INTERNET
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the Senate and committee hearings are available at

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FORTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—SECOND PERIOD

Governor-General
Her Excellency the Hon. Quentin Bryce AC, CVO

Senate Office holders

President—Senator Hon. John Joseph Hogg
Deputy President and Chair of Committees—Senator Stephen Parry
Temporary Chairs of Committees—Senators Cory Bernardi, Thomas Mark Bishop,
Suzanne Kay Boyce, Sean Edwards, David Julian Fawcett, Mark Lionel Furner,
Alexander McEachian Gallacher, Scott Ludlam, Gavin Mark Marshall,
Anne Sowerby Ruston, Dean Anthony Smith, Ursula Mary Stephens, Glenn Sterle and
Peter Stuart Whish-Wilson

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 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 Australian Labor Party—Senator the Hon Penny Wong
Deputy Leader of the Australian Labor Party—Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy
Leader of the Australian Greens—Senator Christine Anne Milne
Chief Government Whip—Senator Helen Kroger
Deputy Government Whips—Senators Christopher John Back and David Christopher Bushby
Chief Opposition Whip—Senator Anne McEwen
Deputy Opposition Whips—Senators Catryna Louise Bilyk and Anne Elizabeth Urquhart
Australian Greens Whip—Senator Rachel Siewert

Printed by authority of the Senate
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<th>Senator</th>
<th>State or Territory</th>
<th>Term expires</th>
<th>Party</th>
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<td>30.6.2017</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 H. Coonan, resigned 22.8.11), pursuant to section 15 of the Constitution.
(2) Chosen by the Parliament of Western Australia to fill a casual vacancy (vice J. Adams, died in office 31.3.12), pursuant to section 15 of the Constitution.
(3) Chosen by the Parliament of Tasmania to fill a casual vacancy (vice Hon. N. Sherry, resigned 1.6.12), pursuant to section 15 of the Constitution.
(4) Chosen by the Parliament of South Australia to fill a casual vacancy (vice M. J. Fisher, resigned 15.6.12), pursuant to section 15 of the Constitution.
(5) Chosen by the Parliament of Western Australia to fill a casual vacancy (vice C. Evans, resigned 12.4.13), pursuant to section 15 of the Constitution.
(6) Chosen by the Parliament of Queensland to fill a casual vacancy (vice B. Joyce, resigned 8.8.13), pursuant to section 15 of the Constitution.
(7) Chosen by the Parliament of New South Wales to fill a casual vacancy (vice M. Thistlethwaite, resigned 9.8.13), pursuant to section 15 of the Constitution.
(8) Chosen by the Parliament of Victoria to fill a casual vacancy (vice D. Feeney, resigned 12.8.13), pursuant to section 15 of the Constitution.
(9) Chosen by the Parliament of New South Wales to fill a casual vacancy (vice R. Carr, resigned 24.10.13), pursuant to section 15 of the Constitution.

PARTY ABBREVIATIONS

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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<td><strong>Prime Minister</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Tony Abbott MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Indigenous Affairs</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service</em></td>
<td>Senator the Hon Eric Abetz</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women</em></td>
<td>Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Josh Frydenberg MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Alan Tudge MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Warren Truss MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Deputy Prime Minister)</td>
<td>The Hon Jamie Briggs MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Foreign Affairs</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Julie Bishop MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Trade and Investment</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Andrew Robb AO MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon Brett Mason</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>
<td><strong>Attorney-General</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for the Arts</strong></td>
<td>The Hon George Brandis QC</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Vice-President of the Executive Council)</td>
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<td>(Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate)</td>
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<td>The Hon Michael Keenan MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Treasurer</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Joe Hockey MP</td>
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<td><strong>Minister for Small Business</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Bruce Billson MP</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(Manager of Government Business in the Senate)</td>
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<td>The Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP</td>
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<tr>
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Monday, 3 March 2014

The PRESIDENT (Senator the Hon. John Hogg) took the chair at 10:00, read prayers and made an acknowledgement of country.

PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION

Election Petition

The PRESIDENT (10:01): For the information of senators, I present orders from the Court of Disputed Returns disposing of the election petitions in respect of the election of senators for the state of Western Australia.

COMMITTEES

Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee
Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee

Meeting

Senator KROGER (Victoria—Chief Government Whip) (10:01): by leave—I move—

That—

(a) the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee be authorised to hold a public meeting during the sitting of the Senate today, from 10 am to 11 am, to take evidence for the committee's inquiry into the Criminal Code Amendment (Misrepresentation of Age to a Minor) Bill 2013; and

(b) the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee be authorised to hold a private meeting otherwise than in accordance with standing order 33(1) during the sitting of the Senate today.

Question agreed to.

BILLS

Climate Change Authority (Abolition) Bill 2013
Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

to which the following amendment was moved:

At the end of the motion, add: ", but the Senate expresses concern over the impact of the abolition of the Climate Change Authority on the provision of independent advice to Government and the public on carbon pollution reduction targets and actions."

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance) (10:02): I thank senators for their contributions to the debate on this bill to abolish the Climate Change Authority—and, when I say 'contributions', I mean there were very extensive, detailed contributions by a very large number of senators in this chamber. One might have been tempted to say that there was a bit of a filibuster going on—

Senator Moore: No, no, no.

Senator CORMANN: 'No, no, no,' say the opposition. But anybody who has been watching the process here in the Senate since the last election would know the opposition
have been proceeding at a snail's pace on legislation which people across Australia expect the parliament to pass sooner rather than later.

Just to remind the chamber: the coalition went to the last election with a very clear policy to scrap the carbon tax. The reason we took that policy to the last election is that the carbon tax is pushing up the cost of electricity, it is pushing up the cost of living, it is pushing up the cost of doing business, it is costing jobs, it is bad for the economy and it would be in the national interest to scrap it. Scrapping the carbon tax would help bring down the cost of electricity. It would help bring down the cost of living. It would help bring down the cost of doing business. Bringing down the cost of doing business in Australia will help create jobs. It will help protect jobs—in the manufacturing sector in particular. The Labor-Green carbon tax has driven down our international competitiveness. Scrapping the Labor-Green carbon tax will help us improve our international competitiveness, it will help us grow the economy more strongly and it will help create jobs. We should get on with it as a matter of urgency.

In fact, the Australian Labor Party has an opportunity today to end this filibuster once and for all: to get out of the way and let the government proceed with implementing the mandate we received at the last election. I remind the chamber again that a number of senators on the other side of the chamber—a number of Labor senators—also went to the last election promising to scrap the carbon tax. In fact, Senator Pratt went to the last election in the great state of Western Australia suggesting that Labor had already scrapped the carbon tax. Since then, Labor has been trying to put all sorts of qualifiers on that promise. Senator Pratt has been trying to suggest that there were all sorts of qualifiers to that promise, but in the pamphlets that Senator Pratt circulated in Western Australia in the lead-up to the last election there was no fine print: no qualifier. They said, 'The government'—the then Labor government—'has removed the carbon tax.' It will be interesting to see how Senator Pratt approaches this issue in the lead-up to the next Senate election in Western Australia, which will take place in just a few weeks time. I know that people right across Western Australia will look very carefully at what Senator Pratt has to say about what is essentially an anti-WA tax which is hurting businesses and families across Western Australia.

The Climate Change Authority (Abolition) Bill is part of the package of bills delivering on the government's commitment to repeal the carbon tax and to remove all of the unnecessary bureaucracy associated with it. The current economic environment demands greater rigour in the spending of public money. So, as well as strengthening the economy by taking costs out of the economy by scrapping the carbon tax, getting rid of unnecessary bureaucracy such as the Climate Change Authority will help us repair the budget. One of the other challenges that we have inherited from the previous government is a budget in very bad shape with $123 billion worth of projected deficits over the forward estimates and $667 billion worth of debt if the government does not take any corrective action.

Abolishing the Climate Change Authority will make a contribution to the government's cost-saving reforms. The abolition of the authority is expected to result in a saving of $22 million over the forward estimates, which will help us repair the budget mess we have inherited. This saving is justified because, with no disrespect to the staff of the Climate Change Authority, the Climate Change Authority is not needed. The authority was created to perform the principal function of providing advice around the operation of the carbon tax. Without a carbon tax, the need for a separate body to do this is gone. Furthermore, the
authority is currently tasked with providing advice on related climate change policy matters concerning the Carbon Farming Initiative, the renewable energy target and the National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Scheme. The government is well placed to receive authoritative advice on climate change matters from other, existing, government bodies. Essentially a level of unnecessary double-up is happening at present. That is part of the waste that developed under the previous government. The Bureau of Meteorology, for example, advises the government on climate trends and climate science. The CSIRO advises on climate science as well as the environmental effects of climate change and the most appropriate and effective technological and scientific responses to climate change. We have an entire Department of the Environment dedicated to providing the government with authoritative advice on environment and climate change policy.

The Climate Change Authority (Abolition) Bill allows the government to deliver on its commitment to the Australian people in the lead-up to the last election, and this is a government that delivers on its commitments. We will continue to press ahead with this legislation until such time as it passes the parliament. Our promise was to abolish the carbon tax to reduce cost pressures on households and businesses, to boost economic growth, to increase jobs and to enhance Australia's international competitiveness. The government is also abolishing the carbon tax because, essentially, it does not work. There is a fundamentally better way to reduce emissions than through a tax which is essentially just an electricity tax.

Australia will reach its bipartisan emissions reduction target of five per cent by 2020 through the government's Direct Action Plan. An essential element of that plan is the Emissions Reduction Fund. The fund will provide incentives for abatement activities across the Australian economy, rather than pushing up prices. The government is clear in its intention that the repeal of the carbon tax will take effect from 1 July 2014. The abolition of the Climate Change Authority will take place on the earlier of a date to be proclaimed under the legislation or six months after the date on which the abolition act receives royal assent. This will give an appropriate amount of time for the Climate Change Authority's operations to be wound down.

The government has a clear mandate to repeal the carbon tax and abolish all of the associated unnecessary bureaucratic functions. The opposition and the Australian Greens should respect the wishes of the Australian people. As the Prime Minister has said, the Australian people have already voted on this bill. Now the Senate finally gets its chance. We will abolish the carbon tax, stop unnecessary spending and fulfil our election pledge. I commend this bill to the Senate.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: The first question is that the amendment moved by Senator Pratt be agreed to. A division is required. It being prior to 12.30, the division cannot be put, by order.

Senator FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate) (10:11): I move:
That the division be deferred until 12.30.
Question agreed to.
Debate adjourned.
BUSINESS

Consideration of Legislation

Senator FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate) (10:12): by leave—I move:

That government business orders of the day Nos 2 to 10, relating to the Clean Energy Legislation (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013 and eight related bills, may be taken together for their remaining stages.

Question agreed to.

BILLS

Clean Energy Legislation (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013
Ozone Protection and Synthetic Greenhouse Gas (Import Levy) Amendment (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013
Ozone Protection and Synthetic Greenhouse Gas (Manufacture Levy) Amendment (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013
True-up Shortfall Levy (General) (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013
True-up Shortfall Levy (Excise) (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013
Customs Tariff Amendment (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013
Excise Tariff Amendment (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013
Clean Energy (Income Tax Rates and Other Amendments) Bill 2013

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That these bills be now read a second time.

Senator PRATT (Western Australia) (10:12): The Labor Party and Labor senators oppose the Clean Energy Legislation (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill and related bills. Why? Because Labor's position on climate change is very clear. It is a clear position based on scientific evidence and sound economic principles. We on this side of the chamber understand the need to reduce the risk of dangerous climate change by cutting dangerous greenhouse gas emissions. We on this side of the chamber understand that the best way to do this is to recognise the real cost of pollution in the bottom line of our nation's polluters, and this is best achieved through a market based mechanism. Labor established such a mechanism and in the short time of operation this mechanism has delivered cuts to emissions with no negative effect on inflation and continued employment and economic growth.

The so-called 'carbon tax' or 'fixed price period', in Labor's view, can be removed leaving an already legislated emissions trading scheme which puts in place a legal cap on carbon pollution. We know that industry is quite capable of finding its best method of operating efficiently within that cap. We need the caps to comply with our international obligations to meet emissions reduction targets.
The bills before the chamber today remove Australia's ability to meet its binding international obligations to reduce the risk of dangerous climate change to our planet. Those opposite are ignoring the science, they are ignoring the future and they are ignoring the environment. They will create higher costs for our economy to adapt in the future and to manage the greenhouse pollution in our nation.

The coalition seeks, with no effective replacement mechanism for emissions reduction, to abandon the efficiency of a market based mechanism. Direct Action is a slogan, not a policy. Direct Action nationalises the carbon pollution problem, asking taxpayers to pay rather than the polluters themselves. Direct Action is flawed and cannot achieve our globally binding targets. Direct Action does not have legislated emissions reduction targets. If we pass these bills, there will be, in effect, no emissions reduction strategy in place for our nation. Direct Action will not exist when its predecessor is eliminated.

The collateral damage from these bills, which was noted in earlier debates, is the abolition of the Clean Energy Finance Corporation and the Climate Change Authority and the cuts to the funding of the Australian Renewable Energy Agency. This collateral damage is being driven by political ideology rather than by sensible climate change policy.

We know that the coalition are not at all serious about addressing climate change; it is not in their 'knitting'. John Howard calls those of us who accept climate change 'religious zealots'. As we all know, our Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, once said 'climate change is crap'. I know there are many on the other side who do not accept climate change, despite the scientific evidence. These bills demonstrate that they are winning the day; they are winning these debates within the coalition. There is a plethora of scientific and economic experts who back Australia's existing climate change strategy.

What I have found extraordinary during the hearings we have held on the Direct Action policy is that the coalition has been unable to put forward a single advocate for its discredited policy who is prepared to front up to the Senate committees and defend this policy as a good idea. Where are the recognised experts who say Direct Action is a good strategy? Where are the credible experts who say Direct Action will work? They are nowhere to be found, because there are none. We do not hear the cries for backing an expensive scheme to pay companies to pollute. Why would anyone support such a proposition? But we do hear that countries will achieve higher levels of emissions reductions at much lower cost because of the use of a market based policy.

While this government dismantles our functioning emissions reduction program and sits on its hands over climate change, the CO₂ in the atmosphere is at a record high and Australia is on track for its warmest year ever. I have been dismayed this week to hear the Bureau of Meteorology warning West Australians that they face decades of rising temperatures, with hotter, drier and more extreme summers. This summer in Western Australia was the driest on record, with just 2 millimetres of rain for Perth; it was also the driest on record for Mandurah. Perth had only three days when rain fell, and not one drop fell last month—the first dry since February 2000. A Perth news report states:

The weather bureau is normally conservative—
as we all know—
but Bureau of Meteorology climate expert Neil Bennett said the data was staring climate change sceptics “in the face”.

---
It’s climate change. It’s warming. It’s staring you in the face …

As we said in the report of the Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee inquiry:

Removing this policy suite for the sake of a slight reduction in utilities costs in one financial year is reckless and irresponsible.

It is reckless and irresponsible to allow Australia to fall behind in our contribution to the global emissions reduction effort. It is reckless and irresponsible to expose us to future costs and potential international retribution for our contribution to global warming on this planet.

Late last year, in its *Climate and carbon: aligning prices and policies* report, we know that the OECD highlighted the need for countries to price carbon. It said:

If governments are serious in their fight against climate change, the core message of this reform must be that the cost of CO$_2$ emissions will gradually increase, creating a strong economic incentive to reduce the carbon entanglement and to shift towards a zero carbon trajectory.

A central feature of such an approach is placing a price on carbon.

On a per capita basis, Australia punches above its weight in its contribution to global CO$_2$ emissions. This is a well-known fact and it places a high moral obligation on us as a nation to keep pace with the world's efforts to tackle climate change; otherwise, we as a country are effectively a significant drag on the efforts of other nations. Why would they act when we as a country with a high standard of living are emitting above the per capita average—way above the per capita average. There is a profound moral obligation on our country to act. We had a credible policy that encouraged global action. That is what these bills are repealing. From being at the leading edge of this effort, we will be behind the rest of the world. Australia will become—and we are already because of these bills before us—a pariah in the international community because of the negative political will of a government that is putting the future of our planet last in its priorities.

Expert submissions to the Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee inquiry supported a carbon price as the most effective emissions mitigation strategy. One of those credible experts, whom I had the pleasure of seeing give evidence, is Dr Frank Jotzo. He said:

The carbon pricing mechanism currently in place is an economically sound basis for climate change mitigation policy in Australia. Repealing Australia's Clean Energy Legislation and related bills is undesirable if a lasting policy framework for greenhouse gas emissions reductions is to be established, and if emissions reductions are to be achieved cost effectively.

If emissions reductions are to be achieved without carbon pricing, then regulatory and subsidy approaches will need to play a larger role. These are generally more costly and less effective in creating incentives for long-term investment in low-carbon options by Australia's businesses. Repeal will exacerbate policy uncertainty, with adverse effects on investment.

And that is exactly the path that the government is taking us down. Mr Nathan Fabian, CEO of the Investor Group on Climate Change, said that a scheme cap that reflects an emissions reduction objective; broad coverage of sources of emissions in the economy; transitional assistance arrangements for trade exposed sectors; the ability to access international permits to achieve least cost abatement; and the capacity to respond to deeper reduction targets as necessary over time are the essential elements of good climate policy. The Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists noted that the Productivity Commission considers:
… an emissions trading scheme is by far the most cost effective way for Australia to contribute to global efforts to mitigate climate change.

So what we have here is the coalition government's repeal bills and direct action policy creating a significant level of uncertainty in industry. Even worse, what we have here are these bills creating a dearth of climate change mitigation, and no-one really knows what the coalition will put in its place.

We know, from the evidence that our committees have received and from the lack of intellectual basis on which direct action is based, that the coalition's heart is not in place in any decent strategy to tackle climate change. It has no emphasis on a decent policy strategy. Worse still, these repeal bills mean we no longer have the economic tools we need for the future. This is not just about tackling climate change; this is about providing the capacity for our economy to transition to the economic future which we know is inevitably coming and in which carbon will be constrained. We in the Labor Party take tackling climate change very seriously—not just from an environmental point of view but also, very importantly, from an economic point of view. Having a long-term framework would mean we had stability and certainty for investors, industry and the wider community. Direct action, it is patently obvious, cannot deliver a long-term commitment. It is bound by the term of the forward estimates.

Personally, I think direct action is a policy the coalition have put forward so that they can be seen to be doing something on climate change when they do not mean it. It cannot set a cap. It cannot have a legislated binding target. It cannot be an effective policy. It creates uncertainty. It restricts innovation and investment in clean energy in our country. It is completely counter to any rational thinking. The coalition is stuck in short-term political thinking, more interested in political slogans about the carbon tax. The coalition government are here for today without regard for future generations. They are here exploiting the situation for maximum political profit, and they are leaving a policy wasteland in their path.

I am pleased to say that we do not think like that on this side of the chamber. We are about the future: we are about opening the door for our society to develop and thrive into this century and the next. We know that the short-term thinking the coalition is putting forward will make our local industry less competitive, not more competitive. The Prime Minister's claim of an average reduction of $550 a year for households is completely flawed. He said household electricity costs will be $200 less and gas $70 less, but there is no evidence that substantiates this. The Grattan Institute, ACOSS and other significant stakeholders that I do not have time to quote directly have all refuted these claims.

Labor's clean energy package included the Jobs and Competitiveness Program, which smoothed the transition for emissions-intensive and trade-exposed industries. These industries have no clear path forward under the coalition's direct action policy; instead, uncertainty is being locked in. These industries will need to change for the future at some point, but you are removing the tools and the capacity for them to do that. What we have in our existing policy, with legally binding caps, gives certainty and the capacity to meet future targets and to allow industry to transition. It gives flexibility for companies to choose how best to meet their emissions obligations within the targets set.

Our existing policy is achieving carbon mitigation outcomes, and we have a government that is trying to throw that all away. Future generations will ask, 'Why did they throw it all
away?" History will show that we have a Prime Minister who was stuck in the past, who chose to abandon rational, functioning policy for short-term political gain. As we heard in the hearings: Direct Action is a policy that is not based on any scientific evidence or on any credible economic framework.

To conclude my remarks on these bills, the reality is that the world, with or without us, will be moving to an energy revolution—a revolution in the way that we generate and use energy for domestic, commercial, industrial and transport purposes. If you accept—and I certainly do—that climate change is real and is caused by carbon emissions then you have to recognise that having the tools to reduce the carbon in our atmosphere is a basic economic necessity. Failing to provide these tools, as the coalition is doing, will leave our households and businesses without the capacity to adapt, and the rest of the world will benefit from changes. Australians will be left in the dead-end jobs of yesterday, while other countries will have a competitive advantage; they will be way ahead of us. This is the path which the coalition is leading us down. We do not want to see our great technologies go offshore, without the investment being made in that technology here in Australia.

We cannot afford to miss the boat on this. It is our opportunity to have the leading-edge industries of the future. We cannot afford to be left behind on that front. Labor's Clean Energy Future package gives Australia the framework to keep up with the rest of the world—the framework that those opposite are repealing. The coalition want to destroy that framework and, along with it, the associated investment, business and jobs. We oppose the bills for the sake of our environment and for the sake of the jobs of the future.

Senator MILNE (Tasmania—Leader of the Australian Greens) (10:32): I rise today to oppose the Abbott government's attempt, through the Clean Energy Legislation (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013 and related bills, to remove and destroy the emissions trading scheme that is currently law in Australia.

We are living in a climate emergency. You would not know that if you looked around the Senate chamber at this time, when there are about seven people here. But we are living in a climate emergency and we are at this point even unsure as to whether we have already gone beyond the tipping points of many of the major indicators, from which there will be no return.

Let me just start with the situation as it is, as I stand here. Just last week, 10 million scallops died off Vancouver Island because of ocean acidification. In low-PH water, scallops cannot form shells. This is consistent with research from the Antarctic Climate and Ecosystems CRC in Hobart, where they have said exactly the same thing: you get to certain point of ocean acidification and those creatures which need shells cannot form them, and so you have wipe-out. That goes to the microscopic creatures and down to krill. Imagine what will happen if krill cannot reproduce. You are going to see a collapse in the marine food chain. This is already happening, and the 10 million scallops off Vancouver Island is just one example.

We are seeing extreme weather events around the world. There has been horrendous flooding in the United Kingdom and the big freeze in North America, described as the 'Arctic vortex'. We are seeing droughts, fires and heatwaves here in Australia such that there is a recognition that, to be able to continue to grow food, you are going to have to move where you grow some sorts of food and you are going to have to change the manner in which you grow it. But you have to take into account the significant shifts in the climate and you are
going to have to take into account what the scientists and the Bureau of Meteorology are already saying, whether it is in Perth, in Tasmania or even in south-eastern Australia generally: we are going to see higher levels of extremely hot days, fire-danger days; we have to recognise that more people are going to die because of heatwaves; and not only do we now have to mitigate against things getting worse but also there will be huge costs in adapting to it.

In terms of food production, right around the world we are seeing the impacts of global warming. In 2008, we had, essentially, a food scarcity crisis because of climate change. Because of drought around the world and because of fire, the price of grain went up and so we had huge price rises, particularly in the Middle East, an importer of grain, and as a result the Arab Spring. The first riots in the Arab Spring were food riots. That is the reality for us.

In news just this weekend, coffee prices out of Brazil have reached a 16-month high because of drought, and the assumption is that they are going to have to shift where they grow coffee, that it is no longer going to be viable in the future. Countries like Brazil are recognising that, whereas here in Australia we have a government which rejects the science of global warming and says to farmers, 'We'll just give you the money. You don't have to change what you're doing; you just do that and it'll all come back to normal.' We are actually beyond normal. We are living in a hotter, wetter world, and things have permanently changed everywhere.

I come back to ocean acidification and what it is already doing to coral reefs. Warmer temperatures are bleaching coral reefs. We have ocean acidification weakening those reefs in the front of extreme weather events which smash them. We are seeing deterioration in our coral reefs right around the world. A survey out just last week said we have lost most of the big fish from our reefs around Australia partly, of course, because of overfishing but also partly because of climate change impacts. We are seeing species extinction. We are seeing invasive species spreading into areas where they never before were able to survive, destroying ecosystems. The east coast of Tasmania is a classic case, where the sea urchin is destroying the kelp beds, for example. We are losing, in Queensland, the white lemuroid ringtail possum; it is probably heading for extinction because it cannot survive extreme hot weather events. In Tasmania, the cider gum on the central plateau cannot go any higher. We are going to see the extinction of a third of all species we know because of global warming. That is the terrifying assessment from the world's leading biologists.

That is the extent of the challenge before us. That is why we have to have an emissions trading scheme—because this task has to be scaled up. Five per cent is patent nonsense in terms of what needs to happen. Australia needs to start paying its fair share now in the global climate task. I am glad that the Climate Change Authority has brought out its report saying that Australia, at a minimum, needs to reduce emissions by 15 per cent plus four per cent, 19 per cent, by 2020. I would have liked to see it much higher than that; nevertheless, that is where the authority has come out. But it also said we have to get on a trajectory for 40 to 60 per cent by 2030 and get ourselves carbon neutral by 2050. We are not going to do that unless we have a market mechanism which enables us to scale up the response to the challenge. And that is why what the Abbott government is doing is so reprehensible. It is the first responsibility of government to protect its people. The Abbott government is actually making Australians more vulnerable—and the economy extremely vulnerable—and setting us back decades because of its refusal to accept the science of global warming.
As for where we are in a global sense, the world is recognising that we are losing the battle. The scientists said we had to have global emissions peak and start coming down by 2015. The world failed us in Copenhagen; there is no doubt about that. We should have come to a treaty there which recognised the task of getting those emissions turned around and coming down by 2015, but it has not happened. That is why I say we risk having already gone beyond tipping points. But now the world is starting to get serious. We have the United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, calling a summit in September this year and saying he wants nations to put on the table their 2020 target but also their post-2020 target. We have the world coming into the Lima talks later this year, framing up the move towards a 2015 global treaty. People are recognising that there is a limited carbon budget that the world has to address, and Australia only has a very limited share of that global carbon budget, because it takes into account heritage and legacy issues and it also takes into account the maximum of what is expendable. That is the context in which Australia needs to be considering the task.

Around the world, emissions trading has been recognised as the way that we are going to be able to address this most efficiently. There are broad-based emissions trading schemes in the European Union and in California. China is trialling emissions trading in seven large cities and provinces and has made clear its intention to introduce national emissions pricing in the form of emissions trading. South Korea is preparing a national emissions trading scheme. All around the world, countries are working together and separately to develop emissions trading schemes, because they are scalable. They are able to give the incentives, if you like, or the clear policy direction to companies and to the community to say that our task is to reduce emissions.

When you have a task to reduce emissions, if you go with an emissions trading scheme then you have something that is legislated and participation is compulsory, whereas Direct Action is voluntary. With an emissions trading scheme, you have an incentive to find more abatement options, because the polluters are paying and the polluters will work hard to find other options to reduce their emissions, whereas if it is voluntary there is no incentive. With an emissions trading scheme, you do not have to go through the complex and difficult task of setting baselines or benchmarks; you just tell the market what the cap is and they go and find a way of meeting that cap. Abatement costs can pass through, so you can have more abatement reduction. Around Australia at the moment, there is a reduction in electricity demand, and that has come from a growing awareness that coal fired power is a big polluter. The price of pollution is what the polluters have to pay. At the moment the community is being subsidised, if you like, or assisted to be able to deal with that, with the tax-free threshold and other assistance packages, but it has drawn people's awareness to how to reduce their emissions, and more abatement options open up. In terms of funding, the policy can be made cost-neutral to industry and the government. In fact, you can get a situation where future policy certainty is guaranteed because budgets can be set into the future on the back of what is expected.

But instead of that we have a government in Australia saying that they do not want a market-based mechanism, they are only going to go with five per cent and they are only putting $1½ billion into it. We are out of step internationally in terms of our responsibility and in terms of the level of the task. Frankly, driving expansion of coalmines and coal seam gas at a time when we need to reduce emissions is madness and should stop. There is no way the
Bowen or Galilee basins should be opened up to coal. The biggest increase in emissions at the moment is through fugitive emissions, and that is coal and coal seam gas. We are also not counting the emissions that occur from burning our coal in other countries. We need to take responsibility in Australia—and do not bother telling us that Australia is not a major problem. We are a major problem. We are one of 12 countries who make up 70 per cent of global emissions.

Fifty per cent of Australia's emissions domestically come from 12 polluters only, and they are overwhelmingly in the coal fired generation sector. The carbon price is working to reduce emissions in that sector. It is a lie for people to get up and say that the carbon price is not working; the carbon price does not cover all sectors at the moment, but it does cover electricity and it does cover coal fired generation. That is why it is working, because a price on coal fired pollution works. We need to get out of coal fired pollution as quickly as possible and into 100 per cent renewable energy. The government is determined to get rid of emissions trading and attack the renewable energy target. The only conclusion that you can draw from that is its intention to prop up coal fired power generators against the competition that is coming in from renewables and against the future. It is a ridiculous policy which is totally irresponsible in the long term.

When you look at how we got to the position we are at in our emissions trading scheme, I just want to put on the record that the Greens right back from 2007 on supported the Bali road map, which said that Australia as developed economy had to reduce its emissions between 25 and 40 per cent by 2020. That was in 2007. The Labor government at that time determined on a five per cent emission reduction target. It was not even in the ballpark. The scheme that was developed at that time had a cap at 25 per cent, instead of a foundation, a base, at 25 per cent. That political argument meant that there could not be a resolution of what the appropriate emissions reduction target should be in the face of the climate crisis. As a result we came up with a clean energy package which legislated an emissions trading scheme. So let us stop pretending it is a tax. What is legislated is an emissions trading scheme. It was determined that there would be a fixed-price period during which time the new institution, the Climate Change Authority, would determine an appropriate target. The target would then be recommended to the parliament and the parliament would absorb that target into the legislation and it would go to flexible pricing in 2015 with a link to the European Union.

If you are serious about addressing climate change, you do not want to abandon a carbon price that drives change. A price of $23 or $24 is not high enough to drive the kind of change into renewables you need, which is why the Greens secured the $10 billion with the Clean Energy Finance Corporation to supplement the carbon price to drive the investment into renewable energy. That is why the Greens will not be supporting Labor's amendment to try to go to emissions trading on 1 July 2014. Apart from anything else, if you are interested in actually driving change then you would want to wait until the European Union's attempt to fix their scheme started to kick in. I am pleased to say that the European Union has dealt one blow at least to the low price in the European Union by agreeing to backloading. They have agreed to take 400 million units out of their emissions trading scheme and backload it and they want to make that 900 million by 2016 to drive up the price.

The test for the Labor Party here would be if the European price was now $60, would they be keen to go to flexible pricing in 2014? Probably not. The issue for the Greens is: we have
to behave with integrity in terms of the challenge of the task ahead. It is critical we stick with what we have got. We have policy certainty. We have got a very good policy framework, recognised by the International Energy Agency as template legislation for the rest of the world. No-one can understand why Australia would abandon a polluter-pays principle for a government corporate welfare principle—a payout of taxpayer dollars to the polluters as opposed to raising from the polluters to be able to make the changes we need to be able to mitigate against increased emissions and to move to the low-carbon economy.

I want to go to the low-carbon economy for a moment, because abandoning carbon pricing is abandoning the very things the government says it wants. It says it wants to have increased productivity. It says it wants increased jobs. But the government, by abandoning emissions trading, is turning Australia into a rust bucket economy. A rust bucket economy is what will happen if you abandon carbon pricing, because everywhere else in the world gets the signal and knows what has to happen. Where are the research and development dollars going? Where is the innovation going? Where are the incentives going? All into the new technologies. Frankly, if you want to drive the manufacturing industry out of Australia, as was put to us in the Senate inquiry last week, the best thing you can do is get rid of carbon pricing, because those companies will go elsewhere in the world where they can pick up the research and development dollars and incentives to upgrade their equipment and their products that they are selling into the market.

So what we are going to do is prop up coal fired power and old and inefficient technologies. We have already seen the end of the Clean Technology Food and Foundries Investment Program, where more than $470 million was not spent. We have food processors around Australia crying out for higher levels of efficiency. Those programs were putting that efficiency in there. If you wanted to actually see Australia in the longer term be competitive, the best thing you could do is get ahead of the curve. You would embrace carbon pricing, you would increase the level of ambition and you would drive Australian community, industry and business generally to get with it and find ways of reducing emissions, leading the world and selling the intellectual property as well as the product. Instead of that, we are going to be so far behind the eight ball. We are not going to slow down the momentum of the rest of the world, but the rest of the world will pass us by. People will look back and say they cannot believe it. We had it happen once with solar, where our best brains left the country. We do not want it to happen again when it comes to addressing the shift to a low-carbon economy in the face of a climate emergency.

I say again, the Abbott government is acting against the best interests of Australians. We are a continent most vulnerable to global warming, but we are an economy and a society which is already suffering and will suffer a lot more by a short-sighted, silly policy of paying the polluters—corporate welfare to coal fired generation—when our whole framework should be innovative and futuristic.

Senator Edwards (South Australia) (10:52): It is disappointing that I have to rise this morning and talk about this, because it is obviously a political ploy by the other side to extend this debate; in other words, it is a filibuster. I thought that, given that everybody bar one currently in this chamber is facing an election in two weeks—Senator Collins will be facing an election in November in her home state of Victoria—I might get up and speak to this silliness which is going on. In our home state of South Australia we are facing some tough
times. I have just listened to Senator Milne's contribution, where she seeks 100 per cent renewables. I guess that, when you are a minority party, you never have to worry about balancing the books or how many jobs have been modelled to be lost while you move through a transition economy into a utopian existence where we have 100 per cent renewables. When you have the responsibility, and the majority of Australians on 7 September last year voted for change and a change in policy—there could not have been a clearer policy position than that we would abolish the carbon tax, and they voted overwhelmingly for that change—there cannot be a stronger proposition for the people on the other side to stop this, this week. Stop it and vote this legislation through.

In my home state of South Australia, we face an election in two weeks, and my Tasmanian colleagues in the chamber are in the same predicament. The two states under Labor reign have the unenviable position on the economic tables of being the two least economically viable states in this country. As we all know, in recent weeks Holden announced that they will be withdrawing from Elizabeth, in Adelaide's north. In the weeks leading up to the 2013 federal election, the member for Wakefield tried to con voters by sending a letter to the entire electorate stating that he had personally 'secured guaranteed support for GM Holden, ensuring production at Elizabeth until 2022'. What a cruel hoax that letter turned out to be. That is just one part of the mismanagement and waste that is Labor, under not only the member for Wakefield's former government but also under that of Premier Jay Weatherill. Their ambivalence about the drivers of business is the real reason why these businesses have failed. Labor certainly had no vision for the car industry, as we saw when Mitsubishi and Ford went under on Labor's watch. So, really, who is responsible for the slaying of Holden's line? As I said, in two weeks time, Tasmania and South Australia will go to the polls, and I guess we will have an idea of who the voters believe is responsible for the inattention and the ambivalence that is the carbon tax.

Now Toyota have announced that they will be leaving Australia in 2017. This will have a huge impact not only on Victoria but also on South Australia, where hundreds of jobs in the auto components sector rely on selling their product directly to Toyota. Both Holden and Toyota cited the high cost of doing business in Australia as the reason for closing down their manufacturing operations. That is the common denominator. Just at a time when they were least competitive, the government gave them a carbon tax—a tax of which their leader had said, 'There will be no carbon tax under a government I lead.'

The carbon tax is one of many tax increases and regulations that the previous, Labor government burdened industry with. This coalition government has committed to removing that carbon tax and putting Australia in a much better and more competitive policy setting so that the private sector can flourish. That is what we were elected to do and that is what we are doing here today. The carbon tax has hurt families, hurt businesses and hurt our economy. Not only does the carbon tax make it more difficult for Australian businesses to compete abroad, because other countries do not have the level of carbon tax that we in this country have; it also makes it more difficult for domestic businesses to compete at home because there is no carbon tax on imports coming into this country.

In the last 24 hours, a very respected and prominent industry participant, Mr John Borghetti, the CEO of Virgin airlines in this country, provided some commentary which everybody on the other side should listen to. Despite all the noise that is going on about
Qantas and Virgin, both he and the CEO of Qantas airways, Mr Alan Joyce, have stated that the carbon tax is a massive impost on their business. In fact, Mr Borghetti said it was not up to governments or oppositions to 'pick winners'. He stressed:

…the best assistance the government and the opposition—

that is you lot over there—

can provide is the removal of the carbon tax, which has cost this industry hundreds of millions of dollars.

I know that you do not necessarily study the business pages of any of our financial dailies here, but, if you had not noticed, airline and aviation is at a crisis level.

Senator Whish-Wilson interjecting—

Senator EDWARDS: Thank you, Senator Whish-Wilson, because I know you have a background in equities and you understand how financial markets work. I would be pleased to hear, in your contribution to this chamber, how you see that crucifying the aviation industry with this tax, when there is no other aviation competitor to Virgin and Qantas, helps the aviation industry in this country. So I accept your interjection, and I will listen quite intently as to how you solve this problem.

Senator Whish-Wilson interjecting—

Senator EDWARDS: Oh, 'A dollar extra for every person,' I hear you say. John Borghetti, another South Australian who is very concerned about the way in which you are filibustering this whole process of carbon tax, knows that when we go to the polls in South Australia and Tasmania in the next few weeks you will be judged for this level of incoherent political activity that you approached us with. He continued:

To that end, I just say we applaud the government's position on this.

Virgin Australia has reported a half-year loss of $84 million; $27 million of that is Labor's carbon tax. That is on top of the $106 million hit to Qantas from its tax charges last year. So while Senator Whish-Wilson says, 'It's just another dollar per passenger,' it is actually all those shareholders' costs. They are not competitive. When Singapore Airlines, Emirates, Etihad and Air New Zealand—all of those—fly into this country, how much do they charge their passengers from their countries of origin for their carbon taxes? Labor, you must face up to the clearest possible mandate that was given by the Australian people to this coalition government on 7 September. The carbon tax is a hit on jobs. And it is not just on the aviation sector; you must know that. It is across the board—including Western Australia, where its impact is aggravated by Labor's failed mining tax.

Anyway, back to South Australia. South Australia had the worst economic growth performance of all mainland states for each of the last two years—and that is not my data; that is ABS data. South Australia's domestic economy, excluding exports, contracted last year—also the worst performance on the mainland. Alarminglly, South Australia was the only state to record a drop in exports, with South Australia's goods exports contracting by 1.7 per cent last year. There are many things governments can do to help ease cost pressures on businesses, and repealing this carbon tax is an essential legislative step we must take.

The peak business group in South Australia, Business SA, surveyed its members when the carbon tax was initially announced back in February 2011. An overwhelming 69 per cent opposed its introduction—another example of the former Labor government's inability to
listen to the needs of businesses. In its submission to the carbon tax repeal consultation, Business SA stated:

While the Carbon Tax has only been in effect for just over 15 months, it has impacted business and in particular small business. The South Australian economy has, according to preliminary estimates, contracted over the past 12 months and the Carbon Tax is putting further constraints on an already struggling economy which has a significant manufacturing component. South Australian small business has also faced the most rapid increases in energy prices across Australia in recent years and the Carbon Tax is an avoidable component of these costs.

So businesses are doing it tough. Are you listening? No, you are not. Scrapping the carbon tax is the first of many ways this coalition government intends to help make doing business in Australia easier and more competitive. Through removing over $1 billion of red tape out of the economy each year, we plan to help businesses get back on track.

‘But what about reducing greenhouse emissions?’ I hear you ask. With regard to renewable energy, South Australia has certainly punched above its weight. Again, I quote from Business SA’s submission:

That is not to say South Australia shouldn’t do its fair share to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In fact, South Australia reached its 20% renewable energy target back in June 2011, well before the introduction of the Carbon Tax. This furthers the argument that Australia can and will meet its obligations to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions without a Carbon Tax.

That is what they have said. But we have all paid the price for this renewable energy, and the carbon tax has been an added cost to our already expensive electricity prices.

Finally from Business SA:

South Australian business and in particular small businesses have had to absorb significant energy price rises since 2008 with electricity costs alone rising approximately 80% of this period. Repealing the Carbon Tax is one step towards easing the rise in the cost of electricity to reduce the cost pressures on our businesses.

But do you listen? Do you listen to the peak industry business bodies? No. We are in this chamber, beating it out, slugging it out, while you talk it out.

So it is not just businesses that will be delighted to see the repealed carbon tax. Scrapping the carbon tax will save households an average of $550 a year. That is real cabbage; that is a lot of money. So, on average, household electricity bills will fall by $200 a year and gas bills will fall by $70 a year. The government have a plan to provide relief on electricity prices and we are keeping our election promise to repeal the carbon tax. Our promise was to repeal the carbon tax and we were elected on that promise.

South Australians have been particularly affected by electricity prices, and we see that in our travels around our state. Bill shocks from the electricity price hikes in South Australia are a major cause of electricity disconnections, according to a report by the South Australian Council of Social Service. That is real pain out in the households. Electricity prices in South Australia are already among the highest in the world and urgent action is required to ease the pressure, with a growing number of South Australians having their power cut off following massive electricity price hikes.

The future for farmers, families and small businesses under this carbon tax is not bright. I am concerned about the impacts for many small businesses in my home state, whose overheads are already high and whose margins are low. The horticulture industry is suffering
greatly, out through the northern areas of Bolivar, the Wakefield Plains and those areas—the food bowl of South Australia. And, indeed, all of those areas in Tasmania with high-production horticulture industries are suffering, without doubt, and feeling the effects of rising power bills as a result of a carbon tax.

I need to look no further than the effect on a business that I know, as does Senator Whish-Wilson from Tasmania: the wine industry. We are both very concerned about the lack of margins in that industry. If you watched a story on the ABC's Landline yesterday you would have seen a lot of people concerned about the rising costs of production in that sector. Electricity, fuel and mechanical harvest costs are major inputs of wine-grape production affected by the tax. Combined with the sector's exposure to trade and current low profitability the carbon tax is just another impost on the growth and future of the industry at large. Growers have indicated that up to half the increase in power bills is attributable to carbon tax charge. There is no doubt the carbon tax is contributing to the demise of profitability in this important industry sector. The value of the Australian wine industry was $4 billion five years ago; it is now down to $2.8 billion. How do we reverse this trend? We make it more profitable and give people greater money to access markets to grow their businesses and not cruel them.

There was so much uncertainty and such little confidence in government over the years during which Labor, with its flip-flop policy settings, ran this country. We have been very clear: we want to remove this carbon tax and remove the uncertainty that goes with the carbon tax. The only certainty with the carbon tax is more cost, less margin, fewer people employed, less profitability and less growth.

If Labor continue to oppose scrapping the carbon tax then they continue to support higher electricity prices for all Australians. To those people in Tasmania and South Australia who are facing the polls in the next two weeks: I want you to bear in mind the actions that are being carried out in this chamber when you vote. It is another example of those on the other side of this chamber having no regard or interest in supporting industries and issues taking place outside their own sphere of influence.

A clear message has been delivered by Australians: they want to see the carbon tax gone in its entirety. The previous government said the tax would reduce domestic and global emissions yet, pursuant to their own modelling, even with the tax, domestic emissions will rise from around 560 million tonnes in 2010 to 637 million tonnes in 2020. I say to all of those on the other side: listen to the Australian people, get with it, vote with us on this and repeal this hideous tax.

Senator URQUHART (Tasmania—Deputy Opposition Whip in the Senate) (11:12): I rise to speak on the debate on Clean Energy Legislation (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013 and related bills. With my colleagues on this side, I will not be supporting these bills.

This suite of bills sets Australia up to fail on our climate change obligations, to fail our children and our grandchildren and to fail millions of people facing displacement from the effects of climate change. These repeal bills seek to set Australia up to do less to combat climate change. These bills seek to leave the burden and heavy lifting of decarbonising our economy to future generations.

There is a strong foundation of scientific fact underpinning the need to reduce global emissions to reduce the risk of global warming above two degrees. It is so certain, in fact, that
doubt has crept in. With 95 per cent certainty that greenhouse gas emissions from humans are the cause of global warming, some cast doubt and ask, 'What about the five per cent?' If you were 95 per cent certain that something bad, something nasty, was going to happen to you or your family, would you sit by and ask, 'What about the five per cent?'—or would you find out what was causing the problem and get about fixing it? It is not too late to fix the problem of climate change, but time is running out—and fast.

Late last year I participated in the Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee inquiry into these repeal bills. The new coalition government referred these repeal bills to the committee to examine the costs of pricing carbon for households and businesses, while the opposition referred these bills on the basis of examining how they fitted with Australia's long-term climate change obligations. Put simply, we started from and continue to see this problem through very different lenses.

On one side the new coalition government see climate change in terms of purely the here and now. The arguments from those opposite revolve around immediate costs for business but fail to mention the Jobs and Competitiveness Program that was embraced by so many businesses that saw an opportunity to invest in energy-efficient technology, in renewables or in low-emissions technology to give their business a competitive edge. Their arguments are that the immediate costs for households are too high, but they fail to recognise that the carbon price was offset through tax cuts and increases to welfare payments to nine out of 10 households.

On our side we see the problem in terms of the medium to long term. The need to have in place a price mechanism for emissions reduction beyond 2020, with targets for reductions at 2030 and 2050, is just as important as a 2020 target. It is not just about the here and now. It is about the kind of Australia and world we want to leave to future generations. Just last week the Climate Change Authority reiterated its calls for an increase in the emissions reduction target to 2020, recognising that emissions reductions made now are less costly in the longer term.

Labor's approach to reducing emissions is to repeal the carbon tax and keep in place the already legislated emissions trading scheme, which puts a legal cap on carbon pollution. This lets business work out the cheapest and most effective way to operate within that cap. Cap and trade is overwhelmingly endorsed by economists as the most cost-effective and efficient emissions-reduction method. The OECD recently confirmed that higher levels of emissions reductions can be achieved at much lower cost through a carbon market mechanism. Carbon pricing is cheaper and more efficient than direct subsidies without a pricing signal.

The first 18 months of the carbon price has seen emissions from electricity fall, with coal power generation down and renewable energy generation up. The carbon price is not the sole reason for these changes, nor has it been insignificant. As such, the carbon price has been effective in increasing the competitiveness of renewable energy generation. Meanwhile, Australia's economy grew at trend in 2012-13, while additional government assistance to households has more than offset any price rises caused by the carbon price.

The binding caps will ensure Australia meets its international emissions reduction targets under the second commitment period of the Kyoto protocol—2013 to 2020—and under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. These are the targets pledged by
99 countries, covering eighty per cent of global emissions and including all of the major emitters, to reduce or limit emissions by 2020.

A flexible price would bring the Australian carbon price into line with the carbon price prevailing under the European Union Emissions Trading System, which is currently expected to be around $6 per tonne of emissions. Moving to flexible-price emissions trading would ensure Australia meets its international emissions reduction commitments while also reducing compliance and transaction costs for businesses, increasing flexibility and improving risk management. Importantly, embedding a carbon price in our economy sets Australia up on a long-term trajectory for emissions reduction. Slow decreases in the cap on pollution over a long period of time give businesses and households certainty and limit the risk of a carbon shock in future years, a carbon shock that will hit households and business far harder than a responsibly introduced carbon price. Direct action subsidies with a finite duration do no such thing, and the new coalition government is fully aware of this.

These bills have left many across the world wondering: is the new Australian government serious about reducing emissions? After all, it was just a few years ago that the new Prime Minister famously dismissed climate change science as 'absolute crap' to a small crowd in rural Victoria. Based on the coalition government's policies, Australia's rating on the Climate Change Performance Index has dropped to 57th out of 61 countries. Embarrassingly, at last year's Warsaw Climate Change Conference, Australia received four of the five 'Fossil of the Day' awards. These awards recognised the coalition government's backward proposal to wind back the carbon price mechanism and abandon support for research and clean energy.

It is clear that this current Senate will not pass this suite of bills as they stand. What of the next Senate? Interestingly, in Tasmania, the Liberal opposition election spokesperson, Vanessa Goodwin, is questioning the Palmer United Party's stance on abolishing the price on carbon. I quote: 'Mr Palmer has refused to pay his $8 million carbon tax bill, including penalties, and now he is aiming to win the balance of power in the Senate so that his senators will vote to backdate the abolition of the tax so Mr Palmer doesn't have to pay it.' Will those opposite cede to Mr Palmer's demands? What is the cost to the Australian budget if those opposite abolish the carbon price and refund all payments made over the past two years? Clearly, they will rely on the Palmer United Party senators to pass this legislation.

This legislation, which has been discussed for months, sets Australia up to fail. In its latest report on climate change policies, the OECD has highlighted that those serious about tackling climate change are implementing a price on carbon. For Australia to have a carbon-pricing mechanism in place and then remove it means we are turning our back on the world.

China, long held up by the coalition as not acting, is implementing seven carbon-pricing trials, and in one its carbon price has surged higher than Europe's. Guangdong province, China's largest, with a population of more than 100 million, introduced a cap on greenhouse gas emissions and issued carbon permits to big polluters from 10 December last year. Emissions trading schemes were also introduced last year in Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen provinces. As we participate in this debate to remove Australia's carbon-pricing mechanism, China is getting on with implementing carbon-pricing policies to see its economy through the carbon restraints destined to occur across coming decades. Yes, China's starting price is lower than Australia's, but there were amendments on the table in the House of Representatives to reduce our price and the new coalition government did not even allow them to be debated. As
our new coalition government seeks to send Australia backwards, China recognises the impacts of pollution upon its economy and upon its society and is putting in place the long-term policies to deal with it.

The President of the United States of America has outlined his desire for a national market based solution to climate change. He acknowledged that it would not pass the current Congress and has moved anyway to introduce stronger regulations. It is interesting to note the similarities between the Republican Tea Party and the climate deniers in the new coalition government. It is also interesting to see the opportunism of some of those in the coalition in using President Obama’s remarks—that emissions trading will not pass Congress and that America will increase its efforts through regulation—to justify their claim that emissions trading is not being implemented across the world. In Australia we already have a carbon-pricing mechanism in place, so the coin is flipped the other way.

In his submission to the Senate inquiry, Dr Frank Jotzo, a leading climate change academic at the Australian National University, highlighted the clear benefits to the Australian economy of using a carbon-pricing mechanism to tackle climate change. The submission said:

The carbon pricing mechanism currently in place is an economically sound basis for climate change mitigation policy in Australia. Repealing Australia’s Clean Energy Legislation and related bills is undesirable if a lasting policy framework for greenhouse gas emissions reductions is to be established, and if emissions reductions are to be achieved cost effectively. If emissions reductions are to be achieved without carbon pricing, then regulatory and subsidy approaches will need to play a larger role. These are generally more costly and less effective in creating incentives for long-term investment in low-carbon options by Australia’s businesses. Repeal will exacerbate policy uncertainty, with adverse effects on investment.

Dr Jotzo was not alone in supporting the current clean energy legislation. The clear majority of submissions to the inquiry opposed the repeal bills. Mr Nathan Fabian, the chief executive officer of the Investor Group on Climate Change, in evidence to the inquiry, said that the world is acting to reduce carbon. Mr Fabian said:

Nations are implementing emissions reductions policies that make sense for their circumstances.

... ... ...

It is our view that an emissions trading scheme with a cap makes sense for Australia's circumstances. That is because it is in the interest of Australian companies to be able to contribute to emissions reductions at least cost while reducing their own emissions from domestic plant and equipment over time, and in a time frame that makes sense to them.

It is simply not good enough for the new Australian government to throw out this well-thought-out policy, a policy that is designed to lower uncertainty for businesses and households and that seeks to meet our international emissions reduction obligations at the least cost to jobs and our economy.

The coalition government's repeal bills and Direct Action policy undermine investment certainty in renewable energy and energy efficiency measures. If there is bipartisan recognition that climate change is a serious concern, we must limit Australia's emissions. We need a long-term framework to provide some certainty to investors, business, the community and other nations.

The coalition claims its Direct Action Plan will reduce emissions by five per cent from 2000 levels by 2020. But this legislation before us does not specify a five per cent reduction.
The target is purely that—just a target. It is not binding. The government has insisted there will be no further expenditure across the four-year budget. Everything is unknown until the government's review processes are finalised sometime this year.

On top of that, the government has announced a review of the renewable energy target—to be conducted by an individual who does not even believe that human induced climate change is an issue. Despite claims to the contrary, the renewable energy target, currently set at 20 per cent of generation by 2020, actually acts to lower energy prices. This is because the variable cost of wind power is virtually zero and increased use of wind generation reduces the nation's reliance on expensive gas generation. Despite this basic economics, there are fears in the community that the coalition will abolish or reduce the renewable energy target. If they do, this will increase energy prices and reduce our nation's capacity to generate renewable energy.

The delays, the poor legislation and the RET review are clear impediments to long-term investment in the Australian renewable energy sector. The Investor Group on Climate Change suggests that, because of the relative policy certainty in countries like Ireland, the UK and USA, it is easier and more secure to invest in those countries than it is to invest in Australia. Investors like long-term certainty. They like reasonable returns combined with the lowest possible level of risk.

It is not just big institutional investors that are being hit by the investment uncertainty created by the coalition government's delays and poor policy. The 2,000 investors in the Hepburn Community Wind Co-operative in Victoria have had their projected returns slashed. The families who invested in the cooperative made their investment decisions in the years 2008 and 2009, a time when there was bipartisan support for a carbon-pricing mechanism. Their earnings are expected to fall from 4.1c per share in 2012-13 to 1.1c per share without a carbon price. So much for the Prime Minister's declaration that we are 'open for business'. The new coalition government are, in fact, 'eyes wide shut' in their approach to providing certainty to business.

The new coalition government have sought to frame this debate as being about the utility bills paid by households and businesses. In seeking to repeal the carbon price, their main purpose seems to be to achieve a miraculous reduction in utility bills and overall costs on households and businesses. Never mind that the rise in electricity costs has overwhelmingly been the fault of infrastructure upgrades to our distribution networks and never mind that there are different prices and usages in every state—the Prime Minister has been unambiguous in stating the reductions Australians can expect if these repeal bills pass. He said:

Thanks to this bill, household electricity bills will be $200 lower next financial year without the carbon tax. Household gas bills will be $70 lower next financial year without the carbon tax.

