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SITTING DAYS—2013

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FORTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—FIRST 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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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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</table>

(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 Tasmania to fill a casual vacancy (vice Hon. B. Brown, resigned 15.6.12), pursuant to section 15 of the Constitution.

(5) Chosen by the Parliament of South Australia to fill a casual vacancy (vice M. J. Fisher, resigned 15.8.12), pursuant to section 15 of the Constitution.

(6) 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.

(7) Casual vacancy to be filled (vice B. Joyce, resigned 8.8.13), pursuant to section 15 of the Constitution.

(8) 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.

(9) 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.

(10) 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—B Wright
Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—C Mills
Parliamentary Budget Officer—P Bowen
<table>
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<td>Prime Minister</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Indigenous Affairs</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Indigenous Affairs: Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Eric Abetz</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Indigenous Affairs: Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister</td>
<td>The Hon Josh Frydenberg MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister</td>
<td>The Hon Alan Tudge MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development</td>
<td>The Hon Warren Truss MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Deputy Prime Minister)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development</td>
<td>The Hon Jamie Briggs MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>The Hon Julie Bishop MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Trade and Investment</td>
<td>The Hon Andrew Robb AO MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Brett Mason</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Employment</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Eric Abetz</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Leader of the Government in the Senate)</td>
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<td>Assistant Minister for Employment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attorney-General</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for the Arts</td>
<td>Senator the Hon George Brandis QC</td>
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<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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<tr>
<td>Treasurer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Small Business</td>
<td>The Hon Bruce Billson MP</td>
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<tr>
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<td>The Hon Bob Baldwin MP</td>
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<td><strong>Minister for Defence</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Veterans’ Affairs</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Michael Ronaldson</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Centenary of ANZAC</em></td>
<td>Senator the Hon Michael Ronaldson</td>
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The PRESIDENT (Senator the Hon. John Hogg) took the chair at 10:00, read prayers and made an acknowledgement of country.

PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION

New South Wales

The PRESIDENT (10:01): I have received, through the Governor of New South Wales, the certificate of the choice by the Parliament of New South Wales of Deborah O'Neill to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Senator Bob Carr in respect of his term ending on 30 June 2014.

I table the document.

Senators Sworn

Senator Deborah O'Neill made and subscribed the oath of allegiance.

DOCUMENTS

Order for the Production of Documents

Senator CASH (Western Australia—Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women) (10:05): I table documents relating to the order for the production of documents concerning border protection.

GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S SPEECH

Address-in-Reply

Debate resumed on the motion:

That the following address-in-reply be agreed to:

To Her Excellency the Governor-General

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY—

We, the Senate of the Commonwealth of Australia in Parliament assembled, desire to express our loyalty to our Most Gracious Sovereign and to thank Your Excellency for the speech which you have been pleased to address to Parliament.

Senator BOSWELL (Queensland) (10:05): Before my time was cut short, I was making an argument to the Senate about what renewable energy was doing to Australia's manufacturing industry. With a combination of carbon tax and renewable energy, the actual use of energy has dropped by 10 per cent. The Labor Party and the Greens have been absolutely and spectacularly successful in stopping carbon, but the downside of that is that they have destroyed hundreds of thousands of jobs in the manufacturing sector. You all ought to stand up and take a bow because, when you introduced the carbon tax, you said the use of energy would be reduced and the use of carbon would be reduced. That is 100 per cent correct, but you have left a wake of disaster out there behind you: jobs lost, industries closed down and industries leaving Australia and heading for New Zealand, China and so forth where they will still create a carbon footprint. Maybe there is some excuse for the Greens: forgive them, for they know not what they do. But you in the Labor Party should know what you are doing, because you say that you are going to represent the blue-collar workers of
Australia. If ever there were a sell-out of the blue-collar workers, it would be a carbon tax and renewable energy.

There is a $600 renewable energy tax and a carbon tax on Holden and Toyota. It is no wonder that they are running up the white flag and heading overseas. Of course, SPC, the last of the canneries in Australia—the last of the Mohicans—is fighting to stay in Australia. This is not all because of the carbon tax—I would be less than honest if I said that—but the carbon tax and renewable energy are playing a huge role. I cannot for the life of me understand what you are doing and why this is a complete sell-out. However, I will address the carbon tax when the bill comes before the house. I want to continue with what I was saying about the RET.

Right now, RET is costing us around $2 billion a year. By 2020, that will have gone up to $5 billion a year. Much of the cost of renewables comes from those subsidised under the Small-scale Renewable Energy Scheme—in particular, residential rooftop solar photovoltaic panels. Solar PV is dealing a heavy blow to industry. While it may be the case that the huge residential uptake of solar PV has seen some householders enjoying lower power bills and generous subsidies, this has come at the cost of everyone else. These subsidies have come from someone; someone has had to pay. In this case, what you have is a massive wealth transfer where business is being forced to subsidise the household sector and where low-earning householders are being forced to subsidise those rich enough to afford solar panels.

In both cases, what it comes down to is network charges. Solar PV owners do not have to pay the cost of building and maintaining electricity networks, which make up half of the typical power bill. However these householders must still draw from the main grid during times of the day when their solar panels are not generating enough electricity, and the rest have to pay. The Energy Supply Association of Australia estimates that solar owners are avoiding network charges of $340 million a year, and rising, while feed-in tariffs schemes are adding $680 million a year, the cost of which is being met predominantly by non-solar households.

In short, because solar PV owners do not have to pay for the poles and wires making up the electricity network, you have consumers who do not have solar panels cross-subsidising those that do. The commercial sector, meanwhile, is paying hundreds of thousands of dollars to meet small-scale targets that have no bearing on their industrial capacity. It is a bit like the last three blokes at the bar being forced to pay the bill for 30 people who were drinking champagne earlier in the night. Despite the small-scale renewable target being scheduled to go down, the cost burden of solar on our communities will only go up as more solar panels are purchased and the price of small-scale technology certificates continue to rise.

The knock-on effect of renewables goes beyond higher electricity bills. Solar and wind are undermining our established utilities and replacing them with less reliable and much more expensive power sources. In the latest national forecasting report, the Australian Energy Market Operator revealed that electricity demand was declining faster than predicted. Its forecast for 2013-14 was 2.4 per cent lower than for the previous year. It stated that increased rooftop PV and systems had offset growth in residential, commercial and light industrial energy. Between 2008 and 2009, and 2012 and 2013, rooftop PV output grew 230 per cent. In the same time frame, total residence and commercial power consumption fell by an average of one per cent a year. Listen to it Greens—one per cent per year! You have done particularly
well: you have lowered the electricity output but you have destroyed hundreds of thousands of jobs. It is a drop that the AEMO has not seen since the NEM commenced.

Much of that comes from continued industrial closures that are seeing demand plummet. With demand continually falling, the current fixed large-scale renewable target of 41,000 gigawatt hours would represent around 26 or 27 per cent of the forecast demand in 2020, rather than 20 per cent. The decrease in demand means that we are on track to spend billions more than necessary to achieve the 20 per cent target. It has been estimated that reducing the current large-scale renewable target from 41,000 gigawatt hours to a real 20 per cent target of no more than 33,000 gigawatt hours would reduce annual costs from $5 billion a year to $3.7 billion by 2020.

Decreasing demand has also destabilised our electricity grid. First, you have the gas-fired power stations that produce cheap and more reliable electricity sitting idle because the RET favours electricity generated by renewables. However, the gas plants need to operate at a certain capacity in order to be economically viable—meaning keeping them open but unused is uneconomical for the operators.

Second, you have renewables dumping more power in the electricity grid than is required by demand. This is why turbines must be shut down or shut off especially on windy days, because they are generating too much power and they may overload the grid. This can lead to ludicrous situations such as what occurred in Germany this year. On 16 June its wholesale electricity prices fell to minus €100 per megawatt hour. The power generators were paying managers of the grid to take their electricity off in order to keep the grid from overloading. The grid was only able to cope with the maximum of 45 gigawatt hours at a time without becoming unstable. Generators at the time were pumping in 51 gigawatt hours, 29 gigawatt hours of that from solar and wind.

Because it is much more difficult to reduce output from solar and wind generators, the burden of adjustment fell on gas-fired and coal-fired stations, whose output was reduced to only about 10 per cent of capacity. What you have here, again, is renewables reducing the viability of reliable electricity generators.

While the situation in Australia may not be so bad that our power prices are going negative, it is certainly the case that renewables have destabilised power grids across the country. In Western Australia, rooftop solar panels are so popular they are threatening to overload grids in a growing number of country towns. This has forced the state government to ban new solar installations. Renewables are a big problem not only when they generate too much power but also when they generate too little. What you have is coal-fired stations, which remain an order of magnitude cheaper than solar and wind, still having to prop up solar and wind. Because current renewable technologies are unable to store more than a fraction of surplus energy, the gaps in power generated from renewables must be filled by coal. This happens whenever there is too little or no wind or sunlight, meaning that the fossil fuels must always be on standby to avoid power drop-offs. It is estimated that around 1,000 megawatts of standby power from fossil fuels is burned to keep the coal and gas plants available as a baseload. This negates nearly all wind generation in Australia over an entire year. The fact is that, with every new wind turbine and rooftop solar panel, more coal is automatically being burned and more carbon dioxide is being emitted.
So renewables are not helping one bit to lower carbon emissions. There would still be an argument for them if they reduced the cost of electricity. But, as I have already outlined, for industry renewables have been a ball and chain that have sent electricity prices skyward, while those households without solar panels are paying more and more on their power bills to cover those with solar panels. We are now a country living well beyond its means. Our blue-collar workers enjoy some of the highest wages in the world, and that must not change. We should do our best to provide workers with the best we can afford. In that case, the only way we can compensate industry and keep our manufacturing viable is by keeping our energy cheap. Instead, we are throwing away our major competitive advantage in favour of a policy that sends electricity prices soaring while reducing demand via industry closures that are happening left, right and sideways. At the same time, incredibly, the RET is actually pushing up carbon emissions. It is madness perpetrated by the Greens. I would go so far as to call it economic treason. We have betrayed our manufacturers by taking away their natural advantage of cheap, abundant energy and forcing them into the rigmarole of expensive, unreliable renewables.

We must get rid of the RET before it can cripple manufacturing any further. We could lower the target to a 'real 20 per cent' figure, but, as I said before, this would only lower the annual cost of renewables from $5 billion to $3.7 billion by 2020. Better yet, we should halt all new investment in renewables and allow only existing and committed projects to proceed as subsidised. This would lower the annual renewables cost to $1.7 billion by 2020. Our best option would be no compromise at all and abolishing the RET altogether. If renewables are truly as viable as claimed, they should be able to stand on their own two feet after subsidies for all renewables projects have been removed. If instead we choose to continue penalising businesses and households with higher and higher power prices then all we will have done is committed economic treason against our country. The people of Australia deserve better.

