the public sector, in relation to global health development issues, including research.

**Recommendation 12**
The committee recommends that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade investigate creating a mechanism to track gender issues across the Australian aid program and budget.

*Agreed.*
Mechanisms are already in place to track gender issues across the Australian aid program. This includes tracking gender equality expenditure and program performance on gender equality. The Government's new performance framework, *Making Performance Count: enhancing the accountability and effectiveness of Australian aid,* was issued on 18 June 2014. The new performance framework contains a target to track the effectiveness of all investments in addressing gender issues.
Recommendation 13
The committee recommends that the Australian Government restore an appropriate level of funding for climate change mitigation and environmental protection programs within the aid budget.

Not agreed.

Programs encompassing climate change mitigation and environmental protection will continue to be part of the delivery of Australia's aid programs.

Recommendation 14
The committee recommends that the Australian Government commit to allocating 10 per cent of the aid budget for emergency and humanitarian response.

Not agreed.

Australia will continue to uphold its global responsibilities, including by maintaining a strong humanitarian program. Of the total development assistance budget, $338.6 million will be allocated for humanitarian, emergencies and refugee expenditure in 2014-15, an increase of almost 30% from 2013-14, with further funding allocated to assist communities to reduce disaster risk. This includes an increase of the Emergency Fund by 30%, from $90 million to $120 million, to enable Australia to respond swiftly and effectively to global emergencies and emerging priorities.

Recommendation 15
The committee recommends that the Australian Government re-establish the AusAID NGO Cooperation Program Innovation Fund.

Noted.

The Government will spend $140 million over the next four years on an innovation fund.

Australia will become a founding partner in the Global Development Innovation Ventures program, an international program supported by the US and the UK aid agencies, to identify, test and scale up successful new approaches to development.

DFAT will establish an Innovation Hub to use partnerships, personnel exchanges and secondments to promote creative, innovative and new solutions to development challenges.

Recommendation 16
The committee recommends that the Australian Government join the Global Development Innovation Venture.

Agreed.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs announced on 18 June 2014 that Australia intends to become a founding partner in the Global Development Innovation Ventures program.

Recommendation 17
The committee recommends that the Australian National Audit Office consider the procurement of aid-related technical services by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Noted.

The Auditor-General is an independent officer of the Parliament. In determining the forward Audit Work Program for the Australian National Audit Office, the Auditor-General makes an independent assessment of his audit priorities, taking into account the priorities of the Parliament, and available resources.

Recommendation 18
The committee recommends that the Australian National Audit Office undertake a review of the Department of the Foreign Affairs and Trade to ensure it has retained and maintained the key skills, processes and specialist staff necessary to effectively administer Australia's aid program.
The Auditor-General is an independent officer of the Parliament. In determining the forward Audit Work Program for the Australian National Audit Office, the Auditor-General makes an independent assessment of his audit priorities, taking into account the priorities of the Parliament, and available resources.

Recommendation 19
The committee recommends the Australian Government consider changing the title of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to reflect the importance of its overseas aid and development assistance responsibilities.

Noted.

Recommendation 20
The committee recommends that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade recommit to the Transparency Charter and continue to increase the amount of publicly available information regarding Australia's aid program.

Noted.

The Government is committed to high standards of transparency and accountability in the management of the Australian aid program. The Government's new development policy, *Australian aid: promoting prosperity, reducing poverty, enhancing stability*, outlines this commitment and replaces the previous Transparency Charter.

Recommendation 21
The committee recommends that the Australian Government develop aid benchmarks which can be applied consistently to all agencies which provide official development assistance.

Agreed.

The Government's new performance framework for the Australian aid program, *Making Performance Count: enhancing the accountability and effectiveness of Australian aid*, provides additional assurance that the aid program is effective, achieving results and value-for-money. The new performance framework operates across all levels of the aid program. The performance of Australian aid delivered by Australian Government departments with significant official development assistance expenditure will be assessed and reported on annually.

Recommendation 22
The committee recommends the Australian Government continue to consult closely with aid sector stakeholders in the development and implementation of aid benchmarks.

Agreed.

Stakeholders were consulted in the development of the new performance framework for the Australian aid program, *Making Performance Count: enhancing the accountability and effectiveness of Australian aid*, issued on 18 June 2014. This included more than 40 consultations with over 70 stakeholders and experts in Australia and overseas, and 48 written submissions. The Government will continue to consult with stakeholders on the implementation of the new performance framework.

Recommendation 23
The committee recommends the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade expedite the provision of detailed information to stakeholders regarding which programs and areas will be impacted by the aid budget funding changes announced on 18 January 2014.

Agreed.

Information on the implementation of the revised budget for 2013-14 is available on the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) website.
Recommendation 24
The committee recommends that the Australian Government should refrain from mid-year changes to aid funding allocations in the future unless they increase available funding.

Not agreed.

We are committed to administering a responsible, affordable and sustainable aid program and recognise that certainty of aid funding is important to aid effectiveness.

Dissenting report by Coalition Senators

Recommendation 1
The Coalition Government deliver aid against its stated priority objectives, including to promote Australia's national interests through contributing to economic growth and poverty reduction.

Agreed.

The Government's new development policy, Australian aid: promoting prosperity, reducing poverty, enhancing stability, was released on 18 June 2014. The purpose of the aid program is to promote Australia's national interests by contributing to international economic growth and poverty reduction.

Recommendation 2

Agreed.


Recommendation 3
The Government further strengthen the aid program's fraud management controls and systems.

Agreed.

The Government has committed to ensuring that the aid program is effective, achieving results and value-for-money, including through robust internal and external evaluation, audit, risk management and fraud prevention systems. Under the Government's new performance framework, Making Performance Count: enhancing the accountability and effectiveness of Australian aid, released on 18 June 2014, major country and regional programs will be required to develop and implement new fraud and anti-corruption strategies.

Dissenting report by the Australian Greens

Recommendation 1
Tied aid programs should not be considered as Official Development Assistance. Overseas development should contribute to poverty alleviation and should not be used as corporate welfare for Australian companies.

Noted.

Australia's aid program was untied in 2006. The Government's objective for the aid program is to promote Australia's national interests through contributing to economic growth and poverty reduction. The promotion of economic growth is not a corporate welfare mechanism.

Recommendation 2
Aid should not be linked to Australia's punitive refugee policy either through spending in Australia or overseas, and aid should not be used as a means of leverage deals with neighbouring countries.
Australia does not have a punitive refugee policy. Australia is one of the top three resettlement countries in the world. Resettlement is offered to people found to be refugees through its Humanitarian Programme. Australia also actively contributes to international refugee protection, by working with UNHCR and the international community to ensure comprehensive, integrated responses to refugee situations.

Assistance to refugees in developing countries is reportable as ODA, as is expenditure for the sustenance of refugees in donor countries during the first twelve months of their stay. Australia's bilateral development programs are agreed in consultation with developing country partners.

Recommendation 3
The Government should maintain its commitment to the MDGs by ensuring all aid policy meets MDG guidelines.

Noted.

Recommendation 4
The Government should end programs and policies that do not meet the objectives of the MDGs such as the Mining for Development Initiative.

Not agreed.

Recommendation 5
Environmental aid, including climate change adaptation funds should be added to the aid program as priority areas.

Not agreed.

Recommendation 6
The Government should reassess the aid for trade policy and cease the use of aid as a bargaining chip to further these negotiations.

Not agreed.

Recommendation 7
A significantly increased level of scrutiny and accountability needs to be applied to where the Government partners with the private sector.

Not agreed.

All partners involved in the delivery of Australia's aid program, including the private sector, are held accountable for their performance. The Australian Government will work with the most effective and
innovative delivery partners to achieve its international objectives with a particular focus on value-for-money and achieving results against each investment. As part of the aid program's new performance framework, Making Performance Count: enhancing the accountability and effectiveness of Australian aid, released on 18 June 2014, the systems used to assess the performance of the aid program's key delivery partners will be strengthened to better link performance and funding.

Recommendation 8
The Government to more regularly release information about the aid program and increase the transparency about decision making processes.

Noted.
The Government is committed to high standards of transparency and accountability in the management of the Australian aid program. The Government's new development policy, Australian aid: promoting prosperity, reducing poverty, enhancing stability, outlines this commitment.

Australian Government response to the Senate Select Committee on the National Broadband Network Interim Report July 2014
INTRODUCTION
On 14 November 2013, the Senate established a Select Committee on the National Broadband Network (the Committee) to inquire into and report on the Australian Government's (the Government) reviews of the National Broadband Network (NBN) and the governance of NBN Co Limited (NBN Co).
The Committee's Terms of Reference require it to report to the Parliament with particular reference to:
a. the establishment of the Government's Strategic Review of the NBN;
b. the outcome of the Strategic Review of the NBN;
c. the establishment and findings of the Government's cost benefit analysis;
d. the conduct and findings of the Government survey of the availability of broadband in Australia; and

e. any related matter.
On 26 March 2014, the Committee tabled its first interim report. The report made five recommendations and included a dissenting report that rejected the majority report.

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT RESPONSE
The Australian Government has considered the Committee's interim report and provides the following response to the recommendations.

Recommendation 1
NBN Co should submit a revised Strategic Review that provides transparent assumptions and corrects deficiencies and distortions. The revised Strategic Review should provide details of only two scenarios:
- An optimised FTTP rollout that adopts the technology changes and other management initiatives outlined in Scenario 2, together with a plan to address identified industry capacity constraints; and
- A revised Multi-Technology Mix that is based on actual costs for FTTN and HFC derived from discussions with Telstra, Optus and vendors. This scenario should also include all costs to undertake the flagged upgrades to 100 Mbps by 2023, 250 Mbps by 2028 and 1000 Mbps by 2030.

The revised scenarios should include consideration of broadband quality beyond just download speeds, and the demand for attributes like upload speeds and reliability in the residential and small business market.
Prior to submission, the Strategic Review should be scrutinised and verified by an independent advisor engaged by the Department of Communications and the Department of Finance.

The Government does not support this recommendation.

The Strategic Review was prepared to evaluate the position of NBN Co and to inform decisions on a revised Statement of Expectations. The Strategic Review, together with other reviews (i.e. the Fixed Wireless and Satellite Review and the Broadband Availability and Quality Project) will be inputs to NBN Co's 2014-17 Corporate Plan which will be finalised later in 2014.

A more detailed view on the issues arising in respect of this recommendation is provided in the document, Response to the Senate Select Committee on the NBN and the Coalition Senators' Dissenting Report.

**Recommendation 2**

NBN Co should continue and accelerate the roll out of the FTTP network while further analysis is undertaken.

NBN Co should be allowed to proceed free from political interference.

The Government notes this recommendation.

NBN Co is continuing the rollout of fibre-to-the-premises (FTTP) while work on the transition to the multi-technology mix model proceeds. The transition needs to be undertaken in a responsible manner, consistent with the Government's 8 April 2014 Statement of Expectations that it avoid service disruption for consumers; minimise uncertainty and disruption for construction partners; and achieve rollout objectives as cost-effectively and seamlessly as possible.

A more detailed view on the issues arising in respect of this recommendation is provided in the document, Response to the Senate Select Committee on the NBN and the Coalition Senators' Dissenting Report.

**Recommendation 3**

Governance processes between NBN Co and the Minister should be investigated to determine how a document with the deficiencies evident in the Strategic Review was produced and signed off by the NBN Co Board and the Minister.

The Government does not support this recommendation.

A more detailed view on the issues arising in respect of this recommendation is provided in the document, Response to the Senate Select Committee on the NBN and the Coalition Senators' Dissenting Report. Note that KordaMentha is currently conducting an audit of governance measures at the NBN Co, in order to improve current arrangements.

**Recommendation 4**

The Committee recommends that the Senate amend the Committee’s Terms of Reference to enable ongoing and robust Parliamentary oversight of the National Broadband Network.

The Government does not support this recommendation.

The importance of proper Parliamentary scrutiny of the rollout and implementation of the NBN is recognised by the Government.

**Recommendation 5**

Shareholder Ministers and NBN Co should implement concrete measures to improve transparency and accountability. At a minimum, NBN Co should:

- Immediately take steps to rectify community uncertainty about the rollout. NBN Co should inform communities where physical construction is taking place, and provide forecasting data on its website to advise local communities when services are expected to become available;
- Attend all Parliamentary Committee hearings and answer questions on notice accurately and in a
timely fashion, as is appropriate for a Government Business Enterprise accountable to the Australian
people; and
- Publish the full program summary report on its website, in accordance with the interim statement of
expectations.

The Government notes this recommendation.

A more detailed view on the issues arising in respect of this recommendation is provided in the
document, Response to the Senate Select Committee on the NBN and the Coalition Senators' Dissenting
Report.

1 Available at www.malcolmturnbull.com.au/media/response-to-the-senate-select-committee-on-the-nbn

**Australian Government response to the Senate Inquiry report:**

**The Framework and operation of subclass 457 Visas, Enterprise Migration Agreements and Regional Migration Agreements**

**July 2014**

**Preamble**

The Australian Government welcomes the opportunity to respond to the report of the Legal and
Constitutional Affairs Reference Committee titled *Framework and operation of subclass 457 Visas, Enterprise Migration Agreements and Regional Migration Agreements*. The report was published on 24
June 2013.

The Government notes the importance of the Subclass 457 visa programme, Enterprise Migration
Agreements and Regional Migration Agreements (now called Designated Area Migration Agreements) in allowing employers to access skills and technical expertise that are unavailable in Australia and
enabling overseas businesses to establish an Australian operation or to fulfil a contractual obligation in
Australia.

The Government is grateful for the work the Committee has taken in respect to this important subject,
and to those who contributed views and evidence to the Committee.

The Government's response to the recommendations made by the Committee follows. A number of the
recommendations have already been implemented. Many of the recommendations were referred to the
independent panel appointed by the Government to review the integrity of the Subclass 457 visa
programme. The independent panel provided their report to the Assistant Minister for Immigration and
Border Protection, Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash, on 30 June 2014.

**Responses and Recommendations**

**Table 1: Summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recommendation 1</strong> &lt;br&gt; 2.105 The committee recommends that, for the exclusive purposes of the 457 visa programme, the Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency be given the responsibility and commensurate funding to compile and prepare a skills in demand list which also takes into account regional labour market skill shortages.</td>
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<td>3.76 The committee recommends that the <em>Fair Entitlements Guarantee Act 2012</em> be amended to make 457 visa holders eligible for entitlements under the Fair Entitlements Guarantee scheme.</td>
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<td><strong>Recommendation 5</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Recommendation 9</strong></td>
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<td>5.104 The committee recommends that the government initiate a review of the Ministerial</td>
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</table>
Advisory Council on Skilled Migration (MACSM) to establish clear terms of reference, operating guidelines and consultation and communication strategies for that body.

**Recommendation 10**

5.111 The committee recommends that the proposed changes to on-hire arrangements and sponsors' obligation not to recover certain costs be effected immediately and separately to the regulation currently proposed to commence on 1 July 2013.

**Recommendation 11**

5.114 The committee recommends that the proposed empowerment of Fair Work Inspectors under the *Migration Act 1958* and to subclass 457 visa condition 8107 be effected immediately and separately to the Migration Amendment (Temporary Sponsored Visas) Bill 2013.

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**Recommendation 1—Supported in principle**

The committee recommends that, for the exclusive purposes of the 457 visa programme, the Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency be given the responsibility and commensurate funding to compile and prepare a skills in demand list which also takes into account regional labour market skill shortages.

The Government supports this recommendation in principle, with any subsequent work to be undertaken by the Department of Industry.

Preliminary analysis by the Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency (AWPA) indicates that additional data would be necessary to complete a list at the state/territory or regional level. However, this view would need to be confirmed with in-depth analysis of the matter prior to formulating any final view and the cost involved in obtaining the additional data is undetermined at this time.

**Recommendation 2—Referred to the Independent Review of the 457 Programme**

The committee recommends that the government institute a review of the extent to which Australia's immigration system does and should facilitate the flow of low- and semi-skilled labour into Australia.

The Government has referred this recommendation to the independent review of the 457 programme.

The role of Australia's skilled migration programme is to contribute to Australia's economic prosperity through the supplementation of Australia's labour force with skilled migrants. Temporary skilled programmes support economic growth by assisting employees to address shortages, over the short to medium term, in particular industries and regions. Australia's permanent skilled programme contributes through the introduction of skills of high value over the long-term.

It is desirable, in developing skilled migration policies to allocate priority to those potential migrants who have the highest levels of human capital with an aim of raising the overall productive capacity of the labour force.

A number of programmes exist which permit visa holders to work in semi-low skilled occupations. These include the working holiday maker programmes, the special category visa for New Zealand citizens, the student visa programme and the seasonal worker programme. Those people who enter Australia under the family programme or as a dependent on a temporary or permanent skilled visa also have work rights.
It is not possible to determine the number of visa holders who seek work in low and semi-skilled occupations in Australia as skill levels are only recorded for primary applicants who apply for skilled visas.

**Recommendation 3 - Referred to the Independent Review of the 457 Programme**

The committee recommends that a dedicated pathway for intra-company transfers be introduced to the 457 visa programme.

The Government has referred this recommendation to the independent review of the 457 Programme.

The purpose of the subclass 457 visa programme is to enable employers to fill short to medium term skill shortages by recruiting qualified overseas workers where they cannot find appropriately skilled Australians. The subclass 457 visa programme has provision for intra-company transfers.

When Labour Market Testing commenced in late 2013, certain intra-company transferees nominated for a subclass 457 visa became exempt in order to ensure Australia's compliance with international trade obligations. Those exempt will include executives and senior managers who are employees of a company operating in Australia, and who will be responsible for the entire or a substantial part of that company's operations in Australia.

**Recommendation 4—Not Supported**

The committee recommends that the Fair Entitlements Guarantee Act 2012 be amended to make 457 visa holders eligible for entitlements under the Fair Entitlements Guarantee scheme.

The Government does not support this recommendation.

The Fair Entitlements Guarantee Act 2012 is a safety net scheme designed to safeguard employees whose employer may become insolvent and is unable to meet their liabilities, such as paying employee entitlements.

It has been a long standing principle in Australia that Government safety net schemes are only available to people with ties to Australia, such as through citizenship or permanent residence. Broadening the scheme to cover subclass 457 visa holders would be a significant policy change that may impact more broadly across other aspects of Government's financial assistance programmes.

Payments under the Fair Entitlements Guarantee Act 2012 only become necessary in a very small percentage of liquidations and bankruptcies. In the vast majority of cases employees are able to get their entitlements through the assets of their former employer.

Ineligibility for assistance under the Fair Entitlements Guarantee Act 2012 in no way affects a subclass 457 visa holders' right to recover unpaid entitlements from a former employer in the liquidation or bankruptcy process applicable to that employer.

These restrictions on residence requirements were tested in 2012 when the Fair Entitlements Guarantee legislation progressed through Parliament.

The Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights accepted the residence eligibility requirements were unlikely to be incompatible with Australia's human rights obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as they were necessary to maintain consistency with broader social security legislation and the restriction was appropriate and proportionate to that objective.

**Recommendation 5—Not Supported**

The committee recommends that the Government initiate an inquiry into the extent to which relevant workplace and occupational health and safety legislation protects the legal rights, remedies and entitlements of 457 visa holders and whether temporary migrant workers in Australia are adequately protected by relevant workplace and occupational health and safety laws.

The Government does not support this recommendation.
The Fair Work Act 2009 (FW Act) does not deal with coverage of employees by reference to the Migration Act 1958. The FW Act applies to national system employers, including trading and financial corporations formed within Australia and foreign corporations, and their employees throughout Australia including the territorial sea, Christmas and Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

The Government does not consider an inquiry into the extent to which relevant workplace relation laws protect subclass 457 visa holders is required at this time. The Fair Work Ombudsman provides tailored advice and assistance for workers that are identified as vulnerable, including subclass 457 visa holders, to ensure they receive their legal entitlements under the FW Act.

In place of another inquiry, the Government supports implementation of practical measures to ensure vulnerable workers are aware of their rights. The Department of Immigration and Border Protection currently makes available a fact sheet on the rights and obligations of overseas workers on its website. An informational video on the same topic is also made available. The fact sheet and video have both been translated into multiple languages to cater for persons from non-English speaking backgrounds who prefer to view this information in their native language.

In addition, Recommendation 11 has been implemented and will increase compliance monitoring in relation to employment conditions for sponsored subclass 457 visa holders.

With regard to work health and safety (WHS) laws, it is the nature of a person's employment which determines their legal rights and remedies under these laws rather than their residence status. All Australian jurisdictions have laws to protect workers from workplace harm and injury. Seven of the nine jurisdictions have adopted the nationally harmonised work health and safety laws. Under these laws, the definition of worker includes but is not limited to, employees, contractors, employees of labour hire companies and outworkers. Persons conducting a business or undertaking are required to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of workers engaged or caused to be engaged by them, as well as workers whose activities in carrying out work are influenced or directed by that person. Victoria and Western Australia are yet to adopt the harmonised legislation and continue to operate under their OHS legislation where protection is limited to 'employees'.

Recommendation 6—Referred to the Independent Review of the 457 Programme

The committee recommends that the immigration programme be reviewed and, if necessary, amended to provide adequate bridging arrangements for 457 visa workers to pursue meritorious claims under workplace and occupational health and safety legislation.

The Government has referred this recommendation to the independent review of the 457 Programme.

With effect from 1 July 2013 the time period increased from 28 to 90 consecutive days, for primary subclass 457 holders to find a new sponsor or to depart Australia, if they cease employment with their sponsoring employer. This time period allows visa holders to pursue meritorious claims under workplace and occupational health and safety legislation before the consideration is given to cancelling the visa.

If a visa holder has a genuine need to be in Australia then the Department of Immigration and Border Protection may defer cancellation of the 457 visa until after this need has been met. Alternatively, if sufficient justification exists then a decision may be made not to cancel the visa, in which case the visa holder may remain in Australia until their subclass 457 visa expires. However, once the subclass 457 visa expires a person's options are limited.

Under current bridging visa provisions there is not capacity to provide a person the authority to stay in Australia while pursuing non-immigration related claims after a visa expires.

If a person is undergoing medical treatment in Australia in relation to a workplace injury, then they may be eligible for Medical Treatment (Subclass 602) visa. To be eligible for this visa the applicant would need to provide a medical treatment plan that includes an end date for the treatment.
Recommendation 7 - Referred to the Independent Review of the 457 Programme

The committee recommends that the Department of Immigration and Citizenship be required to provide 457 visa holders, on each approval, variation or re-approval of an application, with comprehensive information regarding sponsors' obligations; relevant workplace and human rights governing the employment relationship; and sources of workplace, legal and migrant advice and assistance while working in Australia.

The Government has referred this recommendation to the independent review of the 457 Programme.

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection currently makes available a fact sheet on the rights and obligations of overseas workers on its website. An informational video on the same topic is also made available. The fact sheet and video have both been translated into multiple languages to cater for persons from non-English speaking backgrounds who prefer to view this information in their native language.

Recommendation 8 — Supported in principle

The committee recommends that the Government prepare and release submission guidelines for Enterprise Migration Agreements and Regional Migration Agreements.

The Government supports this recommendation.

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection has prepared submission guidelines for both the Enterprise Migration Agreements and Regional Migration Agreements (now called Designated Area Migration Agreements) programmes, and is consulting with stakeholders prior to their release.

Recommendation 9 — Supported in principle

The committee recommends that the government initiate a review of the Ministerial Advisory Council on Skilled Migration (MACSM) to establish clear terms of reference, operating guidelines and consultation and communication strategies for that body.

The Government supports this recommendation.

In light of the current inquiries into the subclass 457 visa programme and the Significant Investor Visa programme, the government believes that the Ministerial Advisory Council on Skilled Migration (MACSM) should be reconstituted with new terms of reference once the review reports are received.

Recommendation 10 - Referred to the Independent Review of the 457 Programme

The committee recommends that the proposed changes to on-hire arrangements and sponsors' obligation not to recover certain costs be effected immediately and separately to the regulation currently proposed to commence on 1 July 2013.

The Government has referred this recommendation to the independent review of the 457 Programme.