There is evidence to suggest the coalition government has overestimated the impact of removing the carbon price on household expenses. The committee heard that households in some states could expect a greater-than-quoted reduction, while in others, where rates or usage are not so high, the reduction would be less. Mr Tony Wood, the energy director at the Grattan Institute, said to the committee that the savings generated from removing the carbon price will be less than they would have been when it was first imposed. Other prices have risen over time. The carbon price has been internalised by business and unpicking it in exact terms is nigh on impossible.
All of this would be fine in normal debate. People would understand that the Prime Minister is debating prices in average terms and would expect some reduction. However, given this Prime Minister's penchant for absolute honesty in debate, if the repeal bills do one day pass this place, I will be watching eagerly for the results of any research into changes in electricity and gas costs and I will hold him to account if his absolute guarantees are not met. If he is off even by a few dollars, it will be another promise broken by this new coalition government. Their record of broken promises is getting longer and longer by the day.

What of promises? What of commitments?
The coalition has, on numerous occasions, both in opposition and in government, said it is committed to our internationally declared target of a five per cent reduction on 2000 levels by 2020; however, its Direct Action Plan is still in the draft stage, even though it has been policy since 2010.

Direct Action does not appear to be adequately funded through to 2020 and the Prime Minister has said that there will be no further funding. Either a promise will be broken on the level of abatement through to 2020 or the promise of no further funding will be broken. If the new coalition government is to find more funding for Direct Action there is a real concern in the community that it will reallocate funding from existing environment programs or from social welfare. The Australian Council of Social Services highlighted in its submission to the inquiry that there is no real benefit for low-income Australians from one year of reduced power prices if Direct Action is funded by reducing programs on which these people rely.

Programs that low-income Australians rely upon are right in the coalition's sights for termination. The schoolkids bonus and low-income superannuation contribution are set to be abolished. A $6 GP tax is all but certain to be included in this budget. We have the new coalition government saying that things will be better, prices will be less, cost of living will be easier and there will be more opportunity, and yet these repeal bills do not provide guaranteed funding or guaranteed emissions and they will carve a huge hole in our nation's budget, resulting in large cuts in funding to education, health and public services. There are no guarantees for long-term price reductions or increases in opportunity over the long term.

These repeal bills are a backward step, leaving households and businesses vulnerable to a shock in future years. The necessity to act on climate change only grows stronger each year. The immediate and long-term costs of allowing warming greater than two degrees are the core reason for acting now with a policy suite that is designed to scale-up over time. Removing this policy suite for the sake of a reduction in utility costs in one financial year, which may not actually eventuate, is not only reckless but also irresponsible.

Despite the shallow rhetoric of the new coalition government that they believe in climate change and support action, it is clear from these repeal bills that nothing could be further from the truth. If these repeal bills pass, we the parliament will leave Australia with no credible emissions reduction policy. We will leave the 46th and 47th Parliaments of Australia with much harder decisions in the future. I urge senators to vote no on this bill.

Senator LUDLAM (Western Australia) (11:32): I am proud to stand here today in defence of the Clean Energy Act, the best set of tools we presently have to drive the clean energy transition in Australia. I have wondered, as I suspect many people have, what is driving Prime Minister Tony Abbott in the senseless and aggressive attempt to bankrupt the
clean energy industry in Australia. This is uppermost in my mind, as Western Australia goes back to the polls on 5 April.

The Australian Greens have ambitions for Western Australia to be the solar state, and so the desperate and unhinged way in which Prime Minister Abbott has led his team in the face of overwhelming evidence would be bewildering but for one thing. Sometimes you hear people suggest that Mr Abbott has an ideological hatred for renewable energy. Why else would you hire someone like Maurice Newman, an outright climate change denier, to review the renewable energy target? In truth, I do not think it has anything to do with ideology. It is a hard-nosed and very systematic attempt to crash the clean energy industry, not because it is not succeeding in competing with coal and gas but because it is competing too well.

The coal and gas industries, the bankroll of the election campaigns of the Liberal and National parties, are driving Mr Abbott in this direction, and it makes a dire kind of sense. What could possibly threaten the incumbency of the coal and gas industries—technologies with decades of incumbency, decades of influence and powerful lobby groups with direct access into the cabinet room? I can think of something that would be a direct threat: an energy source where the capital investment is upfront, and then the fuel costs are eliminated. Gone. It is an energy source as powerful and limitless as the sun itself and as perpetual as the winds and the tides, or the practically infinite energy of the planet's interior.

Imagine, if you will, a solar power station a mile across running only on sunlight, able to generate electricity day and night. Now imagine the cost of this technology falling so rapidly that even the Commonwealth government's economic assessments are obsolete on the day that they are printed. This is what is driving the coalition's unforgivable attack on solar and wind energy. It is a hardline, last-ditch defence. It is absolutely essential then that we protect this legislation now, and after new senators take their seats in July. More than any other single issue, this is the one that is driving the Australian Greens' campaign in the West.

The fact is we know that the Clean Energy Act is working. Australia's carbon emissions from the sectors that are covered by the carbon price scheme are down more than seven per cent since 1 July last year. This is a structural and historic change, a shift in the energy mix away from coal towards gas and renewables. There has also been a decline in demand for grid energy. It is largely, although not entirely, being driven by the carbon price. We have the IMF, the World Bank, the United Nations and the OECD—not exactly likely members of this vast socialist conspiracy that appears to have infected the minds of those who oppose bills such as these—urging Prime Minister Tony Abbott not to abandon the price on carbon.

It is not only working but also making us more globally competitive. If you look at countries like Germany, Denmark, the UK, Korea and Switzerland, they have ensured that their competitiveness—if that is your primary metric and the thing you care most about—is driven and linked to low-carbon growth.

Clean energy investment has stalled since the announcement of the renewable energy target hatchet job on top of the climate repeal bills we are debating today, and there is no question that the practical impact of abolishing the renewable energy target will be to destroy jobs. In 2014, the solar photovoltaic industry employs 12,300 Australians across 4,300 businesses—the vast majority, as you would expect, being small businesses. If the renewable energy target is abolished, up to 6,750 solar PV jobs will be lost by 2018; about 2,000 of them will be lost in the short term.
When in opposition, the government ran on an election promise of an employment plan which would create one million jobs. How is that working out for you? Having accidentally presided over the destruction of thousands of skilled manufacturing jobs, you are now setting out to deliberately destroy thousands more. The Greens know that the clean energy future is a job-rich future. The following are the number of jobs which are created per $1 million invested. Five jobs are created in natural gas. This is because the industry is not particularly labour-intensive but is extremely capital-intensive. In the coal industry, seven jobs are created. In smart-grid installation, 12 jobs are created. In solar energy, 14 jobs are created. In building retrofits, 17 jobs are created. In mass transit and freight rail installation, which this government has also turned its back on, 22 jobs are created.

As a Western Australian, I am keenly aware that the debate on renewable energy risks turning into a caricature with the mining industry on one side and everyone else on the other side. But I know from experience that such an opposition of interests is not valid. In fact, I strongly believe that regional, Western Australian miners will be the first adopters of large-scale solar. They are not necessarily driven by the same motivation as we are, but that does not matter. They will act on the basis of the business case alone, because their survival depends in part on driving down the cost of energy against predicted steep increases in the price of gas and distillate which will blow the marginal impact of the carbon price out of the water.

Imagine if we had created an investment arm of the Commonwealth to help de-risk large-scale renewable energy projects. Imagine if we had created a grants body which had substantial expertise in the clean energy sector and which could help mining companies and other intensive users of electricity to transition out of gas and diesel and into the solar industry. Imagine if such entities existed. Then imagine that the government came into this place and attempted to wreck all of them.

Last year on 4 November, ARENA, which is one of the government entities I refer to, held a resources and renewable energy forum in Perth. The forum was hosted by the Chamber of Minerals and Energy of Western Australia and showcased the opportunities for developing renewable energy projects to hedge against predicted skyrocketing increases in gas prices and serious uncertainty about future increases in the price of diesel and distillate. A piece by Jonathan Gifford on 2 December last year in RenewEconomy notes:

"Off-grid mining operations in Australia tend to have electricity supplied either through diesel generation or through gas pipelines. At the diesel-supplied sites, ARENA estimates costs of around $200/MWh to $500/MWh, while at the pipeline-supplied sites around $100/MWh."

A friend, colleague and sometime mentor of mine Professor Ray Wills, who is the former head of the WA Sustainable Energy Association, has pointed out that the diesel market alone presents a billion-dollar opportunity for renewable energy. He says:

"With over one hundred mine sites chewing 700 MW diesel a year, that’s a potential $2 billion market in WA alone."

"The metric is that every 1 MW of solar would save almost 500 000 litres of diesel."

The companies who run these mines will be adopting the grants that are dispersed by ARENA and then stepping up to the large-scale renewable energy targets which are being supported by
the Clean Energy Finance Corporation. But the government proposes to wreck the Clean Energy Finance Corporation. It is unforgivable.

The Greens understand that an electricity network running 100 per cent on the infinite power of sun, wind and wave is not only necessary but also possible now. Our Energy 2029 proposal takes head on the challenge to do so. What would it cost? What technology mix would be needed? What efficiency improvements would be needed? How many jobs would it create? The Greens did not write the Energy 2029 scenarios; we relied for them on the goodwill and expertise of the talented engineers and technologists at a group called Sustainable Energy Now. The Energy 2029 proposal envisages the creation of 26,000 jobs between now and the year 2029 in order to go fully renewable on the south-west grid. This would be a case of a state quite literally taking its power back. From the actions of a family in Girraween to nickel operations in the goldfields, Western Australians are going to install the next generation of energy technologies in coming decades and eliminate our fuel bill permanently. Energy 2029 demonstrates the profound truth that the clean energy transition will be much cheaper in the long run than the ever-increasing combustion of business as usual.

We know how to do genuine sustainability and prosperity on the scale of the household; but what about on the scale of the city of nearly two million people? The Transforming Perth collaboration, with AUDRC and the Property Council, represents one step towards meeting the large-scale sustainability and prosperity challenge. It is a blueprint for a city centred on fast, zero-emission public transport and built for people. We demonstrated through the collaboration that, by reorienting growth along just seven of the 18 identified public transport corridors, we could create more than 200,000 dwellings and build resilience, diversity and affordability into one of the most car-dependent cities in the world. The work of the collaboration builds on decades of determined and effective advocacy by people such as Professor Peter Newman and his team at CUSP and my former lecturer Allan Johnstone at Murdoch University, who has inspired a whole generation of students as to the sheer human potential of truly sustainable cities.

To bring the vision of a zero-carbon, sustainable city to life we need to build fast, efficient public transport. The Perth light rail project is the centrepiece of this vision. We launched the project on the eve of the 2007 election and found a huge well of public support. Working with people across the city—local government, in particular—and public transport advocates, we succeeded in persuading the state Liberal government to begin serious feasibility work on a light rail network for Perth. In 2013 the Commonwealth committed $500 million towards rail projects in Perth, including Perth light rail, only to see the commitment overturned by incoming Prime Minister Tony Abbott. Investment in public transport is essential both to giving the people the choice of getting out of the traffic jam and to cleaning up transport sector emissions. The good news is that it does not all have to be done on budget. Innovative funding mechanisms such as tax increment financing can get light rail built in Perth at a fraction of the cost proposed by Premier Barnett.

The Transforming Perth proposal imagines diverse, affordable housing clustered along rapid transit arteries and thereby allows us to rethink the whole question of housing affordability. In a city with some of the most unaffordable housing in the world, it is time we took on the tax policies which have deliberately inflated a housing bubble and imperative that
we rethink the kind of housing we build—not just in the cities but also across all communities in WA. The Greens have developed a national housing affordability strategy that directly confronts the tragedy of homelessness and the precarious and terrifying place on the edge of homelessness faced by hundreds of thousands of Australians.

For a country increasingly edgy over the future of skilled manufacturing as this government presides helplessly over the destruction of thousands of jobs, look no further than the modular housing industry. This industry has the potential to provide thousands of skilled jobs in sustainable prefab dwellings installed in a fraction of the time taken to build dwellings using regular construction methods. They would be made from local, sustainably-grown plantation timber. There is a massive opportunity here, if we choose to take it.

Consolidating urban growth, as we transform Perth, has the essential benefit of taking the pressure off our urban bushland and peri-urban agricultural and horticultural areas. It allows us to step up in defence of our last remaining islands of urban bushland, and rebuild the links between them. This is the essence of the Perth Greenways project. As the city bakes in its own heat island, we know that shady neighbourhoods are up to four degrees cooler than those where concrete and sand dominate the landscape.

The government is trying to tear down the biodiversity fund—a $1 billion fund the Greens secured as part of the clean energy package. This is essential to buy back areas of high conservation value habitat currently under direct threat, including places close to home like Point Peron and Anstey Keane, Beeliar Wetlands and others. A combination of buybacks, community grants and a moratorium on further clearing of urban bushland is now extremely urgent as we watch ever more habitat going under bulldozers. The centrepiece of the Greenways project is that the whole network should be protected in the National Reserve System.

While we talk about high-technology transport options like light rail, we should also keep in mind the important place of the humble bike. The bicycle is, I think, one of the most elegant inventions of the industrial age. The Perth bike network is, effectively, broken. It looks in places as though it were written in Morse code—dots and dashes that appear on the map in no apparent order. For only three per cent of the state transport budget and a commitment of $80 million nationally by the Commonwealth government, Perth and other Australian cities could become the world's best for bikes. That is the essence of the Bike Vision plan that the Australian Greens launched in WA a little over a year ago.

Western Australia's population is overwhelmingly concentrated in the south-west of the state, but if you want to understand the future of the city look to the regions. Western Australia's rural communities are essential to our food security, economy, and cultural identity. Around 11,000 people worked in agriculture in WA in 2009-10, with Western Australian farm products generating just under $6 billion of revenue, or about 11 per cent of the state's GDP. Many farmers and pastoralists are practising sustainable farming but still face wildly predictable rainfall, poor returns, volatile world markets and extreme weather events as a result of climate change. That is why the Australian Greens developed a regional resilience plan designed to safeguard prime agricultural land from extractive industries; to increase substantially our investment in research and development—with $300 million—to assist farmers to stay on the land; to provide $100 million in grants for farmers to be more energy self-sufficient; to reform competition policy to serve the interests of community not just big
businesses; to provide $85 million to help farmers sell locally and get a fair price; to invest in tier 3 grain rail lines, which are very important for the south-west of WA, to help our wheat exporters do the job that we need them to do; and to invest in the enormous potential of oil-mallee cropping—to put an energy crop into the rotation as a way, as well, of offsetting the devastating impact of dryland salinity in the Western Australian wheat belt.

These are the initiatives that the Australian Greens believe are most urgent for Western Australia. We will continue to advocate for them—not because of this government but despite this government, which proposes to do so much damage with these repeal bills and so many others.

Obviously, we could not do this work alone. Our role here, as political advocates, is backed up by a very deep well of support in the community. I want to acknowledge groups like the Australian Solar Council—the national peak solar industry body—which, just today, has asked Western Australians to vote to support solar in the Western Australia Senate election on April 5. I want to acknowledge the Western Australia renewable energy target alliance—an industry led body gearing up to save the renewable energy target from the senseless assault proposed by the Liberal and National Parties. Sustainable Energy Now is a group very close to my heart. They include engineers, technologists, practitioners, economists and those who drove and wrote the Energy 2029 scenarios for Western Australia.

But we know these decisions will not all be made in board rooms. While there are people designing the new platforms—designing the industries of the future—we also need to protect what we have. Farmers in Western Australia are gearing up to lock the gate against the invasion of the gas fracking industry that proposes to do so much extraordinary damage to our groundwater resources and landscapes between the south-west, the mid-west and Kimberly of Western Australia. People like Jon Moylan and others are stepping up to stop the Maules Creek coalmine and protect the Leard State Forest in New South Wales. These are all parts of the same campaign. The Kimberley mob is gearing up to take on the fracking of the entire Canning Basin by Baru Energy. The tunnel picketers in Melbourne are asking for no more than a substantial investment in public transport rather than more road building. And there are those undertaking direct action in Western Australia—those who will camp tonight in the great south-west forests—those of the WA Forest Alliance, including Jess Beckerling and those who are on forest platforms protecting these essential stands of native biodiversity, even as the impacts of climate change worsen across the south-west of WA.

All of us are in this together. These are the campaigns that will determine not just the make-up of the Australian Senate after this July but the kind of world inherited by people who were too young to vote in the poll of last September. Dangerous climate change, in my view, is already with us. The choices that we make in votes like that which we will have today, are about whether we can perhaps avoid catastrophic climate change. I would hope that the Australian government can get past the interests of those key financial backers and get behind this. I thank the chamber.

Senator RUSTON (South Australia) (11:51): Standing here today, discussing the Clean Energy Legislation (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013 and the related legislation, I am really quite amazed that we are debating the abolition of the carbon tax. When listening to the debates that have preceded, you would have thought that we were debating the issue of climate change—and I do not think that is what we are doing. The reality is that climate
change is a matter of science, and it has been a matter of debate in a lot of other areas, but what we are actually talking about today is a carbon tax that appears, from all the evidence that has been put in front of me, to have been an absolute failed policy. You have to ask: is this some sort of veiled attempt to disguise what is really going on here—namely, defending the legacy of something that plainly did not work?

I have no issue whatsoever with many of the things that have been said today, particularly by the Greens, about some of the things that are happening around the world, but the fact is that the carbon tax has done absolutely nothing to help the things that you are talking about. The reality is that we are talking about a tax. We can sit here and call it any other thing under the sun that you want, but the cold, hard facts are that the carbon tax is exactly that: it is a tax—it is a tax on business; it is a tax on the people of Australia; it is a tax on our future. What has it achieved in terms of carbon emission reductions? Not a lot. Last week or the week before, I think, the Climate Change Authority came out and said that there has been a 0.1 per cent reduction in emissions and we have spent $7 billion in 12 months. So you would have to suggest that that is a pretty negligible result for the extraordinary amount of trouble, angst and anguish that we have seen and the money that the Australian economy has ploughed into this so-called initiative.

I listened to the comments of Senator Milne about all the environmental changes that are going on in the world at the moment. We talked about scallops, we talked about penguins and we talked about all sorts of things, but the reality is that at no time has anybody said to me, and at no time during her speech did Senator Milne state, what the contribution of the carbon tax had been or was intended to be towards fixing the problems which she was discussing. I think we just need to be very clear about what the particular bill we are debating is actually all about.

Another comment that was made by Senator Milne in her speech was that the government is refusing to accept the science of global warming. I do not think that is necessarily an accurate statement. I certainly accept the science of global warming, as does the government. What we do not accept is that, in the attempt to move the world to a position where we have reduced carbon emissions, we have to destroy every business, every economy, every region and every community in Australia in this hell-bent desire to reduce our carbon emissions by some extraordinary amount in such a short time. We believe that we need to move in a sensible, methodical and planned way to transition Australia's economy so that it can cope with a new world that has lower emissions and a clean energy future. I do not think anybody will argue with that, but making comments that the government does not accept the science of global warming and climate change is, I think, putting false information on the record.

Another comment that was made was that the reduction in energy usage is a result of people becoming more aware of the damage to the environment by large polluters. I put on the record that we have seen a reduction in the amount of energy usage in Australia over the last couple of years as a direct result of the extraordinary increase in the price of energy. Certainly, in my community, a number of times people—particularly our oldies, our vulnerable and those on very low incomes—have told me they are not turning on their air-conditioners on hot days because they cannot afford to pay for the power. I do not think that the reason they are doing it is that they have become more aware of the environmental impact of large polluters. I would suggest it is just a very sad reflection of the fact that they no longer
can afford the luxury of being able to keep themselves cool on a hot day or warm on a cold day.

Let us look at the impact of the carbon tax on some of the more affected sectors. I have to say, coming from regional South Australia, that the most disappointing thing is that much of the serious impact of this tax has happened outside of the capital cities. We are seeing major, major impacts in our rural and regional areas. But, before I go onto the specifics of the rural and regional areas, we only have to look at the impact that this measure has had on our automotive sector—and nobody but nobody can walk away from the fact that the carbon tax had to have had an impact on the very unfortunate decisions that many of our car manufacturers are making—in choosing not to manufacture in Australia anymore. Four hundred dollars per car as a result of the carbon tax is just $400 added to the bottom line of every car that gets sold in Australia.

In more recent times, we have seen the issue with Qantas. If you look at the amount of money that Qantas has paid in carbon tax over the last 12 months and the amount of money it is projected to pay over the next 12 months, it makes a very, very big difference in its losses. If you take $115 million and add it straight back onto Qantas's bottom line last year, and stick $160 million, as is projected, onto its bottom line for the next 12 months, all of a sudden you have a situation where this company has to do a whole heap less housekeeping and look for a whole heap more assistance from government to be profitable again, because it is actually the government that has caused it to be largely unprofitable in the first place. So the best thing we could do for the automotive industry—unfortunately it is too late—and for Qantas, Virgin and Jetstar is to get rid of the carbon tax.

I need to talk about Rex. Rex is the airline that looks after regional South Australia and a lot of regional communities across the whole of Australia. It is absolutely the lifeblood of these communities in their ability to remain connected to their capital cities and the services that many of the people who live in these communities need. You only need to look at the fact that we have seen such an extraordinary centralisation of services in my home state of South Australia to realise that an airline is so important, because people who are receiving medical care or the like or require assistance often have to fly to the capital city. If we end up with a situation where we have caused a regional airline, be it Rex or the other regional airlines around Australia, to be so unprofitable that it will start having, through commercial decisions, to stop flying these routes, all of a sudden you have dealt an absolute blow to our regional and rural communities. Whilst, in another debate at another time, I would like to talk about the decentralisation of services away from the capital cities back into our rural and regional areas, the first thing that we can do here today is get rid of the carbon tax so that we do not put pressure on our regional airlines that would result in there being any chance whatsoever that they no longer find it commercially viable to fly.

Regional communities rely heavily on the movement of freight. Freight does not just come into the wharf on a ship; we have to move it both from the country into the city and from the city back out to the country. Much of the freight that is going from the country into the city is feeding the city. The previous government's suggestion that road transport be caught by the carbon tax was probably one of the most horrific things that anybody in regional and rural Australia had heard. The country's extraordinary reliance on road transport means that we
need the most efficient and effective service possible. Once again, the carbon tax makes the
cost of doing business in the country more expensive.

Country people rely heavily on energy. Recently there has been a lot of debate in the
Riverland, a big wine-grape-growing area, about the very low prices that growers are
receiving for their grapes. The growers would probably be able to withstand much of the
decrease in prices for their commodities if their costs were not increasing so terribly.
Sometimes grapes are grown in areas which do not receive adequate rainfall, requiring
significant irrigation, but the costs of pumping have gone through the roof. So a major burden
on the cost of doing business is exacerbated by massive increases in energy costs. The people
who grow the food and the commodities for us all to enjoy while we are sitting around our
dinner tables are the ones who are bearing the brunt of this unfair tax.

Not only do wineries face increased electricity costs, but the processing of grapes into wine
also involves a huge refrigeration component. As we know from much of the debate on
legislation relating to the carbon tax and from subsequent debates on the direct action
policies, which are currently being developed by the government, the refrigeration sector has
probably taken the biggest hit from the carbon tax. Supermarket owners have told me that the
cost of re-gassing their fridges has had a major impact on their profitability. We are talking
about 80 per cent increases in the cost of gassing a fridge since the introduction of the carbon
tax. The most significant impost has been on the little guy, on our primary producers, on our
rural and regional communities—the people who can least absorb these changes. To a large
extent our growers are price takers; they do not have the capacity to pass on increases in
prices to consumers. If a fresh produce grower turns up at Coles or Woolworths and says, 'I'm
terribly sorry, my costs of production have increased,' the supermarket will say, 'Bad luck, I'll
just buy it from your neighbour.' The producers are in a squeeze. I want to put on record the
disproportionate impact of the carbon tax on rural and regional areas. We need to accept the
fact that it is the people in rural and regional areas who grow the food and who carry this
country. Rural and regional areas are where the economy is generated. We need to do a lot
more to make sure that we are not just putting burden after burden on people in these areas.

It is not just me who is running around saying that the carbon tax has been a bad thing.
Rural and regional Australia relies heavily on tourism. Tourism Accommodation Australia
said in a submission: 'This inefficient tax needs to be repealed to put Australia’s accommodation industry back on a more
level playing field with international competitors…Profit reductions of up to 12 per cent are attributed
to the increased cost related to the carbon tax.

The Australian Retailers Association continues to call on the opposition and the minor parties
not to play politics on this issue and to support the removal of the carbon tax. Tasmanian has
an election coming up. The Australian Forest Products Association states:
Following the September 13 election the Abbott government was given a clear mandate to remove the
carbon tax. We ask that the Senate promptly passes the bills to remove the carbon tax as it is in our
national interest that businesses have certainty and policy clarity.

The National Farmers Federation—a group that represents many of our rural and regional
producers—states

...agricultural businesses are primarily cost takers and consequently suffer the impost of any cost
imposed through the supply chain.
That just reinforces what I was saying a minute ago about the unfortunate situation that our primary producers find themselves in, because they have no capacity to pass on costs to the consumer. We all know that the consumer ended up with rebates and handouts from the previous government. They were compensated for their increased cost of living by an increase in welfare and social payments. But nobody gave any of those rebates and handouts to our farmers, who had no ability at all to absorb the extra costs.

Next weekend the South Australian people go to an election and, after 12 years of Labor, they have a chance to decide on their future and on the government that they want to lead them over the next four years. I think Senator Edwards in his contribution this morning pointed out that the two states that are still under the control of the Labor Party—South Australia and Tasmania—both go to the polls on 15 March, in 12 days time. By all economic indicators, they are the two states that are doing the worst. In some cases I think South Australia is in the unenviable position of being below Tasmania on some of those indicators. That is a very sad reflection on the two remaining Labor governments in Australia. The states that have had the good fortune to elect coalition or Liberal governments have seen that they will have a much better economic future.

It is really disappointing that we are even standing here today, because, as was rightly pointed out by the Australian Forest Products Association, on 7 September the people of Australia went to the polls. Nobody in Australia could have been left in any doubt whatsoever that we were asking the people of Australia whether they thought the abolition of the carbon tax was something that they wanted. From the minute Julia Gillard, the then Prime Minister, introduced the carbon tax—I might say that it was a tax that she said she was never going to introduce—the then Leader of the Opposition and now Prime Minister Tony Abbott said, right the way through, that we would go to the polls in 2013 to abolish the carbon tax.

I cannot for the life of me work out why those 27 or 28 Labor senators and nine Green senators—so that makes up 35 or 36 or so people in Australia—and the 50 odd that sit downstairs—who, combined, number fewer than 100—seem to think that it is okay for them to ignore the will of the Australian people when they actually said on 7 September that they did not want a carbon tax.

Today we have a suite of bills before us, I would like to think that it is an opportunity for us to reflect and act on the wishes of the Australian public today and get this bill passed to abolish the carbon tax. That is because one of the things that we have failed to acknowledge in all this is that the government accepts that we need to do something in the climate area and in this space. The minister has come out with a direct action policy package. I know those opposite do not like it. I am not sure whether they do not like it because they do not like it, they do not like it because they did not think of it.

But the reality is that the people of Australia said they wanted to get rid of the carbon tax. That is what we want to do. That is what we are asking those opposite to do. We have a suite of policies that we are putting forward to replace the carbon tax package. We are asking those opposite to act in a responsible and reasonable way. Let us look at the development of this particular package of climate initiatives so that we can work towards getting the outcome that everybody wants. I do not think there is anybody in this place who is going to argue against the reduction in carbon emissions, moving towards a clean energy future and ensuring the
sustainability of the environment around the whole of the globe. Nobody would argue that is not something that we all want to do.

The difference is that the people of Australia elected an Abbott coalition government. The people of Australia have said to us, 'We are okay with how you are proposing to tackle this issue. We are okay with the fact that you are going to take into account the economic impacts and the social impacts on our regional communities, as you progress towards the goals that have been set.' They are the goals that we all agree on. Nobody disagreed with the five per cent reduction in emissions by 2020—apart from the Greens, who would have liked a 25 per cent reduction. If you can maintain your economy and you can stimulate your economy so that we can afford to make those kinds of changes, then maybe there is an option for those desires and an ability to increase some these targets so that we actually do get faster and better decreases in the emissions that are occurring.

I think what those opposite need to do is accept the fact that they lost election and let us just get on with fixing up the issues that we need to fix up, instead of filibustering and blocking every piece of legislation that the government tries to put through. It is legislation that the people of Australia on 7 September voted us in to deliver.

Senator BILYK (Tasmania—Deputy Opposition Whip in the Senate) (12:11): Today I would like to start with a quote from the Prime Minister, Mr Tony Abbott:

The climate change argument is absolute crap…

It is a short quote and, I will give you, it is a sharp quote. It completely embodies the vicious and distasteful anti-intellectualism of the Abbott government. The expert opinion of tens of thousands of scientists—highly qualified, well-respected and peer reviewed—can be swept away with one short, ignorant, foul-mouthed phrase.

Scientists spend their lives dedicated to finding out how the natural world works: what is happening, how it is caused and occasionally how it can be stopped. Science does not work the way that politics does. Unlike those opposite, scientists can admit when they get things wrong. In fact, a key point of the scientific process is in scientists trying to prove their own hypothesis wrong. Once they have tried to disprove their own hypothesis, their work gets sent to a peer-reviewed journal where a group of highly respected scientists then try to disprove the paper author's results. Only after a panel of experts scientists have tried to find any fault with the submitted paper and have not found one is the paper published. On top of that, when scientists do manage to find fault in the conventional wisdom, they are not stigmatised and they not rebuked; they are congratulated by their peers. If the wisdom you have overturned is large enough, you may even get a Nobel Prize.

The arguments in support of climate change are not 'absolute crap', no matter what Mr Abbott and those opposite believe. The arguments in support of climate change are the result of millions of hours of research by tens of thousands of scientists who critically analyse their own and their peers' works, using the scientific method—the method that has resulted in the current technological marvels of our current day society.

These arguments are the best understanding of how the environment has changed due to human action and they will stay the best understanding of how the environment is changing due to human action whether the current government believes it or not. These arguments will stay the best understanding of how the environment is changing due to human action, even
though the government has closed the Climate Commission. These arguments will stay the best understanding of how the environment is changing due to human action, even though the government is getting rid of hundreds of scientists at the CSIRO. It is extremely disappointing that we have reached a stage in our society when scientists are politicised by the government. It is extremely disappointing that government agencies can be closed down because the Prime Minister or government ministers are ideologically opposed to their research. Instead of listening to expert opinion, they act to silence them. We have seen, last year and this year, the attempts by the government to close down for purely ideological reasons the Climate Change Authority, the Clean Energy Finance Corporation and the Land Sector Carbon and Biodiversity Board.

Mr Abbott did not tell the Australian people that Australia would be a nation that no longer cared about science, that no longer had a vision of Australia as a major player in the scientific world. And he did not say he would get rid of the science minister, a ministry that Australia has had since 1931. Just because the previous shadow minister, Sophie Mirabella, did not win a seat does not mean you cannot put someone else in there as science minister. You could have chosen someone else. You could have chosen Senator Macdonald, for instance! Mr Abbott did not say his cuts to public servants would include sacking hundreds of scientists from CSIRO, an organisation whose achievements Australians are rightly proud of, and he did not say he would close the Climate Change Commission. Just one day into the new Abbott government, the commission was razed to the ground—a body designed to make clear the science and economics of climate change.

I would like to take a moment to mention two of the recommendations from the Climate Commission report, *The critical decade*, that those in government may have found inconvenient:

We are already seeing the social, economic and environmental consequences of a changing climate. Many of the risks scientists warned us about in the past are now happening…Three years into the Critical Decade it is clear: substantial progress is being made globally to reduce emissions. However, far more will need to be done to stabilise the climate. If you actually allow an independent body to explain the science and economics of climate change to the Australian people, they might decide Tony Abbott's direct action policy is 'absolute crap' as well.

This government is not serious about getting frank and fearless advice from its agencies, only advice that fits their ideological world view. The Abbott government does not want it known that 99 countries, covering 80 per cent of global emissions and including all of the major emitters, have pledged to reduce or limit emissions by 2020. The Abbott government wants to hide that information from the public. It also wants to hide the fact that Australia's rating on the Climate Change Performance Index has dropped to 57th, out of 61 countries, due to the coalition government's policies. I guess it is not surprising from a Prime Minister who believes climate change is 'absolute crap', but it is extremely shameful.

Those opposite should be ashamed that such anti-intellectualism is the hallmark of this new government. They should also be ashamed that they have sold out their own ideological principles. The so-called Liberal Party no longer believes in liberalism. Classical liberal economic theory says that the market is the most efficient mechanism by which to ensure actions occur. This is what they believe—or, at least, that is what they claim to believe. The Liberal Party's direct action policy is a direct intervention into the economy by the

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CHAMBER
government—what they typically decry as Marxism. When even China, the world's most populous nation, a communist nation, is adopting a market based emissions trading scheme, the Australian Liberal national government, the Abbott-Truss government, is introducing Marxist-style direct government intervention into the economy. On this issue the action by the Australian Liberal Party is more Marxist than the actions of the Chinese Communist government. If the Liberal Party's interventionist direct action policy is good, does that mean the 'market is best' philosophy that underpins economic liberalism is flawed and thus the economic ideology that underpins the Liberal Party is inherently wrong? Or does it mean that they are cynically proposing a policy they believe will not work—at a cost of billions of dollars to the taxpayer, not to the polluter?

The carbon price becomes an emissions trading scheme on 1 July 2015—a market based mechanism. The Labor opposition wants to make the transition sooner—1 July 2014—and this is what we took to the election. I would like to remind people that the government also took an emissions trading scheme to the 2007 election—which they reneged upon, rolling Malcolm Turnbull and replacing him with Tony Abbott, rather than keeping their promise to the Australian people. That is what their corporate overlords wanted, and it is what they have received.

But it is not only the expertise of scientists that those on the government side turn their backs upon; they also choose to ignore the advice of their traditional friends the economists. I would like to quote from a recent article in Fairfax. It states:

'Leading economists have overwhelmingly rejected Tony Abbott's direct action on climate change policy and backed carbon pricing. A Fairfax Media survey of 35 prominent university and business economists found only two believed direct action was the better way to limit Australia's greenhouse gas emissions. Thirty, or 86 per cent, favoured the existing carbon price scheme. Leading Australian economist Professor Justin Wolfers was quoted in the article as saying he was

...surprised that any economists would opt for direct action, under which the government will pay for emissions cuts by business and farmers from a budget worth $2.88 billion over four years'.

Professor Wolfers would probably be surprised that any economist would support this so-called direct action policy—because it is a complete and utter dud.

Former Treasury secretary Ken Henry called the coalition's direct action policy a 'bizarre' strategy which would involve the government paying big polluters in a scheme that would cost more and reduce productivity. BT Financial's Dr Chris Caton said:

...any economist who did not opt for emissions trading 'should hand his degree back'.

Several of the economists surveyed said the weight of international evidence showed carbon dioxide emissions could be reduced more efficiently through a broad based market mechanism such as a trading scheme. The widely esteemed economist Saul Eslake—who just happens to come from my home state of Tasmania—said back in July 2011:

The recent report by the Productivity Commission which looked at more than 1,000 different carbon policies across nine countries concluded unequivocally that market based interventions achieve reductions in carbon emissions at lower cost than interventions based on direct action.
And the OECD released a report last year confirming that countries could achieve higher levels of emissions reductions at much lower cost if they relied on market based policy.

The Australian people are being sold an economic lemon, and those on the government backbench know it. The truth is that a price on carbon pollution can work and has been working. But the Abbott government is now removing effective action on reducing carbon emissions and replacing it with a plan to pay big polluters to reduce pollution—with the funds coming from, you guessed it, mum and dad taxpayers. This is despicable. They do not want effective action on climate change and they are happy to waste billions of taxpayer dollars and throw away their own professed ideology to ensure no effective action happens.

The Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee inquired into the Clean Energy Legislation (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill and associated bills and reported in December last year. These 11 bills were referred to the committee on 14 November, allowing just 18 days for the bills to be reviewed. Some 37 individuals and organisations managed to make submissions in that short time frame. In their submission to the inquiry, the ACTU made the point:

Repealing the Clean Energy Future package is irresponsible policy making. Repeal:

- Discards a fair and inclusive approach to action on climate change through the protection of jobs (through industry assistance) and the provision of assistance to households and communities while driving a reduction in Australia’s emissions.
- Throws out mechanisms to incentivise the adoption of new and more carbon and energy efficient technologies; underpin the commercial viability and market potential of low emission technologies; and induce substitution towards lower carbon fuels, products and services;
- Removes industry support, resulting in little assistance to industry to remain competitive in the current global shift to a low carbon economy; and
- Creates policy uncertainty as there is little support for direct action, creating a climate change policy void and ignores the research showing the need for comprehensive policy to underpin emission reduction activities.

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- Removes industry support, resulting in little assistance to industry to remain competitive in the current global shift to a low carbon economy; and
- Creates policy uncertainty as there is little support for direct action, creating a climate change policy void and ignores the research showing the need for comprehensive policy to underpin emission reduction activities.

The Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists unequivocally rejected the government's direct action policy. With regard to the goal to keep global temperature rises below two degrees above pre-industrial levels, they said:

We can find no evidence that the government’s Direct Action policy is capable of achieving such a target.

Achieving the scale of emissions reductions to avoid dangerous climate change will require a range of institutional responses. All such policy decisions should be informed by the best information from relevant experts, including scientists and economists.

The Wentworth Group accepts the advice of economic experts, including the Australian Productivity Commission, that an emissions trading scheme is by far the most cost effective way for Australia to contribute to global efforts to mitigate climate change.

The coalition government's lack of long-term funding commitments for Direct Action further confirms Labor's view that the coalition government has no long-term commitment to meaningful action to address climate change. Direct action is going to be extremely expensive, even to reach the modest five per cent reduction target by 2020.

To quote the Labor senators' dissenting report on the inquiry into this bill:
The Grattan Institute in evidence before the Committee highlighted how Direct Action can have no longevity as a policy without further significant budget appropriations.

My understanding from every conversation I have had with the senior representatives of the government is that direct action has been targeted directly to achieve the five per cent target by 2020; that is shorthand, obviously. Many have criticised whether it might even do that. But, just focusing on your question, there is fundamentally no reason why the Emissions Reduction Fund, which is the centrepiece of direct action, could not be expanded. But because it is funded on budget, which is by the very nature of the instrument different from an emissions trading scheme or a renewable energy target, it would require additional budget appropriations in future times to be able to achieve that outcome.

I find it ironic that Liberal-National senators in this place voted to scrap the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, which is making the government a profit of $2.40 for every tonne of carbon abated, while supporting an ineffective, inefficient scheme that will cost the Australian taxpayer a significant amount for every tonne of carbon abated. And they claim to be prudent economic managers! The Clean Energy Finance Corporation is returning four per cent above the government bond rate, while supporting over $2 billion of renewable energy and efficiency projects. While those opposite scream that they have a mandate to repeal the clean energy future plan, recent surveys of voters showed that they do not agree. In a Nielsen poll from late last year, only 12 per cent supported the government's direct action policy. Voters are not convinced by this policy.

We on this side of the chamber are not convinced by this policy, either. The claims by the government that repealing the carbon pricing scheme will lower prices for households is false. The introduction of the carbon price caused only a 0.7 per cent increase in the CPI.

I would like to quote, once again, the Labor senators' dissenting report into these bills. It states:

In its submission, ACOSS highlighted the increased network expenditure as a factor that would impact any reductions in electricity bills:

Based on currently available evidence, it remains unclear whether repealing the carbon tax will lead to a significant decrease in household living costs. ACOSS has been advocating for low income energy consumers in energy market reform processes for the past seven years. The drivers of energy price rises are much broader and more complex than the introduction of the carbon price alone including, for example, increased network expenditure.

Industry group COzero noted that some businesses would not see any impact from repeal because of the length of hedging contracts entered into.

Electricity contracts, in particular, hedged contracts, have been entered into by Liable Entities and Counterparties until the end of the 2015 financial year. These contracts have an implied carbon price in them. Regardless of whether the Carbon Tax is removed, or not, these contracts will have to be honored with a carbon component that will have to be either absorbed by Liable Entities, or passed on.

Australian voters should be concerned about the lack of transparency that the government have shown on this issue. They have been dishonest about the current effects of carbon pricing, they have been dishonest about international action and they have been dishonest about the cost and efficacy of their own policy. Clearly, they have no interest in addressing climate change. The fact that they have no real interest in reducing electricity costs, just political posturing on the issue, can be summed up in one quote from Tony Abbott, which, funny enough, has now been removed from his website:

If you want to put a price on carbon, why not just do it with a simple tax …
And further:

Why not ask electricity consumers to pay more …

Those opposite do not care and do not want effective action on climate change. This is just another example where they are trying to implement a joke of a policy that no-one on their side ever believed they would have to implement. I call upon the Senate to reject the Clean Energy Legislation (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013 [Provisions] and related bills. These bills are not good policy and will not result in the desired emissions cuts. The Liberal-National government's direct action policy will waste billions of dollars and will make Australia the laughing stock of the world.

As I said, we have tens of thousands of highly qualified, well-respected and peer-reviewed scientists, but they can all be swept away with one, short, ignorant comment by the Prime Minister. These scientists spend their lives dedicated to finding out how the natural world works, what is happening, how certain events are caused and how they can be stopped. I would remind those opposite that, as I have already said, scientists undergo a very strict process of peer review. So I think it is incumbent on those opposite to actually take some notice. I know they do not think science is a very important issue. We know that, because there is no science minister. But I would encourage those opposite to stop thinking as they have been led and to actually start thinking for themselves in this matter.

Debate adjourned.

Climate Change Authority (Abolition) Bill 2013

The PRESIDENT (12:35): The question is that the amendment moved by Senator Pratt be agreed to.

The Senate divided. [12:35]

(The President—Senator Hogg)

Ayes ....................38
Noes ....................31
Majority ...............7

AYES

Bilyk, CL
Brown, CL
Carr, KJ
Dastyari, S
Farrell, D
Furner, ML
Hanson-Young, SC
Lines, S
Ludwig, JW
Marshall, GM
McLucas, J
Moore, CM
Peris, N
Pratt, LC
Siewert, R
Stephens, U
Thorp, LE
Urquhart, AE

Bishop, TM
Cameron, DN
Collins, JMA
Di Natale, R
Faulkner, J
Gallacher, AM
Hogg, JJ
Ludlam, S
Lundy, KA
McEwen, A (teller)
Milne, C
O'Neil, DM
Polley, H
Rhiannon, L
Singh, LM
Sterle, G
Tillem, M
Waters, LJ
The PRESIDENT (12:38): Order! The question is that the bill, as amended, be agreed to.

The Senate divided. [12:39]

(The President—Senator Hogg)

Ayes ........................32
Noes ........................38
Majority.................6

AYES

Abetz, E Back, CJ
Bernardi, C Birmingham, SJ
Boswell, RLD Boyce, SK
Brandis, GH Bushby, DC
Cash, MC Colbeck, R
Cormann, M Edwards, S
Eggleston, A Fawcett, DJ
Fierravanti-Wells, C Fifield, MP
Heffernan, W Johnston, D
Kroger, H Macdonald, ID
Mason, B McKenzie, B (teller)
Nash, F O’Sullivan, B
Parry, S Payne, MA
Ruston, A Ryan, SM
Seselja, Z Sinodinos, A

NOES

Abetz, E
Bernardi, C
Boswell, RLD
Brandis, GH
Cash, MC
Cormann, M
Eggleston, A
Fierravanti-Wells, C
Heffernan, W
Kroger, H
Mason, B
Nash, F
Parry, S
Ruston, A
Seselja, Z

PAIRS

Conroy, SM Ronaldson, M
Wong, P Scullion, NG

Question agreed to.
Question negatived.

Clean Energy Legislation (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013
Ozone Protection and Synthetic Greenhouse Gas (Import Levy) Amendment (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013
Ozone Protection and Synthetic Greenhouse Gas (Manufacture Levy) Amendment (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013
True-up Shortfall Levy (General) (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013
True-up Shortfall Levy (Excise) (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013
Customs Tariff Amendment (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013
Excise Tariff Amendment (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013
Clean Energy (Income Tax Rates and Other Amendments) Bill 2013

Second Reading

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (12:42): I also rise to speak on the Clean Energy Legislation (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013 and the related
package of legislation that is currently before the chamber, while the government continues putting its wrecking ball through Australia's climate policy and its climate legislation framework.

Of course, we will be opposing this legislation. The carbon pricing legislation is in fact a remarkable example of successful legislation, of legislation that was carefully designed to address climate change in an intelligent manner that will deliver the transformation of our economy—which is exactly what we have to do in the face of climate change.

What those on the other side do not get, and what climate deniers do not get, is that climate change will transform our world, our economy and the way that we live. So we need a legislative and policy response that addresses that transformation but helps guide that transformation in a way that delivers a stronger, cleaner and greener economy and that builds that economy and does not wreck that economy.

What the government proposes to put in place is 'direct action'. There is nothing direct about it—there is, in fact, no policy around 'direct action'. The only direct action that has in fact been taken is to directly deny climate change and directly focus on policies that will wreck our economy and will not lead us to a new, clean, green economy and will not transform our economy.

That directly relates to the impacts that climate change is already having on our world—for example, in my home state of Western Australia. I note that on Saturday, the first day of autumn, Perth was sweltering in 38-degree heat. The irony was not lost on me at the time, sitting in that 38-degree heat on the first day of autumn, that the legislation coming up in this place was going to be the government trying to wreck the climate package that was put in place and that is starting to be effective and would have delivered the change required.

In Western Australia the 2011-12 summer was Perth's hottest on record and the 2013-14 summer was the second-hottest on record. In fact we have had the eight hottest years in the last decade. Perth's summer was the driest for five years—we had only two millimetres of rain. In Mandurah—which, for those who do not know Western Australia, is the region immediately south of Perth and in fact is one of the Perth southern suburbs—it was the driest on record. We are in a drying climate in Western Australia. The Bureau of Meteorology was reported as saying that we are in a warming, drying climate. They are confirming that in Western Australia. They said that the trend is going up. It seems foolish to ignore that trend. The climate does not change like this. This is really remarkable. In other words, we are seeing the impacts of climate change in Western Australia.

We are seeing changes across the south-west of our state that threaten the very future of agriculture as we know it. Although we did have bumper crops in some areas in Western Australia—and I have heard wonderful stories about those crops—in other areas we still have farmers who are in drought. In the north-eastern part of the agricultural wheat belt they are still in drought. Of the 100 to 150 farmers in the who are affected by drought, many of them did not in fact put their header into the crop. Those farmers are feeling climate change now. Bunbury, in Western Australia's south-west, has had eight of its hottest summers since the turn of the century.

In commenting on the impact of climate on drought, CSIRO said just two weeks ago that the modelling shows that climate trends will transform agricultural regions and see many
farms disappear. Climate change is happening. It is happening now. It is transforming our agricultural regions, so we need to be transforming our agriculture to address the transformation that is going to occur in our regions.

But what do we get? We get the minister for agriculture saying that you cannot plan for drought, that it is an exceptional circumstance—we are going back to that old language of 'exceptional circumstances'—and that we have to rely on the good Lord for rain. In fact, that is not what is going to fix and address climate change. It is nonsense to say that we have to rely on the good Lord for rain when the science shows quite clearly that climate change is happening and is changing our environment and our climate and is therefore changing our economy, because you cannot de-link the economy from the climate and from our environment. Looking at agriculture in particular, we are in a warmer, drying climate. We need to acknowledge it. We need to invest in addressing that and we need to invest in transforming our agriculture.

I have said in this place a number of times that in Western Australia, for example, it is well known that our farmers have been very adaptable. They have adapted to the Western Australian environment, because trying to grow crops in Western Australia is difficult. They had to be innovative to survive and start agriculture in Western Australia in the first place. But as the economist Ross Kingwell, who used to work for the department of agriculture said: 'WA farmers have adapted as far as they can to the change in climate. We need to be investing in addressing climate change and investing in the technology and the changes that will enable our agriculture to adapt to the change in climate.'

While we have this head-in-the-sand approach to climate change we will not put in place the changes that are necessary to address climate change. Nothing was more evidence of this than when the government last week announced the drought package, which had many mechanisms in it that we need to support farmers and deal with the most immediate crisis facing our farmers. But there was a complete lack of framework or context to what is happening overall to our climate and the impact that is having in making our extreme weather events more extreme and in making it more difficult for farmers to adapt to the changing climate. We need to continue to make the small changes that have enabled them in the past to be able to grow crops and develop our agricultural assistance. They cannot adapt alone.

This government is not only burying its head in the sand but pulling apart the architecture that was put in place to actually start helping. The funds we are putting aside to help our agriculture to adapt and help address the effects on our physical environment—such as the Biodiversity Fund—are being scrapped. They are going. That is not a sign of a clever country. It is not a sign that the government is taking climate change seriously, and of course we know it does not.

We need to be preparing for this change, which is what the legislation being repealed by this package of bills was designed to do. It was designed to put in place the changes needed to help us be ready for the impact that climate change is going to have on our economy, an impact which is going to be even more severe than what we are already experiencing. We need to be able to prevent and mitigate further damage to sectors like agriculture. By denying climate change and denying global warming, Mr Abbott and his government are failing Australians.
One of my portfolios is the marine environment. The impact of climate change on the marine environment seems to be something else the government is in denial about. The government is ignoring the fact that climate change is having an increasing impact on our marine environment, an impact which will in turn have an impact on the economy based on that environment—tourism, commercial fishing, recreational fishing and other recreational activities focused on the marine environment.

It is clear from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that climate change is impacting on sea levels and is causing ocean warming, increased acidification and changes to salinity levels. Climate change has also been linked to alterations in some of our ocean currents, driving them closer to the poles. These all threaten our marine environment. That environment will be impacted on and is, in fact, already being impacted on. As these trends continue, the distribution of marine life will change. We are already seeing that around Australia. As an example, the waters off the coast of Western Australia to the south are becoming warmer. We are already seeing problems with invasive marine species. We are already seeing fish—tropical species—in these waters that we have never seen before. I have spoken before in this place about how there are websites with maps onto which people can upload posts about species they have caught which are outside their normal distribution range. These sites make very interesting reading.

This is significant for the way we manage our fisheries. Again, by denying climate change and its impact, we are also limiting our opportunities to put in place mechanisms to help us plan for the future and manage our fisheries better. The sensible approach would be to put management regimes in place now that reflect what will happen as a result of climate change, that adjust catch sizes and quotas to reflect what will happen under a warming, acidifying ocean.

Healthy and sustainable fisheries and marine life are extremely important to our economy. The Centre for Policy Development did a study of the south-west of Western Australia and showed that industries there which are based on the marine environment generate $2.9 billion each year. We are talking about a significant impact on our economy, an impact that this government is in denial about.

Our oceans and marine life are under increasing pressure from a range of threats—overfishing, pollution, and oil and gas exploration and production, for example. Our oceans are already under a significant amount of pressure, and climate change is adding to that. Climate change, as I said, is linked to ocean warming, increased acidification and changes to ocean currents, all of which impact our marine ecosystems. Climate change will also, as I was saying, increase the threat to our biosecurity. Changes to our oceans will affect the distribution of fish species and their growth rates. Some species may increase in numbers. Others, however, may reduce in numbers. The implications of this represent a profound threat to our biosecurity.

The recent reports of coral bleaching in Western Australia are an illustration of how the very foundations of our marine ecosystems are at risk. There is a study being done at the moment by the CSIRO and University of Western Australia of some beautiful coral areas off the Pilbara coast. It is an area with a stunning environment that has to be managed around the activities of the oil and gas industry—which is ironic because the extraction of that gas and oil leads to the promotion of further climate change through increased carbon dioxide emissions.
On the study's most recent research trip, evidence of coral bleaching in the Pilbara region was found. Sadly, this included the breaching of a pocket of ancient coral heads, many of which were close to 400 years old and have been an important record of reef health. It is suspected this bleaching event was due to the marine heatwaves that have occurred in the region over the last couple of summers. I for one can attest to the fact that the water off Perth is noticeably warmer.

We know that marine environments need to be protected from these threats. Part of the approach is to ensure that there are adequate legislative protections. But the government are instead trying to remove those protections through this package of bills. That takes me to the action the government have taken to get rid of our marine parks. I hear the government saying: 'We have not got rid of marine parks. That 10-year process you had in place to thoroughly look at the science and plan for bioregion marine planning—we have not cancelled that. We have just cancelled the management plans!' What that means is that all we have now are lines on a map—because there has been no change to the management of those areas. This government scrapped the management plans, effectively scrapping those marine parks. As I confirmed in estimates last week, the activities that have been going on in those areas can continue—another stake in the heart of our marine ecosystems. To address climate change we need to have a resilient marine environment and, to achieve that, we need to have marine protected areas. This government have effectively scrapped the marine parks. They are knocking down every level of protection we can put in place.

The biggest crime is their denial of climate change and failure to take that adequately into account. So now around Australia we have lines, on maps, continuing—regardless—for marine park activities. Marine sanctuaries are a key tool for helping protect our marine environment. They protect fish stocks. They put in place proper management of those areas. They help rebuild our marine life and make it much more resilient in the face of climate change. We have a world-leading legislative and policy approach that was carefully crafted to put in place mechanisms that would help us transform our economy, because there is absolutely no doubt that our economy is under threat from climate change. It is under threat from fossil fuels continuing to burn. We need to be smart and clever. We always say this is the smart and clever country—it is not. It is about to commit another crime against the planet, by getting rid of this package.

Climate change will change our environment. Future generations will be turning around and saying, if this package goes, 'How did you get it so wrong, granny?' or 'Great-grandad, how did you get it so wrong? You knew the science. It was there. You could see the climate change in front of you.' Open your eyes and look at the impact this it is having on our planet. Look at the droughts that are getting worse, more often. Instead of making platitudinous statements about 'waiting for the good Lord and the rain', wake up and realise that we need to be changing now. We will be held culpable into the future because you failed to heed the warnings while this was happening around you.

We, for one, will not support the destruction of this legislation. We need to do everything we can to plan for a better future and strong, resilient economy. That is what this legislation is about. You are failing this planet; you are failing Australians. (Time expired)

Senator MASON (Queensland—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs) (13:02): Today the Senate is debating the repeal and reversal of one of the greatest
political cons ever perpetrated upon the Australian people. It is an edifice of magical thinking, completely divorced from economic and environmental reality. It is monumental. It is the world's largest environmental tax, with no impact—absolutely none—on the environment, but with a significant negative impact on the economy and standard of living of Australian families. It is a carbon tax based on a lie that there would be no carbon tax. It is a fraudulent policy imposed on an already-struggling economy by the unholy alliance of the morally vain Australian Labor Party and Australian Greens.