Senator LUDWIG (Queensland) (10:18): I rise today to speak on the address-in-reply to the speech by the Governor-General. The speech is designed to outline a new government's plan and vision. It strikes me as slightly ironic when you look at the government's policies before the election. Short as they were, I looked for a positive plan for Australia. Quite frankly, I could not find it. We are speaking today about the government's plan, whereas in truth this is a government that had no plan.

In fact, this government has snuck into office with the barest of policies ever taken by an opposition to an election. They did not treat the Australian people with the respect or courtesy, quite frankly, that they deserved. When you now look at some of the things that are unravelling before you, what is now occurring is the uncovering of the true nature of the government, the underlying DNA is pushing through. The Liberals and Nationals are revealing their true selves. This is not the government that the people voted in—far from it. Far from the harmless, half-baked ideas that were presented to the voters, this government is rolling out a radical agenda to unpick the nation.

We have already seen the threads of that. You see on education the work that they are now doing there. You see the work they are now doing on trade and transparency—both clearly giving you an indication of how this government is going to proceed. They have started already with their broken promises in just three short months in these three areas. On transparency we now have a cloak-and-dagger government. On trade we now have a hapless
foreign affairs minister running around Asia. We will talk a little bit more about education shortly, but you can already see that they are finding how to spin a new word on better school funding.

Given they have broken promises in these areas, let's take the fair way. We must assume that other dormant, silent plans exist for this government in other portfolios. The empty rhetoric and hollow words that have been made in the address-in-reply, in the Governor-General's speech, may have gotten the government through that day. They may have been able to then outline their so-called 'plan', but in truth it is going to be a rod for their own back. You can see it very early in their speech:

My government has a clear and comprehensive plan …
We have not seen that yet.
It will be a purposeful government.
Purposeful in terms of wrecking the economy, yes.
Every day it will work in a way that is careful, collegial, consultative and straightforward, …
Can I be a little wry and say we have not seen much of that yet but I shall not hold my breath either.

You then turn to the commitments that have been made. First is the commitment to make Australia 'open for business'. It was a promise repeated often by Mr Abbott in opposition. We now have him again over the weekend on a range of radio stations. The first time, he comes out to defend Mr Hockey—nonetheless a little belated, but he obviously saw the need to rescue a drowning rat. He was trying to convince, I think, not only the public but himself too. He was really saying 'I think I can, I think I can, I think I can' when he used the phrase: 'We're open for business. We're open for business. We really, really are open for business.' I think the public can see through that. I think his actions speak far louder than his words on this issue between Mr Hockey and Mr Abbott.

The Nationals I would always call the doormats to the Liberals. In this instance they have proved me at least wrong on one issue. They have run an effective rearguard action on the Treasurer on foreign investment, and it seems as though they were victorious on this account. I think it is an empiric victory. Nonetheless, two weeks ago we had the indignity of the Prime Minister trying to influence the FIRB decision on Warrnambool Cheese by going on radio and giving a preference to particular domestic companies. Straight out of the blocks on Tuesday the Treasurer signed off on a completely different arrangement.

That was nothing, nothing, compared to the GrainCorp decision. I recognise there are many different views on this when it comes to the GrainCorp decision. I heard many of them in the previous government.

I understand there are different opinions in the community about this. I listened carefully to the now Treasurer's promise at the election. Mr Hockey promised that Australia would be open for business. Liberal Senator Dean Smith certainly agreed. In the chamber a few weeks ago he said—so this is the Liberal view:

The debate about foreign investment should not be used as a Trojan horse by those seeking to reverse the strong and obvious benefits that have resulted from the deregulation of wheat export marketing in our country.
The previous government thought that that debate had ended at that point, with the deregulation of the wheat industry and the removal of the WEA.

Mr Hockey got rolled on foreign investment—that much is plain to see. Whether you agree with the decision or oppose it, it is not what is currently before us. What is truly before us is how the government now acts in the national interest. It needs to act in the national interest and make decisions based on the national interest, not based on the National Party's interests. The business community, the agribusiness community and the public want consistency and certainty. This new government spent an entire election campaign—and probably a little bit longer, given the amount of rhetoric during the last couple of years—crowing about the need for business certainty. With the actions of the Treasurer on foreign investment that certainty had been ripped from the marketplace. Well, now we see it. What they have now done is ensure that that uncertainty will continue. You have already seen the repercussions of that uncertainty in the marketplace for GrainCorp now.

I turn to the next biggest issue than has confronted this government: education. Education reform is vital to this country. It is one of the things that I have been very passionate about. The Liberals and Nationals gave an ironclad promise. Mr Christopher Pyne's own website, Pyne online, stated the Liberals election policy in clear, stark terms. I quote:

Tony Abbott and the Coalition have confirmed that they will commit the same amount of federal school funding as the Government over the forward estimates. Every single school in Australia will receive, dollar for dollar, the same federal funding over the next four years whether there is a Liberal or Labor Government after September 7.

I will repeat the key line: Every single school in Australia will receive, dollar for dollar, the same federal funding over the next four years …

Yesterday the Prime Minister told the public:

We are going to keep the promise that we actually made, not the promise that some people thought that we made, or the promise that some people might have liked us to make.

Mr Abbott has effectively told the Australian people: 'It's not me; it's you. That's the problem.' He has told the public that, if they make the mistake of taking the government at its word, it is their own fault. How extraordinary! (Quorum formed) As I was saying, Mr Abbott told the public that, if they made the mistake of taking this government at its word, it is their own fault—quite an extraordinary thing to say. It is like a shonky used car salesman who blames the customer for being upset after they bought an absolute lemon. Mr Abbott is pulling funding out of schools across the country. That is the clear fact. His own conservative colleague the New South Wales education minister has called the backflip 'immoral'. Our schools deserve better, our kids deserve better and the voters deserve better than this shonky deal that this government is trying to proffer.

The rank hypocrisy of those born-to-rule types has started already to seep into this place, and I believe that they are not going to be able to temper it. They are not going to be able to do what the Governor-General's speech set out for them to do. They are not going to be able to say they are going to be careful, collegiate, consultative and straightforward. They have failed on every one of those, and we are not even into the first 12 months yet. They have not managed to be careful, they have not managed to be collegiate, they have not managed to be consultative and they are not straightforward. That is where we are: with a government that is
obsessed with being opaque. This government is already showing the telltale signs of taking
the punters for granted and being reckless with the economy, and the leaders of government
have become obsessed with secrecy.

One of the first acts of the Labor party on winning government in 2007 was to put the
ballasts under and around the economy to prepare for the coming global financial storm. One
of the first economic acts of this government was to jack up the national credit card with no
explanation to the Australian people. The contrast could not be starker. Before the election the
then opposition leader, Mr Abbott, and the then opposition spokesperson on the Treasury, Mr
Hockey, were like Henny Penny, running around telling everyone the sky was falling. On
going into office, what I can only describe as a hush fell over the government. It is the first
time I have seen an incoming government so quiet. You would normally expect a little bit of
hubris, a bit of, 'This is what we're going to do,' a bit of rally-rousing and a bit of good news
for the troops—some good messages to come out. There has been nothing. It is dead flat.
They must have either all gone on holidays or been told to shut up—one or the other. Either
way, I suspect nobody was running the economy at that point, because you could tell when it
stopped. When the hush stopped, the confusion started. It must have been when they picked
up the levers and said, 'We ought to do something now,' because you can look at the
confusion over education, over trade and foreign affairs, and over their Sovereign Borders
plan—'We're not going to tell anyone about it; we're not going to talk about it; in fact we'll be
silent about it, and hopefully it'll go away.' That is their plan.

The contrast between the early period of the government and now is just so stark. In fact,
for most of the early weeks of the new government we heard more about the Prime Minister's
bike riding, the Attorney-General's books and bookcase—or lack of a bookcase—and Mr
Randle's canned safari than about the government's policies and plans for the Australian
people. The transcript I have here of the Governor-General's speech will provide a useful
reference for this government—because it is, apparently, their plan. It is very telling when
you turn to the section dedicated to education. Their silence speaks louder than words—it
really does. They do not talk about a better schools funding plan. They do not talk about how
they are going to manage the education portfolio. What they talk about is how they are going
to give school communities more of a say in how their schools are run, about how the
government will work more cooperatively with the states—that is a laugh; they have not
managed that so far, have they?—and about how, in the classroom, they are going to provide
a vision for a national curriculum that is 'rigorous and challenging without being cluttered or
prescriptive'. But there is nothing in the speech about funding: there is nothing about how the
government are going to ensure that schools get the funding they deserve. The Pyne Online
quotes are not mentioned. There is no mention of the fact that the government said before the
election that they were going to meet our commitment. There is nothing about any of that in
here. When you look back, you understand why it is not in here. It is not in here because the
government had no intention whatsoever of doing it. Now the jig is up; it is quite plain that
they do not intend to do it.

The government say about their small business deregulation plan that they will lighten the
red-tape burden—they go on with their usual statements. But their solution, which we found
out at estimates last, is to create little cabals—little consultative groups, unconnected and
uncoordinated, right throughout all the departments—who will sift through regulatory

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burdens and try to remove them. I suspect that what they are actually going to do is create more bureaucracy to try to remove bureaucracy. That would, quite frankly, be a Liberal way of doing things. Coming back to this speech will be a good way to hold this government to account.

Under the heading 'Asia and the region', the speech says that the international policy focus will be on 'the advancement of Australia's core strategic and economic interests' with 'key partners' to bring a 'Jakarta, not Geneva', focus in our foreign policy. That is very true, isn't it? The government have managed to do that very quickly and very decisively! But I think what we need is a more responsible government—a government that is more meted—because this government is not showing the signs of being so at all.

We will be able to hold them to account on the following statement. To make sure that the 'moment is not missed', the Abbott government have said that they will 'fast track free-trade agreements with South Korea, Japan, China, Indonesia and India'. Time lines would be helpful here, but still we can hold them to account. I think that we do have to provide a strategic lead in the region which includes South Korea, Japan, China, Indonesia and India, and I will await with bated breath seeing the free-trade agreements come to fruition under a confused and hapless government whose foreign affairs minister is already in strife in Asia.