The changes to prevent on-hire arrangements and to strengthen the obligation not to recover costs were implemented on 1 July 2013 through the Migration Amendment Regulation 2013 (No. 5). All businesses who sponsor subclass 457 visa holders are required to comply with these requirements.

Recommendation 11 — Referred to the Independent Review of the 457 Programme

The committee recommends that the proposed empowerment of Fair Work Inspectors under the Migration Act 1958 and to subclass 457 visa condition 8107 be effected immediately and separately to the Migration Amendment (Temporary Sponsored Visas) Bill 2013.

The Government has referred this recommendation to the independent review of the 457 Programme.

The empowerment of Fair Work Inspectors and the change to visa condition 8107 were introduced by the Migration Amendment (Temporary Sponsored Visas) Act 2013 which came into effect on 1 July 2013.
Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (18:04): by leave—I move:

That consideration of the committee reports and government responses tabled earlier today be listed on the Notice Paper as separate orders of the day.

Question agreed to.

Australian Defence Force
Order for the Production of Documents

Senator KIM CARR (Victoria) (18:04): by leave—I move:

That the Senate take note of the document.

On 18 July 2014 the Minister for Defence tabled a letter in response to an order for the production of documents from Senator Madigan on behalf of Senator Xenophon. Senator Xenophon had asked the government to explain why an Australian manufacturer had not been successful in tendering for a contract worth approximately $15 million to make 100,000 pairs of boots for the Army. That manufacturer is Rossi Boots. It is an iconic firm which has been making boots in South Australia since the early 1900s. The minister's letter states that the successful tenderer was also an Australian firm, Amare Safety, which will deliver the boots via an Australian firm operating in Indonesia, and herein lies the problem. I am not critical of Amare Safety but I am critical of the government for failing to recognise the role that Australian government procurement decisions play in maintaining Australian industrial capability and Australian jobs. The minister's letter states that:

Under the Commonwealth's procurement rules Defence is not able to discriminate against a bid based on its country of origin.

This statement is, at best, misleading. The minister must know that governments should always seek to obtain value for money in procurement decisions. That does not mean mandating government procurement for Australian firms but it does mean that governments should apply the right balance in applying rules. Most important of all, obtaining value for money does not simply mean buying at the lowest price. It means assessing the whole of life costs, whether the goods are fit for purpose and whether a potential supplier has the right experience and understanding of local conditions.

That understanding of 'obtaining value for money' was reinforced by the recent report of the Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee on Commonwealth procurement. So I ask the minister: what whole-of-life considerations were taken into account in awarding the contract to a firm that will make the boots in Indonesia? Will the department regularly send officers to Indonesia to inspect the process and the various facilities? How does the decision to award this contract offshore provide economic benefit to Australia? And did the department make any effort to reach an agreement with an Australian firm on price, delivery, compliance or quality?

I ask a further question: was any attempt made to apply the same process that led to the purchase of the slouch hat from an Australian manufacturer under the same procurement guidelines, which this government now claims preclude the use of Australian firms in this manner? Let me assure the minister that I will be pursuing these matters further and we are looking forward to the next estimates committee hearings on these questions.
Senators XENOPHON (South Australia) (18:08): I endorse the remarks of Senator Carr in relation to this matter concerning Australian manufacturing and what occurred in respect of Rossi Boots was nothing short of a disgrace. Rossi is a very great Australian company, based in South Australia, and has been making boots for 100 years and for our troops in World War I, World War II and for other conflicts since that time. It missed out on a contract with the Australian Defence Force. Why? Because of this narrow procurement process, which has been the subject of a recent Senate inquiry report and which clearly needs to be fundamentally reformed. The process is too narrow.

It does not take into account the whole-of-life costs. It does not take into account the multiplier effect of having something made locally, made by Australians being paid award or above-award wages, of the highest quality. Instead, Rossi missed out. Interestingly—and I want to make this point clear—I think the defence minister was genuinely concerned when he heard about this. He was not aware of it until it was raised publicly. I think his answer in the chamber expressed that surprise in respect of that. I do not want to single him out; I single out a flawed system that has been in place for many years.

Interestingly, with respect to the documents we got from the defence minister, the offers for part B of the tender by the manufacturer, one offer was 10 to 20 per cent and others ranged from 20 per cent to 30 per cent more expensive than the winning bid. Let us put that figure in perspective. Studies have been done overseas and work has been done here about spending locally in respect of defence procurement. The Royal United Services Institute in the United Kingdom undertook a study and found a benefit of some 37 per cent in terms of taxes collected by the United Kingdom Exchequer—the Treasury—because that money is actually spent there.

I expect that there would be a similar benefit here in Australia in terms of local taxes, state and federal, that would be collected by virtue of people working and paying their taxes, let alone the multiplier effect of someone being in the community working, earning a wage and spending that money locally. I do not get it. And when you consider the benefit of those jobs and the multiplier effect, then this is a gobsmackingly silly decision.

I commend the work of Victorian DLP senator, John Madigan, who has been passionate about this issue. He was with me on 14 July when we had a press conference with Neville Hayward, CEO of Rossi Boots. These issues will not go away. It is not just about South Australian companies; it is about every Australian company. It is emblematic of a malaise, I think, within the Defence Materiel Organisation in dealing with these issues. In my view, the DMO does not get that whole-of-life cost or the benefit of having something built here. A Senate committee has been looking at the decision by the Australian government to exclude Australian companies in respect of the building of two naval supply ships, worth in the order of $1.5 billion. A restricted tender has been put in place restricting it to Spain and South Korea. I find it extraordinary that Australian companies would be excluded, even from the tendering process.

The lesson to be learnt from the Rossi Boots saga is that the procurement process we have in place needs to be fundamentally reformed. It needs to take into account the benefit of local manufacturing. It needs to take into account the whole-of-life cost that Senator Carr was referring to and also the information that I have obtained, that the DMO, as I understand it, has not been to the Indonesian factory where the boots are to be made. They have not
followed up the claims made about the manufacturing process and conditions there. These are matters that ought to be undertaken.

I also wish to acknowledge that the CEO of Rossi Boots, Neville Hayward, is very grateful for the interest that Senator Kim Carr has shown in relation to this matter and his very hard work. He also acknowledges the work of a local member of parliament, Matt Williams, for the interest he has shown in this matter. Something has seriously gone wrong here, but it is emblematic of a bigger problem in Defence and a bigger problem with government procurement. There are not too many bootmakers left in this country and decisions like this will force more and more manufacturers to the wall.

Fortunately, the postscript to this story is that, whilst Rossi Boots would have been much better off had they won this contract, this tender, there has been a lot of strong community support. I have bought two extra pairs of Rossi shoes and boots, in addition to my steel-capped Rossi boots that I have had for a few years. A lot of people are giving support. Local businesses and consumers are out there across the country and that indicates that a bit of people power has helped Rossi Boots and other Australian companies. But the Australian government, with its deep budget in procurement, needs to do much better.

Question agreed to.

COMMITTEES

Community Affairs References Committee
Reports

Senator DI NATALE (Victoria) (18:15): by leave—I move:

That the Senate take note of the reports.

The out-of-pocket costs in Australian health care inquiry reports make for some interesting reading. This was an issue that I referred to the Community Affairs References Committee prior to the handing down of the budget. There was recognition that one of the great challenges in health care is the significant out-of-pocket costs for ordinary consumers and the impact they are having on access to health care.

Firstly, it is important to define the nature of the problem and to understand what sort of health expenditure is included when we are talking about out-of-pocket costs—that is, the costs borne by the consumer, not by any insurance or government funding. We learnt that in Australia we spend a lot on non-pharmaceutical, non-PBS medications. It is one of the largest areas for out-of-pocket healthcare costs. But we also know that dental care is a huge source of out-of-pocket costs and that is because we have very little in the way of state or federal support for the provision of dental services. In fact, 20 per cent of what people report as out-of-pocket expenditure was a result of dental services being provided.

We learnt about medical services that effectively relate in large part to things like the out-of-pocket costs associated with going to see a GP who does not bulk bill. Aids and appliances is another interesting area where there is very little support in the way of government expenditure. We note that 10 per cent of all out-of-pocket expenditure was in the area of aids and appliances. PBS medicines also make up a large part of the expenditure.

We have always had out-of-pocket costs. They have always been a feature of the healthcare system even though we do have the PBS to provide subsidised medicines and we do have
health care funded by a universal insurer— that is, Medicare. The question is: is this a feature of the system that is getting worse and is that impacting on accessibility to the system? One of the great concerns is that we have seen a very real increase in out-of-pocket expenditure as a proportion of household expenditure. Consumers previously spent 2.7 per cent of their household final consumption budget 10 years ago. We are now spending 3.2 per cent so it is a problem that was significant a decade ago and is now getting worse. The question then is: what impact is that having on access to health care? We heard from a number of witnesses that in fact the out-of-pocket costs associated with things like dental care and medicines are impacting on people's ability to get health care to such an extent that in many cases people are forgoing what is really important necessary medical care and imposing huge costs on the system down the track.

The issue of co-payments was raised through the inquiry. It became a significant issue during the budget and we addressed that concern. The committee made it very clear that co-payments do have an impact on people's ability to pay for medical care. It is a very blunt tool. It impacts on those people who are least able to afford it. And those people who are least able to afford it are often people who have higher rates of chronic disease, so there is a double whammy for people on low incomes. They are more sensitive to co-payments and they are more likely to have an increased burden of chronic disease so they are going to be higher users of the system.

Moving beyond the issue of co-payments—and of course that issue will continue to get ventilated through the Senate as those budget measures continue to be debated—one of the other things that were recognised through the inquiry was the safety nets. We have two significant safety nets in the Australian healthcare system: the Medicare safety net and the PBS safety net. We learnt that one of the big problems is that they do not provide people with the upfront assistance they need. People who do not have the disposable income to be able to afford large out-of-pocket costs do not get the benefit from the safety nets that they need. In fact, some people will achieve the threshold for one safety net but not benefit from the other safety net. One of the clear recommendations was that we need a single safety net for out-of-pocket healthcare expenses that covers medical services, medicines and other healthcare expenditure. A recommendation to government was that they implement such a significant reform.

We heard about private health insurance. One of the great ironies of private health insurance is that people take out private health insurance with a view to insuring themselves against significant out-of-pocket costs and they are precisely the sorts of people who often face the largest out-of-pocket costs, particularly when they have a surgical procedure performed. They are the people most likely to be faced with significant medical bills. One of the great concerns there is the degree to which people are aware of these costs from the outset and are able to make decisions to access health care outside of that delivered through private hospitals. We have a real problem with informed financial consent in the health system. Again, the report made it very clear that what we need to do is implement a much more transparent system to achieve informed financial consent.

Finally we heard about the evidence for implementing measures such as co-payments and for looking at addressing some of the out-of-pocket costs that currently exist in the system. We looked at many of the market drivers and the sustainability of the health system. We
heard from a number of witnesses who presented to the inquiry—they believed and made it very clear—that the evidence supports the view that our health system is sustainable and that healthcare spending, as a proportion of GDP, has been stable and Commonwealth health spending, as a proportion of GDP, has, if anything, decreased. The important measure here is not the absolute numbers but what we are spending on healthcare as a proportion of GDP, and those numbers are stable. The notion that our healthcare system is not sustainable and the drastic measures that target the accessibility of the system was dismissed by witnesses such as the AMA. It was dismissed by witnesses, such as the Consumers Health Forum of Australia whose submission made it very clear that they did not support many of the changes that make accessibility worse. They made it very clear that they do not support the proposition that the drastic changes are necessary in order to improve sustainability of the health system.

In summary, we have got a document that highlights the fact that we already have a big problem in this country with people being able to access health care. For many Australians health-care is already out of reach. If they have a medical illness that is not supported through a government program—for example, needing a medical device or an appliance, something like a pacemaker, or other cardiac procedures that are sometimes done—there is no cover at all. We heard that people particularly in rural and regional communities, where patient travel is a big factor and where bulk-billing rates are lower, often face even greater challenges. The message that came through loud and clear was the last thing that we want to be doing is making a bad problem worse. That is what we are poised to do by increasing co-payments and by increasing the proportion that individual consumers need to spend out of their own pocket on health care. So we are at a fundamental point in healthcare reform in this country. A debate is required to answer this question: do we believe that people's ability to pay for health care determines their access to it? This report makes it very clear that, rather than exacerbating the current problem, we should look at addressing the issue through reforms such as those recommended in the report. I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.

**DOCUMENTS**

**Productivity Commission**

**Senator KIM CARR (Victoria) (18:25):** I move:

That the Senate take note of the document.

I would like to make some comments about the Productivity Commission's report concerning the Australian automotive industry. This is a very poor report; this is a very bad report. It demonstrates yet again that the Productivity Commissioner's fundamental failure to understand the significance of automotive manufacturing to this country. This is a classic and a perverse position that the report has taken, whereby it appears that the productivity commissioners are taking on the role of a coroner, in which the coroner regards the death of the subject with glee. The motor vehicle industry's announcement that they will cease their manufacturing operation by 2017 has created a mood of inevitability in some commentary amongst some of the more conservative elements of this country. This is an assumption that this industry will die. They go on to take this view, which we have heard recently by incredibly well-paid bankers, who are receiving $19 million a year—I am thinking of Mr Smith from the ANZ bank, who said that it was inevitable and that nothing could be done to
prevent it. This is an assumption with which I fundamentally disagree. This is an assumption which is flawed.

Nothing is inevitable. While there are still assembly lines capable of moving and while firms of the supply chain remain capable of producing components, Australia's automotive industry is able to look to a renaissance. This is exactly the same position the British automotive industry was in after the fiasco of the Thatcher government. It is exactly the same position the English faced when they had to deal with the catastrophe of Margaret Thatcher. The British industry, too, was expected to die, and that just did not happen. The prophets of doom were confounded because the scorched-earth industry policy of the Thatcher era were abandoned. Successive British governments came to understand that new policies aimed at attracting different forms of investment in automotive manufacturing could succeed. Instead of high-volume production aimed at mass markets, investment that was directed towards advanced manufacturing for niche markets could be successful. The industry developed lines of specialisation, such as engine production, and it was able to attract new international investment. Today, the United Kingdom automotive industry is thriving and no-one questions its viability. In England, the Conservative Party understands the importance of co-investment. Of course, the doomsayers are not to be found there apart from the right-wing think tanks, who always work on the assumption that manufacturing workers' jobs and manufacturing families' lives are not worth defending.

I do not suggest the British experience will be replicated in every respect in this country, but I do not take the view that the shutdown of the automotive industry was inevitable. We have to acknowledge the change in investment policies could begin the transformation of the industry in this country. What the Productivity Commission has done is to actually state the view that the wider vehicle producers were unable to survive in a highly-competitive, global and domestic market. Of course, they cannot if the government of the day seeks to drive them out of the country.

It was a simple proposition, so this government hounded the automotive industry out of this country because of the neoliberal views of extremist elements of the Liberal Party that had their heyday with Joe Hockey, the North Shore merchant banker who was able to succeed in destroying so much of the investment, so much of the capability, that had been built up in this nation over generations because of his ideological fetish for turning his back on the auto industry. He was to strip out some $2½ billion of industry support from the Department of Industry, and of course he has made the pledge to take $900 million out of the Australian automotive industry programs that were developed under the Labor government. The ATS cuts especially imperil the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of Australians. This Productivity Commission report fails to acknowledge the consequences. Innes Willox of the Australian Industry Group put out a statement tonight which bells the cat. He is well known as a person who is not unsympathetic to the political aspirations of this government, but he makes this point:

The Productivity Commission's final report ... released today seriously underplays the impact of the end to car making in Australia and should be treated with caution.

Mr Willox says:

The report fails to acknowledge that the situation facing the auto sector is not just another minor 'adjustment' in the economy; it represents the virtual closure of an entire industry. This will happen
within a relatively short span of time and it will affect a large number of businesses, employees and communities.

In this context, the PC Report displays a disappointing and disturbing absence of practical recommendations to help facilitate an orderly transition of businesses and people seeking to move out of the local auto supply chains, beyond the existing set policies that were devised well before the current situation emerged. This absence of practical policy advice or new recommendations seriously undermines the value of the report. As a result, the report misses the opportunity for Australia to make the most of the considerable capabilities, skills and experiences in Australia's auto supply chains and to avoid the wasteful destruction of those capabilities.

We found none of those sentiments in this report from these vandals of Australian automotive manufacturing. What we know is that the Productivity Commission's report has fundamentally missed the point. The bulk of the evidence presented through the inquiries and submissions demonstrated support for ensuring that investment is created, that jobs are created and that industrial capabilities are developed so that we can build upon those capabilities through so many industries.

We have here a case of blind faith being exhibited by the neoliberals and free marketeers in this government that shutting down the automotive industry will somehow or another create new economic opportunities. We know the reality. Some suburbs, particularly to the north and the west of Melbourne, in the south-east corridor in Melbourne and to the north of Adelaide, are going to be savagely affected. Given the rising levels of unemployment in this country, you would have thought that the commission's glib prediction that 40,000 people will lose their jobs was fundamentally underestimating the social distress that is being created as a result of this government's blind vandalism when it comes to manufacturing in this country.

The report goes on further to suggest that we should open up the prospect of importing second-hand cars from overseas. These people know no limits. Some 230 dealers and service centres oppose the recommendation to open up the Australian automotive market to grey imports of second-hand vehicles. It is put to me by the automotive industry that grey imports of second-hand vehicles from other countries will open up Australian drivers to consumer risk and will also have a significant impact on jobs in dealerships across the country. It could halve the new vehicle market, I am told, meaning that fewer people will be employed in dealerships across the country. Dealerships of all new car brands are respected and leading businesses and community sponsors, particularly in country areas. The information provided to me goes on further to say that, for consumers, grey imports will decrease the residual value of the cars that people currently own and this will make it more expensive to trade in on a new vehicle, and for people salary sacrificing this will cause lease rates to increase. In this context Labor simply will not support changes to the Motor Vehicle Standards Act that would allow for a flood of substandard second-hand vehicles that would undermine the warranty and other safety provisions that Australians rightly expect.

This report, like so many of the Productivity Commission's attitudes on the automotive industry, should be confined to the dustbin of history. It is a tragedy that the Australian automotive industry has not had a friend within this government, despite the promises that this government made prior to the last election. I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.
I want to take note of a few NBN documents: the government response to the NBN Select Committee's interim report, the independent audit report of the NBN public policy process for the period April 2008 to May 2010 and the NBN Co Limited corporate review dated 8 August 2014. If you have followed the progress of the National Broadband Network project at all you will have quickly realised that the project has become the worst kind of political football. The project as we know it today was launched by Labor in April 2009—a vision that was supported at the time by the Greens and indeed the overwhelming majority of Australians.

The aim is simple when you say it quickly—to deliver fast and affordable broadband to all Australians, no matter their location, and to deliver needed reforms to ensure fair competition in the telecommunications industry. It is fair to say that most participants in this debate have changed their views at one point or another in pursuit of this objective. The Labor Party, for example, began with a fibre-to-the-node project that was then quite substantially scaled up after the expert panel that they appointed to work out the economics came back and said that such a scheme would be obsolete on the day it was built, don't bother, go straight to a fibre-to-the-home rollout. There was a change of direction for the Labor Party.

For the coalition's part, when Senator Minchin was communications spokesperson—Acting Deputy President Bernardi will remember this—the coalition were fiercely opposed to a structural separation of Telstra and reforms to the underlying asymmetries in the wholesale broadband and telecommunications market. When Minister Turnbull took on the portfolio there was quite an abrupt change there for the coalition. So in the past people have shown a willingness to change their views as facts become available.

I think the aim of fast universal broadband to all Australians is still one that is worth strong support. Unfortunately, along the way something really disturbing has happened to the debate; it is almost like an insidious poison has crept into the discussion around the NBN Co. It started with a technology discussion around the particular kind of technology to bring to bear and the pros and cons of conducting a cost-benefit analysis. Senators probably do not need to be reminded that I am of the view that that is the wrong kind of instrument to bring to bear on a project such as this. Then the debate progressed to very personal attacks on the senior management of the company, the construction companies, their suppliers' tender processes and every level of oversight. Today, if you mention NBN Co in polite conversation, I think that people cannot hear that name without thinking about the incredible levels of venom, politics, backbiting and aggression that have contaminated the debate at every level. When it comes to the NBN, it seems our leaders cannot agree on anything. I think we are right at the precipice of doing the equivalent of what our forebears did—that is, rolling out different rail gauges in different states and territories with nothing matching up at the state lines. It was an infrastructure decision that might have made sense in very local contexts at the time but that later had enormous costs for people who had to come along afterwards and clean up the mess.

The reports that we are dealing with tonight represent some of the problems that we have fallen into with discussions around NBN and the rollout of telecommunications in Australia. One report was commissioned for the sole purpose of criticising the previous Labor government's creation of the NBN. One report was commissioned for the sole purpose of...
criticising the previous management of the project. Neither of these documents serves the parliament, the company or the general population of this country very well at all.

If NBN were a 12-month or two-year project, you could get away with it. If it were the kind of thing that a government could get up in one or two terms, the political polarisation and rapid changes of direction that occur would matter less. But the NBN is not that; it is much more akin to an electricity grid, a rail network or, for that matter, the road network. If you do not set down, in a cross-party way, standards and an agreed direction for the project, you end up short-changing yourself, blowing billions of dollars needlessly, frustrating the customers—that is, the entire Australian population—and going backwards fast. That is what I think has occurred in this instance. We know it is possible. Other countries around the world—notably countries with large populations condensed into a fairly small area such as South Korea, Singapore and Japan, in particular—have successfully constructed end-to-end fast fibre networks that go all the way from the exchange, through the back-haul network to individual customers. It can be done. Australia is not out on a limb in deploying this technology.

It is a project that will take more than a decade to complete, because of that long lead time. We need a policy that the coalition is happy with, that the Labor Party is happy with and that crossbenchers—who are responsible for oversight of these kinds of things and for individual votes on market reform and restructuring, for example—are happy with. It is going to be deployed in the hands, at least for the next couple of years, of a Senate that has a more diverse and more active crossbench than any in modern political history. So it makes no sense for the incredible polarisation around the development of the NBN to continue to plague what I think we could get everyone here to agree is a critical piece of national infrastructure.

I will speak briefly on the interim report of the ongoing Senate Select Committee on the National Broadband Network inquiry. I have been involved in the committee since its inception, and before that I was involved in its predecessor, the Joint Committee on the National Broadband Network. We have discovered that all sides hold some truth and that all sides perhaps need to let go of some entrenched positions. We established that the former government's subcontracting arrangements that NBN Co put in place—effectively pyramid subcontracting—had so many different tiers of management and middle management that the people actually laying the pipes, digging the ducts and laying the cable were getting fundamentally and profoundly ripped off, which was one of the reasons that the company struggled to get the kind of volume rollout that it needed.

We also, I think, established beyond any reasonable doubt Minister Turnbull's intuition that a fibre-to-the-basement configuration in some areas is going to be much faster and cheaper than trying to put fibre up to every individual apartment dwelling. In some contexts—for example, with older building stock—it may make sense to do that, as Minister Turnbull, from his experience overseas, has been hinting at. But the fact of the matter is that most Australians do not live in high-rise apartments. We are an incredibly dispersed population; we are heavily urbanised, obviously, but most Australians live in the suburbs in detached or semidetached dwellings that need to be served by an individual strand of something—whether it be copper or glass fibre. I think and hope that the committee has laid to rest—for its members and anybody following its work—the idea that we could maybe just sit on our hands and wait for wireless to overtake everything. I think we have got through that degree of misapprehension.
of the fundamentals of the technology; at some point, you actually have to lay high-capacity fibre for wireless networks to function at all.

I think we have also established that the fibre-to-the-node build is extremely problematic. Under the trials that Minister Turnbull initiated of the so-called multitechnology mix—this mixed technology idea that we will use a bit of everything—there is still not a single customer connected to the network 10 or 11 months after the change of government and the change of policy. That tells us that the expert panel that Minister Conroy convened so many years ago probably got it right on the subject of very large-scale fibre to the node—not individual niches, where it makes sense, but at the largest scale, which the coalition seems to be embarking on—in that it will be obsolete on the day it is built. Those nodes will need to be ripped out and people will eventually need to be connected, if we are not to entrench the digital divide in this country, to an end-to-end fibre network.