Only Labor and the Greens could have claimed that a big new tax would help the economy grow. That is what they claimed. Only Labor and the Greens could have claimed that a new tax was needed to save the planet, even though that tax would have absolutely no effect on the temperature or the climate. Only Labor and the Greens could have argued that Australia had to set the example and lead the world—when no one else was willing to follow—and kneecap their own economy, for no gain. You might call it 'unilateral economic self-harm'. That is what I would call it. In the end the tax did not lower the temperature, but it did lower the Labor vote.

The debate we are having today goes back more than when the carbon tax was first imposed on the good people of Australia two years ago—against their will and without a political mandate. Today's debate represents a closure on four years of political madness that cost two Labor Prime Ministers their jobs, one of them twice. Four years ago I stood here in this chamber arguing against a similar harebrained idea embraced by Labor and the Greens: the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, the CPRS, also known as the emissions trading scheme.

During that debate, four long years ago, I remember saying that it was the ultimate folly to try to rush through and pass an emissions trading scheme bill before there had been a United Nations climate change conference in Copenhagen and before our major trading partners introduced similar schemes. It seemed pretty logical. But, no, Labor and the Greens were hell-bent on pushing it through. As I and many others suspected, Copenhagen was a dismal failure, and the recent Warsaw conference was a fizzer as well. Over the past four years there has been no major international agreement, and I venture a guess that we are unlikely to see one in the foreseeable future. None of our major trading partners—none of those resource-rich trade-exposed economies—have remotely come close to introducing similar far-reaching and punitive schemes at home, whether they be emissions trading schemes, carbon taxes or whatever. None of them have.

President Obama said no. Canada said no. Japan said no. China, India and Brazil are not shooting themselves in the feet either. They also said no. The European Union—here we go! Oh, yes, the European Union! The European Union's carbon trading scheme—for those who are familiar with the literature—is an international joke. Those who look at the literature will know this. It is small, it is limp and it is a corrupt market, useful only for spivs, speculators and organised crime. It is a bastard offspring of the gnomes of Zurich and the bureaucrats of Brussels. Thanks to Labor and the Greens, Australia found itself leading with no-one following.

At a time when the world economy continued to be in the doldrums and economic growth has slowed down to a crawl, apparently no-one was keen to enter an international economic suicide pact. Surprise, surprise, surprise!—no other country on earth except Australia would
stand up and deliberately damage its economy, as the left in this parliament wanted us to do. They talk about the big side of town. They do not care about kids trying to get jobs or businesses being created. They do not give a damn—they never have.

Let's make it clear—and I hope the Greens listen to this—if the G20 were to decide tomorrow that it is a good idea that we should have a universal emissions trading scheme or a uniform carbon tax across the whole group, I would say that Australia should join in with those major economies.

Honourable senators interjecting—

Senator MASON: I hope you heard that. If the G20 acts, we should act as well. But I will not be holding my breath. And I do not want Australia to be holding its breath either.

Over the past few years, I have repeatedly asked myself why an Australian government and the Australian Greens would penalise its own people with a carbon tax. Why would you do that? Why would you introduce a tax which is so pointless from the point of view of environmental impact? Why would you do that? Why would you penalise the working families, the businesses and the exporters? Why would you do that? Why would you do something so against the national interest, handicapping us vis-a-vis our trading partners? Why would you do that? I will tell you what the answer is. It is simple.

Honourable senators interjecting—

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Boyce): Senator Wright and Senator Pratt, please desist from interjecting. Senator Mason, perhaps you will not need to speak quite so loudly if you are not addressing the interjections.

Senator MASON: As you know, these sorts of things do not worry me. There is a pretty easy answer. Why did the Greens and the Labor Party gang up on the Australian people and do this? I will tell you why. The answer is moral vanity. As always, it was the vain belief that the left—the Greens and Labor—know what is best and that they are the world's conscience. And the answer is guilt—guilt that Australian capitalism, innovation, entrepreneurship, jobs and hard work have made us one of the most prosperous and successful nations on the face of the earth. And the answer is self-loathing, or at least deep scepticism of the values of one's own society. Moral vanity, guilt and self-loathing: the three great contributions to politics from the left in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. That is what you might call the perfect leftist trifecta.

For the left—the Labor Party and the Greens—the ETS and the carbon tax were not policy. They were just these great, giant psychodramas designed to make themselves feel better about themselves, to demonstrate to the world how enlightened they were and how morally superior they were to the coalition. To the Labor Party and the Greens, it was all about appearing in the next Al Gore documentary, another photo opportunity at the United Nations and more applause and more accolades from the trendy international elites. It was a never-ending circle of moral onanism. That is what they provided.

The left—the Greens more so than Labor—have always been ambivalent. The Greens in particular have always been ambivalent about business. So punishing producers and employers, particularly in mining and in energy, was never going to be a major problem for the Greens. But the working class was always the key Labor constituency, and there was no clearer sign of how the Labor Party had lost its way and drifted away from its roots than its
decision to sacrifice the interests and wellbeing of working families so that the inner-city elites could enjoy that warm and fuzzy feeling of righteousness, superiority and moral vanity. The Labor Party were quite happy to sacrifice the jobs of the people they used to represent to cultivate the trends in the inner city. Great! That is what has happened to the once great Australian Labor Party. It is no longer the party of Ben Chifley and John Curtin. It is now the party of the inner-city left, vying, of course, with our friends in the Australian Greens.

The left does not care anymore about the working class. Environmental utopia has replaced the workers' paradise as the great goal. The environment has become the new proletariat. After all, polar bears are much cuddlier and much cuter than working class miners or truck drivers. Only business, capitalism and progress remain as the traditional enemies of the Labor Party, and for the Greens remain the exploiters, the oppressors, and now also—God help us!—the polluters. The Left's tried, tested and failed vision of the world is still there. The Left's vision remains—informing their rhetoric and animating their actions—that capitalism, Western civilisation and our way of life are inherently dangerous and contain destructive forces that have to be tamed. That is what the Greens believe. They believe that a government of enlightened experts—like themselves!—knows best, that individuals need to be subsumed for the collective, and that liberty should always be sacrificed for equality.

Instead of fighting for a workers' paradise, which is what the Labor Party used to do, the Left now tries to save the planet from pollution, from global warming, from overpopulation, from resource exhaustion and from nuclear power. And, yes, the proposed remedies are the same. The remedies have not changed: the growth of the state with, always, more government, more debt and the redistribution of wealth. They always have the same solutions; only the problems are different.

This debate has gone on for many years, for some of us. I have spoken quite a few times in this debate. So I would like to finish on a more personal note. I am particularly glad to participate in this debate today—perhaps more glad than nearly any other senator—because it brings for me, finally, some sense of closure. During those turbulent few months—you will remember them Acting Deputy President Boyce—more than four years ago, I argued against the CPRS or the emission trading scheme, in the coalition party room as well as in the shadow ministry. My colleagues Senator Fifield and Senator Cormann and I were the first to resign from the coalition front bench because we could not, in good faith, support this policy.

I was told by many in Canberra that I was disloyal and crazy and that I was committing political suicide. But I was told by party members and constituents back in Queensland that the ETS was bad policy—bad for families, bad for business, bad for exporters, bad for Queensland and bad for Australia. Back then I spoke to scores of party members. They were right. And yet they were derided by some—even in my own party—as being the 'peasants' revolt' or the 'pitchfork revolution'. I remember those times so well! But, in the end, they had a far greater insight than all the political sophisticates around here. We have learnt, haven't we, over the last four or five years, that the cultural insights of these so-called sophisticates—these elites—is often abysmal? Their insights are so divorced—from where the Australian people are, from working Australia, that it is nearly unbelievable. They are light years away.

I chose to listen to my party members and constituents knowing that there is far more to their collective wisdom than the conventional wisdom of the Canberra political echo chamber.
Since that time four years ago we have been proven right, time and time again. Now we are turning the last page on this sad and sorry chapter of Australia's political and economic history. It is a victory for common sense in the end—and, indeed, a victory for the national interest. I say this to the Liberal-National Party members and the people of Queensland: this one is for you.

Senator POLLEY (Tasmania) (13:19): I would like to contribute to the Clean Energy Legislation (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013 and the 10 related bills. Here we are with one of the coalition's first real orders of business. It is not about creating something, about instituting a new reform or about legislating for the future direction of this country. There is no coalition agenda to be set—no vision, no real substance and no real leadership. The No. 1 priority for them is not even about amending another policy or scheme. Instead, it is about repealing hard-fought legislation and recklessly hacking away at the progress the Labor Party has made on reducing emissions, transforming our economy and encouraging renewable energy.

I have spoken in this chamber on numerous occasions about how it is so much easier to tear a policy down than it is to innovate, consult and devise a solution that is in the long-term interest of Australia. So it should come as no surprise to anyone that the coalition has set its sights on dismantling clean energy legislation. In doing so, they are pandering to base fears in the electorate that they have cynically stoked through their own short sighted agenda.

This government promises to be the most uninspired, contemptuous, reactionary and downright narrow-minded one that Australia has witnessed in quite some time. This is just the first chapter, so settle yourselves in for what promises to be an entirely disappointing ride. We have known for some time that the Abbott government is intent on scrapping what it calls a 'toxic carbon tax'. Shortly after the election, the Prime Minister released draft laws to abolish the price on carbon and warned that Labor needed to repent in its support for this policy.

Even though it is now in government, the coalition has continued to go on the attack, employing the same mindset and strategies employed whilst in opposition. The new member for Bass has frequently attacked my stance on this issue, claiming that the carbon tax must go, for the sake of jobs and growth. But, as I have pointed out, carbon pricing and its associated benefits for renewable energy actually have the potential to enhance Tasmania's future economic prospects. But on a broader point, his comments are reflective of a conservative mentality that does not fully understand why using a market mechanism to restrict carbon emissions is so important.

The coalition forget that, prior to the federal election, the then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, announced a plan to fast-track Australia's transition from the fixed price on carbon, which is what we currently have, to an emissions trading scheme. An ETS is an example of a flexible price-trading system on carbon emissions and is being used in numerous countries around the world today.

Whilst many commentators claimed at the election that Labor were confused about how to respond to the coalition's draft legislation, our shadow environment minister, the member for Port Adelaide, actually clarified Labor's position perfectly when he said:

We took to the election a commitment to terminate the carbon tax, as it happens on the same date that Tony Abbott intends to terminate the carbon tax on the 1st of July next year. But we also took a very strong commitment that in place of the carbon tax we would put an emissions trading scheme, a scheme...
that has a legal limit on carbon pollution and then lets business work out the cheapest and most effective way to operate.

This is why we decided that we would absolutely not back the repeal of carbon pricing if it were not going to be replaced with an ETS. This clarification and other statements from senior Labor leaders were of course ignored by the coalition, which has relied on the simplistic mantra of the price on carbon being a 'great big new tax' to characterise its preference for direct action on climate change—but more on that in a minute.

Throughout his reign as opposition leader and now Prime Minister, Tony Abbott has consistently stunned observers with his ignorant comments concerning climate change policy. The most notable example occurred in July last year, when he told open-mouthed reporters in Sydney that the carbon pricing policy generally was 'not a true market'. In fact, he went a step further and clarified his statement as follows:

It's a market, a so-called market, in the non-delivery of an invisible substance to no one.

I will let that hang in the air just for a moment so we can revisit once again how stupid a statement it was. No comments from the leader of a major Australian political party have been more misguided, arrogant or ignorant in living memory. The reaction by commentators in the media was, at first, stunned silence, followed by a close look at just how silly these remarks really were. Giles Parkinson summed up the thoughts of many best when he said:

Abbott's comments, parroted or not, suggest firstly that this Rhodes scholar who studied for an economics degree does not understand financial markets. They are full of commodities traded in their trillions but never actually delivered, be they invisible substances such as natural gas, or very visible products such as cattle and pigs.

It is little wonder that an ETS is not coalition policy with a leader like this in charge. At first, I assumed that the Prime Minister had dreamed up these observations in the shower that morning, but now it turns out that he may have actually been trying to tap into the type of language that has often been used on climate change deniers' blogs. I do not make it a habit to surf around sites such as the Galileo Movement most evenings, but apparently they frequently refer to carbon emissions being 'odourless and invisible' and, therefore, they seem to suggest, kind of harmless.

I will leave you to form our own conclusions about the merits of such beliefs that can be found on the internet. What we instead need to do is focus on the relative merits of the Labor and coalition policies and determine which party has the ideas and insight to achieve the aim of meeting vital emissions reduction targets. As Tony Wood, energy program director at the Grattan Institute, pointed out in an opinion piece in the Financial Review prior to the election:

The emissions reduction targets of both sides—Labor and the coalition—are the same. Both accept that Australia must contribute to the long-term objective of keeping global average temperature increases to less than 2 degrees.

The debate should now be which policy is likely to achieve the target most efficiently and which prepares Australia for the long haul of addressing the climate change challenge.

Let us not focus on three word slogans; let us actually compare the policies. First, let us examine the coalition's plan to dismantle carbon pricing and enforce its 'direct action' climate change policy. For those who have not delved into this scheme in any great detail, I will save
you the suspense—it is not great. In fact, it is far from great because it not only would be quite ineffectual in practice but also promises to be quite expensive. This is rarely a combination that policy wonks reach for when devising a substantial and sophisticated policy blueprint.

Direct Action basically involves encouraging businesses to cut emissions via government grants—it is focused on buying emissions reduction. As part of this, emissions targets would actually be entirely voluntary. By voluntary, I mean that all Australian polluters will be completely free to ignore the direct action Emissions Reduction Fund. There will be no penalties for doing so. As a result, there would not really be a strong incentive for businesses to eliminate carbon based emissions beyond the perceived value of the grants. It will not cap Australia's carbon emissions and no credits will be traded on a market. Instead, polluters will basically be paid to, hopefully, pollute less than they otherwise would.

Indeed, one of the more widely discussed flaws inherent in this scheme is that the direct action policy will not really be orientated towards any particular baseline. The Minister for the Environment has indicated that targets will be measured from a baseline calculated according to a polluter's emissions over the previous five years, as sourced from the National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Scheme. But, as Lenore Taylor and others noted, the policy will be available to many polluters that do not report to the NGER.

There is also the matter of cost. A key component of the scheme involves a giant fund to pay for companies and landowners to institute measures like soil carbon capture and coalmine gas projects. The problem is that it will take an extraordinary amount of money, over $2.5 billion in fact, to achieve the objective of reducing emissions by 160 million tonnes from 2000 levels. This means that under Direct Action it will be near impossible to meet the agreed upon renewable energy target of a five per cent cut in greenhouse emissions by the end of this decade. The closer one looks at the fine print of this scheme, the worse it looks. In fact, there may be some hesitancy for the coalition to continue with this policy for years to come. As the member for Wentworth noted in 2011, such a scheme that relies on taxpayer money to reduce emissions would:

… become a very expensive charge on the budget in the years ahead.

Let us compare that policy with a fixed price on carbon transitioning into a full ETS that features a flexible market mechanism. This holds several distinct advantages. It fundamentally alters how businesses consume energy. A price on carbon, whether fixed or flexible as part of a trading scheme, uses the competitive forces of the marketplace itself to make Australia less reliant on carbon emissions. This is not necessarily because private enterprises have undergone an ideological transformation about the impact they are having on the planet. Rather, the pure calculus of how to meet their energy needs has been superficially adjusted in favour of renewable energy, because this is what pricing carbon is designed to achieve—a transition from a reliance on carbon emissions to greater use of newer, cleaner technologies.

Without carbon pricing many experts fear that there will not be the same investment in renewable energy and that projects will not reach their full potential. Australia will fall behind as other countries take advantage of innovations in renewable energy that will define energy consumption in the 21st century. I do not know how to put it more simply: if we don't act, others will. It is also worth pointing out that mechanisms like an ETS actually involve less
government intervention than a direct action policy. This is because the government is not subsidising the scheme or directing where resources should be dedicated. Rather, businesses will have a distinct incentive to do this themselves because the market will dictate that it is cheaper to do so.

Pricing carbon has come under a lot of criticism, but it is important to remember that big reforms that tackle longstanding problems are never easy. In his much admired book, *Adapt: Why Success Always Starts with Failure*, Tim Harford explores how the process of innovating to combat climate change can be so difficult. But, as he explains:

… a carbon price has to be the centrepiece of any policy on climate change. A price on carbon acts in more subtle ways than any regulator will be able to, encouraging a switch away from coal and towards … renewables, encouraging energy efficiency in every choice we make, and in the last resort, encouraging us to do without products, services and activities where the energy cost is just too high.

It is a system that guides decisions through the most effective of deterrents—cost.

So, why then, many people ask me, is the Abbott government so intent on repealing the price on carbon and so opposed to an ETS? The answer is probably the same one that we can attribute to the Prime Minister's stance on a range of issues—because it is easy and it pays politically. He and his top advisers have obviously sensed an opportunity to tap into an undercurrent of suspicion that persists in some sections of the Australian community when it comes to climate change policy. Linked to this is the reality that he would not have his current job, with its perks of repealing legislation and being seen riding his bike everywhere, were it not for his very stubbornness on this issue.

If we take our minds back to 2009, we may recall that it was only a bizarre sequence of events that allowed the Prime Minister to assume the leadership of his party in the first place. At the time, he was not an odds-on favourite; he was not even a favourite. In fact he was not even really taken all that seriously until an incredible internal battle erupted in the Liberal Party leadership. This revolved around the then opposition leader, the member for Wentworth, and his insistence on supporting the then Rudd government's planned ETS. Or it may simply be that the Prime Minister just is not convinced, that he is genuinely distrustful of the science behind climate change, that he has not been persuaded by the overwhelming bulk of peer reviewed, expert academic literature which counsels that climate change is man-made and very real. This is the most alarming answer of all, but there is a wealth of evidence to support it. As the member for Wentworth pointed out in one of his more candid moments of 2009 via a blog, and I quote directly:

… the fact is that Tony and the people who put him in his job do not want to do anything about climate change. They do not believe in human caused global warming. As Tony observed on one occasion "climate change is crap" or if you consider his mentor, Senator Minchin, the world is not warming, its cooling and the climate change issue is part of a vast left wing conspiracy to deindustrialise the world.

I think the previous speaker backed up my argument here. Bear in mind that these were not the words of a university undergraduate after a few too many coffees. These were public comments made by a man who is a key part of the Prime Minister's own cabinet as Minister for Communications, a man whose views on climate change are respected everywhere, it seems, except within his own party.
Evidence abounds elsewhere as well. When interviewed on ABC’s *Four Corners* in August 2010, the now Prime Minister was asked if he still questioned the science behind climate change. He responded by stating:

Sure, but that's not really relevant at the moment. We have agreed to get a 5 per cent emissions reduction target.

It is not really relevant? I am afraid the question of whether you are sceptical of humans being responsible for climate change is relevant. It is perhaps more relevant to your policies on combating climate change than anything else. It is relevant because the question of whether or not someone considers human induced climate change a real thing informs just how that person will confront the problem if given the steering wheel of a First World country. Scientists are so united on the view that human induced climate change is real that labelling such consensus 'crap' and hedging on whether the science is settled is irresponsible. It is the same as ignoring all medical evidence and opposing the immunisation of children because of a fear of health risks such as asthma or autism. That is all there is to it!

Yet here we are with a Prime Minister intent on a direct action policy—a policy that is at best very expensive, mostly uncusted and mildly ineffectual and at worst completely ill-suited to developing an economy which can reduce carbon emissions in the long term. What must be particularly demoralising for Liberal Party moderates is that it does not have to be this way. The Liberal Party does not have to be a party that is opposed to scientific consensus and it does not have to be a party that trashes the idea of an ETS.

The entire situation must be particularly depressing for the current Minister for the Environment. This is a man who wrote a thesis at university which argued that a pollution tax on carbon emissions would enable governments to exert greater control over our environment. After entering politics, he, like many other senior coalition figures over the last decade, publicly championed an ETS. He is an educated person and, by all accounts, an insightful and intelligent thinker. But he has managed to ignore his best instincts, ignore the science and ignore his responsibilities as senior minister and fight for Direct Action. It is not because he knows it is the right thing to do in the national interest, but because he saw the way attitudes were shifting in his own party and he wanted to advance his career.

I would say to him that climate change policy matters and that he should consult Wikipedia on the subject if he is confused. If he types in 'emissions trading', he will find that different versions of an ETS are being employed around the world, including in the European Union as well as in parts of China and the United States. I certainly hope that some senior members in the coalition party room are reconsidering the party’s position, because we are running out of time to act on climate change. I believe that many of them know that to be true. I think it is short-sighted of this Prime Minister to lead a party that is actually continuing to deny the science and the facts that are there. He is not prepared to show leadership on this very important policy.

**Senator HANSON-YOUNG** (South Australia) (13:38): I rise today to speak in opposition to this legislation that, if it were to pass, would take our country backwards. It was only just over two years ago that it was with great honour that I and many of my colleagues here in this place were able to vote in support of real action on climate change. That came after massive discussion and debate amongst the Australian population and community. People desperately wanted, after years of being ignored, to see Australia grapple with the fact that we needed to
take action on climate change and we needed legislation in our parliament to help deliver and drive that change.

That day, Australia became a world leader; today we are here debating the repeal of that legislation. We are at risk of being taken backwards by a government that refuses to recognise the threat of global warming. It saddens me to stand here and have to defend the only laws that this country has to reduce the devastating effects of global warming. The evidence has now become even clearer. Hundreds of climate scientists are telling us that climate change is becoming more severe, that humans are causing it and that we can expect more dangerous summers and weather events in our future if we do not act now.

This summer alone has been even further evidence that we are already experiencing the impacts of climate change—bushfires, floods, extreme weather events and days of extreme heat, as well as the health impacts of all of those, the loss of family homes and the impact on our agricultural industries. The drying effects of climate change impact on our weather patterns and on our broader community.

This government is taking us backwards with this legislation, rather than being visionary and seeing what we can be doing for the future to secure industries that are going to need to adapt to a change in climate and to invest in clean and renewable production that we know we need in order to power our homes, our businesses, our cities, our towns and our industries into the future. This government is taking us backwards by abolishing the Climate Commission, cutting the climate department and now trying to dismantle the price on pollution. If we allow Tony Abbott to come in with his wrecking ball over all of these things, what has Australia got left? Not much. We know that the government's plans for Direct Action amount to virtually nothing when it comes to having a significant reduction on the impacts of climate change. We, indeed, would be the first country in the world to dismantle a carbon market that is already reducing emissions.

We know that the next thing on Tony Abbott's list, when he brings in his wrecking ball, is the Renewable Energy Target. That is on Tony Abbott's next hit list. That is going to decimate the renewable energy sector in Australia and in particular in my home state in South Australia. This is all happening at a time when we are already seeing the results of living in a warmer, wetter world. The severity of extreme climate events is increasing. In Australia, that is already having a devastating result.

Nature has given us a reality check and we need strong action on climate change. It is urgent. As leaders in this country, we must respond. As a mother, it is my duty to prepare my daughter for the future. I will not sit idly by while this government turns protecting her future into a political football. We do need to be talking about the impacts of our decisions in years to come—not just in the next election cycle, not just in the next news cycle—and not just on who will be the next leader of the Liberal Party or indeed the Labor Party. It is about protecting the future of the next generation and working to protect our children's future. Putting our heads in the sand, as Tony Abbott would prefer, and ignoring the science—

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Ruston): Senator, you need to refer to those in the other place by their correct title.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: Putting our heads in the sand, as Mr Abbott—the Prime Minister—would prefer and ignoring the science will not help protect our children's future.
We owe it to the next generation to stand up, to raise our voice and to fight for the action not just that we need to continue but that which we have already put in place.

We know that young people, in particular across this country are desperate for real action on climate change. In fact, when you look at the attitudes of voters and attitudes of citizens in this country, overwhelmingly the largest amount of support for direct action—that is, urgent action and action that will reduce emissions for climate change—is amongst Australia's youngest citizens. Why is that? I guess it is because it is their future that we are talking about. We must always be thinking of our younger citizens when we make decisions in this place.

This legislation reduces and takes away the responsibility of those who pollute the most to have to contribute to the cleaning up of our energy industry. Mr Abbott would prefer to use taxpayer money to pay the polluters than to make the country's biggest polluters contribute to schemes and our ability to tackle climate change. This is of course a market mechanism, so it is astounding to hear the negativity and opposition from government members to using the market as a way to reduce climate change and emissions and to drive the change we need in order to have us heading towards a clean energy future—a sustainable future where industry can rely on energy production that is clean, that is green and that will be there into the future.

As we know, Australia is rich in natural resources, but we have been exploiting our mineral resources for more than a century now. The good news is that, in my home state of South Australia, we have a wonderful supply of alternative natural resources that we can call upon. Whether it be solar, wind or even geothermal, South Australia is perfectly poised to make hay while the sun shines, and when it comes to renewable energy alternatives, the economic sun is certainly breaking through the clouds in South Australia. While our nation as a whole is committed to reaching a target of 20 per cent baseload power generation from renewable sources by 2020, South Australia, in 2014, has already achieved better than that, with a renewable power supply of over 21 per cent. The advantages of wind power are well understood in South Australia. Despite our size we produce almost half the nation's wind power capacity already. Yet Mr Abbott wants to tear all of that down and come in with his wrecking ball.

I would like to reference some words from Genevieve, a young woman from my home state of South Australia. She says: 'As a young Australian facing a future of climate change, it pains me to see the leaders of our world, and especially in my home country, acting in such a cowardly manner towards the biggest threats in our history. We need strong, affirmative action right now, and we need it to come from those who have chosen to be our representatives. We need our leaders to do what they have been chosen to do. We need our leaders to be courageous and to stand up and to lead.' When it comes to young people in South Australia, they are the ones who are driving our state; they are the ones who are investing in renewable energy; they are the entrepreneurs who are going to drive our sustainable industry into the future. It is that drive, that vision, that desire for a clean energy future that will provide jobs—that will ensure that the planet and the environment are protected for our next generation—that we must be drawing upon when we think about the legislation before us today.

The legislation before us today is incredibly short-sighted. It dismisses not just the science; it dismisses the fact that we are already seeing devastating impacts on our communities, particularly in our agricultural areas. It is dismissive of the fact that the rest of the world is
trying its hardest to work together as a global community to tackle global warming and to
tackle the dramatic rise in emissions over the last 50 years. Yet, here we have in Australia our
Prime Minister, with his head stuck in the sand, wanting to say Australia is not going to
participate in any of this future-driving in relationship to energy production and tackling
climate change. It is not just disappointing; it is extremely embarrassing to see Australia
trotting around on the global stage, with the Abbott government's ministers pretending we
have nothing we need to worry about when it comes to global warming and climate change.

Well, here on this side of the chamber we know that the long-term cost of inaction is far
too great. My Greens colleagues and I understand the urgency for action, and we will defend
Australia's clean energy legislation at every opportunity. Sometimes in this place I wonder
whether, if we had more young people putting forward their views and having their voices
heard, we might get more insight into what type of country the next generation really would
like us to become. Going backwards is not the option that young people across this country
want us to take.

Senator IAN MACDONALD (Queensland) (13:50): I am delighted to take part in this
debate. Before the previous speaker leaves, I would like to ask her and her party—and anyone
in the Labor Party—a question I would conservatively say I have asked in this chamber at
least 100 times but which no-one will ever answer. A carbon tax that was supported by the
Greens was introduced despite a firm and sincere promise by the then Leader of the Labor
Party that they would never introduce a carbon tax. It was the world's biggest carbon tax. As a
result of that carbon tax, thousands of Australian jobs have gone overseas and tens of
thousands of Australian jobs have been lost because Australia has simply priced itself out of
the market. One of the major reasons is the implementation of a carbon tax that no-one else in
the world is implementing. Australia emits less than 1.4 per cent of the world's carbon
emissions, but under the Labor Party scheme, the world's biggest carbon tax, we were to
reduce our emissions by five per cent—that is, five per cent of 1.4 per cent. No other nation in
the world, including the big emitters, America and China, has a carbon tax or has any
intention of implementing a carbon tax anything close to that of Australia. Yet Australia has
this carbon tax; it has lost all these jobs and for what result? A supposed reduction in carbon
emissions of five per cent of 1.4 per cent.

You do not have to be very clever—and I confess I am not very clever—to work out that
that means there will be absolutely no impact on whatever man-made emissions do to the
changing climate of the world. To me, it is an absolute no-brainer. It will do nothing for
whatever is the perceived impact of man's carbon emissions. Yet for no environmental gain
there was this significant economic pain and the loss of jobs of my fellow Australians.

As you know, Madam Acting Deputy President Ruston, I, like you, come from regional
Australia and in my part of regional Australia there are tens of thousands of jobs in the
coalmining industry. Not only that, many communities live off those mining industries.
Throughout the north of Queensland and the north of Australia, our mining industries have
been the saviour of Australia during the time of the global economic downturn. The mining
industries contributed to Australia getting through that time.

But what did the Labor Party, with their mates the Greens, do? They brought in the world's
largest carbon tax and they brought in a sovereign-risk-inducing minerals tax, which closed
down mines and mineral processing. Also, many jobs in manufacturing jobs were lost in
Australia. You have only to read what Mr Borghetti from Virgin Airlines has said about the impact of the carbon tax. Again, we all knew that. Some of our business leaders, regrettably, have been a bit reticent in explaining the reality of the carbon tax. But we now know what the carbon tax has done to the airline industry.

You will remember that, under the Labor days in government, we even had Australian airlines being penalised more heavily than other airlines throughout the world. No wonder Qantas is experiencing difficulties in profit making. No wonder Virgin is experiencing difficulties in profit making. No wonder Rex and the other regional airlines throughout Australia are having difficulties staying in the air. Their costs are increasing exponentially because of the carbon tax on fuel. But, again, I emphasise that this is a carbon tax, the biggest in the world, that does nothing for the environment. It reduces our emissions by five per cent of 1.4 per cent. I have asked the Greens and the Labor Party, as I say, conservatively 100 times in this chamber since these debates began, the question: please explain to me how a reduction of five per cent of 1.4 per cent will make any difference whatsoever?

Government senators interjecting—

Senator IAN MACDONALD: As my colleagues say, it will make absolutely no difference at all.

Senator Whish-Wilson: Leadership!

Senator IAN MACDONALD: Okay, leadership; thank you, Senator Whish-Wilson. I hope you are speaking after me, because you will be able to elaborate on how Australia's leadership will lead the world. I am a great Australian. I would say anywhere that we are the best country in the world. There is no doubt about that. But, regrettably, Senator Whish-Wilson, very few other countries have the same sort of regard for Australia that you and I have. I am sorry, Senator Whish-Wilson, but the fact that we reduce our emissions by five per cent of 1.4 per cent hardly rated an eye flick in China; it did not rate an eye flick in most of the United States. And the Europeans just laughed at us, wondering why a country such as Australia, which was a real competitor with parts of Europe, was pricing itself out of every market for, according to Senator Whish-Wilson, 'leadership,' which nobody else was going to follow.

Senator Whish-Wilson, if you are right, and it was a case of leadership, what happened to our leadership? How many other countries seriously did anything? You will get up and quote some dodgy figures about some state in America putting on a two per cent tax or something and claim that that is what is happening. You will tell me that China is doing something in a very small way. What you will not tell me is that China sets up a new coal fired power station every week and that is just part of it.

Yet Senator Whish-Wilson is part of the group that supported the Labor government in introducing the world's biggest carbon tax, a carbon tax that has cost the jobs of my fellow Australians for no appreciable gain to the environment. I ask Senator Wilson and anyone in the Labor Party—I have asked this question, conservatively, 100 times before and no-one has yet answered me—to tell me what happens when Australia reduces its carbon emissions by five per cent of 1.4 per cent? Tell me how that will make any difference whatsoever to the changing climate of the world? I will wait, as I have waited for about four years, for anyone to answer that question seriously. And I look forward to Senator Whish-Wilson telling me how
Australia having the biggest carbon tax in the world in order to reduce our emissions by five per cent of 1.4 per cent is good policy. That is why the majority of Australians at the last election rejected the Labor-Greens approach to carbon tax and voted in a government that would seriously look at these things—an adult government that really understands the economy and the environment.

Debate interrupted.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The PRESIDENT (14:00): Order! I draw the attention of honourable senators to the presence in the gallery of the National Assembly of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. 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

Health

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (14:00): My question is to the Assistant Minister for Health. I refer the minister to a decision to shut down the health star rating system website. Does the minister still stand by her statement to the Senate on 13 February 2014 that the Legislative and Governance Forum on Food Regulation:

… took a unanimous decision to have an extensive cost-benefit analysis done that was due to report back to the forum in June this year and it was premature to have the website live until this was completed.

Senator NASH (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of The Nationals in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Health) (14:01): Yes, I do stand by that statement. As I advised the chamber at the time, there had been discussion around the expanded cost-benefit analysis. There was no dissent, indicating that there was no opposition. And I can assure the Senate that—as I am sure some of the senators opposite who have been very involved in this space would know—it is indeed a very robust forum and I would have been under no misapprehension if there was any dissent to what I had put to the meeting.

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (14:03): Mr President, I ask a further supplementary question. Can the minister produce any evidence
whatsoever to support her claim that the meeting of the forum made—and I will use her words—'a unanimous decision' to conduct an extensive cost-benefit analysis and delay the health star rating system pending its completion?

Senator NASH (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of The Nationals in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Health) (14:03): Again, to be very clear to the Senate, there is no delay—I will repeat that: no delay—to the process of implementing a health star rating system. As I indicated previously to the Senate, there was no dissent from the members of the forum, indicating no opposition to what I had put to the forum.

Carbon Pricing

Senator BACK (Western Australia—Second Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (14:04): My question is to the Leader of the Government in the Senate and Minister for Employment, Senator Abetz. Can the minister update the Senate on the impact of the carbon tax impost on the aviation industry and on Qantas in particular? And can the minister advise what steps could be taken today to alleviate that situation?

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): I thank Senator Back for the question. Senator Back is a Western Australian senator who understands the need for affordable air services to cover the vast distances of our nation and indeed his home state. Senator Back is right to highlight the carbon tax. It cost just three players over $150 million last year: Rex, $2.4 million; Virgin, $48 million; and Qantas, $106 million.

Senator Cormann: Just one year?

Senator ABETZ: That is just one year, Senator Cormann. So, what can be done? First of all, the Senate today could vote to remove this job-destroying carbon tax to help our struggling airline sector. That would be a great first. But another thing Labor could do is ensure that the opposition has command of the facts. Yesterday a very senior opposition frontbencher—Mr O'Connor, no less—claimed that the government is the majority shareholder in Qantas. And he did not say it once, he did not say it twice, he said it three times—and of course he was wrong on each and every occasion. Labor's cure is a recipe for a government owned airline, forgetting it was Labor itself that sold Qantas over 20 years ago under the Hawke-Keating government. It now appears that Labor, having abandoned economic responsibility and common sense, is abandoning its own history. This is ignorance writ large. This is incompetence writ large. And this is Labor writ large: no idea, no clue, no remedies and suggesting things that are palpably untrue. I ask rhetorically: who would you—

(Time expired)

Senator BACK (Western Australia—Second Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (14:06): Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. Can the minister inform the Senate of any proposals for the government to provide financial support to Qantas, including through partial ownership of Qantas, and of any flaws in such proposals?

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): I am aware that the ALP are seeking to rewind the clock well over two decades to when their forebears saw the need to sell Qantas. As Labor Minister Willis said at the time, this was 'to allow the airlines greater access to equity capital'. That was the reason that Labor undertook those
reforms—and it seems now, a generation later, that the successors of the Hawke-Keating reforms have basically abandoned those reforms, denied their own history and are now pretending that government ownership would be better than that which their own forebears realised over two decades ago were so absolutely essential: the privatisation of Qantas and Australian Airlines. It seems as though the incarnation of the current Labor Party is nowhere near— (Time expired)

Senator BACK (Western Australia—Second Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (14:07): Mr President, I ask a further supplementary question. Can the minister advise the Senate of the government's response to reports of possible industrial action at Qantas?

Senator ABETZ (Tasmania—Leader of the Government in the Senate, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Minister for Employment) (14:08): I was sorry to hear last week that the first response to the news of job losses at Qantas by certain union bosses was the threat to take industrial action. This is a very difficult and anxious time for Qantas employees. The very last thing they need is for their airline to be attacked by rogue industrial action. This would simply make a bad situation so much worse.

Rather than threatening industrial action, these union bosses would be of greater benefit to their members, and their members' job security, by campaigning for legislative action in this place and by asking their senatorial branch office in the ALP to repeal the carbon tax. That is what we on this side invite them to consider. When Mr Borghetti of Virgin says 'the best assistance that can be provided is the removal of the carbon tax', I invite— (Time expired)

Ministerial Staff: Code of Conduct

Senator McLUCAS (Queensland) (14:09): My question is to the Assistant Minister for Health, Senator Nash. Why did the minister advise the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee last Wednesday that his chief of staff had resigned as a director upon commencing his employment when ASIC records show that he remained a director of the lobbying company until 13 February 2014—five months after he started in the minister's office?

Senator NASH (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of The Nationals in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Health) (14:09): As I did indeed indicate to the Senate estimates committee last week, I was advised by my former chief of staff that he had instructed his accountants to remove him from all directorships. He was removed from the APA directorship, which is the lobbying company.

Senator McLUCAS (Queensland) (14:10): Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. Why did the minister claim her chief of staff had resigned as a director when he had not? Does the minister still maintain that having a chief of staff who was a director and 50 per cent shareholder of a lobbying company with industry clients who operate in her area of ministerial responsibilities is not a conflict of interest?

Senator Ian Macdonald interjecting—

Senator Sterle: Throw him out!

The PRESIDENT: Order! I remind honourable senators that interjections across the chamber are disorderly.

Senator NASH (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of The Nationals in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Health) (14:11): As I have informed the Senate on a number of
occasions to date, I was advised by my former chief of staff that he had directed his accountants to remove him from all directorships. I have also outlined to the Senate on several occasions the undertakings that were required of my former chief of staff to ensure that there was a strict separation so that there could be no real or perceived conflict of interest.

Senator McLUCAS (Queensland) (14:11): Mr President, I ask a further supplementary question. Will the minister table the letter that she claims her chief of staff wrote to her at the commencement of his employment outlining measures to deal with the many conflicts of interest between his business affairs and his responsibilities as a ministerial chief of staff?

Senator NASH (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of The Nationals in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Health) (14:12): Again, for the Senate: there were no conflicts of interest—

Senator Wong: Not even the Prime Minister agrees with you!

Senator NASH: I would perhaps invite those opposite—

Opposition senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Order! Just wait a minute. Minister, you are entitled to be heard in silence—resume your seat.

Senator Wong: You are the only one who is still saying that—so are you right or is Tony Abbott right?

Honourable senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Order! Those on my right and on my left: if you wish to debate the issue the time is at the end of question time. The minister is entitled to be heard in silence. When there is silence we will proceed.

Senator NASH: Thank you very much, Mr President. As I have indicated to the Senate on many occasions now, there was no conflict of interest.

Senator Wong interjecting—

Senator NASH: That is exactly what it is about: there was no conflict of interest.

Senator Wong: That's not what the PM says; you can't even get your lines right!

The PRESIDENT: Order! Minister, resume your seat. If people wish to debate the issue I remind them they can do that at the end of question time.

Senator NASH: Thank you very much, Mr President. I have advised the Senate on several occasions now of the arrangements surrounding the employment of my former chief of staff which ensured that there was no conflict of interest. For several hours, from recollection, last week Senator Wong did indeed ask—as did other senators—a range of questions relating to these matters. I would suggest that most of these—(Time expired)

Ukraine

Senator BERNARDI (South Australia) (14:13): My question is to the Attorney-General, Senator the Hon. George Brandis. Can the minister update the Senate on developments in Ukraine and Australia's attitude to those developments?

Senator BRANDIS (Queensland—Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council, Minister for Arts and Attorney-General) (14:14): Thank you very much, Senator Bernardi, for that important question. The Australian government is
gravely concerned by reports of Russian military activity inside Ukraine and by the decision of the Russian parliament to authorise the use of force. Today, the Minister for Foreign Affairs called the Russian ambassador into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Officers of the department conveyed the Australian government's views regarding the escalating situation in Ukraine. The United Nations Security Council has met twice within the last 24 hours to discuss the escalating crisis. Australia has made clear our unequivocal support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine and that the use of force, or the threat of the use of force, is completely unacceptable. Not only would this be contrary to the Charter of the United Nations but, under a series of international agreements to which it is a party, Russia itself has committed to respect Ukraine's sovereignty.

It is vitally important for the international community to take active and deliberate steps to prevent further escalation of tensions. The Australian government urges the Russian government to abide by its international obligations and calls on the government of the Ukraine, as well, to continue its restraint in the face of this provocation. Australia remains in close contact with friends and allies on the situation, including the United Nations Security Council.

Senator BERNARDI (South Australia) (14:15): Mr President, I thank the minister and ask a supplementary question. What is the Australian government's view of the steps that should be taken by the international community, and what role is Australia playing in an attempt to resolve the current crisis?

Senator BRANDIS (Queensland—Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council, Minister for Arts and Attorney-General) (14:15): The Australian government's view is that it is unacceptable for any nation to threaten the territorial integrity of Ukraine in any way. What needs to be done is to focus on how to step back urgently from the crisis. Clearly, a resolution of tensions will require urgent dialogue. The government is concerned to learn that a request by the new government of Ukraine for urgent talks with the Russian Federation has been rejected. The Australian government urges all parties to keep open the channels of communication. Within the UN Security Council, Australia has supported moves for international mediation, including by the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and the European Union. We will continue to support such measures and any useful, necessary measures.

Senator BERNARDI (South Australia) (14:16): Mr President, I ask a further supplementary question. What advice will the minister give to those Australians planning to travel to the Ukraine?

Senator BRANDIS (Queensland—Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council, Minister for Arts and Attorney-General) (14:17): The Australian government's travel advice for Ukraine was re-issued on 1 March. Due to the volatile political situation, particularly in Crimea, and the serious risk of further escalation, with potential for violence, the government has increased the level of its travel advice for Crimea to 'Do not travel'. (Time expired)

Homelessness

Senator LUDLAM (Western Australia) (14:17): My question is to the Minister representing the Minister for Social Services, Senator Fifield, because I understand there is no
longer a housing minister. Are you aware that the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness expires on 30 June, putting at risk hundreds of jobs across 41 different organisations providing at least 80 different support services in Western Australia? Are you aware that Mission Australia has calculated that without essential funding under this agreement some 80,000 men, women and children will be adversely affected and forced back into dangerous situations of homelessness or situations approaching homelessness, and that the jobs of some 3,400 staff across Australia would be in jeopardy? What is the Australian government doing to resolve this situation?

Senator FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (14:18): The government acknowledges the positive impact the sector provides for vulnerable Australians and its important role in reducing homelessness. But I do need to point out that the previous government terminated NPAH funding beyond 30 June 2014 and did not provide for homelessness funding in the forward estimates. There was no provision for NPAH funding in the Pre-Economic Fiscal Outlook in August 2013, issued by the former Treasurer.

The government obviously is aware, though, that this has created significant uncertainty and difficulties in maintaining staffing levels and continuing the same level of support services. Significant funding decisions will continue to follow the budget process, and these decisions will be announced in May. The government will work to ensure that there is certainty for the sector as soon as is possible.

This is a situation that those of us on this side of the chamber who are now in government have found portfolio area by portfolio area—that is, where the previous government did not make adequate funding provisions and they did not put funding into the forward estimates. Obviously this government have an immense fiscal challenge and we are endeavouring to prioritise. We are endeavouring to frame a budget that can see that the core business of government, the core functions of government, receive the funding resources they deserve. I acknowledge that there is some uncertainty in this sector at the moment, and the government is working hard to resolve that as soon as possible.

Senator LUDLAM (Western Australia) (14:20): Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. I might just ask Senator Fifield if he can check something, as I would hate to accuse him of misleading the Senate. Funding was not terminated. You might like to correct the record, Senator Fifield. Can the minister explain who, if anyone, is providing the government advice on homelessness and housing affordability since you axed the Prime Minister’s Council on Homelessness, the Select Council on Housing and Homelessness and abolished the National Housing Supply Council and the Major Cities Unit? Do you actually have a policy on housing and, if you do, can you provide it to us?

Senator FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (14:21): Contrary to what Senator Ludlam was seeking to perpetrate in the estimates committee last week, the government does have a housing minister. Minister Andrews is the minister responsible for housing. It is an area of priority for this government. This government will not necessarily receive advice from the same sources and in the same mechanisms as the previous government. It is up to each government to choose the mechanisms that best suit them. As Senator Ludlam would be aware, there was a decision of COAG to rationalise the number of ministerial councils from
22 down to about eight. While there will not be a dedicated ministerial council on housing, the federal housing minister will still work extremely closely with his state counterparts on these important issues. (Time expired)

Senator LUDLAM (Western Australia) (14:22): Mr President, I thank the minister for his answer and ask a further supplementary question. Minister, can you inform Western Australians, who are carefully considering who they are going to vote for in the forthcoming Senate by-election and who are suffering acutely from some of the least affordable housing in the country, whether you have any policy whatsoever on housing affordability or whether you just intend to run the campaign on three-word slogans?

Senator FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (14:23): It is as true of the housing portfolio as it is of every other government portfolio that you are in a much better position to assist the Australian people if you have a government that is living within its means, if you have a government that is not spending billions and billions of dollars on interest payments. Every single dollar that is spent on an interest repayment is a dollar that cannot be spent on housing, health, transport and people with disability. Something that this chamber and those opposite need to understand is that there is an opportunity cost for each dollar that goes on the interest bill. We are working hard on getting the budget back into balance. We are working hard on a plan to repay debt. If we do that, we will be in a much better position to do the right thing than those opposite ever were, including in housing policy.

Drought

Senator O'SULLIVAN (Queensland) (14:24): My question is to the Minister representing the Minister for Agriculture, Senator Abetz. Can the minister outline to the Senate what new action the government is taking to support farmers and communities in drought affected areas across Australia?

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 congratulate Senator O'Sullivan on his first question and welcome him to the Senate. I understand that Senator O'Sullivan, as recently as yesterday, led discussion on this serious issue at the LNP state council at Toowoomba.

The Australian government is providing a new package to assist drought affected farm businesses and farm families to deal with immediate financial pressures and improve their capacity to recover when the current drought breaks.

Opposition senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Order! Senator Abetz is entitled to be heard in silence.

Senator ABETZ: I would have thought that, on an issue like this, the Labor Party would be able to resist interjecting.

The package is fair but fiscally responsible, providing targeted and time limited measures to promote drought resilience and preparedness over the longer term. Elements include the interim farm household allowance, which will replace the current transitional farm family payment. The new payment will provide a more generous asset test. The Australian government is also providing $280 million for concessional loans to assist drought affected farm businesses recover from drought and return to profitability in the long term. Drought
concessional loans of up to $1 million or up to 50 per cent of eligible debt, whichever is lower, will be provided to eligible farm businesses at an initial interest rate of four per cent over a five-year period. We are also providing additional funding for water infrastructure, social support and the control of pest animals. In relation to water infrastructure, a further $2 million is set aside to extend assistance to other areas and jurisdictions if required. In relation to pest animals, $10 million is set aside. In short, it is a very well-rounded package.

Senator O’SULLIVAN (Queensland) (14:26): Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. Can the minister outline to the Senate how the government’s drought assistance package will benefit affected farmers?

Senator ABETZ (Tasmania—Leader of the Government in the Senate, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Minister for Employment) (14:26): This package of measures will offer financial, social and mental health support to our farming communities so they can manage during drought and be in a strong enough financial and emotional position to effectively recover from drought. The drought concessional loans will allow eligible farm businesses to restructure their existing debt at a lower interest rate and provide finance to meet their ongoing daily business running costs and cover drought recovery activities. The additional funds for water infrastructure will invest in infrastructure to provide water for emergency animal welfare requirements and improve long-term drought resilience. Social support funding will enhance the capacity of service providers across drought affected areas, particularly in Queensland and New South Wales, to deliver outreach services, including counselling and community events.

Senator O’SULLIVAN (Queensland) (14:27): Mr President, I ask a further supplementary question. Can the minister outline to the Senate when the government’s drought assistance package will become available to those who need it?

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): The interim farm household allowance will replace the current transitional farm family payment. Payments to new applicants under the interim farm household allowance start as of today, 3 March 2014. This is an interim measure until the new farm household allowance commences on 1 July 2014. Drought concessional loans will be available once delivery arrangements are settled with the relevant state and territory governments. The Department of Social Services is already delivering the improved mental and social support services. Negotiations have already commenced with the states to get funding for pest management and water infrastructure delivered as soon as possible. I compliment a former Senate colleague Mr Joyce, now the member for New England, for this package. It really will be of great assistance to drought affected farmers, not only in New South Wales—(Time expired)

Water

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (14:29): My question is to the Assistant Treasurer, the minister responsible for corporate law and business law and practice. I refer the Assistant Treasurer to his statement to the Senate, on 28 February 2013, in which he said:
I played no role in the awarding of the January 2012 contract to AWH by Sydney Water.
Does the Assistant Treasurer stand by that statement?
Senator SINODINOS (New South Wales—Assistant Treasurer) (14:29): I think this question relates to some proceedings which are about to unfold in New South Wales. The Leader of the Opposition may be referring to the fact that the ICAC, the Independent Commission Against Corruption, will hold a public inquiry, commencing on 17 March, in relation to certain affairs of Australian Water Holdings. I am aware of such an inquiry. I am not aware of allegations against me personally.

Senator Wong: You were asked a specific question.

Senator SINODINOS: I am answering your specific question. And I stand by what I said in the Senate at that time, on 28 February.

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (14:30): Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. Did the Assistant Treasurer write to the chairman of Sydney Water, in August or September 2011, copied to the New South Wales Premier and the Minister for Finance, seeking a meeting to discuss the contractual relationship between Australian Water Holdings and Sydney Water?

Senator SINODINOS (New South Wales—Assistant Treasurer) (14:31): That is a matter on the public record, as I recollect. I can get you further particulars after question time, but that is my recollection. In relation to this matter generally, there are not too many more sleeps to go before the issue of the affairs of Australian Water Holdings is properly canvassed in the federal arena. It is in the public arena that I did write a letter; yes, that is correct.

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (14:31): Mr President, I ask a further supplementary question. Did the CEO of Australian Water Holdings advise the office of the New South Wales Premier that the Assistant Treasurer would attend a meeting with the New South Wales Premier's chief of staff at Governor Macquarie Tower at 10 am on 28 September 2011 to discuss the relationship between Australian Water Holdings and Sydney Water? Did he attend that meeting?

Senator Abetz: But you weren't Assistant Treasurer!

The PRESIDENT: Senator Sinodinos, you need to answer that in so much as it applies to your portfolio.

Senator SINODINOS (New South Wales—Assistant Treasurer) (14:32): I was going on to say that that was before I entered the Senate or had any frontbench responsibility.

Honourable senators interjecting—

Senator Wong: I would have thought you would take the opportunity to back your statement.

Senator SINODINOS: I stand by what I said to the Senate, and I have nothing further to add to what is on the public record.

Honourable senators interjecting—

Senator SINODINOS: Let's not have any of this faux suspicion. There will be an appropriate opportunity for all these matters to be ventilated, but they go to matters which relate to a period before I was in the Senate.
SENATE
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Australian Defence Force

Senator EGGLESTON (Western Australia) (14:33): My question is to the Minister for Defence, Senator Johnston. Can the minister inform the Senate why it is important that senior Defence Force personnel receive bipartisan support from the elected representatives of the Australian people? Is the minister aware of any departure from this important principle and, if so, what is the government's response?

Senator JOHNSTON (Western Australia—Minister for Defence) (14:33): I thank the senator for his question. It is, of course, obviously important that Defence personnel can act without fear or favour, as they do. They are on the front-line of defending Australia and Australians without, as I say, fear or favour. In return, they can expect bipartisan support in carrying out their orders and conducting their operations.

Last week, I observed a most disgraceful attack upon a senior, respected lieutenant-general, who is dealing with one of the most difficult policy failures this country has had to confront—and, may I say, doing a sterling job in very difficult circumstances. This attack was one of the most disgraceful low points of this parliament. He was accused of engaging in a political cover-up. The opposition spokesperson for defence sank to a new low in this place. He has single-handedly demeaned the standing of his own party in the eyes of Defence personnel and the wider Defence community and members of the Australian community. This situation needs to be repaired. I say the senator should apologise and withdraw. Such behaviour reflects on all of us. Being robust is fine. Asking difficult questions in estimates is fine. But a personal attack on a professional member of the ADF—doing a very good job in difficult circumstances—is completely unacceptable. This is not the view of all parliamentarians. He should not have been attacked, and Senator Conroy should have apologised. (Time expired)

Senator EGGLESTON (Western Australia) (14:36): Mr President, I have a supplementary question. I again refer the minister to the need for those serving in Australia's Defence Force to enjoy bipartisan support from both the government and the opposition. Is it beneficial to the morale of Australia's Defence Force for slurs against senior serving officers to go uncorrected?

Senator JOHNSTON: The Leader of the Opposition, having observed the conduct of the spokesperson for Defence from the opposition, should have taken measures, shown some leadership and replaced the spokesperson. (Time expired)

Senator EGGLESTON (Western Australia) (14:38): Mr President, I ask a further supplementary question. Is the minister able to advise the Senate of any example of a failure to adhere to the principle of bipartisan support for officers who have served our country and the effect of this on the morale of other serving officers?
Senator JOHNSTON (Western Australia—Minister for Defence) (14:38): After Mr Shorten's failure to deal with the opposition's spokesperson, he then conducted a most outrageous campaign against a sitting senator, accusing him of attacking a former Chief of Army and calling him a coward. He was completely in error and subsequently, realising the error, apologised to the parliament and took steps to remediate the outrageous slur that he had perpetrated. Why would the Leader of the Opposition, having apologised himself, realising the damage to Australian Defence personnel from his having impugned the courage of a former Chief of Army, not take action against his shadow spokesperson? Why would he not do that, irresponsible and embarrassing as his commentary was? (Time expired)

Water

Senator KIM CARR (Victoria) (14:40): My question without notice is to the Assistant Treasurer and relates to his responsibilities for business law and practice. I again refer the Assistant Treasurer to his statement to the Senate on 28 February 2013, in which he said:

I played no role in the awarding of the January 2012 contract to AWH by Sydney Water.