Their solution to everything is to create Productivity Commission reviews and white papers. They have done this on rural and regional Australia rather than come out with a clear, concise plan about how they are going to address issues in rural and regional Australia. There is no urgency—’We will take our time and develop a white paper over the next 12 months and see what happens out of that.’ I think that rural Australia deserves far better. I think that rural Australia deserves a much more comprehensive and immediate plan to assist. That is what our government did when we were in government. This government thinks that it can delay it for 12 months, develop a white paper and see what comes of it after that. This rank hypocrisy is clearly demonstrated in broadband. We are going to get second-class broadband as a consequence of this government. This government does not understand that business, industry, research fields, health, hospitals and agriculture all need fast broadband.

Senator WRIGHT (South Australia) (10:40): I rise to respond to the Governor-General's articulation of her government's agenda and to reply to some of this coalition government's agenda, of which there are some aspects that have been articulated and, more importantly, some aspects we did not hear about. Before I do so, I want to reflect on the Prime Minister's opening priority as he stated it in the speech he made to the welcome to country ceremony in the Great Hall on the first day of this 44th Parliament. How ironic it was. First, we heard a very moving welcome from local representatives of the first Australians, the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples from the Canberra region, who welcomed all of us who have come to this country after them. Then, we had Mr Abbott proceeding to tell us first-up, before anything else, that his government would secure the borders. Before health, before prosperity and before education for our population, his government's first priority would be to secure the borders.

It struck me: against whom? Have I missed something? Can it be that we are actually at war and I had not noticed this? Who is it that threatens our security to such an extent that the pre-eminent priority for this new government is to lock up our country and secure our borders? Now, of course, I see it. This government would have us believe that we are under
dire threat from marauding hordes of those women, men and children who come to us from across the sea, making precarious journeys away from the horrors of war, torture and persecution—the horrors and fears that would have any one of us fleeing given the same circumstances. These people come to seek sanctuary with us, and this government's first, pre-eminent priority is to secure the borders against them.

These are people who—it is clear from the decision that they have made—are courageous, resourceful and resilient. These are people who are willing to risk everything for a new life, for the sake of their families and for a belief in the future. These are people who, if welcomed and supported by us, make great citizens, bringing with them a sense of gratitude and determination to render their risks and sacrifices worthwhile in their new life. We see this around us. We see the great contribution made by many of those who have come before on similar journeys. Shamefully, this Prime Minister and his government are clearly intent on continuing the tone that they set in opposition, emphasising threats and fears and playing up the worst in us—the prejudice and the mean-spiritedness—rather than appealing to the best of us in Australia—compassion, decency and a sense of a fair go.

I turn now to the Governor-General's address, which set out the government's agenda for the 44th Parliament. In focusing on the areas of schools and education and on the legal rights and interests of Indigenous Australians, I am particularly interested not only in what was said but also in what has not been said. On the topic of schools, it is not so much what the government is keen to say as what it is prepared to abandon, as we now know very clearly. This is what will be crucially important now and over the next three years. When it comes to the idea of advancing Indigenous Australians and their ability to enforce their own rights, there are elements of the government's agenda that require much more scrutiny and accountability.

First, let me turn to education and the government's stated vision for education as being greater autonomy for principals, a rigorous national curriculum, all children leaving school literate and numerate, and tackling cyberbullying. Let me say that I wholly commend work towards making students feel safe and accepted by tackling cyberbullying and I look forward to working with the government on this and other issues related to the mental health and wellbeing of young people. From my meetings with teachers, principals and parents, I know there is growing concern about the level of anxiety and sadness being experienced increasingly by younger children in Australian schools. There is a need for a much more dedicated, highly skilled workforce in schools when it comes to promoting mental health and wellbeing and help for those kids who are struggling. We need experts in mental health in schools and I want to see a greater emphasis on qualified mental health specialists to support and assist teachers and principals to meet the growing needs of their students.

But it is also important to point out that issues of cyberbullying—and bullying generally—cannot be divorced from wider issues like the commonplace discrimination and homophobia experienced by young people in Australia on the basis of their sexuality. The government's willingness to allow religious schools to continue to discriminate against students and staff on the very basis of who they are as people—their sexual identity and preferences—reinforces the systemic discrimination that allows bullying to flourish. Cyberbullying, and bullying generally, occurs in a context and it is irresponsible for any government to condone conditions which seriously undermine the mental and physical health of many of its citizens.
The other apparent cornerstones of this government's education policy, such as independent public schools and a curriculum stripped of progressive ideals, are distractions from the crucial core task of educating students to attain to the best of their ability. That has to be the core task in Australia: to harness the human potential that is in our schools among our kids to make sure that every kid can reach the absolute height of their ability by providing adequate opportunity.

Several months into this new government it is now clear that these are dangerous distractions deliberately designed to divert attention from the pressing call for real needs based funding reform in our education system. Now we fully understand something long suspected by those of us who knew that Prime Minister Abbott and Minister Pyne had never acknowledged the inequity of the current system. We know now that this government has every intention of moving away from the principles so clearly espoused in the Gonski review of schools funding.

The past several years have seen some great developments in education reform in Australia and many of us have been cautiously optimistic that we were moving away from a long-held inequitable system. To its credit, the previous government recognised the need to provide all students with access to high-quality schooling and tasked the panel led by the businessman David Gonski with its review of funding for schooling—the Gonski review. The Australian Greens welcomed the Gonski review in 2012 because we have long advocated for needs based funding for schools and we have long championed universal access to high-quality education for all kids in Australia. From early childhood education, through the schooling system to options like TAFE and university, we believe that Australian kids have a right to educational outcomes that do not depend on wealth or location. In the 'lucky' country where our average per capita income is among the highest in the world, how well a child performs at school should not be a matter of luck. The Greens have been resolute that funding for schools should be based on need and equity—what is fair—and should prioritise the public education system to ensure that public schools can set the educational agenda and standards for the nation. While they were not perfect, we supported the Labor government's reforms to school funding in the 43rd Parliament because they were going to end the unfair funding model that has seen a far greater increase in funding to wealthy private schools than to needy government schools over decades, and they were going to transition to a new needs-based model based on principle that would see a significant investment in public education to address the huge gap between children from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds.

It is true we were disappointed by the inadequacy of the funding that was to be devoted to this—it did not come close to the investment that was recommended by the Gonski panel—and of course we thought that the regime should have included more robust accountability measures to make sure that the money ended up where it needed to go. However, the framework set out in the Australian Education Act of this year offers a tremendous opportunity that is open to all education sectors: public schools, Catholic schools and other independent schools. It is the opportunity for a truly needs-based, sector-blind funding system where the factors that have been proven to disadvantage students can truly be adjusted for—factors like disability, remoteness, low socioeconomic status, not having English as the first language at home, the size of the school and the particular and pressing needs of Australia's Indigenous students.
By contrast, this government has never acknowledged the inequity in the existing system, reinforced and entrenched by policy decisions of the Howard government, which saw funding for the wealthiest schools in Australia increase at a far faster rate than funding for the poorest ones. Neither Christopher Pyne, now the Minister for Education, nor the Prime Minister has ever acknowledged the shameful fact, clearly documented in the Gonski review, that in Australia we have the most segregated schooling system, where a child's background is more likely to determine their educational performance than in any comparable nation in the OECD. In some cases this leads to a gap of five years in the same age group.

Of course, even before he held the office of minister, Christopher Pyne has played education reform like a game of political football, far more interested in politics than principle. Now we see that this is set to continue as he and the Prime Minister ruthlessly dump their pre-election commitment to match the Labor government's education reforms. In doing this, they betray not only the trust of the voters who believed them but also the many, many committed teachers across Australia who have been waiting for this change in policy and have been working against the odds to offer all kids the chance to reach their potential, and those children themselves.

While a more equitable funding system may have been jettisoned by this government, it is clear that the issue of independent public schools is still squarely on the agenda. But this notion, characterised by tweaked governance like school boards and increased financial autonomy for principals, is a distraction from the core reforms we need to get on with. It is obviously an article of faith for Christopher Pyne, but what is the evidence for this great ideological push? The best reference point we have for independent public schools in Australia is the Western Australian model, and the Western Australian government's own analysis of the model, led by the University of Melbourne, concludes that there is no evidence to indicate changes in enrolments or student achievement. I have spoken to stakeholders in Western Australia who are comfortable working with the independent public school model, and I accept that that is meaningful, but many other stakeholders and researchers argue there is no evidence in favour of independent public schools in terms of increased student achievement, and there are significant risks with a move that basically amounts to privatising the education system. By removing an education department's role in ensuring that money is well spent and ensuring a base level of quality across the board, there will be even less accountability in how resources are allocated.

The national rollout that the government proposes would impact different states in very different ways. Some states are traditional and centralised, while others already have a highly devolved system of governance. We also know that in Australia principals experience high levels of stress, anxiety and bullying. The Australian Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey, published this year, showed the need to provide principals with the highest level of professional support. Increased workloads and demands for productivity, if not coupled with appropriate resources and support, will compound this.

The international research varies widely on the claim that independent public schools will enhance productivity. There is no evidence beyond the level of principal perception of the actual efficiency and productivity of the independent public school model in Australia. International comparisons can be misleading due to unique factors in educational systems and
legislation. For example, some charter schools in the United States, which are likened to independent public schools, are run by for-profit corporations.

Even more contentious is the claim that increased school autonomy improves student outcomes. The Melbourne University study found 'no substantive increase in student achievement' and described the lack of impact on achievement as 'concerning'. This is actually consistent with evidence at the international level. Multiple research projects in the UK, the United States and New Zealand have found that school autonomy has very little or no effect on student achievement.

The government's claims of improved efficiency and student outcomes are misleading. They are used to bolster an agenda that is designed to distract from core issues, like the need to make a more significant financial investment in schools in Australia and making sure that that investment is targeted at the schools that most need it. Internationally, independent public schools are found to have unintended consequences, like schools manipulating admissions to select and exclude particular students to bolster their market position. This can actually compound the social segregation that we know can occur when certain schools are privileged and others disadvantaged. Of course, we actually have that scenario before us in 2013 in Australia.

By contrast, the evidence in favour of directing funding to where it is most needed is very strong. This is the call to action that the Greens would like to make. All sectors in Australia who are concerned about educating every one of our children should unite to ensure that public funding is directed to those schools that need it most.

Australia's future lies in new ideas. Giving kids a great education will make that possible. We cannot do that without investing in and supporting great teachers and a curriculum that teaches the basics well but is also rich in art, music, languages and thinking skills. As the Australian Greens spokesperson on schools, I call on this government to commit to truly address the growing inequity in our schooling system by using evidence based measures to advance this rather than spending finite resources on unproven, ideologically inspired notions, which are being used to distract from the most important task at hand.