One of the things that I think the last hearing of the committee established with a bit of diligence is that the government and the new NBN Co management include some individuals with a lot of experience in the telecommunications sector here and overseas. They are looking at what they can do to drive the cost down of the fibre-to-the-premises build-out. I think what we are potentially seeing—if we can draw the sting out and pull the politics out of the debate—is a convergence of technology and consensus. Yes, there will be a bit of a multitechnology mix. There will be a bit of fibre to the basement, there will be a bit of wireless and there will obviously be satellite infill. But I think we can see our way towards a National Broadband Network that returns to that original vision of the vast majority—a percentage of the population in the high 90s or the mid-90s—being served by an end-to-end fibre network. That actually looks to be the best option.

This is the offer the Greens are putting on the table tonight and in all of our work in this space: pull the politics out of it and get on with building a network that provides a universal broadband service to a country that needs infrastructure like this more than ever. I look forward to working with the crossbenches to pull this project out of the ditch. I look forward to working with those on the coalition side who also agree that this is a network that really needs the politics pulled out of it—so that we can actually get on with the job. I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.

**Business of the Senate**

**Tabling**

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Bernardi) (18:46): I table the *Business of the Senate* for the period 1 January to 30 June 2014.

**Work of Committees**

**Tabling**

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Bernardi) (18:46): I table *Work of Committees* for the period 1 January to 30 June 2014.

Ordered that the document be printed.
Responses to Senate Resolutions

Tabling

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Bernardi) (18:47): I present the following responses to resolutions of the Senate:

Minister for Education (Mr Pyne) to a resolution of the Senate of 27 March 2014 concerning research funding

Minister for Education (Mr Pyne) to a resolution of the Senate of 16 June 2014 concerning higher education funding

Minister for the Environment (Mr Hunt) to a resolution of the Senate of 18 June 2014 concerning greenhouse pollution

Premier of Queensland (Mr Newman) to a resolution of the Senate of 18 June 2014 concerning National TAFE day

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Ms Bishop) to a resolution of the Senate of 23 June 2014 concerning the Marrakesh Treaty

Minister for the Environment (Mr Hunt) to a resolution of the Senate of 25 June 2014 concerning the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area

Minister for the Environment (Mr Hunt) to a resolution of the Senate of 8 July 2014 concerning the Western Australia shark cull

Assistant Minister for Health (Senator Nash) to a resolution of the Senate of 17 July 2014 concerning Indigenous Australians vision loss

Marrakesh Treaty

Senator WHISH-WILSON (Tasmania) (18:47): by leave—I move:

That the Senate take note of the document.

I appreciated the response from the Hon. Julie Bishop MP, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, in relation to the Marrakesh Treaty. The World Blind Union currently estimates that only five per cent of all published books in developed countries and less than one per cent in developing countries are ever produced in accessible formats for people who are blind, visually impaired or otherwise print disabled. The Marrakesh Treaty facilitates access to published works for these persons.

While it is great that the government finally signed the Marrakesh Treaty following the Senate motion urging them to do so, we now need to ratify this treaty. This treaty needs to go through the JSCOT process. Ratification also needs to happen in a number of other countries. The way it works now is that we need 20 countries to not only sign the agreement but go ahead and ratify it. So far only India has ratified the agreement. We need all 20 countries to ratify it before the Marrakesh Treaty can come into effect.

Providing foreign aid for disabled individuals in various countries is an important aim for us. I recognise the Minister for Foreign Affairs has outlined that in her letter, but we should use our diplomatic network to show leadership in this area of diplomacy, as we have in a lot of areas of international diplomacy. We should be encouraging other countries, some we have very close relationships with, to also sign and ratify that agreement as quickly as possible. The Greens would like to work with the government and other senators to fast-track the ratification of the Marrakesh Treaty through this parliament.
Question agreed to.

**Department of Health**

**Senator CAMERON** (New South Wales) (18:50): I move:

That the Senate take note of the document.

This document represents the reporting requirements under section 34A of the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Act 1992. It is clear that tobacco causes huge problems for the health of individual Australians across this nation. It is also clear that the other side of the chamber argues that trying to do anything through legislative processes is the nanny state in action—the IPA argument that keeps getting fed to the coalition. Their view is that, if there is government intervention to do something for the collective good, suddenly you are in the nanny state.

I have always wondered why people who are supposedly sensible would swallow that argument. Given the developments over the last few weeks, however, you would have to wonder whether there is anyone of any sense sitting across the chamber—when you see this coalition government destroying itself in full view of the public.

It is probably the most unfair government that there has ever been in this country. It is clear that they are determined to attack those who cannot afford to look after themselves. In terms of the tobacco industry, one of the reasons why they would support this nanny state argument is that they get funding. Certainly the National Party continues to take funding from the tobacco industry to fight its election campaigns. There was a belated position adopted by the Liberal Party that they would not take donations from the tobacco industry, but the federal director of the National Party says, ‘Like all other parties, we accept money from a broad range of organisations and individuals.’ The National Party are now the only party who accepts donations from the tobacco industry—a product that destroys Australians' health, a product that kills people. They are happy to take funding from the producers of that product to fight their election campaigns. Is it any wonder that the Australian public look askance at the coalition when they talk about health, when they pretend that they are supporters of a good health system in this country? Destroying people's health through tobacco and then accepting funding from the tobacco industry is just not an acceptable proposition in a modern economy.

The other problem we have is that we do not really know what funding is coming to the coalition. We are starting to see through the New South Wales ICAC a little bit more about the funding of the coalition. We see that property developers are sitting in their Bentleys, handing out brown paper bags full of money to the coalition to support them against the Labor Party and other parliamentary parties in election campaigns. We have got these slush funds, the Free Enterprise Foundation. We do not really know how much money has gone into them. We do not know whether the tobacco companies are still funding the Liberal Party of Australia in an underhand way. That is probably happening, because if you look at what is happening in New South Wales you will see that funding is being funnelled through the Free Enterprise Foundation. Money is being funnelled from New South Wales into Canberra through the Free Enterprise Foundation and back into the New South Wales parliamentary campaigns for the coalition. The Cormack Foundation, with $3.9 million, is one of the biggest donors to the Liberal Party. Where does that $3.9 million come from? Nobody knows. It is probably from the tobacco companies, the big mining companies and the wealthy individuals.
who are all supporting the Liberal Party, because they want to give them carte blanche to get on and use the system to maximise their profits at the expense of Australians. I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.

Productivity Commission

Debate resumed on the motion:

That the Senate take note of the document.

Senator CAMERON (New South Wales) (18:56): This document is the Productivity Commission's report No. 70 on Australia's automotive manufacturing industry. I heard my colleague Senator Carr take apart this report in his previous contribution to the Senate. I think I am one of the few senators who has actually worked in Australia's automotive manufacturing industry. I worked in the components sector and I worked in the car industry itself. As a migrant coming to Australia, these were the first jobs I had. They were secure jobs. They were skilled jobs. They were jobs that allowed me to start my life with my family in Australia. Yet we have the coalition taking advice from the Productivity Commission—flawed advice, as Senator Carr outlined, and advice that is based on economic ideology, economic arguments that are discounted everywhere else in the world—that you should not have a car industry because it places pressure on the cost of living for ordinary Australians and it diminishes the market operating effectively. These are nonsense arguments. These arguments that used to go around and that the Productivity Commission still uses are not used anywhere else in the world by modern economies.

It is clear that in the UK, as a Senator Carr indicated, with government support, government intervention and government arguments for strong, well-paid skilled jobs, they have got a thriving car industry. If you can have a thriving vehicle industry in the UK, you can certainly have a thriving vehicle industry in Australia. But the Productivity Commission, with its bias, with its lack of understanding about how the real world works, sets about coming up with these reports that simply mean that we do not have an opportunity to continue to provide decent jobs for Australians and for migrant Australians who are coming here to start off in skilled jobs with decent wages.

What is the proposal we have from the coalition? They actually chased these multinational companies out of Australia. They dared Holden and they dared Toyota to leave Australia. Then they go, 'Oh dear, they went.' It is the absolute worst piece of industry policy or industry politics that you would ever see anywhere in the world. All around the world advanced economies want to maintain a strong vehicle industry. Why do they do that? Because these are skilled jobs. They provide multiplier jobs through the economy. They have got some of the strongest research and development. Yet this Productivity Commission, full of bean counters and boffins who have never had a real job in their life, comes out and destroys jobs in the Australian economy at the behest of this government.

I am appalled when I see the South Australian senators get up at question time to ask their dorothy dixer questions given to them by the minister. When are they going to ask questions about South Australian jobs? When are the Victorian members going to ask about Victorian manufacturing jobs? When is the coalition going to stand up for jobs for Australian workers? I do not see that happening at all—because we have got a government that is mean, nasty and
tricky. This is a government that came to power on the basis of lies. Did they tell the South Australian car manufacturing workers or the Victorian car manufacturing workers that they would chase the companies that they work for out of Australia? No, they did not. They lied to the Australian car industry and they lied to the car industry workers, as they have lied on a whole range of issues. They have lied on health, they have lied on education and they have lied to the Australian public on a range of issues that are becoming clear now. This is a government that is reprehensible and a government that the Australian people deserve to get rid of. I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.

Australian Research Council

Senator CAMERON (New South Wales) (19:01): I move:

That the Senate take note of the document.

I rise to take note of the Australian Research Council strategic plan under section 43 of the Australian Research Council Act 2001. I think it behoves all Australians to place some emphasis on the issue of research, especially research and development. As I indicated in my previous contribution, the amount of research and development that is undertaken in the vehicle and component sector around the world provides high-paid, high-quality and high-skilled jobs—something which this government does not care about.

Research is part of the scientific process of ensuring that Australia can match it with the rest of the world—that we are simply not a quarry, simply not a farm and simply not a tourist destination. Yet we have a government that is not interested in manufacturing jobs. We have an industry minister who has been gagged by the extremists in the coalition. We have an industry minister who does not understand or care about jobs in regional Australia based on manufacturing and engineering. It seems to me that, if we are ever to be a nation that can proudly take our place as an advanced economy, we will need to change things quickly. And I suppose the only way we can do that is to change the government.

How can the government talk about how it is going to take this country forward if it does not have a minister for science? Where are the basics of research done? The basics of research are done in the scientific community. Scientists look at these things that are used by the manufacturing sector and the rural sector. How many scientific advances have been made that have helped people become more productive and more efficient in the agricultural sector and many, many industries? Yet this is a government that cannot even deem to have a minister for science. It seems to me absolute nonsense that that can happen.

We have a government that argue that we have to deal with all these manufacturing problems, but, unless you have strong research, you are not going to make a difference to future capacity for this country to engage internationally. One of the research arguments that they are putting up is that we should put a $7 GP tax on ordinary Australians to fund research in the medical area. How much of a nonsense is it that you would put a tax on people going to the doctor to fund scientific research? You either stand for scientific research and you fund it or you do not—you do not make up this nonsense where you penalise ordinary Australians every time they go to the doctor. Every time they go to the doctor, the Treasurer's hand is in their pocket. Every time they go to the doctor he takes $7 out.
There was supposed to be a budget emergency. Does it go into the budget? Of course, it does not—because we know there is no budget emergency. We know this was the rhetoric, spin and lies of the coalition prior to the last election. We know that people do not trust the coalition. We know that the hand of the Treasurer is going to be in their pocket. The Prime Minister will be in the right-hand pocket and the Treasurer will be in the left-hand pocket. They will each take $3.50 out every time someone goes to the doctor in this country. It is an absolute nonsense.

We do need research, but we do not do it at the expense of sick Australians. We do not do it at the expense of poor Australians. We do not do it at the expense of people who need to get to a doctor. It is so much nonsense—and the government wants to implement a paid parental leave scheme that will give some of the richest people in this country $50,000 a year. How much nonsense is that! This is a government that is reprehensible, a government that has lied and a government that needs to get its act together. I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.

Moorebank Intermodal Company

Senator CAMERON (New South Wales) (19:07): I move:

That the Senate take note of the document.

Under the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, the Moorebank Intermodal Company Statement of Corporate Intent was tabled in accordance with Commonwealth Government Business Enterprise Governance and Oversight Guidelines 2011.

Moorebank Intermodal is one of the projects that the former Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, Anthony Albanese, promoted in Western Sydney. This is one of a number of proper infrastructure projects that will bring benefits to Western Sydney. At the moment the coalition government are not taking the approach that they lectured everyone about prior to the election—that is, there should be cost-benefit analyses of projects. They simply want to reduce the threshold for the amount of money a project has to be worth before there has to be proper scrutiny. So they want to reduce scrutiny.

I am sure the National Party would like scrutiny of projects in rural and regional Australia. I am sure they would want to know that cost-benefit analyses of projects in rural and regional Australia were being done. I am sure that they want to know that, if a project is being undertaken in rural and regional Australia, it is actually going to benefit rural and regional Australia, not the election campaign of a National Party member or one of the Liberal country members.

These are important issues when we are dealing with infrastructure and regional development—and it is an issue not only in rural and regional Australia but also in metropolitan Australia. In New South Wales we have a project called WestConnex. It has not been subjected to any detailed analysis of what the cost will be or what the benefit will be to the commuters coming from Western Sydney into the city on a daily basis. After all the hypocrisy and the arguments from the coalition about having cost-benefit analyses when Labor was in government, we find that they do not care about cost-benefit analyses when it is about trying to give a leg up to the embattled Baird government in New South Wales.
The coalition want to announce big projects in Western Sydney—despite not knowing when that project is going to start, when it is going to end and whether or not it is going to be a benefit. They want to make these announcements because they are embattled day in, day out in ICAC. It is about making announcements and trying to get away from the scrutiny that ICAC is placing on the illegal activity of Liberal Party MPs in New South Wales. I think about nine have gone now, and another one will be going soon, so it will be 10 by the time the latest Liberal MP comes under scrutiny in ICAC. You see the need for scrutiny, for parliamentary oversight and for cost-benefit analyses when you are dealing with big projects either in metropolitan areas or in regional areas. It is not good enough for a Liberal MP in New South Wales to jump into the front seat of a Bentley, get a brown paper bag and then vote for and support projects in parliament. That is not how it works. There are moral issues and there are legal issues that have to be dealt with.

I noticed that Prime Minister Tony Abbott blamed legislation for the problems in New South Wales, because they cannot take money from property developers. The Prime Minister said that that is the problem. Well, Prime Minister, that is not the problem. The problem is that Liberal MP after Liberal MP in New South Wales are getting brown paper bags from property developers and are operating illegally. They are breaking the law. That is the problem in New South Wales, not the legislation.

The breaching of the law by Liberal Party members is reprehensible. It should stop, and ICAC should get to the bottom of it, and we might have one or two Liberal members standing at the end of it. I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.

Commonwealth Ombudsman

Senator CAMERON (New South Wales) (19:13): I move:

That the Senate take note of the document.

I would like to speak on the Commonwealth Ombudsman's report for 2013-14 relating to the Fair Work (Building Industry) Act 2012. If there is one thing that I have been interested in all of my working life in Australia it is to get fair work for Australian workers. One of the biggest challenges that workers faced was the Work Choices legislation, which contributed to the demise of the Howard government. The Howard government pushed an ideological position. We now see leaks coming out of the coalition cabinet room. I am not sure of Mr Brian Loughnane's title, but he is the equivalent of secretaries who argue the positions that should be adopted by the party, who do the research in the party. As has been publicly exposed this morning, he has advised that the coalition should stop being ideological.

Surely when the extremists are in control in the coalition party room the issue of extreme ideology dominates. Some of the extreme ideology comes from the Prime Minister down. And it is clear that the ideology that is dominating in workplace relations is the ideology to try to destroy the trade union movement, to try to destroy workers' rights to bargain collectively, to try to make it difficult for unions to operate effectively and to give more strength and more so-called flexibility to the employer to push down the wages and conditions of working people in this country.

We see this through the operation of the royal commission. Royal commissions should be used when there is a real problem. And I suppose there should be a royal commission into
some of these slush funds that the coalition uses to breach the law of New South Wales, such as the Free Enterprise Foundation. The coalition channels money from New South Wales to Canberra and then the money is taken in brown paper bags from developers. The money has been given by developers—which is illegal. They channel the money to Canberra, they put it into one of the big funds in Canberra and then they channel the money back to New South Wales, and it is then an illegal operation.

Well, ICAC is on to this. ICAC is looking at the operation of the Free Enterprise Foundation and looking at what Mr Brian Loughnane's involvement was in this. We get plenty of lectures from the coalition about the rule of law in industrial relations. How about applying the same tests on industrial relations to your operations when it comes to taking money off business donors? Just comply with the law; do not do illegal things. If you actually complied with the law and did not engage in illegal activity, you may not have lost nine, I think it was, of the Liberal Party members in New South Wales. I think it will be heading for 10, and who knows where it is going to stop?

Focusing on workplace relations is one thing; lecturing the trade union movement and using a royal commission to try to destroy the trade union movement is another. It is part of the campaign, because you know you cannot run Work Choices up again. You are too scared to run it up. You know there would be a huge pushback from the community if you tried to have Work Choices again, so you try to destroy the trade union movement. How can anyone trust a party that lies to the Australian public, that breaches the law in New South Wales, that takes brown paper bags off property developers? If there was ever a need for a royal commission it would be the royal commission into the Bentleys and brown paper bags that the Liberal Party is involved in in New South Wales, and who knows what happens elsewhere? But we should find out. I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Williams) (19:18): Order! I propose the question:

That the Senate do now adjourn.

Ryder, Mr Arjen

Senator BACK (Western Australia) (19:18): It is with a degree of grief that I rise to honour the memory of Mr Arjen Ryder and his wife, Yvonne, who were so tragically taken when flight MH17 was shot out of the sky on 18 July. Arjen was a student of mine at the Muresk Institute of Agriculture in Western Australia in 1980 and 1981. He joined the Department of Agriculture in 1983 and had a stellar career in the department serving the agricultural and rural communities of Western Australia over many years. It is my understanding that he and his wife, Yvonne—who in fact had been a teacher at the John Calvin School in Albany for many, many years—had taken off for Europe on a seven-week holiday at the conclusion of his working life and that he was due to retire. Perversely, the time at which the group was meeting in Albany to plan a function to honour him and his contribution to agriculture in the district was the very time at which they heard the information that MH17 had been so tragically removed from the sky.
I join and associate myself, as others have in the chamber, with the motions moved today with regard to all of those 38 people based here in Australia—Australian citizens, students or those who resided in this country. It was an absolute tragedy, and for this man particularly, a man who gave his life to the agricultural communities of our state, a person who specialised in salinity—which, as you would know, Acting Deputy President Williams, is a particularly devastating condition in Western Australia. Arjen worked for his entire career in that area. He was a member of the WA Department of Agriculture and Fisheries Catchment Hydrology Group. He contributed significantly to our knowledge of groundwater trends and salinity management. Arjen worked throughout the wheatbelt areas right down to the south coast at Albany in the field of salinity, geophysics and salt content in the soils. He went to Carnarvon after the floods some four years ago, in 2010-11. He worked on the Carnarvon flood recovery program. Most recently he was up in the Ord, on Ord Stage 2 in Kununurra, working again in the field of groundwater monitoring and sampling.

In addition to his work with salinity, Arjen worked in salt land management, in perennial pasture management and development, particularly lucerne, and in liming of soils to try to improve their soil fertilities. He was a man who had, in his quiet way, an incredible influence on his community, as indeed I understand his wife had on the community of children, parents and others at the John Calvin School. They were residents of the Albany area for 25 years.

Along with so many other families, the Ryder family were quoted during one of the memorials for them, and I would like to quote their words, because I think they speak volumes for the character of the family and extended beyond. 'We are not seeking retribution against those responsible for this tragedy,' they said. 'Our prayer is for peace in Ukraine through contrite hearts and minds, not rhetoric which incites more violence.' In their generosity, they went on to thank the Australian government, the Governor-General and the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Bishop who, with our ambassador to the UN and his excellent staff in the Australian mission to the UN, were able in such a short space of time not only to get a resolution up in the Security Council, but also to have it unanimously voted on, including by all five permanent members of the Security Council.

The Ryder family particularly wanted to mention those in the Australian Federal Police and the forensic personnel. I have to say on a slightly lighter note for that family at least, the remains were identified in Holland and they will come back to Western Australia. They also commented on the excellent work undertaken by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and also the executives, management and staff of Malaysia Airlines, who of course themselves lost 15 staff in that tragic event. A thousand people attended the memorial in Albany, and it is a just reward for the memory of two lives that affected so many people in their district. As a person associated with agriculture, Arjen, I am proud to say, had been a student at an institution at which I taught and he made a fine contribution to our state and our country.

**Employment**

**Senator POLLEY** (Tasmania) (19:24): I rise in this place tonight because my home state of Tasmania is under attack from a government which is undertaking its legislative agenda on the run and with blatant disregard for the wellbeing of the people of my home state of Tasmania. Tony Abbott is attacking our education system—
The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Williams): Order! Senator, you will address the Prime Minister and other politicians by the correct term, please.

Senator POLLEY: with new fees for TAFE, higher fees for university and HELP repayments, as well as cutting programs like Youth Connections that help young people to get a job. And that is what I want to talk about tonight, Youth Connections, or Joblink as it is often called in my home state. This organisation provides a vital service to the community; it is designed to assist young people who are most at risk of leaving school or who have already done so. Services are flexible and include one-to-one support for all eligible young people. The goal is to help young people to overcome the barriers and problems that make it difficult to stay in, or return to, school or training. The organisation also works cooperatively with other service providers in their local region to improve the support available for young people. Providers welcome referrals from many sources including young people themselves, family members, friends, teachers, training providers, Centrelink and other community organisations.

Out of 25 people who sought assistance from Joblink in northern Tasmania, 18 recently graduated from TAFE. This important organisation provides individuals with hope and real strategies to get back on their feet so they can find a job or continue with their education.

What does this government do to this organisation and what does it do to Youth Connections across the country? It cuts their funding. Youth Connections was created by Labor in 2010 to ensure young people do not fall between the cracks and end up unemployed or dependent on welfare, all of which is now at risk as a result of the Abbott government's $1.7 million cut to Youth Connections funding. If someone drops out of school because of family problems, an unwanted pregnancy or for any other reason, it is incredibly important they be given a second chance to restart their education. Completing high school is an essential part of gaining meaningful employment and earning a wage. Youth Connections helps more than 750 young Tasmanians a year, and since 2010 it has helped more than 1,400 young people in northern Tasmania alone to get back on the path to finishing school.

Despite these results, the Abbott government has failed to commit any funding to the program beyond 2014—potentially forcing the seven Tasmanian Youth Connection locations to close their doors at year's end. The Prime Minister and his three amigos—Bass MP Mr Nikolic, Lyons MP Mr Hutchison and Braddon MP Mr Whiteley—are completely walking away from Youth Connections and from the thousands of young people the program supports each year. They are doing this when they know Tasmania has the highest unemployment rate in Australia at 17.5 per cent, up from the 15 per cent when this Prime Minister took office—this is negligence of the highest order.

Wouldn't you think that in order to tackle this escalating youth unemployment they would be inclined to invest further in Youth Connections? It would seem logical, surely. But clearly not according to this government. Last week the shadow assistant minister for higher education, Amanda Rishworth, and I visited Joblink and met with two very passionate members of the community, Lisa Amerikanos and Emma Dickenson, who help at-risk youth every single day to turn their lives around to make their future brighter. We know from Senate estimates that the Minister for Education, Christopher Pyne, has not even asked his department for advice about the importance of programs that make sure young people complete school and move into work. These services, are particularly important to Tasmania.
The Prime Minister came down to our state and promised 'Jobs, jobs, jobs' before the election, but his solution now is to tell young people of Tasmania to leave the state. Well, Mr Abbott, that is not acceptable to the Tasmanian community, and it is not acceptable for our young people. I am calling on those three amigos to ride into town and stand up to Mr Abbott and Mr Pyne to ensure that that funding is reinstated and, in fact, that it is increased, because it is a project that has an 80 per cent success rate. There is not another program that comes anywhere near it, and to lose it would be a shame and an indictment on this government.