Did the Assistant Treasurer stand to receive a personal benefit if Australian Water Holdings were awarded this contract?

Senator SINODINOS (New South Wales—Assistant Treasurer) (14:40): I stand by what I said to the Senate: I played no role in the awarding of that contract. If you are referring to the fact that I registered on my Senate members' interests statement an interest in Australian Water Holdings, which I subsequently repudiated—

Senator Wong: Why are you ducking the question?

Senator SINODINOS: I am not ducking any question.

The PRESIDENT: Order! If you wish to debate the issue, debate it after three o'clock.

Senator SINODINOS: I repudiated that shareholding for reasons which have to do with the presence of the Obeids in that company. The fact of the matter is that I played no role in the awarding of the contract because I had entered the Senate and it was not appropriate for me to be involved in the work of that organisation any longer. I resigned as a director on 2 November 2011.

Senator KIM CARR (Victoria) (14:41): Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. Does the Assistant Treasurer still try to maintain that he did not know the Obeids were involved in owning one-third of the company? Does the Assistant Treasurer stand to gain a parcel of shares worth approximately—

Honourable senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Order on both sides!

Senator KIM CARR: Did the Assistant Treasurer stand to gain a parcel of shares worth approximately $3.5 million if the Australian Water Holding company entered into a contract with Sydney Water?

Honourable senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Order! I remind the Senate again that the question need only be addressed in so much as it pertains to the portfolio.
Senator Wong: Mr President, I rise on a point of order. In the interjections that just occurred Senator Brandis made an extraordinary allegation to Senator Carr. I would ask him to withdraw it.

The PRESIDENT: Because of the general disorder at that stage I did not hear a specific comment.

Senator Wong: I am inviting Senator Brandis to withdraw the assertion about who put Senator Carr into parliament and the suggestion about criminals. He ought to withdraw that interjection.

Senator Abetz: Your former national president is in jail.

Honourable senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Order on both sides! I made it quite clear that I did not hear anything that might have been said by Senator Brandis. I invite Senator Brandis, if he did make such a claim, to withdraw it. That is the invitation. I have done that previously on other occasions.

Honourable senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: I have made the comment prior to calling the minister.

Senator SINODINOS (New South Wales—Assistant Treasurer) (14:45): I reject the premise of the question. I was no longer involved in the company and no longer involved in trying to negotiate contracts. And, while I am on my feet, there are plenty of people on that side who can tell us more about the Obeids than I could ever do.

Honourable senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Order on my right and on my left!

Senator KIM CARR (Victoria) (14:45): I have a further supplementary question. Did the Assistant Treasurer, at any stage disclose his pecuniary interests in Australian Water Holdings, and its contractual dealings, to the chairman of Sydney Water, the New South Wales Premier or the New South Wales Minister for Finance? If not, why not?

The PRESIDENT: Again, I preface this answer with the statement I have made consistently. The minister need address that question in so much as it applies to the portfolio.

Senator SINODINOS (New South Wales—Assistant Treasurer) (14:46): The only point I will make is that it was very clear from any correspondence I have ever had with any organisation or on behalf of any organisation on whose behalf I am acting. It would be the same in that particular case. That is a most peculiar question. I think question time should be about policy. You are talking about a series of circumstances before I entered this house and about which I made a disclosure. This faux controversy does not reflect well on the interest of the opposition in policy, I have to say.

Asylum Seekers

Senator SESELJA (Australian Capital Territory) (14:47): My question is to the Assistant Minister for Immigration Senator Cash. Can the minister advise the Senate how previous approaches to border protection impacted those asylum seekers waiting in UNHCR camps?

Senator CASH (Western Australia—Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women) (14:47): I thank Senator Seselja for his question. I commence my answer to the Senate by quoting from an article
dated 2 March 2014 on News.com.au, when reporting comments by former Prime Minister Rudd when he was at an Oxford University recently. Mr Rudd said that a 'large slice' of people arriving by boat were not genuine asylum seekers. The site reports:

"Where it got to by the end of 2013 was the number of folks coming by boat was overwhelming the whole (Australian) refugee intake," he said.

As I stated, he said that recently in his speech to the Oxford Union.

A direct impact of the former, Labor government's failed border protection policies on those refugees waiting endless years in camps—when I say 'endless years' I mean five years, 10 years, 15 years or in excess of 20 years—is that more than 14,500 desperate people waiting in these camps were denied a place by those opposite, in conjunction with their little alliance partners the Greens, in our offshore humanitarian program, because those places were taken by people coming here illegally by boat.

It is a fact—again, Mr Rudd acknowledged this—that Australia runs one of the most generous humanitarian settlement programs in the world. However, the sad truth is this: in any one year less than one per cent of the world's 10.5 million refugees will be resettled. In any one year more than nine million will miss out. And under the previous government policy the great tragedy was—(Time expired)

Senator SESELJA (Australian Capital Territory) (14:49): I ask a supplementary question. Can the minister advise the Senate how the coalition government is ensuring that order, fairness and integrity are restored to Australia's migration program?

Honourable senators interjecting—

Senator CASH (Western Australia—Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women) (14:50): Those opposite, including Senator Hanson-Young, laugh about the concept of fairness and integrity in Australia's humanitarian settlement program. However, this government will never, ever outsource our border protection policy, like those opposite did, to the people smugglers. When you outsource a border protection policy this is what happens—in excess of 50,000 people come to your country illegally.

Even though those opposite decided to increase the humanitarian intake to 20,000 per year, the only reason they did that was because in the same year as the announcement, 25,000 people arrived here illegally by boat. So, when it comes to integrity and fairness in Australia's border protection system this government is all about restoring it.

Senator SESELJA (Australian Capital Territory) (14:51): I ask a further supplementary question. Can the minister advise the Senate how the implementation of strong border protection measures ensures Australia can maintain our commitment to assisting the world's refugees.

Honourable senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Order! I remind senators at the other end of the chamber that if you wish to debate this the time to do it is after 3 o'clock.

Senator CASH (Western Australia—Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women) (14:51): The fundamental difference between this government's border protection policy and the failed policy of the
former government is that, of the 13,750 visas that we have committed to, not one of those visas will go to someone who arrived in Australia illegally by boat. That is how you restore integrity and fairness back to your immigration system.

We will run an immigration program of which the Australian public can, yet again, be proud. We have said that a minimum of 11,000 of the 13,750 places in this government's humanitarian settlement program will go to those people desperately waiting for five, 10, 15 and 20 years in camps overseas—those people who were deliberately denied a place by the former government.

Financial Services

Senator DASTYARI (New South Wales) (14:52): My question is to the Assistant Treasurer.

Government senators interjecting—

Senator DASTYARI: He asked for a policy question; I am giving him one!

The PRESIDENT: When there is silence on my right we will proceed! Order on my right! I remind you that Senator Dastyari is entitled to be heard in silence.

Senator Ian Macdonald: We're trying to help him out, Mr President!

The PRESIDENT: Senator Macdonald, interjections are disorderly!

Senator DASTYARI: I refer to the Assistant Treasurer's Future of Financial Advice proposals to scrap conflicted remuneration provisions, reintroduce the worst aspects of trailing fees and remove the requirement for advice to be provided in the best interests of consumers. Minister, isn't Alan Kohler right when he says in today's Australian, in a full page advert, that your plan to remove some of the important parts of the Future of Financial Advice legislation is a case of 'wrong way, go back'?

Senator SINODINOS (New South Wales—Assistant Treasurer) (14:54): I thank the young senator from New South Wales for his policy question because debate on Future of Financial Advice is exactly something this chamber should be all about. Let me say I reject the assertions made by Mr Kohler today. I do not believe that we are winding back the consumer protection provisions. I do not believe, by clarifying the best interest duty, we are in any way derogating the obligation of financial advisers to act in the best interests of their customers, their clients, because it is enshrined in common law. It is enshrined in the Corporations Act as well as in the Future of Financial Advice reforms. No less an authority than the former Chief Justice of the High Court, Sir Anthony Mason, made that point at the recent national conference of the self-managed professionals association on the Gold Coast.

Senator Lines: It's enshrined in your DNA to give back to the big end of town!

Senator SINODINOS: Senator Lines, it repays close reading. In relation to general advice, the point we have made all along is that there are circumstances where there was overreach by the legislation in terms of prohibiting the use of what is called conflicted remuneration for general advice. It was an unintended consequence because it would sweep up too many employees who otherwise were only just doing their day job of providing low-cost and factual advice on particular products or financial services.
As I have indicated, the industry is moving to a fee-for-service basis. This was, indeed, an initiative largely sponsored by the industry itself. We support that and this legislation will reinforce all of that. Thank you.

*Government senators interjecting—*

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Silence on my right! If you wish to debate this—

**Senator Lines:** And just as—

**The PRESIDENT:** Order, Senator Lines!

**Senator DASTYARI** (New South Wales) (14:56): Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. I refer the Assistant Treasurer to the government’s regulation impact statement prepared by the Treasury. Why does this statement only assess the cost to business and ignore the impact on consumers? Minister, what will the cost be to consumers of new commission streams eating into their investments under the proposed changes?

**Senator SINODINOS** (New South Wales—Assistant Treasurer) (14:57): The benefit to consumers will be that financial advice will be both more accessible and more affordable— and there will be more of it available, including what is called scaled advice, which is very specific to a particular issue affecting a financial adviser. It is very important we understand that these costs are not a free lunch; they have to be passed on to consumers. By reducing those costs and promoting competition in the sector, we will promote lower fees and lower costs to consumers. More people will get access to affordable advice.

**Senator DASTYARI** (New South Wales) (14:57): Mr President, I ask a further supplementary question. Assistant Treasurer, why is the government once again putting the interests of consumers last and removing provisions that were put in place to protect them?

**Senator SINODINOS** (New South Wales—Assistant Treasurer) (14:58): The changes we are making will help consumers. They will promote affordable and accessible advice. We are not removing their protections.

**Indigenous Affairs**

**Senator BOYCE** (Queensland) (14:58): My question is to the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Senator Scullion. Could the minister update the Senate on the implementation of the Remote School Attendance Strategy following his visits recently to the NT, WA and my home state of Queensland in the past month?

**Senator SCULLION** (Northern Territory—Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Leader of The Nationals in the Senate) (14:59): Thank you to Senator Boyce and thank you for your support during my visit to Queensland. This is a top priority for this government to get Aboriginal and Islander children to school. We have set ourselves a target of 90 per cent, for the reason that that is no different to anyone in the mainstream—attendance is at about 90 per cent, give or take some sick days and those sorts of things.

As of last week, to achieve this—on the philosophy that we should be employing Aboriginal and Islander people from those communities—we got over 300 school attendance officers, who met all of those checks and balances, and we have another hundred or so to employ. The only hold-up with that has been in getting some of them Working with Children certificates. The duties of these officers are not just to get bums on seats; they are to assist in getting kids to school, they are to assist with breakfast programs and they are to assist in the
classroom, especially with kids who are not used to the classroom situation. Most importantly, these officers ensure that there is a liaison with the parents so that we can maximise the benefits of having kids in school.

We will be providing additional funding of $180 per child to assist with uniforms, transport and any other impediments to getting kids to school. I have visited kids in schools in Galiwinku, Gunbalanya, Yuendumu, Tennant Creek, Ali Curung, Carnarvon, Roebourne, Meekatharra and Palm Island to hear about the wide range of challenges facing those schools. The thing that remains absolutely constant is the decision to employ Aboriginal people from the community who can sit down and respect the community's views about the schools. That is what underpins this process. In Meekatharra it was not hard to understand how difficult it would be to go to work at 8.30 in the morning when it is 38 degrees. (Time expired)

Senator BOYCE (Queensland) (15:01): Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. Could the minister tell the Senate whether any of the people appointed as school attendance officers has moved into full-time work since the program started?

Senator SCULLION (Northern Territory—Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Leader of The Nationals in the Senate) (15:01): I have done a bit of research on most of the school attendance officers. When I visited St Michael's School in Palm Island I was cranky to learn as soon as I got there that three of my perfectly good attendance officers had been poached by the department of education in Queensland.

I could not be happier with the result, because school attendance officers are not the end of the game; this is an incubation place where people can see them at work, as part of the education system. That will hopefully continue into the future. Interestingly, the police contacted me to see if there were any impediments to them doing the same sort of thing with respect to recruiting.

These people are respected by the community, they are already engaged and they have already demonstrated an excellent work ethic, particularly in the area of communicating. These skills will be used right across the spectrum. I certainly hope that other organisations see this as being an incubator, not an endgame. (Time expired)

Senator BOYCE (Queensland) (15:02): Mr President, I ask a further supplementary question. Could the minister tell the Senate if the early limited data that we have on the school attendance strategy indicates whether the program is making a difference or not?

Senator SCULLION (Northern Territory—Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Leader of The Nationals in the Senate) (15:02): This program has been in place for only a limited period of time, but across the board we have seen substantive increases in school attendance. The program is in week 6 now in Gunbalanya, and attendance is still up by about 25 per cent. By week 3 in Wogayala, attendance was up by about 54 per cent. By week 3 in term 1 in Maningrida, attendance was up by about 28 per cent. When I say it is a bit of a mixed bag, certainly no-one is resting on their laurels. I think it has gone extremely well thus far. Across the country well over 600 Aboriginal children who are attending school today would not have been attending were it not for this initiative.

There is some cynicism—perhaps healthy cynicism—about the fact that we need to continue to provide resources to ensure not only that children get to school but that they get a good education. I would assure everyone in this space that I will be ensuring that the states
and territories are kept to their end of the bargain in providing the necessary education resources. *(Time expired)*

**Senator Abetz:** Mr President, I ask that further questions be placed on the *Notice Paper*.

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

**Question No. 7**

**Senator LUDLAM** (Western Australia) (15:04): Pursuant to standing order 74(5), I ask the Minister representing the Minister for Communications, Senator Fifield, for an explanation as to why answers have not yet been provided to question on notice No. 7, lodged on 12 November. The question relates to funding of the ABC, particularly relating to its capacity around the country and the kind of contracting that the ABC is up to. Senator Fifield, recognising that you are the representing minister here, I hope that Minister Turnbull has given you something useful to tell the chamber. I recognise that Minister Turnbull has a lot on his plate, taking on demented plutocrats past and present. But an answer to this question is now—

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Senator Ludlam, you asked the minister for an explanation. You have not given the minister for a chance, having gone on—

**Senator LUDLAM:** It is a very detailed request for an explanation.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** I think you have asked your question, and I intend to call the minister, unless you have something additional to add.

**Senator LUDLAM:** As long as I am able to make some remarks after the minister has spoken.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** You will have an opportunity after the minister has given a response. Minister?

**Senator FIFIELD** (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (15:05): I am advised that Senator Ludlam's detailed and multifaceted question required detailed analysis by the ABC. I am advised that the provision of the response has been delayed as a result of the internal processes in the ABC, due to the need to audit security and payroll data. I will, on behalf of the minister, table the response at the earliest opportunity.

**Senator LUDLAM** (Western Australia) (15:06): I move:

That the Senate take note of the explanation.

I will not detain the chamber for long. I thank the minister for providing that information on behalf of Minister Turnbull. I do acknowledge that this is a complex question; it has multiple parts. It relates among other things to the closure of specific units within the ABC providing specialist programming, both radio and television broadcasts, and also the increased casualisation and outsourcing that we are seeing within the ABC. The question goes to the sustainability of funding for our ABC, the national broadcaster; the degree to which funding shortages are driving ever-increasing outsourcing; and the running down of production capacity in states other than New South Wales—and, you could argue, Victoria—particularly Western Australia, Tasmania and South Australia. The ABC has a large and relatively new studio in East Perth in Western Australia which operates practically empty for much of the week.
The ABC is already juggling an immensely tight budget, largely as a consequence of more than a decade of neglect and funding cuts by the former Howard government. The ABC and SBS are now facing extraordinary challenges on two fronts. I do acknowledge former communications minister Senator Stephen Conroy for beginning to address and turn around the finances of both the ABC and SBS, which were indeed on starvation funding.

The ABC is having to wear direct threats on two sides: firstly, to its editorial independence by repeated criticisms and attacks from the Prime Minister on down and, secondly, through the so-called efficiency review into public broadcasting. This is where I think some timely answers to the questions that we have put through Senator Fifield to Minister Turnbull would help give some comfort.

We know that the ABC appears at item 50 on the Institute of Public Affairs hit list. Item 50 says, effectively, 'Break the ABC up and let the private sector get on with the job.' I put this proposition to Mr Mark Scott in budget estimates this time last week. His comment was, 'That would be catastrophic.' SBS, a beloved national broadcaster, appears at item 51 on the IPA's hit list, which effectively says, 'Sell them. Just get rid of SBS; it is surplus to requirements.' It is unbelievable.

Senator Fifield, I am interested to know what confidence can the Australian public have that the Abbott government is not simply pursuing a vendetta—a peculiar, personal vendetta—against public broadcasting. Whether you justify it in terms of the so-called efficiency review or whether you think the ABC is simply being unpatriotic and reporting things that you would prefer that it did not, the ABC is not the equivalent of a Chinese state-owned broadcaster. It is fiercely independent, it is beloved by the vast majority of Australians and it should be left alone.

The best thing that Minister Turnbull could do with this portfolio would be to increase and lift the funding of our national broadcasters—both the ABC and SBS. A first step towards regaining the confidence of the Australian public would be to provide an answer to these questions which are now some 2½ months overdue. I thank the chamber.

**Senator IAN MACDONALD** (Queensland) (15:09): I would like to speak to the motion to take note. I am not quite sure what Senator Ludlam's discussion then had to do with taking note of why the question had not been answered, which is what I understood this was all about. But it did remind me how, in the days of the Labor government—the Labor Party supported by the Greens—refused to allow the ABC to provide information that we sought on many occasions on questions about the payments made to senior broadcasters of the ABC. I wonder why Senator Ludlam is now so keen to get these answers when, back in those days, he was never keen to insist on the Labor Party providing answers at all.

Although it was not germane to the motion, Senator Ludlam did carry on at some length about the ABC having an efficiency dividend. I think most Australians and most government departments will think, scratch their heads and say, 'Now, everybody else has efficiency dividends. Why is it that the ABC should be excused from these efficiency dividends?' It is an interesting question that perhaps Senator Ludlam may at some other time be able to explain. Why should the ABC be set aside whilst education, health—do not quote me on those; I am not on the inner circle in what is going to happen in the budget—and all other departments, I suspect, will be asked to contribute to paying off the Labor Party's $600 billion debt that they ran up with the support of the Greens?
I just note in passing that Senator Ludlam talks favourably about the SBS. I do not mind the SBS. I think it is almost self-funding itself—I do not have the figures in front of me just now—but it is more efficient and it has advertising from the public—that is, from industry. I am not one to suggest that the ABC should raise its own revenue.

I do note Senator Ludlam's praise of the former minister, Senator Conroy. I do not want to go into that, except to say I know Senator Conroy did try to help the ABC by—against all advice from his department and from independent sources—giving the contract for Australia's international broadcasting to the ABC, when all of the sensible advice was to give it to an organisation that was seen to be able to do that in a more balanced way and in a way that was in Australia's interests. But perhaps that is what Senator Ludlam was getting at.

Lest I be misunderstood on this, I just want to say I have no vendetta against the ABC. ABC radio, particularly in regional Australia, does a magnificent job. I could not say quite the same about their news bulletins and their current affairs programs emanating from a capital city, but certainly in many instances—in the work they do in regional and rural Australia in radio in particular—they are a wonderful organisation.

Also on that line, the ABC for many years has been running a wonderful program called Heywire, which brings young people from rural and remote Australia—people who would never normally have the opportunity—to Canberra to see what other people, or other kids from the closer capital cities, see quite regularly. They bring them into Canberra. I have great regards for the ABC in that instance. I support the motion of Senator Ludlam that we should take note of Senator Fifield's answer.

Question agreed to.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE: TAKE NOTE OF ANSWERS

Water

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (15:13): I move:

That the Senate take note of the answers given by the Assistant Treasurer (Senator Sinodinos) to questions without notice asked by Senators Wong and Carr today relating to Australian Water Holdings Pty Ltd.

There were two issues I think which were very clear today in question time: the first is that the Assistant Treasurer sought to dismiss the questions from opposition senators on the basis that this all occurred a very long time ago, prior to his entry to the Senate; the second is that we saw the Assistant Treasurer refuse to answer key questions and refuse to take the opportunity provided to him, as a minister in question time, to ensure that the public was clear about his response in the face of facts which simply do not add up.

I want to make a couple of points. We are asking questions which have been raised in the public arena about a contract which was awarded to the company Australian Water Holdings by Sydney Water Corporation. Serious questions have been raised in relation to the process by which this contract was awarded and a range of other matters concerning Australian Water Holdings. It is a matter of public record that the Assistant Treasurer had significant interests in this company before he entered this place, including during the time when this contract was being discussed. When Senator Sinodinos entered the Senate in October 2011, he declared AWH shares on the Register of Senators' Interests, but in February 2013 he told the Senate
the shares had never been issued and he had renounced any entitlement to this shareholding. I would note that the interest was only renounced on 26 February 2013, well after the senator entered the parliament, and in fact the senator engaged in activities relating to AWH, including the opening of an office, in July 2012. I make these points simply to reflect the fact that the defence of this all being in the distant past does not bear up to close examination.

The questions that were asked by opposition senators today related specifically to a statement made by Senator Sinodinos, whilst he was a senator, to this chamber—a very important statement, a statement such as other senators have been required to make from time to time. This was the opportunity for the Assistant Treasurer to make clear to the chamber and to the Australian public some of the issues which are raised by his statement to the chamber and facts as they have subsequently been reported. First, the very bold assertion—which the Assistant Treasurer says he stands by still—was made to this Senate:

I played no role in the awarding of the January 2012 contract to AWH by Sydney Water.

That was a very categorical statement. However, in the face of the fact—and, as I understand it, this was conceded today in question time by the Assistant Treasurer—that the Assistant Treasurer actually wrote to Sydney Water, copied to the New South Wales Premier and minister for finance, seeking a meeting to discuss the contractual relationship with Australian Water Holdings and Sydney Water, one would think the Assistant Treasurer, the man with responsibility for business law and practice and corporate law, would take the opportunity to explain how that fact could be true at the same time as the fact in his statement that he had no role was true. He could have explained how those two things could both be true—because they do not add up—but he chose not to.

The other question which I asked today which was ducked, which was avoided, was whether or not—and this is been reported publicly—the Assistant Treasurer in fact attended a meeting to discuss this relationship between Australian Water Holdings and Sydney Water. That has been publicly reported. That is inconsistent, one would have thought, on the face of it, with the statement that was made previously by Senator Sinodinos, and again he had the opportunity today to clarify. He had the opportunity today to explain how it is that both statements can be true. He was asked if he attended a meeting. That has been reported on the public record. I invite him to tell us if he in fact did and how, if he did attend such a meeting, that can be consistent with the fact that he said to the Senate that he ruled out any involvement whatsoever in the awarding of the contract, because those facts do not add up.

The final thing—and my colleague Senator Carr may well go to this—is that he was asked whether or not he stood to benefit in any way from the awarding of such a contract, and he declined to answer. He declined to answer. That is a question a minister should answer. (Time expired)

Senator BIRMINGHAM (South Australia—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment) (15:19): It is astounding that we sat through 55 minutes of question time today before we saw anything remotely akin to a policy question from those opposite, anything coming at all close. In the meantime, from the government side we heard questions in relation to the impact of the carbon tax on jobs, and particularly jobs in the finance and airline sectors; we had questions on the very fragile and concerning situation in the Ukraine; we had questions on the matter of drought relief and how we will assist those struggling in our rural communities; we had questions around the standards and level of respect that should
be applied to our defence personnel; we had questions on border protection and the wonderful inroads being made in securing our borders and stopping the dangerous flow of asylum seekers to Australia; and we had questions around the immense accomplishment already being achieved by Senator Scullion and the Indigenous affairs portfolio in relation to getting more young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander schoolchildren at school.

These were the significant policy issues asked about by government senators in question time today, and yet on the other side all we had was attempts—pathetic attempts at that—at sleaze and innuendo from a line-up of senators whose past associations, frequently, with some of their Labor colleagues stand up to no scrutiny whatsoever. Frankly, it is astounding that this modern Labor Party would want to come in here today and ask questions of the nature they are asking when at this very point in time their former colleague the former member for Dobell Mr Craig Thomson is awaiting sentencing for crimes that he has been convicted of; their former federal party president Mr Michael Williamson went into custody today awaiting sentencing for crimes that he has been convicted of; and their former pick of Speaker awaits judgement for charges that have been levelled against him. Frankly, the idea that those opposite would come in here with no evidence, with nothing but hopeless innuendo and allegations that stretch credibility far beyond belief, when their track record is so damning—and so damning in judgements held up by the courts—really does beggar belief. It is astounding that those opposite would go down such a pathway.

We know it is not just the activities of those specific convictions that I referred to; there are those issues around the whole operation of the trade union movement, which every single member opposite is a member of. There is the whole operation of many of the trade unions and the operation of the slush funds in the trade unions that former Prime Minister Julia Gillard conceded were common practice. How many of those opposite would like to come in here at some stage and confess whether they have been the beneficiaries of a slush fund, whether they were ever elected to union roles on the basis of the slush funds in the unions and whether their supporters, those who put them in their positions and gave them their preselections, have ever been beneficiaries of the union slush funds that Ms Gillard said were common practice throughout the trade union movement?

We just heard Senator Wong come in here and attempt to stretch credibility even further with her suggestions around the Assistant Treasurer. She said she wanted an explanation that had not yet been given in relation to Senator Sinodinos's statement that he played no role in the awarding of the January 2012 contract to AWH by Sydney Water. I have heard Senator Sinodinos in this place on multiple occasions and outside give very clear explanations. It is not that hard to understand: prior to coming into the Senate he had another job, he fulfilled that job, he resigned from that job on coming into the Senate and as a senator he played no role. It is a fairly clear-cut matter. The attempts by those opposite to besmirch his reputation—in the face of what all their associates have been guilty of—stand no test. (Time expired)

**Senator KIM CARR** (Victoria) (15:24): I seek leave to table a letter signed by Arthur Sinodinos dated 29 August 2011. I understand the government has seen this and agrees.

Leave granted.

**Senator KIM CARR**: I want to refer to Senator Sinodinos's speech on 28 February. He came into the chamber late in the adjournment debate—at 10 past 10, in fact—and made what
I thought was a highly unusual set of declarations regarding his involvement in the company Australian Water Holdings. He said:

... the cost of being in public life is, where possible, to make full and frank disclosure. I am disappointed that it took a journalist to remind me of these directorships on this occasion.

This was a speech where he acknowledged he had failed to declare directorships of no fewer than six separate companies. It was an extraordinary speech in that he also went on to say:

... I was shocked and disappointed to learn that a company whose mission I believed in and was passionate about was financially linked to the Obeid family.

It was an extraordinary proposition because the day after he was made chairman of this company arrangements were made for the Obeid family to buy one-third of the company, a company of which he had been a director for two years prior to being on the board of that company. It is quite extraordinary. He went on to say:

I played no role in the awarding of the January 2012 contract to AWH by Sydney Water. I was by then in the Senate and Mr Michael Costa, who succeeded me as chairman, was responsible for securing that agreement. I understand from public statements by New South Wales government ministers that this process was conducted at arm's length between the two parties to the contract, AWH and Sydney Water.

The contract referred to an exclusive 25-year, $500 million deal with state owned Sydney Water—a contract awarded without public tender by the O'Farrell government, contrary to the advice of the New South Wales Solicitor-General. It caused the valuation of Australian Water Holdings to increase by some $65 million—a company which Senator Sinodinos had a claim of a five per cent holding in. He was a major beneficiary of that growth. To claim he had nothing to do with these contractual arrangements is clearly not true. It is not true, because the letter I have tabled today explains how he wrote to the Chairman of Sydney Water on 29 August 2011 seeking an urgent roundtable with the shareholding ministers in Sydney Water.

I find it extraordinary that, in a statement to this Senate about his statements of pecuniary interests he is making as a senator about past actions, he claims not to know anything about these matters. I find it quite incredible that he can explain what appears to be his attendance—and I would like to hear whether my impression is correct—at a meeting with the Premier's Chief of Staff, Mr Peter McConnell, on 28 September 2011 at 10 am, confirmed by email sent the previous day from the CEO of Australian Water Holdings to the Premier's office.

Let us not forget that Senator Sinodinos, as he is now, was very busy at this time. On 26 August 2011 he publicly confirmed he was seeking preselection for the Senate vacancy left by the resignation of Senator Coonan. As late as 12 July you were still opening the buildings of Australian Water Holdings—the Newcastle office, for instance. When you try to give us the impression you know nothing about these matters I find you quite disingenuous. I ask you a simple question: why don't you follow your own advice here and give full and frank disclosure?

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Senator Carr, you cannot ask a simple question. You have to direct your comments to the chair.

Senator KIM CARR: I think the Senate is entitled to a declaration of full and frank disclosure from you, Senator, to this chamber, particularly at a time when you have already made a statement about previous neglect of your responsibilities in terms of your pecuniary interests. It is quite an extraordinary proposition for you to say today that these are all matters
that are going to come up before ICAC—and, indeed, they will—but you have a responsibility to this chamber. You have made a declaration. As senators we are all required to make an accurate declaration and that is the matter before us at the moment. Have you correctly declared to the Senate? When you are seeking to correct the previous failures, have you further misled the Senate?

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Before calling Senator Bushby, I remind senators to direct their remarks to the chair, not directly to senators.

Senator BUSHBY (Tasmania—Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (15:29): I find incredibly curious Senator Carr’s suggestion that the Register of Senators’ Interests requires you to detail your past actions or past holdings. The Clerk of the Senate is in the chamber; she may care to clarify that later on. My understanding is that the obligation is to detail any current interest that might impact on decisions made in this place, not those interests that one may have held prior to coming into the Senate. I suspect that there are many senators on the other side who would be quite concerned if that were the standard.

Mr Deputy President, I do not think you would be surprised that the opposition in this place continues to focus on slur and innuendo when, as you would be aware, there are many policy matters of great significance to Australians that it continues to ignore. These include issues such as the carbon tax and the impacts that is having on industry right across Australia. We heard last week from the CEO of Virgin, who highlighted the fact that the single biggest thing we could do to help the airline industry in Australia is get rid of the carbon tax. Where were the questions about the carbon tax and how we can assist industry in Australia? Where were the questions about Labor’s legacy of rising unemployment and the rising debt that the nation faces? There were no questions on those. Where were the questions about the airlines? Labor has chosen even to ignore asking questions about Qantas, which would be highly relevant this week to members opposite, I would have thought. Where were the questions about the impact of Labor’s decisions on the challenges that Qantas now faces? Internationally, there is one major, significant world issue, the current uncertainty in the Ukraine. It was up to us to ask a question about that. Where were the questions from Labor concerning world developments that could impact on Australia? There were no questions on that at all. Instead, they chose to spend almost all of question time, almost all of the questions they had available to them, casting further slur and innuendo.

We are taking note of answers to questions asked about the Assistant Treasurer, but today is not the first opportunity we have had to look at this. The opposition asked questions about the Assistant Treasurer and his holdings in Australian Water Holdings last year. What changed today? What changed is the fact that they have spent the last two or three weeks chasing another minister. That chase has come to nought. They thought they had something; they thought they could smell blood. They have chased it hard but it has come to nothing. They spent all of one day last week in an estimates hearing asking questions, banging their head against a wall, trying to get a ministerial scalp. The reality is that it came to nothing. What are they doing now? They have changed tack and are chasing another minister. That is typical of Labor. They are far more interested in a fight. They are far more interested in chasing the prey and playing the politics than in arguing about what might be the best policy for Australians, about what might be in the best interests of Australians. Those opposite think they can smell blood and, like frenzied hounds, they are going in for the kill. But is there any
...blood? Days of questions in this place and also in estimates to Senator Nash have revealed none. That is because there is none. They were asking questions of the Assistant Treasurer today. They have asked questions about this matter previously. There is no blood, because there is nothing to find, nothing to discover. Now, having failed dismally with the first minister, they have moved onto a second.

They should be doing what any aspiring government should—that is, closely examining the issues, policies and initiatives to ensure that the desired effect is delivered. In their case, they do not show any interest in the outcomes of the policies that they look at. They are only interested in the media spin that they can get out of it. When they were in government they were far more interested in the media impact of their announcements rather than the actual outcomes that might be delivered from the things that they were announcing. I suspect that there was an awful lot of asking going on in the then Prime Minister's office: 'What can we announce tonight to fill this hole in the media spin cycle?'

Senator Brandis: What about the opening of the ASIO building?

Senator BUSHBY: Exactly. The opening of the ASIO building.

Senator Fifield: No-one's in it!

Senator BUSHBY: Senator Brandis and Senator Fifield are exactly right. There was a whole series—possibly even hundreds—of announcements that were made by the previous government about policy initiatives that they were going to deliver on. Six months later nothing had happened, and they were quietly swept under the carpet. It is typical of Labor. We have seen the same in Tasmania, with Tasmanian Labor doing exactly the same thing. That is one reason that I think we need to see a change down there in less than two weeks time. (Time expired)

Senator CAMERON (New South Wales) (15:34): I stand to take note of questions answered by Senator Sinodinos. I want to go first of all to the profile of Senator Sinodinos on his own website—the website of the Liberal Senator for New South Wales and the Assistant Treasurer. I think this demonstrates the cover up that is on in a range of areas with the coalition, the lack of transparency and the lack of openness in a whole range of areas. Senator Sinodinos in his biography outlines the work that he did while he was the senior economic adviser for the opposition leader, Mr John Howard. He outlines the work he did as Chief of Staff when he was working for the Prime Minister. He outlines work in 2006 when he was with Goldman Sachs, JBWere and the National Australia Bank and when he held various other corporate appointments. He outlines charity work he has done. He indicates that he was appointed an officer of the Order of Australia in 2008. Then he jumps from 2008 to 2011, saying that he returned to politics in 2011. There is not one word about his relationship with Australian Water Holdings. That is typical of the coalition. They are trying to cover up something that should be in the open for the Australian public. Why wouldn't you want to cover that up?

When you look at what Australian Water Holdings did over the period before, during and after Senator Sinodinos's term as chairman of that company, you will see that the Liberal Party did very well—thanks, very much—out of Senator Sinodinos's time at Australian Water Holdings. In 2009-10, they received $13,000 in donations; while in 2010-11 the New South
Wales Liberals received $51,603, the federal Liberals received $10,000 and the federal Nationals received $10,000—a total of $84,603. So the money was flowing in.

**Senator Brandis:** How much did you receive from corrupt trade unions, in the Labor Party?

**Senator CAMERON:** The Attorney-General asks how much I received from corrupt trade union dealings. I can say very clearly that I have received nothing in relation to corrupt trade union dealings.

**Senator Brandis:** You, the Labor Party.

**Senator CAMERON:** Senator Brandis, why don't you just walk out with me after this; we will call a press conference and you can make that assertion publicly.

**Senator Brandis:** What about the Labor Party?

**Senator CAMERON:** Will you do that? Will you come out and make that assertion publicly against me? You will not do that because you have no guts and no credibility.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Order! Senator Cameron, address your remarks through the chair, and those on my right will stop interjecting.

**Senator CAMERON:** This is what happens when there is a question on the coalition that needs to be answered. The Attorney-General tries to cast aspersions on his fellow senators when there is absolutely no basis for those assertions. What we have here is a clear position where Senator Sinodinos made financial gains from Australian Water Holdings. Who for one minute out there in the general public would understand how, when you become a chairman of a company in New South Wales, you stand to gain $5 million in a period of 12 months. These are questions that have to be answered. These are questions that need to be open to the public. This is a problem that needs to be dealt with and Senator Sinodinos has not answered these questions. *(Time expired)*

Question agreed to.

**Homelessness**

**Senator LUDLAM** (Western Australia) (15:40): I move:

That the Senate take note of the answer given by the Assistant Minister for Social Services (Senator Fifield) to a question without notice asked by Senator Ludlam today relating to homelessness.

I went back and double-checked—the word 'housing' does not appear in the title of Minister Andrews. In the same way that we do not have a minister for science, we do not have a minister for housing. I want to get that very clearly on the record. The answer from Senator Fifield was profoundly disappointing, and this issue affects dozens and dozens of services. These are people on the front line who are providing homelessness and emergency support services either to the in excess of 10,000 people sleeping on the streets and in doorways and parks in this country or to those 100,000-odd Australians—it is difficult to know the exact number—who are suffering from different forms of homelessness and who are at risk, living in extremely precarious circumstances. Senator Fifield, again I give you a certain amount of latitude because you are here representing another minister, and it is not your portfolio—

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Please address your remarks through the chair, Senator Ludlam.
Senator LUDLAM: Through you, Mr Deputy President, the funding was not terminated at all. Senator Fifield, you were quite critical of the former government for simply suspending and rolling over the funding for the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, but the government has now effectively ceased all negotiations. The Abbott government has abolished all of the expert bodies who were formerly providing it with advice on housing affordability and homelessness. The COAG body—where housing ministers were getting together to try to hash out an agreement, because these are complex issues and they take years to negotiate—no longer exists; there is no longer a forum for these discussions to occur. My state colleague the Hon. Lynn MacLaren MLC, in the Western Australian Parliament, put a question to the state government on 11 December last year about the number of organisations in Western Australia that are going to hit the wall—they are organisations that are providing support services for homeless people today who are going to be shedding staff and closing their doors this month. It is absolutely extraordinary. All that Senator Fifield could do was mumble about how expensive it is to provide services for people.

The Centre for Social Impact Studies out of the University of Western Australia and AHURI are two of the few organisations—thankfully independent—who still exist to do research and advocacy in this area. AHURI released a report last December that looked at the degree to which investment in homelessness programs has the potential to make significant cost savings for the taxpayer. Through you, Mr Deputy President, I do not buy your argument, Senator Fifield, that it is a waste of money for taxpayers to be spending money on homelessness. It is extraordinary.

Senator Fifield: I didn't say that.

Senator LUDLAM: You put to the chamber that you were broke and that you could not afford it, and that is what I am pushing back on now. Even if that is your only metric, the study found that governments save on average $3,685 per client in non-homelessness costs in the first year after people receive support. The investment in putting shelter around people, the housing-first approach, saves taxpayers money. That is obviously an important metric and it is something that the federal government should be concerned about—getting the best out of a tight budget. The fact is that the government does not appear to realise that this investment in providing support services up-front which prevent people from dying—people die in winters and they die of heat stress in summer, if they are homeless—can save us money.

This affects organisations like the Albany Halfway House Association, which houses support workers in the Great Southern region. It affects Anglicare WA, which runs Foyer Oxford in Leederville; it affects the WA Division of the Red Cross Society, which runs the Kalgoorlie Aboriginal Visitors Accommodation facility out in the Goldfields and it affects the Private Rental Tenancy Support Service Initiative in north-west metro. These are crucial front-line services that are going to the wall because nothing is happening.

What the state government told my colleague, Ms McLaren, a couple of months ago was that these talks have ceased because the Commonwealth is no longer at the table. So I am not taking a shot at the Western Australian state government, who actually do have some quite innovative policies on housing affordability. The Commonwealth government, just as Senator Fifield appears to be about to do, has left the building, and that is totally inappropriate. Just for the Hansard, Senator Fifield has not left the room; he is taking advice.
Foundation Housing Limited; Pilbara Community Legal Service, who have a domestic violence outreach initiative; and St Bartholomew's House Incorporated, which Senator Siewert and I were very fortunate to tour during the election campaign last year, are where people are going to lose their jobs, and people will lose these emergency support services. It is not good enough for the Australian government to cry poor when the rational thing to do is fund these services. (Time expired)

Question agreed to.

NOTICES

Presentation

Senator Siewert to move:
That the Senate—
(a) notes that:
(i) the shark cull and the deployment of drum lines continues in Western Australia,
(ii) at least two mako sharks have died after they were caught on the drum lines,
(iii) the mako shark is listed as a migratory species under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act), and
(iv) the Minister for the Environment (Mr Hunt):
   (A) has exempted the drum lines from the EPBC Act, and
   (B) says that ‘any breach of conditions will result in the exemption being terminated’; and
(b) calls on the Government to terminate the exemption of the drum lines from the EPBC Act

Senator Rhiannon to move:
That the Senate—
(a) notes that:
(i) Transfield Holdings is a major sponsor of the 18th Biennale of Sydney,
(ii) Transfield Holdings is a shareholder in Transfield Services,
(iii) Transfield Services is being paid $1.22 billion by the Australian Government to run offshore detention centres on Manus Island and Nauru,
(iv) five artists have pulled out of the Biennale of Sydney because of Transfield’s links to Australia’s cruel mandatory detention policies, and
(v) 28 Biennale artists have written to the Biennale board, urging it to cut ties with Transfield and to find new sponsors; and
(b) commends the courage and commitment to human rights of the Biennale artists who have both written to the board requesting new sponsors and the artists who have pulled out of the Biennale of Sydney.

Senator Macdonald to move:
That the time for the presentation of the report of the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee on the Criminal Code Amendment (Harming Australians) Bill 2013 be extended to 28 May 2014.

Senator Waters to move:
(1) That the following matter be referred to the Environment and Communications References Committee for inquiry and report by 16 June 2014:
The history, appropriateness and effectiveness of the use of environmental offsets in federal environmental approvals in Australia, including:

(a) the principles that underpin the use of offsets;
(b) the processes used to develop and assess proposed offsets;
(c) the adequacy of monitoring and evaluation of approved offsets arrangements to determine whether promised environmental outcomes are achieved over the short and long term; and
(d) any other related matters.

(2) That in conducting the inquiry the committee consider the terms of reference in (1) with specific regard to, but not restricted to, the following projects:

(a) Whitehaven Coal’s Maules Creek Project;
(b) Waratah Coal’s Galilee Coal Project;
(c) QGC’s Queensland Curtis LNG project;
(d) North Queensland Bulk Port’s Abbot Point Coal Terminal Capital Dredging Project; and
(e) Jandakot Airport developments.

Senator Waters to move:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that:

(i) meeting notes and draft decision documents released under Freedom of Information in regard to the Abbot Point Coal Terminal Capital Dredging Project have revealed that the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA):

(A) believed the Abbot Point dredging proposal in the form proposed at that time should be refused a Great Barrier Reef Marine Park permit for offshore dumping of dredge spoil,

(B) found offshore dumping of up to 1.6 million cubic metres per year for three separate dredging campaigns has the potential to cause long-term, irreversible harm to areas of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, in particular seagrass meadows and nearby coral reefs of Camp Reef, Horseshoe Bay, Cape Upstart, and Holbourne Island,

(C) considered the North Queensland Bulk Ports dredge plume modelling for the offshore dumping to be of limited value, deficient and unreliable,

(D) considered that remnant and recovering seagrass meadows, such as those around Abbot Point, provide critical foraging refugia for struggling turtle and dugong populations,

(E) found the project could result in water quality in the region being in a degraded state for approximately the next 6 to 7 years, and

(F) clearly advised Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities officials in June 2013 that GBRMPA did not consider it practical or feasible to develop environmental offsets of the magnitude required to offset the damage caused to the reef by the proposed dredging and offshore dumping at Abbot Point, and that the project approval as proposed would involve conditions which are effectively unachievable, and

(ii) there do not appear to have been changes made to the proposed Abbot Point Coal Terminal Capital Dredging Project since these concerns were raised by GBRMPA officials that would address these concerns; and

(b) calls on the Minister for the Environment (Mr Hunt) to immediately revoke his approval of the Abbot Point Coal Terminal Capital Dredging Project.
Senator Rhiannon to move:

(1) That the following matter be referred to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee for inquiry and report by 18 March 2014:

A plan to support Qantas as a national carrier, and in doing so, the committee consider:

(a) what plan should be implemented to ensure Qantas remains a strong national carrier with jobs onshore, including options available to the federal government such as:

(i) a debt guarantee,
(ii) a debt guarantee with conditions to protect local jobs, wages, conditions and services,
(iii) a federal government loan,
(iv) an equity stake in Qantas, or
(v) any other forms of support;

(b) the levels and forms of government support received by other international airlines;
(c) the ownership structures of other international airlines; and

(d) the impact on Qantas workers and the wider community of the announced job cuts and other measures, such as a wages freeze for all employees and route cuts.

(2) That the committee hold at least one public hearing and invite the Chief Executive Officer of Qantas Airways to appear before the committee.

Senator Bilyk to move:

That the Senate—

(a) notes, with concern, the decision of the Russian Parliament to authorise the use of force against Ukraine;
(b) supports the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General’s call for the preservation of Ukraine’s territorial integrity and sovereignty;
(c) urges all parties to exercise restraint, and to seek to resolve the situation peacefully; and
(d) calls on the Australian Government to work together with the international community, including as a member of the UN Security Council, to seek a peaceful resolution to the situation in Ukraine through dialogue.

Senators Wright and McLucas to move:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that the National Perinatal Depression Initiative, since 2008:

(i) has improved the prevention and detection of antenatal and postnatal depression, and provided better support and treatment for expectant and new mothers experiencing depression, and in doing so, has provided what experts have called ‘the ultimate two-for-one’, by ensuring the babies’ wellbeing in the course of supporting mothers at this critical stage of life, and

(ii) has demonstrated Australia to be a world leader in terms of its support for, and treatment of, people experiencing perinatal depression;

(b) notes that the initiative is under review, and there is no clarity in relation to the future of its federal funding; and

(c) calls on the Federal Government to express whether it has a commitment to the support of new mothers and their children, by continuing the National Perinatal Depression Initiative beyond the 2013-14 financial year.
Senator Xenophon to move:

That, given the recently announced half-yearly losses of the Qantas Group, its plans to retrench 5,000 employees, and its requests for amendments to the *Qantas Sale Act 1992* and a debt guarantee, the following matters be referred to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee for inquiry and report by 26 June 2014:

(a) the likely causes of Qantas’ decline in financial performance;
(b) whether the *Qantas Sale Act 1992* is, or has been, an impediment to Qantas’ current and long-term financial viability, including the existing foreign ownership and foreign airline ownership restrictions;
(c) the effectiveness of the national interest and foreign ownership provisions in the *Air Navigation Act 1920*, and whether these provisions led to the greatest benefit for Australians;
(d) the ‘Open Skies’ policy and its impact on the competitiveness of the Australian aviation sector, including the policy’s role in shaping bilateral agreements and air navigation rights;
(e) the direct costs on Australian-domiciled air carriers, including airport charges and depreciation allowances, compared to foreign-based competitors; and
(f) any related matters.

Senator Wright to move:

That the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee be authorised to hold a private meeting otherwise than in accordance with standing order 33(1) during the sitting of the Senate on Wednesday, 5 March 2014, from 1.30 pm.

Senator Fierravanti-Wells to move:

That the Senate authorises the publication of the unpublished documents provided to the former Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Committee by Fair Work Australia in relation to the Fair Work Australia report, *Investigation into the National Office of the Health Services Union under section 331 of the Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Act 2009*.

Senator Williams to move:

That the Environment and Communications Legislation Committee be authorised to hold a public meeting during the sitting of the Senate on Tuesday, 4 March 2014, from 6.45 pm, to take evidence for the committee’s inquiry into Australia Post.

Senator Brown to move:

That the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories be authorised to hold private meetings otherwise than in accordance with standing order 33(1) during the sittings of the Senate, as follows:

(a) Thursday, 6 March 2014;
(b) Thursday, 20 March 2014; and
(c) Thursday, 27 March 2014.

Senator Kroger to move:

That the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters be authorised to hold public meetings during the sittings of the Senate, from 9.40 am, as follows:

(a) Wednesday, 5 March 2014;
(b) Wednesday, 19 March 2014; and
(c) Wednesday, 26 March 2014.
Senator Siewert to move:

That the following bill be introduced: A Bill for an Act to amend the Native Title Act 1993 to further the interests of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders, and for related purposes. Native Title Amendment (Reform) Bill 2014.

Senator Madigan to move:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that:

(i) the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees’ position is that Australia should provide asylum seekers who enter Australia by whatever means with a full and efficient refugee status determination process in Australia, and

(ii) it would be significantly more cost-effective to process asylum seekers onshore as opposed to offshore;

(b) recognises that Australia:

(i) only has limited influence in ending the circumstances forcing people to flee their homeland and seek asylum,

(ii) must increase efforts overseas to do all it can to foster peace and stability in areas of conflict around the world, and

(iii) must also focus on what it can do to help the plight of asylum seekers in a balanced, dignified, safe and compassionate way; and

(c) calls on the Government to:

(i) strengthen relations and provide further assistance to Indonesia to stop people attempting the treacherous journey from Indonesia to Australia by boat,

(ii) increase our annual asylum seeker and refugee intake from Indonesia, and

(iii) process all asylum seekers onshore, at least in recognition of it being cheaper.

Senator Di Natale to move:

That there be laid on the table by the Minister for Finance, no later than noon on 17 March 2014, any reports received from the National Commission of Audit.

Senator Wong to move:

That there be laid on the table by the Assistant Minister for Health, no later than 12.45pm on Wednesday, 5 March 2014, a copy of the letter submitted by Mr Alastair Furnival to the Minister at the commencement of his engagement as her chief of staff containing undertakings on action to address conflicts of interest between his business affairs and his ministerial staff role.

Senator Collins to move:

That the Senate:

(a) endorse the conclusion at paragraph 1.57 of the 152nd report of the Committee of Privileges on a possible unauthorised disclosure of the draft report of the Select Committee on Electricity Prices; and

(b) adopt the recommendation that no contempt be found in respect of the matter referred.

Senator Urquhart to move:

That the Senate expresses its sincere condolences to the family, friends and work colleagues of Mr Michael Welsh, who was tragically killed at work at the Mount Lyell copper mine on Tasmania’s west coast on Friday, 17 January 2014.
B U S I N E S S

Rearrangement

Senator FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (15:46): I move:

That general business order of the day no. 9 (Landholders' Right to Refuse (Gas and Coal) Bill 2013) be considered on Thursday, 6 March 2014 under the temporary order relating to the consideration of private senators' bills.

Question agreed to.

C O M M I T T E E S

Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee

Reporting Date

Senator KROGER (Victoria—Chief Government Whip) (15:46): by leave—I move:

That the time for the presentation of the report of the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee on the provisions of the Migration Amendment (Regaining Control Over Australia's Protection Obligations) Bill 2013 be extended to 18 March 2014

Question agreed to.

N O T I C E S

Postponement

The following items of business were postponed:

Business of the Senate notices of motion nos 2 and 4 standing in the name of Senator Hanson-Young for today, proposing references to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee, postponed till 5 March 2014.

Business of the Senate notice of motion no. 1 standing in the name of Senator Hanson-Young for 5 March 2014, proposing the disallowance of the amendments to the Migration Regulations 1994 made by the Migration Amendment (Unauthorised Maritime Arrival) Regulation 2013, postponed till 27 March 2014.

Withdrawal

Senator XENOPHON (South Australia) (15:47): I ask that business of the Senate notice of motion No. 3 standing in my name and in the name of Senator Madigan for today proposing a reference to the Economics References Committee be withdrawn.

M O T I O N S

Forced Marriage

Senator KROGER (Victoria—Chief Government Whip) (15:48): At the request of Senators Cash, Moore and Waters, I move:

That the Senate acknowledges that:

(a) under age and forced marriage is a totally unacceptable illegal practice and will not be tolerated in Australia under any circumstances;

(b) the Australian Government is deeply concerned by this illegal practice and is keen to work jointly with state and territory governments on tackling this issue;
(c) under the Commonwealth Marriage Act 1961, it is an offence to solemnise a marriage where one or both parties is not of marriageable age;
(d) it is also an offence to go through a form of ceremony of marriage with a person who is not of marriageable age;
(e) under the Commonwealth Criminal Code, it is also an offence to force a person into marriage without their full and free consent through coercion, threat or deception;
(f) the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Slavery, Slavery-like Conditions and People Trafficking) Act 2013 has strengthened Australia's response to slavery, slavery-like practices and human trafficking, including by criminalising forced marriage; and
(g) the Government provides support to victims of forced marriage through the Support for Trafficked People Program, which provide victims access to accommodation, financial support, counselling, medical treatment, legal and migration advice and interpreter services.

I advise the Senate that I am associating my name with this motion.

Question agreed to.

Renal Services

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (15:49): I move:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that:
   (i) poor kidney health continues to be a serious problem for Aboriginal people in Central Australia with an alarming growth in the need for dialysis both now and in the future,
   (ii) the release of a report by the Western Desert Nganampa Walytja Palyantjaku Tjutaku Aboriginal Corporation and EY into Service Delivery Model of remote dialysis in Central Australia, and
   (iii) this report finds that the Western Desert Dialysis model of care:
     (A) offers a unique combination of services and approach to patient care and community engagement that has allowed for significant success particularly in terms of patient participation,
     (B) is cost effective,
     (C) encourages higher patient participation rate,
     (D) creates better clinical outcomes,
     (E) offers higher levels of clinical safety, and
     (F) supports people to be able to remain on country, which means that there is a greater prospect of children accessing education, adults contributing economically and communities remaining safe and stable; and

(b) calls on the Government to ensure that:
   (i) the $10 million earmarked by the previous government for renal services is urgently spent on improving central desert infrastructure, and
   (ii) a community approach to renal services is at the heart of any renal treatment strategy.

Senator FIFIELD: As has been noted in the chamber by Minister Nash, this motion today is a stunt of sorts, and the government does not support it. The former government allocated $13 million to respond to the findings of the Central Australia Renal Study. However, it is
understood that negotiations by the previous government with states and the Northern Territory failed to reach an agreement and, as a result, $3 million was returned to consolidate revenue. In 2013-14, $10 million was allocated for projects to support dialysis in Central Australia, but, again, negotiations by the previous government with the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia were unsuccessful. There are significant challenges associated with delivering dialysis services in Central Australia, and this government is considering innovative ways to deliver services to remote communities and to ensure that resources effectively reach those who need them.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (15:50): I seek leave to make a short statement.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

Senator SIEWERT: This is back on the agenda for a number of reasons, but one is that the government is currently trying to cut funds wherever possible and it is very important to ensure that the Senate highlights the importance of this $10 million for the community of Central Australia. Western Desert Dialysis services have also just released a report by EY that shows the very significant contribution that community dialysis provides to the community. In fact, it provides services at the equivalent of the national efficient price, which is particularly important given that these services actually provide dialysis services in community. It is extremely important to keep people in community. This motion also calls not only for the $10 million but also to remind the government of the importance of community dialysis and delivering that dialysis in community. (Time expired)

Question agreed to.