I turn now to the Prime Minister's stated objective of being the first Prime Minister for Indigenous Australians. I commend the government on signalling a new era of engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and a greater acknowledgement of their status as the First Australians. This will be welcome if it is grounded in policy. It remains to be seen, however, how this will be translated into meaningful action. For instance, I want to see the government elaborate on what this signifies for Indigenous people and their legal rights. Two days before the election the coalition covertly flagged significant cuts to the Indigenous Legal Assistance and Policy Reform Program—$42 million over the forward estimates, with $7 million before the end of June next year.

On one hand the government states that it wants to prioritise efforts to end disadvantage in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and on the other hand it cuts legal aid funding for Indigenous people, which can only fundamentally undermine this commitment. These cuts go directly against the government's rhetoric and will exacerbate already grossly unacceptable imprisonment rates for Indigenous Australians. It is a matter of national shame that Australia's first peoples are some of the most incarcerated peoples in the world.
In estimates it has become clear that no work has been done by the Attorney-General's Department to assess the likely effects of this cut on the ability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal services to advise and represent their clients or the likely consequences on what are already scandalous rates of imprisonment. To see these rates come down, we need a fundamentally new approach to criminal justice in Australia and we need leadership at a federal level to set justice targets to close the gap and facilitate the uptake of justice reinvestment principles. Justice reinvestment is a smarter approach to criminal justice. Reducing crime and escalating imprisonment rates requires smart, evidence based policy that actually works.

Given the inconsistency between the Prime Minister's avowed commitment to Indigenous people and this slashing to funding, the Australian public is entitled to clear answers around how this government intends to deal with Indigenous imprisonment rates and how it will equip Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to enforce their own legal rights. Where possible, I will work with this government to bring about the best possible results for our nation. Along with my colleagues in this 44th Parliament, I will always hold true to the values that underpin the Australian Greens, because these are the values that will go towards achieving the healthy, caring, just society that I want to see for my children and other people's children.

Senator EGGLESTON (Western Australia) (11:00): One of the most visionary aspects of the coalition's policies of the recent federal election was our comprehensive policy for the North as mentioned in the Governor-General's speech at the opening of parliament. We in the coalition believe there is clear scope in northern Australia for an integrated approach from the Commonwealth, working together with relevant state and territory governments and the private sector, to unleash the development potential of the North to capitalise on the opportunities presented by the so-called Asian century, in which there will be spectacular growth in the middle class of the ASEAN nations to our north, as well as by similar developments in the nations of the Indian Ocean rim to our west.

Without doubt, now the coalition is in government, our 2030 Vision for Developing Northern Australia will play a pivotal role in the development of the North. This vision was released by now Prime Minister the Hon. Tony Abbott in Townsville on 21 June this year and formed one of the coalition's election policies in our strategic plan for the sustainable growth and future development of northern Australia. We have already taken the first step in the process by conducting extensive consultations across the North, including public forums in Western Australia, which were held in Kununurra, Broome and Karratha in July, with the then shadow parliamentary secretary for northern and remote Australia, Senator Ian Macdonald, and me. Similar forums were held in north Queensland and the Northern Territory.

This work will culminate in the release of a formal white paper by the newly established parliamentary committee for northern development which will be chaired by the federal member for Leichhardt, Warren Entsch. However, the point must be made that while northern Australia enjoys a number of competitive advantages, many are currently underutilised. In fact, while northern Australia is a land of enormous potential, including in agriculture, mining and tourism, we in the coalition believe the greatest untapped opportunity lies in the development of the North as the food bowl for Asia by developing agriculture across the
North, particularly irrigated agriculture, followed by realising the great potential for developing the tourist industry in the North.

Turning to the idea of a food bowl for Asia, many people are not aware that by 2020 more than half the world's middle class will live in Asia and Asian consumers will account for 40 per cent of the global middle class. Asia's real GDP is also expected to increase from US$27 trillion to US$67 trillion by 2030. Asia and the ASEAN nations are therefore already the world's biggest and fastest-growing regional economies, while Indonesia is predicted to be the eighth largest economy in a decade. This is why Australia needs to market itself now as the answer to Asia's future food needs. Australia has already been a net food exporter for well over a century, producing enough food currently to feed 60 million people, and our agricultural technology used in other countries, moreover, helps feed some 400 million people.

The iconic Ord River scheme, which was set up by the Menzies government in the 1960s, has enabled 50 years of research in the agricultural potential of the north. In Kununurra there is a plan to extend the Ord River irrigation area into the Northern Territory, where it is planned to grow sugar which will be exported to Asia. This is a very important precedent in Kununurra, Mr Acting Deputy President Sterle—and you are a man who knows a great deal about the north—that could be followed in other areas across the north of Australia where irrigated agriculture could be established. The CSIRO concluded that five million to 17 million additional hectares across the North are potentially suitable for agriculture purposes. Increasing our irrigation water usage from just six to nine per cent—only three per cent—would mean that, after meeting our own people's requirements, we could feed an additional 100 million people. The Ord River Dam contains six times the volume of water in Sydney Harbour and perhaps water could be piped south to the Fitzroy Valley to develop agriculture on the black soil plains of the West Kimberley. Since the Aborigines there are very much against the damming of the Fitzroy River, the Ord River water could be put to good use in that area. The Pilbara pastoral industry, which has long been overshadowed by the mining industry, is still working successfully. There are cattle stations throughout the Pilbara, all the way along the coast from Karratha to Broome and inland to the Karijini National Park. I have no doubt that the Pilbara agricultural sector can, and should, be an important contributor to the food bowl for Asia concept for the north of Australia. There is a huge opportunity for Australia to work with our closest neighbour, Indonesia, in particular, to supply their rapidly growing market for food and other commodities, valued at some $300 million to $400 million a year in the recent past.

Moving forward, our focus needs to be on broadening our scope to include the nations of the Indian Ocean rim—which stretches from Indonesia and India to the Gulf and eastern South Africa as well as the island states of Mauritius and Madagascar—because, in doing so, there are great opportunities for the expertise which exists in the north of Australia, particularly in mining, energy and food production, as well as in services like education, which are needed in these areas. At a recent meeting in Perth, Australia took over the chairmanship of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for two years, and there are high hopes that the Indian Ocean Rim Association will develop over time into an Indian Ocean version of APEC. While APEC took some 20 years to reach the point that it is at now, I am hopeful that
the Indian Ocean Rim Association will mature into a successful partnership in a shorter time than that.

I would like to make some more comments about the great opportunities that exist for the north of Australia. Firstly, I will talk about mining and energy. Although we have a huge mining industry, why can't this be developed into a processing or manufacturing industry as well? Sir Charles Court had a vision of a jumbo steel mill in the Pilbara when the Pilbara mining industry was established. The cost of labour, the cost of power and the poor industrial relations of that time have been cited as reasons for a secondary processing industry not being established. But today, with automation, the workforce required is smaller so costs are down, industrial relations are much better and, with gas, the cost of power is much less. Given this, why can't Sir Charles's grand vision of a jumbo steel mill in the Pilbara be resurrected, instead of sending our iron ore to Korea, where it is taken off the ships on one side of the port, taken straight to a blast furnace, taken to a steel-rolling mill and then exported from the other side of the port. Why can't we be doing that in the Pilbara? Should we just continue to export shiploads of iron ore or dirt to China and Japan, or should we be focusing on developing some kind of secondary processing? It is a very interesting question. I have been told that the Asians would prefer to be purchasing rolled steel instead of iron ore, and that is a very interesting fact to bear in mind. It seems the problem is not with the market; it is with the producers who are quite happy to just continue exporting ore. Some people even describe Australia as a Third World country in disguise because we are no more than just 'a quarry and a farm' and we are losing most of our manufacturing industries, but I would submit that in the Pilbara there is an opportunity to reverse that perception with locally based secondary processing.

I will turn next to energy. Northern Australia has the potential to grow its energy export industry to over $150 billion worth in 20 years, and the Pilbara thereby has the opportunity to be the major energy supplier across Asia and the Indian Ocean rim. Another industry of great potential in the North is tourism. Tourism is one of the largest industries in Australia and, according to Tourism Research Australia, it contributes some $87 billion to the Australian economy. The coalition vision is to expand northern Australia's tourist economy to two million international visitors per annum by 2030. People who travel the world to see and explore attractions that are unique and different go, for example, from Europe to Africa. In Australia we have many attractions which are unique and different, from the Queensland barrier reef and rainforests to the wonders of the Red Centre and Indigenous culture in the Northern Territory. In the Pilbara, we have some of the most interesting landscapes in the world, especially in the Karijini National Park. Also, across the region in general, there is rugged beauty, with historic towns such as Cossack and Marble Bar and, of course, the wonders of the Ningaloo Reef, not to mention the Kimberley Bungle Bungles or Purnululu National Park, as well as the beautiful and unique Kimberly coast, accessible these days by cruise boats operating from Darwin and Broome. So there is plenty to see in the North and there is plenty of potential for developing tourism.

One of the most important things that we need to do if we are going to expand our tourist industry is upgrade major transport arteries and infrastructure. Significant and sustained growth cannot be achieved without doing these things. We need improved roads, we need better hotels and we need more airports, and the coalition white paper will consider tasking Infrastructure Australia with conducting a comprehensive audit of northern Australia's
infrastructure needs. When that report is delivered to the government, it is planned that the recommendations will be implemented over a period of 15 years.

Gaps in communication infrastructure and the high cost of services in the region will also be addressed. Communications infrastructure is particularly important. In this day and age, mobile phone coverage along the long, lonely highways of Australia should be provided as a matter of course and not regarded as an optional extra service. These days, with solar powered transmission facilities, there is no reason at all why there should not be mobile coverage along the Great Northern Highway, the North West Coastal Highway and all the other long, lonely highways in Australia, such as the Stuart Highway in the Northern Territory and the Bruce Highway in Queensland.

The strategic requirements of the North are an important aspect of the coalition's overall strategy for the region, particularly for Australia's defence and border protection. The Defence Force Posture Review last year recommended an increase in the Defence presence in the north-west. Given the massive scale of project developments on the north-west coast—running into many billions of dollars—the ease with which an unauthorised boat recently showed it could access the area and tie up under an oil rig is a cause for concern. If it is that easy for a fishing boat to get into those areas where the oil rigs and other developments are, it would be easy for a boat with terrorists on board to do the same. This is a problem which we need to seriously address.

In the last parliament I was Chair of the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee and I am now Chair of the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee, and during Senate estimates I have been active in questioning the ADF about its lack of presence off the north-west coast, pursuing it to increase the naval presence in that area. This is an issue which was raised as a problem a decade ago by the then Governor-General, Michael Jeffery, so it is a problem that has been known about for a long time. It is certainly a weakness in our overall defence position.