**Building and Construction Industry**

**Senator CAMERON** (New South Wales) (19:29): I rise to tonight in the adjournment debate to talk briefly about the royal commission into the building and construction industry. It is quite clear to me that this is a political attack on the trade union movement by the coalition government that has been designed to weaken workers' capacity in the building and construction industry to collectively bargain and have decent rights and rates of pay in that industry. I am not sure how much of the political donations that are in the secret coalition fund have come from the building and construction sector, but I would hazard a guess that it is a fair amount.

As we watch the building and construction industry go about its political agenda in support of the coalition's position, it is clear that they are not dealing with the key issues for the building and construction industry. I want to draw the Senate's attention to the Kingsway construction report of insolvencies in the industry between 2010 and 2011. It has the latest figures that are available. We hear so much about the union movement and the construction industry. We hear from the coalition about thuggery. They set up the ABCC and have some of the most politically motivated public servants in the country working for them. They gave the ABCC more funding and they want to take money away from pensioners. Yet the key issue in the construction industry is the number of insolvencies. There were 1,862 insolvencies in the financial year 2010-11. Twenty-three per cent of all insolvencies in this country were in the construction sector. Fifty-four per cent of the construction insolvencies occurred in New South Wales.

You have to listen to the figure of $2.64 billion when you talk about productivity and economic issues—that is the estimated amount of money lost by creditors in construction related insolvencies annually. That is $2.64 billion not being paid in the construction industry. Is there any reason why you would not have organised crime trying to get in there and heavy people not paying their debts to get a small percentage of this insolvency money in the industry? Is there any reason why you will not see bikies in the industry using standover tactics to gain money back for some creditors and industry? Just a small percentage of $2.64 billion would mean a thriving standover industry for bikies and organised crime trying to gain back owed money for people in the construction industry.

I suppose if the coalition were talking about this issue they would try to blame the CFMEU for some of the insolvencies in the industry. But when ASIC do an insolvency they document what the insolvency is about. In the building and construction industry, six issues are most commonly cited by those companies that have insolvencies: (1) inadequate cash flow or high cash use, with cash flowing around the industry without proper tax being paid and the like; (2) poor strategic management of business—businesses are not strategic and there is bad
management in the sector; (3) poor financial control, including lack of records; (4) poor economic conditions; (5) trading losses; and (6) undercapitalisation.

If you really want to look at the building and construction industry and understand what the problems are, you have to go back to insolvencies. You have to go back to poor management. You have to have a look at lack of capital. You have to look at the issues that ASIC have identified in that industry. You have to stop bashing up on the trade union movement in the industry. You should stop the royal commission. You should stop wasting money on the royal commission. If you want a royal commission, do one into insolvency in the industry. Let's deal with the issues there. Let's make sure people are paid and stop $2.64 billion not circulating in this community and creating jobs. That is the issue in the building and construction industry.

**Budget**

**Senator URQUHART** (Tasmania—Deputy Opposition Whip in the Senate) (19:34): I rise in the adjournment debate to add my voice to the continued opposition to this government's cruel and unnecessary budget. It is a budget that stands in delusional denial of the reality of life for so many north-west Tasmanians. This budget viciously rips away support for those Tasmanians who are not lucky enough to have a job. The truth is that this budget is built on a foundation of lies. By fabricating a hysterical economic crisis, the Abbott government is attempting to sneak through a budget that would tear our national social contract to shreds.

This government thought that we would not notice that the poorest 20 per cent of families will pay $1.1 billion more than the richest households into government coffers. In fact, the top 20 per cent of households will actually be $825 million better off from 2017. The government thought we would not realise that, if degrees meet predictions of costing over $100,000, fewer north-west Tasmanians will take on higher education and take on that debt. They thought we would not mind that the absolutely poorest Australians, the unemployed, would have their entitlements ripped away for over six months out of every year. This government thought we would not see that, measure after measure, this budget places the burden squarely on those who are most vulnerable and the least able to speak for themselves. While everyone knew that Mr Abbott and the coalition would make some cruel decisions, few expected the savage cuts that were delivered. These are savage cuts that will hamper the ability of Tasmanians to not only get ahead but get to the starting line.

A fortnight ago, *The Weekend Australian Magazine* published an essay titled 'What prospects do Burnie's young unemployed really have?' The essay included commentary from young people, academics, charities, employment service providers and industry. The essay's take-home message was that more support needs to be provided to our young people both at school and in their late teenage years and early 20s when they are searching for work. In particular, needs based funding is required, as would have been delivered under the Gonski Better Schools Plan, and so are employment services programs that provide a full range of services and analysis, as was provided through the Youth Connections program and the local employment coordinators.

Of course, the Gonski Better Schools Plan was slashed in this year's budget, while Youth Connections and the local employment coordinators were simply done away with. What were they replaced with? Nothing but rhetoric of the worst kind. For months we have had the full...
cast of Tasmanian Liberal politicians, from the employment minister, Senator Abetz, to his three amigos—Mr Whiteley, Mr Nikolic and Mr Hutchinson—putting the burden of unemployment and social isolation solely on the shoulders of our state's young people.

But the rhetoric reached a new height in The Weekend Australian Magazine article. In possibly one of his nastiest displays, Mr Whiteley outlined the philosophy behind his government's education and employment policies, saying:

It is my very strong view that some of our young people just need an extra prod … They need that prod and that is for us to say, ‘Some of the options have been taken away and here are the options that are left if you want the government to provide regular payments'. … Some people will cry a little longer than others but it is for their own good in the long run.

What an appalling display in any forum, and particularly from someone who espouses to be Burnie's champion.

Mr Whiteley, the young people of north-west Tasmania are not cattle. They do not need an extra prod. Mr Whiteley, you say, 'Some people will cry a little longer,' yet your government offers them no real education or employment solutions. Your government axed Tools for Your Trade and is slashing support for higher education. Staff and students at the University of Tasmania campus in Burnie are worried that it might close. Mr Whiteley, there are wide and complex reasons why our young people might experience some time on unemployment benefits. It is not for us, as politicians, to cast aspersions on the most disadvantaged people in our community. It is for us, though, to seek to find ways to ensure the security of our communities and to create programs to break the cycles of poverty and inequality, not to name-call our young people as cattle in need of a prod and as crying babies while slashing employment programs and needs based education funding.

Davidson, Mr Francis Michael, OBE

Senator NASH (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of The Nationals in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Health) (19:38): I rise tonight to pay tribute to a remarkable and wonderful Australian, Francis Michael Davidson OBE of Little Yarran in Young. Michael, as he was better known, passed away on 7 August. He was a truly remarkable individual from my home district. He leaves behind his wife, Pammie, his children, Victoria, Susan, David and Edwina, 12 grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

Michael was born in 1928 and had a lifelong commitment to his community and to rural Australia. He was one of the founding fathers of the NSW Farmers Association and the National Farmers' Federation. In the 1970s, as president of the Graziers' Association of New South Wales, he saw the need for one voice for agriculture in New South Wales. With the United Farmers' and Woolgrowers' Association—the other associations at the time—he worked tirelessly with others to pull them into one organisation. It was an extraordinary feat. In 1978 the Livestock and Grain Producers' Association of New South Wales was born. Michael was president of that association from 1979 to 1981. That association became the NSW Farmers Association in 1987.

That New South Wales agreement prompted change at a federal level, and eventually the National Farmers' Federation was formed. Michael was president of the National Farmers' Federation from 1981 to 1984. Former NSW Farmers Association chief executive Peter Comensoli said in an article written by Robyn Ainsworth on 14 August that he had:
… sought advice from Mr Davidson.
Of all the people I associated with at NSW Farmers, Michael was the most clear in his view that a single, federal body must emerge, and he was a thorough gentleman in all his dealings …
That is a theme that emerges constantly about Michael, that he was such a gentleman. He was on many boards. His acumen and his ability to reach outcomes and work with people was well known and much commented on. He had the ear of prime ministers. He had the ability to change the way rural Australia was heading. He was a truly amazing individual.

He was a member of the National Party—we are very proud of that—for around 50 years. I remember a couple of years ago presenting him with a long-service medal in my office. We were so terribly proud that for so long, for so many decades, Michael had been part of the National Party. He was involved in a local branch. He was a trustee. He was always there to give advice and wise counsel. He would come to the Christmas drinks that I host in my office. I remember one of the very first occasions and, being pretty new on the block, I was having Christmas drinks. It was a very social occasion, as they are, in my office. Michael sidled up to me and said, 'Are you going to say a few words?' It just prompted me to remember the right procedure and the right protocol. Even though it was just an informal evening, the right thing to do was to say a few words. It was a small thing but of course it was something Michael would think of.

He came to see me in my office a couple of years ago to talk about some issues that were concerning him. It struck me then that he had this amazing lifelong experience but was still able to look at issues in the modern moment, in the day, and apply all that experience to what we actually needed in the here and now. I thank him very much for the advice and wise counsel he gave to me over the years.

His was a very close family. I will quote from a book, *Every Tree, Rock and Gully: a memoir of pioneering families*. It is a very recent book. In the book, Michael said: 'Frank and Heather, my parents, gave me a stable, affectionate and secure upbringing. They were very good at it because that is what they were. They enjoyed life with their four children and, as was typical of those times, the enjoyment was often on the property, with picnics, tennis parties, the occasional evening party and visits to friends in the district.' He adored his wife, Pammie. Again from the book: '1954 was the greatest year of my life, when Pamela Alsop and I were married. At 26 my life began to have real meaning. For nearly 60 years, Pammie has been remarkable, loving, caring and supportive.' I think they are such beautiful words from a wonderful man about his beautiful wife.

He was so proud of his family. They were so important to him, and at the same time he gave so much of himself to rural Australia—so much of his time and of himself. He was charming, wise and a thoroughly decent gentleman, with at great intellect. He was a visionary and he was constantly working to improve the circumstances of rural Australia. He had such a strong ethic of believing in the responsibility to contribute to community. He was an absolute giver and had this extraordinary belief that you should make a contribution—that it was important to make a contribution. I learnt so much from his view of rural Australia. What we are doing here in this place reflects the thoughts that Michael Davidson had about how important it was to be prepared to make a contribution.

There was a memorial service for Michael last Tuesday at the home of his son, David, and daughter-in-law, Belinda. What a beautiful service it was. There were hundreds of people
there. It was such a fitting tribute to a man who was so well respected and so recognised by so many in rural communities. His children and grandchildren made wonderful contributions, as did his beautiful and very gracious wife, Pammie. I do not think anybody will forget three of his grandchildren singing at one point. It was quite a moving and extraordinary moment.

At the service his son, David, made a beautiful contribution, and at the end of that contribution he made the comment that often with memorial services there will be butterflies let out of a jar or pigeons let go to fly. He thought it was much more fitting to do something else entirely. He had penned up a mob of ewes at the back of the marquee where the memorial service was being held. His two sons, Sam and Charlie, went out and let the sheep go. It was lovely. I think Michael would be terribly proud of them. He will be terribly missed by many people. Rural Australia is a better place for having been blessed with and to have had the life of Francis Michael Davidson.

Indigenous Health

Senator FAULKNER (New South Wales) (19:47): For several years now I have spoken in this chamber on the state of Indigenous eye health in this country. My motivation for doing so is simple—it is absolutely unacceptable that any Australian suffer from preventable or treatable vision loss in a nation as wealthy as our own.

This evening, I want to once again draw the attention of the Senate to the eye health of Indigenous Australians. I also want to acknowledge the Abbott government for continuing with parts of the Indigenous eye health funding regime put in place by the previous Labor government, and lend my support to calls for charging a national body to oversee the campaign to close the gap in eye health.

I should also mention that The Fred Hollows Foundation, the group established to continue Fred's legacy of work around the world and with Indigenous communities, has recently campaigned to 'End Trachoma Now'. This campaign has rightly attracted support from government, opposition and crossbench parliamentarians. More, though, can sign up and explicitly support the campaign to wipe out trachoma.

It should be a continuing source of national shame that our Indigenous communities in remote Australia rank alongside countries like Afghanistan and Chad in still experiencing endemic rates of trachoma. Indigenous Australians shoulder the burden of more eye disease and yet receive less treatment for eye disease than non-Indigenous Australians. Indigenous adults are still six times more likely to be blind and three times more likely to have low vision compared to non-Indigenous Australians. Indigenous Australians are 12 times more likely to be affected by cataracts, but seven times less likely to undergo cataract surgery. Two out of every five older Indigenous Australians would not be able to read tonight's Hansard for want of a pair of glasses. This cannot continue.

Vision impairment robs people of their autonomy and cripples their capacity to benefit from education, seek employment and manage their health effectively. Indigenous vision loss is a wanton waste of this country's human capital. Ninety-four per cent of vision loss in Indigenous communities is preventable or treatable, yet 35 per cent of Indigenous adults have never had an eye exam.

Trachoma, diabetes, cataracts and refractive error: just four conditions account for almost all of the vision loss in Indigenous Australia. It is essential we work towards the elimination
of trachoma and address the avoidable vision loss caused by cataracts, diabetes and refractive error. Closing the vision gap between Indigenous Australia and non-Indigenous Australia is, of course, both prudent and practical.

Between the years 2009 and 2013, the Rudd government dedicated $16 million dollars to eliminating trachoma. Senator Nash announced earlier this year that the current government will maintain funding for this program for a further four years. I believe that was a sound decision, given that trachoma rates have fallen from 14 per cent in 2009 to four per cent in 2012. If this trend continues, we will eliminate trachoma in Australia—a disease which has lingered in this First World country for far, far too long. The Minister for Health, Peter Dutton, has cleared up some ambiguity around the funding of this program and guaranteed it will continue in the years ahead. This is the right decision from the Minister for Health, and I commend it.

In another life, also as Minister for Health, Prime Minister Tony Abbott established the National Trachoma Surveillance and Reporting Unit. Now, as Prime Minister—and in line with expert recommendations—I would commend that he moves to establish Indigenous eye health as a national priority and charge a national body to oversee the fight to close the gap in Indigenous eye health. Presently, several groups are involved in a series of national and regional programs, yet there is no single body to oversee this process. There is no single body charged with collecting and collating Indigenous eye health data; there is no single body with the authority to create and maintain national guidelines or benchmarks for Indigenous eye health.

A body charged with national oversight for Indigenous eye health would create continuity and would enhance accountability. As the April 2014 discussion paper, The roadmap to close the gap for vision—the need for national oversight, prepared by the Melbourne University Indigenous Eye Health Unit put it, it could be achieved by utilising:

... existing committee structure, experience and expertise ... There is no need nor is there desire to set up a separate, stand-alone ... group.

This is not about creating another layer of bureaucracy; it is about creating continuity and it is about enhancing accountability.

National oversight in Indigenous eye health is supported by key experts and organisations in the field. They are experts such as the tireless advocate Professor Hugh Taylor and organisations like the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists and Optometry Australia. Closing the gap in Indigenous eye health is, as I have said, prudent and practical. It must be a priority. Where necessary, we should focus on preventing vision loss; wherever possible, we should eradicate the conditions that lead to vision loss.

Finally, I would urge the government, the opposition and all those on the crossbench and in this parliament with an interest in eye health to make Indigenous eye care a national priority and to charge a national body with tackling this critical issue of genuine national significance.

Health

Senator DI NATALE (Victoria) (19:57): I rise today to talk about the battle that is going on around the future of Australia’s health system. We are currently involved in a debate about whether our health system is affordable, whether it is sustainable and whether, in fact, we can
continue on the trajectory we are on in terms of government spending. Clearly, the Abbott government have put forward a view that the increased expenditure on health has to be reined in. But what is worth reflecting on is the view that most people express when asked, 'What do people want from their governments?' What they say repeatedly is that they want a better health system and they want their taxes to support Medicare and the PBS and to deliver a fair system of health care for those people who need it.

It is worth reflecting on the health system at the moment and where the small increases in spending are occurring. The advances in science and medicine over the past decade have been remarkable and we are now seeing modern medicine treat conditions that, only a few years ago, were thought to be incurable. We have seen remarkable progress on the issue of melanoma, for example, where we are now starting to understand that immune therapies are successful in addressing the issue of sun cancers. Malignant melanoma, in particular, responds to medications that have their origin in immune therapy.

There are a number of other conditions where we have seen remarkable progress, such as the treatment of type 2 diabetes, ulcerative colitis, obstructive airways disease and so on. The small increase that we are seeing in health spending comes about as a result of these breakthroughs in health technologies and people getting access to new life-saving treatments. That is something that we should celebrate. It is something that we should be proud of and it is something that Australians want.

The real issue is whether we should spend government revenue on these measures. In order to answer that, we have to address two fundamental questions. The first is: is it a good thing to rein in spending in health care when the cost of that might mean denying people access to these lifesaving treatments? Should we be decreasing spending rather than increasing it if the cost of that decrease is that people are denied access to medicines? When you look at what we spend on health compared to other OECD countries, you get a picture of health expenditure in Australia ranking quite low down when compared with similar nations. In fact, we are the 10th lowest of the 33 OECD countries when it comes to public spending on health care. The question we should be asking ourselves is, in a rich, prosperous, developed country like Australia, why shouldn't we increase spending on health care; why shouldn't we be increasing access to these treatments that we know will allow people to live longer and healthier lives?

The second question is: if we are to increase health spending, is the level of spending we have at the moment and any potential increase that derives from increased health technologies sustainable? Can we continue that level of spending over the long term? When we look at what Australia has spent on health over the past decade and what projections look like for the next decade, we see a picture of Australia's spending on health as a proportion of GDP being relatively stable. It is just over nine per cent now, having increased by a per cent or so over the previous decade and potentially increasing by another half to one per cent over the next decade. If that spending is efficient, and when you consider that it is much less than that spent by France at 11.6 per cent, Canada at 11.2 per cent and the Netherlands at 11.9 per cent, and similar to the UK—and almost half that of the US—you begin to get a picture of a health system that is not spiralling out of control but is sustainable by world standards.

Yet we hear the claim that spending is spiralling out of control and healthcare costs are rising in real terms. Of course that is true, but so too are incomes—it is estimated that average weekly earnings will double by 2050—and our economy is growing, making arguments using
absolute numbers in health care almost meaningless. That is not to say that we should not examine what are appropriate expenditures in health care and where we can get better efficiencies. No-one is suggesting, even for a moment, that we should not do that. But let us ensure that we have a debate that is grounded in reality and that accepts the facts as they are. When we took evidence at a recent Senate committee hearing we heard from people like Jeff Richardson, who is the professor and foundation director of the Centre for Health Economics at Monash University. He said very clearly that health spending is not unsustainable and that comparison with other countries indicates that we do spend relatively little on health. The evidence from the AMA was similar—we have a health system that is efficient, that does well in terms of providing equitable access to people and that does not need the sort of radical surgery proposed by this government.

We have some big choices to make. The question of whether health spending is sustainable is not a value-free proposition—it is a choice that we need to make. It is sustainable if we choose it to be sustainable. It is sustainable if we choose to raise the revenue to provide the treatment for people as new treatments emerge. It is sustainable if we begin to take on some of the inefficiencies that do exist within the health system, largely at the margins but that are there and that allow us to get better value for money. That is the discussion and that is the debate that we as an Australian community should be having, and we should not be disguising what is going on at the moment, where we have a government that is trying to raise revenue and increase its tax base by raising the cost of health care in Australia—attacking the very system that we most want our governments to provide.

The result of this is not just an attack on fairness and not just an attack on a health system that does provide people with the means of living longer and healthier lives; it is also shortsighted in narrow economic terms. Most of the suggestions that have been put forward by this government will result in long-term economic costs, they will result in huge shifts from the Commonwealth government to state governments through the hospital system and they will mean that people are denied access to essential health care. We have problems when it comes to collecting the data and evidence necessary for us to build on what is already a very efficient health system, and getting a thorough understanding of what drives the cost of health care can be achieved only when we have reliable data. Yet we have heard time and again that the datasets necessary to attack some of the inefficiencies in our health system either are not being collected or are unavailable—or at least are not being made available to the people who need them. It is a problem as simple as an understanding of the linkages between the MBS and the PBS datasets still being unachievable.

Health is too important to be whipping up a scare campaign. We need an honest and open debate about what we want from our governments. We need to ensure that debate happens in health care, and unfortunately that is not what is occurring at the moment.

Queensland: Agriculture

Senator CANAVAN (Queensland) (20:07): I rise tonight to talk about debt, in particular rural debt, and drought—the two Ds, if you like. When you have debt plus drought, you often end up with desperation, so you end up with three Ds. In the parliamentary break, I spent a bit of time driving from Townsville to Mount Isa. It is very dry in those areas. They have gone through two very dry seasons and much of the area is in drought. After those two very hard years—plus a few other hard years, which I will talk about later—there is a lot of debt in rural
industries, and they are struggling under that debt. It becomes a bit like a chain around the ankle. It is hard now to have the flexibility to keep going and get back on your feet.

I went to five of the towns along that road: Hughenden, Charters Towers, Richmond, Julia Creek and Cloncurry. I ended up in Mount Isa. In Charters Towers, I was meant to go to the cattle sales that were on that day, but there were no sales; they were cancelled. That was the ninth week in a row that the Charters Towers saleyard had no sales. It is one of the busiest saleyards in the north, yet there had been no sales for nine weeks. That is in the context of record kills in abattoirs at the moment. There are a lot of cattle going through the system, but they are not going through the saleyards. They are not going through the saleyards because people do not have the confidence to send their cattle to yards for auction, where they potentially risk getting a low price. Once they have sent their cattle there, they have no option to take them home, because they have no money to do that. So they are putting cattle straight through the meatworks; they are putting cattle through the grid, as it is called. That leaves people in a pretty desperate situation. There are not many meatworks in the north; if you draw a line from Townsville to Perth there are no meatworks north of that in the country. So when the cattle have to go to the meatworks and not the saleyards, the meat processors have a pretty good position in the marketplaces. Prices in our beef markets, as many of you would know, are down to record lows; they are down to levels that we have not seen for 20 or 30 years. That is making it tough for people.

Those low prices come on the back of a rollercoaster ride in land values for our beef sector, particularly in North Queensland. I want to put on record in the Senate something that many people probably do not realise: 10 years ago rural land values had been flatlining for a number of decades. In the space of five years, land values in North Queensland went up about five times, about a 400 per cent increase. Then we had the GFC, and since then prices have fallen by 40 per cent. To put that in context, before the subprime crisis, residential housing prices in the US cities that were most affected by the crisis—cities such as Phoenix and Las Vegas—went up two to three times. Since the crisis, prices in those cities have fallen by about 30 per cent. So the pastoral industry and the grazing industry in rural North Queensland experienced a bigger increase and a bigger decrease than any of the cities in America experienced as a result of the subprime crisis. We have all seen what effect those price changes had in America. I reckon that if we had similar price changes on the Australian Stock Exchange or in the suburbs of our cities, there would be absolute carnage; people would be under water and they would have a lot of difficulty getting back on their feet. But that is what happened in North Queensland over the last 10 years, and it is no surprise, then, that people are struggling. What is a surprise is that we still have a beef industry in this country after all of that. It shows the resilience and efficiency of our industry that they still survive.

The industry have been through a financial disaster. They have had some natural disasters, with the drought, with floods in 2009 and 2010, and fires as well in many areas. Then, of course, we saw another natural disaster: 'Tropical Cyclone Ludwig', when he decided overnight to ban live exports to one of our biggest markets. That took 500,000 head of cattle out of the industry, and that further depressed prices. So much of the position that people are in is not a result of their own business management and it is not a result of general market conditions; it is a result of a government decision that was made in 2011 that devastated the industry and is still devastating the industry. Back then, before the live export ban, cattle
prices in markets up and down our east coast were about $4 a kilo carcass weight. Last year, they dropped to $3.15 per kilo. A lot of the change is due to the live export ban. So in the last five years we have had a 40 per cent reduction in land values, a 20 per cent reduction in prices and a shutdown of one of our major markets for our beef industry. It is no wonder that people are in a desperate situation.