NOTICES
Withdrawal

Senator MADIGAN (Victoria) (15:51): I ask that business of the Senate notice of motion No. 1 standing in my name for today proposing a reference to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee be withdrawn.

DOCUMENTS
National Security
Order for the Production of Documents

Senator LUDLAM (Western Australia) (15:52): I move:

That there be laid on the table by the Attorney General, no later than 2 pm on 6 March 2014, evidence to substantiate the Attorney General's claim to the Senate on 11 February 2014 that former National Security Agency contractor Mr Edward Snowden 'has put Australian lives at risk'.

I seek leave to make a short statement.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

Senator LUDLAM: It is great to have the Attorney-General in the chamber here today. I wonder whether the Attorney-General might rise to the occasion, as it were, and provide us with some information as to why he will not back up on the public record, neither here in this chamber nor even at an estimates committee last week, how he is able to accuse Mr Edward...
Snowden the whistleblower of being a traitor when he has been neither charged nor convicted of any crime in the United States, when senior US administration figures have been careful not to use that phrase and when he cannot prove or show any evidence whatsoever that Australians have been put in harm's way? Similar claims were put about publisher Julian Assange when the WikiLeaks documents were first put into the public domain. And unless Senator Brandis is about to prove me wrong, we are about to see debate in here closed down. All I was asking for was evidence to substantiate the claim which Senator Brandis was not able to substantiate in estimates last week. I do not think it is too much to expect that if you make these extraordinary claims that you back them up. (Time expired)

Senator BRANDIS (Queensland—Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council, Minister for Arts and Attorney-General) (15:53): by leave—What the notice of motion seeks is that I lay on the table evidence supporting claims that I have made that Mr Snowden's disclosures have put Australian lives at risk.

Contrary to what Senator Ludlam has just said, I did provide that information to Senator Ludlam in estimates last week. Senator Ludlam asked me:

What work has been undertaken on the impact on Australia's national security of the revelations of the whistleblower Edward Snowden—in particular, on whether his revelations have placed Australian lives in danger?

... ...

What I am particularly interested in is whether you can identify a single individual whose life has been placed in danger.

... ...

... I just wonder what particular intelligence you have to hand to contradict that?

To which my reply was:

You asked me if I am aware of particular cases. The answer to your question is yes, on the basis of the intelligence briefings I receive.

Contrary to what Senator Ludlam has said, I have told him the source of my claim. That is the intelligence briefings that I receive— (Time expired)

Senator BRANDIS: Mr Deputy President, I seek leave to continue my statement.

Leave not granted.

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

Question negatived.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Abbott Government

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (15:55): 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 failure of the Abbott Government to be accountable and transparent.

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

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

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (15:55): This MPI deals with the failure of the Abbott government to be accountable and transparent. We all recall Mr Abbott’s promise, amongst other things—along with 'There will be no cuts to health and education,' and we know how truthful that promise was—the promise from the Prime Minister, Mr Abbott, to restore accountability and to improve transparency. That was what he said. That was one of the things in the little booklet that everybody was holding up as the plan for government.

After five months in office we know the truth. We see a government that fails to display transparency and that fails to meet basic tests of accountability. Instead of transparency this government is obsessed with secrecy. Instead of accountability, this government has misled the public. And one of the most blatant examples of that has been a minister in this place, the Assistant Minister the Health, Senator Nash.

The Assisting Minister for Health had a conflict of interest at the heart of her office. Her chief of staff had financial interests in a lobbying firm which represented clients in the food industry. Of course, this has given rise to legitimate questions about the impartiality and integrity of the minister's decision making. But instead of giving a transparent account; instead of coming into this chamber and giving a full, comprehensive and clear statement about these matters, what we have seen from this minister is stonewalling, refusal to answer questions and misleading statements to this chamber—misleading statements to this parliament.

The Prime Minister's statement of ministerial standards provides:

Ministers are required to provide an honest and comprehensive account—'and comprehensive account', I repeat—of their exercise of public office, and of the activities of the agencies within their portfolios, in response to any reasonable and bona fide enquiry by a member of the Parliament or a Parliamentary Committee.

The Prime Minister's statement further says:

Ministers are expected to be honest in the conduct of public office and take all reasonable steps to ensure that they do not mislead the public or the Parliament.

Well, Senator Nash has breached these standards. She has misled this Senate, not just once but several times. This is a serious failure of accountability by the Abbott government and the Prime Minister should ensure that his standards are upheld.

Let me recount the facts about the conflict of interest in Senator Nash's office. Mr Alastair Furnival was engaged as her chief of staff on 19 September 2013. Until 13 February 2014 he was a director and a 50-per-cent shareholder of Strategic Issues Management, which in turn wholly owned the lobbying business Australian Public Affairs. Clients of Australian Public Affairs include Mondelez, which owns Kraft and Cadbury; and the Australian Beverages Council, which represents soft drink and fruit juice manufacturers.
Now, the Prime Minister's Statement of Standards for Ministerial Staff requires staff members to:

Divest themselves, or relinquish control, of interests in any private company or business and/or direct interest in any public company involved in the area of their Ministers' portfolio responsibilities. The fact is this. Senator Nash failed to ensure her chief of staff complied with this requirement in the Prime Minister's own statement of standards for ministerial staff. As the Assistant Minister for Health, Senator Nash is responsible for decisions which would clearly affect the commercial interests of these clients of Australian Public Affairs. Decisions like her move to take down the health star rating system website on 6 February at the behest of the powerful Australian Food and Grocery Council have rightly been question in the Senate and by the public. At the time she made this decision, her most senior adviser had a financial interest in a lobbying firm representing confectionery and food manufacturers. To any reasonable person looking at this, it is an obvious conflict of interest; but it appears to be obvious to all except the Assistant Minister. Senator Nash's response to the public revelation of this conflict of interest has been the opposite of transparency and accountability. In particular, she has misled this chamber on a number of occasions. The first mislead was during question time on 11 February, when Senator Nash said:

There is no connection whatsoever between my chief of staff and the company Australian Public Affairs.

It took Senator Nash six hours on 11 February to come into this chamber and reveal that, in fact, Mr Furnival retained a share in Australian Public Affairs, completely contrary to her earlier statement. And she has provided no believable explanation for this mislead. In fact, in estimates last week she admitted she was well aware of Mr Furnival's history as a lobbyist at the time she hired him. How is it possible that a minister could come into this chamber and boldly say there is no connection whatsoever when, at estimates last week, she said, 'I had known Alistair Furnival for a long period of time, and I was very well aware of his previous employment and his previous work history'? All of a sudden she simply forgot it—as a minister coming into this chamber and answering questions in question time. It simply does not stack up.

The second mislead is in relation to the Legislative and Governance Forum on Food Regulation. During question time on 13 February Senator Nash said one of the reasons the website was removed was that

…the forum took a unanimous decision to have an extensive cost-benefit analysis done that was due to report back to the forum in June this year. It was premature to have the website live until this report was completed.

The communique from the forum shows that it took no such decision—unanimous or otherwise. All it shows is that the minister informed the forum that she would direct the department to undertake an analysis; it makes no reference to the website. The decision to take down the website at a time when her chief of staff had interests in the food industry was all Senator Nash's own work. The minister sought to create in this chamber the impression it was a decision of the forum, in an attempt to justify her compromised decision. The fact is she went too far. But she has refused to correct this misleading statement.

Senator Nash's third mislead was her claim that Mr Furnival had resigned from all related companies. In estimates last week Senator Nash said that, after she had engaged Mr Furnival,
he maintained a strict separation from Australian Public Affairs and 'resigned as a director from all the related companies'. That is what she said. I invited Senator Nash on a number of occasions in Senate estimates to correct the record. She said Mr Furnival had resigned as a director from all related companies. That was a statement that was not true. Mr Furnival continued to be a director until 13 February 2014—another mislead by this minister.

There was plainly a conflict of interest. It demonstrates a complete lack of judgement and understanding of her responsibilities that the minister continues to refuse to recognise it. Ministerial accountability to the parliament is fundamental to our system of government. It is fundamental that ministers take the responsibility to be truthful and accurate to this chamber; it is a weighty responsibility. The facts demonstrate that this minister has not done so. She has breached the ministerial standards. There was a conflict of interest at the heart of her office and, when it emerged, she has tried to cover it up by misleading the Senate. As the facts have come to light, she has continued to mislead the parliament and has refused to accept responsibility. She has comprehensively walked away from the principle of ministerial accountability, which is so important to our government. And she has been allowed to do so by a Prime Minister and a government which has failed to uphold its own standards. There has been a complete lack of transparency, a failure of accountability. This has been the first big test of the integrity of this government, and they have failed it comprehensively. Instead of treating this chamber with some respect, instead of coming in here and saying, 'I got it wrong; I'm going to comprehensively answer this question; I'm going to comprehensively account for my actions,' what we have continued to see week after week since this was raised is the minister refusing to account for her actions, continuing to mislead the Senate, and providing misleading answers. This is a minister who has not lived up to either the explicit statement of standards or the principles of ministerial responsibility.

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS (New South Wales—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Social Services) (16:05): I have to say that those opposite have absolutely no shame whatsoever. Today, on the day you have put up this motion, your former president, Michael Williamson, has been remanded in custody. You have put up this motion as Craig Thomson is awaiting sentencing after being found guilty of fraud and deception. Those opposite have absolutely no shame whatsoever, coming into this place today with this absolutely absurd motion. I would have thought, Senator Wong, that experience would have told you this sort of behaviour is totally inappropriate. Here you are today, bleating about this and making accusations about Senator Nash. I would remind you that you sat there for 18 months while the then Minister Carr was foreign minister. You were not concerned about his shareholdings, were you? And let's not forget that Bob Carr owned a lobbying company the whole time that he was minister, despite that being against the Standards of Ministerial Ethics. Documents in the former Prime Minister's office on this issue mysteriously disappeared after Julia Gillard was deposed.

I would remind those opposite that Bob Carr was the sole owner of a lobbying company, R J Carr Pty Ltd, for the entire 18 months that he was foreign minister. He claimed it was dormant, but this still contravened former Prime Minister Gillard's Standards of Ministerial Ethics, which required divestment. Section 2.9, dealing with shareholdings, requires:

\[\ldots\]

… that Ministers divest themselves of investments and other interests in any public or private company or business …
R J Carr Pty Ltd was listed with the Australian Securities and Investment Commission as operating from Senator Carr's electorate office, until Senator Fifield raised this in estimates. In answer to a question on notice, former Prime Minister Gillard said that then Senator Bob Carr's:

… arrangements are consistent with the standards of ministerial office.

That was a blatant lie, unless she was evasively quibbling with the word 'office,' as opposed to the Standards of Ministerial Ethics.

Senator Abetz FOI-ed the relevant documents on this matter from former Prime Minister Gillard's office. He was told that they were not official documents of the minister. However, the Information Commissioner formed the preliminary view that they were indeed official documents. Despite former Prime Minister Rudd—on replacing then Prime Minister Gillard—securing the documents, a search conducted in August 2012 found the documents were no longer held. Those opposite come in here today and make accusations, when this saga shows Labor flouted ministerial standards and resorted to covering its tracks by losing documents which should have been held.

I now turn to the issue of Mr Thomson and Mr Williamson. There is no doubt that those opposite had been running a protection racket and that has been bandied about. That is precisely what they have done in recent years. There have been any number of quotes on the record where people were asked about Mr Thomson and his activities. As those opposite know, I have spent considerable time, since August 2011, delving into these matters in a lot of detail.

August 2011 was the first time I spoke on the record on this matter. I talked at that time about Mr Thomson's legal costs and asserted that they could be up to one-quarter of a million dollars and invited then senator Mark Arbib, who obviously knew a lot about it, to tell us all about it. He sat there time and time again, after I made this allegation, and said absolutely nothing. Why? Because those opposite knew precisely that the Labor Party was protecting Mr Thomson and paying his legal fees. Indeed, as Senator Dastyari has virtually admitted, the legal costs were about $350,000. Yet those opposite sat there and protected Mr Thomson. You have quote after quote where people, such as Ms Gillard, Dr Emerson, Mr Albanese and many other Labor figures, repeatedly showed their support for the then member for Dobell.

Let us look at those legal fees. Surely, the Labor Party must have known the weasel words that Mr Thomson was putting on the Register of Members' Interests. We know that he failed twice to disclose interests on the register of interests, including in relation to his legal fees. His correspondence to the registrar was carefully couched, only referring to a sum of money being paid. He also stated that he had an open account with Kalantzis Lawyers. The register of interests also disclosed that he had no interest in real estate and that his home was owned by his wife. The other day the Darlinghurst offices of Schapelle Corby's lawyer, Bill Kalantzis—interestingly, the same law firm as Mr Thomson's—was raided by the AFP last week amidst speculation of the $2 million paid by Channel 7. Perhaps the AFP should have looked a little bit harder; they may have found some Thomson documents.

I now return to the issue of Mr Thomson and the protection of him by those opposite. I have pursued this matter, particularly in relation to documents held by a Senate committee relevant to the Fair Work Australia report. Those opposite, when in government, protected those documents and refused their release. When I sought documents on matters relating to
the jobs incubator on the Central Coast, Minister Kim Carr—who stood here today asking questions about Senator Nash—sat there and protected Mr Thomson, along with their Green alliance partners over there, who always talk about transparency and bleat about openness in government, and refused disclosure of those documents.

Indeed, as I have repeatedly said, those opposite will do everything they possibly can to ensure that those documents relevant to the Fair Work Australia report—there are eight folders—are not released, because they have something to hide. That is why those documents have not been released. The short question that I ask those opposite is: who knew what and when, and what should they have known about both Mr Williamson and Mr Thomson that they hid for so many years?

It is hypocrisy to come into this place today, on the very day that your former HSU president has been remanded in custody on a range of fraud and deception of the HSU membership and on the day that we are awaiting the sentencing of Mr Thomson, who has also been found guilty of fraud and deception. We all know the old proverb that a fish stinks from the head down. As far as the Labor Party is concerned, this is very much the case. When you have your president engaging in the sort of corrupt behaviour Mr Williamson was engaging in—as well as people who head unions like the HSU, like Mr Thomson—it shows how deep the corruption must go in the union movement and those it supports on the other side. That is why I would like to conclude my comments by saying that this is precisely the reason there is a need for a royal commission into the alleged financial irregularities associated with the affairs of the trade union movement. And that is why it is vitally important that we establish the Registered Organisations Commission to introduce some effective governance for trade unions and to help prevent such conduct occurring in the future.

**Senator MADIGAN** (Victoria) (16:15): I rise to speak on this matter of extreme public importance—the failure of the Abbott government to be accountable and transparent. The people of this country put a huge amount of trust in the men and women of this chamber and of the other place to represent them—not to represent the concerns of foreign countries or companies but to represent the people who elected them and who pay their salaries. I understand that some secrecy needs to be involved when it comes to running the country—defence plans, for instance, are best kept under wraps to protect lives. However, successive governments have moved too far into the shadows, and phrases like 'national security', 'sovereign risk' and 'commercial-in-confidence' are often touted in answer to a question the government does not want to answer.

I understand that not everything can be divulged. But when politicians act with integrity and there is a certain continuity in how issues are handled, the public can have a bit of faith that the government is acting in their best interest behind the scenes. There are many in the public who now have no faith that the government is acting in their interest. How can they be when everything is happening behind closed doors? I support open, honest and transparent government. It is clear that some in this place do not. I stand here today reminding the government that a push for transparency and the conduct of a witch-hunt against unions can be sincere only if one has tunnel vision. For some to suggest that illegal behaviour exists only in the union movement is a fallacy. The law is the law. Prosecute the law without fear or favour. Hold those to account no matter who or what they are. That is the only way to be truly just, fair and accountable. The public deserves transparency, honesty and integrity. We must
practice what we preach. Please do not bring parliament further into disrepute. Stop throwing stones at each other and learn from past mistakes. It does not absolve anyone's behaviour when they try to justify that behaviour in terms of the behaviour of someone else. We are accountable for our individual actions and failures. Pointing at the failures of others does not absolve us of our own failures.

Senator MOORE (Queensland) (16:18): Thank you, Senator Madigan: you have actually picked up many of the points I was going to make. But it does not hurt to reinforce them. In terms of the issues around accountability and transparency, we talk much in this place about our responsibilities and the fact that to have the faith of the public we need to ensure that governments and indeed parliaments actually operate in a way that enshrines the issues of transparency and accountability.

In the last sitting week we had a series of questions around the issues surrounding Senator Nash. It was due process in terms of questioning from this side of the House, which we continued today, about a line of events in relation to free and open exchange from the minister to the parliament about what had gone on in her office with her interactions with her staff members. That, in my opinion, as I said at the time, was the job of this parliament. In taking note of answers—which I know is the high point of our day in this place!—what absolutely confounded me was the argument put by members of the government that we had no right to question the minister and, going further, that it was some kind of personal attack on her, and that she was known as a person of integrity.

That caused me great concern in terms of the argument around questioning a minister about process. It is our job to ensure that questions are asked about the probity of decision-making processes. I do not want to pre-empt what you are going to say, Senator Smith, if you are part of this debate—you might remember some of the questions we had at estimates. Again, the arguments were that we were wasting the time of the estimates committee in continuing lines of questioning around the sequence of what occurred. That is exactly the point: we are there to ask questions. It is not an issue of whether we get the answers we like or not. It is an issue of whether the answers fully explain what occurred and, if there is any variation in the answers that come forward, that we are able to identify that so that we have a clear understanding of what happened. And, more than us having that clear understanding, it is important that the people in the wider Australian community can trust decisions being taken in this place—that they can be sure that ministers and parliamentary committees are all fulfilling the trust they have placed in us, which is following through on what the job is about and making sure the statements made in this place are accurate and, if they are not, that they are put back and corrections made so that we know what has gone on.

During the last sitting week it was said by members of the government that there was no need to do this, therefore it was not our role. I strongly object to that. When the coalition took up their order to form government this time they were very clear that they were going to uphold the highest standards of accountability and transparency. They must be held accountable for that statement. They were very quick. Senator Fierravanti-Wells in her contribution went through the kinds of statements and questions that she asked when on this side of the chamber—at length, very often—about issues happening in the then government. That was her job. What we heard today was not any defence of Senator Nash but rather throwing across the chamber, 'Well, you guys did it worse'. As you know, Madam Acting
Deputy President Ruston—you have heard me say this many times in this place—that is just not a good enough argument: just throwing grenades across this place, to use a full defence metaphor, is not the way to ensure that we are going to get the best practice now.

We need to know what is happening in today's government, what issues they are taking seriously and how they respond to us. As to Senator Nash's position: we will continue to ask those questions, to find out exactly what occurred in terms of any conflict of interest. In this case serious questions are being asked in the wider community about decisions around the websites and the influence in the department and the minister's office that would lead to taking actions that did not reflect what people thought was going on. That has been one of our major concerns about this issue: having that absolute trust that what it is said has occurred is in fact what has occurred.

The other area I want to touch on is that we have seen a number of advisory boards and organisations that have been ceased by the government without explanation. My understanding is that the people whose tenure was finalised found out through the media that they had lost their positions rather than through any personal contact from a minister or a minister's office explaining the situation—again, not a process that would create a great deal of trust.

I cannot take part in this debate without some discussion about Senator Cash's response to this whole issue of the activities related to what we now call 'stopping the boats'. When we were in government we were asked consistently about every possible detail that was going on with the number of refugee boats that were arriving—of course, we called them refugees, but they are not called that anymore; I can't even remember the title but people are being depersonalised to such an extent that they are not people. Nonetheless, there was a clear understanding that there was absolute knowledge in this place and in the wider community about what was going on. And there were great demands by the then opposition to ensure that all the data was accurate, that we actually knew what was happening, that we could respond to questions about what was going on.

No sooner did the government change then there was no longer the opportunity have questioning in the parliament or to find out at any time what was happening. We had to wait until the Friday briefing sessions before there could be any exchange of information about what was happening on an issue the government themselves claimed was the most important issue they were taking up at the time. We did ask regular questions in this place about what was happening and we were told by the Minister representing the Minister for Immigration that we would need to wait until Friday, when the ministerial briefing would occur, because it was 'an issue of national security'. Senator Madigan, you actually referred to the way that those terms can be used to obfuscate and to stop openness and transparency in debate and in any kind of process relating to finding information.

It was not just the parliament that raised its concerns about this new way of sharing information in this important area. The media themselves, who had actually been working so closely in the previous parliament when the then opposition was making its statements about this issue, received regular information at that time—but no longer. Now it is by a determination of the minister what, when and how information can be shared, in such an important area. We just get stonewalled. It is not the business of the parliament; it is not the
business of the community; it is the business of the minister to determine when information can be shared.

Not only were we told it was an issue of national security; we were actually told, in the most offensive way, that by having the information we were in some way aiding the people-smuggling industry. I find that to be without any kind of defence. If we can throw allegations around without fulfilling that information sharing process, it defeats the purpose of why we are in parliament. It is the job of this parliament to ask questions. It is the job of this parliament to have confidence that there is goodwill about exchanging accurate information—and, if that cannot occur for whatever reason, full explanation of why not is required rather than just the stonewalling rejection of any right of people to have their questions answered.

If we are going to be absolutely transparent and accountable there has to be clear understanding of what that means. It means that, within the parliament, we are convinced that there is a commitment that there will be information shared and that the process is treated with respect rather than just a waste of time.

Senator IAN MACDONALD (Queensland) (16:28): The hypocrisy of the Australian Labor Party in bringing this motion forward leaves me almost speechless. We spent the last three or four years dealing with perhaps the biggest expenditure by the Australian government in any field—and that, in a business enterprise: the NBN—and could we get any information at all from the ALP government about that? They did not do a cost-benefit analysis that looked carefully at the NBN, and Senator Conroy would never give any information, and any question to him was responded to with threats and bullying, as was the way of then Labor ministers.

The Labor Party, with the support of the Greens and the then Independents, set up this dodgy committee that was supposed to be giving all the information on the NBN to everyone. Even Senator Ludlam used to complain of this committee that we could never get any information. That is just one example of the way the Labor Party ran the government without any information and without any real accountability. There were so many requests for documents in the term of the Labor government. Did the Greens or Labor worry about that then? Of course not. But suddenly there is a whole new regime and, when documents about national security matters are asked about and there is a refusal to give them, we have this mock outrage.

Let me go to that briefly—it is a matter for a wider debate in legislation coming up. The Labor Party people are complaining that no information is being given to them about certain aspects of Operation Sovereign Borders. Yet, at a committee meeting attended by ALP and Greens senators, the minister actually said that this was a matter of national security but, because they were parliamentarians and entitled to information, he would give them a private briefing. He said, 'Come and see me and the department and we will tell you what you want to know. But we do not think it is in Australia's interest that the information should be broadcast so that people-smuggling criminals know exactly what it is'. But did the Labor Party take that up? I think perhaps they did—I do not want to wrongly accuse them. But, of course, the Greens refused. They want the information on the public record. To what end? Tell me. How is that impacting upon the human rights of Australians or on the ways of the Australian
government? It is stopping a problem that the previous government not only was incapable of stopping but actually positively encouraged.

That covers that point. I heard some of the previous speakers complaining that they could not ask questions at estimates. The reason they could not ask questions, I have to say—without being too offensive—is that most of them did not have the gumption to ask the questions that would give them the answers they were seeking. From Senators Wong, Carr and Conroy we would get long speeches, long political statements, without questions at the end. And all Senator Conroy could do was hurl abuse at public servants and Defence officers, who were really not in a position to defend themselves, instead of asking a question. Then we had the outrageous proposition at estimates that estimates was only for opposition senators and that government senators who wanted a bit of information and accountability from the government should not be allowed to talk. How about that?

As I keep saying to Labor senators, we are not like them. People on the government side may, equally, want to hold their own government to account. We do not just sit back and take whatever the ministers say as gospel. Most backbench senators want to put their questions to government ministers. They want accountability. They are not always just prepared to accept—as the Labor Party did—a pat on the head and to be told, 'There, there. It'll be right. Don't you worry about that.' So this proposition that only opposition senators can ask questions at estimates is another element to this whole question. The Labor Party want accountability but only accountability for Labor Party senators.

Then, I heard a previous speaker in this debate complaining that Senator Nash would not give them any information. I have sat in this chamber and heard Senator Nash be questioned on any number of occasions, and she has answered every question factually, moderately, sincerely and with the actual facts before her. When I happened to ask some questions at the estimates committee I could not get a chance to get in there because there were two Labor senators who, rather than asking questions, seemed to be making political statements and accusations against Senator Nash. And Senator Nash answered fully and fairly on any matter she was asked for information about. Also, the secretary of the department, in what I felt was a very professional exercise, answered things fairly and squarely, but she also was subject to abuse from the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, who called her a straw man. This is the sort of thing you get from the Labor Party these days. If the public servants do their job professionally and it does not suit the Labor Party, they also get abused. The secretary, who was a woman, was called a straw man by the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate.

There was plenty of time for information. The estimates process, which has been in place for decades now, is there for senators to get information. But to get the information you actually have to ask questions. You cannot just go in there and make long political statements and abuse officials and military officers and then complain that you could not get any accountability. If the opposition and Greens senators did estimates 101 they would learn that if you ask questions at estimates you can get information, and often you can use the information to your own political advantage. But the current lot of Labor senators do not seem to understand this, because they abrogate their responsibilities and waste their time by hurling abuse and making political statements rather than asking questions.

We are an open and accountable government, unlike the previous government. I only had time to mention the NBN. Time would not permit me to go through all of the occasions when
the Labor Party, in government, abrogated any responsibility for accountability and transparency. In contrast, this government do.

Senator LUDLAM (Western Australia) (16:37): I do not normally bother with these MPI debates—and I suspect people outside the building do not normally bother with them either—but this one was too good to resist. The subject of transparency and accountability is one that is very close to my heart. This is a government that is largely following, I acknowledge, in the footsteps of the previous government and the one before that in getting the balance between transparency and privacy deliberately and profoundly wrong. I will speak of transparency first and accountability later. It is this government that has perfected the asymmetry in which the state is steadily withdrawing behind a curtain of national security—which means whatever the Attorney General says it means. I understand 'national security' to mean protection from threats of organised violence or other forms of serious harm from state or non-state actors. To most people, national security does not include spying on the Timorese government with the aim of strengthening the hand of Australian gas corporations. It does not include stoking fear of refugees fleeing war and violence in our region. National security has nothing to do with Occupy Melbourne, climate change campaigners, the trade union movement, farmers locking the gate or the publication of material in the public interest by working journalists, whether they be at The Guardian, the ABC or the WikiLeaks organisation. National security has nothing, in fact, to do with the all-out assault on privacy undertaken by the US NSA and its partner organisations, including those here in Australia.

Senator Brandis, as the first law officer of this country, is the most dismal exponent of hiding behind fluid and ambiguous definitions of national security in order to shroud the ordinary operations of government in secrecy. One half of this agenda, demanded with numbing repetition by the same familiar faces in the Attorney General's Department, is massive transparency for ordinary people: data retention schemes and ubiquitous warrantless surveillance—to the extent that we are now seeing more than 300,000 rubber-stamped data requests every single year.

The other half of the agenda is maximum secrecy around the operation of government. Whether it is Minister Scott Morrison hiding behind the uniforms of the Royal Australian Navy or Senator Brandis's smug refusal to inform the Australian public why he insists on calling Edward Snowden a traitor, we can see an entrenched pattern of behaviour. It is about secrecy for government but transparency for everyone else.

It was the cypherpunks who first pointed out this tension between privacy and transparency, as long ago as the early 1990s, as well as the degree to which governments and corporations were deliberately and systematically engaged in tipping the balance in the direction of authoritarianism. Ordinary people have a right to privacy; governments have an obligation of transparency.

I have a copy here of Nineteen Eighty-Four. It was written by George Orwell in the year 1948 and published in 1949. It is a vividly realised dystopia in which the surveillance state has become completely ubiquitous. Here is a short passage from early in this profoundly important and disturbing novel:

There was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment. How often, or on what system, the Thought Police plugged in on any individual wire was guesswork. It was even conceivable that they watched everybody all the time. But at any rate they could plug in your wire.
whenever they wanted to. You have to live—did live, from habit that became instinct—in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinized.

I guess we can forgive Mr Orwell for not foreseeing the advent of cameras that see in the infra-red spectrum. So now there is not necessarily any privacy even in darkness. Ordinary people have a right to privacy and governments have an obligation of transparency. I am sending a copy of this book to Senator Brandis to help fill out his brand-new $15,000 bookshelf. The book was intended as a warning, not an instruction manual. Let us hope, when it finds pride of place on his $15,000 bookcase, that he eventually gets around to reading it.

I said I would get to the subject of accountability. This government thought they would not be accountable until the 2016 general election, so they set about doing all the revolting stuff straightaway, presumably in order to spend the next year or two talking about tax cuts. But it has all come unstuck, which perhaps accounts for the deer-in-the-headlights stares of Liberal senators these last few weeks. They are going to be held accountable now, in a matter of only a few weeks, when Western Australian voters determine the final balance of numbers in this, the Australian Senate. I will do what I can to ensure that, when people go to the polls in WA, the drive towards secrecy in government—and the annihilation of privacy for everyone else—is thrown sharply into reverse.

Senator LUDWIG (Queensland) (16:42): I see, Senator Ludlam, that it may be your fault if there is an extension required for the bookshelf! This matter of public importance debate goes to the heart of the problem with the Liberal-National Party government. As I have said before in this House, this is a government wedded to secrecy. They operate in the shadows and hide themselves from scrutiny by the media, the public and this parliament. I can understand, on a certain level, why this is so. It is because every time they have shown who they are and what they are doing, the public recoils. This is not the government the public were promised.

There is no greater example of the Abbott government's secrecy than Operation Sovereign Borders. This is a policy where secrecy knows no bounds, where there is no matter that cannot be considered operational and no area that cannot be deemed off limits. The truth is that we do not know for certain what is happening on or off our waters. Both sides of politics want to reduce the loss of life at sea. That is why the former government worked for years to get the support of the parliament to put in place measures that would work. The coalition government's lack of transparency over its immigration policies is, however, unprecedented. They do not even answer basic questions from the media or the public. Even the once infamous 'no comment' weekly press conferences have been canned. They do not even have those any more.

Given that, you might think there would not be much need to employ media staff, but those in the chamber will be shocked to discover that the facts are quite the opposite. The Sun-Herald revealed yesterday that Minister Morrison had 66 spin doctors slaving away—at huge cost to the Australian taxpayer—to answer nothing at all. In the last hour or so, I understand, Minister Morrison made a personal explanation about this matter. He claimed:

I can confirm that there are only 39.7 full-time equivalent staff employed in that area of my department. I seek leave to table question on notice No. SE13/0169 from the minister's own department that shows not only that there are 66.2 ongoing public relations communication and media
staff but also that there are an additional eight non-ongoing staff, an additional 5.5 staff in
Operation Sovereign Borders and an additional 33 media staff in Australian Customs, all
under the minister's portfolio.

Leave granted.

Senator LUDWIG: I note that the article shows the minister was given an opportunity to
respond before it was published on Sunday. But, true to form, the minister did not respond to
questions. I also seek leave to table the article by Bianca Hall, and I would encourage all
senators to read it.

Leave granted.

Senator LUDWIG: I hope the minister gets his facts right and gives an apology to the
journalist, or returns her call in future so that at least his side can be put, if it should be any
different from what I have just outlined. He may need to do another personal explanation as
well. In addition, it does seem—and I will stay with the number of 66, notwithstanding the
number I have added—they must have gone AWOL, because under Minister Morrison they
are not allowed to tell the people of Australia or the media what is happening. What is
shocking is the cost being expended by the minister's department on media monitoring. There
is not a cent being spared in watching what the media is reporting. They have spent a
whopping $11,476 on media monitoring since the Abbott government was elected. They are
not just watching the media, however; they are also spending thousands of taxpayers' dollars
watching themselves.

Since coming into office, Minister Morrison's team of spin doctors has spent over $9,000
just on recording the Sky news and ABC 24 televised conferences—not that you find out
much there. I would encourage the minister to buy his department a set-top box and maybe a
recorder or two. It would certainly be cheaper than the nine grand he is spending on media. I
would also like to encourage them to keep away from the shadows—come out into the light
and explain your circumstances. This is a government that promised to end waste, and yet
they have a minister leading an army of spinners who answer nothing and charge an arm and
a leg for what ABC iView can do for free. (Time expired)

Senator SMITH (Western Australia) (16:47): When the Greens come to the Senate and
quote 1984 we know that there is a political party in this country that is prone to delusional
tactics greater than that of the Labor opposition. When we reflect on George Orwell's 1984,
the quote that I think is most apt for where we find ourselves in Australian politics and
particularly the position of the Australian Greens is the one that suggests that leaders in all
ages have tried to impose a false view of the world for their followers. I do not think a more
apt quote would suit the Australian Greens and the way they conduct themselves in Australian
politics. It is very interesting. Senator Ludwig has a boldness and predictability about him on
the outcome of the 5 April Senate election that is totally unwarranted. When Western
Australians think about their state and prosperity, it is Labor and the Greens, tied hand-in-
glove, using a handbrake on our economy. But that is a speech for another time.

If the opposition had been successful over the last few weeks in prosecuting the case
against Senator Fiona Nash we would not be doing this today. Instead, we might be having a
discussion about real issues, in terms of transparency and accountability, like a royal
commission into union thuggery. But, no, we senators have decided that we will use this
precious time to have a discussion about a failed fishing expedition that has gone on for weeks. Some of us in this place witnessed that fishing expedition—not for one hour on Monday, not for half a day on Monday but for a lot of time on Monday—at the Finance and other public estimates hearings, when other ministers were quizzed about the issue. We saw it again on Tuesday and Wednesday. That was a waste of the Senate's time. Senator Moore is absolutely correct. Everyone, particularly opposition parties, has a responsibility to inquire and seek answers—but there comes a point when the same questions, if they are not delivering you the answer you want or expect, should be abandoned. That is what we did not have last week and that is not what we have had today.

I want to reflect on the very measured contribution of Senator Madigan. He made two important points. One was that people in glass houses should not throw stones—and I will come to that in a moment—and the other, and I think the most important one, was about consistency. There is a lot in the contribution of opposition senators that I want to respond to. Senator Ludwig said that the government is being secretive on border protection. Actually, the government is following the professional advice of a general. As well-meaning as people's concerns might be around border protection, it is the attitude of generals on operational issues, like border protection, that matter the most. Just for the record, it might be valuable to go back to 23 September of last year to hear what Lieutenant-General Angus Campbell had to say:

Sure. While I have not, as a norm, and would not offer comment as to advice I provide to government ministers of the day, a range of officials and I have discussed this question and we are very appreciative of the opportunity to provide regular periodic briefings to the media, the reason being that there is an absolute respect for the need for the Australian people to be aware of what is occurring.

And this is the most important point:

But, there's also a balance that is struck operationally to ensure the protection of the conduct of current and anticipated activity operationally which might otherwise message to people smugglers how we intend to conduct our business. And so, for that reason, a periodic and appropriate routine to media briefings is something I very much support.

There is no doubt that the Australian community wants issues of illegal immigration managed sensitively. There is absolutely a role for transparency and public discourse, but operational matters, when they come to saving people's lives, need to be respected.

I would just like to go now briefly with the limited time that is available to me to the issue of consistency. Labor coming into the chamber today to talk about transparency and accountability is a bit like Hugh Hefner talking about marital fidelity. It does not ring true. If you do not believe me, go back through the records and inquire to yourself about the CMAX Communications issue where an adviser to the former Minister for Defence in 2008 was alleged to have had some conflict of interest. Go back and have a look also at an adviser to former parliamentary secretary Maxine McKew who had worked for Allen Consulting and had had an interest in the company. Look no further than David Epstein, the former Prime Minister's chief of staff and his wife's—

Honourable senators interjecting—

**Senator SMITH**: Let's go to Mike Kaiser and his appointment to the National Broadband Network. I would like to bring the discussion back—

**Senator Wong**: Go outside and say it. I will say what I said about Nash outside—
Senator SMITH: Senator Wong, you are disgraceful.

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Whish-Wilson): Order! Senator Wong and Senator Smith, please direct your comments through the chair.

Senator SMITH interjecting—

Senator SMITH: That is the second time in less than four days that a female Labor senator has invited me to take it outside. There is a pattern of behaviour here. I would like to go back to the substance of my—

Senator Wong: Mr President, I raise a point of order. Perhaps Senator Smith did not hear the interjection. I invited him to go outside and say the defamatory accusations he is making of people inside this chamber under cover of parliamentary privilege. That is what I am inviting him to do. If he is making an assertion about something else, it is incorrect.

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Thank you, Senator Wong, you now have that on Hansard. Please direct your comments through the chair. It is untidy to debate across the chamber.

Senator SMITH: In the screeching, it may have been hard for me to hear what was being said—that is quite accurate. So I just want to go back to the substance of the issue and talk about the former foreign minister, Bob Carr. There might be a skerrick of truth in this. Former Senator Bob Carr, was the sole owner of a lobbying company, RJ Carr Pty Ltd, for the entire 18 months he was the foreign minister. There is now quiet and silence. There might be a skerrick of truth in this. He claimed it was dormant, but this contravened Prime Minister Gillard's standards of ministerial ethics, which required divestment— (Time expired)

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT: The time for discussion has expired.

DOCUMENTS

Tabling

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (16:57): I present documents listed on today's Order of Business at item 12, presented to the President, Deputy President and temporary chairs of committees since the Senate adjourned on 13 February 2014.

The list read as follows—

Committee reports (pursuant to Senate standing order 38 (7))

1. Select Committee into the Abbott Government's Commission of Audit—Interim report, dated February 2014. [Received 19 February 2014]

2. Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee—Interim report—A claim of public interest immunity, dated 19 February 2014. [Received 21 February 2014]

3. Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee—Interim Report—Effect on Australian ginger growers of importing fresh ginger from Fiji, the effect on Australian pineapple growers of importing fresh pineapple from Malaysia, and the proposed importation of potatoes from New Zealand, dated 28 February 2014. [Received 28 February 2014]

4. Community Affairs References Committee—Second interim report—Care and management of younger and older Australians living with dementia and behavioural and psychiatric symptoms of dementia (BPSD), dated 28 February 2014. [Received 28 February 2014]
Government documents (pursuant to Senate standing order 166)
1. Department of Finance—Campaign advertising by Australian government departments and agencies—Report for 2012-13. [Received 21 February 2014]
3. Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)—Equity and diversity—Report for the period 1 September 2012 to 31 August 2013. [Received 21 February 2014]

Reports of the Auditor-General (pursuant to Senate standing order 166)
1. Report no. 20 of 2013-14—Performance audit—Management of the Central Movement Alert List: Follow-on Audit: Department of Immigration and Border Protection. [Received 20 February 2014]

Return to order (pursuant to Senate standing order 166)
Industry—SPC Ardmona—Report on Government Assistance—Order for Production of Documents—Letter from the Minister representing the Minister for Industry (Senator Ronaldson) to the Clerk of the Senate (Dr Laing) responding to the order of the Senate of 12 February 2014 and raising public interest immunity claims, dated 13 February 2014. [Received 17 February 2014]

Immigration—Asylum Seekers—Operation Sovereign Borders—Order for Production of Documents—Letter from the Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection (Senator Cash) to the Clerk of the Senate (Dr Laing) responding to the order of the Senate of 13 February 2014 and raising public interest immunity claims, dated 20 February 2014 and attachment. [Received 21 February 2014]

Immigration—Border Protection Operations—Lifeboats—Order for Production of Documents—Letter from the Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection (Senator Cash) to the Clerk of the Senate (Dr Laing) responding to the order of the Senate of 12 February 2014 and raising public interest immunity claims, dated 21 February 2014. [Received 21 February 2014]

Statements of compliance with Senate orders (pursuant to Senate standing order 166)
Indexed lists of departmental and agency files (continuing order of the Senate of 30 May 1996, as amended on 3 December 1998):
Finance portfolio. [Received 26 February 2014]
Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security. [Received 28 February 2014] National Health Performance Authority. [Received 28 February 2014]
Safe Work Australia. [Received 18 February 2014]

Lists of contracts (continuing order of the Senate of 20 June 2001, as amended on 27 September 2001 and 18 June, 26 June and 4 December 2003):
Attorney-General's portfolio. [Received 25 February 2014]
Cancer Council. [Received 27 February 2014]
Defence portfolio. [Received 26 February 2014] Department of Health. [Received 27 February 2014]
Department of Human Services. [Received 28 February 2014] Education portfolio. [Received 17 February 2014]
Finance portfolio. [Received 19 February 2014]
Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio. [Received 28 February 2014] Independent Hospital Pricing Authority. [Received 28 February 2014] Industry portfolio. [Received 25 February 2014]
National Blood Authority. [Received 25 February 2014] Organ and Tissue Authority. [Received 27 February 2014]
Prime Minister and Cabinet portfolio. [Received 28 February 2014] Professional Services Review. [Received 28 February 2014]
Social Services portfolio. [Received 25 February 2014] Treasury portfolio. [Received 27 February 2014] Veterans’ Affairs portfolio. [Received 26 February 2014]

List of departmental and agency appointments and vacancies (continuing order of the Senate of 24 June 2008, as amended):
Agriculture portfolio. [Received 17 February 2014]
Communications portfolio. [Received 21 February 2014]
Department of Veterans’ Affairs. [Received 17 February 2014] Education portfolio. [Received 19 February 2014]
Employment portfolio. [Received 17 February 2014]
Environment portfolio. [Received 18 February 2014]
Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio. [Received 14 February 2014] Human Services portfolio. [Received 17 February 2014]
Immigration and Border Protection portfolio. [Received 17 February 2014] Infrastructure and Regional Development portfolio. [Received 17 February 2014] Prime Minister and Cabinet portfolio. [Received 28 February 2014]
Treasury portfolio. [Received 27 February 2014]

Lists of departmental and agency grants (continuing order of the Senate of 24 June 2008):
Attorney-General’s portfolio—Replacement. [Received 21 February 2014]
Communications portfolio. [Received 21 February 2014] Department of Education. [Received 17 February 2014] Department of Employment. [Received 18 February 2014] Department of Health. [Received 21 February 2014] Department of Social Services. [Received 20 February 2014] Department of Veterans’ Affairs. [Received 17 February 2014]
Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio. [Received 19 February 2014] Human Services portfolio. [Received 17 February 2014]
Immigration and Border Protection portfolio. [Received 19 February 2014] Organ and Tissue Authority. [Received 21 February 2014]
Prime Minister and Cabinet portfolio. [Received 28 February 2014] Treasury portfolio. [Received 27 February 2014]

COMMITTEES
Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee
Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee
Community Affairs References Committee

Reporting Date

Senator McKENZIE (Victoria—Nationals Whip in the Senate) (16:56): I move:
That—
(a) the time for the presentation of the report of the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee on its inquiry into a public interest immunity claim be extended to 6 March 2014;
(b) the time for the presentation of the report of the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee on its inquiries into the effect on Australian ginger growers of importing fresh ginger from Fiji, the effect on Australian pineapple growers of importing fresh pineapple from
Malaysia, and the proposed importation of potatoes from New Zealand be extended to 31 March 2014; and

(c) the time for the presentation of the report of the Community Affairs References Committee on its inquiry into care and management of younger and older Australians living with dementia and behavioural and psychiatric symptoms of dementia be extended to 19 March 2014.

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS

Rearrangement

Senator McKENZIE (Victoria—Nationals Whip in the Senate) (16:57): I seek leave to move a motion to provide for consideration of committee reports just tabled.

Leave granted.

Senator McKENZIE: I move:

That consideration of those documents be listed on the Notice Paper as separate orders of the day.

Question agreed to.

PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION

Queensland

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (16:58): I table the original certificate received through Her Excellency the Governor-General from the Governor of Queensland on the choice by the parliament of Queensland of Senator O'Sullivan to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Senator Joyce.

DOCUMENTS

Business of the Senate

Tabling


Ordered that the document be printed.

Korea-Australia Free Trade Agreement

Order for the Production of Documents

Senator RYAN (Victoria—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education) (16:59): I table documents relating to the order for the production of the following document:

Korea-Australia Free Trade Agreement.

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Order for the Production of Documents

Senator RYAN: I table documents relating to the order for the production of the following document:

Australian Broadcasting Corporation.
Responses to Senate Resolutions
Tabling

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Whish-Wilson) (17:00): I present the following response to Senate resolutions as listed at item 13 on today’s Order of Business, including a response from the Minister for the Environment (Mr Hunt) concerning the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area.

The list read as follows—
Response to Senate resolutions:
Ambassador of the Kingdom of Cambodia (Chum Sounry) – Cambodia (agreed to 13 February 2014)

Senator MILNE (Tasmania—Leader of the Australian Greens) (17:00): I seek leave to move a motion in relation to the response of the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Cambodia to the Senate resolution.
Leave granted.

Senator MILNE: I move:
That the Senate take note of the document.

I thank the Senate for allowing me to have this opportunity. I note in the response from the Ambassador that he states that the motion which was passed by the Senate was based solely on the views of Mr Sam Rainsy, which are biased and flawed on several points, according to the ambassador.

I put to you, Mr Acting Deputy President, that the ambassador is wrong. The information in the motion that was passed by the Senate is correct. I stand here today to say very clearly to the people of Cambodia that in this parliament we will continue to support the democracy movement. I would like to call for a stop to all the political violence that is going on in Cambodia as we speak—especially the police and the army’s deadly crack-down on workers asking for better living conditions, starting with an increase in the monthly minimum wage to US$160.

I want to say, here, that the garment workers in Cambodia are working for very low wages. They work long hours and in terrible conditions. It has got to the point where they report in the newspapers the first fainting of the year. That refers to hundreds of workers who have fainted because of paint spills or toxic spills in the factories. It is just shocking.

The workers have gone on strike. There are 600,000 workers on low wages in Cambodia. In some cases, when these workers tried to leave factories to join others on the streets in protesting for higher wages the gates were locked to prevent them getting out. Companies like Puma, H&M and Gap are all getting the benefit of goods from these low paid workers in Cambodia. As a result, when they went out on strike, the regime of Hun Sen turned on them. Four were shot dead—live ammunition was used against them—and 23 of them were detained. So I stand here today calling on the government to release those people who are still jailed. Out of those 23 people, 21 are still detained. They should be released.

What is more, the minimum wage—$160 a month—is not an unreasonable wage. It is wrong for overseas companies to threaten to pull their factories out of Cambodia if they have to pay an appropriate wage. We have run strong consumer campaigns against what happened
in Bangladesh, for example, and we will stand up for the workers of Cambodia to be paid
decent wages.

But we will also stand up for an independent investigation into the serious irregularities
which marred the 28 July 2013 national elections and obviously distorted the will of the
Cambodian people. We know, now, from several investigations into those elections last year
that parts of the election were rigged. There was 'indelible' ink that washed off very easily, so
people voted more than once. There were situations where some voters were barred from the
ballot offices and other people cast their votes. So they were not allowed to vote.

We know that there were a whole lot of missing and duplicated voter names We know that
1.2 million to 1.3 million names were omitted from the voting rolls. Sam Rainsy, the leader of
the opposition party, was not able to vote or stand as a candidate. He had been in exile from
Cambodia and was only allowed back just two weeks before the election, as a result of a royal
pardon. But the rules suggested that he was not even able to vote.

The US Department of State has called for a transparent and full investigation of all
credible reports of irregularities in the Cambodian election. Human Rights Watch came out
and said that the ruling Cambodian People's Party appears to have been involved in electoral
fraud. They called for an independent commission to investigate allegations of fraud.

The Australian parliament stands by our request for an independent investigation into the
serious irregularities in the national elections last year. We want to make sure that all the civil
society organisations and independent human rights organisations in Cambodia, as well as
many international observers' views are respected here.

It is quite wrong for this letter from the Ambassador from the Kingdom of Cambodia to
suggest that this is a biased view from just the opposition party in Cambodia. It is not. It is the
view of many observers from non-government organisations and of parliaments such as this
parliament and the European parliament, which also passed a very strong resolution
condemning the violence that has been going on in Cambodia.

Just this last week, Gareth Evans, a former Minister for Foreign Affairs in Australia came
out and condemned the Hun Sen regime and said that they were getting away with horrendous
violence in Cambodia.

It is time that this parliament took a stand for democracy in Cambodia—for the poor people
working in that garment industry, so that they get a decent wage and decent conditions in
which to work. That is not too much to ask. Of course, we want to make sure that in standing
up for them we do get free and fair elections and not have the situation that we have at the
moment, where in the last election, in spite of all the repression that had gone on, in the final
result that was declared there were 55 seats to the Cambodia National Rescue Party and 68 to
the Cambodian People's Party, even with all those irregularities. That is why the opposition
says that it won the election and that, if the irregularities had been investigated, that would be
shown. That is why we must have an independent investigation into the elections. Finally,
the Hon. Julie Bishop met with the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia, Hun Sen, on 22
February. He allegedly asked for Australian assistance in election reform in Cambodia
because 'Australia has precise intention to be a good friend and partner of Cambodia' while
'deepening bilateral ties'.
I do not want to see asylum seekers sent to Cambodia. In the current circumstances it would be shocking to send people into a regime where there is repression and violence. At the moment there are rules against association, for example. Areas where the opposition meet are being shut down and people moved on. Just in the last few days, Hun Sen has come out and said that, if they lift the ban on association or protest, he will encourage pro-government forces to come out and protest beside the anti-government forces, which is a recipe for inciting violence, actually, when you come down to it.

This parliament must take a strong stand for human rights in Cambodia, for strengthening of the democratic movement, for an independent investigation into the irregularities in the elections last year and to stand up for what is right, not to engage with the Cambodian government in trading off our strong stand for human rights if it means some awful, tawdry deal on asylum seekers. That would be a shocking thing to do. Instead, we know what we have to do, and that is make a strong stand. We call on Hun Sen to lift the ban on public assembly that has been implemented in Phnom Penh. We want to make sure that we get out of jail these 21 people who are currently there in no-one knows exactly what circumstances. We do not want to see a situation where workers trying to protest for better rights are shot down in the street. That is unacceptable and we need to stand up and say so. I look forward to Australia calling for an independent investigation into the election and I look forward to Australia getting behind the statement that it made to the United Nations in which our country identified those human rights abuses. It is time to take a strong stand against the Hun Sen government.

Question agreed to.

Tabling

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT: I present the following response to Senate resolutions as listed at item 13 on today's Order of Business:

Response to Senate resolution:

Minister for Environment (Mr Hunt) – Great Barrier Reef (agreed to 12 February 2014.

Senator WATERS (Queensland) (17:11): by leave—I take note of the response given by Minister Hunt to the Senate resolution regarding the Great Barrier Reef. I notice that today we received a response from the minister to the Senate's request and mine to table the public submissions into the Great Barrier Reef draft strategic assessment. As people may know, this is the document which will set the future of the Great Barrier Reef. It is a very important document. It is a document which also, as many people might not know, puts the reef in the hands of Premier Campbell Newman. It takes away federal approval powers and gives those entirely to the Queensland government. It is a crucial document, given that that state government has set upon a program of repealing as many environmental laws as it possibly can in the short time it has been in charge in Queensland.

So I was very interested in the minister's response to the resolution that public submissions be made public, as the name would suggest. Sadly, the minister has said that, actually, it is not really his problem—'Don't call us, we'll call you,' is in essence what the minister said today. The reason I requested this information is that there was some reporting of the mining industry making a submission to that process and seeking some favours, essentially, whereby the regulation of dredging and offshore dumping be weakened for the reef. I was very
interested to know that the mining industry wants to weaken protection for the reef and enable it to continue its disastrous program of offshore dumping simply because it is cheaper for the industry to dump this sludge in the water than it is to treat it safely and dispose of it on land. Hence the Senate's resolution.

The Australian public have a right to know what was said in those submissions—what the mining industry asked for, whether in fact they have had any truck with this minister and whether there have been any meetings or negotiations about whether those demands to weaken reef protection will be granted. But we do know that, in that process of the strategic assessment, the reef protection will be weakened, because Premier Campbell Newman will be put in charge of issuing approvals.

So I was quite disappointed with the federal minister's response today that it is not really his problem because the process is being run by the Queensland government and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority—so they will look into it, but do not hold your breath. I am afraid that is not good enough. This government has a responsibility to protect the reef and it is not just a legal responsibility, although of course it is that; it is also a moral responsibility, a responsibility that it seems to be doing all it can to shirk. We saw over the weekend some freedom of information documents released by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority that in fact show that the science is clear that dumping is dangerous in the reef—that offshore dumping of this sludge to make coal ports bigger and deeper for yet more export is damaging the reef and in fact should not proceed. We know that, sadly, Minister Hunt ignored that science and approved the expansion of Abbot Point anyway, such that we will now have the world's largest coal port, in a World Heritage area. I think that is utterly horrific and that you would find that many in the community would agree. Hence our concern about the disclosure of these submissions. The public have a right to know what favours the mining industry are seeking, what weakening they have sought in reef protection, whether they have had any truck with the minister, whether any quiet negotiations behind closed doors have gone on and why the federal government is not making this their responsibility. It is not okay for the minister to say, 'We are not running the process—it is nothing to do with us. Go away; it is not our problem.' It is our problem. It is the problem of all of us. It is a problem for the 63,000 people who need a healthy reef for their job and it is a problem for our budget bottom line, given that the reef brings in $6 billion every year and could continue to do so into the future if we look after it.

We will be pursuing this issue of making those submissions public. I am disappointed so far that the minister has said that he is liaising, 'but don't call us, we'll call you'. That is not good enough. We need those public submissions disclosed if the public is to have any confidence in this process of a strategic assessment for the reef. We will be following this up. Rest assured that the public cares very much about our reef and wants to know that its interests are being put ahead of the interests of the big mining companies and the interests of the Abbott government in doing favours for the mining industry.

Question agreed to.
DELEGATION REPORTS

Parliamentary Delegation to Mexico

Senator O'NEILL (New South Wales) (17:16): I present the report of the Australian parliamentary delegation to the 22nd annual meeting of the Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum held in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, from 12 January to 16 January 2014. I seek leave to move a motion in relation to the report.

Leave granted.

Senator O'NEILL: I move:

That the Senate take note of the document.