A coalition defence white paper will consider basing more of our military forces in northern and north-west Australia, especially in the resource-rich areas with little or no current military presence but where there is a more tangible need for a military presence than appears to be the case on the east coast. Unless we are worried about an unprovoked attack from New Caledonia or New Zealand, we might be better served by basing more of our defence forces on the north-west coast.

In conclusion, overall the coalition sees the North as a land of enormous potential, particularly for capitalising on the opportunities presented by the growth of the middle class in the ASEAN group of countries and similar developments in the 35 nations of the Indian Ocean rim. In all, there are great prospects for agriculture, mining, energy and tourism. We in the coalition believe that it is vital for Australia to position itself now if we are to benefit from the Asian century and all that it offers us in terms of opportunity.

Senator LINES (Western Australia) (11:19): In this debate on the address-in-reply to the Governor-General's speech, I want to focus my contribution on the early childhood education and care sector in Australia. This sector is not only critically important for enabling parents to go to work confident that their children are being cared for and educated well but it is also critically important, as all the academic research shows, for the quality development of Australia's young children, from infancy through to the time they start school.
We have seen an amazing number of backflips from this government. We have seen backflips in education and on a range of matters, but for me the backflip on early childhood education and care is one of the most spectacular. The kind of backflipping we are now seeing from the coalition in relation to early childhood education and care is more spectacular than what we would see from professional acrobats.

Over the past six years, whilst in opposition, the now government went on and on about early childhood education and care. It went on about a number of issues, including the reforms that Labor introduced but primarily the cost of early childhood education and care—blaming Labor for increasing the cost of care to parents. In fact, the truth is that cost to parents came down under Labor, as we changed the inadequate Howard funding arrangements, moving the rebate for parents on out-of-pocket expenses from 30 per cent to 50 per cent. So Labor actually brought down the cost of early childhood education and care in this country. That move by Labor—increasing the rebate of the inadequate John Howard scheme from 30 per cent to 50 per cent—made child care much more affordable for all parents.

When Labor introduced a three-year temporary cap on the indexation of this rebate, the coalition, the then opposition, screamed long and loud and proclaimed that the sky had fallen in. Many MPs and coalition senators spoke in this place about Labor's temporary indexation of the rebate.

I would like to quote from Senator Nash in her speech in this place when she said:

What is extraordinary about this legislation—meaning the temporary freeze on the rebate—is that the government—meaning the Labor government—are making it harder, not easier, for families to access childcare and to get assistance for childcare fees. Senator Nash went on to say that the government was doing nothing for families in regional areas. Then she said:

It is quite extraordinary that the government should do this for a savings measure—I think it is predicted to save $86 million over four years. Since when did the working families of this country become the cash cow for this government? We should be assisting families with their childcare expenses, not making it harder.

I can only assume that Senator Nash would still hold true to those comments, made very passionately and very eloquently.

What we saw during the election campaign was that the now Prime Minister, Mr Abbott, went one extraordinary step further by personally signing a letter to childcare services across the country about Labor's freeze on the indexation of the cap. I have not seen Mr Abbott's letter and I am sure it does not let parents know that Labor's cap was a temporary cap and was due to be lifted. But Mr Abbott was then no doubt trying to score political points. Guess what? Here comes the backflip. Once elected, we saw another backflip from this government as Mr Abbott quietly introduced legislation to prevent the indexation from being lifted and in fact further extending the cap until 2017. So the coalition in opposition were going on and on about the cost of early childcare services in this country, yet when they had the opportunity to allow that cap to be lifted as Labor had done, they put a cap on it. So they have in fact made it
much harder for working families to continue to afford child care. This will save the government about $100 million.

Interestingly, almost at the same time the government have now asked the Productivity Commission to conduct a public inquiry into what they are now calling the childcare and early learning system to look at it being improved. One of the areas that they have particularly asked the Productivity Commission to report on is that the government are saying that families are struggling to find quality child care and early learning that is flexible and affordable enough to meet their needs so that they can participate in the workforce—affordable, put there by a government which at the same time has extended the cap on the childcare rebate until 2017. So it makes a bit of a mockery of what on the one hand the government is doing and what on the other it is saying.

Again the government has hung its hat on the productivity inquiry, saying it is the biggest reform in the early childhood sector since the early childhood sector started in this country. I would beg to differ. That report again is due to be finalised in October 2014, despite the government saying there is an urgent need. Given the requirements that the report has to lie in the chamber, and so on and so forth, that report will not see the light of day until 2015. The other puzzling piece about the whole productivity inquiry is that the Prime Minister is on the public record as saying there will be no additional funding. He said that before he took the $100 million out. We are going to do this supposed far-reaching reform into early childhood care in this country, yet there is not one additional cent for any of the recommendations that the productivity inquiry is likely to make. That can only lead me to one conclusion: if we are going to broaden the scope of early childhood education and care in this country then parents will be up for more out-of-pocket expenses. I am wondering now if the reason Mr Abbott has frozen that cap on the rebate is to get parents used to paying much more if they want additional services. You cannot take the existing amount of funding and expect it to stretch to a whole new range of services; it is just not possible.

What we have heard from the government since it was elected is that they inherited a mess. I have got to say that Labor inherited a mess in terms of early childhood education and care from the coalition government. When we took office, the early childhood education and care sector was regulated by state and territory governments. That meant we had eight separate pieces of regulation governing early childhood education and care in this sector. That meant that for a two-year-old in Hobart to be cared for and educated there were different child-to-carer ratios, there were different educational outcomes, there were different caring outcomes than for the same two-year-old being cared for in Perth. So it was a mess.

The Labor government introduced much-needed, long overdue and greatly welcomed reforms. We did this in full consultation with the sector, and that was confirmed last week in Senate estimates. Labor embarked on full consultation with all parts of the early childhood education and care sector. There were meetings in every state and territory across the country, and there was an overarching reference committee established. That committee was a true reflection of the sector: there were private representatives and representatives from the charitable sector, there were early childhood providers, there were out-of-school-hours carers, there were Aboriginal organisations, there were unions, there were independent and church based preschools and there were relevant state departments. The reference group was well briefed and had input into the full range of matters under consideration. As I said, there were
many, many face-to-face consultations and the opportunity for written submissions. And of course provider peak bodies and other interested groups continued to meet privately with the relevant ministers and the shadow ministers.

This reform—revolutionary, the first of its kind and long overdue—was the national quality framework focused for the first time on the care and education of Australia's youngest children. Why? Because all of the academic research informs us that the early years of a child's life impact critically upon a range of outcomes throughout that child's life. Frank Oberklaid is a renowned early childhood specialist academic whose research, along with a multitude of other studies, indicates:

… the environment experienced by a young child literally sculpts the brain, and establishes the trajectory for long term cognitive and social-emotional outcomes … to improve outcomes in adult life, there needs to be a focus on these critical early years.

This is exactly what Labor's reforms undertook to do, and it is exactly what Labor's reforms actually deliver. Mr Oberklaid goes on to say:

Optimal brain development is dependent upon a positive environment, incorporating factors such as: good nutrition, good health and a nourishing and stimulating environment.

Prior to Labor's national reforms, this positive environment was left to states and territories and differed quite markedly across the country. This is why Labor felt that it was imperative to invest in the early years through increasing the availability of quality preschool for four-year-olds and establishing the national quality framework for all early childhood educators and care providers. This was done in full consultation with state and territory governments through the COAG processes—no backflips and nothing done in secret; what we said is what we did—and we consulted widely.

So from a patchwork of inadequate legislation in states and territories, we developed national legislation and one set of regulations so that for children, wherever they were being cared for and educated across Australia, expectations and outcomes were the same. A national framework focused around three concepts: belonging, being and becoming. A national framework widely endorsed and well received by the early childhood education and care sector. Belonging, being and becoming is a vision for children's learning with outcomes for children from zero to five years.

So the national regulations cover processes for provider approval, they have a ratings scale, they have a process for assessment and they have minimum staffing requirements. They also spell out minimum educational requirements for carers. The sector embraced these reforms. Finally the sector was seen by others—parents and the general community—as a sector staffed by professionals, offering quality education to Australia's youngest children. It was finally seen by others as a fantastic career getting the recognition it deserved, except for one remaining, outstanding and critical area—that is, the wages of early childhood educators.

There is an ongoing and outstanding crisis in early childhood education and care—that is, every week around 180 educators are forced to leave a job they love because they cannot afford to stay. These are educators who develop a relationship with the children that they care for and educate every day. These are educators who care and educate young babies through to children of five years. As the academic research points out, those children need a stable, stimulating environment and not an environment where each week 180 educators leave, not an environment where parents come into a service to find another new face as they hand over
their beloved child for a day in a childcare centre. Parents do not want this turnover, and educators do not want it either. But the facts are they simply cannot afford to stay in this career—one they have studied for, one they love and one they devote a significant amount of time to—because the wages are too low.

So let me give you some examples. One of the things Labor did was to bring in qualifications for all levels of educators in a service—and that is appropriate because the academic research tells us it is important. It is important to parents to have the confidence of knowing that the educator caring for their child has some experience behind them and an academic or TAFE qualification. But an educator with a certificate III—that is, the equivalent of a tradesperson—ears just $18.60 per hour. Teachers do not earn much more: about $21 an hour. What Labor did was recognise that and so it established a fund—an early childhood quality fund—and put $300 million in there. It invited services to apply, and services across the country did apply. It was not enough money but it was a start. It would have delivered $3 an hour to that certificate III worker, which would have enabled that certificate III worker to stay in a sector they love.

This is another backflip by this government which, when in opposition, committed itself to the Early Years Quality Fund. It has since reneged and taken another $300 million out of the sector. What educators across this country are asking the Abbott government is: when will they see a decent wage increase? When will they get the recognition they deserve? When will their pay packets be decent enough to enable them to stay in the job they love? We are now months past the election. We are overdue for a commitment. It is time the coalition lived up to at least one commitment it made, instead of backflipping and pocketing $300 million from the early years workforce.

Senator WILLIAMS (New South Wales) (11:39): I rise to speak on the address-in-reply. The Tuesday the 44th Parliament was opened was another historic day for this nation. The opening of the 44th Parliament is another milestone for the wonderful democracy in which we live. I am sure the other 75 senators in this place feel honoured and privileged to represent the people of the states and territories, along with the 150 members of the House of Representatives who were elected on 7 September. The privilege of representing our people is a tremendous honour, especially in this 44th Parliament where the laws of the land and the direction of our nation are set.