That is all confirmed by data. In the last couple of months, Meat and Livestock Australia put out a situation report on the beef industry. The report had three major findings. It found that the majority of business in the north are not sustainable; they are not making enough money right now. It found that their financial performance has been dropping off, principally because farms are having to take on more debt and pay more interest. They also found that farms are only making about one per cent return on their assets at the moment. ABARES data confirms that over the last 10 years average debt for the northern beef industry has increased from $280,000 per farm to $650,000. The biggest component of that $400,000-odd increase in average farm debt has been to finance working capital. It has not been to finance investments in more fences, more irrigation or more productivity. It has all been made just to keep the business running year to year—to keep buying breeders to keep the business running. That is of great concern, because if people now are at the limits of their working capital finance, if they cannot go back to the market to get more finance, they are going to be in a very difficult position in the next couple of years. Most people, because they have been drought affected, have destocked. There is not a lot of cattle in the region at the moment. But I am of the view that prices are going to go up and that they are going to go up big time. We want people to restock, but they are going to have to get finance to do that, because if they buy a breeder, if they buy a heifer, they are going to have two years before they get a cheque. They are going to have to have a calf and fatten that calf up, and they need finance in the meantime to do that.

I want to give credit to the Gulf Cattlemen’s Association, who are a newly-formed organisation in our north. They have been at the forefront of highlighting these issues for people in their region. They have just completed a survey of 600 graziers in their area in the gulf and Cape York. They got a 26 per cent response rate; 160 graziers filled out the form. It shows and confirms the concerning situation, with more than 50 per cent of graziers not believing they have a viable future in the industry.

I think that all of this points to the fact that there is a role for us here: that we need to help people out. People are in a tough situation and I believe we are a country that helps people out when they are doing it tough. They are doing it tough, as I said before, in large part because of government decisions, because of decisions made in this place, on this hill in Canberra. We should reflect on that when we consider what we should do to help these people out. Whichever side it was—I was not in this place when those decisions were made—I think it is incumbent on us to help people who have been affected by bad decisions made in this place.

We need to get the banks together with the industry. We need to get the government at that table as well to try to facilitate an outcome. People have too much debt. We need those debt levels to come down to more moderate levels. We need the banks to be part of that process and the government has a role in helping to facilitate that. We need that discussion to take place because we need to give people a future. We need to give people some hope. We have an obligation to help out people who are in need.
I also think there are some longer term issues here. There has been some rain in Queensland in the past week—not in all of these areas in the gulf, but some areas of Queensland had some good rain. That is welcome, but the rain is not going to wash away the debt. The debt is an issue that predates the drought—as a result of live cattle, as a result of a change in world economic conditions—and it is an issue that is going to outlast the drought as well.

I and others have called on this place, the Senate, to consider establishing an inquiry into rural debt. We have not had an inquiry into rural debt for some time. These issues, I recognise, go beyond just the beef industry and beyond just North Queensland. There are many other agricultural industries that have also suffered, and are also suffering, under high debt loads, but we have very limited information about their situation. We have obtained some more detailed information on the north in recent months. I do think an inquiry is something the Senate could turn its mind to—and it could be a vehicle for elevating this issue. I think it is our job, when we are not in this place, to spend some time on the ground, to see what people are feeling and thinking, and to bring that back to this place—to try to raise the issue on their behalf. That is what I found over my five-week parliamentary break.

Asthma

Senator BILYK (Tasmania—Deputy Opposition Whip in the Senate) (20:17): Asthma is a serious problem in our society. This is particularly so in my home state of Tasmania, which has the highest rate of asthma sufferers per capita in Australia, with around 13 percent of Tasmanians having the condition. That means that around 62,000 Tasmanians have been identified as having the disease. Many more may not have been identified and could be living with it unmanaged.

Asthma is a condition of the airways. People with asthma have sensitive airways in their lungs which react to triggers that set off their asthma. It manifests through a number of symptoms, including difficulty breathing, shortness of breath or very rapid breathing; severe wheezing when breathing both in and out; coughing that will not stop; chest pain or pressure; tightened neck and chest muscles, called retractions; and difficulty talking and performing normal daily activities. It is an extremely serious condition and can have utterly tragic consequences. An estimated 411 people died from asthma in Australia in 2009 alone.

Many sufferers of asthma are young children, so it is important that those around them—particularly parents, carers and teachers—are aware of their condition and are able to assist in the management of the condition and provide treatment if an attack occurs. This is particularly important in the place that children spend a large portion of their lives in—schools. The statistics show that asthma affects around one in nine school-aged children. This means that in an average classroom there will be at least three students with asthma.

As co-convenor of the parliamentary asthma group, I am aware of the importance of promoting awareness and understanding of this terrible disease. Recently I met with the Asthma Foundation of Tasmania to discuss an innovative new program that they are running in Tasmanian schools. The new Asthma and Anaphylaxis Schools Program is a revitalisation of Asthma Tasmania's previous schools program. It aims to provide school staff with practical means to help prevent asthma and/or anaphylaxis from causing deaths, anguish and absenteeism. Anaphylaxis is the most severe form of allergic reaction and is potentially life
threatening. Asthma and anaphylaxis are inextricably linked, as nearly everyone who dies from anaphylaxis suffers from uncontrolled asthma.

The Asthma Foundation of Tasmania has also changed the emphasis of the program to give risk minimisation greater prominence. While it is still vitally important that school staff are trained in the emergency management of asthma and anaphylaxis, it is equally important to ensure that schools do not get into a situation where they need to use first aid in the first place. As the old saying goes, prevention is better than cure. Consequently, they have developed a system whereby schools can identify students who are at high risk and then help staff to develop strategies to avoid emergencies. The new system awards one of two levels of status to a school—'asthma and anaphylaxis active' and 'asthma and anaphylaxis proactive'—based on the training that staff do and the way the school has implemented the program.

'Active' is the entry-level status that is focused upon identifying high-risk students and providing emergency training for staff. Active status is current for two years. To reach active status, the school needs to meet the following criteria: sufficient staff members have to have undergone training approved by the Asthma Foundation of Tasmania so that they can adhere to the two-minute rule, there has to be sufficient equipment and basic prompting information to enable first aid to be delivered within the strictures of the two-minute rule, the school has to have found out which students have asthma or anaphylaxis, and the school has to have established who the high-risk students are. The two-minute rule is the core concept behind emergency training within the Asthma Foundation of Tasmania schools program. The rule says that, when it is identified that a student may be having an asthma exacerbation or a severe allergic reaction, it will take two minutes for an appropriately trained staff member to give emergency treatment. That is important because oxygen deprivation can cause permanent damage to a child in only two minutes. It is vitally important that a child affected be treated within that two-minute time period.

'Proactive' is the higher level status aimed at reducing the likelihood of an asthma or anaphylaxis emergency. The prerequisite for the proactive program is that the school has already achieved active status. Proactive status is current for four years. To reach proactive status the school needs to meet the following criteria: personal safety plans have been developed for each high-risk student; the school has given a commitment that at the beginning of each school term there will be a brief staff first aid demonstration; and the school has also committed to point the parents of a child with uncontrolled asthma toward a service that will assist in getting the student's asthma under control. It is really important for schools to identify high-risk students, because they are the ones who are most likely to have a severe asthma attack or allergic reaction and require emergency management of their conditions.

The Asthma Foundation have outlined a set of criteria to determine whether a student is a high-risk student and is in danger of a severe flare up of asthma or an anaphylactic reaction. A high-risk student with anaphylaxis is any student who has been prescribed an adrenaline auto-injector. A high-risk student with asthma is any student who has one or more of the following characteristics: they use their asthma reliever medication two times or more per week; they have visited emergency or been readmitted to hospital due to asthma in the past 18 months; an ambulance has been called due to an asthma flare up in the past 18 months; they have been prescribed oral medication for asthma, either a tablet or syrup, in the past 18 months; they are regularly absent due to asthma; or the doctor believes the student might need extraordinary
supervision at school because of their asthma. As mentioned earlier, each high-risk student should have a personal safety plan. This is an agreed set of protocols and precautions devised by the school to avoid or manage risks posed by the student's asthma or anaphylaxis. It must be stressed that an individual safety plan is tailored to an individual student's needs. It is certainly not one size fits all.

The Asthma Foundation of Tasmania have prepared a whole suite of materials to go with their new training program. These include posters, information for school newsletters, letters to parents, information sheets about asthma and anaphylaxis, personal safety plans and asthma brochures. These resources have been specifically designed and tailored for use by schools. I urge all schools to visit the Asthma Foundation of Tasmania's website at www.asthmatas.org.au to download the new guide. It is easy to read and in it you will find all the information needed to start your school off on becoming an 'active' or 'proactive' school. Students, parents and schools would benefit from better management of asthma in schools, it would reduce suffering of students and absenteeism and it may just save a life. It would be an incredibly positive step for all schools in Tasmania to gain 'active' or 'proactive' accreditation, and I urge them to do so.

Just as a final word: asthma not only affects children. As I mentioned earlier, tens of thousands of Tasmanians know they have the condition but there could be many thousands more who might not know they have it. Unfortunately, if you are unaware you have the condition you are of course unable to manage it. If you need help to understand the issues around asthma further, you can call the Asthma Foundation of Tasmania on 1800 278 462 on weekdays and talk directly to one of their asthma and allergy advisers or make an appointment to have a face-to-face consultation. Talking to the experts may help you treat your condition better or identify that you have asthma, if you have not already been diagnosed. Obviously, a better understanding of asthma would reduce the tragic statistic of hundreds of Australians dying from it each year. I urge everyone to find out more about it.

Racial Discrimination Act 1975

Senator WRIGHT (South Australia) (20:25): Tonight I am rising to thank the community for a job well done. Through resolute and strong community action, we have seen off a threat to fundamental decency in Australia and won the battle, at least for now. So it was during the winter recess that many in Australia rejoiced to hear Prime Minister Tony Abbott finally announce the shelving of his government's plans to weaken the Racial Discrimination Act. Mr Abbott's government had planned to reduce existing protections against racially-motivated hate speech. Throughout Australia, many rallied to oppose this. The government's proposed changes would have given a green light to racism in our communities and provided succour and encouragement to careless, vociferous, belligerent commentators like Andrew Bolt. Indeed, the government's proposed legislation could have accurately been called the 'Andrew Bolt Protection Bill'.

Following a humiliating court case in 2011, Andrew Bolt has been wanting a freer rein to peddle his opinions, without the irksome restrictions of the Racial Discrimination Act requiring him to be accurate or show good faith. For the sake of 'accuracy', it is worth revisiting the Federal Court case of Eatock v Bolt—and Justice Bromberg's conclusions about Andrew Bolt's journalistic writings, which gave impetus to the Abbott government and their backers' most recent attacks on the Racial Discrimination Act.
Andrew Bolt wrote articles that were found by the judge to be not only reasonably likely to offend but also reasonably likely to insult, humiliate and intimidate fair-skinned Aboriginal people. And Bolt was unable to take advantage of the exemptions for 'fair comment' and 'genuine purpose' in section 18D of the act because Justice Bromberg concluded that the articles were not written 'reasonably and in good faith', as the exemptions would have required. Ouch! The articles included untruthful facts and the use of inflammatory and provocative language.

The government has been wanting to give even more power to people like Andrew Bolt—powerful people who already have media megaphones to ensure their opinions are heard. And to do this the government was willing to strip away the protections of ordinary people—in some cases very vulnerable people—who should be able to go about their lives in Australia, free from the fear of racial hate speech. In defending the actions of the government, the Attorney-General, George Brandis, maintained that the government has no role in protecting people from what he flippantly described as 'hurt feelings'.

Since then, the Attorney-General has had the opportunity to read more than 5,000 submissions sent to him about the proposed changes. Many of those submissions would have informed him of the lived experience of people who have come face to face with racism on a regular basis. We do not know how many of those 5,000 submissions were against the changes, as the Attorney-General refused to tell us. But we do know, given the strength of public opposition, that the vast majority did not support the government's proposed changes. If he has had an opportunity to consider those submissions with humility, I wonder whether the Attorney-General now realises that racism is not just a matter of 'hurt feelings'. There is overwhelming evidence that racist abuse attacks the core of a person's sense of self and wellbeing. Report after report demonstrates that racial slurs can have debilitating existential and mental health consequences for those who have been targeted, even to the point of suicide.

Allowing racial abuse attacks the core of our social cohesion, too. Giving the go-ahead to bigotry sends an insidious message to our community that this kind of behaviour is acceptable—allowing hate and intolerance to grow—where responsible leadership would nurture the opposite. The great news, though, is that community action on this issue has shown convincingly that I am not alone when I say this is not the kind of Australia I want to live in. People in the legal profession, human rights experts and mental and public health professionals have all objected to weakening laws against racial vilification.

People from every corner of this country—from many cultural backgrounds—have united against the government's plan to weaken protections against hate speech. The Attorney-General's exposure draft was met with vehement criticism and, in many cases, utter disbelief. It propelled the community into action. Letters and emails were written, phone calls made, petitions signed, events organised and many connected, shared and united with others in their local area. The message and the outcome could not be clearer: Australians are better and bigger than this.

Tonight I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge some of those who helped to achieve this wonderful result. Erin Chew and Kingsley Liu of Project 18C worked tirelessly across the country, asking local councils to move motions showing their support for leaving the Racial Discrimination Act intact. As a result of their work, 70 local councils nationwide,
representing over seven million constituents, were prepared to move beyond their usual comfort zone of rates, roads and rubbish to move a motion in favour of decency and protection against racial abuse for their residents—showing true leadership. And there are likely to be many more in coming months.

I met with members of first peoples and multicultural and ethnic groups from all over Australia who came to the parliament. I also met with representatives of South Australian multicultural and community organisations who met with me in my electorate office earlier this year. Meeting with and listening to these unique and diverse Australians helped me to better understand how the Racial Discrimination Act is not just words on paper but actually a living law which offers them real and valuable protection from the degrading and hurtful racism that they or their friends and family may experience in their daily lives in Australia.

I would like to thank Kahlí, who sent me the submission she made in relation to the government's proposed changes. She told the Attorney-General:

You will not have witnessed strangers on buses shouting abuse and physically intimidating and threatening a mother for singing to her child in another language.

You will not have experienced the horror of watching men waving a knife about while harassing a group of students on a tram for speaking amongst their own group in Chinese.

You do not see the threats and insults experienced by everyday Australians just trying to go about their everyday lives.

There is another person I would like to acknowledge—among the many who contributed to this result—and that is the Race Discrimination Commissioner, Dr Tim Soutphommasane. Dr Soutphommasane has been a staunch and vocal advocate for the multicultural community, in the face of political pressure, and I greatly admire his resolve and commitment to the values of diversity and respect that he represents.

At the height of the campaign against the changes earlier this year, polling showed nine in 10 Australians believe it 'should be unlawful to 'offend, insult or humiliate somebody based on their race'. Recent polling shows that 83 per cent of people agree with the government's decision to drop the proposed changes to the Racial Discrimination Act. Australians have said a clear and resounding 'no' to racism.

Another person, Vivien, exemplifies this view, and she shared her submission to the Attorney-General with me as well. She wrote:

We are all citizens of this amazing world together and I love the diversity we all represent.

We all come from somewhere and each have a story.

Let's work together to ensure we look beyond any form of bigotry by demonstrating zero tolerance to those who would give protection to bigots ...

I want to express thanks to all people in our world for their journey. Without them, I would not be who I am.

The Australian Greens believe in an inclusive, welcoming and caring community where every person is valued and accepted for exactly who they are and can participate fully in the life of the nation. Bigotry and racism undermine this possibility.

The Australian Greens celebrate multiculturalism as one of Australia's greatest assets. The Racial Discrimination Act means that all Australians, no matter their skin colour or heritage, are protected by the law from racially-motivated hate speech and action—and it is crucial that
we keep it this way. We must remain vigilant. What the government have tried once they are likely to try again. They still have powerful mates who want the change—people like Andrew Bolt and their friends in the Institute of Public Affairs. And South Australian Senator Bob Day of Family First has made it very clear he will pick up the cudgels of this 'It's a right to be a bigot' cause. So we must remain ready to again defend our protections against hate speech if it becomes necessary. But in the meantime across Australia people have come together, united to prove that we are bigger than bigotry. I congratulate the community. Because we have met this challenge we are now even stronger than we were before. (Time expired)

Federation Reform

Senator REYNOLDS (Western Australia) (20:35): I rise to speak on the coalition government's white paper on the reform of our Federation. Firstly, I would like to congratulate the Prime Minister and the government for providing all Australians with this historic opportunity to have a direct say in the future of our Federation.

Over the years I have become a passionate supporter of our Constitution—not because I am a rearward looking traditionalist but because for 114 years it has delivered stable government and it possesses unique mechanisms to successfully deal with intractable conflict and stalemate. As I said in my first speech, I am both a passionate Western Australian and a proud Australian—two different but nonetheless consistent identities. I believe our Constitution continues to serve both identities well and that collectively we have the capacity to be far greater together than apart. But our union must always be just and it must always be efficient. There is no perfect democracy. The extensive deliberations and compromises of our own founding fathers delivered us an enduring and robust Federation, but not a perfect one. I have learnt through my experience here and overseas that the health of all democracies is neither self-evident nor self-sustaining, and we must never take it for granted.

Unlike many other modern democracies, our Constitution was born of talk, not war. Our nation is a testament to what can be achieved peacefully and with an enduring spirit of sovereign cooperation and compromise. The slogan 'one people, one destiny' used by two of our founding fathers, Henry Parkes and Edmund Barton, resonated across Australian colonies, since it was a message of sovereign cooperation and not integration. In 1928, the Western Australian Premier Philip Collier declared that this enormous country cannot be governed from a political centre by men almost entirely ignorant of conditions in the far corners of the land. Now in this place, as a senator for Western Australia, I have already seen that this statement is as true today as it was then.

I also said in my first speech that I believed it is time that, as a nation, we celebrate and encourage the diversity of our states and territories and approach our Federation with a new respect and a new maturity. To understand the present and prepare for the future it is first wise to look at the past. In 1901 it was the promise of collective and stronger defence, foreign affairs and trade, rail standardisation and the abolition of intercolonial duties and excises that got the colonies over the line to deliver Federation. Critically, the guarantees that a sufficient revenue funding base would be available for the states to meet their new constitutional obligations got Western Australia over the line, but only just. Revenue was also the prime motivation for the 1933 secession attempt by Western Australia. To help understand Western Australia's concerns then and now, it was predicated at Federation that only 25 per cent of
total state and Commonwealth taxation revenue would be required by the new Commonwealth government, with the remainder going to the states.

But, as Sir Robert Menzies observed in the mid-1960s, it was a starry-eyed expectation that the new Commonwealth parliament and government would be cheap. Sir Robert was absolutely right. Today total revenue raised is split 75 to 25 per cent in the Commonwealth's favour. The simple truth is that, since Federation, despite review after review, we have never provided a sufficient revenue base for both the states and the Commonwealth to meet the increasing levels of service expected by all Australians. The goods and services tax was introduced by the Howard government to remedy some of the ills of vertical fiscal imbalance. As a broad based consumption tax, the GST has allowed revenue to flow directly to the states. But its method of distribution is now punishing economically successful states—in particular my state of Western Australia—by allocating back to them far less than they collect in order to subsidise consistently underperforming states. To highlight this iniquity, WA's projected per capita share of GST will fall from 45c in the dollar last financial year to 38c this financial year, and based on current projections it may fall as low as 11 per cent in just three years. Critically, our long-term economic growth depends on all states doing better, not on slowing down the sectors of the economy that are doing well.

Consider the following facts and implications not only for Western Australia but also for the rest of the nation. If Western Australia received GST revenue on a per capita basis, this year alone it would have been $3.7 billion better off, enabling it to fund critical infrastructure projects and support our rapid population growth. Instead, the downgrading of WA's credit rating from AAA to AA1 by Moody's was a stark reminder of the impact this chronic underfunding has on our most productive state, a state on which today the rest of the country is so reliant.

The Western Australian Treasurer, Mike Nahan, said yesterday that, while WA has to live within its means, it is no longer sustainable for Western Australia to pour money into the coffers of other states. The extent today of this subsidisation is simply staggering. The typical Western Australian household will pay on average $6,000 of GST per year. From that amount, $3,700 will go to subsidising households elsewhere in Australia. That leaves only $2,300 for Western Australia to pay for essential services. To highlight it even further, this year, $496 million of the money collected from Western Australians goes to Tasmania; $746 million to South Australia; and $142 million to the ACT. Unbelievably, $598 million also goes to Queensland, a relatively productive state. This year alone WA taxpayers are supporting the Northern Territory by $1.73 billion. This situation is neither just nor was it ever the intent of our founding fathers. This is one of the reasons I so strongly support the concept of competitive federalism.

I agree with Henry Ergas, who observed that resource states need to provide better public services than other states and charge lower taxes in order to attract people. Our current federal-state arrangements simply do not provide for this to occur. I believe all states possess competitive advantages, and I simply do not believe there are any excuses for all of our states not to thrive; merely I believe that there is a lack of political leadership to innovate and transform. In my first speech I welcomed the Prime Minister's white paper on reform of the Federation. On this side of the House, we are aware of the issues that have led to this white paper, which are clearly laid out in the Commission of Audit report. This report notes that
responsibilities have accumulated over time and that this has increased the risk of administrative duplication and overlap, higher costs, blurred accountability, opportunities for cost-shifting and a reduction in the efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of services. Australian taxpayers are certainly not getting value for their taxation dollars today.

In this white paper process the Commonwealth, working with the states and territories, will seek to clarify the roles and responsibilities of each level of government to reduce waste and inefficiency and increase the effectiveness of the federal system. Most encouragingly for Western Australia is that this white paper will align closely with the forthcoming white paper on the reform of Australia's taxation system.

The Prime Minister's announcement on the Federation white paper stated that an issue to be considered would be 'the most appropriate approach for ensuring horizontal fiscal equalisation does not result in individual jurisdictions being disadvantaged in terms of the quality of services they can deliver to their citizens'. In plain English, that means revenue share—a critical issue for Western Australia, not just for equity but also to ensure that we can remain the economic powerhouse of our nation. The white paper on the reform is a wonderful opportunity, therefore, to begin a statewide conversation around reform of our Federation. Now is the time to get the conversation going and for all Western Australians, like me, to learn more about our rich constitutional history and our respective roles within it.

**Forced Adoption**

Senator MOORE (Queensland) (20:45): In our February 2012 Community Affairs References Committee report, Former forced adoption policies and practices, we made, as is our wont, 20 recommendations. Some of those are moving through the system, as you know, Mr Acting Deputy President Smith. There were two particular recommendations dealing with the harmonisation of records, with those really important things that so many of us take for granted—our certificates: births, deaths, marriages—and our committee heard some gut-wrenching stories about the importance of effective records for people who either have lost children to adoption or were themselves adopted. Those two recommendations were recommendations 13 and 14. Recommendation 13 reads:

The committee recommends that:

- all jurisdictions adopt integrated birth certificates, that these be issued to eligible people upon request, and that they be legal proof of identity of equal status to other birth certificates, and
- jurisdictions investigate harmonisation of births, deaths and marriages register access and the facilitation of a single national access point to those registers.

We also, in recommendation 14, followed up by saying that our committee recommended that:

- all jurisdictions adopt a process for allowing the names of fathers to be added to original birth certificates of children who were subsequently adopted and for whom fathers' identities were not originally recorded; and
- provided that any prescribed conditions are met, the process be administrative and not require an order of a court.

Through the process of consideration of the report we thought it should be relatively straightforward for the offices of attorneys-general across all the states, led or guided by the federal Attorney, to consider the changes to the registration process called for by the
recommendations. We knew that it would take a lot of discussion, because we know how strongly states hold on to their own areas of expertise, but we did not really understand at the time that there would be a reluctance to move forward because there was a reluctance to initiate any legislation around the process. And as you and I know, Mr Acting Deputy President, there cannot be change in something as important as registry without legislation.

If all those attorneys-general could hear the gut-wrenching stories we heard in our committee, perhaps they would understand how important getting harmonisation of records is. I want to quote from some of the evidence we received. As you know, this came directly to us in hearings we held across the states. One person who actually had done a lot of work in this records area came and talked about how the recording of a birth was fundamental to a person's identity. They said:

The naming of a child is so fundamental a concern that it has been recognised by the United Nations in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which states in principle 3:

The child shall be entitled from his birth to a name and a nationality.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ratified by Australia in 1996, states in similar terms, in article 24.2:

Every child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have a name.