This was an amazing event. It is the first time I have had the opportunity to attend a meeting of the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum. It was the 22nd occasion on which the forum has met. The forum was hosted by Mexico in Puerto Vallarta, where all the participating Asia-Pacific nations gathered together. In our consideration of critical matters of importance to the entire region, we were led by the President of the Senate of Mexico, Senator Raul Cervantes Andrade. We moved very quickly into experiencing the Mexicans' hospitality, which particularly centred on their celebration of culture. The states across the great country of Mexico have an incredible variety of traditions which are represented in different forms of music and dance, variations in the language and different cultural practices. At the end of every day throughout our time in Puerto Vallarta we were treated to an incredible display by the Mexican community, who showed great pride in their wonderful history and cultural depth. Family is so important to Australians, and we got a sense of how important family was to the people of Mexico and how much they cared about and responded to their communities.

The work of the annual meeting of the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum was chaired by Senator Teofilo Torres Corzo. The parliamentary forum traversed three main areas: firstly, political and security matters; secondly, economic and trade matters; and, thirdly, regional cooperation in the Asia-Pacific. Much discussion was had around those three areas, with a fantastic range of resolutions put to the forum. The objectives that each of these areas was seeking to cover were declared in 1993 in Tokyo. They are important, particularly in light of current foreign affairs concerns about Russia, one of the participating countries. Identifying and discussing matters of common concern and interest in order to highlight them in a global context provided a foundation on which parliament-to-parliament relationships were made. At times like this, when we sense there is great tension and a crisis that will hopefully be averted, conversations between people who have shared a meal and some common understanding can become important in building the bridges needed to jointly pursue peace. Forums like this are important because they help to deepen the understanding of the policy concerns of participating members. A critical examination of political, social and cultural developments enables discussion of economic growth and integration to encourage and promote the whole region. National parliamentarians can work with one another in expressing those interests and finding ways to achieve great outcomes.

The Australian delegation was very active. Of the 41 draft resolutions proposed by 10 countries, Australia submitted six. I am very happy to say that the resolutions we put forward were adopted at the close of the forum. Those resolutions were in the areas of strengthening peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region; combatting terrorism, drug trafficking and
organised crime; trade and economic cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region; cooperation in facing climate change; strengthening social cohesion and the participation of youth in development; and promoting cooperation in education, culture, science and technology in the Asia-Pacific region.

I want to acknowledge my colleagues from the Australian federal parliament with whom I travelled. I can very proudly say that, in a context where our divisions are usually much more noted than our consensus, it was a team Australia delegation; we worked particularly well together as a team. The delegation was led by the Hon. Bronwyn Bishop, Speaker of the House, and included Mr Stephen Jones, member for Throsby; the Hon. Philip Ruddock, member for Berowra; Mr Mark Coulton, member for Parkes; and me. We were also assisted by Mr Damien Jones, adviser to the Speaker, and brilliantly supported by Ms Robyn McClelland, our delegation secretary and Serjeant-at-Arms in the other place.

Mexico was a very interesting place in which to hold this program, for us to learn so much more about it and to gather and to receive such support from the hosting community. The delegation also took the opportunity to engage in a bilateral program in Mexico City, where we really worked in the areas of understanding development with regard to agricultural production, matters of security and also the area of economic and trade matters.

Mexico City is a phenomenally interesting place geographically. It is in the middle of the lake, and one of the things we saw was the decay of infrastructure as slippage happened. One layer of temple was built over another and another. The reality is, though, that it is a thriving city and it is the major city of the 14th largest economy in the world. Mexico has a population of 118 million people.

In that great economy, one of the truly amazing things that they are doing is continuing the work of a Nobel Peace Prize winner from 1970 by the name of Dr Norman Borlaug. This is of great interest to Australian farmers. Indeed, Mark Coulton who was with us, found out that he was actually farming wheat that come from CIMMYT, which is the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre. The delegation was advised that this year will be Dr Borlaug's 100th birthday in March 2014; there will be an amazing recognition of his contribution to the health and well-being of millions, dare I say billions, of people on this planet through providing much more resilient forms of wheat and maize. This work continues.

I am pleased to let the Senate know that CIMMYT is opening an office in Indonesia this year and it is going to serve as a regional hub for Southeast Asia, particularly with the development and the deployment of stress tolerant, drought tolerant and nutritionally-enriched maize hybrids in Indonesia—that is the focus there. That is the kind of work that they do.

With regard to security issues, we were treated to a delegation of local experts who gave us incredible insights into the challenges and responses that are now occurring in the area of security—drug trade, arms trade and those sorts of issues—and the success that they are achieving. We also had a fantastic meeting with a delightful and erudite group of respected economic analysts and leading business people—Ambassador Andres Rozental, Valentín Diez Morodo and Roberto Newell García—who gave us insights into some of the challenges and opportunities that are available to Australian companies over in Mexico.

We developed a deeper understanding of not only potential opportunities to deepen trade but also barriers to trade and investment. I do want to put on the record a very important point
that they made, which was the difficulty of securing Australian visas for business people seeking to come on frequent visits to Australia. I think this was noted by the Speaker and I hope that there will be a response coming forthwith to ensure that important trade can continue.

Can I take the opportunity in this final moment to acknowledge the great work in terms of support that we were offered by DFAT, who provided us with a wonderful brief before we went and support throughout the actual forum held in Puerto Vallarta. Can I acknowledge also the kind welcome and great work in preparation for the visit by His Excellency, Mr Tim George, who was more than ably supported by Mr William Blomfield, the deputy head of mission. I would also like to acknowledge Her Excellency, Mrs Beatriz Lopez Gargallo, who met with us before we left. She is the Mexican ambassador here in Canberra.

Overall, I would say that the outcomes of building relationships across the great distances that divide us were certainly enabled by this parliamentary program. Australia's contributions were noted and we continue that conversation annually. I commend the report to the house. Question agreed to.

COMMITTEES
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters

Report


Ordered that the reports be printed.

Senator KROGER: by leave—I move:

That the Senate take note of the report.

I would actually like to make a few remarks in relation to this report in tabling it. The committee, of which I am a member, has considered the content of this statement and unanimously endorses it. On 12 December 2013, the Senate adopted the report of the Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration on the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Above the Line Voting) Bill 2013, which recommended that this bill be referred to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters for inquiry. As a result, the bill stood referred to the electoral matters committee.

The bill proposes to reform the system for electing candidates to the Senate in light of perceived attempts to game the system through preference deals at the 2013 federal election. This proposal is timely, as the current system has resulted in the election of candidates who attracted a very small proportion of the primary vote—less than one per cent, in some cases. The intention of the bill is to simplify the voting process to better allow voters to determine their own preferences.

The bill proposes an optional above the line voting system for electing candidates to the Senate. Electors would have the option either of numbering at least one group voting square above the line or at least as many candidates as there are to be elected at that particular election. Voters would then have the option to go on to number as many other squares as they wish. This would allow voters to express their preferences to the extent that they wish.
The committee is currently conducting a wide-ranging inquiry into the 2013 federal election and all matters relating thereto. The main focus of our committee for the early stages of this inquiry is in fact the current voting system used to elect senators. The committee is considering a range of different proposals, including several responses to the provisions outlined in this bill. There seems little point in covering the same territory twice or pre-empting the conclusions of this more than comprehensive inquiry. Given the wide-ranging nature of the inquiry into the federal election, the committee does not want to consider individual reforms by way of private bills. This committee takes very seriously its responsibilities when it comes to the future of Australia's electoral system and is intent on considering this proposal in the context of the range of reform options that will be presented during the course of this inquiry.

Additionally, I would like to note that, should this bill be passed by the Senate, the House will have a chance to consider its provisions in detail at that point. Therefore, the committee has decided not to inquire into this bill in a separate inquiry and will instead incorporate consideration of its provisions into the broader inquiry into the 2013 federal election. This will allow time and scope for the deepest consideration possible, as well as consideration of a range of other potential reforms to the Commonwealth Electoral Act which will, no doubt, come up in the course of the committee's consideration.

It is the committee's intention to report on the issue of Senate voting early, ahead of the full report. We are currently taking submissions on this specific issue, with the aim of reporting, if possible, before the parliamentary break before the budget. I would also like to note that there is a very comprehensive number of days that have been assigned to public hearings in all states, and a couple of the regions, which will provide us with a very broad brief for us to consider for our inquiry.

Question agreed to.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS
Questions Without Notice

Senator SINODINOS (New South Wales—Assistant Treasurer) (17:32): by leave—I rise to correct the record. In answer to a question I received in question time today, I incorrectly stated that I resigned as a director of Australian Water Holdings on 2 November 2011. The correct date is 9 November 2011, as disclosed in my statement of interests when I entered the Senate.

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (17:32): by leave—I thank Senator Sinodinos for letting me know he was coming in to make that correction. I would make the point that both now and in Senate question time he has failed to answer very significant questions about how it is possible that he played no role in the awarding of the contract and no letter has been tabled in the Senate in which he wrote to the Australian Water chairman, as chairman, in relation to the contractual relationship—

Senator Sinodinos: Before I entered the Senate.

Senator WONG: I will take the interjection. He said it was before he entered the Senate. But the statement to the Senate was made as a senator, and that statement was that the minister played no role in the awarding of the contract. He ought to explain how he could
have written a letter if he had played no role. He also has not sought to explain how it has been publicly reported that he was in fact in a meeting with Premier O'Farrell's chief of staff about this very issue. If that is the case, how is it possible that that can stack up with the assertion he has made to the Senate, in the chamber, as a part of his statement?

Senator Sinodinos: Because the contracts were negotiated after I left.

Senator Wong: The minister continues to interject. If he has something to add on this, I invite him—and the

BILLS

Primary Industries (Excise) Levies Amendment (Dairy Produce) Bill 2014

First Reading

Bill received from the House of Representatives.

Senator Sinodinos (New South Wales—Assistant Treasurer) (17:36): I move:

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

Question agreed to.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Senator Sinodinos (New South Wales—Assistant Treasurer) (17:36): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Leave granted.

The speech read as follows—

PRIMARY INDUSTRIES (EXCISE) LEVIES AMENDMENT (DAIRY PRODUCE) BILL 2014

Australia's dairy farmers lead the world in producing efficient, sustainable, and quality produce to meet domestic and international demand. In the 2012/13 financial year, the Australian dairy industry produced 9.2 billion litres of milk for domestic use. The dairy industry overall represents a $13 billion farm, manufacturing and export industry, with export earnings in 2012/13 of $2.76 billion. Maintaining the health of Australia's dairy herd is vital to the industry and the nation.

The Primary Industries (Excise) Levies Act 1999 provides for the collection of levies that are used to fund initiatives that will increase productivity and sustainability of industry. Primary industries levies enable relevant industries to pool effort and resources to effectively manage priority issues. These initiatives include research and development, marketing and promotion and plant and animal health programs.

The levy system enables industries to remain highly competitive in world markets. The Australian Animal Health Council levy on dairy produce under the Act was introduced to provide funding for animal health programs carried out by Animal Health Australia. The funding also provides for the dairy industry's annual membership rates to Animal Health Australia. For the dairy industry, the levy is payable by producers who deliver or supply dairy produce for the manufacturing of dairy produce, such as whole milk or whole milk products.

The amount paid by producers is based on the milk fat and protein content.

Australian Dairy Farmers Limited, the industry's national representative body, has requested the preparation and introduction of this Bill into parliament. The Primary Industries (Excise) Levies Amendment (Dairy Produce) Bill 2014 will enable the dairy industry to continue to meet its obligations
in relation to its Animal Health Australia annual membership and other animal health and welfare initiatives. Australian Dairy Farmers Limited is also party to the Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement. This Bill will allow the dairy industry to meet its obligations as a signatory to this agreement.

The Bill amends the *Primary Industries (Excise) Levies Act 1999* by increasing the maximum rate of the Australian Animal Health Council levies on dairy produce. The maximum rates will increase from 0.058 to 0.145 of a cent per kilogram of milk fat and from 0.1385 to 0.34625 of a cent per kilogram of milk protein. The increases to the milk fat and protein levy maximum rates will enable application for future increases to the operative levies provided for under the Primary Industries (Excise) Levies Regulations 1999, if required. The current operative rates, which were set in 1999, are at the maximum level allowable under the Act.

While the proposed maximum rate increase is significant, the Bill will not increase the actual levy paid by industry members. It should be noted that any increase to the operative rate requires a case to be put by industry to government, demonstrating widespread industry consultation and strong support as set out in the Australian Government's Levy Principles and Guidelines.

The Primary Industries (Excise) Levies Amendment (Dairy Produce) Bill 2014 is important to ensure Australian dairy farmers are able to be partners in the biosecurity system and maintain the health of Australia's dairy herd.

Debate adjourned.

**Tax Bonus for Working Australians Repeal Bill 2013**

**First Reading**

Bill received from the House of Representatives.

*Senator SINODINOS* (New South Wales—Assistant Treasurer) (17:37): I move:

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

Question agreed to.

Bill read a first time.

**Second Reading**

*Senator SINODINOS* (New South Wales—Assistant Treasurer) (17:37): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Leave granted.

*The speech read as follows—*

This Bill repeals the *Tax Bonus for Working Australians Act (No. 2) 2009* (‘Tax Bonus Act’) to ensure that the Commissioner of Taxation does not make any further tax bonus payments, which are more commonly known as the '$900 stimulus cheques'.

The Government made a commitment to end this waste during the 2013 Federal Election, and this repeal Bill delivers on that commitment.

Tax bonuses were paid to Australian residents who paid tax in the 2007-08 income year and who met certain income tests.

The payments were designed to provide stimulus to the Australian economy at the height of the Global Financial Crisis (‘GFC’).
Eligible taxpayers received $900 where their taxable income was up to $80,000; $600 where their taxable income was over $80,000 but less than $90,000; or $250 where their taxable income was over $90,000 but less than $100,000.

Most payments were made in 2009, but a number of payments have continued to be made because of either the late banking of cheques, or the issuing of an amended assessment for the 2007-08 income year.

In fact more than 480,000 payments totalling more than $400 million were made over the financial years following the original payment of stimulus cheques between July 2009 and the present, when we are now some four and a half years on from the GFC.

This includes the fact that last financial year (the 2012-13 financial year) in which more than 15,000 cheques were issued totalling around $13 million of borrowed money.

If it wasn't bad enough that the Government was borrowing money to pay for $900 stimulus cheques four years on after the height of the Global Financial Crisis, it is worse that these stimulus payments continue to be sent to taxpayers living overseas.

Since its introduction, more than 16,000 stimulus payments have been sent directly to taxpayers living overseas, totalling around $14 million of borrowed money, all supposedly to provide stimulus to the domestic Australian economy.

Over 1,000 of these stimulus payments worth nearly $1 million have walked out the door in the four years since July 2009.

Worse still is the fact that stimulus cheques have been, and are still being made out to those who are deceased.

Since the introduction of the stimulus cheques more than 21,000 payments have been made to deceased taxpayers, totalling more than $18 million of borrowed taxpayer funds.

Of these 21,000 stimulus payments which have been made to the deceased, over 2,000 of these payments have gone out the door since July 2009.

This includes the payment of 40 stimulus cheques to deceased individuals so far this financial year.

The total amount of borrowed Government money spent on stimulus payments to date is estimated to be around $7.7 billion.

At the time of introduction of the original legislation in 2009, the Government opposed the entire economic stimulus package, including payments to be authorised by the Tax Bonus Act, on the grounds that the package was poorly targeted, ineffective in supporting employment, and unaffordable.

Given that stimulus to the economy is no longer required and time has moved on since the GFC, the Government considers that further payments are not warranted.

This represents an opportunity to stop further government waste and is a step towards more prudent Budget management.

The ATO has ceased issuing cheques in most circumstances, except when it has been requested by the taxpayer.

Therefore, to ensure that further unnecessary tax bonus payments are not be made by the ATO, this bill repeals the Tax Bonus Act.

We can no longer afford to be borrowing money to pay for this type of spending.

In fact Government spending has never returned to levels prior to that of the Global Financial Crisis. In the 2008-09 financial year alone, real Government spending grew by more than 12%.
The Government is now spending over $100 billion a year more than the final year of the Howard Government.

That is why this Government is proceeding with a Commission of Audit which has been tasked to assess the role and scope of Government, as well as ensuring taxpayers' money is spent wisely and in an efficient manner.

This Bill is a step in the right direction when it comes to ending waste in Government.

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEES
Abbott Government's Commission of Audit Select Committee
Community Affairs References Committee
Economics Legislation Committee
Economics References Committee
Education and Employment Legislation Committee
Education and Employment References Committee
Electoral Matters Committee
Environment and Communications Legislation Committee
Environment and Communications References Committee
Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee
Finance and Public Administration References Committee
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee
Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee
Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee
National Broadband Network Select Committee
National Disability Insurance Scheme
Northern Australia Select Committee
Public Works Committee
Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee
Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee
School Funding Select Committee

Membership

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Whish-Wilson) (17:36): The President has received a letter requesting changes in the membership of committees.
Senator SINODINOS (New South Wales—Assistant Treasurer) (17:36): by leave—I move:

That senators be discharged from and appointed to committees as follows:

Abbott Government's Commission of Audit—Select Committee—
Appointed—Participating member: Senator O’Sullivan

Community Affairs Legislation and References Committees—
Appointed—Participating member: Senator O’Sullivan

Economics Legislation and References Committees—
Appointed—Participating member: Senator O’Sullivan

Education and Employment Legislation and References Committees—
Appointed—Participating member: Senator O’Sullivan

Electoral Matters—Joint Standing Committee—
Appointed [for the purposes of the committee’s inquiry into the 2013 election]—Participating member: Senator O’Sullivan

Environment and Communications Legislation and References Committees—
Appointed—Participating member: Senator O’Sullivan

Finance and Public Administration Legislation and References Committees—
Appointed—Participating member: Senator O’Sullivan

Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation and References Committees—
Appointed—Participating member: Senator O’Sullivan

Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation and References Committees—
Appointed—Participating member: Senator O’Sullivan

National Broadband Network—Select Committee—
Appointed—Participating member: Senator O’Sullivan

National Disability Insurance Scheme—Joint Standing Committee—
Discharged—Senator McKenzie
Appointed—Senator O’Sullivan

Northern Australia—Joint Select Committee—
Appointed—Participating member: Senator O’Sullivan

Public Works—Joint Statutory Committee—
Discharged—Senator Boyce
Appointed—Senator O’Sullivan

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee—
Discharged—Senator Boswell
Appointed—Senator O’Sullivan
Participating member: Senator Boswell

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee—
Appointed—Participating member: Senator O’Sullivan
School Funding—Select Committee—
Discharged—Senator McKenzie
Appointed—
Senator O’Sullivan
Participating member: Senator McKenzie.

Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties

Membership

Message received from the House of Representatives notifying the Senate of changes in the membership of the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit, and the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties.

BILLS

Clean Energy Legislation (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013
Ozone Protection and Synthetic Greenhouse Gas (Import Levy) Amendment (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013
Ozone Protection and Synthetic Greenhouse Gas (Manufacture Levy) Amendment (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013
True-up Shortfall Levy (General) (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013
True-up Shortfall Levy (Excise) (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013
Customs Tariff Amendment (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013
Excise Tariff Amendment (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013
Clean Energy (Income Tax Rates and Other Amendments) Bill 2013

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That these bills be now read a second time.

Senator LUNDY (Australian Capital Territory) (17:38): Australian political representatives on both sides of the ideological divide are often accused of being short-sighted. Too concerned about immediate political advantage and winning the day, they forget about the long-term challenges facing Australia.

For the most part, I think this is an unfair characterisation. Many of the policies of the previous Labor government demonstrate that we were ready to face the harder and long-term challenges that Australia has been confronted with. These included initiatives designed to diversify Australia's economy, so it was less reliant on our mining exports; infrastructure projects such as the National Broadband Network, which the Australia of today needs if we want to stay competitive in the economy of tomorrow; and policies such as the Better Schools package, which sought to overhaul the model of education funding in Australia and ensure
that the workforce of Australia's future had access to people with a world-class education. None of these policies were short-sighted. In fact, I can confidently say that they all had the long-term interests of Australia and Australians at their core. However, I cannot say this about the bills we are now debating: the Clean Energy Legislation (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013 and related bills.

It is without a doubt one of the most short-sighted, narrow-minded and senseless pieces of legislation I have seen in my 18 years as a senator in the Australian parliament. This bill not only repeals a piece of legislation that is working; it replaces it with something that even its proponents know will not work. Labor's position on climate change is clear, because the science of climate change is clear.

Over 97 per cent of published climate scientists agree that climate change is real and that it is driven by man-made greenhouse gas emissions. Since the beginning of the 20th century global average air temperature has increased by just under one degree Celsius. The average temperature in Australia has increased by 0.9 degrees over the last century and every decade since the 1950s has been hotter than the one preceding it.

We know that the speed of this climb in global temperature is unprecedented in the history of the earth. The World Meteorological Organization records show that the decade from 2001 to 2010 was the world's warmest decade and that the 2000s were warmer than the 1990s, which, in turn, were warmer than the 1980s.

We also know that, over the same period, greenhouse gas emissions have continued to climb. Since the industrial revolution, human activities such as the burning of fossil fuels, agriculture and land clearing have increased the amount of greenhouse gases in our atmosphere.

We are now seeing the environmental impacts of this climate change. Our oceans are changing, with climbing greenhouse emissions as well. Firstly, the oceans are becoming warmer. The world’s oceans absorb 90 per cent of the heat input caused by greenhouse gas emissions. Sea temperature is the single greatest determinate of the diversity, abundance and distribution of marine life in Australian coastal waters. It stands to reason that any change in sea temperature could therefore have a devastating effect on the marine ecosystems that surround Australia, including of course our World Heritage listed Great Barrier Reef.

Greenhouse emissions are also making the world’s oceans more acidic. For tens of millions of years the world's oceans have remained at a relatively stable acidity level. However, in the last 200 years, since the beginning of the industrial revolution, we have witnessed a rapid and substantial increase in the acidity of the world's oceans.

The oceans absorb carbon dioxide where it forms carbonic acid. It has a massive capacity to do this. We now know that about half of the anthropogenic carbon emissions have been absorbed by the ocean over time. That actually slowed the rate of climate change as the ocean took on a disproportionate amount of emissions compared to the atmosphere.

This acidification has considerable environmental impacts, slowing the growth of hard-shelled organisms. This may seem minor, but these same organisms are the basis of the marine ecosystems that produce the fish we eat. With over a third of the world’s population relying on seafood as their primary source of protein this represents a major problem.
Finally, changes in atmospheric temperature are causing the world's sea levels to rise through a combination of melting ice caps and thermal expansion of the oceans’ water. We know that even a slight rise in ocean level could have a serious impact on Australia’s eastern seaboard, not to mention the many island nations in our region which face devastation with rising sea levels.

Climate scientists have not just pointed out the correlation between emissions and warming; they have discovered the causes underlying the link. The ability of carbon dioxide to influence the earth’s climate has been understood for well over a century. We know that atmospheric carbon dioxide is one of the most significant drivers of global climate change. We also have some idea of what the consequences will be if the world fails to act to mitigate the effects of climate change. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has warned the world that aggressive mitigation strategies are required to hold global warming to less than two degrees Celsius.

The Labor Party accepts all of this and we believe that something needs to be done about it. During our tenure of government we implemented an integrated set of policies to drive deep reductions in carbon pollution, while enabling us to achieve more ambitious targets in the long term.

Firstly, we introduced an emissions trading scheme, which put a legal limit on pollution for Australia’s 370 largest polluters, specifically formulated to cut pollution in the cheapest and most effective way. Every year this legal limit reduces the ability to ensure that Australia meets its pollution reduction targets and, by extension, our international obligation in the fight against climate change.

By pricing carbon, the ETS encourages businesses to develop technologies and processes that curb their carbon emissions. In keeping with this we gave unprecedented support to the renewable energy sector. Our renewable energy target guaranteed that at least 20 per cent of Australia's electricity would come from renewable resources by 2020. Labor invested $3 billion in the Australian Renewable Energy Agency to support innovations that not only increased the supply of renewable energy in Australia but also made our country competitive in the international market for renewable energy technology. ARENA, which is the acronym for the Australian Renewable Energy Agency, supports 100 projects in Australia.

We also established the $10 billion Clean Energy Finance Corporation, which this government tried to abolish the last time we sat in this place. We did this because we respected the consensus of the world's scientific community. And we did it because we took the advice of Australia's leading economists, who still say that a market based mechanism would be the most effective means of reducing emissions without damaging our national economy. Unsurprisingly, these policies are working. During our time in office Australia's wind capacity trebled, more than one million solar panels were installed, compared with only 7,500 under the Howard government, and employment more than doubled in the renewable energy sector.

Within one year of the introduction of the carbon price we saw a significant impact on Australia’s emissions and our economy—but not in the way this government would have us believe. In fact, 150,000 jobs were created with the carbon price in place. Our economy grew by 2½ per cent and inflation remained at record lows. Crucially, though, Australia’s pollution
in the National Electricity Market decreased by seven per cent, while our renewable energy generation grew by 25 per cent.

By any measure, the carbon-pricing mechanism was a success: emissions declined in the industries targeted by the price, the renewable energy sector grew and the economy remained strong. Yet today we have a bill in front of us that will abolish this mechanism and replace it with a package of legislation as worthless as the paper it is printed on—Direct Action. Under the coalition’s Direct Action, instead of having Australia’s 370 largest polluters pay for their pollution and the costs that pollution imposes on the rest of us, Australian taxpayers will finance a slush fund to pay polluters to cut their emissions without any guarantees that equivalent emissions reductions are actually occurring—the Emissions Reduction Fund. This fund relies on the ‘baseline and credit’ methodology—a methodology under which it is impossible to know whether emissions reductions are truly additional or whether they would have happened anyway. And despite what the government might say, no amount of rigorous policy design can fix this fundamental flaw. No independent analysis and no reputable economist or climate scientist has been able to demonstrate that Direct Action can deliver on the coalition government’s claims. Their policy will remove a cap on Australia’s carbon emissions, meaning that our environment will once again be put aside for the short-term economic gain of those who are big polluters.

But worst of all, perhaps—and there are many bad things about it—this policy will see Australia default on its 2020 reduction targets. We know it and the government knows it. Mr Abbott has already indicated that he intends to abandon Australia’s emissions reductions targets when Direct Action fails. And he is scrapping the organisation that recommended these targets—the Climate Change Authority.

The reality is that the coalition government is happy to sit back and do nothing while Australia fails to meet its obligations to the international community and to do its part to combat global climate change. That is exactly how Direct Action will be viewed by the international community—as a refusal by Australia to act while the rest of the world moves to tackle climate change. Ninety-nine countries, including Australia, have made formal pledges to the United Nations to reduce carbon pollution. Collectively that covers over 80 per cent of global emissions and 90 per cent of the global economy. Thirty-five countries, including Australia, have national emissions trading schemes. Collectively they have a population of 560 million people. When we include subnational emissions trending schemes, that number grows to 900 million. By 2015 that number will be closer to two billion. China even plans to introduce a nationwide ETS after 2015. But no other country relies on grants-tendering schemes like the Emission Reductions Fund as their primary policy to reduce emissions. And that is because no other country has a government that is foolish enough to implement a policy that will drain their budget, trash their international reputation and do nothing to reduce carbon emissions.

We used to be in a privileged position here in Australia. We used to argue about whether Australia should lead the world in the fight against climate change. Labor always believed that we should—that if we could then we should. We had survived the global financial crisis thanks to the stable management of our economy by the Labor government and we were best positioned to develop the clean energy policies and the technologies the rest of the world would come to rely on. That is what the clean energy package was designed to do for
Australia, and what it still could do for Australia—as long as the bill before us today does not pass.

I find it very depressing to know that with a change of government Australia has gone from leading the world to debating whether Australia should be left behind. And make no mistake: if this piece of legislation passes through our parliament, Australia will, I believe, be left behind. It will be humiliating for Australia and a great blight on our history as it is told in later years. As a country we cannot hide from the economic or environmental impacts climate change is going to have on Australia. One way or the other, we will be forced to transform into a clean energy economy. But for every day that this government delays, for every backward step it takes and forces the rest of the country to take, it will only make that transition more difficult and ultimately more painful for the people of Australia—particularly future generations, who will be left to pick up the pieces of the era of neglect.

That is why the Clean Energy Legislation (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill and related bills that we are debating should not pass. As a nation we should not sacrifice our long-term stability and prosperity and our international reputation so that Australia's big polluters can continue to make more money today. If we do, history will judge this government and this parliament as hopelessly short-sighted—and none of us will be able to say that that is an unfair judgement.

Australia is a proud place of extraordinary innovators. Their ability to take great ideas and turn them into inspiring technologies designed to shape our country for the future and to meet those modern challenges is, I think, unsurpassed. We were able to demonstrate, through a period of government, the success of great Australian ideas turning into great Australian businesses, with those businesses contributing to the economic transformation that we all know is so essential for our country.

Our abundance of sunshine, our tracts of land and the availability of space mean that we are in a unique position to harness the sun's energy and not only replace, through renewable technologies, what we are currently using in fossil fuels but do it in a way that the rest of the world can look at and be inspired by. This in turn is an export industry in itself.

I recall the years very early on in the Howard government when I lamented the reductions in the higher education budget of the late nineties that saw our leading position in the area of photovoltaic technology diminish over the subsequent decade because of that lack of early investment. While we were able to restore that position on many fronts, through a period of Labor government, we are now seeing the same pattern again. The disinvestment that is occurring in that sector, and the walking away from a program of investment that would see us meet our renewable energy targets, not only fails to address the issue of climate change but is disabling what is arguably one of our most significant future export opportunities in renewable energy that Australia is likely to see as we move through the next challenging decade.

Senator DI NATALE (Victoria) (17:55): I would like to take this opportunity to reflect while we are here having a debate about whether to repeal our clean energy laws. I do not think a debate about how best to respond to climate change is a bad thing—it is a good thing: there are many different views on the best strategies to tackle climate change, many of which are perfectly reasonable and worthy of debate. The merits of a fixed tax versus a floating price, the degree to which overseas emissions should be allowed, the role of direct industry subsidies, the role of a renewable energy target and complementary financing mechanisms are
all important policy questions—and we should debate them. But that is not what we are debating today.

This is not a debate about the most appropriate economic response to the threat of runaway climate change. What is so disappointing today is that we have a debate because the Australian parliament is still divided on whether climate change is worth responding to at all, on whether climate change exists, on whether climate change is real. We have been over this issue many times, and there are many things I could say, but for me the most interesting question is this: how is it that something that is accepted as a scientific fact in most other developed countries is still the subject of such intense debate here in Australia?

I say that because the existence of climate change is not a matter of opinion. It is a scientific question that we can answer empirically. I do accept that science is messy. Scientific discovery is not really an event; it is a process—Eureka moments are the exception rather than the rule. It is messy: it involves real-world experimentation, it involves developing complex models, it involves repeating experiments, it involves publishing results and it involves testing your conclusions by publishing your evidence in the peer-reviewed literature. The conclusion of the scientific process when it comes to climate change tells us something unambiguously: that human induced climate change is real, that it is happening and that it is cause for enormous concern. Most countries accept this; they accept that climate change is a real threat to our way of life. They accept that not taking strong action is simply unthinkable.

In most countries this is not a political issue—it is not a left-or-right issue, it is not a conservative-versus-progressive issue. In fact, in many countries it is the economic dries, in the tradition of Margaret Thatcher, that are leading the charge, that are pushing for a robust response to climate change—because they know that the biggest hump in the road on the way to economic growth is now climate change; they understand that you cannot talk about jobs, housing, cost of living or taxes without taking into account the effects of climate change. So what is it in this country that makes it such a hot political issue? Why do we have so many armchair experts who claim to have some special insight into the science?

Reflecting on that question, the example of tobacco control is quite instructive because the parallels are quite stark. I would like to point to the work of the authors of a publication called *The Merchants of Doubt*, who have documented these parallels in great detail. It is now 50 years since the Surgeon General, in 1964, stated categorically that smoking was a cause of lung cancer. Yet it took decades before governments acted. Why the delay? Many of the same factors are at play when it comes to climate change. In both examples what you see is the role played by a small group of hand-picked scientists, the role of vested interests, the role of the media, and the lack of political leadership all coming together in a lethal cocktail, where the community are confused and where complacency and inertia are the result.

In the smoking example, we had the tobacco industry hand-pick and pay a small group of sympathetic scientists who believed that the attempt to establish a link between tobacco and lung cancer was part of some grand conspiracy to control people's lives and restrict their freedoms—no different to the way people with environmental concerns are seen today. We saw tobacco industry executives cultivate relationships with key journalists. They targeted journalists they knew were sympathetic, and they appealed to this notion of journalistic balance, as though there were two valid sides to this debate. Here, when it comes to climate change, we have people like our own Bob Carter, who is an adviser to the IPA. He is paid a
monthly fee by their American counterpart, the Heartland Institute, as 'part of a program to pay high-profile individuals who regularly and publicly counter the alarmist message'. And let us not forget that we have Morris Newman joining the tinfoil hat brigade as one of this government's chief business advisors.

When it comes to the media it is of course hard to go past News Limited's reporting of climate change. But it is not just the Murdoch press that should be singled out. We have a number of outlets, including our own ABC, who have bought into the idea that balanced reporting means giving equal time to opposing arguments, even when one argument has no basis in fact and has been comprehensively discredited. I have always believed that good journalism is not about subscribing to some misplaced idea about balance; it is about getting to the truth.

I want to say something about the creeping censorship that has emerged in this debate—for example, the howls of outrage when someone has the temerity to link extreme weather events with climate change. Soon after the typhoon in the Philippines, for example, I made a simple, very factual observation that extreme weather is the face of climate change. My colleague Adam Bandt made a similar point when discussing the unseasonal bushfires in New South Wales in October last year. And, of course, we got the mock outrage from the usual suspects, with people like Andrew Bolt saying it was disgraceful that the Greens used a natural disaster to pursue a political agenda, that we would seek to gain political advantage out of this event; that cheap opportunism of this sort is to be deplored, that our comments were insensitive and hurtful, and that we were ideologues who would use any human tragedy for our own selfish political ends.

The ultimate disrespect here is not by those people who are prepared to state what is a simple fact. The disrespect here to victims is by self-appointed censors who indicate that it is now inappropriate that we say when we are seeing something that harms people around the world. Is it the wrong time to talk about road safety if a bus goes off a cliff? Is it wrong to be talking about the responsibility of the coal mine operators in Morwell while the town is blanketed in smoke? Should we not talk about alcohol related violence when someone is in intensive care? Of course we should. That is precisely the time to talk about it. At a time when these things occupy the public consciousness, that is precisely the time to talk about it.

It is not just the Greens who say that. Listen to what the delegate to the Warsaw climate conference said days after the typhoon in the Philippines:

To anyone who continues to deny the reality that is climate change, I dare you to get off your ivory tower and away from the comfort of your armchair. I dare you to go to the islands of the Pacific, the islands of the Caribbean and the islands of the Indian ocean and see the impacts of rising sea levels; to the mountainous regions of the Himalayas and the Andes to see communities confronting glacial floods, to the Arctic where communities grapple with the fast dwindling polar ice caps … Likewise, people living in rural communities affected by bushfires—such as people in my community; I live in an area that is and has been affected by bushfires—have expressed their gratitude to me for daring to say that climate change is a factor in bushfires.

It is easy to blame the media and focus on vested interests, but what we cannot ignore here is the complete lack of political leadership we have seen. I was disappointed when Labor walked away from what was then the greatest moral challenge of our generation and proposed a citizen's assembly. But of course the great criticism here must be directed at the Abbott
government. The real political opportunism here was Abbott's seizing the leadership on the back of his party's division over the issue of climate change and suddenly turning an environmental catastrophe into a cost-of-living debate.

What we needed during the last parliament was someone from either side of politics to talk about the reality of climate change in terms of what it really is: a looming environmental catastrophe—one of the great health challenges of the coming generation. Then there is the impact it will have on our neighbours and what it will mean in terms of rising oceans and creating a new class of climate refugees. That is the sort of debate that was missing, because we had two parties falling over each other to tell Australians just how tough they have it and that this was simply a cost-of-living issue.

I could say that many of the actions of the various players in this—that is, the media, the hand-picked scientists, the business advisers and some of the politicians—are motivated by greed or malice. I think that might be true in some cases. But, for the most part, I think something more powerful is at play when it comes to the climate change debate.

What unites most of the opponents of action on climate change is that they live in denial—and I have spoken about denial before. It is a powerful defence mechanism because it helps us deal with uncomfortable or, dare I say it, inconvenient truths. I saw it many times in my medical practice—the smoker who coughs up blood but refuses to go and see a GP or the lady who has a lump but refuses to go and see a GP. They do not see their GP because they worry about what the implications might be.

When it comes to climate change, something very similar is going on. We have people who are ill-equipped, or perhaps simply unable, to deal with what is a very uncomfortable truth. It is uncomfortable because climate change challenges, at its heart, the conservative world view, this world view that grants humans dominion over the earth. It challenges conservative notions of progress and, above all, it forces people on that side of politics to admit that the market has failed. Almost exclusively, people on the conservative side of politics have an almost blinkered world view when it comes to the infallibility of markets. They see any challenge to the primacy of markets as a heresy and that any government intervention is an evil to be avoided at all costs. It is a belief system, an article of faith—no different from any other sort of fundamentalism.

The irony is that opponents of putting a price on pollution are actually arguing against market principles. It might surprise people to know that many of us over here understand the importance of markets. But we also recognise that markets fail. Where there are monopolies, where there is information asymmetry or where there are externalities—as we have seen with climate change—markets do not operate efficiently. Climate change represents the most spectacular example of market failure our generation has ever seen. That is why most economists understand that putting a price on pollution is the most efficient way of combating climate change—and it is why the coalition's Direct Action Plan has no support among the mainstream economic community. Tony Abbott once said that carbon dioxide was an odourless, colourless gas. The Direct Action Plan is friendless and it stinks.

I will now move on to the carbon tax bills. Australians have every right to be proud of the package of clean energy legislation that was introduced in the last parliament. The clean energy industry was bolstered by the Clean Energy Finance Corporation and by the renewable energy target—something else that is in the coalition's crosshairs. Combined with the
emissions trading scheme and the establishment of the Climate Change Authority, it was one of the great achievements of the last parliament. The Greens understood it was not perfect, but we were proud of it. Sadly, however, it was undermined from day one. It was undermined by political opportunism, cheap shots, misleading claims and simple slogans.

It is easy to wreck things. Being a wrecker is easy. Tearing things down is easy. Building things is hard. What we have now is a government made up of wreckers who want to tear things down, who want to tear down action on climate change, Medicare and our public education system. Tearing things down is easy. Creating things, building things, nation building—that is hard and that is where this government is failing.

This is not a debate about electricity bills. It is not about scoring cheap political points and settling scores. It is not about Left-Right politics. It is not about conservationists versus obstructionists. This is a debate about life and death. Reducing it to a misleading discussion about a few dollars here and there is irresponsible. That is where the real political opportunism is happening. Failing to face up to the challenge of climate change because there is some political mileage to be gained is the very essence of political opportunism. I am certain that Australians of the future, the generations who come after us, will look back on today's debates with a mixture of anger and bewilderment. They will know that, unlike the generations before us, we had the science and we had the knowledge—and yet we failed to act.

The clean energy package implemented with the support of the Greens represented real hope in turning the tide on climate change and putting Australia on a clean energy footing. To step back now—now that the evidence is clear, now that we have the knowledge—would be a great tragedy. It would be a complete abrogation of our responsibility to future generations. I therefore urge the Senate to do what is right. We cannot pass these bills and we cannot walk away once again from the great moral challenge of our generation. We must protect our clean energy laws.

At the request of Senator Milne, I move:

At the request of Senator Milne, I move:

"but the Senate:

(a) rejects this bill and the related bills;

(b) recognises that:

(i) the world is on track for 4 degrees of warming; and

(ii) warming of less than 1 degree is already intensifying extreme weather events in Australia and around the world with enormous costs to life and property;

(c) calls on the government to:

(i) protect the Australian people and environment from climate change by approving no new coal mines or extensions of existing mines, or new coal export terminals; and

(ii) adopt a trajectory of 40-60% below 2000 levels by 2030 and net carbon zero by 2050 emissions reduction target in global negotiations for a 2015 treaty."

Senator SESELJA (Australian Capital Territory) (18:14): When we have these debates it is worth stating clearly what they are about—and also what they are not about. I will briefly address some of the contribution from Senator Di Natale and the Greens. It is not about the alarmist ravings that we heard from Senator Di Natale and the Greens. It is not about the
capitalise on tragic deaths and link every fire, drought, flood, cold snap, heatwave and cyclone to climate change. It is not about that. It is nice that Senator Di Natale spent his last five minutes talking about the bills in front of us. This debate today is about honouring the will of the Australian people.

It might surprise the Greens, but of the parties represented here only the Greens have gone to the last couple of elections supporting a carbon tax. The Liberal Party did not go to the last couple of elections supporting a carbon tax and the Labor Party did not go to the last couple of elections promising to introduce a carbon tax.

Senator Di Natale interjecting—

Senator SESELJA: Senator Di Natale rightly interjects, and I pay him credit. The Greens are being consistent on this issue. They are wrong, but they are being consistent—as opposed to the Labor Party, who have been nothing but deceitful on this issue. Senator Di Natale is spot-on when he says the Greens are honouring what they said they would do before the election. They are wrong; they should honour the mandate that we have. But the Labor Party has now gone to two consecutive elections lying to the Australian people about the carbon tax. They have gone to—

Senator McLucas: Mr Acting Deputy President, I have a point of order on appropriate language. The senator should select his words in line with Senate and parliamentary language.

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Whish-Wilson): There is no point of order.

Senator SESELJA: We note the Labor Party's sensitivity on this issue, through Senator McLucas. They have not told the truth. They have lied to the Australian people for a couple of elections in a row. That is fundamentally what this debate is about. It is about honouring the will of the Australian people—not the eight per cent who voted for the Greens and voted for a carbon tax. It is about honouring the will of the 90-odd per cent who voted against the carbon tax. That is what this debate is about.

Never before had a government sought to sabotage its own economy as the Labor-Greens coalition did when it introduced the carbon tax. I think never before has a major political party lied about the same issue two elections in a row. For two elections in a row the Labor Party has gone to the people and lied about its intentions on the carbon tax. The first was in 2010, when they said they would not bring it in. The second was when, having not honoured that promise, they went to the 2013 election promising to terminate the carbon tax. Now they have the opportunity and they are choosing to dishonour that promise again.

The mums and dads, the small-business men and women, and the pensioners of Australia are waiting for the judgement they delivered at the last election to be honoured in this place. That is what they are waiting for. They are waiting for the judgement that they gave on this issue to be honoured, and the Senate should respect the judgement of the Australian people. They should respect the judgement of those small-business men and women, those mums and dads, and those pensioners who are doing it tough, who want that relief and who are now waiting for what they voted for—and what the overwhelming majority of people voted for—to be honoured.

In introducing this bill to the House of Representatives the Prime Minister took the first and most important step in building a more prosperous economy for all Australians. This was
a tax introduced by the previous government after promising not to do it. They then promised
to terminate it. It is worth reflecting on what Kevin Rudd had to say on it. Before the 2013
election, he said:

The Government has decided to terminate the carbon tax to help cost-of-living pressures for families
and to reduce costs for small business …

We agree that terminating the carbon tax would reduce cost-of-living pressures and would be
good for small business in this country. That is what we are seeking to do through these bills.

This is a tax that unfortunately does not help the environment but does hurt consumers and
businesses. It is a tax which is all pain for no gain. It is staggering to fathom the true cost of
the tax: a $7.6 billion hit on the Australian economy in 2012-13 and a direct hit on 75,000
businesses. It is $7.6 billion for an emissions decrease of only 0.1 per cent. Scrapping the
carbon tax will mean that families, on average, will be $550 better off this financial year. It
will mean that electricity bills will be $200 lower a year and gas bills $70 lower a year.
Electricity prices went up by around 10 per cent because of the carbon tax and we know—as
Kevin Rudd himself said, when he was promising to scrap it before the election—that
scrapping the tax will relieve families of that cost burden.

We saw a recent example right here in the ACT, with the Independent Competition and
Regulatory Commission's determination. We know that in July 2012 electricity prices went up
in the ACT by 17.7 per cent, and around 14 per cent of that 17 per cent increase was
attributed to the carbon tax. We heard recently, in the determination from the ICRC, that the
complete removal of the price on carbon considered in isolation would cause ACT retail
electricity prices to fall by about 12 per cent. That is what we would see right here in the
ACT.

The senior commissioner of the ICRC said:

It is important that customers enjoy the lower retail electricity prices that would flow from such a move
as early as possible.

I say, 'Hear, hear,' to that. We on this side agree wholeheartedly with the statement of the
senior commissioner of the ICRC

It is important that we get this tax repealed as soon as possible so that electricity users around
this country can enjoy lower prices and have their cost-of-living pressures eased. These are
real cost reductions of hundreds of dollars, and we did not hear anything about it from the
senator representing the ACT, Senator Lundy. There was no mention of the 12 per cent
decrease that would occur here in the ACT if she and her colleagues voted for lower
electricity and gas prices for consumers here and right around the nation. If it is not removed,
families will not get the relief that they deserve.

The repeal of the carbon tax will enhance the competitiveness of both big business and
small business. It means that businesses will save $87.6 million each year in compliance costs
because they will no longer have to deal with the red tape of the carbon tax. We on this side
of the Senate want to see businesses flourishing, and there are a range of things that need to
be done. Lowering their electricity costs is a very important part of allowing businesses to
flourish. We know this because we have heard it from so many businesses. Just in the last few
days we have heard from the Virgin Australia CEO, John Borghetti, who stated that the best
assistance the government and the opposition can provide is the removal of the carbon tax, which has cost this industry hundreds of millions of dollars.

It is all well and good to lament issues that the industry is having, but those opposite—the Labor Party and the Greens—are imposing hundreds of millions of dollars of additional costs on those industries. This debate is about removing those costs. Virgin Australia reported a half-year loss of $84 million, which included a slug of $27 million for the carbon tax. We know the figure for Qantas is a $106 million hit from the tax just this year. This is a cost that overseas airlines do not pay. It is a cost that the vast majority of overseas businesses are not burdened with. So it is effectively a reverse tariff that hits our companies—companies based here and companies employing people here—that does not hit their international competitors. That is why it is reckless, that is why Kevin Rudd was right to promise to terminate the carbon tax and that is why the Labor Party should honour that promise, having broken its promise before the 2010 election.

The hypocrisy of those opposite is astounding. Of course, those opposite would be fully aware that not only is the carbon tax hurting now but it is also set to rise. At the beginning of the new financial year, if not repealed, the carbon tax will rise to $25.40 a tonne. Just last week, the Labor Party abandoned their support for carbon tax options. They said yes to saving businesses and consumers hundreds of millions of dollars. I call on them to go one step further and support the repeal of the carbon tax, as the Australian people have urged them to do and expressed in the clearest possible terms at the last election. This debate is about honouring the will of the Australian people, lowering the cost burden on businesses and lowering electricity prices for families, pensioners and those doing it tough in our community. Not only do we have the Labor Party and the Greens voting to increase electricity prices and to increase gas prices, but they are doing it in the face of the clearest possible message that has been delivered to them at the ballot box. It is time that that mandate was respected. It is time that this carbon tax was repealed.

Senator O’NEILL (New South Wales) (18:26): Before I go to the remarks that I have prepared, I will just say how hard it is to sit here and listen to the sort of speech that we have just heard where all of this fake care for families and small business is being put on the record. Let’s get some facts and not just about the climate change debate. Let’s go to a few families that, at this time, will have been able to manage getting their kids to school with the assistance of the schoolkids bonus. For families that are eligible for the family tax benefit part A, $410 for primary school children and $820 for those students in secondary school will enable them to have choices in the subjects that they are interested in because a little bit of pressure will come off the family budget. If you are an average Australian with maybe three kids, like I have, and you are eligible for that $820, $410 and $410—depending on their school level—it is a lot of money to assist you with getting your child to school. That is an awful lot more to be taken away from the Australian people than the amounts we have heard the senator over there, with respect, putting on the record today.

They are rubbery figures, they are uncertain figures, and we cannot be sure that any change they make would flow on to ordinary people. Let’s not forget, when we are talking about the flow-on to businesses, those business people who are taking a risk and setting up their business are often struggling, and the family tax benefit part A is something many of them are eligible for as well. They are going to have that asset and support for them and their family
taken away. I think these crocodile tears for families are an absolute myth. They are a pretence, and they take away from the quality of the conversation that Australian politicians should be having with real families, where they address real things, instead of this nonsense which they created at the beginning of the carbon price debate and which they are continuing now in this chamber.

With regard to climate change, the act that is now being debated is one that this nation will look back on and absolutely regret. It is a negative, backward-looking piece of legislation that is attempting to take us back to the 1950s and some benign view of the world. The reality is that we have to attend to climate change. This is a day inscribed in Hansard—lest the Australian public will point as yet another time that the Abbott government betrayed their trust. I know that the coalition are keen on having these days at the moment. It seems the more that they betray the trust of Australia the happier they are. They have already proclaimed a number of actions that we can point to in their short time in office where they have blatantly reneged on their responsibility to govern in the national interest for all Australians—not just for some Australians with loud voices and deep pockets. In opposition, the coalition promised to be an open and accountable government, a government of adults. I hear Senator Lines frequently asking, 'Will the adults actually stand up?' because we have not seen much adult behaviour from those here yet. Instead, we have seen them walk in and pull down the shutters and threaten the very institutions whose role—

Sitting suspended from 18:30 to 19:30

Senator O'NEILL: I might reiterate a couple of the comments that I made before the break and then continue with my prepared remarks. We have been hearing from the government here in the Senate that they are going to repeal the carbon legislation. They have been making much of its being a fantastic thing for ordinary families. The reality is, though, that while they may hold out some hope of returning some money to some families, they are taking money away, hand over fist, from the schoolkids bonus—$410 per annum for children in primary school and $820 for young people in high school. This bonus is going to eligible families who receive family tax benefit A—a very significant contribution to those families' incomes. The bonus is positively and powerfully making a difference to the cost-of-living pressures that are on families.

If, like me, you have three children—mine are just about out of school; my last one is in year 12—you would know that with one student in high school and two in primary school you would stand to lose $820 for the secondary school student and $410 for each of the children in primary school. When you add that up, $1,640 is a lot more than anything that the coalition government are promising to return the average family household. It may be better to say that they are indicating that they may return it to the average family household.

Senator Farrell: Don't believe anything they say.

Senator O'NEILL: I do not believe them. I appreciate that prompt from my colleague. We cannot believe anything they say because the reality is that they are there to support their friends in big business. They are happy for companies that are polluting to get away with doing that for free. That is really what a carbon price is to for. Just as I have to pay to put my garbage in the bin and put it in the front yard to be taken away, the carbon price is about
making the people who pollute—the limited numbers of big businesses who pollute excessively in our environment—pay for what they are doing.

In responding to the pressure of big business, the new Liberal-National Party coalition have decided that they are going to be the friends of big business. They are not friends of small business. When the government talk about businesses benefiting they do not realise that small businesses in the community are where the Schoolkids Bonus will be spent and which will be advantaged by that. There is the small business, for example, of Payless Shoes at Woy Woy, near where I live, where schoolchildren have been getting their shoes. With a little pressure off family budgets, people might be able to go and have a coffee in such small businesses, and keep that small business alive.

People who are starting up small businesses are never flush with cash. They have lost their instant asset write-off under these supposed friends of small business—those sitting on the opposite side of the chamber, who are really crying crocodile tears but doing nothing to put money into the pockets of ordinary Australians who are genuinely doing it tough in terms of managing their family budgets.

This government's unseemly assault of the national broadcaster is another example of the way in which they are ignoring the reality of being a government that has a vision for the country. Our national broadcaster, the ABC, dared to raise serious allegations but that was swiftly followed by the launch of an efficiency review by those opposite, as well as plans to cut the ABC's budget by almost a quarter of a billion dollars. These are all the sneaky things that they are doing. They are pretending that they are friends of the ordinary Australian. They are pretending that they are friends of small business. They are pretending that they are friends of the Australian population while cutting and slashing away.

Such actions are clumsy attempts to bully and cajole our national broadcaster into meek compliance. This, coupled with Mr Abbott's and Mr Morrison's hiding behind the navy and claiming war-time censorship to justify their secretive contempt of the Australian public, clearly shows that this is a government addicted to secrecy—

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Fawcett): Order! Under standing order 193 imputation of improper motives or personal reflections on members is disorderly.

Senator O’NEILL: I withdraw. This government is apparently reliant on a compliant press. They are going to do all they can to endeavour to make that press comply. They promised that they would improve relations with Indonesia; instead they have allowed them to be dragged through the mud in an unseemly fashion that has damaged both nations' interests in the process.

This government promised to be responsible with public expenditure but on coming to office have proceeded to blow the budget by billions of dollars. As well, they are foregoing significant revenue. It is little wonder they were hell-bent on removing the debt ceiling without even bothering to inform the parliament where the money would go. And, thanks to the economic fringe dwellers from the Greens party, they have got their wishes. They promised a unity ticket on the Gonski funding model before the election and then, as soon as they got here, they decided to break that critical election promise that is about building the capacity of this nation. It is not just about kids in school but their productive capacity as great learners moving into the 21st century.
Now they are pretending that the $1.2 billion with no strings attached for the non-signatory states is an improvement on Labor's model, but there is no mention of the fact that those states can, as a result of this Liberal government coming into power, now gut their own state education budgets without any accountability to the Australian people and the Australian taxpayers.

There is no mention from those opposite of the $7 billion that was set to flow to schools in years 5 and 6 of the Labor Gonski model, and which the coalition refuses to commit to. There is a massive difference between what they said before and what they are planning to deliver in government.

Clearly, Mr Abbott and his Pyne-occhio have lied to the Australian people on the future funding of our nation's schools by dismantling the equitable structure established under Labor and endorsed by a majority of state governments of both political stripes. Their complete contempt for the education of our 3.6 million schoolchildren—like their decision to renege on our nation's efforts to combat global warming currently on display—provides evidence that this is a government with no regard for Australia's future. It is all about what they can get away with under the cover of darkness with a sleight of hand—a little bit pulled here and a little bit put there; a whole lot pulled here and a little bit put there. This is tokenistic and, in fact, disgraceful treatment of the Australian people, as if they will not figure it out.