As we approach the end of 2013, Australians are looking optimistically to the future. They made it clear on 7 September that they were sick of the infighting and self-centredness of the previous government. They have given an outstanding vote of confidence in the Abbott-Truss government—the coalition government—to guide our nation in future years. Our government is about making decisions for the betterment of our nation.

On the carbon tax, this afternoon I will table the report of the Senate inquiry into the legislation coming forward to the Senate on that very issue. We hear from the opposition that they may well oppose the abolition of the carbon tax in the Senate. I find that quite amazing given that, when the Rudd government was elected in 2007, the mantle they ran under was the abolishing of Work Choices and when that legislation came here into the Senate we simply sat here quietly, respected their mandate and allowed the Fair Work Australia bills to pass. I question whether the Senate will now do the same—will they respect the will of the people of this nation?
The Australian Labor Party goes back a long time. It is the oldest party in our nation, along with the National Party which was formed shortly afterwards—the Country Party, as it was then. On 7 September, the Australian Labor Party received its lowest primary vote in 110 years. This was due to the carbon tax which was never going to be introduced. You will remember former Prime Minister Julia Gillard, along with former Treasurer Wayne Swan, said before the 2010 election that there would be no carbon tax. Well, there is a carbon tax, and the fact is they gave a commitment not to introduce it. We have given a commitment to abolish it. We know the cost to business, and I will talk more about that when we get to the carbon tax repeal bills which will be in this chamber very soon. It is amazing that when I asked the Department of the Environment, during our inquiry, about the government's plans for the carbon tax they advised that our emissions will not go down; in fact, they will go up. So there will be no reduction in emissions except for a crazy scheme to buy permits overseas later on—which I have said all along will simply open up a world of fraud and allow the siphoning of taxpayers' money.

Another clear commitment of the Abbott-Truss government, when in opposition, was the abolishing of the mining tax. You will recall, I am sure, that in June 2010 the elected Prime Minister of the time, one Mr Kevin Rudd, was removed from the prime minister's position. He was planning a super profits tax and the new Prime Minister, Ms Julia Gillard, said, 'We need to clean this up.' So who did she meet with? She met with representatives of Rio Tinto, BHP Billiton and Xstrata—the three biggest mining companies in our nation. They came to an agreement. It is amazing how, when it came to collecting that tax, those three big companies paid little or none. That is smart business, in my opinion. It is smart business if you can set up a plan with the government of the day and dodge a bullet yourself. You are being very clever. Of course, it was the small miners that faced the tax. None of us would argue that the Australian people do not deserve a fair share of the minerals in the ground. That is why we have state royalties. It is a simple case of allowing states to raise their royalties or put them in proportion with the price of the commodities so that when the price of the commodities goes up, a bigger return goes to the states and hence to the people.

The third big issue was asylum seekers. This is a tragic issue. I think it was in October 2008 when the former Prime Minister Mr Kevin Rudd abolished the regulations and laws that were put in place by the Howard government. We saw the opening up of a people-smuggling industry, and more than 50,000 people arrived here in boats. Sadly, more than 1,100 lost their lives in that process. A few months ago there was an absolute tragedy when bodies were floating in the ocean and an Australian boat had to go past those bodies to try to save more people after another boat had gone down. It is a very sad affair when you are in a boat and you must simply pass by those bodies floating in the water. That was just one of the many tragedies that have happened. And of course they have cost the Australian taxpayers billions and billions of dollars. It is good to see now that those numbers of people are shrinking.

Red and green tape: it is a sad fact that in just 15 months Labor had five ministers for small business—that is an average stay of three months. The small business minister in the Labor Party was never in the cabinet. Small business is the backbone of our nation—the biggest employer. There was hardly enough time to get the title on the door, that is how often small business ministers' names changed. This is the disregard the previous government had for our
small business sector which, as I said, is one that employs half of all industry employees in this nation.

Already, the small business sector has reacted to the election of the Abbott-Truss government. CPA Australia’s fifth annual Asia-Pacific Small Business Survey shows around one in five Australian small businesses expects to employ more people in 2014, and a significant proportion expects to invest in new assets over the next 12 months. This is in stark contrast to what we saw under Labor when 412,000 jobs in small businesses were lost, while the number of employing small businesses declined by 3,000.

For too long business, and particularly small business, has been strangled by red and green tape. Time and time again business people tell me of the endless paperwork they have to complete just to open their doors. We will identify where this burden can be taken off them. The first act will be to remove the carbon tax, and this will be a huge relief for all small businesses, particularly those heavy users of electricity such as butcher shops, corner stores and supermarkets. Our government will ensure that the Board of Taxation, the ACCC and the Fair Work Commission will have small business expertise.

Our recent Senate inquiry was amazing. I know a person who owns an IGA supermarket. It is a pretty tough game to be in when you are competing against Coles and Woolworths. He had to repair a gas leak in one of his large refrigeration units. He had to replace 65 kilograms of refrigerant, which would have cost $26 a kilogram before the carbon tax but cost $150 a kilogram because of the carbon tax. A thing that should have cost around $1,950 was $9,750—more than $8,000 above the cost for 65 kilograms of refrigerant gas because of the carbon tax. What does the IGA owner do? He must increase the price, up the margin, to pay for it. This is what the carbon tax did to businesses, especially the small businesses that find it hard to compete.

Rural and regional Australia will be well looked after by the Abbott-Truss government. I know that the Australian population lives around the seaboard and is crammed into the big cities. I think the real heart of Australia is in our farming families and our regional businesses. It might be the local milk vendor or the agricultural machinery dealer, the local hardware store or the dress shop. They are all an integral part of the economy. Our dairy farmers, cattle producers, wool growers, vegetable growers and egg producers work seven days a week against the elements to provide food and fibre for our nation and for export. One can only imagine what would happen to us if they were to down tools tomorrow.

We are investing in the future. We will increase the contribution to resource development by $100 million. We will commit $20 million to strengthen biosecurity and quarantine, establish a biosecurity flying squad for the first-response units and create a first-response biosecurity and container fund to tackle alien pest and disease incursions. This is very important; we are an island nation. One of the great selling assets we have in exporting our food is our clean, green image. We must see that that clean, green image is maintained, that diseases and pests are not brought into this country.

We will commit $15 million in the form of rebates to small exporters for export certification registration costs. We will provide $8 million towards minor new chemical permits to increase access to new technology and safe, effective pest and disease control, and $2 million will be provided over four years to assist the integration of agriculture into school curriculums.
But this is what the Abbott-Truss government will not do: we will not react to a TV program and shut down Australia's live export trade. This was a disgraceful decision and the ramifications and negative effects on the beef industry were huge. When the previous Gillard government cut live exports to Indonesia, it did absolutely nothing for our friendship with our closest neighbour, a big trading partner, and, of course, the price of cattle simply went down and down. Those cattle, when exported live, cannot exceed 350 kilos live weight. The delay in those exports meant a lot of those cattle exceeded 350 kilograms of live weight. Jobs were lost—people who fly helicopters to do the mustering, people at the waterfront; truckies and their road trains who carry the stuff had their trucks lying idle until some months later when those cattle trucks transported many of them south.

The town where I live were very proud and very pleased they had Bindaree Beef, an export abattoir. Truckies were bringing cattle from the top of Western Australia to northern New South Wales, because they could not market them, at a cost of $200 a head freight. What was left for the beef producers? So we are certainly not going down that way of cutting off food supplies to our nearest neighbour.

GrainCorp: just last Friday Treasurer Joe Hockey took a courageous decision and rejected an application by Archer Daniels Midland to take over GrainCorp. It was an important day for Australian agriculture and we listened to the people whose future depends on the success of GrainCorp and those who are grain producers. I did not have one wheat farmer call my office or speak to me to say it would be a good thing for Australian wheat growers, especially on the eastern seaboard, to sell off GrainCorp.

Established in 1916 by the New South Wales Government, GrainCorp is already a monopoly, and to have it sold off to a multinational company—that was a courageous decision by Treasurer Joe Hockey. Some have said we are not open for investment, we are not open for business, but that is not the case. The Treasurer made it quite clear that of 131 applications he looked at, he rejected one out of 131. I find it amazing that the Foreign Investment Review Board were not unanimous in their recommendations. That says it all in itself. When it comes to rural Australia and selling off farms and agribusinesses, what I have seen of the Foreign Investment Review Board is that it is a rubberstamping factory to sell off rural Australia.

Obviously, someone at the board gave this serious thought. The problem was the vertical integration of Archer Daniels Midland. They would have sold the chemicals and fertiliser to the farms. They would have bought the grain and put it in their silos for storage and charged a fee if it was going to be warehoused. They would have put it on their rail and taken it to their facility at the waterfront. Then because of the 16 per cent ownership of Wilmar International Limited they would have put it on their ships and taken it to China, where they have built their new flour mills, and processed the wheat into flour with very cheap labour and very cheap electricity, then put the flour on their ships and brought it back to Australia.

What would that have done to great companies like Dick Honan and the Manildra Group? How could they have survived when we have the cost of labour, the cost of electricity, the cost of energy and the cost of processing in Australia? We have already seen too many industries close down in this country from value adding. That would have led to more monopoly for Archer Daniels Midlands, who operate in more than 140 countries around the world. We would have only been four per cent of their business, but they could have added...
through their value-adding chain through the very clever way they have set up their facilities and their processing in countries with cheap energy and cheap labour. They could have made it very hard for Australian processors to complete.

Look at the canola industry. They would have done the same with that. How could the processing of our processing canola oil survive? That is why I believe Treasurer Hockey has made a very courageous and wise decision. Archer Daniels Midland already has almost 20 per cent share in GrainCorp. That can be raised to about 24 per cent. But I know GrainCorp will grow. They started as a small New South Wales business almost 100 years ago. They have grown to what they are today and they will continue to grow.

I am very pleased to see the increase in the Nationals representation in the 44th Parliament. Already the new member for New England, Mr Barnaby Joyce, who is the Minister for Agriculture, has hit the ground running, meeting farming groups, looking at drought and disease issues and generally engaging with farming communities. This is in stark contrast to what happened in the portfolio in the preceding six years. I welcome the member for Lyne, and the member for Page into our National Party room, David Gillespie and Kevin Hogan respectively. I have known David Gillespie for many years. He is a doctor, a gastroenterologist. He set up his business and knows what small business is about. He is a father, a husband—just like Kevin Hogan—and it is great to have these people in this part of our party room working in conjunction with the Liberal Party and a strong coalition.