This witness went on to say:

As an adoptee, it is hard to feel you belong when you do not look like anybody you live with, and your genetic self does not fit. Then on top of that to have certificates full of lies, mistakes and half-truths adds to the confusion of your identity. Even a prisoner of war has a serial number and a rank that define his identity, and that is respected. My son's right to have his original name on his original birth certificate was finally fulfilled last year. He knows the meaning of his original name and how that ties to his family of origin, me.

The committee also heard evidence that birth certificates provided validation of a woman as a child's natural mother. Again in evidence, we heard:

I never got a birth certificate. To me, that is acknowledgement that I have given birth, that this child is mine.

This mother thought she was going mad, and we had to have the counselling team heavily involved. She knew she had a baby but the records—those things that are there to tell us what is recorded about us by our state and by our nation—said she did not have a baby.

It is so important for people to be able to have full knowledge of their identity. And, as I said earlier, to prove that we are who we claim to be when we are wanting to get passports, when we are wanting to run for office in some places, we need to produce our birth certificate. Under the current system, it varies from state to state as to whether someone who has given birth to a child who is then put up for adoption has any permanent record that they had actually gone through that process. Origins Australia has done a lot of work in this area, and the Victorian branch has proposed that two documents be available—they are different, but both can be identifying documents. Origins said:

We talked about birth certificates before. Origins lobbies for the original birth certificate and an adoption certificate, and for the child or the person who was adopted to be able to use either of these documents as legal tender.
We heard from Miriam Mandryk, who did a thesis which is almost compulsory reading if you are working in this area. It is called *Adopted persons access to and use of their original birth certificates: an analysis of Australian policy and legislation*—an invaluable document, if you are studying this area, to see exactly what is happening across our country. Miriam said that:

Where a child is illegally deprived of some or all of the elements of his or her identity, States Parties shall provide appropriate assistance and protection with a view to re-establishing speedily his or her identity.

She reasoned that some of the actions involved enforced adoptions which were, as we found, illegal. Governments then should have a responsibility to help rectify issues with these children's—now adults'—identity documentation; in this case, birth certification.

We know there is complexity when we are looking at changing laws, but something that was identified as being so important—something that had caused so much pain, something about which people have been talking for many years—these are the kinds of issues we would expect our governments to respond to. We would expect them to hear what citizens are saying and then to respond. We continue to ask attorneys-general to consider these issues, and we think it is particularly important now that, once again, issues of adoption are getting some precedence in our nation with current discussions around intercountry adoption. The right to have identity documents that reflect the reality of your birth is important. A whole segment of our report looked at the particular issues around fathers who were often excluded when children were given up for adoption, and the need for a father who has found their child existed, and they have been able to meet, could then have a birth certificate process adapted that put their name on the process.

This issue causes great pain, and we believe it is something our government should take very seriously. We believe the call for harmonisation of records and easy access should be addressed by governments working effectively together and with the people whose need is so great. It would be important to all of those people, who came to see us throughout 2012 and who continue to raise these concerns with us, to feel a confidence that attorneys-general will take up this challenge. There must be a way to ensure that all kinds of records are true. Only recently I heard of a case where a woman had found her child and then the young man had died, but her name was not present as his mother on his death certificate. I think we should be able to work together so that that kind of pain is not felt by many more people across our community. We should be able to get this right.

**Economy**

Senator MADIGAN (Victoria) (20:56): Tonight Opera Australia performed in the Great Hall of Parliament House. Many may be surprised that I appreciate opera, but then again many are surprised about many things I say. Tonight's performance was high theatre in the best sense, but it had nothing of the ridiculousness we see in parliament week after week. Is the Australian public impressed by what they see here? Are they involved and interested, or have they switched off? Writing for *The Conversation* this week, Robert Douglas, Emeritus Professor at Australian National University, asked an important question: who speaks for the public interest? Who speaks for the welfare and wellbeing of the general public? Clearly, it is not the parliament, according to Professor Douglas. He said:
Grassroots common sense and decency lie at the heart of two growing movements to reassert the voice of the people in the management of our local and national affairs. Kitchen table conversations and community organising could perhaps help to reinvigorate Australian democracy.

Professor Douglas decries the influence of lobby groups. He says: 'For various reasons, politicians listen to them.' Certainly, my Canberra diary is full of back-to-back meetings with lobby groups. But who speaks for the future welfare and wellbeing of our children? And where are the grassroots common sense and decency he talks about? Professor Douglas says we need to restore balance to the political equation.

Tonight I would like to focus on matters of national importance. It has been three months since the Treasurer handed down his budget, and supposedly there have been three months of negotiation since. But it has been three months of tit for tat between the opposition and the government. What about the real issues? What about the matters that impact on Australian families and workers? What about the issues that impact on rural and regional communities and small businesses? What about the issues that impact on Australian manufacturing and our agricultural sector? What about Australia's fuel security? Those of us who are old enough to remember petrol strikes will recall hundreds of Australians queueing up to put fuel into their cars—just last year we ran out of diesel. What about the sell-off of our farms to overseas interests? And, not least of all, what about the unfair state of our housing market?

But first things first. Our manufacturing sector provides nine per cent of all jobs; it contributes nine per cent to Australia's GDP. With a national gas crisis looming, Manufacturing Australia—yes, admittedly a lobby group—anticipates that we could lose 200,000 jobs. That is $28 billion of economic value that could be wiped out if the government does not act. Natural gas makes up 15 to 40 per cent of the cost basis for a range of products, including fertiliser, alumina, cement and bricks. What is the government doing about this? What plans do they have to be proactive on this crucial issue? We are suffering a gas crisis because of decisions made by a previous government. Why don't we have sufficient domestic gas reserves for domestic and industrial consumption? What is the current government's answer? Fracking? Shale gas? In short, everyone is getting fracked—the environment, our farming communities, manufacturers, the car industry and the list goes on. The government crow about getting rid of the carbon tax. They might eventually do something about the RET. Meanwhile, unemployed Australians will have to apply for 40 jobs a month—and where are the jobs?

My Fair Trade Workers Rights Bill 2013 was introduced on 20 June last year. It sought to promote international labour standards and human rights whilst increasing the competitiveness of Australian businesses. Seven days later I put up the Fair Trade (Australian Standards) Bill. This bill was last debated on 5 December. Senator Edwards had this to say about the bill:

This bill has the effect of obliging Australia to adopt import requirements that will place further unnecessary obstacles in front of potential trade opportunities.

'Further unnecessary obstacles'? The Fair Trade (Australian Standards) Bill would require Australia's trading partners to ensure that companies that export goods to Australia take responsibility for ensuring that their manufactured goods meet Australian standards prior to being sold on the Australian market. The bill would require the minister to ensure appropriate standards are included in any trade agreement that Australia enters into with another country.
This is not unreasonable. This is not anti free trade; this is fair trade. It is fair trade that will support Australian manufacturers, Australian workers and Australian families.

Now I move to the farming sector. This was once the backbone of the Australian economy. Why? We had an abundance of land, water and demand. Yet we have farmers committing suicide at a rate twice the national average. This is a complex issue. In my home state of Victoria, I have seen firsthand the stress and anguish banks impose on farmers. I have seen the predatory behaviour of the finance and legal sectors, intent on raping our farmers.

Last year, Senator Xenophon and I introduced the Reserve Bank Amendment (Australian Reconstruction and Development Board) Bill 2013. The bill sought to establish a new board under the Reserve Bank which would be made up of the Governor of the Reserve Bank as an ex officio member, one representative of the bank and seven other members with rural or agricultural experience, including at least one economist, accountant, banker, representative of the states and territories, and farmer. The new board would determine what policies they create and implement in order to assist Australian businesses in the agricultural sector in a way which most advances our national interest. The board would use the capital and other abilities of the Reserve Bank to ensure its self-formulated policy took full effect. The board would be directly accountable to both the House of Representatives and the Senate or a committee of either. The board's policies would be subordinate to the Reserve Bank board's policies and so, if there were any overlap or inconsistencies, the Reserve Bank board's policies would still have full effect. The bill is currently before a committee. Senator Xenophon and I would like to see public hearings take place. What the Australian agricultural sector needs most from the government is positive action.

Now, in my remaining minutes, I want to talk about fuel security. As a member nation of the International Energy Agency, Australia is required to have 90 days of liquid fuel security—but this is a minimum. The UK has 268 days, Korea has 222 days and the United States has 174 days. Even Luxembourg, with a population of 500,000-odd people, has 94 days. Australia has 71 days. Of that, around 14 days is still at sea, five to 10 days worth are in crude oil tanks at refineries and three days worth is in our cars. That is right—the largest portion of Australia's liquid fuel reserves are still at sea. Is this an issue on the radar of our government? What will be their response when Australian motorists are possibly queuing for fuel?

Over recent weeks, we have been discussing the budget. We have been discussing how it will impact on people. But we must not forget what sustains us, our communities and our families. Without a strong manufacturing sector, we are dead. Without a strong agricultural sector, we will starve. Without a policy of liquid fuel security, we will be at the mercy of sudden external threat. These are the important issues, and I urge the government to address them.

Forestry

Senator SINGH (Tasmania) (21:05): I rise tonight to highlight the importance of what is currently being debated in the upper house of the Tasmanian parliament and of understanding what is under threat of being locked up in Tasmania. Actually, it is not 'what' but 'who'. It is not the forests. Tasmanian trees and Tasmanian forests are not locked up. They are protected, for the moment. It is the Tasmanian people who are being stripped of their free speech protections. It is they who will be locked up under conservative Premier Will Hodgman's
draconian new criminal law—the Workplaces (Protection from Protesters) Bill—that will strip away the rights of Tasmanians to proclaim their opinions publicly.

Earlier this year, the Prime Minister laid bare the sum total of conservative 'conservationist' governments' credentials when he bewailed that Australia has quite enough national parks and quite enough locked-up forests—too many locked-up forests, actually, particularly in Tasmania. The question I would rhetorically ask the Prime Minister is: from whom are those forests locked up or, to put it another way, from whom are those forests protected? Nothing is locked up; no-one is locked out. We are, instead, encouraged to visit these areas, to experience them and to enjoy them. The Tasmanian wilderness is already a tourism mecca. The United Nations World Heritage Committee agrees that it is an area of outstanding global environmental and cultural value. It is an area that deserves a modicum of protection from a very small number of corporations who would like to clear-fell it. This protection was a keystone of the Tasmanian forestry agreement, one of the great achievements of the previous federal and state Labor governments as well as the Tasmanian forestry industry and the conservation movement.

The beauty of the Tasmanian forestry agreement was its compromise. No-one got what they wanted. Over four years key industry and environmental groups, through a process of give and take, worked out an agreement that would assist the Tasmanian forestry industries transition to a more sustainable long-term footing while providing significant conservation benefits.

Senator Colbeck interjecting—

Senator SINGH: No group, Senator Colbeck, got everything they wanted, but every group got something. It defined the concept of a practical, pragmatic compromise. It was an agreement. Indeed, it was a peace agreement. It was a final agreement on wood supply and conservation, securing a minimum of 137,000 cubic metres per year of high-quality sawlogs and agreeing to protect an extra 504,000 hectares of native forests with important conservation values. It was an agreement between—

Senator Colbeck interjecting—

Senator SINGH: Let us go through the list. It was an agreement, Senator Colbeck, between the Australian Conservation Foundation; the Australian Forest Contractors Association; the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union; Environment Tasmania; the Forest Industries Association of Tasmania; the National Association of Forestry; the Tasmanian Country Sawmillers Association; the Tasmanian Forest Contractors Association; Timber Communities Australia; and the Wilderness Society. Undeniably, certain fringe and intransigent industry and environment organisations were not supportive of the Tasmanian forest agreement. Those groups complained that the TFA was either a sell-out to the environmental lobby, by adding over half a million hectares of native forest into reserves, or a sell-out to the forestry industry, by allowing continued logging in native forests. But the signatories to this agreement, which I have listed, on the other hand, declared that they were prepared to move forward under a deal that provided certainty, supported jobs, preserved more areas with important conservation values and, most importantly, finished the bitter, never-ending war over Tasmania's forests. It is called the 'forest peace deal' for a very good reason. It brought peace. By 2013, the forest wars were over.
A Tasmanian forestry industry which derives resources from areas that contain high-value forests cannot prosper in the international market. In fact, the native forest sector in Tasmania has been in decline for the last 20 years. Prices for native forest wood products have been flat or falling, costs have been rising and both domestic and international competition has been increasing. Since 2008, the deterioration of the sector has accelerated because of the global financial crisis, increased woodchip production from South-East Asia, the high Australian dollar and declining Japanese paper demand. The old markets are gone and the traditional industry must change.

Despite this reality, on the basis of his empty, cruel promises in return for votes, Premier Will Hodgman is seeking to reignite the forest wars, for inane, political point-scoring reasons only, by ripping up the TFA and strangling the thousands of Tasmanian voices who want to object. Despite Will Hodgman's hollow bombast prior to 15 March that, were he to win the election, his first act would be to tear up the forest peace deal, this unprecedented agreement has not been torn up yet. The Tasmanian parliament's Legislative Council is currently debating its future and with it the future of Tasmania's forests and our forestry industry.

The conservative vision for the future of Tasmanian forests was made clear in Greg Hunt's feeble de-listing request that was rejected outright by the World Heritage Committee. In the words of former New South Wales environment minister and Attorney-General Bob Debus:

On the one hand they brazenly claim that the carefully conducted scientific assessments of the value of the forests are mistaken, and on the other they propose to introduce draconian new criminal laws to control forest protest.

And it is these draconian, poorly drafted laws that will mandatorily lock up Tasmanians. For the purposes of the ridiculously named Workplaces (Protection from Protesters) Bill:

... a person is engaging in a protest activity if the person participates, other than as a bystander, in a demonstration, a parade, an event, or a collective activity—about anything, anywhere that might be a workplace, a public place or on roads near what might be a workplace or a public place. Obviously this legislation is designed, if that is the right word—perhaps slapped-together is more apt—to stop anyone and everyone protesting about forestry or mining. In reality, Tasmanians will not be able to protest anywhere but in their homes or perhaps in their own gardens.

What is the Liberal Party in Tasmania about? What does it want? What is it really about, except corporate profit? It is completely split on the issue of personal freedom. Federally it claims to advocate free speech, democracy and individual freedom. Senator George Brandis and Prime Minister Tony Abbott wanted Australian speech to be so free that bigots could insult anyone they wanted, because they felt like it, because such bigotry would improve Australia's political and social discourse. And that solemn promises to the electorate could be freely made and broken just as quickly. But on the other hand Tasmanian Liberals seek to undermine not only Tasmanians' freedom of speech but freedom to associate and advocate ideas in a park, on a road or just about anywhere. (Time expired)

Mental Health

Senator XENOPHON (South Australia) (21:15): Tonight I would like to discuss an issue that is most serious and has not been discussed enough. In fact, many would say that, through neglect or indifference, it has been swept under the carpet. My interest was triggered by a
 constituent, Robert, who has stopped me in the street on a number of occasions over the past few years and has articulated this issue very well to me. He knows people, friends, who, because of the level of the antipsychotic medication they are on, could sleep 16 hours a day or more. Effectively, one-third of their living years are lost. He talks about other symptoms and side effects they have. My constituent calls this a 'major humanitarian disaster' in Australia, and his views deserve to be heard and debated so that we may get a better outcome.

At the outset, I want to make it clear that I am not in any way suggesting that people should not be prescribed antipsychotic medications where necessary, and nor should they go off it in any way without appropriate medical advice. I am simply suggesting we listen to credible experts in mental health about alternative methods and support, or alternative therapies, in accordance with the best medical practice, that can lead to a reduction of the dose of such medications, and with it a better outcome overall for both the patient and society at large.

The National Mental Health Commission released a national report card in 2012 on mental health and suicide prevention. One of the main recommendations encourages all governments to work collaboratively in setting a target to reduce early death and improve the physical health of people with mental illness. According to the report card, the poor physical health and early deaths of people with mental health difficulties is a serious national problem. This premature mortality of people with serious mental illness is lethal discrimination, according to some, where thousands of people are dying from suicide, heart disease and cancer, which are preventable and often treatable.

An Australian study from 2001, referred to in the 2012 report card, showed that people living with a mental illness had an overall death rate of two and a half times greater than the general population. In particular, the rates of heart related problems, diabetes and obesity are much higher than the rest of the community, and there is a 30 per cent higher chance of dying from cancer, when compared with the general population. With statistics like these, it is little wonder that the commission has labelled this a serious national problem.

The 2012 report card admits that antipsychotic medications that are prescribed to manage severe mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia, are directly associated to the risk of severe physical illnesses. This is a double blow for those suffering from severe mental illness, who will now add a decline in their physical health, and ultimately their quality of life, to what they are facing. Our Indigenous population are the hardest hit, due to poverty, marginalisation and lack of access to good medical and psychiatric care.

I would like to relay a story told to my office of a 21-year-old man in my constituency in South Australia who was put on Seroquel, but on too high a dose. He would wake at 10 am, rush to work and apologise profusely for being late, but to no avail. He was soon fired from the position because his boss said his mental health issues were 'not their problem'. His girlfriend politely told him that she needed the security of a partner who could keep a job, and she left him. Countless others across Australia are faced with similar situations, often due to overmedication. New research has shown that much lower doses of medication from early in the course of illness can make a patient much more accessible and responsive to psychological recovery.

The population of those with a mental illness is not connecting sufficiently with the limited services available. It is estimated that only one in five people with a mental illness has a tailored mental health treatment plan with their local GP. When it comes to prescribing
antipsychotic medication, it seems the burden falls disproportionately on GPs rather than on psychiatrists, who have an additional level of expertise. That concerns me. Fewer than half of all people suffering from mental illness receive any treatment. State government hospitals are unable to cope with the demand and discharge seriously ill patients back to GPs, where they languish until their next relapse.

The national report card in 2013 added a further eight recommendations to the existing 10 from 2012. In recommendation 2, the commission highlights the need to increase the current mental health services and support from between six and eight per cent to 12 per cent of the Australian population. This increase would more closely align with the current population of Australians who suffer from mental illness.

The report card goes on to highlight the need to develop national targets and indicators for mental health reform initially recommended in the previous year's report card. Yet there has been no commitment to adopt them. Since making these initial recommendations in 2012, another 2,200 people have taken their lives each year. Of these deaths, all can be attributed to some form of mental health issue. I suggest we need to do all we can to prevent all of these deaths. According to a study conducted in 2012 by the Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia, many people using antipsychotics describe significant impairment in their everyday life as a result of medication side effects. More research is needed into the serious side effects on the health of those affected.

Mental disorders account for 13.1 per cent of the burden of disease in Australia, which equates to $20 billion lost in productivity and labour force participation. Mental illness is a leading contributor to the burden of disease, in terms of morbidity rates and disability. In a recent Medibank Private report it was revealed that $29 billion is spent on mental illness in Australia annually. These enormous costs are largely the costs of failure—pensions, prisons and poverty—and are due to a lack of quality care of patients. Quality care will actually save large amounts of money. As federal parliamentarians we need to push for reform and investment. The federal government has a huge role to play here.

Treatment for mental illness should consist of three main elements: medication, therapy and, most importantly but quite often lacking, expert evidence based psychosocial care and community support. There is an obvious gap of ongoing clinical support in the community and education on the various illnesses and how to cope with them.

We have all heard the statistics: almost half of Australians will experience some form of mental health issue in their lifetime, while the rest of the population will attest to having someone close to them affected. If mental health issues have such a big impact on almost all of us, and on such a personal level, why are we not making a bigger deal about it? The answer is that most people are affected but have not found their voice yet. What is needed? With 75 per cent of mental illness emerging before the age of 25, we need to look at an investment in young people with mental illness and not at welfare. Imagine what a little investment to properly manage this crisis would affect: a society that can contribute more and a happier one at that. How can we expect those with severe mental illness to play a contributing role in society when they have such proven reduced life expectancies as a result of their associated ill health in those severe cases?

Professor Patrick McGorry, former Australian of the Year and president of the Society for Mental Health Research, is a strong advocate for structured investment in mental health to
decrease the premature death, preventable disability and lost productivity currently associated with this. To complement initiatives such as headspace, Professor McGorry highlights that more specialised expertise is required for a complex range of disorders in young people. With strong support and implementation, he predicts that up to $10 billion can be saved annually. This major return on investment cannot be ignored and is worth talking about. In fact, I spoke to Professor McGorry earlier this evening and he endorsed concerns about the overmedication of antipsychotic medication and a lack of credible alternatives and support. In fact, he made reference to trials being carried out using aspirin and fish oil that could reduce the need for such high doses. That research is welcome.

Whilst we wait for the National Mental Health Commission to report back on the progress of the 18 recommendations made in the 2012 and 2013 report cards, I urge my colleagues to push the mental health crisis back into the spotlight. Mental Health Week, which is from 5 to 12 October this year, is another vital opportunity for Australians to talk about mental health. I am grateful to my constituent Robert for raising this important issue with me. I am sorry that I have not raised it earlier, but I intend to raise it again and again until we get a result. I will continue to do more work on this, because as a nation we must do better to improve the quality of life of so many Australians who deserve better.

**Agriculture**

*Senator O'SULLIVAN* (Queensland—Nationals Whip in the Senate) (21:24): I intend to continue a theme that has been present in many of my speeches since I came to this place in February—that is, matters that are of significant importance to people in agriculture and primary production, particularly beef producers in my state of Queensland and, most particularly, beef producers in the western and northern aspects of the state, who are engaged in grass-fed beef production. I recently undertook a tour of western Queensland in the company of Senator Brett Mason, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, and over time we had a series of about 25 meetings, which allowed us to engage one-on-one, firsthand with over 300 people who are involved in the pastime of predominantly pastoral pursuits west of the township of Roma and all the way through to Mount Isa.

Whilst I have acknowledged before, and I will continue to acknowledge it again, that there are some aspects of agriculture and some agricultural enterprises that are doing well, I would have to declare that the majority of producers in the area through which we travelled are having a very, very significant struggle. I have put this matter on the record previously and I will continue to do so until we are able to start, as a government and as a parliament, to be able to respond with some meaningful changes to support this vital sector of our country to get back on their feet, to grow their businesses and to return to contributing to the wealth of this nation.

There is a belief amongst many that the problems in the bush are confined simply to debt and drought and that somehow by mitigating the debt circumstances, transferring the type of debt and the application of debt and having rain will restore their fortunes and that everything will be all right. I can report to you that that is not the case. Drought and debt circumstances for many have compounded their circumstances, but the problems that are facing these producers have been coming for 20 years. It is about a lack of profitability in their enterprises.

These enterprises are reporting, in many cases, zero return on investment and those that are operating effectively are operating on about three or four per cent return on investment. These
are not anecdotal figures; these are figures that have been borne out by many peer-reviewed empirical studies into this issue over the last decade. We have producers who are reporting the same level of income per kilogram for their commodity—for their beef or for their livestock—as they were receiving 20 years ago. In fact, for those who have looked at the index in the last 24 months, there have been occasions where producers who have sold their entire livestock for up to one-quarter of the prices per kilogram that they would have received 20 years ago.

Many of the property owners I spoke to have completely sold all of their breeding stock, and they are in no financial position, even with the return of fortune with the weather and even with restructuring their debt with government support in some instances, to restock their properties. In the language of producers, many sold breeding livestock, including replacement heifers, for as low as 30c or 35c a kilogram, yielding prices that for many barely covered their freight and that certainly showed no return on their investment in that livestock. We all know that when there is a break in the seasons and surface waters are replenished and the need for investment in fodder and support feed is mitigated, thousands upon thousands of producers will return to the market and will be competing for replacement stock and so, if they are in a position to purchase that stock, they will be buying them at a price 600 or 700 per cent more expensive than they originally sold their breeding stock for.

The issues I found in the bush involved drought, debt, profitability and, in many cases, the impact of a high dollar. There are consequences from the reduction in breeder numbers—they have their land but they are incapable of producing the commodity that typically provides their income. I am talking about millions of hectares of country in the west where they have limited or no surface water, even if they did have pasture feed. They have endured diminished extension services funded by state and federal governments, so in many cases they are being denied the sort of support they received for many decades which enabled them to cope better with the circumstances they faced.