To dismantle our nation's first comprehensive response to climate change at the very time such a response is of paramount importance and urgency borders on criminal negligence. The bill that we are debating defies logic. It is akin to a firefighter throwing away the hose as the fire approaches. Such an act is simply unthinkable, but here we are with a government prepared to do it—to give up the future benefit of Australians for a short-term, self-interested political gain and a misrepresentation of reality. All the Wikipedia searches in the world by the Minister for the Environment could not convince even the simplest person of the reasoning behind the coalition's brazen act of national and international self-harm.

The coalition's arguments are so weak that they have systematically begun to dismantle the publicly funded sources of independent information on climate change in a vain attempt to hide their shame, lest somebody who really knows about what is going on alerts the public to the reality that the Liberals are trying to deny. They have abolished the Climate Commission—and saved the princely sum of $1.6 million a year—to silence the inconvenient truths emanating from the research of that august body of researchers. The commission's brief was very clear: to provide apolitical and reliable information for the public. That, it seems, was at odds with the coalition's desire to shut down informed debate. One thinks about these people who were giving apolitical and reliable information. I ask all Australians to think about the really fantastic kids in science in your class who filtered through into university and did science degrees, who were the top of their year at university and who have pursued with dedication careers in science research. They are the people whom this government refuses to listen to. They were the kids at the top of the class—you know who they are—and instead the government are listening to the lowest common denominator, those with loud voices and weak argument.

They have also gutted funding for the CSIRO, that august body that all Australians hold such regard for, and they are moving to abolish the Climate Change Authority and the Clean Energy Finance Corporation. These simply are not the actions of a government that considers
climate change to be real; rather, they are the actions of climate sceptics, led by a climate
cynic Prime Minister, who is on the record as describing climate change as 'absolute crap'—
such eloquence from the Prime Minister of Australia.

Recently, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released its fifth
assessment report, and its findings are sobering. The IPCC report finds:
Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, and since the 1950s, many of the observed changes are
unprecedented over decades to millennia. The atmosphere and ocean have warmed, the amounts of
snow and ice have diminished, sea level has risen, and the concentrations of greenhouse gases have
increased.

... … ...

Human influence on the climate system is clear. This is evident from the increasing greenhouse gas
concentrations in the atmosphere, positive radiative forcing, observed warming, and understanding of
the climate system.

... … ...

Continued emissions of greenhouse gases will cause further warming and changes in all components of
the climate system.

I know what it is like to have pressure on a family budget. I know that reality. I was one of
six children growing up in a family that started its own small business. It was tricky at the
beginning—it was successful in the end, but it was difficult. As teachers, for my husband and
I managing a budget on teachers' wages was not that easy with three kids. Things changed,
but the reality is that, for a small amount of money that the government are saying may come
back to Australians' households, they are ready to sell off the future of our children and our
grandchildren. That is not a fair trade.

As an island known for its weather extremes and natural disasters, these findings should be
ringing alarm bells. Indeed, the drumbeat of scientific findings such as these has been
growing louder and louder for decades. The recognition of the need to act has reached a point
where even the most strident climate sceptic publications have now begun, belatedly, it would
seem, to acknowledge reality. Today, the consensus among climate scientists on the risk of
global warming is in the order of 97 per cent. Effectively, the entire scientific community is in
agreement. Global warming and climate change pose an existential threat. Late last year, New
South Wales endured some of the earliest and most severe bushfires on record. The
Philippines has been devastated by Typhoon Haiyan, killing thousands and destroying the
lives and livelihoods of countless more. The people of Tuvalu, Kiribati, large areas of coastal
Bangladesh and the Maldives may well be forced to evacuate their areas completely before
the turn of this century, if not within the decade. These are just some examples, but, sadly,
there are many, many others.

It seems the coalition, at both state and federal level, on receiving unpalatable advice about
the serious threats posed by climate change, choose to deny its existence rather than accept
the policy platform and action imperatives that the facts demand. Unlike the coalition, Labor
recognises the importance for Australia to play its part in addressing this human induced
crisis. We owe it to our forebears who built this great nation and, more importantly, to our
children and grandchildren, who will inherit it, to respond. Under Labor, Australia did
respond. We introduced a market based mechanism with a three-year fixed price, moving to a
floating price thereafter. We set up the Clean Energy Finance Corporation to provide billions
in low-interest loans to help companies open up new opportunities and invest in clean energy technology and infrastructure, with a positive benefit now in terms of jobs and innovation, leading to a long-term future benefit. We set up the Clean Technology Fund and the Carbon Farming Initiative to help manufacturers modernise for a low-carbon economy and support new low-emission farming practices.

We established the Climate Commission and the Climate Change Authority to provide critical independent advice on the effects of climate change and on Australia's reduction targets. We provided needed funding for the CSIRO to contribute to climate change research and develop new ways to cut carbon emissions. Labor's policies delivered strong leadership and vision, something that was needed to help reduce the risks posed by climate change. Our efforts recognised the need for Australia to act as well as the need for increased global cooperation, as evidenced by linking our carbon price to the European market.

Across the world, nations have implemented or are developing emissions trading schemes of various stripes. Ninety countries, accounting for more than 80 per cent of global emissions and over 90 per cent of the international economy, have now pledged to take action to mitigate climate change. The EU has operated an emissions trading scheme covering 30 countries since 2005. New Zealand has had an ETS in place since 2008. Our top five trading partners—the US, Japan, China, South Korea and India—have either implemented or are piloting carbon trading or pricing schemes at local, state and national levels. China is launching seven pilot emission trading schemes. Action on climate change through a market based response is clearly a global phenomenon as, the world over, nations work towards lowering carbon emissions through the most efficient means possible.

In Australia, one of the world's highest polluters per capita, which stands most threatened by climate change, an ETS has previously been embraced by both sides of politics. Even John Howard saw the good sense in doing so in 2007. Labor reached out to the government in good faith by agreeing to abolish the fixed price and move to an ETS one year earlier. But we will not let the Abbott government vandalise this nation's future. Labor will stand for Australians today and into the future. (Time expired)

Senator WRIGHT (South Australia) (19:46): I rise to speak against the Clean Energy Legislation (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013 and related bills. In 2011 I was extremely proud to stand in this parliament as a South Australian senator with the Australian Greens and vote for a visionary package of 18 clean energy bills, which was to finally establish a framework for tackling the urgent challenge of climate change, and it was going to tackle it in a comprehensive and coordinated way. Today we are facing legislation which is designed to smash that framework and take us backwards, take us away from a system which is delivering a decrease in carbon emissions over and above what we dared hope for in 2011 and encouraging investment in energy efficient industries.

The fact is that this move from the Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, and his government is stupid, irresponsible and deeply, deeply cynical. It is the outcome of a relentless political strategy to gain office. In opposition, Mr Abbott deliberately drummed up fear and confusion about climate change and actively encouraged the public to turn away from science and knowledge towards ignorance and prejudice. So, when it comes to the coalition's approach to climate change, do not look for policy, do not look for evidence and, despite all the rhetoric, do not look for good faith. Instead you will find political expediency. In trying to work out
what is going on here, you will find an irrational and deeply visceral urge to destroy any legacy of the previous term of government, even if that legacy is, as we have constantly seen, effective, actually saves money and is demonstrably in the national interest, as we face the challenge of climate change across the planet, not just in Australia, this century. So, yes, I am dismayed by the fact that I have to stand here and face this onslaught, and I am angry about it.

This government's determination to rip down the clean energy package, repeal the price on pollution, dismantle the Climate Change Authority and destroy the Clean Energy Corporation I think amounts to a fundamental breach of the trust that lies at the heart of our democratic process in Australia, and that is the trust that people have when they vote for a government to govern in the best interests of the Australian people. The Australian people includes our young people; it includes the children, teenagers and young adults who cannot yet vote, but these are the Australian people who will inherit a parched and dangerous future if we do not do what we know we need to do now to prevent that from happening. If we do not take effective action, it is they who will experience the worst of it long after most of us in this parliament are well gone.

The Australian people also includes the farmers and the people on the land, one of the constituencies that this government, the Liberal Party and their National Party allies, claim to represent. These are people who are actually working at the coalface of climate. In my view it is a huge breach of faith that the government have sold these rural Australians a pup. The government have misled the very constituents who are relying on them to govern in their interests. Most recently, the Prime Minister has been out professing to care about farmers, but his drought package does nothing to acknowledge the increasing threat of climate change, which is acknowledged by the vast majority of scientists. It does nothing to build resilience in the face of what we know is coming.

The government's white paper, the guide to long-term agricultural policy, does not mention climate change at all. It is as if the drafters do not see climate change influencing agriculture into the foreseeable future, yet this view is at odds with most experts in climate and those who are working around the planet at the interface of climate and agriculture. Indeed, as it was reported in The Land on 1 March, the US Department of Agriculture's 2014 proposed budget includes US$98 million earmarked for programs researching interactions between climate change and agriculture—because they get it; they know that climate change is going to be an integral part of farming in the 21st century.

David Lobell, a Stanford University environmental scientist who, in 2013, was awarded a $600,000 MacArthur genius grant to further his work on the effects of climate change on food production, calculates that climate change has already clipped 10 per cent from global farming productivity growth over the last decade or so. He says that temperatures are rising and that generally temperatures do bad things to crops. Yes, we have experienced variations in climate in Australia, but the scientists are clearly telling us that these variations will get worse and more extreme as our climate becomes more volatile. There is something that we can do about it. It is totally irresponsible not to take effective action.

The most recent report from the Climate Council, which was released on 18 February, shows Australian cities are already experiencing extreme heat. This is the extreme heat that was predicted in the 1990s, but it was not predicted to occur until 2030—so it is coming early. Heatwaves in Australia are becoming longer and hotter, occurring more often and starting
earlier in the season. Since 1950, the number of record hot days across Australia has more than doubled. These heatwaves lead to more drought, more severe bushfires, more deaths of vulnerable people, the deaths of other animals in other species and the disruption of ecosystems.

So in 2014 and forward, ever more serious droughts and other extreme conditions will make it harder and harder for farmers to make a go of it. It will, tragically, drive some of them to suicide. Yet this government is intent on tearing down any vestige of the Clean Energy Future package—the 18 acts that are showing a reduction in carbon emissions in Australia. This move is spiteful, it is illogical and it is science denying.

What is interesting to note is that it has not always been like this. I would like to quote from a rather inspiring document now. It is a manifesto from a different era. I quote:

We embrace the philosophy of sustainable development — we reject the false dichotomy of jobs versus the environment. We can have both, at the same time pursuing strategies of ecologically responsible development which improves our standards of living while promoting responsible, conservation policies which improve our quality of life.

We will work with all Australians to achieve these goals and with the States, the conservation movement, industry, scientists and all concerned citizens.

We seek a co-operative, federalist approach to the solution of environmental problems but we will never resile from a willingness to act in the genuine national interest wherever that is required.

This is a document signed by Senator Chris Puplick, who was then the shadow environment minister and minister for the arts, and Andrew Peacock, the then leader of the Liberal Party, when they were in opposition in 1990. This was the Liberal Party's climate change policy in 1990. I have the document here and I will be seeking leave to table this document in a minute.

They talk of sustainability and being responsible to ecology. They talk about the false dichotomy of jobs versus the environment. They talk about working with people and the conservation movement, industry and scientists. They talk about the national interest. They were the glory days, indeed. At that time, the Liberal Party had a target to reduce greenhouse gases by 20 per cent by 2000. Today, 24 years later, when all the direst predictions from those days are starting to come true and come true early, the coalition's goal is to reduce emissions by five per cent. Even then, they have no effective mechanisms to achieve this paltry target.

Last week, the independent Climate Change Authority recommended Australian’s emissions reduction target be almost quadrupled to 19 per cent by 2020 and suggested that it should then dramatically ramp up in the next decade to cut 40 to 60 per cent of emissions by 2030. I seek leave now to table this document, which outlines the Liberal Party's climate change policy from 1990. It is a very inspiring document which contains the signature of then opposition leader Andrew Peacock.

Leave granted.

Senator WRIGHT: The truth is that the Clean Energy Future package—18 related bills introduced into the last parliament at the instigation of the Australian Greens and with the support of Labor—is working. Australia’s emissions are being reduced in the various sectors which are covered. The electricity sector emissions were reduced by 6.1 per cent in the year to March last year. That is 12 million tonnes of CO₂ less than the previous year.
In the first six months of the scheme, emissions from electricity generation came down by seven per cent and the dirtiest brown coal generation in Victoria fell by 14 per cent. The scheme only covers around 60 per cent of our total emissions, and yet total emissions—including transport, agriculture and waste that are not covered by the scheme—have remained flat while our economy has grown. In short, the vital decoupling of economic growth from emissions growth has now begun. But, despite this progress, the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, the Climate Change Authority and the Land Sector Carbon and Biodiversity Board will be abolished by Mr Abbott's repeal package.

So, it is clear that, having just embarked on effective action on climate change, we are now again at a crossroads. We can go forward moving confidently towards the clean energy, low-carbon economy that will position us well in a world that will be increasingly intolerant of high-carbon industries and practices or we can remain fixated on failed policies of dig it up, cut it down and ship it away. This will lead us, as the scientists are telling us, to a volatile and dangerous future.

The Australian Greens oppose this bill, because we value a safe climate and a secure future for the next generation. We are not alone; we stand with thousands of Australians who oppose the trashing of these vital laws. In my own state of South Australia, 4,000 people marched for climate action in November last year. Half that number again have signed our petition calling to maintain climate action. We have heard from many of these people, beseeching us to be on the right side of history.

We have heard from Dianne. She and her husband are semi-retired farmers in a marginal area of the wheat belt in South Australia and they want strong action in response to climate change because they believe their children deserve to inherit a healthy planet. She writes of the measures they have taken themselves and then she says:

First, we are convinced by the science of climate change. Second, we have lived long enough on our land—over 35 years—to experience what we would argue are increasingly severe weather events that we believe are the result of climate change. Third, when our children were young we took them to the Great Barrier Reef. We snorkelled and dived in pristine waters surrounding reefs vibrant with multi-coloured coral and fish. Years later my husband and I returned to celebrate our 50th wedding anniversary and were devastated to see the state of the reefs we visited. They were, in reality and metaphorically, a pale imitation of the stunning World Heritage reef we had previously seen. Fourth, we believe climate change has been brought about by human intervention and that we should all contribute within our own capacities to intervention designed to reverse the change. We think we have already contributed significantly to intervention strategies in our own lives. Now, it seems, the coalition's direct action plan is asking us to pay again. Yet we wonder: when and how do the emitters pay?

And Merilyn has told us she does not want to be a 'here and now' Australian; she simply wants to ensure that her grandchildren, and future Australians, have a reasonable world to live in.

These South Australians have a right to be concerned. All the evidence is that the implications of climate change for my home state of South Australia will be catastrophic. We have just come through one of the hottest summers on record—just five years since the last one, in 2009. The Bureau of Meteorology has reported:

One of the most significant multi-day heatwaves on record affected south-east Australia over the period 13 to 18 January 2014…While peak temperatures mostly fell short of those observed in 2009 and 1939,
extreme heat persisted for a longer period than it did in those heatwaves over some areas, particularly near coastal regions of Victoria and South Australia (including Melbourne and Adelaide).

Numerous records were broken for extended periods of heat in January this year. On Thursday the United Nations Meteorological Organization declared that Adelaide was the hottest city in the world. Having effective climate action is absolutely crucial for the people of South Australia, not only in the future but, as we have seen, for people living right now.

The economic costs of failure to act on climate change are well documented. Contrary to the government's mantra that the carbon price is unaffordable, abolishing it will actually come with a huge price tag that will be paid for by future Australians—and by the poorest of the world—for generations to come. In 2006, economist Sir Nicholas Stern carried out the most comprehensive review ever on the financial cost of global warming and found that climate change could not only devastate the environment but also cut the world's annual economic growth by 20 per cent and cost $9 trillion. Three weeks ago he wrote that the risks are even bigger than he first realised, with annual greenhouse gas emissions increasing steeply and some of the impacts, such as the decline of Arctic sea ice, starting to happen much more quickly. Stern has recommended that governments …implement a strong price on greenhouse gas pollution across the economy, which would also help to reduce emissions [and] foster the wave of low-carbon technological development and innovation that will drive economic growth and avoid the enormous risks of unmanaged climate change.

In Australia, this is what we have done. The price on carbon has been a source of revenue to a government that claims to be in the midst of a budget emergency. At a time when revenue forecasts are shrinking—and the government is using that as an excuse to cut scientific research, childcare workers, universities and low-income superannuation benefits—the post-election report from the Parliamentary Budget Office shows that abolishing the carbon price would remove $7.3 billion from the government's revenue stream over the forward estimates. What is even worse, half a trillion dollars of investment in low-emissions projects is at risk if the Clean Energy Finance Corporation is scrapped. The CEFC is brilliant. It can deliver three per cent of the five per cent abatement which the government has targeted while turning a profit for the government. It will increase the budget balance and ensure that tens of billions of dollars of private capital is invested in Australia. Every dollar it has spent has generated $3 in private sector investment.

If you look at the CEFC's website, there are some great case studies from South Australia. An ice-cream maker up in Laura, in the mid-north, who employs 50 people has managed to get a cheaper loan—not a grant, but a subsidised loan—where they leverage private money as well. They have reduced their carbon emissions by 50 per cent and secured their future, including exports to Asia. An office block in Adelaide used CEFC money to replace its lighting and reduce its CO₂ emissions from lighting by 40 per cent. And there are other South Australian projects which would be well able to use the money and would benefit all of us. There is a solar thermal plant up in Port Augusta. Various Riverland farmers want to put solar panels in to help insulate them against the next drought coming. There is geothermal which is struggling in the far north of the state for want of investment—it is a project at risk. The beauty of the CEFC is that it leverages private money. It offers concessional rates and it offers longer term paybacks, which is what a lot of these industries absolutely need. The Investor
Group on Climate Change says that, if the CEFC is trashed by this government, money and investment in skills will either sit on the sidelines or go to other markets.

The Australian Greens are long-term advocates of a price on carbon. We stand for sensible and responsible policy and investment based on established science and economics. We do not support this bill; we are on the right side of history for this. Unfortunately, that gives us little comfort if our fellow members of this national parliament are not willing to act on principle—and not out of spite—and vote with us against this bill. I will finish with this question: when future Australians look back at this government, and at this time, and ask—

(Time expired)

Senator EGGLESTON (Western Australia) (20:06): Last week was a big week for Australia's two main airlines: Qantas Airways and Virgin Australia. In this country where remoteness and isolation go hand in hand, air travel is rightly viewed by many as less of a luxury and more a necessity of life. As Qantas CEO, Alan Joyce, pointed out in his speech, in the four years to 2012 capacity into Australia by competitors increased by 46 per cent, which in itself was more than twice the global average.

From both Virgin and Qantas there was very little good news last week. For my state of Western Australia, 12 May will see the last regularly scheduled Qantas international service from Perth. In days gone by, Qantas had an extensive international network from the capital of Australia's largest state. But, from 12 May, Qantas will not fly from Perth to anywhere abroad. From that date our national carrier will serve just three of the country's eight capitals with international services.

While the news from Qantas was grim, I was particularly interested to hear Virgin CEO John Borghetti, when he delivered his airline's half yearly results on Friday. One line particularly struck me. Mr Borghetti said:

… the best assistance the government and the Opposition can provide—

to our airline industry—

is the removal of the carbon tax, which has cost this industry hundreds of millions of dollars …

While the government is eager and willing to please the airline industry and every other industry in the country by abolishing this tax, it seems that the opposition parties—the ALP and the Greens—are not keen to do it. The carbon tax should never have been introduced. It is costing the airline industry and every other industry in this country big dollars. Last year alone, Qantas paid $106 million in carbon tax. To put that into perspective, that is more than 40 per cent of the first half loss that Qantas announced on Thursday. Without the carbon tax, Qantas's figures would be 40 per cent better than we heard last week.

The coalition knew, when in opposition, that a carbon tax would impose an extra cost across the board on Australian industry and consumers. A survey conducted by the Curtin Business School of the Curtin University of Technology and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, in Western Australia, prior to the introduction of the tax, found that almost 70 per cent of consumers believed they would be worse off under the proposed carbon tax. Yet a majority said it would not change their behaviour. That was only one example of a multitude of studies, commentaries and surveys that showed that the tax would be bad for Australia, the economy, industry and consumers. In 2011 Reg Howard-Smith, CEO of The Chamber of Minerals & Energy in Perth, said:
The Carbon Tax is … taking over from common sense and … our global competitors are celebrating … as Australia shoots itself in the foot …

The Minerals Council of Australia estimated that the tax would cost some 23,000 jobs, plus additional secondary job losses in local businesses. That is, 23,000 jobs directly in the mining industry.

There are those on the other side who like to argue that the government does not believe in the science of climate change. I come from the south-west of Western Australia. I grew up in Busselton and, as I have said in this chamber previously in debates on climate change and the carbon tax, I can assure you that I believe in climate change because the south-west is a great example of the reality of climate change. In fact, there has been a decline in rainfall in the south-west of Western Australia over the last 20 years of around 25 per cent. But the reality is that climate change has been going on for millions of years and is very much a natural phenomenon of the natural history of the earth.

The ocean has risen and fallen. We all know that there was once a land bridge to Indonesia from the north-west of Western Australia. A couple of years ago, in 2010, I went to Barrow Island, off the north-west Pilbara coast where I was told it was possible to identify, around the island, seven different sea levels over the last few thousand years. I was also told that records show that the island was under the sea for many hundreds of years. So the rise and fall of the ocean has, again, gone on for thousands of millions of years, long before mankind established industries. Again, it must be regarded as part of the natural history of the earth.

Seashells are to be found in the soil at Marble Bar, some 200 kilometres inland from the ocean, in the Pilbara. Greenland is called 'Greenland' because it was once green. I am also informed that the Sahara desert was once fertile and green. In short, the evidence for climate change, having been a natural part of the earth's history, is undeniable.

We also hear much about the UN International Panel on Climate Change from some as being the ultimate authority on man-induced climate change. But, equally, there are those who point out that members of the UN IPCC are mostly fairly junior scientists and are, by no means, at the top of their fields. The IPCC has also been rocked by scandals of falsification of its results. Given that, I personally believe that the findings and recommendations of the IPCC should be regarded, at the very least, with a healthy degree of scepticism. This does not mean, however, that I do not believe we should clean up pollution. We should make sure that we reduce pollution to an absolute minimum. Nevertheless, I do believe that climate change—which is real, as I have said—is actually part of the natural history of the earth.

In November 2011 I sat in this chamber and listened to the ALP senators crowing about the benefits this carbon tax would produce for Australia—a carbon tax they were about to legislate for. Since that time I have heard those opposite spruik the well-worn line that Australia has one of the highest rates of carbon emission per capita of any country in the world. Well, of course we do. While Australia has a small population, we are one of the most highly industrialised countries in the world, with a rich mining and resources sector, which, coupled with a comparatively small population, means Australian emissions levels, averaged out, will appear to be high when in reality they are probably just typical of a Western industrialised country.

I believe the ALP was so blinded by their euphoria about the carbon tax that they gave no serious consideration to the facts that were raised by the coalition senators about the
consequences of this tax. Back then I and my coalition colleagues warned that there was no doubt at all that a carbon tax would impose an extra cost across the board on the Australian economy and on consumers. In fact, it is undisputed that, unless this tax is abolished, Australians are set to pay some $9 billion in carbon tax each year and will see electricity prices go up. And because electricity is so central to the production of many goods, the cost of consumer goods will inevitably rise as a direct result of the carbon tax, just as we have seen airlines struggling to survive under the burden of the carbon tax they have to pay.

In August 2012 the Water Corporation of Western Australia levied an additional $21.3 million on around 1,010,000 residential and non-residential customers as a direct result of the carbon tax—a lot of money. Back then I stood in this chamber and joined my coalition colleagues in arguing that a carbon tax would impose an extra burden on Australian industry—a burden like that explained by John Borghetti last weekend. I would like to say that it was very prophetic of me, but the simple truth is that the then Labor-Greens government was warned repeatedly that the carbon tax they were so adamant about introducing would not deliver what they so blindly told themselves it would. They simply ignored the evidence before them.

Our competitors around the world do not have to pay carbon taxes, because none of our major trading competitors, with the exception of the European Union, have been so short-sighted as to implement carbon taxes or a carbon emissions scheme. That of course leads to the question of Australia having an emissions trading scheme, for which the introduction date was brought forward by the ALP-Greens government last year. But surely, given what we now know, one must ask: why do we need an emissions trading scheme, and what for? Emissions trading schemes, in my view, are totally fraudulent, because they do not reduce emissions at all. Emissions trading schemes do not lead to a reduction in emissions because industries still produce the same emissions, which are traded against the purchase of a carbon sink, such as an Indonesian rainforest or something similar—all at great cost, which is of course passed on to the consumers in the form of higher electricity charges as well as charges for consumer goods. In other words, an ETS is a kind of card trick whereby a company buys, for example, an Indonesian rainforest for a huge amount of money and tell themselves what good chaps they are, but then back in Australia they still produce the same level of emissions but charge the customers much higher prices for the same electricity. The losers are the consumers—Mr and Mrs Average Australia—and the only winners are the stockbrokers who stand to make millions and millions of dollars from their trading or brokerage fees on carbon emissions.

As I said in a speech last year, the notoriously longest established emissions trading scheme in the world is the European scheme, which has cost billions of dollars but has not reduced carbon emissions at all in Europe. I think that speaks for itself. Surely we cannot be so naive as to not learn the lesson from the European experience. As far as the mining and gas industries go, we are already seeing investment drift off to other parts of the world because Australian costs are so high, and part of the reason for that is the carbon tax. Chinese and Australian industry is developing new mines in West Africa and other parts of the world where it is cheaper for them to operate than it has become in Australia. Relieving the Australian mining industry of the cost of the carbon tax, and not introducing the proposed emissions trading scheme, will preserve our existing mining and gas industries and the jobs
and incomes of many Australians. I think we should relieve the Australian people of the burden of the carbon tax.

One of the more naive aspects of the previous government's approach was that they did not seem to understand that the mining industry is an international industry and that the miners and the mining companies will go to the places where the costs are lowest—and, naturally, they look to their bottom line. I am told this is happening very much already in the gas industry, where Australian costs are the highest in the world and, I am told, there will be no more LNG projects developed in Australia—when, for example, in a country like Canada it is 12 per cent cheaper than Australia to establish these industries. When you are talking about $45 billion projects, 12 per cent is a lot of money. I am told that in the United States the costs are even lower.

So I believe that it is in Australia's interests that we abolish the carbon tax and not proceed with the crazy nonsense of the ALP-Greens emissions trading scheme and that the sooner we do these things the better it will be for the ordinary people of Australia, who cannot afford the higher prices and lower standard of living these two monstrosities are bringing us.

Senator SINGH (Tasmania) (20:23): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Clean Energy Legislation (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013 and related bills. I do so not with a sense of joy or commitment to the bills in any way, shape or form but to put on the record my opposition to the bills. I do that very much because we know very clearly that climate change is no fairy tale. The scientific evidence has certainly been proven when it comes to climate change. That is why my Labor colleagues and I have been presenting the insurmountable evidence during debate over the last sitting weeks on that particular front. That is why I stand to contribute with some apprehension—apprehension for all Australians, for their homes and for their livelihoods, which are at risk because of the short-sightedness of the Abbott government and the strong political agenda of the Abbott government, to the detriment of important policy reform.

In playing politics, Australia's environmental future becomes a sacrificial lamb—and so has Australia's future as a global leader in the Asia-Pacific region when it comes to tackling climate change, pollution and its associated effects. The sacrifice that this government has undergone is obvious with the very words of the Prime Minister who, in a speech to Young Liberals on 30 January 2010, stated:

... even if dire predictions are right and average temperatures around the globe rise by four degrees over the century, it is still not the ‘great moral challenge’ of our time ...

I still believe that it certainly is.

A four-degree rise would change Australia unrecognisably, with the Murray-Darling Basin beyond salvation, eastern Australia having 40 per cent more droughts, a fall in irrigated agriculture by 90 per cent in the nation's food bowl, the number of very hot days—that is, days over 35 degrees, as we have experienced markedly this summer—increasing dramatically, and the Great Barrier Reef and the billions of dollars of tourism that it relies on devastated.

Labor's approach to climate change has been unified, bringing together industry, top scientists and the community. The Labor policy provided unprecedented support for renewable energy through the renewable energy target—RET—the Clean Energy Finance
Corporation and the Australian Renewable Energy Agency. It also provided support for business to become more efficient and productive, including clean technology programs and the Jobs and Competitiveness Program. And it provided support to reduce land sector emissions through the Carbon Farming Initiative.

What has all of that policy work, that policy reform, from the last parliament achieved? It has achieved: the trebling of Australia's wind capacity; solar panels being installed in more than a million households, up from fewer than 7,500 under Howard; employment in the renewable energy industry more than doubling to over 24,000 people; around 150,000 jobs being created—in fact, the economy continues to grow at 2.5 per cent, as inflation remains low; and pollution in the National Electricity Market decreasing by seven per cent, an important outcome because it is the very notion behind putting a price on carbon—reducing pollution, which decreased in that short time alone by seven per cent. On top of that the renewable power generator, as a share of the National Electricity Market, increased by 25 per cent.

Labor has been and continues to be dedicated to achieving the best possible policy to tackle one of the key challenges of this century. By tackling climate change in the most cost-effective way we can support the environment industry in Australia continuing. That is why we support terminating a fixed price on carbon if it is replaced by a system that puts a legal cap on carbon pollution and lets business work out the cheapest and most efficient way to operate within that cap.

Our Prime Minister has introduced into the parliament a series of bills that will get rid of the legislated cap on carbon pollution and create a free-for-all for big polluters—an opportunity for big polluters to do as they please. In Australia we know that we pay for what we use—from electricity to water to our groceries—but under Prime Minister Abbott's policy the biggest users of electricity, polluting the most carbon, do not pay. I urge the Senate to retain the integrity of the clean energy policies, to retain the Climate Change Authority to ensure robust independent analysis and advice, and to stop the cuts to Australia's renewable energy research and development.

The last Labor government's policies, including the emissions trading scheme, the renewable energy target and the $10 billion of the Clean Energy Finance Corporation will all be trashed under the Abbott government. Australia will have no chance of continuing the changes to reduce pollution and ensure that an environmentally effective, economically responsible and socially fair response to climate change is followed through. Nor will we become a leader in the region; in fact, we will fall behind the rest of the region as countries like China continue to go forward in addressing their own carbon emissions.

Australia has some of the world's best renewable energy resources, ranging from sunshine and wind power to geothermal energy to tidal power in the oceans surrounding our continent. And of course in my home state of Tasmania there is hydro-electricity. Australia needs to harness these resources to generate energy without polluting the atmosphere. It makes no sense not to do so, as it is a natural and ongoing resource that does not result in pollution.

In Labor's time in government, employment in the renewable energy industry more than doubled to over 24,000 people, wind capacity trebled to over 3,000 megawatts and over one million solar PV systems were installed, which was up from fewer than 7,500 under the Howard government. Renewable energy now powers the equivalent of 4,000 homes around
Australia each year. Australia now has over 370 renewable power generators accredited under the renewable energy target policy. In 2012-13, with our clean energy future plan in place, renewable energy output in the National Electricity Market was up 25 per cent on the previous year. These are statistics, or at least outcomes, from good economic and social reform done by the last government, a Labor government, that had the insight to see the importance and the necessity of moving forward in the areas of environmental pollution and climate change, not because it was something we thought of ourselves but because it was something that came out of a lot of study across the globe going on at the UN level, the EU level and the OECD level, and we wanted to ensure that we were playing our part in addressing the importance of reducing pollution in our own country and contributing to combating climate change through some kind of scheme by which we could be part of a global scheme for reducing carbon pollution.

The outcomes that I speak of bore fruit. They show that the policies put in place by the last Labor government were of benefit not only to Australians as individuals—through the changes they made to their own homes, the renewable energy they were creating themselves and the changes within their own community—but also to businesses in the way that they operated and the way they actually wanted to become a cleaner player when it came to their own business operations.

ARENA, the Australian Renewable Energy Agency, an independent agency, was funded to invest in projects that actually improved on the competitiveness of renewable technologies and increased the supply of renewable energy in Australia. ARENA is currently supporting in Australia a range of innovative renewable energy technology projects, including bioenergy, geothermal, hydro, ocean and solar power.

All of this good work in renewable energy and in reducing carbon pollution will come to an end under the Abbott government's plan. A recent survey showed that 86 per cent of economists back an emissions trading scheme. They back it as the cheapest and most efficient way to tackle carbon pollution. Last week, former Treasury secretary Ken Henry called the government's policy a bizarre strategy that involves the government paying big polluters in a scheme that will cost more and will reduce productivity. What kind of coalition government wants to reduce productivity? As we have discovered in recent weeks, a number of industries already are going to be reducing their productivity. Surely this government under its watch does not want even more of a reduction in productivity, especially in an area that is doing so well. Renewable energy technologies are doing so well, not only as a new innovative form of industry but also in providing a benefit to the environment, to the community, to our children and to future generations.

Kirsten Rose, the CEO of the Sustainable Energy Association of Australia, stated:

... we and many of our members believe that ETS—that market mechanism—gives them choices and flexibility in a different way than a direct action plan, which is, effectively, bidding for money to support specific projects.

...  ... ...

... our membership is wholly behind an emissions trading scheme and the policy certainty that would bring ...

That shows that we need an emissions trading scheme. We need to listen to the 86 per cent of economists, to people in civil society, to people in our communities and to those businesses...
and entrepreneurs who are embarking on renewable energy innovation. We need to take heed of the scientific data, the global data, that shows we need to act and we need to recognise that the economists tell us that the ETS is the cheapest way of achieving the outcomes we desire for our nation.

On top of that, we must foster innovation in this country. We need to embed the carbon costs of doing business into the thinking of entrepreneurs and job creators—and we need to do it now. That has, in fact, been going on since Labor's policy has been in place. But we need to deepen our capacity to produce high-quality, low-emissions goods and services that we can sell to the world.

To me this is a no-brainer. This is something that makes perfect sense. Why would you not take action at a time when our climate is in such a state of flux, at a time where we are seeing more climate driven natural disasters, at a time when scientists are telling us that the future may be quite bleak unless we act on our contribution to carbon pollution? Why would you not want to do all that you can? Producing renewable energy is not only good for combating climate change; it is good for the environment and for us. It means that not only are we not taking nonrenewables from the earth but we are also instilling a new way of operating, a new way of thinking, among businesses, industry and individuals—making sure that the energy we create, where possible, is renewable.

That is exactly what the last Labor government's policies—the bills the repeal of which we are debating here this evening—were all about. They were about ensuring that we had the framework in place so that business, industry and individuals could change their behaviour for the better. The people that I talk to—I do not know exactly who the coalition talks to—embrace that idea. They are proud of having changed their behaviour.

I know that I come from a state that has a strong and proud reputation for being clean and green. It has a hydro-electric scheme. It has beautiful clean air that I always look forward to breathing as soon as I step off the plane upon coming home from Canberra. But I am sure that Tasmania is not some sort of anomaly. I am sure that the rest of Australia is of the same mind when it comes to wanting to breathe clean air and drink clean water. I am sure the rest of Australia also wants to ensure that it does not pollute—or at least pollutes as little as it possibly can. I am sure that the rest of Australia also wants to leave this country in a better state than, perhaps, our forebears did and wants to ensure that our children have a bright future. For our children's sake, if the world's climate is going to be in such a state of flux, we should be trying to reduce our impact upon it as much as possible.

So why would a new government want to come in and, simply because it was one of their slogans, sweep away all this good work? Why would they want to do that now that they are in government and know all the detail behind what the last government did? Why would they want to do that given the overwhelming research and evidence that has been provided showing how important it is to address climate change and showing that the way the Labor government approached it—an emissions trading scheme—was the most efficient and cost-effective way of doing it, that putting a price on carbon pollution was the best way to change the behaviour of the big polluters? Yes, the scheme had a fixed price, but that fixed price was only ever on 500 of the biggest polluters. It was not on individuals. It was never a carbon tax on individuals. That was a scare perpetrated by the then opposition, the coalition—but it was certainly not the case. The policy was designed to tax, or put a price on, the emissions of
those big polluters in order to give them the incentive, the encouragement and the support to change the way they had been operating. And a number of them did.

Where those polluters passed the tax down the chain—through higher prices here and there—the government at the time compensated people, particularly low-income earners. It was a very good reform. I believe that, in generations to come, people will look back and think, 'Why did a new government come in and undo all of that important work aimed at protecting our future and our children's future?' The repeal of Labor's clean energy legislation is being done in the name of politics, in the name of a slogan, in the name of trying to get elected. It is not based on science, economics, decency or care for our environment or the people who live in it. I do not support any of these bills.

Senator WATERS (Queensland) (20:43): In order to understand the significance of what this government is now seeking to do in overturning, through this climate change bills repeal package, the country's first national climate laws, it is necessary to reflect on the clean energy package—its genesis and its success. The clean energy package was a truly remarkable and incredible achievement of the last parliament. In my short time here, it has been the most significant day I have had the pleasure of being involved in and being a part of. On that day, I was really proud of this parliament. I was proud that we had started to take the action necessary to safeguard our way of life—not just for my own daughter but for all future generations.

I was proud of the fact that we had taken action for the people of this generation, who are already suffering from the impacts of climate change. Our Pacific neighbours and our Torres Strait Islander communities are already facing saltwater incursion into low-lying farmland, and all around the world people are suffering from extreme weather events, which are sadly becoming more intense and more frequent. I was proud that we had taken action for all of the other creatures we share this planet with. I was proud that we had set aside the short-term interests of a vested few and had acted in the public interest and for the good of all future generations. Lastly, I was proud that we had looked at the science and had considered not just the needs of ourselves but also the needs of those to come.

This parliament did something that really mattered that day, and I want to take this chance tonight to publicly acknowledge, thank and pay tribute to the leadership of Senator Bob Brown, former Leader of the Australian Greens, and Senator Christine Milne, the Leader of the Australian Greens, for driving that climate action. I want to single out Senator Milne for her tenacity and determination in raising the issue of climate change long before it was a mainstream issue, in just never giving up and in managing to keep a smile on her face throughout. I pay tribute to Senator Milne.

In the short time that we have seen the carbon price operating, it has demonstrated a number of things. Firstly, it has demonstrated that we can, in fact, take the action we need to to safeguard our way of life and to ready our economy for the low-carbon future that the rest or the world is already moving towards. It has demonstrated that we can do this without economic shockwaves and, in fact, with the growth of new sectors—not just any new sectors but job-rich new sectors, which both sides of this parliament frequently claim to be concerned about. I mean job-rich sectors like clean energy, tourism and manufacturing. The key thing the carbon price has demonstrated so far is that it is actually working. It has already lowered our national emissions and has done so profitably. Likewise, the complementary measures
have seen renewable energy flourish. We have the real start of a new economy here. And we know this renewable energy takes pressure off peak demand and we know this means it brings down electricity prices, and this is particularly important in the recent heatwaves.

The scheme was not perfect. We saw that there was overly generous compensation, in our view, to the big polluters, but that was also planned to be subject to review as the years progressed. If indeed the age of entitlement is over, as we are sometimes told by this government, those sorts of subsidies should be examined along with the other fossil fuel subsidies that rank in the billions of dollars every year that are meted out by taxpayers to those very profitable, often multinational, fossil fuel companies. They do not need the help, and probably never did. If these laws were to pass the parliament and be repealed—and I will harken back to that in the course of this contribution—there would be a windfall gain to those fossil fuel companies of $450 million per year. And that is just the cost of their fugitive emissions—that is, the leaking gas wells and the gassy coalmines—under the carbon price.

In total, according to the Parliamentary Budget Office's post-election report, abolishing the carbon price would remove $7.3 billion from the government's revenue stream. At a time when revenue forecasts are shrinking and we are seeing cut after cut to all of the things we hold dear—to universities, to single parents and even now to that great institution of Medicare—at a time when we have a need for an additional revenue stream, why on earth is this government countenancing the loss of $7.3 billion every year? It boggles the mind. It must simply be ideology and not evidence that is driving this government. We see that with the Commission of Audit's razor-gang.

If it were evidence based then this government would at least be seeking to retain the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, that magnificently successful organisation—that $10 billion renewable energy bank, if you like—that not only has seen emissions reduced but also has been making the government money and stimulating a new, incredibly profitable and exciting sector of our economy. If indeed it were evidence driving this government's decisions then they would be retaining the Clean Energy Finance Corporation. Sadly, we see that the lack of evidence pervades. It is all the more so when it comes to the science itself, and climate science most of all.

The most confronting example of that, in recent times, was when the government put a climate sceptic in charge of the renewable energy target review. That is the target which was reviewed by the Climate Change Authority—who are actual scientists—not 18 months ago. They are scheduled to do an update to that in about six months time. Sadly, this government wants to abolish them as well. But I am really proud that today this chamber voted to keep that science based independent organisation. That is the organisation which last week recommended that Australia's emissions targets need to be increased, that if we are to follow the science and tackle climate change we should be increasing our reduction target to 19 per cent by 2020.

This government wants a five per cent target, yet it is not even prepared to spend the money to meet that five per cent target. It has quarantined $3 billion to spend on its bizarre direct action policy but it has admitted, countless times, should that money not produce a five per cent cut in emissions that: 'It doesn't matter; we won't throw any more money at it. It doesn't really matter if we don't meet that five per cent.' It does not care. Sadly, that five per
cent target is itself far too low and will do nothing to help prevent more extreme drought, bushfires and economic ruin fuelled by global warming.

That is what we are talking about tonight, when we talk about climate change. It is not just, as the Prime Minister said, some invisible, odourless and weightless substance. No doubt he got a wealth of scientific advice on that statement, given that we now no longer have a science minister in this parliament. It is about the extreme weather events that this country is already facing. We are in a climate emergency and, when you look at the predictions from the government's own advisers about what we face under a changing climate, it is really very confronting.

I want to read into the record some of the projected impacts of global warming for my home state of Queensland. They come from a combination of sources, mostly the Bureau of Meteorology and the CSIRO. Brisbane will experience more variable rainfall and stronger winds, leading to more extreme weather events. Extreme rainfall intensity is projected to increase, which could lead to more flooding—and we have already seen what happened with the devastating 2011 floods. Coastal areas are at high risk, and up to 67,700 residential buildings are at risk of inundation from a sea level rise of just 1.1 metres. That same sea level rise would also put up to 4,700 kilometres of Queensland's roads, up to 570 kilometres of Queensland's railways and up to 1,440 commercial buildings at risk. The number of days in Brisbane above 35 degrees could go from one a year up to 21 a year by 2070. Sadly, we know the effect that those extreme heat days can have on the elderly and the young.

In Central Queensland the projections are likewise for hotter weather and dry conditions that could lead to extreme and more frequent fire behaviour. We have had quite a lot of that lately, and none of us would wish it to continue unnecessarily. The fire season will start earlier and end later, there will be an increased fire frequency in the region and more areas will be burnt. The area will experience more variable rainfall, stronger winds and droughts, leading to more extreme weather events. The projections are also that there could be an increase in category 3 to 5 tropical cyclones, and there could be an increase of up to 60 per cent in severe storm intensity by 2030 and a 140 per cent increase by 2070.

The facts continue, and they are incredibly sobering. Far North Queensland may see an increase in the spread of diseases such as malaria and dengue fever due to more favourable conditions for vectors. It may also see ecosystem changes and extinctions in the wet tropics rainforests, increased heat related illnesses and flooding, erosion and damage to infrastructure associated with sea level rise. I could go on. Sadly, these are very, very sobering facts.

But it is not just human cost and human misery that will come from a failure to address runaway climate change. Our iconic plants and animals will also suffer. Our biodiversity will shrink and the world's biodiversity will suffer. Today is inaugural World Wildlife Day, and today two learned folk, Bradnee Chambers, the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Environment Programme Convention on Migratory Species, and Christiana Figueres—hopefully, not talking out of her hat today, as the Prime Minister once contended—who is, of course, the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, talked about the need for an international agreement in 2015. They said today that the agreement will not come a moment too soon for species like the monarch butterfly, humpback whale, polar bear, turtles and countless other species which, for millennia, have migrated across ancient routes spanning hundreds and thousands of miles. They say that
climate change is clearly already impacting on many animals and plants and could spell extinction for some without urgent action.

We all know that polar bears in the Arctic are already challenged by several years of thawing, melting and thinning ice, making it harder and harder for some to hunt and to find food. Meanwhile, warmer beaches are affecting the hatching patterns of marine turtles. Cooler beaches produce predominantly male hatchlings, while warmer beaches produce mostly females. So we have a whole lot of lady turtles, and that is not good news for future reproduction. Blue whales now have to migrate further from their feeding grounds in warm waters to their breeding grounds in the cooler parts of the sea, and their main food source of krill is declining because of changes in temperature and acidification of the oceans due to climate change.

As a Queenslander, I hope the Great Barrier Reef holds a really special place in all of our hearts. Sadly, the latest science that we are seeing says that the reef probably will not withstand a two-degree rise and that it will only take a one degree rise to see severe coral bleaching in the reef. That is incredibly disturbing, given that we already have a 0.9 degree rise at this point in history. Of course, it is not just temperatures that will do damage. Ocean acidification makes it harder for corals to form and weakens the existing coral structures.

Yet we have approvals for new mega coalmines and coal ports handed out like they are lollies and tossed around like confetti. In the Galilee Basin up in north Central Queensland, we have plans for coalmines that are just enormous—three times as big as the current biggest coalmine that we have got in this country. Many of them are planned for that region. If we do not keep that coal in the Galilee Basin in the ground then we will not have a chance of constraining global warming to any kind of liveable climate. In fact, Bill McKibben, who came out to visit Australia last year, has done some calculations and says that if the Galilee Basin coal were mined and burnt it would represent six per cent of the entire carbon budget for every single country in the world forevermore if we do want to keep to two degrees and keep a liveable climate. So the sheer size of these resources and the potential damage that they stand to do to our way of life, to our economy and to our planet just boggles the mind.

Much of the coal from those areas is exported through the Great Barrier Reef. We already have 12 coal ports, but apparently that is not enough. This government wants to approve yet more and expand the existing ones even more, with mass dredging and offshore dumping of that dredged spoil, and it wants to treat the reef like a highway for ships carrying coal and gas. So we see both the direct impacts on the reef from a doubling—and, in fact, a tripling in some cases, depending on your time frame—of coal exports and the terrible climate impacts when that coal is burnt. I am sure people will have seen the approval of Abbott Point, giving us now, in our Great Barrier Reef, the dubious honour of the world's largest coal port in a World Heritage area. I think that is a true tragedy. Over the weekend, we saw evidence from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, who have said that it is perfectly clear on the science that this proposal is bad news and that that offshore dumping of that dredged spoil is going to have devastating impacts on the reef. Apparently, that did not really matter to the minister. Again, science seemed to come at the bottom of a very long list of other considerations—mostly the profits of foreign multi-national mining companies.

It is clear to me that people really care about the reef. They care about the plants and animals that we share this world with, and they care about the sort of world that they want to
leave for their own children and for generations to come. To that end, in the short time I have left, I want to share with the chamber a few of the contributions that have been emailed to me or sent to me via Facebook from Queenslanders.

People are really concerned about the backward step that this government wants to take on climate and they cannot understand why anyone would have such a lack of perspective that they would do this. The first fellow, David Bruce says:

To me it is really simple. I now have a grand daughter, just eighteen months old, and I nor anyone else have the right to jeopardize her future. My granddaughter will need a lot of things, but most of all she will need clean air, clean water, clean soil. A biosphere that is habitable, that's what she needs! We must provide this!

J Lawrence says:

I was one of the sixty thousand people that marched for Climate Action (on 17th November). I want my baby grand children to grow up and be able to enjoy fresh drinking water, to be able to see the Great Barrier Reef and all the wonderful and diverse marine life within those waters, to have the same quality of life that I had as a child.

I am rallying on behalf of the future generations, that's the least I can do.

As stewards of this land, we must take care to maintain it in as good a condition as we possibly can.

We should aim higher toward higher clean energy initiatives, it is our duty as human beings.

There have been many other contributions, but sadly I do not have time this evening to share them. I look forward to sharing those in the future.

I want to take the chance, though, to pay tribute to some of the community groups in Queensland that have been working tirelessly to protect our environment—particularly on climate issues. I want to mention conservation groups along the Great Barrier Reef coast, including the Mackay Conservation Group and the North Queensland Conservation Council. I want, particularly, to mention all the young people at the Australian Youth Climate Coalition in Queensland and across the nation. They are just amazing young kids, who are so active in their democracy and who are really fighting for their right to a decent future.

I also want to mention community groups like 350.org and Market Forces. And, of course, I want to acknowledge the landholders and community groups in our beautiful farming regions of Queensland, who are taking a strong stand against the coal mining and coal seam gas mining that is pillaging their land and recklessly threatening their groundwater supplies. There are so many people who are fighting for a safe climate and who are fighting for the sort of future that I want my daughter to have.

I am really proud to stand in this place to say that the Greens will always back them. We will back strong climate action and we will do everything we can to make sure that this government does not tear down the progress that we have finally started to make, so belatedly and yet so importantly. Today we have seen the retention of the Climate Change Authority. I am hopeful that we will be able to retain the Clean Energy Finance Corporation. Things are going to change here after July, but I am confident that the science will speak, the evidence will speak and the good sense will speak so that we may be able to retain several aspects of our climate laws. I think that is what we all need to work to deliver.

It is not all doom and gloom. I think we have a bright and exciting future. If we see this as an opportunity and start investing in the low-carbon economy of the future this will be good
not only for business but for the planet and for future generations. I caution the government against proceeding down this path. I look, despite all indications to the contrary, with optimism for the future.

Senator McKenzie (Victoria—Nationals Whip in the Senate) (21:03): I want to speak briefly on the Clean Energy Legislation (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill and related bills. I will speak briefly as I want the Senate to deal as quickly as possible with the passage of these bills because the Australian people made it so clear, in their mandate at the federal election sixth months ago, that they wanted us to deal with this.

I briefly wanted to mention a specific bill in that package—the Customs Tariff Amendment (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013. That is the bill which deals with amending the provisions to remove the carbon price imposed through the excise equivalent customs duty on aviation fuel. I remind the chamber what great news this is for the embattled airline industry and for the workers of that industry, who, together with their CEOs, are facing the very real challenges of operating in a highly competitive industry. As Virgin CEO John Borghetti said last week:

… the best assistance the government and the Opposition—
 that includes Labor and the Greens—
can provide is the removal of the carbon tax, which has cost this industry hundreds of millions of dollars.

We have seen over recent weeks the impact of that cost impost daily as it ricochets throughout our economy and impacts, particularly, on the airline industry.

The chamber has heard again over the last six months—and over the previous two years—of the impacts of the toxic, ill-conceived and ineffective attack on households and businesses. The reality is that electricity costs rose 15.3 per cent in the first quarter after the tax came into effect. Household fuel and gas costs rose 14 per cent. Businesses have similarly been struggling under the weight of the carbon tax and, for our largest dairy food company, Murray Goulburn, it was an annual cost of $14 million in the first year of the carbon tax coming into effect. That was an impost of $14 million on a farmers’ cooperative trying to take the best produce in the world—a lot of it grown down south in my state of Victoria—to the international markets.

But it was not only businesses that bore the cost of carbon tax. In 2012-13 the carbon tax cost more than $13.4 million across the Victorian public health system, including $208,000 to Albury-Wodonga Health. But my focus tonight is on regional Victoria—specifically dairy and horticulture, our two great agricultural industries, particularly in the north of the state—and the food processing sector. Victoria's dairy sector accounts for 65.6 per cent of Australia's milk production and our exports were valued at over $1.8 billion—86 per cent of the value of Australia's total dairy exports. According to Australian Dairy Farmers, the average cost of the carbon tax on a dairy farm—and we heard this over and over again, and those opposite tonight refuse to heed the fact that with their carbon tax they had actually forgotten about the dairy farmers—would be between $5½ thousand and $7,000 per annum. This is significant in the context that these farmers and small business people are price takers and are trying to compete in a highly competitive global market. According to modelling by the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences, ABARES, the average savings to farms of the full repeal of the carbon price in 2014-15 would be $4½ thousand for the dairy industry and $4,620 for vegetable growers.
If the ALP and the Greens wanted to see vibrant regional communities being economically sustainable with our environmental standards and our land and water management practices, which are world-class—if you want to judge environmental practice, Australia leads the world in how to sustainably manage our water and land resources—they would be getting rid of this tax so that the good work of Australian farmers and, indeed, regional communities more broadly could be undertaken.

It is not only dairy farmers but the regional Victorian food industry that is struggling to remain competitive under the carbon tax. Our food manufacturers are already dealing with the impacts, and the Australian Food and Grocery Council's carbon tax survey from July 2013 found that 28 per cent of respondents experienced a greater than five per cent increase in their costs due to the carbon tax. To those opposite, most of whom have not operated their own business, five per cent does not sound like a lot of money, but these businesses are operating in incredibly challenging circumstances. With the high Australian dollar and the cost of doing business, including input costs—and not just labour costs but chemical costs, refrigeration, transport costs et cetera—five per cent is a significant amount of money. Sixty-seven per cent of survey respondents reported they were unable to pass those costs on. This carbon tax is crushing Australian industry. The data is in.

The former, Labor government also planned to extend the carbon tax to fuel used by the trucking industry from 1 July 2014, only three months away. If those opposite, like Glenn Sterle—Senator Sterle, I apologise—cared about a vibrant, sustainable trucking industry, he would be voting to repeal this to get rid of the impost on those in the sector in only three months time. We know industry needs time to plan and budget, but, with this uncertainty continuing, it is a cruel reminder of what Australians have had to live under with the incompetent legislative agenda program of the former government over the past six years.

The freight and logistics sector accounts for about 15 per cent of the Victorian economy, and extending the carbon tax to fuel will mean an effective carbon tax on each and every one of Australia's 47,000 trucking businesses, 85 per cent of which have fewer than five employees. That is small business; that is mums and dads. These are not the multinationals that the Greens are so keen to talk about and that Labor wants to smash. These are mums and dads operating throughout regional and urban Australia. These companies employ small numbers of people and may not make the headlines but are struggling under the hangover of bad legislation left by the former government, which Australians overwhelmingly voted against on 7 September. Labor and the Greens claim to support regional Australia and the agriculture industry and, indeed, made several badge-of-honour statements, if you like, in weekly regional papers in the lead-up to the election. But their absolute contempt for the mandate given to this place by regional Australia, who voted in overwhelming proportions to get rid of the carbon tax, makes a mockery of those words, so glibly spoken, particularly by Senator Milne, in the lead-up to the federal election. Now is the time to prove their support for regional Australia, because regional Australians want the carbon tax gone—and that election result could not have been clearer.