There is a lot to be done. There are things I have worked on since I have been in this place, like the changes to the registration of liquidators, where we launched an inquiry. The previous government did nothing. We met a situation where a rogue liquidator got into a business called CarLovers Carwash. It cost CarLovers $1.8 million in legal fees to have that rogue removed. You cannot have a system like that. ASIC needs more powers.

I look forward to our inquiry into ASIC, and to knowing why it took them so long to act on Commonwealth financial planners when they were tipped off by the whistleblowers when people lost their life's earnings. You see it over life. You see a young couple meet—they get married at, say, 27. They go and take out a big mortgage to buy the house, to fulfil the Australian dream. They have two or three children, they rear the kids and educate the kids. The kids grow up get educated, get a job. Mum and dad put a little nest egg away, their life earnings, and it might be at the age of 55 or 65 they find some rogue comes in and gambles with that money, like putting it on a racehorse. ASIC needs to lift its game. I look forward to that part of the inquiry, we need a strong, active corporate watchdog.

There are many things that need to be done. We need to get the budget in order. Already AIFM's figures last Friday were over $300 billion. We cannot go on mortgaging our kids' futures way. There are going to be hard decisions to be made and, as I said, Treasurer Joe Hockey has the worst job in Australia. He will deliver his budget next May, and in the meantime we are still working on the previous government's budget. That is why the debt is still going up. I think this is of greatest concern, especially if the world economy slows down more. We have seen the recessions in Europe. Japan has a huge government debt. America is the same, breaching their cap and political wars putting the scares right through international financial markets. We need stability in Australia, but we need to get our debt under control. I will support tough decisions by Treasurer Joe Hockey to do exactly that. I think it is a case where we need to look after our country for future generations.
We look back at what our ancestors did. They built our nation, our farmers. Those remarks of AWU boss Paul Howes, that the ma and pa farmers are gone—what a disgrace! The generation of farmers are the ones who know the land, have conserved the land, have preserved the land, have looked after the land and have helped build this nation. Mr Howes, stick to your union job and stay out of the rural Australia. You do not understand it. I do understand a bit about shearing sheds. I spent 27 years of my life in them. I was actually a member of the AWU for 12 months but I did not buy a ticket and got kicked out of the shed under compulsory unionism days.

So, there is a tough job ahead for the government, and many tough decisions to be made. But I know under the leadership of Mr Tony Abbott and Mr Warren Truss and the careful guidance of Treasurer Joe Hockey and the team around them—that is what I like about the Prime Minister so much, and my Leader of the Nationals, Mr Warren Truss: they get on so well—we have a great coalition, and I look forward to doing the best for our nation in the future years.

Senator STEPHENS (New South Wales) (11:59): I rise to contribute to this debate, the address-in-reply. I listened to the Governor-General's address with great interest as she outlined the Abbott government's agenda for the 44th Parliament. I have to say that while I listened intently I was watching the faces and the body language of those opposite and I have to say it was very revealing. There were many who could not help but smirk at the words, 'We should never be a country that cuts tall poppies down to size,' knowing as we all did the relentless character assassination led by Mr Abbott against the former prime ministers Gillard and Rudd and Labor members, and the notion that the government will bring a 'Jakarta rather than Geneva' focus to foreign policy. We have seen how that has gone for all the wrong reasons. Our relationship with Indonesia is now at its lowest ebb and we need to very seriously consider how we are going to address that. What was really most disconcerting about the address-in-reply was the lack of policy detail and what was left unsaid has me most worried, as we discovered last week with Minister Pyne's announcements in relation to reneging on the deals across all states and territories in relation to education funding. That concern is quite real and very genuine.

What do we know about this government's approach to social policy, the challenges of aged care, community services, housing shortages or homelessness? There was nothing in that statement that gave us any clue as to what the government's approach might be to those real and emerging challenges. Where was the detail of the complicated machinery-of-government changes in relation to Indigenous affairs, consolidating all of the decision making and the policy development into the central agency of the Prime Minister and Cabinet—a classic example of where coordination equates to micromanagement, and the conflicting priorities of central agency decision making with service delivery can mean delays and inertia where policy change was actually the driving factor in the first place.

The policy agenda of 'Australia is under new management and open for business' allows commentary from close prime ministerial confidants like Maurice Newman, the chairman of the Prime Minister's Business Advisory Council. In his address to CEDA's 2013 annual dinner, he argued that our minimum wage is too high, that the NDIS is too expensive, that corporate welfare is crippling Australian industry and that climate change is a myth. This government is relying on a coterie of experts to provide cover for the decisions being made
across portfolios and we can see even in the way in which the Commission of Audit is being undertaken that that is code for widespread cuts to government programs. And we are seeing some familiar faces: Dr Kemp has re-emerged to undertake the government's higher education review and Dr Switkowsky is back to advise on telecommunications and the NBN—and the list goes on. Not content to just promote jobs for the boys; the government has also withdrawn the appointment of a number of advisory bodies to suit its own purposes. I think it was a deliberately spiteful decision to rescind the appointment of former Premier Steve Bracks as US consul-general. Then we had the decision to wind-up the Australian Social Inclusion Board, the national housing reform council, the Insurance Reform Advisory Group, the Not-for-Profit Reform Council, all based on the argument 'that these bodies have outlived their original purpose'—or, more importantly, are not focused on the government's policy priorities. That speaks volumes for what is really in this government's mind.

The government has signalled its intention to claw back the not-for-profit reform agenda, putting civil society organisations back in their place at a time when there is growing expansion of their role in direct delivery of social services. Again, the government's rhetoric does not support the reality of the work that these organisations do on the ground. Mr Andrews has said that he wants to abolish the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission, despite its success in reducing red tape, in building greater capacity and capability in the sector and in implementing the recommendations of the Productivity Commission report, which provided a seminal, independent road map for modernising Australia's multibillion-dollar not-for-profit sector—something that is quite critical to meet the implementation of the NDIS, as just one example.

It is a shame that Senator Kim Carr has left because we would like to know what the government's policy agenda for innovation and research and development is. Again, it is Mr Newman who gives us the clue—a known climate change sceptic. He believes that money spent on science and cutting carbon pollution is wasted. So it is very hard to reconcile the rhetoric of the government's statement with the reality of their cuts to the CSIRO and the subsequent loss of our scientific expertise to overseas. It is hard to reconcile the digital divide being created across the country by tearing up the NBN rollout targets and the immediate impacts on university communities—including in New South Wales, Western Sydney and Wagga Wagga—with the rhetoric of innovation within health, commitment to food security, productivity in agriculture and investment in regional industries. What is the future of the multistage, innovative and collaborative research programs being managed across Australia and international research institutions by cooperative research centres, for example?

What we have seen is a very clear theme emerging in the coalition government, one that will no doubt be dubbed 'dirty little secrets,' I am sure and it is this: no government in living memory has been as reluctant as this government to inform Australia about its decisions, to justify its actions or to engage with the Australian community. We have all heard of Steven Covey's *The seven habits of highly effective people* and the first of those is 'start with the end in mind'. This is certainly what we have seen in the first few months of the prime ministership of Mr Abbott. He has closed down the transparency of open government—an expectation of a modern democracy. Mr Abbott described being in opposition as theatre and while he was in opposition he promised Australians they would get a 'no surprises government'. What we have
been witnessing in recent weeks is akin to theatre of the absurd. His election manifesto claimed:

The Coalition will do the right thing for Australia and deliver a strong, stable, accountable government that puts the national interest first and delivers a better future for all Australians.

We will restore accountability and improve transparency measures to be more accountable to you.

At his campaign launch in August, Mr Abbott said again and again:

We will be a no-surprises, no-excuses government, because you are sick of nasty surprises and lame excuses from people that you have trusted with your future.

How that statement has come back to bite—now we know that a no-surprises government comes at the absolute cost of open government.

Mr Abbott has nothing to say to the Australian people. People in the street are quite nonplussed by his attitude, which they characterise, when I speak to them, as 'pretty unbelievable'. They find it incomprehensible that, unlike our previous eight Prime Ministers, he made no address to the nation in response to the international humanitarian crisis of the hurricane in the Philippines, for example. We can count on the fingers of both hands the number of media appearances he has made. He does not allow his ministers to appear on television. He is being micromanaged by his office, as are his ministers. That is not what Australians would call a grown-up government.

In a signal of the frustration being experienced by the national media, Laurie Oakes recently broke ranks by saying that Prime Minister Tony Abbott and senior ministers were breaking their election promises of greater accountability for voters and that the Abbott government is 'thumbing its nose at voters' through a lack of transparency and communication.

You can't thumb your nose at the voters' right to know and you can't arrogantly say 'we'll let the voters be misinformed and we won't help journalists get it right'. That's just a disgusting attitude.

Laurie Oakes is right—it is disgusting and quite contemptible.

They're busily trying to avoid the media as much as possible and to control the media and ... I don't think they will get away with it for too long.

And, frankly, nor should they. It seems that transparency and the public's right to know are not going to be features of this government.

We have watched the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection tightly bind up his department and others on information about asylum seekers. We no longer know if boats have arrived, been stopped or hidden. This is all done under the pretext that this is not in the national interest and that there is no right to know. Customs no longer issues advice about boats in distress en route to Australia. We read about them in the Jakarta Post. 'On-water matters are not to be discussed'. In another insidious change, it is particularly disconcerting to visit the new website of the rebadged Department of Immigration and Border Protection, where all information about asylum seekers or detention centres has been removed.

Mr Morrison's weekly briefings are held away from the press gallery and he just declines to answer questions, leaving Laurie Oakes again to observe that:

What's particularly not acceptable is Scott Morrison's arrogant attitude. He sees it as getting at the press but it's not. It's getting at the voters and eventually I think the voters will wake up.
I think that they have already done that. Media briefings are reduced to a farce by the minister and Commander Campbell, who must surely rue the day he accepted the poisoned chalice of heading up Operation Sovereign Borders. We are concerned about the politicising of our Defence forces, which is something that has gone beyond the pale already under this government.

Mr Hockey has joined the club. When he announced the government would respond to Australia's ballooning credit card bill by almost doubling the borrowing limit to half-a-trillion dollars, he held a 10-minute press conference and took few questions. He has misrepresented the national accounts and squibbed and fibbed on our economic situation to suit his own purposes, and he is not the only one.