People on the land are reporting large increases in the number of dingoes and predatory dogs. I am inclined to think that the dingo is now in the minority. Dogs such as pig dogs have bred with dingoes, and those crossbred dogs now make up the majority of the dog population in the west. These dogs are much more aggressive and there are many reports of these dogs pulling down cattle of a size that a dingo would be incapable of hunting to ground. Unlike dingoes, these dogs might pull down 20 or 30 calves or weaners in the course of a day and consume none. It is a blood sport for them. There is evidence that these dogs are now travelling up to 120 kilometres in a day, so the traditional means of tracking a pattern of dog activity on your property and responding are gone. By the time you have discovered the work of these dogs, they might be 50 or 60 kilometres away.

Weed infestations are getting out of control. West of Charleville, between Charleville and up around the back way to Stonehenge and Jundah, about 50 per cent of properties in the mulga are no longer occupied. During the course of our visit a producer who went there in 1988 told us that in one district alone where there used to be nine families on a mail route there are now none and on the north-south mail route that intersects with the route I just spoke of there is one family left out of eight. Survey work on a property north of Aramac showed there were 26,000 kangaroos on a property of 110,000 acres. It is professionally estimated that they are eating up to 50 per cent of the pasture. The cattle are competing with this and
they are competing with the dogs, and, Mr Acting Deputy President Back, you would know better than anyone in this place that fertility rates are down around 40 per cent.

It is now absolutely impossible for these enterprises to service any debt—and, mind you, they have got debt. They have their old traditional debt that in many cases was properly invested in developing and increasing the productivity of their properties but, more recently, they are borrowing money against the remaining equity in their properties to survive. In effect, these producers are now subsidising the production of beef in our country—not all of them, but in the areas I pass through, which make up about 60 per cent of the land mass of Queensland, they are subsidising the production of beef and there are others who are enjoying the benefit of that subsidisation. In any other business one might consider that that was not a very sensible state of affairs. Indeed, for many of these producers it probably is no longer a sensible thing to do but there comes a point for these people on the land where everything they have—everything their forebears had—is invested in their rural properties and the road gets so narrow that it is impossible for them to turn around. In many cases they are on a collision course with bankruptcy.

I listened very carefully to Senator Madigan and Senator Xenophon, who spoke about mental health. As we travelled through western Queensland, these people did not talk in statistical terms—they named their neighbours who had committed suicide. They did not say that a half of one per cent of the population have been subject to mental health issues and have taken their life. They named their neighbours and the people in their community, and they named their wives and their children. I am not laying that at our feet; I am not going to lay that at the feet of this government or anyone in it. If we allow these circumstances to continue or deteriorate, then we have to take some ownership of what is happening in rural Australia and particularly in our state of Queensland.

In Queensland we are suffering drought conditions that have not been seen since 1902. Properties are receiving less income per kilogram of beef production than they did 20 years ago. The volume of beef that they are producing on their properties is up, because they have invested in pastures—as you would know, Mr Acting Deputy President Back—and they have invested in genetics. They have been able to produce more kilograms of beef per hectare than they did 10 or 20 years ago. They are not currently confronted with some of the big infrastructure and capital costs faced by programs years ago, such as the reticulation of water, the building of dams and turkey's nests, the fencing of the properties—all things which increased the productivity of these enterprises. But it has taken them nowhere, because, as I said, they are being paid the same per kilogram for their commodity as they were two decades ago. They were rewarded for their hard diligence—I must say, significantly—by the decision to suspend the live cattle trade in 2011 by their Commonwealth government. Again, I lay that at no-one's feet; that was a decision of this place. In retrospect it was a very ill-conceived decision and its impact is still playing through the balance sheets of these properties and those of their neighbours all the way down as far as Central Queensland.

We have a subprime crisis in northern Queensland and northern Australia. We have had reports, with supporting evidence, of declines of up to 28 per cent in the value of properties. When you have a collection of securities where your loan-value ratio is 70 per cent, which is not unusual if you have some more farm securities involved, and when you have a 28 per cent collapse in value of the main asset in the body of securities, you are nudging subprime. I say
there are hundreds of properties—possibly more than 1,000—across northern Australia that are marking time with their banks, with their lenders, waiting for a break in the seasons, waiting for improvements in commodity prices and waiting for increases in live cattle exports that will impact positively back on the domestic markets. I think the banks will then exercise their rights to sell these properties. Over the next five years or more, we are going to see the complexion of primary production in my state change significantly and not necessarily for the better. Whilst I am not against aggregations of holdings by corporations, Australian or otherwise, their behaviour is completely different to that beehive of family-held enterprises, partnerships and corporations that underpins the viability of hundreds of our small communities right across my state—I am sure the same applies to New South Wales, Victoria and indeed Western Australia.

I made myself a promise during this trip, and I have tied my right wrist to my left ankle on this promise: it is time for us to draw a line in the sand. I am no longer going to devote my speeches, my time and my energy to establishing what the problems are. These people are tired of hearing from their members of parliament about what their problems are. They are tired of us indicating to them what the circumstances were that brought them into these unfortunate circumstances of their own. It is time for all of us across this place to dig deep, without regard to partisanship, to start to produce some solutions to support our primary producers. Each of us has to personally put a value on primary production for our nation. Each of us has to answer the question of whether we intend to continue to support these small communities and the social infrastructure that goes with them. We need to decide whether agriculture is important to us. We need to accept, I say, the proposition that agriculture and primary production will be the next economy. Long after the mining resources of gas, coal, iron ore and the like have made their contribution, we will go back to the age of producing soft commodities, predominantly for export into the Asian market.

I say to colleagues in this place that we need to spend some of our time—not all of our time; everyone here has a very important mission and they have their own missions—thinking about our fellow Australians who have invested their lives, in many cases for many generations, in agricultural pursuits across Western Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and all the way across the nation until we get to the beautiful west coast of Western Australia. We need to put a value on that. We need to ask ourselves where they fit. We need to ask ourselves whether we want to join in partnership with them as they transition to this new economy and whether we are going to support them to take and exploit these markets in the Asian area. Decisions have to be made with them in mind.

**Broadband**

Senator CONROY (Victoria—Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (21:44): Another sitting of parliament and there are yet more politically motivated coalition reviews of the NBN that need to be repudiated. As the Senate is already aware, the coalition has, since the election, commissioned six different reviews of the NBN at an outrageous cost of more than $10 million to the taxpayer. That is $10 million being funnelled into the back pockets of Minister Turnbull's mates. That is right—those on the other side may well gasp—$10 million for no other purpose than to try and smear the Labor Party and the reputations of hardworking Australians who supported the National Broadband Network.
Tonight I want to focus on the two latest political witch-hunts, the Scales review, which looked at the NBN policy development process, and the KordaMentha review, which looked at NBN Co's governance. Let me start with the Scales review. I have known Bill Scales for a long time. He has been a fine public servant. But I wrote to him when I heard he had accepted this job to express my disappointment that he would sully himself in such an overt political attack with such little merit. Unfortunately, that is what happened. The Scales review of the National Broadband Network was deeply flawed from the outset. It set out to denigrate the NBN and ignored considerable achievements, focusing simply on attacking the Labor government. Its findings were, quite simply, wrong.

Mr Scales chose to ignore that NBN Co built from scratch a company of close to 3,000 people, a company with all of the processes and systems needed to function as a wholesale telecommunications company. He chose to ignore that it had successfully launched an interim satellite service which was so popular that it effectively sold out faster than anyone could have anticipated. He chose to ignore that it had designed and constructed a long-term satellite solution that was on schedule and on budget for services beginning in mid-2015. Further, it designed and was deploying a 4G fixed wireless network. It designed and was deploying a transit network to support all of the access technologies in this massive project, this project worth billions of dollars—and that transit network was on budget and on schedule for completion by 2015. NBN Co developed a 27-year special access undertaking which was subsequently accepted by the ACCC. This was unprecedented. All of that was ignored and Mr Scales also ignored the fact that NBN Co preserved the integrity of its financial plan while overcoming difficulties in the brownfields fibre rollout.

To come to his conclusions, Mr Scales also had to disagree with all of the advice given to the Labor government by numerous independent government agencies and policy experts. Let me just list them for the Senate and those listening. Mr Scales disagrees with the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission. Mr Scales disagrees with the NBN Panel of Experts, which included Ms Patricia Scott, Secretary of the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy; Dr Ken Henry, Secretary of the Treasury; Reg Coutts, Professor Emeritus of Communications at the University of Adelaide; John Wiley, CEO of Lazard Carnegie Wiley; Rod Tucker, Laureate Professor at the University of Melbourne and one of the world's foremost experts in fibre technology; Tony Mitchell, then chairman of Allphones; and Tony Shaw, a former chairman of the Australian Communications Authority.

But it does not stop there. Mr Scales absolutely rejects the advice of the Australian National Audit Office. This advice found that the advice provided by that panel of experts I have just listed was appropriate for the government to act upon. The ANAO's report said: The conclusions and recommendations in the Panel's Evaluation Report are supported by appropriate evidence.

So on the one hand we have Mr Scales, a former executive of Telstra, whose paid job was to ensure that we could not get reform of the telecommunications sector in this country, who was hired by Mr Turnbull and who is a close friend of Ziggy Switkowski. On the other hand, we have the independent National Audit Office.

But he does not stop there. Mr Scales disagrees with technology experts such as CSIRO and National ICT Australia, who rated fibre-to-the-home as the best broadband technology
available to Australia. I could go on—Google and Cisco, for example. I could list endless support for fibre as 'the endgame', as Dr Hugh Bradlow, Telstra's chief technology officer, called it. But, no, Mr Bill Scales knows better than all of those people. According to Mr Scales, all of these Australian and some overseas institutions and experts are wrong and he is right. He very much reminds me of the minister who paid him to do this review. All the experts say fibre-to-the-home is the broadband endgame; but, oh no, Minister Malcolm Turnbull knows best—copper is the future for telecommunications in this country.

As Graeme Samuel has said, this review is nothing more than 'political payback'. As the former head of the ACCC, I am not surprised Mr Samuel feels this way. One of Mr Scales' key findings was that the ACCC gave advice to the expert panel that it was not qualified to give and the expert panel did not question. What was this advice? That the upgrade pathway from fibre-to-the-node to fibre-to-the-home was not cost effective. Mr Scales claims that the panel of experts did not properly test this advice from the ACCC and that the panel relied heavily on it in making recommendations to the government about the NBN. What is the truth? The truth is simple. Mr Scales is completely wrong—and it is not just me standing here today who says this. Professor Rod Tucker, a member of that expert panel, has made this clear in a recent article repudiating the findings of Mr Scales. Professor Tucker says:

... all of these assertions are incorrect, and this taints the credibility of the audit.

That is right—'taints the credibility of the audit'. He goes on to say:

In reality, the panel spent many hours discussing and analysing the technology options and the upgrade paths ... The panel also independently evaluated other models for upgrades.

Simply put the panel did not rely heavily on the ACCC advice.

Professor Tucker's view has been backed up by another member of the expert panel. In a letter to the publication Communications Day, Professor Reg Coutts from the University of Adelaide, said:

I can only strongly echo Rod's comments that we thoroughly considered the options for the NBN particularly FTTN and the possible scenarios to transition to a FTTP solution which is accepted worldwide as the final solution ... as Telstra chief scientist Dr Hugh Bradlow has said publicly several times.

Professor Coutts goes on to say—and these next quotes are the most damning indictment of Mr Bill Scales and his political witch-hunt:

Our conclusion ... that FTTN could not be assumed as a transition to FTTP ... was reached before the 'unsolicited' report by the ACCC was received literally at the 11th hour of the process and certainly did not influence our conclusion.

Professor Coutts finishes by making clear that Mr Scales knew this before he wrote his report. Professor Coutts said:

Rod, I and Tony Shaw each individually told Bill Scales that the ACCC ‘bombshell’ as it has been termed was NOT a major influence (let alone a ‘bombshell’) on our conclusion re FTTN transition to FTTP.

So here we have two people with full knowledge of the process shooting down one of the key findings of the coalition commissioned report. Worse, Mr Scales knew this finding was false
but he made it an important part of his audit's conclusions anyway. It tells you all you need to know about the credibility of this audit.

Professor Tucker's response also makes another very important point. He says:

A fundamental flaw with the audit process was that Scales, by his own admission, did not have access to key information, with limited access to documents associated with the panel of experts' activities.

In other words, he was not privy to what the panel of experts considered. Let's not let information and facts get in the way of Mr Bill Scales. So, with limited information, nothing like the full facts, the man paid for by Mr Turnbull comes up with the findings, surprisingly, of exactly what the minister asked him and what he wanted to hear. What a shock. What an indictment and a waste of taxpayers' money.

Mr Scales also ignores or dismisses further work that was undertaken to implement the government's NBN policy, following the government's decision. He just dismisses it. The development of the NBN business case, which shows that the NBN will generate a return for taxpayers, is something that even Malcolm Turnbull's own shonky strategic review does not refute. The implementation study conducted by McKinsey and Company and KPMG found that the $43 billion rollout estimate was conservative and that the government could expect a return on its equity investment sufficient to fully recover its funding; and steps taken to enact legislative changes to govern NBN Co and facilitate the NBN rollout.

I am immensely proud of everybody involved in getting NBN Co off the ground and ensuring that we stopped the likes of Mr Sol Trujillo at Telstra from bullying the government, from bullying the telecommunications sector and from running telecommunications policy in this country. Mr Scales, in a truly mind-blowing argument, suggests that after Telstra sabotaged the NBN mark 1 tender process, the government should then have gone back and sat down with Telstra to negotiate with them. That is right—reward Telstra for its disgraceful conduct when it was kicked out of the tender process.

If the government were to have followed Mr Bill Scales' advice, more than 240,000 Australians today would not have faster or cheaper broadband. There are 240,000 Australians today using the National Broadband Network and getting faster and cheaper broadband than they did after 11 years of kowtowing to Telstra and letting Telstra run the sector and the policy in this country. I am proud to have been part of a government that oversaw the structural separation of Telstra and delivered fast and affordable broadband to hundreds of thousands of Australians.

Before I conclude my remarks I want to mention the KordaMentha governance review into NBN Co. That is right—another review. It does not take long to realise why the NBN rollout is stalling and crawling today. Since Mr Turnbull became the minister, all we have had is lots of politically motivated reviews—no action and $10 million of taxpayers' money funded to his mates like Henry Ergas. The KordaMentha review is yet another vindictive attempt by Minister Turnbull to smear the reputations of highly respected executives that are leaders in their industries.

Mr Turnbull has form on this. Before the election he threatened the NBN Co board with a judicial inquiry. He also made a string of wild claims about the governance of NBN Co, including a lack of accountability as well as whether timely and accurate information was provided to the parliament at all times by NBN Co. All of these claims were false and they...
have not been supported by the KordaMentha review. When he was shadow minister, Mr Turnbull also questioned the capacity of the chair of NBN Co to do her job. He claimed management was 'tearing itself to pieces' and 'the board is opposed to the chief executive'. The governance review into NBN Co found this not to be the case.

The review, however, did make other findings critical of members of the NBN Co board. I think on this occasion it is better to outline how the directors themselves have responded. It is, after all, their reputations that the minister has smeared in this process. A total of nine directors, including one who is still serving on the board, wrote a response. They disagreed with most of the findings and considered many of them to be 'unsupported by the facts'. They also made it clear that all key strategic risks were considered on a timely basis and that the board promptly disclosed information regarding NBN Co to shareholder ministers and their departments.

One director hit the nail on the head when they told the Australian Financial Review that the KordaMentha review was nothing more than a 'witch-hunt'. In his response to the review, former NBN Co CEO Mike Quigley raised his frustration with the 'deliberate distortion of facts' when it came to NBN Co. I want to put on the record my thanks to Mr Quigley and the directors of NBN Co, all of whom I worked with during my time as communications minister. We may not have always agreed, but they always performed their duties with care and diligence. Their records and the board positions that they have held and continue to hold speak for themselves. I also want to say that it is profoundly troubling that we have a minister whose intent is always to smear those he disagrees with. It does not help recruit people to government business enterprises when they know that a minister can behave so disgracefully.

But we have one more report being released this very night. I will speak on that—it will not come as a surprise—in the future. It is their cost-benefit analysis. I have made comments in the past about this review and I intend to make further ones.

If we look past these politically motivated reviews, we see the NBN rollout stalling and the prospect of the government buying the copper network back off Telstra. You can play the game and pretend that they have given it to you for free, providing you do the maintenance, and you can pretend that that means the capex maintenance cost is going to be hundreds of millions of dollars, if not $1 billion, a year. That is a farce. But let me say this: Malcolm Turnbull recommending the buying of the copper from Telstra will have the same effect on NBN Co as his recommendation to Ray Williams at HIH to buy FAI had on the insurance industry and the company, HIH. It went bankrupt.

**Middle East**

Senator RHIANNON (New South Wales) (22:04): The war against Palestine continues. Along with the deaths of more than 2,000 and the destruction of essential infrastructure, many aid funded projects of vital importance to the health and wellbeing of Gazans have been destroyed. On 20 August this year a number of aid groups wrote to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Julie Bishop. The groups are Act for Peace, ActionAid Australia, Anglican Overseas Aid, Australia Palestine Advocacy Network, Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA, ChildFund Australia, Islamic Relief, Oxfam Australia, PLAN, RedR, Save the Children and World Vision Australia.
These groups wrote to 'request the Australian government’s ongoing support to humanitarian, reconstruction and recovery efforts in Gaza, and to intensified diplomacy to reach a just and lasting agreement that ensures peace, security and prosperity for both Israelis and Palestinians'. These 12 groups urged the Australian government to take action in five key areas. These are:

(a) Press all sides to refrain from violence and hold them accountable to their obligations to protect Palestinian and Israeli civilians from military operations and rocket attacks, in accordance with international law.
(b) Push for improved access to Gaza, including through the UN Security Council, for the delivery of humanitarian and reconstruction materials.
(c) Provide Australia’s fair share of funding to Gaza’s reconstruction.
(d) Lift the blockade of Gaza as a critical first step towards a durable peace in Israel and the OPT.
(e) Ensure the full and equal involvement of Palestinian and Israeli women in the resolution of the conflict.

I request that the foreign minister, Julie Bishop, publicly release her response to this important letter.

As well as the more than 2,000 Palestinians in Gaza killed since the start of the latest Israeli attack, according to emergency services, 10,915 Palestinians—men, women and children—have been wounded. Since the truce collapsed on 19 August, at least 112 Palestinians have been killed in more than 350 Israeli air strikes. At least 70 mosques and 277 schools have been damaged. Over half a million schoolchildren in the Gaza Strip will be unable to start the semester that begins this week. According to the Ma'an News Agency, although schools were rescheduled to open last Saturday, nearly one-third are still being used as shelters for some of the 485,000 Gazans displaced by the Israeli bombardment, including 100,000 who have been left homeless.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs have estimated that 373,000 children will need direct and specialised psychological counselling after the end of the assault, while all students would require some form of psychological assistance. Of the more than 3,000 children who have been injured in the assault, UNOCHA said that around 1,000 would suffer lifelong disability, in addition to the estimated 1,500 who have been orphaned. A number of child-safe and disability-accessible playgrounds have been built in the Gaza Strip, many with overseas development assistance funding. The aim is to provide a place for psychosocial rehabilitation for children to engage in play therapy programs. Some of these playgrounds in the north of Gaza city have been damaged, undermining a very important support service for Palestinian children.

There is no justification for Israel's recent and ongoing brutal massacre in Gaza. The idea that Israel's military action against Gaza is in self-defence against Hamas rockets is cover for Israel's attempt to take over more Palestinian land. Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories and eight-year long blockade of Gaza are cruel, degrading and debilitating and have ruined and will continue to ruin millions of lives for generations to come. Gaza, home to 1.8 million people, is known as the world's largest prison because of the Israeli blockade. Like the Sri Lankan government in 2009, Israel accuses a non-state group of using civilians as human shields before attacking them anyway. In the case of Sri Lanka, it was the Tamil civilians. In the case of Israel, the Palestinian civilians in Gaza have been named. As Professor Jake Lynch
from the University of Sydney has written and spoken about many times, such an attack is explicitly ruled out by a norm of humanitarian protection accepted by the vast majority of the international community. Article 50 of the 1977 additional protocols to the Geneva conventions specifies that:

The presence within the civilian population of individuals who do not come within the definition of civilians does not deprive the population of its civilian character.

The list of signatories to this protocol includes 160 of the 200-odd UN member states—Australia being one of them. Among the absentees are Israel, Sri Lanka and the United States. Collective punishment is not permitted under the Geneva conventions and is a war crime. Article 33 of Geneva convention IV states:

No protected person may be punished for an offence he or she has not personally committed.

Collective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism are prohibited.

Pillage is prohibited.

Reprisals against protected persons and their property are prohibited.

Time and again, the international community has failed the people of Palestine. It was inspiring to see the hundreds of thousands of people all over the world, from Madrid to Yemen, Stockholm, Paris, Cairo, San Diego, Jordan, Sydney and the Yarmouk refugee camp in Damascus protesting against the Israeli government's war. Meanwhile the governments of the US and Australia continue to provide cover for Israel's brutality and support the Israeli military.

I was very fortunate to visit Palestine in January 2013, both in Gaza and in the West Bank. While there, I visited projects that were funded by the Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA projects and Anglican Overseas Aid and saw firsthand the constructive work they were undertaking in Gaza under the most difficult conditions. I do send my condolences to the families of the people who have died and the people who are injured. The resilience of these people is deeply inspiring. Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA has been undertaking work in Gaza for 25 years to improve food security and boost incomes for people living in the area. Many times they have had to rebuild the projects that are being funded by Australians giving generously. Devastatingly, many of these life-changing projects in Gaza were destroyed again when Israel started this latest offensive. In particular, the majority of food security projects funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade under the AMENCA program have been destroyed. Since 2009, these projects have included farmland rehabilitation, greenhouse installations and agricultural training—all of which have now been shelled and bombed to ruins. I visited a number of greenhouses in parts of Gaza that had been badly hit during the previous Gaza attack in December 2012. At the time the people working there told me of their plans to rebuild. Now I understand that so much of that area has been totally destroyed.

The al-Wafa rehabilitation and geriatric hospital in the eastern Gaza city neighbourhood of Shujaiya is another sad story. The hospital was an APHEDA-supported rehabilitation hospital for people with serious physical disabilities. The Israeli Defence Force started bombing the hospital with warning missiles on 11 July, demanding the patients be evacuated. On 17 July the hospital was bombed with more warning missiles. Some staff were slightly injured. The IDF started firing again at the hospital. At some point, in coordination with the Red Cross, the IDF agreed to stop firing for two hours to enable the hospital's total evacuation. Since then, I understand it became completely empty and has now been destroyed. The hospital, funded
through donations from the Australian Muslim community and trade union groups through APHEDA, was the only long-term rehabilitation hospital in all of Gaza. Patients were transferred to nearby medical centres. However, these centres are now seriously underresourced and overcrowded. The destruction of this medical facility leaves a huge gap in support for those living in Gaza with serious disabilities.

Also when I was in Gaza I visited the Al-Ahli Anglican hospital. The number of wounded at this centre has, I understand, exceeded the capacity of that hospital, and they have been undertaking a huge job because all state medical facilities in Gaza are on overload. Many of the patients are being transferred to this hospital and are being taken there in an unceasing flow of ambulances, I have been informed. Al-Ahli is experiencing shortages in food, medicines, fuel for transport and operating generators, and much more. The current conflict has also interrupted the work of the breast cancer clinic. Senators may remember that this Senate, in November 2011, actually passed a motion in support of the Anglican overseas aid project called Women Die Waiting. It is a campaign that highlights that breast cancer is one of the major causes of death for women in the Gaza Strip, and that motion that was passed called on all members of the Senate to support the project Women Die Waiting. I just thought that was terribly sad and very ironic—that now the very hospital that has brought forward that program is under so much hardship and difficulty itself.