We are here to reflect the people's will. This is not about whether climate change is real or imagined—we must act on climate change—but we can address it without strangling business and agriculture. Let's face it, we know that the disproportionate effect of this tax was felt in regional Australia and in our industry. It is time for Labor and the Greens to stop denying the
coalition government's mandate to repeal the carbon tax and deliver much-needed financial relief for our regional communities so that we can be sustainable, promote good environmental practice internationally through our land and water management practices and, more importantly, keep employing Australians.

Senator LINES (Western Australia) (21:12): I rise to speak about and oppose the Clean Energy Legislation (Carbon Tax) Repeal Bill 2013 and related bills. I am not quite sure when the government is actually going to stand up and tell the truth about what Labor believes in and what Labor is opposed to—because Labor's position on climate change is clear. We made our position clear before the last election. We are prepared to repeal the carbon tax, something the government just cannot accept. We are prepared to repeal the carbon tax, but the government cannot accept that and it tries to paint a picture that we do not want to repeal the carbon tax. Why does it do that? Unlike us, the coalition does not accept the science of climate change. Labor does—in government we were prepared to do something about it and in opposition we are going to defend it.

The Prime Minister of this country does not want to do anything about climate change because our Prime Minister does not believe in climate change. The Prime Minister's policy removes the legal after cap on pollution. Removing the cap will give the big polluters open slather. I think most Australians would agree that, if you damage something, you pay to fix it. Australians stand for a fair go, and a fair go says that you pay your share. It is about taking responsibility for your actions. But this government wants to let the big polluters off the hook. Instead of polluters paying, the PM is setting up a slush fund of billions of dollars of taxpayers' money to hand to polluters.

Labor have acted. We tackled climate change, and we want to do that into the future. We will support the sorts of moves that tackle climate change in the most cost-effective way possible. That is why Labor support terminating the carbon tax. We have all put it on the record. But the government wants to continue to play its political games and pretend that, somehow, Labor have never agreed to repeal the carbon tax—and we did it before the last election. But—and this is the but; this is the bit the government turns a blind eye to—we will only do it if it is replaced by something such as an emissions trading scheme, if it is replaced by a scheme, not a slush fund, a scheme which puts a legal cap on carbon pollution, a scheme which lets business work out the cheapest and most effective way to operate within that cap.

The OECD has recently released a report confirming that countries could achieve high levels of emissions reductions at a much lower cost if they relied on an emissions trading scheme. Emissions trading schemes are already being adopted in many countries around the world, including the UK, France, Germany, South Korea, Canada and parts of the US and China. We in this place and those in the community know that the Liberals do not accept the science of climate change. Former PM John Howard told a London audience that those of us who accept that climate change is real are a bunch of religious zealots and that he will trust his instinct rather than the overwhelming evidence of over 97 per cent of the world's climate scientists. Our Prime Minister, the Prime Minister of Australia, accused the United Nations climate chief of talking through her hat. What a disgraceful thing to say. Our environment minister used Wikipedia to contradict her opinion on the BBC.

But, seriously, the Australian people have a right to ask just what this government stands for. Many of the current ministers and the PM are on the record as either outright supporting
an emissions trading scheme, a price on carbon or some other form of economic instrument. None are on the record as supporting a slush fund. Let's start with Minister Pyne, who, in 2009, said:

Let's not forget it was the Opposition—

he means the Liberal opposition—

that first proposed an emissions trading scheme when we were in government.

He means the Howard government. He continued:

The idea that somehow the Liberal Party is opposed to an emissions trading scheme is quite frankly ludicrous.

Do we have a government which is quite frankly ludicrous? Other coalition MPs and senators, not just Minister Pyne, are on the record as well. The current Treasurer, Joe Hockey, indicated:

I am mindful of the decision of the Party, but I am also someone who sticks with my principles …

He claimed that he was one who had considered crossing the floor. But apparently not. He is prepared neither to cross the floor nor to stick to his principles. At various other stages, people who are now ministers—Turnbull, Macfarlane, Hunt, Robb, the Attorney-General Senator Brandis—supported an ETS, a price on carbon or other sorts of economic interventions. They are on the public record. And wait, there's more. Ministers Bishop, Morrison, Truss and Ley all talked about an ETS and the need for a price on carbon. What has happened? Where is the truth here? What does the government stand for? That is a question that the voters of Australia are certainly entitled to ask. Why this sudden denial of science and of a need for a price on carbon?

This is clearly a government who says one thing in opposition and does a complete backflip when in government. Why? Because the government cannot bear any success unless it is their own. They cannot bear anything that they did not invent for themselves. They want to tear down Labor's record on the environment and Labor's record on climate change. They want to tear down Labor's record of action. That is the only reason the government could have for their amazing backflip, because neither the Prime Minister nor any coalition members have been able to come up with one credible scientist or economist who is willing to stand up and back their direct action policy—not one.

We know that 86 per cent of economists back an emissions trading scheme as the cheapest and most effective way to tackle carbon emissions. Former Treasury Secretary Ken Henry called the coalition's policy a bizarre strategy which involves the government paying big polluters from their slush fund in a scheme that will cost more and will reduce productivity. Labor's plan, which again the government has criticised in this place and in the media, was to split the bills. We wanted to do that because we wanted to try and make sure that the Climate Change Authority remained in place and that the Clean Energy Finance Corporation—a money-making venture from the government who every day is looking for money—remained in place.

They were part of a suite of policies that the former Labor government put in place. The creation of the Climate Change Authority and the Clean Energy Finance Corporation were two of the most important parts of the work that we did. In its inquiry into the government's carbon tax repeal bills, the Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee
heard from a number of stakeholders about the value of these bodies—not Labor politicians, but independent experts. The value of the Climate Change Authority and the Clean Energy Finance Corporation extends beyond carbon pricing and they should be retained regardless of the headline policy approach that we end up with.

But the government cannot help itself. It has to say, ’Labor will not repeal the carbon tax.’ But actually what we will not repeal and what we do not want to see repealed are these two really good agencies. We do not want to see the carbon tax repealed and replaced with nothing. The government has nothing. Let us be clear about that: they have nothing.

The Climate Change Authority provides expert, transparent advice. What we have seen from this government is that it does not value experts and it is certainly not about transparency. The Climate Change Authority provides advice on carbon pollution and climate change issues to the government, to business and to the public. The CCA’s advice is well respected and Labor doubts that its functions can be performed in-house by the Department of the Environment. That is if, after the Commission of Audit, we still have an environment department. We certainly do not have a science minister.

The role of the Climate Change Authority in providing information and advice should continue, because it adds value to the climate change debate in Australia—even if the Abbott government succeeds in foisting its policy con on Australians. The Clean Energy Finance Corporation provides innovative, money-making projects right across this country. I cannot believe that members of the National Party are so ready to take it down. It has been an absolute boon for businesses in the bush by providing opportunities for new business ventures.

It is renowned across the world in the sorts of reforms it has put forward. It is about one of 14 organisations that exist across the world that act as a catalyst for investment in renewable energy and clean technology. Why on earth would the government want to repeal that? It fills an important role in mobilising capital for investment. It is not a slush fund.

The CEFC facilitates comprehensive commercial loans for both renewable and clean energy technology. I have spoken in this place before about some of the innovative technologies that the CEFC has funded across this country. It is something to be proud of and certainly not a corporation that any sensible, mature and adult government would repeal. Over time, the CEFC has the capacity to make investments that would account for around 50 per cent of the five per cent emissions reduction target by 2020—at a profit to the taxpayer of $2.40 per tonne. That just falls on deaf ears. Why does it do that? Because it was Labor who put it in place and the government cannot bear that. It cannot bear that; it has to rip it down, destroy it and put in place a policy that no credible person in this country supports.

So since being created by Labor as part of the Clean Energy Future package, the CEFC has itself committed $536 million of its own budget while mobilising over $1.5 billion in private capital. It is a success in anybody’s terms, except the Abbott government’s. The average return on investment is seven per cent, a clear argument for retaining it. This CEFC has the potential to return $200 million per year or $1.5 billion to 2020 to government coffers while reducing carbon pollution. But the government is deaf to that, because it cannot bear the success of any government other than itself.
The bills seek to repeal and to abolish the Clean Energy Finance Corporation. So when the government is out there in the media saying that Labor will not repeal the carbon tax, they are forgetting to tell the Australian public about all the other parts of the bill that are worth keeping and that are worth retaining, because they are good for the environment and they are certainly good our budget bottom line. The Clean Energy Finance Corporation has been and should continue to be a clear success in driving investment, reducing carbon pollution and boosting the government's bottom line. For this reason, the bill that seeks to abolish it needs to be taken out and swept under the carpet. We need to keep the CEFC.

What we know internationally is that the world is acting on climate change. Ninety-nine countries worldwide—including Australia, and covering over 80 per cent of global emissions and 90 per cent of the global economy—have made formal pledges to the United Nations to reduce carbon pollution. Under Labor, Australia made significant contributions to global action on climate change. The first act of the Labor government was to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. We subsequently committed Australia to a second commitment period. We are one of the largest per capita polluters in the developed world—we are in the top 20, in absolute terms. Australia's actions are globally significant and we are watched closely by our international partners. Free riding is not an option.

As one of the world's largest polluters, Australia can play a key role as a progressive force for global climate action or we can return to the Howard government mould—and I think we are seeing that already—as a spoiler, a country that buries its head in the sand and denies that climate change is real. So what will Australia say and what will our actions be in providing momentum for a global climate agreement scheduled to be agreed in Paris in late 2015? I shudder to think.

The world's major international economic institutions have firmly lined up in favour of a carbon price. The OECD says consistent carbon pricing must be the cornerstone of government actions on climate change. The OECD's position was supported by both the IMF and the World Bank. China has started seven ETS schemes in regions covering more than two million people, with the aim of having a national trading scheme in place at the end of this decade. Following this move by China, our two nations agreed to set up a joint carbon trading expert group to reflect our shared commitment to serious action on a based approach to climate change. China has made it clear that it will put a cap on coal consumption that will be equivalent to even the most ambitious climate reduction targets envisaged by the international energy agency and the United Nations.

Reports show that Australia is on track for its hottest year yet. Yet here in this parliament we hear the government saying, 'We've had hot days for hundreds of years. It is just the way it is in Australia.' But plenty of expert groups agree with us. That is why Labor accepts that we need to take strong action on climate change. We owe it to our future generations. But the Abbott government just wants to make political capital and has no thought, no consideration, no care about future generations. All the experts agree: Tony Abbott's policy con will not reduce carbon pollution; it will cost households much, much more.

Senator RHIANNON (New South Wales) (21:32): What an appalling piece of legislation we have before us. To repeal the carbon tax is an enormous setback for Australia and, indeed, the world. I remember when these laws were passed in 2011. My friends living overseas were excited and inspired. They told me they were so proud to be Australian and they were in many
conversations about the possibility of preventing real action on climate change. And now we have this real setback here, one that is very destructive. We are withdrawing a crucial pathway towards building a low-carbon future for Australia. It is, indeed, pandering to the will of the big polluting industries. The fossil fuel companies have done well with the election of the Abbott government. They are lining up to reap the benefits of the so-called direct action policy. This bill is an embarrassment to the people of Australia. It was an embarrassment when the leaders of many countries came together last year to work for a low-carbon future and Australia's government leaders, including the environment minister, were here in Canberra working on repealing the Clean Energy Act.

It is an embarrassment that the government pushes ahead with such a destructive plan in the face of such extreme weather events that we have seen this summer. There have been so many reminders in recent months—the bushfires, the devastating typhoons in the Philippines. These extreme weather events are a real indicator, and so many scientists now have linked them to the whole climate change that this world is experiencing. So it is timely to ask why the government would be taking this approach. And the answer lies very much with the enormous power that the fossil fuel industry has in this country. When the previous Howard government participated in the international climate change negotiations they were unequivocal about this. The policy that they worked under, which was stated many times from the then Prime Minister Howard down, was that the coal industry means Australia need special treatment. That was the basis of the whole negotiating tactics.

And now we see a similar approach from the Abbott government and from state coalition governments. I am from New South Wales. We are seeing the government there getting themselves in a real twist because, when they were in opposition, they were speaking up about how we need to protect the local environment and water resources and even saying that some coalmines should not go ahead—coalmines where New South Wales Premier Barry O'Farrell has been caught out in terms of the deals he has been doing on the Central Coast with coalmining companies while he told communities something very different. But it has not just been coalition governments; unfortunately, successive Labor governments have also given coal companies what coal companies want.

What we should be working towards now is keeping in place the important laws that were passed in 2011 and then building on that—because so much more needs to be done. With this we know we can have a win-win. We can have a win for the environment by reducing greenhouse gas emissions; a win for the local environment by protecting all those beautiful natural environments and farming lands; a win in producing more jobs that will last well into the future; and a win for the national economy.

It can also be a win globally. There is so much important work being undertaken in this area. One aspect which is very relevant when we are discussing the possible repeal of this legislation, which we know should be kept in place and should be the foundation for a lot more work to do, is the work of the International Trade Union Confederation. A report they brought down identified in a very clear way the transition that needs to be worked on. That is what a responsible government should now be doing—not working to get rid of action on climate change but working with all sections, including the business community, the unions and the community sector on how we can advance real action on climate change. The report from the ITUC also identified how environmental deterioration and rising social inequality
are the twin perils of the 21st century. We are seeing them go hand in hand. The people who are most disadvantaged are so often in our own region and are the people who will be hardest hit by climate change.

In this century we will see more climate refugees if we do not take some real action. What the study also identified was very interesting. Economic research undertaken by the Millennium Institute forecast that investment of two per cent of GDP in the green economy over the next five years in 12 countries could create up to 48 million new jobs. They identified that in great detail—a plan that should be acted on. Interestingly, in the same report, they spoke very highly of the work done in Australia around the carbon price and how this work of regulation and investment can drive further investment in the economy and create more jobs, which has certainly been the theme of the Greens' work for many years in this area.

The turn back on climate change that is currently occurring in Australia is very serious. When we are having these debates we need to consider what Australia's full contribution to climate change is. Last year researchers from the CSIRO revealed that we export 2.5 times the amount of carbon than the amount we burn nationally. Across the nation there are plans to increase this amount, with proposals for a fourth coal loader in Newcastle. Newcastle, one of the main ports in New South Wales, is actually the largest coal port in the world. There are plans to ship a further 70 million tonnes of coal overseas—to be burnt overseas, to add all that carbon dioxide, all those greenhouse gas emissions, to the atmosphere.

Australia, as we know, is the world's largest exporter of coal. Successive governments have used this as an excuse to avoid their responsibilities to both the international and national community. There is little doubt about the tenacity of the fossil fuel industry. Time and time again, we see them exercising their power, bullying both state governments and local communities, to ensure they get their coalmines approved and they get their coal infrastructure, railway lines and railway bridges to get the coal down to the coal ports so they can get it out of the country as quickly as possible to boost their profits.

It was recently reported in the Newcastle Herald that the proponents of the fourth coal terminal, Port Waratah Coal Services, are actually being prosecuted for allowing some diesel fuel, a very serious pollutant, to flow into the Hunter River. That was at the Carrington Coal Terminal. This is only months after being fined $25,000 for the same thing. They go and do it again. Why do they do it again? Because $25,000 is not even the equivalent of petty cash for these companies.

This debate about the role of coal in our communities is very necessary because of the destruction we are seeing to the global environment, as well as the destruction to people's health locally and, indeed, very much to the local economy and jobs. We are seeing more and more that this industry is a jobs killer. It does not produce the jobs that it once did where we could have real sustainable jobs growth. As was suggested in the report that I just mentioned, from the International Trade Union Confederation, it is by getting behind clean energy and clean manufacturing that jobs can be delivered.

Coalmining has also proved very divisive in communities. We are seeing this very much in the Hunter region in New South Wales. It has been prominent in many debates. The industries that are vital to the region's economic diversity, growth and tourism—such as horse breeding, winemaking and general tourism—are really struggling in so many areas in parts of New
South Wales because of the encroachment of the coal industry and also coal seam gas mining. It amazes me how we have to do battle in government—I saw it when I was in state parliament and we have also seen it here—when you try to address the issue of health impacts of coalmining. There are these constant demands: where is the science, where are the studies on this? We have so often seen people involved in coalmining damaged because of coal dust. This should be a no-brainer and is one part of the industry that should be readily cleaned up.

Many communities in the Hunter area are taking on giant companies and, interestingly, are having some success. One I want to share with you is Bulga, a small, tight-knit community in the Upper Hunter Valley. Their story is very impressive. They fought a long and hard battle against the mining industry. They are actually surrounded by three mines. It is a beautiful, little area but there are three large, open-cut mines where towers of the overburden surround them. One of the world's biggest mining companies, Rio Tinto, is active in this area. They announced plans that they wanted to expand the Mount Thorley-Warkworth mine. The community was very upset. The company changed a lot of the promises they had given to the community when the mine first opened. The Warkworth Sands Woodland—a very interesting ecosystem—was formed 18,000 years ago. It is totally unique. No other such landform is on the planet and it is home to squirrel gliders and glossy black cockatoos. It is a stunning area. Only 13 per cent of this region is left. It has been lost to either mining or farming. Obviously, it should be retained. However, the company vowed to protect the ridge that separated the mine from the town.

But then what happened? The Bulga residents worked very hard because they found out that Rio Tinto had plans to expand its original proposal. The proposal was actually rejected by the New South Wales Land and Environment Court, but they discovered at the last minute that Rio Tinto put in plans for a further expansion and got support from the O'Farrell government to advance that and go against the court decision.

Lock the Gate, now a very famous organisation, have noted that this appears to be an attempt at manoeuvring around the New South Wales Land and Environment Court by breaking up the original proposal, and I am sure it is no coincidence that this application was lodged just days after the New South Wales coalition government changed mining regulations in favour of the industry. That is why I said earlier that what we have seen from successive state and federal governments, Labor and coalition, is: what the mining industry wants, the mining industry gets. There are so many examples of this in the New South Wales parliament. Occasionally, communities have a win and then the government comes in and actually changes the law. The community have found what the company sees as a loophole but the community recognise as a law that they are able to get a win under. And what does the government do? It changes it.

We see this very serious problem where the power of coal companies and coal seam gas companies is just so extensive. This is making it very hard to get real action on climate change. The power of the fossil fuel industry has certainly been one of the big factors in backing up the coalition government coming forward with this plan that we are debating tonight in parliament: the repeal of this important legislation, this package of laws that provides a foundation for real action on climate change.

I mentioned the issue of jobs and gave the example from overseas. There has also been considerable work done in Australia on identifying how, if we work on a transition away from
a dependency on coal to renewable energy, that is where we can have jobs growth that will last. This is an area the government should be working on, because it is now widely recognised that renewables are commercially and industrially viable. We need political will from the government of the day to work responsibly with communities that have been coal dependent on how we can ensure that there is jobs growth and jobs growth well into the future. Governments are not doing that work, but there are certainly many people in the community who are. I will give some examples.

The University of Newcastle Centre of Full Employment and Equity estimates that up to 73,800 jobs could be created across New South Wales if we were to implement 100 per cent renewable energy by 2020 as well as developing a renewables export industry. Under a similar plan, Beyond Zero Emissions have estimated that 160,938 direct jobs would be created in Australia in the renewable energy sector over a 10-year period. The Clean Energy Council estimates that the development of 28 wind farms in New South Wales could create 3,940 jobs. The evidence is clearly in. For the New South Wales economy, let alone the national economy, this is the way to go. This is not just about reducing greenhouse gas emissions; this is the future that we need to be building.

I have found that this really is something that moves people greatly. When we come to debate this legislation in the chamber, I get a lot more emails, as I know my colleagues do. People are very distressed to hear that the clock is about to be turned back. I want to share some of those stories that people have sent in to me. Jillian Reid, an investment consultant, said:

Tax payers, through the 'Direct Action' model, should not be footing a bill while corporations make profits when the markets will drive beneficial, profitable change, if only government policy would guide the market to ensure self-interest is considered 'on the whole' over a longer time frame than the next five minutes. Surely that is the role of government on matters of human survival?

Then there was Royce Levi. He wrote a very interesting piece. He is a teacher. He said:

As a teacher for exactly 50 years, I have a duty, on behalf of the thousands of children and adults whose lives I have influenced in classrooms, to speak up on behalf of the children of tomorrow. I cannot understand why so many members of parliament, so many with children, would so blatantly assault the future with pseudoscience and naive economic jargon.

I found that one of the most telling of the comments. It certainly echoes—

Debate interrupted.

ADJOURNMENT

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Furner) (21:50): Order! I propose the question:

That the Senate do now adjourn.

UWA Gives Back

Senator SMITH (Western Australia) (21:50): I rise this evening to highlight some of the exciting happenings now going on across Western Australia—and I am not talking about the upcoming re-run of the Senate election on 5 April.

Senator Ludlam: Oh come on!

Senator SMITH: Not yet, Senator Ludlam!
As other senators will appreciate, Western Australia is a vast place, with many Western Australians living in regional areas. Of course, some of these communities are quite remote, and it is a constant challenge to find new ways of ensuring that those living in remote areas are able to experience some of the exciting things that are happening across our vast state. It is also important to ensure that young people living in regional and remote parts of Western Australia have access to as many opportunities as possible so that their comparative geographical isolation is not a barrier to the development of their future careers.

That is why I was exceptionally pleased that the University of Western Australia chose to use 2013, which was that university's centenary year, to reach out to Western Australia's regions through an innovative program called UWA Gives Back. UWA Gives Back was born of the recognition that institutions such as our universities cannot survive in isolation, particularly in WA. They can only continue to thrive with the support of local communities, and maintaining that support means ensuring the university's activities are relevant and have a meaning for local people. This requires continuous engagement with local community organisations and school students across regional WA so they can see how UWA's research and community outreach programs are contributing to Western Australia's development and growth.

UWA Gives Back was an initiative that brought the whole university together. The student guild, the metropolitan and regional campuses and every faculty making up those campuses contributed to the program. The university's staff and students went out into regional Western Australia and explained research happening at UWA and how it can benefit the people of Western Australia. They demonstrated to high school students the benefits of tertiary study and encouraged them to consider enrolment at the university. Importantly, students became involved in local projects, including agriculture, urban planning, arts productions and teaching programs, demonstrating that, far from being a remote institution, UWA is working actively within regional communities.

I was fortunate to be able to witness firsthand the benefits of the UWA Gives Back program when I attended the launch of the initiative in Albany at the end of September last year. As I would hope all senators are now keenly aware, 2014 will be a very significant year in Albany, as the community there prepares for the commemorations of the Centenary of Anzac. The significance of this event for the Albany community was clearly acknowledged by UWA during its centenary year last year. As part of the UWA Gives Back initiative, 50 students from both the university's Albany campus and its main campus in Perth have been lending their efforts to help restore Albany's royal forts war museum and assisted in the development of walk trails around the memorial park cemetery.

UWA students also worked with the City of Albany to create a smartphone app to be used during the Anzac commemorations. The app will enable tourists to learn more about Albany's historic buildings and landmarks and a range of other information that will be helpful to the many tourists expected to attend the Anzac events being held in Albany this November. The student volunteers also undertook conservation work with the UWA Albany based Centre of Excellence in Natural Resource Management at the King River, contributing to the conservation of the Great Southern region's spectacular natural environment.

This is a commendable initiative. It was a pleasure to attend the official launch in Albany last September. Of course, the impact of UWA Gives Back spreads far more widely than just
Albany and its surroundings. For example, students from UWA's Faculty of Science travelled to the mid-west for Astrofest and inspired the locals of Mount Magnet with an inflatable planetarium night sky tours, glow-in-the-dark water rockets and an astrophotography exhibition. The mid-west is becoming a global hub for astronomy, with part of the Square Kilometre Array being built there and several new radio telescopes coming online in the Murchison. In a two-week tour of Carnamah, Morawa, Meekatharra, Mount Magnet, Kalbarri and Jurien, staff from the UWA based International Centre for Radio Astronomy Research worked to connect local communities with the night sky, helping to bring science to life for Western Australian school students.

The Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences concentrated on the Goldfields, running a minimedical school and demonstrating how telehealth videoconferencing technology works in practice. In the Pilbara, UWA's Business School presented a showcase to local communities. In the Kimberley, the Faculty of Engineering, Computing and Mathematics engaged with school, community, alumni and industry groups in Derby, Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek, Wyndham, Kununurra and Broome, demonstrating the impact that developments in engineering, computing and mathematics have on our daily lives and the benefits that developing technology will bring to remote and regional communities.

Perhaps the most visually spectacular element of UWA Gives Back occurred last November with the dramatic tale of Geraldton's future, as portrayed through the eyes of artists and local high school students, being projected onto the CBH silo at the port in Geraldton with a soundtrack simulcast on local radio. The Luminous Dreams project was developed by the Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Visual Arts at UWA and the Australian Urban Design Research Centre and supported by the City of Greater Geraldton.

I congratulate the University of Western Australia's Vice-Chancellor, Professor Paul Johnson, as well as the Manager of the UWA Guild Volunteer Hub, Mr Adan Date, and the many UWA students who gave and continue to give generously of their time to support these important programs and events for regional communities across WA. I also extend my appreciation to Mr Adnan Visram, Ms Denisse Fierro Arcos, Mr Bryan Howells and Ms Rosie Jeanes for their tremendous effort in supporting the initiative.

This regional renaissance is being accompanied by other exciting developments in the Perth metropolitan area. I very pleased to note that Perth's rapid development received very positive coverage in last Thursday's edition of The New York Times. While I do not often agree with some of that newspaper's editorial content, The New York Times very strongly endorsed the way in which Perth has set itself up for the 21st century. I encourage all senators, particularly those from the eastern states, to check the full article for themselves. As a proud Western Australian it was very pleasing to read comments such as these:

The capital of Western Australia, where some 1.8 of the state’s two million residents live, left this New Yorker mesmerized: Could a city really be so easy, breezy, green and pristine—so positively livable? I’d thought Williamsburg was hipster heaven; it pales beside Perth.

A state investment program pours millions into new infrastructure and big projects, including a 15,500-seat futuristic arena that opened in 2012; a $750 million airport terminal is also now in the works. Australians once joked that “WA” stood not for “Western Australia” but “wait awhile”—a jab at the
laid-back west-coast lifestyle, not as up-to-the-minute as Melbourne or Sydney—but that now has a new connotation: If you think Perth is getting trendy, wait till you see what it’s becoming.

Many of us in Western Australia have long understood that our city held enormous potential as an international destination. It seems our faith is now being repaid. Just last year we saw Perth entering the top 10 list of the world’s most liveable cities, as ranked by *The Economist* magazine. That said, Western Australians know that we cannot afford to rest on our laurels. We need to continue building infrastructure so that our transport, education and health systems keep pace with the phenomenal population growth that Western Australia has been experiencing over recent times. We can only do that if we get the budget back under control and get rid of taxes and charges that act as barriers to employment growth by penalising industry.

In September last year Western Australians sent at very clear message to those in this place. WA recorded the highest Liberal Party primary vote of any jurisdiction in Australia. Of the 15 House of Representatives seats in Western Australia, 12 are now held by the Liberal Party. I would have thought that such an emphatic result would have given the Labor Party and the Greens a very clear insight into the views of Western Australians. They want the boats to stop. They want Labor’s job-destroying carbon tax gone. They want the mining tax, a tax which hurts Western Australia more than any other part of Australia, to be repealed. Yet it seems senators opposite continue not hear the message.

Through the vagaries of circumstances which no-one particularly welcomed, Western Australians will return to the polls on 5 April to choose six senators for their state. The people of Western Australian will be confronted with a very clear and stark choice. Western Australians can vote for Labor and their Green allies, who continue to support the carbon and mining taxes in this place and fight at every turn this government’s efforts to stop the boats with policies that, demonstrably, are working, or they can support a Liberal Senate team that has a clear plan to get the budget back on— *(Time expired)*

**World War I**

**Senator FARRELL** (South Australia) (22:00): This is the fourth of six speeches that I am in the process of giving about my grandfather's role in World War I and in the lead-up to commemorations of the 100th anniversary of that war. On 6 January 1918, my grandfather, Sergeant Edward Farrell, who had been injured in a troop train derailment near the border of Belgium and France, reported to his fiancee, Emily, that he had regained some of his old spark. He was still in France, and wrote, recalling his front line experiences:

That Flanders Battlefield is the limit, Em. Miles and miles of shell holes and what were once villages. In some places, but for the signs, you wouldn't know a village had been there at all.

And the mud. I have gone down to the waist in it, and at times had to struggle to get out. The night is the time when you can't see a thing in front of you and, of course, most of the work near the front line is done at night. You can't move about in daylight.

In these back areas, Fritz bombs the place every night that the weather permits, and a bomb dropping hundreds of yards away shakes the ground like an earthquake.

See some good scrapes in the air occasionally. Just before we left, a Fritz plane dived straight down out of the clouds at one of our captive balloons. He didn't get it—but the two men in the balloon couldn't get out quick enough (by parachute of course) and they got down all right.
The last few weeks we left Ypres and came down just in front of Messines, what they called a quiet front but we had casualties every night.

Despite the regularity of Edward's letters, it is still difficult to say exactly what battles he had been in by the time he found himself back in England and in hospital, but they could have included the Battle of Polygon Wood, and the Battle of Passchendaele.

During the period July to November 1917 the Australian victories included Menin Road and Broodseinde; at Broodseinde for the first time all the Australian divisions fought side by side. The fighting lasted for eight weeks, and during this time seven Australian soldiers received the Victoria Cross. On 14 November, the five Australian divisions were withdrawn from Ypres. Their casualties over eight weeks had been more than 38,000. Edward recalled one battle in a letter to Em:

Joves, I've been lucky—one Sunday evening going in, the man in front and the man behind me was knocked down, and at times pieces of shell came very close—some spent pieces have hit my tin hat but I never got a scratch.

At Messines we had the first real taste of winter—heavy frost and snow—I felt the cold pretty severely. The only relieving features are that the shell holes and mud become frozen hard.

Of his repatriation back to England he wrote:

Had it pretty quiet coming across the channel in the good ship "St Patrick". Got into Dover in the dark and had several hours in the train.

Am getting along slowly, but nothing much can be done except complete rest. I expect my next move will be to a convalescent hospital.

On 26 January 1918, Edward wrote from Ward 28, No. 1 Australian Auxiliary Hospital, Harefield Park, Middlesex, that the medics had examined him and determined he had concussion and a touch of mustard gas. Four days later he wrote to Em:

I'm nearly OK again, and the doctor says a fortnight out in the country will fix me up. That means I'll be leaving here in a day or so for London where I'll get a ticket to Dublin and county Cork—adding that a chap in the next bed was joining him for the trip to Ireland.

Edward sent Em several post cards from Ireland but waited until he returned to England to report more fully on his journey. On February 16 he wrote from the Hurcott Command Depot, Wiltshire:

Enjoyed the trip down through Tipperary and Limerick and saw the peat boys and ate lots of cakes. We changed train at Fermoy and arrived at Mitchelstown on time at 1.24 p.m. Got outside the station where a young fellow came up and asked if we were looking for Mrs Kent, who was his aunt. His name was Joe Twomey and—or course—some relation to me, as Mrs Kent's father was Gran's brother. I also met the O'Briens, Caseys, Hennessys, Quinlans and Gearys and so on—who were all cousins of some sort.

Over the next few days Edward met other relatives and a number of Sinn Feiners, and visited Kilbehenny, Carhue, Kingstown and Dublin. He also reported to Em:

Food is very plentiful over there, and—and indeed—there doesn't seem to be a shortage of anything. The real butter, eggs and bacon were altogether too much for me and, of course, meeting all the relations was grand—I had no idea there were so many there.

On 25 February, again from Hurcott, he continued his travelogue:

The Irish Sea was very quiet as we returned to Holyhead in Wales, and I didn't see anyone crook at all.
About half way across we heard guns firing behind us. I didn't like the noise at all, but we couldn't see anything. We were escorted by a couple of destroyers and a submarine, and reached Holyhead about midday.

On landing I got on the London express, and the ride to Chester—our first stop—was about the prettiest I've ever been on.

It was fairly sunny and the scenery was exquisite, with the Snowden Mountains on one side the sea on the other.

Some of the rugged peaks are grand, and they towered right over the railway. Seems to be all rivers, bays, bridges, and tunnels etc, and some very pretty little towns and fairly big ones too, the names of which I'd never heard.

Places like Bangor, Rhyl and Colwyn Bay which is some place, I tell you.

Then all the little places called Llan this and Pen that. I was sorry when we left Wales behind. Came on through Crewe, Stafford and Rugby and reached Euston, London, about 6.30.

Throughout late February and March Edward continued convalescing in Hurcott, reporting in several letters to Em that the weather was cold and miserable and that he envied her the heat they were having in Adelaide. He wrote to Em on 25 March:

The news is not particularly bright this morning. We are expecting to see every morning and evening where they've pressed the button between Armentieres and Ypres—that's the part on which the eyes of these camps are turned.

At this time, the Australian 3rd and 4th Divisions were ordered to proceed to Amiens to strengthen the retreating British 5th Army. On 5 April, a counterattack by the 36th Battalion of the Australian 3rd Division at dawn halted the German advance beyond Villers-Bretonneux. The hard-fought action cost the Australians 660 casualties but prevented further advances towards Amiens. On the night of 22 April, British and Australian artillery shelled German mustering areas in the Villers-Bretonneux region. At dawn the infantry was standing ready, but no attack eventuated. Most of the activity on this day was in the air, as planes from both sides criss-crossed the battlefield, bombing, strafing and engaging in dogfights. It was during one of these dogfights that the German 'Red Baron' was shot down over Australian lines, with the strongest evidence as to the shooter pointing to Australian Sergeant Cedric Popkin of the 24th Machine-Gun Company, 4th Division. He was reported as firing the actual bullet that killed Baron Manfred von Richthofen. On 27 April, Villers-Bretonneux was finally secured by Australian forces and was never to be lost to Germans again.

On May 5, Edward wrote to Em that he had moved from Hurcott to the Overseas Training Battalion at Longbridge Deverill, in Wiltshire:

Will have to do about three weeks of pretty solid training here, and then sail across the Channel again. It's a bit like soldiering on again here—only three blankets and the hard floor, so I had to come at the old stint of not taking anything off.

We got news of several of the old boys in the Battalion being killed, also that the HQ staff of the Battalion including Laurie Kelly had been gassed—but I don't know if the gassing was bad or not.

Mr President, I shall continue with subsequent episodes of Sergeant Edward Farrell's wartime experiences when next I speak. In the next part of my speech, Edward will return to the Western Front, and finally the war will end.
Tonight I rise to invite Prime Minister Tony Abbott to visit the beautiful state of Western Australia. I do this in good faith, because we are only a matter of weeks away from a historic by-election that will not just determine the final makeup of this chamber after July but also will decide much more of consequence to the people of Western Australia, whether they are thinking of voting for the Greens or not. Prime Minister, you are welcome out west, but this is a respectful invitation to think carefully about what baggage you pack when you make your next flying campaign stopover. When you arrive at Perth airport, you will alight on the traditional country of the Whadjuk Nyoongar people, who have sung this country for more than 40,000 years. This is 200 times the age of the city that now stands on the banks of the Derbal Yerigan, the Swan River. Understand that you are now closer to Denpasar than to Western Sydney, in a state where an entire generation has been priced out of affordable housing. Recognise that you are standing in a place where the drought never ended, where climate change from land clearing and fossil fuel combustion is a lived reality that is already costing jobs, property and lives.

Mr Prime Minister, at your next press conference we invite you to leave your excruciatingly boring three-word slogans at home. If your image of Western Australia is of some caricatured redneck backwater that is enjoying the murderous horror unfolding on Manus Island, you are reading us wrong. Every time you refer to us as the 'mining state' as though the western third of our ancient continent is just Gina Rinehart's inheritance to be chopped, benched and blasted, you are reading us wrong. Western Australians are a generous and welcoming lot, but if you arrive and start talking proudly about your attempts to bankrupt the renewable energy sector, cripple the independence of the ABC and privatise SBS, if you show up waving your homophobia in people's faces and start boasting about your ever-more insidious attacks on the trade union movement and all working people, you can expect a very different kind of welcome.

People are under enough pressure as it is without three years of this government going out of its way to make it worse. It looks awkward when you take policy advice on penalty rates and the minimum wage from mining billionaires and media oligarchs on the other side of the world—awkward, and kind of revolting. It is good to remember that these things are temporary. For anyone listening in from outside this almost empty Senate chamber, the truth is that Prime Minister Tony Abbott and this benighted attempt at a government are a temporary phenomenon. They will pass, and we need to keep our eyes on the bigger picture. Just as the reign of the dinosaurs was cut short to their great surprise, it may be that the Abbott government will appear as nothing more than a thin, greasy layer in the core sample of future political scientists drilling back into the early years of the 21st century.

The year 2014 marks 30 years since the election of the first representative of what was to become the Greens—my dear friend and mentor Senator Jo Vallentine. She came into this place as a lone Western Australian representative speaking out against the nuclear weapons that formed the foundations of the geopolitical suicide pact we dimly remember as the Cold War. Since the first day of Senator Vallentine's first term, the Greens have been articulating a vision of Australia as it could be—an economy running on infinite flows of renewable energy; a society that never forgets it lives on country occupied by the planet's oldest continuing civilisation; and a country that values education, innovation and equality. These values are
still at the heart of our work; nowhere stronger than on the Walkatjurra Walkabout, which will set off again later this month to challenge the poisonous imposition of the state's first uranium mine on the shoreline of Lake Way. As the damage done by the nuclear industry is global, so is our resistance.

Mr Abbott, your thoughtless cancellation of half a billion dollars of Commonwealth funding for the Perth light rail project has been noted. Your blank cheque for Colin Barnett's bloody and unnecessary shark cull has been noted. Your attacks on Medicare, on schools funding, on tertiary education—noted. The fact that your only proposal for environmental reforms thus far is to leave Minister Greg Hunt playing solitaire for the next three years while you outsource his responsibilities to the same Premier who presides over the shark cull has been noted too.

You may not believe this, Prime Minister, but your advocacy on behalf of foreign biotechnology corporations and Hollywood's copyright-industrial complex to chain Australia to the Trans-Pacific Partnership has been noted. People have been keeping a record of every time you have been given the opportunity to choose between predator capitalism and the public interest, and it is bitterly obvious whose side you are on.

So to be very blunt, the reason that I extend this invitation to you, Mr Prime Minister, to spend as much time as you can spare in Western Australia is that every time you open your mouth the Green vote goes up. You and your financial backers in the gas fracking and uranium industries have inspired hundreds of people to spend their precious time doorknocking thousands of homes for the Greens in the last few weeks. Your decision to back Monsanto's shareholders instead of Western Australian farmers has inspired people across the length and breadth of this country to make thousands of calls and donate to our campaign.

As for the premeditated destruction of the NBN and Attorney-General George Brandis's degrading capitulation to the surveillance state when confronted with the unlawful actions of the US NSA—even the internet is turning green, 'for the win'. Geeks and coders, network engineers and gamers would never have voted Green in a million years without the blundering and technically illiterate assistance of your leadership team. For this I can only thank you.

And, perhaps most profoundly, your determined campaign to provoke fear in our community—fear of innocent families fleeing war and violence in our region—in the hope that it would bring out the worst in Australians is instead bringing out the best in us. Prime Minister, you are welcome to take your heartless racist exploitation of people's fears and ram it as far from Western Australia as your taxpayer funded travel entitlements can take you.

What is at stake here, in the most immediate sense, is whether or not Prime Minister Tony Abbott has total control of this parliament in coming years. But I have come to realise that it is about much more than that. We want our country back. Through chance, misadventure, and, somewhere, a couple of boxes of misplaced ballot papers, we have been given the opportunity to take back just one seat on 5 April, and a whole lot more in 2016. Game on, Prime Minister. See you out west.

International Women's Day

Senator KROGER (Victoria—Chief Government Whip) (22:17): I am actually very pleased to change the tone of the debate tonight after that contribution. I consider myself to be very fortunate to have grown up in an extraordinary, loving and supportive family where my
mother reigned supreme in our house. At the age of 91 she still reigns supreme, and we are all very frightened and make sure that we do what she says. I say that in the context that I was very lucky to be nurtured and brought up in a home where gender was not an issue. I did not know that there was such an issue as gender inequality because it was not something I was brought up with or had to deal with on a daily basis.

With International Women's Day being celebrated across the globe on 8 March, I think it is very important that we use this moment in time to continue to evaluate and assess the progress that is being made across the globe, not just in Afghanistan or Saudi Arabia, where we tend to draw stark contrast to things that may not be sympathetic with our cultural way of life, but also here in Australia.

So it was that I was absolutely mortified when I picked up *The Sydney Morning Herald* this morning and read the headline 'Hotline plan to help hidden child brides in Sydney'. With your indulgence, I will read a couple of paragraphs from that article that was written by Emma Partridge. The opening paragraph says:

There are at least 60 child brides living in south-western Sydney, and many more girls are destined to be forced into under-age marriage, according to the head of a women's health centre.

The article goes on at length in relation to an interview with a doctor in a particular area who assists a number of families and, in particular, these young girls. The article states:

One woman recently came to her in tears and said her husband, who was still awaiting clearance in the detention centre, threatened to kill her if she learnt English or went out of the house without him.

"This is happening in Australia. We are not in the suburbs of Afghanistan - this is the suburbs of Sydney."

A mother and father came into her office and proudly spoke of how they had just celebrated the wedding of their daughter in Iraq.

The doctor turned to the young girl who was 14 and two-months pregnant. This is happening here in Australia, so I raise it here tonight. I think the strongest thing that we can do for our young girls, who have the great fortune to live and be brought up in Australia, is ensure that they have a right and an opportunity to enjoy the innocence of youth. What a tragedy it would be if children could not enjoy the very innocence of their childhood—they should not know any different—or the challenges, the joy and tribulations of adolescence and growing up and the liberty of learning and developing in a supportive environment.

I would have thought that in a socially advanced economy like Australia the least that we should be able to provide for the youth of our country is an education, safety and the protection and safekeeping of children. What should be absolutely paramount is the safekeeping of their innocence, so that they can enjoy something that they will actually never get back in their lifetimes.

Just as we should be protecting and safeguarding that, so too should girls have a right to education and have the right to all the freedoms that we just take for granted here. They should also have the right to choose who they marry. It is something very intrinsically Australian, and it is something that is most unusual for me to get up and speak about tonight. But that article really moved me this morning, and I felt the need to reafﬁrm Australian values and beliefs and that this should not be tolerated in this country.
In some cases underage marriage is a religious norm. In other cases it is a cultural custom, and I understand that. But in many cases—and I would have to say probably in most cases—underage marriage is encouraged by the girl's family. In all cases, and in my mind without question, it would leave mental and physical scars for life.

As legislators in this place, I believe it is the responsibility of those in this chamber and in the other place, in the House, to make sure that we leave the nation a better, fairer and stronger place. In the words of our national anthem that we all sing very regularly, we are a nation that is 'young and free'. We need to make sure that girls around the world, and more particularly in our place here in Australia, know that it is not okay to be betrothed or married against their will. They need to know this. It is not okay to be threatened with death or dishonour if you leave the house without your husband. It is not okay to be told that you will be killed if you dare to learn English. These things are just not acceptable.

Forced marriages are a crime in Australia, and we need to make sure that young women and girls know this and know where to go if they or someone they know are threatened with underage marriage or are to be married against their will. We need to make sure that there are enough support services in our communities to deal with this issue, and we most certainly need to make sure that young women and girls feel safe and secure in Australia.

Having just caught up with Australia's Ambassador for Women and Girls, I want to applaud the appointment of Natasha Stott-Despoja. I think that she will make a sensational ambassador for us here in Australia, and I know that she will be relentless in campaigning for gender equality and the empowerment of women on an international scale.

Australia has a lot to be proud of in this environment, and in many cases we can be considered to be a beacon of female empowerment in this nation. But it is important that we continue to strive for the same rights as our male counterparts. It is most important that we highlight, as Emma Partridge did today in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, where the system is letting down so many people. The absolute No. 1 prerogative of this place must be to ensure the safekeeping and protection of our youth and their innocence. They are the future of this country, and we must make sure that we do everything we can to protect them so that they actually have the opportunity to explore and fulfil their maximum capacity.

Just in closing, I would like to thank people like Emma Partridge for bringing this to the attention of the Australian public. It is something that tends to be pushed aside a little bit. It is not an issue that is given a lot of attention front and centre, and it is one that must continue to be ventilated to ensure that this does not happen in Australia, and that there is a zero tolerance approach to this.

Senate adjourned at 22:27

**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. 3 of 2014 [F2014L00184].

Civil Aviation Act 1988—

Civil Aviation Regulations 1988—Civil Aviation Order 40.3.0 Amendment Instrument 2014 (No. 1) [F2014L00145].

Civil Aviation Safety Regulations 1998—

Exemption — operations by paragliders in the Corryong Paragliding Open—CASA EX08/14 [F2014L00141].

Exemption — recent experience requirements for night V.F.R. agricultural ratings—CASA EX12/14 [F2014L00173].

Exemption — recognition of EASA type certification—CASA EX09/14 [F2014L00163].


Commissioner of Taxation—Public Rulings—


Customs Act 1901—Customs Amendment Regulation 2014 (No. 1)—Select Legislative Instrument 2014 No. 4 [F2014L00152].


Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999—

Amendment of List of Exempt Native Specimens—Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery (deletion) (24 February 2014)—EPBC303DC/SFS/2014/06 [F2014L00185].

Amendment of List of Exempt Native Specimens—Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery (inclusion) (24 February 2014)—EPBC303DC/SFS/2014/07 [F2014L00186].

Amendment of List of Exempt Native Specimens—Queensland Mud Crab Fishery (19 February 2014)—EPBC303DC/SFS/2014/03 [F2014L00165].


Food Standards Australia New Zealand Act 1991—


Food Standards (Application A1081—Food derived from Herbicide-tolerant Soybean Line SYHT0H2) Variation [F2014L00189].


Migration Act 1958—

Migration Regulations 1994—

Eligible Education Providers and Educational Business Partners—IMMI 14/007 [F2014L00146].

Eligible Passports—IMMI 13/158 [F2014L00155].

Statements under section 197AB—1 July to 31 December 2013 [101].


National Health Act 1953—

National Health Determination under paragraph 98C(1)(b) Amendment 2014 (No. 2)—PB 10 of 2014 [F2014L00144].

National Health (Highly specialised drugs program for hospitals) Special Arrangement Amendment Instrument 2014 (No. 2)—PB 11 of 2014 [F2014L00183].

National Health (Listed drugs on F1 or F2) Amendment Determination 2014 (No. 1)—PB 15 of 2014 [F2014L00171].


Navigation Act 2012—

Marine Order 70 (Seafarer certification) 2014—AMSA MO 2014/2 [F2014L00177].


Marine Order 73 (Ratings) 2014—AMSA MO 2014/5 [F2014L00181].


Ozone Protection and Synthetic Greenhouse Gas Management Act 1989—Grant of exemptions under section 40—

Qantas Airways Ltd—S40E65341642.
   Tiger Airways Australia Pty Limited—S40E38471038.
   Virgin Australia Airlines Pty Ltd—S40E89640864.
   Virgin Australia Regional Airlines Pty Ltd—S40E66430359.

Privacy Act 1988—Credit Reporting Privacy Code (CR code) [F2014L00170].

Private Health Insurance Act 2007—Private Health Insurance (Prostheses) Amendment Rules 2014 (No. 1) [F2014L00172].


Remuneration Tribunal Act 1973—


Remuneration and Allowances for Holders of Part-Time Public Office—Remuneration Tribunal Determination 2014/03 [F2014L00188].


Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988—

Section 34D—Variation of Criteria for Approval or Renewal of Approval as a Workplace Rehabilitation Provider (Rehabilitation Program Provider) (17 October 2012) [F2012L02075]—Revised explanatory statement.

Section 34S—Approval of Form of Application for Approval as a Workplace Rehabilitation Provider (Rehabilitation Program Provider) (17 October 2012) [F2012L02079]—Revised explanatory statement.

Section 34S—Approval of Form of Application for Renewal of Approval as a Workplace Rehabilitation Provider (Rehabilitation Program Provider) (17 October 2012) [F2012L02078]—Revised explanatory statement.

Seat of Government (Administration) Act 1910—

National Land (Parking) Repeal Ordinance 2014 [F2014L00167].

National Land (Road Transport) Ordinance 2014 [F2014L00166].

Social Security Act 1991—


Social Security (Deeming Threshold Rates) Determination 2013 (No. 2) [F2013L01854]—Revised explanatory statement.

Social Security (Waiver of Debts — University of New South Wales approved course of education or study) Specification 2014 [F2014L00161].

The following government documents were tabled:

Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)—Equity and diversity—Report for the period 1 September 2012 to 31 August 2013.


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—Letters of advice—

- Attorney-General’s portfolio. [Received 25 February 2014]
- Cancer Australia. [Received 27 February 2014]
- Defence portfolio. [Received 26 February 2014]
- Department of Health. [Received 27 February 2014]
- Department of Human Services. [Received 28 February 2014]
- Education portfolio. [Received 17 February 2014]
- Finance portfolio. [Received 19 February 2014]
- Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio. [Received 28 February 2014]
- Independent Hospital Pricing Authority. [Received 28 February 2014]
- Industry portfolio. [Received 25 February 2014]
- National Blood Authority. [Received 25 February 2014]
- Organ and Tissue Authority. [Received 27 February 2014]
- Prime Minister and Cabinet portfolio. [Received 28 February 2014]
- Professional Services Review. [Received 28 February 2014]
- Social Services portfolio. [Received 25 February 2014]
- Treasury portfolio. [Received 27 February 2014]
- Veterans’ Affairs portfolio. [Received 26 February 2014]
Departmental and Agency Appointments and Vacancies

Tabling

The following documents were tabled pursuant to the order of the Senate of 24 June 2008, as amended:

Departmental and agency appointments and vacancies—Additional estimates—Letters of advice—

Agriculture portfolio. [Received 17 February 2014]
Communications portfolio. [Received 21 February 2014]
Department of Human Services. [Received 17 February 2014]
Department of Veterans’ Affairs. [Received 17 February 2014]
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. [Received 28 February 2014]
Education portfolio. [Received 19 February 2014]
Employment portfolio. [Received 17 February 2014]
Environment portfolio. [Received 18 February 2014]
Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio. [Received 14 February 2014]
Immigration and Border Protection portfolio. [Received 17 February 2014]
Infrastructure and Regional Development portfolio. [Received 17 February 2014]
Treasury portfolio. [Received 27 February 2014]

Department of Human Services. [Received 17 February 2014]

Departmental and Agency Grants

Tabling

The following documents were tabled pursuant to the order of the Senate of 24 June 2008:

Departmental and agency grants—Additional estimates—Letters of advice—

Attorney-General’s portfolio. [Received 21 February 2014]
Communications portfolio. [Received 21 February 2014]
Department of Education. [Received 17 February 2014]
Department of Employment. [Received 18 February 2014]
Department of Health. [Received 21 February 2014]
Department of Human Services. [Received 17 February 2014]
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. [Received 28 February 2014]
Department of Veterans’ Affairs. [Received 17 February 2014]
Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio. [Received 19 February 2014]
Immigration and Border Protection portfolio. [Received 19 February 2014]
Organ and Tissue Authority. [Received 21 February 2014]
Social Services portfolio. [Received 20 February 2014]
Treasury portfolio. [Received 27 February 2014]

Order for the Production of Documents

Tabling

The Acting Deputy President (Senator Whish-Wilson) tabled the following document received on 17 February 2014:
Industry—SPC Ardmona—Report on government assistance—Letter from the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs (Senator Ronaldson) to the Clerk of the Senate (Dr Laing) responding to the order of the Senate of 12 February 2014 and raising public interest immunity claims, dated 13 February 2014.

Tabling

The Acting Deputy President (Senator Whish-Wilson) tabled the following documents received on 21 February 2014:
Immigration—Asylum seekers—Operation Sovereign Borders—Letter from the Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection (Senator Cash) to the Clerk of the Senate (Dr Laing) responding to the order of the Senate of 13 February 2014 and raising public interest immunity claims, dated 20 February 2014 and attachment.

Tabling

The Acting Deputy President (Senator Whish-Wilson) tabled the following document received on 21 February 2014:
Immigration—Border protection operations—Lifeboats—Letter from the Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection (Senator Cash) to the Clerk of the Senate (Dr Laing) responding to the order of the Senate of 12 February 2014 and raising public interest immunity claims, dated 21 February 2014.

Tabling

Pursuant to the order of the Senate of 30 May 1996, as amended, the Acting Deputy President (Senator Whish-Wilson) tabled the following documents received on the dates indicated:
Indexed lists of departmental and agency files for the period 1 July to 31 December 2013—Statements of compliance—
- Finance portfolio. [Received 26 February 2014]
- Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security. [Received 28 February 2014]
- National Health Performance Authority. [Received 28 February 2014]
- Safe Work Australia. [Received 18 February 2014]

Tabling

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education (Senator Ryan) tabled the following documents:
Trade—Korea–Australia Free Trade Agreement—Modelling—Letter to the President of the Senate from the Minister for Finance (Senator Cormann) responding to the order of the Senate of 13 February 2014, dated 3 March 2014 and attachment.

Tabling

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education (Senator Ryan) tabled the following document:
Communications—Australian Broadcasting Corporation—Funding—Letter from the Assistant Minister for Social Services (Senator Fifield) to the Clerk of the Senate (Dr Laing) responding to the order of the Senate of 13 February 2014 and raising a public interest immunity claim, dated 3 March 2014.
Tabling

The following documents were tabled pursuant to the order of the Senate of 20 June 2001, as amended:

Departmental and agency contracts for 2013—Letters of advice—
Agriculture portfolio.
Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority.
Infrastructure and Regional Development portfolio.
National Health Funding Body.

Tabling

The following document was tabled pursuant to the order of the Senate of 24 June 2008:
Departmental and agency grants—Additional estimates—Letter of advice—National Health Funding Body.