I have also received news that a number of projects run by the MA'AN Development Centre have been severely damaged. A centre-funded nursery that supported agriculture in Gaza by growing fruit trees and saplings that could be relocated to greenhouses and other rehabilitated land has incurred over $13,000 worth of damage. The nursery was unable to be accessed because of ongoing military hostilities, leaving some 50,000 trees, saplings and seedlings to wither and die. I visited the MA'AN headquarters in both the West Bank and Gaza. They are working under the most adverse conditions. I do congratulate them on the work, and I very much hope that all their staff are safe.

The MA'AN Development Centre's field office, which had been used to coordinate the food security agricultural work in the south of the Gaza Strip, has, I understand, been seriously damaged, to the tune of about $75,000. Of particular concern is the damage suffered by the MA'AN main office in Gaza as a result of an air strike. This building was also an apartment block where many MA'AN staff members had been living. On 29 July Israel knocked out the only power plant in Gaza. The ABC reported that the local energy authority said the initial damage assessments suggested that the plant could be out of action for a year. 'The power plant is finished,' its director stated.

I urge Australian MPs to add their voice for this war to stop. Speaking to aid representatives I hear a very clear message that what is needed in Gaza is emergency humanitarian aid. I think this is a message we also need to be more vocal about. APHEDA hopes to provide urgent food and care packages to those forced to flee their homes. APHEDA is also prioritising support for overcrowded and underresourced medical centres and providing funds to begin rebuilding the recently attacked al-Wafa hospital and other hospitals so that they may continue their very important work. It is a deep concern that recent cuts to Australia's foreign aid budget of $7 billion will clearly undermine development in the region and some of this work being undertaken. The Australian government should condemn Israel's
harsh actions in Gaza and the damage they have caused to essential projects in the region funded with Australian aid money.

The Australian Greens policy calls on the Australian government to halt military cooperation and military trade with Israel. The call to end military trade with Israel is being taken up by many organisations and within some parliaments. A coalition of Chilean MPs from different parties has started a parliamentary petition asking their government to stop all acquisition of Israeli arms. Chile is one of the top 10 importers of Israeli weapons globally. In Brazil, the Minister of Defence, Celso Amorim, is being called upon to clarify all current military contracts with Israel as well as the ongoing presence of Brazilian military attaches in an office of the Brazilian armed forces in Tel Aviv. It has certainly been identified by many community organisations that this is an important way to assist Gaza by cutting off military ties with Israel. Israel's attacks on Gaza impact on its own interests. Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia need to be challenged.

An important letter by 164 Australians of Jewish identity and background identifies how some in the Jewish community leadership debase the charge of anti-Semitism by applying it to all criticism of Israel. This letter calls on Jewish Australians to break their silence on the onslaught on Gaza by Israel. Among the signatories are actress Miriam Margolyes, union leader Kim Sattler and writers Sara Dowse, Antony Lowenstein and Susan Varga. Vivienne Porzsolt of Jews Against the Occupation, which organised the open letter, said: Silence is consent and, as Jews, we must oppose atrocities taken in our name.

She went on to say:

No racism, including anti-Semitism, is ever excusable. However, the Jewish community leadership promotes the identification of Jews with Israel and all its actions. They label Jewish critics of Israel as ‘self-hating’ and ‘not real Jews’. They debase the charge of anti-Semitism by applying it to all criticism of Israel.

In Australia there have been other important activities highlighting the tragic developments throughout July. I, along with 72 former and current MPs, including former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser, have signed the Canberra Declaration on Gaza, in which we call on all Australian politicians to also support the United Nations Human Rights Council's decision to launch an independent inquiry into purported violations of international humanitarian and human rights laws in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. The declaration also states the following:

The rockets fired from Gaza are not in any way justified and, insofar as they threaten and harm civilians, are illegal under international law.

However, these imprecise rockets cannot be compared with the broad-scale bombing of Gaza by Israel, which has one of the world's largest military forces. The full statement can be found at gazadeclaration.com, and I urge all senators and MPs to sign it.

Australia is one of many Western governments that are showing a lack of meaningful response to the situation in Palestine. Ben Saul, a professor of international law at Sydney University, speaking in this Parliament House on 16 July, stated:

By encouraging or tolerating Israeli violations of international law, Australia weakens the international rule of law, undermines peace and forsakes justice for Palestinians.
In the face of state-sponsored killing on an extensive scale and in the absence of effective political leadership, I do believe we all have a responsibility to act.

The final word should go back to Gaza. I met the head of UNRWA when I was there, as well as very many impressive workers in that organisation. On 14 July, UNRWA's Pierre Krahenbuhl stated:

We must be careful about the endless numeration of casualty numbers. The dead and injured in Gaza are not anonymous. Behind the figures lie multiple individual destinies now torn apart. Too often in their lives have Gazan civilians been denied their dignity. Anonymity in death or injury is the ultimate denial. Palestinians are not statistics, and we must never allow them to be treated as such. They are human beings like others in the world with their identity, and the same hopes and expectations for an improved future for their children.

Veterans

Senator WHISH-WILSON (Tasmania) (22:24): Tonight is my first speech for the Australian Greens on the portfolio responsibility of veterans' affairs, which I have recently taken over from my party room colleague Penny Wright. I would like to start by thanking her for her hard work and the excellent handover that she recently gave me.

I have taken on responsibility for the portfolio for a number of reasons. The main reasons are that I have done some military service myself, I know many veterans and I also have an ongoing interest in military history and military affairs. My service in the military was only short—three and a half years in the Australian Defence Force Academy from 1986 and graduated in 1988; then I went to Royal Military College in 1989. I joined because I wanted to fly helicopters as a young boy, but I was medically discharged in 1989, and so my career was cut short. However, over the years I have kept in touch with a number of the close friends that I made from the time; some are still serving ADF personnel, but many are now also veterans themselves of both Gulf wars, Afghanistan and important peacekeeping operations such as East Timor. I was also born into, and married into, a family of veterans. My father is a Vietnam veteran, as are my two godfathers.

Ever since I did the daily paper round as a young boy in Western Australia through the veterans' ward at Sunset Hospital, where I met and developed friendships with hundreds of veterans from both of the major wars, I have been interested in military history and military affairs. My interest always vacillates between a strange fascination to learn more, a repulsion and a deep sadness. Recently my brother, father and I toured the battlefields of World War I using my great-grandfather Clarence's secret war diary, and it only occurred to me then just how lucky I was to have met, in my own lifetime, so many veterans from this most terrible conflict. It did not seem such a big deal as a boy, but it sure does now that I know what I know. Stepping into the fields of Passchendaele, Pozieres, Villers-Bretonneux and the Somme, following the footsteps of my ancestors, was a very emotional and gut-wrenching experience. Although it belongs to another time and another place, I felt many eerie and close connections to this land which witnessed mankind's most brutal 'hell of hate and fury'. I have no doubt this is because of the seeds that were planted during my daily, cheery childhood chats with often lonely and sick veterans. I often reflect that the veterans were more interested in the joys of children than they were in the afternoon daily newspaper I had to sell.

The commemoration of the Anzacs and the Great War is an important time—a critical time—in our and in other nations' histories. As a nation and as individuals we need to
remember and honour the sacrifice of war and peacetime service, but we need to be honest and forward looking in how we do this. We need to use this as a time to reflect and reassess exactly what the Anzac legend is, what it means and what it should mean—not just to us but to our veterans and to our defence personnel into the future. I look forward to engaging with veteran communities and also to speaking more on the meaning and interpretation of this commemoration in the Senate over coming months. There are currently 20,164 Australian service pensioners from the Second World War; 4,383 from the Korean and Malayan forces; nearly 32,000 from Vietnam; 70 from the Gulf War and 348 from East Timor. Undoubtedly, more from recent conflicts like Afghanistan will also need our support.

I enjoyed Senator Farrell’s various adjournment speeches on his ancestors’ military service, and it is now a great honour and privilege to have the chance to record some of my immediate family’s military service. Tonight I would like to talk about John Henry Browning but, similarly to Senator Farrell, I also intend to outline the wartime experience and sacrifice of other family members at another point in time. I started with ‘Johnny’, as he was called, because of a recent meeting I had with Shinzo Abe, the Japanese Prime Minister, when he was here in Australia. I attended the official dinner for Mr Abe here at Parliament House and was hoping to personally give him a letter from Paul Watson, asking that Mr Abe read a plea from the founder of the Sea Shepherd to cease the cruel slaughter of whales in the Southern Ocean. I was lucky enough to find an opportunity that evening to respectfully look Mr Abe in the eye and hand over this letter from Paul Watson, but I also took the opportunity when introducing myself to inform Mr Abe that my family had relatives—my kids’ great-grandfather, Johnny—buried at Sandakan, and I thanked him for his acknowledgment of Sandakan during his parliamentary speech to the Australian people earlier that day. Shinzo Abe said:

Our fathers and grandfathers lived in a time that saw Kokoda and Sandakan. How many young Australians, with bright futures to come, lost their lives? For those who made it through the war, how much trauma did they feel years and years later from these painful memories? I can find absolutely no words to say; I can only stay humble against the evils and horrors of history. May I most humbly speak for Japan and on behalf of the Japanese people here in sending my most sincere condolences towards the many souls who lost their lives.

I think all senators were probably there for that speech as well.

Recently my daughter Bronte completed a school assignment on Sandakan which outlines the details of the military service, life and death of my wife Natalie’s grandfather and Bronte’s great-grandfather, John Henry Browning, who was brutally murdered during the infamous Sandakan death marches. Bronte worked on this assignment with her grandfather Rob, and I will now refer to some content from this work.

Johnny served in the Royal Australian Army in the ill-fated 2/4th Machine Gun Battalion during the Second World War. His journey began in Northam, Western Australia, and ended at Ranau, Borneo, as a result of the Sandakan death marches. Johnny was to become one of over 22,000 Australians taken as prisoners of war by Japanese forces. At the end of the war, only 13,872 of the prisoners were found alive. One-third of the prisoners died. Sadly for our family, Johnny was one soldier who never made it home.

Johnny first left his hometown of Northam in Western Australia with the 2/4th Machine Gun Battalion for training during July 1941 in Adelaide and then went on to Darwin. After
completing their training, the battalion left Darwin on 30 December and, while sailing past Port Moresby, were subject to a Japanese attack near Rabaul, New Britain. The convoy was turned around and sent back to Fremantle before continuing on towards Malaya and then Singapore.

Having received a frantic phone call from Johnny for a secret meeting, Great Nanna Thelma, who had not seen her husband in months and had since given birth to their son, Robert, travelled with their baby from Northam in rural Western Australia to the Ocean Beach Hotel in Cottesloe to visit Johnny. Johnny had temporarily gone absent without leave—or what is called 'AWOL'—whilst his ship was docked in Fremantle to meet with Thelma. It was a long and difficult trip by train in those days and, by the time Great Nanna Thelma arrived with baby Robert, she discovered Johnny had been caught by the military police drinking in the public bar while he was waiting and had been forced back to his ship. She and Johnny missed each other by so little and never saw each other again. He also never got to meet his son, Robert, who never knew the man he would later call his dad.

After sailing out of Fremantle, the 2/4th battalion and others, who were now separated into brigades, arrived in Malaya. It was not long before they saw action, with the Japanese invading force pushing down through Malaya en route to ultimately capture Singapore. The 2/4th, along with other allied battalions, fought a fighting withdrawal along the Malay Peninsula all the way back to Singapore. Johnny was badly wounded by a bullet in the leg during the short but final battle of Singapore but he later recovered, only to be shipped off to Borneo and the horrors of Sandakan.

The full story and the complete recollections of the final years of his life at Sandakan will forever go unknown. Although we do have the original letters from Sandakan, it is believed they were written by the Japanese to mislead. However, we can use other sources of information to find out about the atrocities that occurred to Johnny and others who were prisoners of war of the Japanese during the death marches. From these other sources, we can presume what he experienced. Yet there is nothing we can imagine from our own lives that will ever compare to the horrors and trauma he and his mates felt and went through.

Letters to relatives from Johnny's surviving mates after the war suggest that he always faced the world with his customary courage and cheerfulness. Judging from what we know about the Sandakan death marches, it is likely that Johnny was part of and survived the second march. Although we cannot rule out the slight chance he was one of the only six who survived the first march, it is more likely that he was one of the 183 prisoners who managed to reach the mountains of Ranau, Borneo, on 24 June 1945. This is reinforced by a letter from the Australian government stating he died on 16 July 1945, only weeks before the war ended. This means he survived not only the infamous death marches but also the horrific conditions at Ranau for almost a month following the trek. It should be kept in mind he had also been badly wounded years before in the leg. The official cause of death was listed as malaria but eyewitness accounts later called such information into question. Reports of beheading and shooting during the final weeks of the war in an attempt to remove all traces of Japanese brutality prior to liberation suggest otherwise.

This is the sad story that will be carried down through my family for years to come, and it is one that is shared by many others. My daughter found investigating Sandakan highly emotional, especially when she thought of the mental and physical state Johnny must have
been in for the last years of his life. The most painful part came from reading his earlier love letters and his regret at not getting to meet his new son. These were sent to Great Nanna Thelma leading up to the fall of Singapore. We can only imagine how shattering it would be to find out about the death of someone close to you through a letter from someone you do not even know and, as in Robert's case, what it must have been like growing up and never meeting or knowing what happened to your father. The moral of this story is that war is sad and brutal. That is why it must be remembered but never glorified. Johnny's story is just one example of why, which we will be reliving with the Anzac spirit going into the commemoration.

I will finish with a brief poem written by the 2/4th which appeared in the *Western Australian News* the week they set sail:

We came from the West, where the beer is best, Parley Vous,
Our camp was better than all the rest, Parley Vous,
We came over here, we don't know why,
Unless they brought us here to die,
Inky Pinky Parley Vous.

**Senate adjourned at 22:36**

**DOCUMENTS**

**Tabling**

The following documents were tabled by the Clerk:

[Legislative instruments are identified by a Federal Register of Legislative Instruments (FRLI) number. An explanatory statement is tabled with an instrument unless otherwise indicated by an asterisk.]

* Australian Prudential Regulation Authority Act 1998—Australian Prudential Regulation Authority (confidentiality) determination—No. 11 of 2014 [F2014L01026].
Australian Research Council Act 2001—
Approval of ARC Future Fellowships Proposals for funding commencing in 2014—Determination No. 129.
Approval of Linkage Projects Proposals for funding commencing in 2014—Determination No. 128.


Civil Aviation Act 1988—
Civil Aviation Order 82.3 Amendment Instrument 2014 (No. 2) [F2014L01113].
Civil Aviation Order 82.5 Amendment Instrument 2014 (No. 2) [F2014L01114].
Civil Aviation Regulations 1988—
Determination—lowest safe altitude (Qantas Airways Limited)—CASA 159/14 [F2014L01041].
Direction—number of cabin attendants for Fokker F70 and Fokker F100 aircraft—CASA 184/14 [F2014L01067].
Direction—number of cabin attendants in Boeing 737-800 series aircraft (Qantas Airways Limited)—CASA 158/14 [F2014L01046].
Direction—number of cabin attendants (National Jet Systems)—CASA 170/14 [F2014L01044].
Directions—for determining maximum weight—Fugro Airborne Surveys—CASA 152/14 [F2014L01042].
Instructions—GNSS as primary means of navigation for NDB and VOR (overlay) approach (Qantas Airways Limited)—CASA 157/14 [F2014L01045].
Instructions—GNSS primary means navigation (A320/A321 and A330 Jetstar aircraft)—CASA 165/14 [F2014L01059].
Instructions—GNSS primary means navigation (B787-8 aircraft)—CASA 163/14 [F2014L01060].
Civil Aviation Regulations 1988 and Civil Aviation Safety Regulations 1998—Civil Aviation Order 48.1 Amendment Instrument 2014 (No. 1) [F2014L01100].

Civil Aviation Safety Regulations 1998—
Exemption—Boeing 717 flight data recorder system (National Jet Systems)—CASA EX82/14 [F2014L01056].
Exemption—carriage of portable electronic devices during flight—CASA EX102/14 [F2014L01111].
Exemption—from requirement to register an emergency locator transmitter with the Australian Maritime Safety Authority—CASA EX63/14 [F2014L01047].
Exemption—overweight landings (Qantas Airways Limited)—CASA EX86/14 [F2014L01069].
Exemption—participation in land and hold short operations (Qantas Airways Limited)—CASA EX67/14 [F2014L01048].
Exemption—recency requirements for night flying (Qantas Airways Limited)—CASA EX65/14 [F2014L01050].
Exemption—recent experience requirements (Qantas Airways Limited)—CASA EX64/14 [F2014L01054].
Exemption—take-offs from Lady Elliott Island aerodrome—CASA EX77/14 [F2014L01055].
Exemption—use of mobile phones and other electronic devices when loading fuel—CASA EX66/14 [F2014L01049].
Hydraulic Shutoff Valves—AD/ERJ-190/12 Amdt 1 [F2014L01109].
Inspection of Wooden Structure—AD/DH 82/18 [F2014L01088].
Number 3 and 4 Bearing Monitoring—AD/LTS/9 Amdt 3 [F2014L01066].
Prescribed type ratings for CASR Part 142 flight training Instrument 2014—CASA 211/14 [F2014L01110].
Repeal of Airworthiness Directives—
CASA ADCX 015/14 [F2014L01040].
CASA ADCX 016/14 [F2014L01098].
Repeal of CASA EX117/13—exemption from standard take-off minima—Jetstar Airways—CASA EX80/14 [F2014L01068].


Commissioner of Taxation—Public Rulings—
Fuel Tax Determinations—Addenda—FTD 2006/2 and FTD 2010/1.
Fuel Tax Rulings—
Addenda—FTR 2007/1 and FTR 2008/1.
Notices of Withdrawals—FTR 2012/1-FTR 2012/3.
Product Rulings—
PR 2014/16.
Taxation Determination TD 2014/20.
Taxation Rulings—
TR 2014/5.

Corporations Act 2001—
ASIC Class Order—CO 14/784 [F2014L01081].
ASIC Market Integrity Rules (APX Market) Amendment 2014 (No. 1) [F2014L01024].
ASIC Market Integrity Rules (ASX Market) Amendment 2014 (No. 3) [F2014L01023].
ASIC Market Integrity Rules (Chi-X Australia Market) Amendment 2014 (No. 3) [F2014L01025].


Customs Act 1901—
CEO Instrument of Approval—No. 1 of 2014 [F2014L01001].


Defence Act 1903—

Section 58B—
Definitions that apply to members on Reserve service—Defence Determination 2014/36.
District allowance—amendment—Defence Determination 2014/40.
Leave—medical absence—Defence Determination 2014/34.
Post indexes—amendment—Defence Determination 2014/35.
Post indexes and approved clubs—amendment—Defence Determination 2014/41.
Redundancy and management-initiated early retirement—amendment—Defence Determination 2014/42.
Salary non-reduction and Accountable Authority Instructions—amendment—Defence Determination 2014/38.

Section 58H—


Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999—
Amendment—List of Specimens taken to be Suitable for Live Import (4 June 2014)—EPBC/s.303EC/SSLI/Amend/069 [F2014L01070].
Amendment of List of Exempt Native Specimens—Queensland Fin Fish (Stout Whiting) Trawl Fishery (13 August 2014)—EPBC303DC/SFS/2014/28 [F2014L01090].
Amendment of List of Exempt Native Specimens—Tasmanian Giant Crab Fishery (18 July 2014)—EPBC303DC/SFS/2014/27 [F2014L01008].
Amendment to List of CITES Species (18 July 2014) [F2014L01043].
Amendment to the list of threatened species under section 178 (162) (30 June 2014) [F2014L01005].


Section 269A—Recovery Plan for the Grey Nurse Shark (Carcharias taurus) 2014 [F2014L01089].

Export Control Act 1982—Export Control (Orders) Regulations 1982—


Export Inspection (Establishment Registration Charges) Act 1985—Export Inspection (Establishment Registration Charges) Amendment (Exportable Goods) Regulation 2014—Select Legislative Instrument 2014 No. 120 [F2014L01117].


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Fisheries Management Act 1991—
Bass Strait Central Zone Scallop Fishery (Closure) Direction 2014 [F2014L01079].

Food Standards Australia New Zealand Act 1991—
Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code—Standard 1.4.2—Maximum Residue Limits Amendment Instrument No. APVMA 7, 2014 [F2014L01033].
Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code—Standard 1.4.2—Maximum Residue Limits Amendment Instrument No. APVMA 8, 2014 [F2014L01096].

Higher Education Support Act 2003—VET Provider Approvals—
No. 43 of 2014 [F2014L01009].
No. 50 of 2014 [F2014L01106].
No. 51 of 2014 [F2014L01107].
No. 52 of 2014 [F2014L01108].
No. 53 of 2014 [F2014L01071].
No. 54 of 2014 [F2014L01094].
No. 55 of 2014 [F2014L01095].

Migration Act 1958—
Determination—IMMI 14/077 [F2014L01003].
Migration Regulations 1994—
Arrangements for Work and Holiday Visa Applicants from Argentina, Bangladesh, Chile, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Poland, Thailand, Turkey, United States of America and Uruguay—IMMI 14/025 [F2014L01064].
Classes of Persons—IMMI 14/060 [F2014L01035].
Classes of Persons and Addresses—IMMI 14/064 [F2014L01027].
Instrument of Revocation—IMMI 14/063 [F2014L00997].
Post Office Box and Courier Addresses—
IMMI 14/067 [F2014L01028].
IMMI 14/071 [F2014L01031].
Postal and Courier Delivery Addresses for Distinguished Talent Visas and Special Eligibility Visas—IMMI 14/066 [F2014L01030].
Specification of Addresses—IMMI 14/065 [F2014L01029].

National Health Act 1953—
National Health Determination under paragraph 98C(1)(b) Amendment 2014 (No. 7)—PB 57 of 2014 [F2014L01052].
National Health Determination under paragraph 98C(1)(b) Amendment 2014 (No. 8)—PB 62 of 2014 [F2014L01125].
National Health (Efficient Funding of Chemotherapy) Special Arrangement Amendment Instrument 2014 (No. 7)—PB 56 of 2014 [F2014L01053].
National Health (Efficient Funding of Chemotherapy) Special Arrangement Amendment Instrument 2014 (No. 8)—PB 64 of 2014 [F2014L01124].
National Health (Highly specialised drugs program for hospitals) Special Arrangement Amendment Instrument 2014 (No. 7)—PB 55 of 2014 [F2014L01065].
National Health (IVF/GIFT Program) Special Arrangement Amendment Instrument 2014 (No. 1)—PB 58 of 2014 [F2014L01061].
National Health (Listed drugs on F1 or F2) Amendment Determination 2014 (No. 6)—PB 54 of 2014 [F2014L01051].
National Health (Listed drugs on F1 or F2) Amendment Determination 2014 (No. 7)—PB 66 of 2014 [F2014L01075].
National Health (Pharmaceutical Benefits—Early Supply) Amendment Instrument 2014 (No. 4)—specification under subsection 84AAA(2)—PB 60 of 2014 [F2014L01062].
National Health (Pharmaceutical Benefits—Early Supply) Amendment Instrument 2014 (No. 5)—specification under subsection 84AAA(2)—PB 69 of 2014 [F2014L01123].
National Health (Price and Special Patient Contribution) Amendment Determination 2014 (No. 5)—PB 53 of 2014 [F2014L01063].

Navigation Act 2012—

Ozone Protection and Synthetic Greenhouse Gas Management Act 1989—Grant of exemptions under section 40—
Kidde Aerospace and Defence Pty Ltd—No. S40E56911050.
National Jet Systems Pty Ltd—No. S40E20753535.
Sikorsky Aircraft Australia Ltd—No. S40E35280523.


Private Health Insurance Act 2007—
Private Health Insurance (Benefit Requirements) Amendment Rules 2014 (No. 3) [F2014L01016].
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The following government documents were tabled:

Australian Research Council—Strategic plan 2014-15 to 2016-17.

Clean Energy Finance Corporation—Program report for the period 17 April 2013 to 16 April 2014.


**Departmental and Agency Contracts**

The following documents were tabled pursuant to the order of the Senate of 20 June 2001, as amended:

Departmental and agency contracts for 2013-14—Letters of advice—
Department of Veterans' Affairs.
Finance portfolio.