Of course, it is not just the Australian public, the media or us as the opposition who are most frustrated by the strict control on information being run from the Prime Minister's office. Spare a thought for the public servants trying to bring to bear the machinery-of-government changes announced by the Prime Minister since his government was sworn in, and who are ultimately responsible for delivering the new government's agenda. They tried desperately during Senate estimates to explain what was going on, but they could not shed too much light. They are being asked to achieve this at the same time as the Prime Minister has directed the elimination of 12,000 jobs within the service, and that decision making be centralised within the Prime Minister's office. Ministers' offices are still not fully staffed. Ministers' offices refuse to take or return telephone calls about critical policy issues. That leads to confusion, misinformation and policy inertia. The atmosphere in the lead-up to the resumption of parliament was shambolic. In some agencies people were desperate, and many commentators began to suggest that this reflected a deep lack of trust in the public sector by the incoming government. That is of concern to us all.

During the caretaker period prior to a general election and in the period following a change of government, one of the main tasks of senior public servants is to prepare portfolio briefs for the incoming government, called the 'blue books'. The documents usually provide a fairly frank assessment of the party's election policies, the public service's view of the economy and other information designed to allow a smooth transition between governments. In 2010 redacted versions, or red books, were released under freedom of information laws, but not this time. The Sydney Morning Herald reported that the Treasury official, an acting assistant secretary, responsible for the decision wrote:

… release of the incoming government briefs would interfere with the establishment of an effective working relationship between the Treasury and Treasurer. The need to develop a trusting relationship is particularly important in the early days of a new government, to set the tone for the future working relationship of the whole department. Disclosure of the incoming government brief would not be conducive to establishing a productive, trusting and effective relationship with the Treasurer and would adversely affect Treasury's effectiveness as a central policy agency, which I also find to be contrary to the public interest. What is contrary to the public interest is this veil of secrecy that has come down over this government's decision making. FOI experts, such as lawyer Peter Timmins, suggest that Treasury's refusal to release its advice to the incoming government is clear breach of the public interest. Mr Timmins's view is that:
It's been in the Freedom of Information Act for 30 years that advice, opinions, recommendations, in the course of the operations of an agency isn't protected—except if, on balance, it would be contrary to the public interest to disclose it.

Senator Ludwig has shone a light on the lack of disclosure by the government and its contempt for freedom-of-information laws, and rightly asks: what have they to hide? At least five departments have refused outright to release incoming government briefs, and another five have asked for fees of up to $2,356 to release the information that previous governments released. No rules have changed; the departments are now simply refusing to release them under the same rules that previously applied.

Now we know that Attorney-General, Senator Brandis, is a signed-up member of the secret squirrels club too because his office recently revealed:

The Attorney-General may, from time to time, provide guidance to the government on the operation of the FOI Act.

And asked whether Brandis supported a recommendation of the recent review of FOI laws by former public servant and diplomat Allan Hawke, Minister Brandis' office said:

The government is closely considering all recommendations of the Hawke review. The Hawke review recommended that the incoming government briefs be exempt from FOI, which does not match with the Abbott commitment that 'accountability and transparency will be the principles that underpin our government'.

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop recently gave the keynote address at the conference of the Australian Council for International Development, but her speech was closed to the media—the rest of the conference was open—because the media were seeking details about the $4.5 billion worth of cuts to our aid budget and the axing of AusAID, which ceased to exist as an independent agency as of 31 October. That announcement certainly did not come into the 'no surprises' category. That action had never been signalled by Ms Bishop in opposition nor by the opposition in its campaign policy.

There are many stakeholders who need to understand just what that is all about: not just the NGO community but the technical consultancy organisations such as SMEC, who work so closely with government in the field. The cuts will have diplomatic impacts too, as programs and funding commitments form part of bilateral agreements signed during diplomatic visits here and abroad. There is no information from Ms Bishop about how the options for implementing large and immediate aid cuts are being developed, who is being consulted or how those impacts will be managed. What possible business is this of the Australian people?

The way in which the AusAID staff were treated was appalling. The graduates, who had already been recruited for next year, were dismissed by email last week. We have to think about what the impacts of the integration of AusAID into DFAT after almost 40 years will look like. It certainly has not been a very happy marriage to date.

Environment minister Hunt, who failed to find one notable scientist to support the veracity of the coalition's direct action plan, and who resorted to Wikipedia to help explain the government's position on climate change, is yet to outline to the Australian people just how this plan is going to deliver the reduction in carbon emissions or how in fact Direct Action will roll out in practice. The bills are in the parliament, as we know and, without the detail required to give Australians confidence, we know that Mr Abbott recently abandoned the
bipartisan international agreement that bound Australia to reducing emissions by up to 25 per cent by 2020 by unilaterally announcing a commitment of five per cent by 2020 instead.

This again is another indication of the lack of commitment to our international obligations—code for the Geneva focus—that became a hallmark of the previous coalition government. Now we see the reinforcement of these issues by the introduction of temporary protection visas, by reverting to depersonalised language, such as 'illegal maritime arrivals', and the challenge to the legality of seeking asylum—the issues that have been raised with all of us most recently as people despair about the lack of information and transparency that is coming from this government. We have silence from the Defence minister about bastardisation, we have silence from the Nationals in general and this is our—(Time expired)

Senator BERNARDI (South Australia) (12:19): The beginning of a new parliament is one of the best times to reflect on the future direction of our country. Having been re-elected for another term, I thought it worthwhile also to reflect on my maiden speech in this place and the causes I have pursued since that speech seven years ago. Back then I warned that the modern rights movement threatened to corrupt the true meaning of 'right', giving status to mere desires and fuelling a competing so-called rights agenda. Seven years later, I regret to say it has come to pass. We regularly see it: a tiny vocal minority pursuing its own desires at the expense of others, at the expense of our traditions and of our societal fabric. I have spent my time here trying to tackle that agenda, along with many other issues that are important to me and important to mainstream Australia.

The other day one of my staff reminded me of a quote from Peter van Onselen back in 2010. He said:

Bernardi was the person who got the ball rolling on Abbott's ambition to become Liberal leader.

I am not sure that is entirely correct but there is no denying that I have done my best to help get the ball rolling on a few worthy causes. I did help to get the ball rolling on tackling Labor's emissions trading scheme in 2009—a policy that was against the national interest, was fuelled by falsities and rent seekers and, regrettably, was embraced by the coalition at the time. The response to my opposition was hysterical and vitriolic. I was called a dinosaur, a rebel, a denier. How dare I question the always accurate, eminent wisdom of Al Gore, Tim Flannery and their acolytes? Those who shared my views in this parliament were told they spoke for nobody but themselves. Yet only weeks later the ETS policy was opposed by the coalition. It was defeated in this place and then it was dumped by the former government.

I helped to get the ball rolling on open discussions about dismissing calls for sharia law and legal pluralism in this country. My approach was labelled at the time as cynical and knee jerk, with some having no problem with the government's plans to change tax, property, insolvency and security laws to accommodate sharia finance. Despite the condemnation of the critics about my concerns, the major parties finally dismissed calls for sharia law in Australia in what I deem yet another win for common sense.

I also helped to get the ball rolling on raising security and identification concerns about face coverings like the niqab and the burqa. People could not run away from me fast enough, quite frankly. They took every opportunity to tell the media that my attitude was simply racist. Who would have thought that being concerned about people hiding their faces in public would draw such absurd responses? These responses look even more foolish when you
consider that New South Wales, Western Australia, the Australian Capital Territory and a number of other places have enacted legislation to tackle this very issue.

On behalf of parents everywhere, I helped to get the ball rolling on challenging excessive foul language during family TV-viewing times. But apparently, by standing up for families, people think you are whipping up a 'moral uproar', which is just another flippant response from the morally vacuous.

I also helped to get the ball rolling on exposing baby bonus payments being paid after abortions, something the previous government at first denied but then were pressed to deal with. My pursuit of these causes has been met with derision by some in the media, contempt from the political left and white-anting from a few snipers on my own side.

So I stand here, somewhat bloodied after these departures from the PC agenda, but I am still determined to keep the ball rolling, to represent my constituents and the millions of Australians who share similar concerns. It is a task that I welcome with every fibre of my being. I agree with the sentiments of the new member for Fairfax: politicians come and go but ideas last forever. Sadly, in the battle of ideas these days, it seems more important to be politically correct than to be actually right. I do not and I will not conform to that mantra.

I have always fought for the things that I believe in. These are the same things that many Australians believe in too. They love this country and want to see it prosper. They love their families and they want to see them strengthened and protected. They love their communities and want to see pride in our culture and a greater sense of belonging. They love to work hard and want to see less government interference in their lives and to keep more of the fruits of their labour. They love our traditions and want to see them endure. They are mighty sick of politicians pushing conviction aside and putting convenience in its place. For the past seven years I have stood together with these Australians and tried my best to give them a voice. It has meant that I have often found myself standing outside the political and media establishment, but I know that I do stand with the mainstream and I make no apology for having firm beliefs. I will not be silenced by the bellicose calls of the intolerant, and neither should any other Australian.

Some in the political class are too afraid to talk about the issues that matter to many of our citizens, the issues that go to the very heart of our society's foundations. They forget that our role in this place should always be more about the commitment to our nation than about satisfying our own personal desires.

So, as we embark on a new direction, with a new parliament and a new government, we are wise to remember that our constituency does not stop at the press gallery or at our own colleagues. This House was built within the hill, not on top of it, as a permanent and enduring reminder that true democracy never comes from the top down. We have a duty to speak up for our beliefs and those of our constituents as well as fostering respectful debate without fear or favour. That will be my goal in this new parliament, as it has been ever since I stepped foot in this place.

In briefly addressing some of the issues I feel are most important, I start by saying there is nothing wrong with loving your country and fighting for its culture and its institutions. After all, those institutions have helped make this country as great as it is, which in turn brings many from overseas to our shores looking for a better life. Australia has been the beneficiary
of decades of migration that have enriched our national tapestry. Indeed, my own family is part of that tapestry too. But we can only maintain this if we stand against what UK journalist David Goodhart refers to as 'separatist multiculturalism'.

Let me say that I do not argue against the genuine desire for different ethnicities to live together harmoniously. I have always supported an orderly and respectful migration policy. But I do have concerns about policies that emphasise differences rather than focus on national pride and citizenship, or policies where Australians are made to feel ashamed of our own history and culture.

Somehow it is seen as xenophobic to suggest that those who choose to come here adjust to our society and embrace our values, the values that made Australia such an attractive place to migrate to in the first place. Some even maintain that our flag is a symbol of division, rather than unity. And when things do not work out, the PC apologists blame our culture, our values and our people for not trying hard enough.

We need to ask ourselves: how does our country benefit if we encourage isolation? How do we build a stronger nation when some are unwilling to become building blocks of a cohesive society? So a balance must be struck between the obligations of society and the obligations of those wishing to benefit from it. After all, a strong and harmonious nation is one that values above all what unites us, not what divides us.

Many amongst the political elites do not seem to want to talk about this, but the public sure do. And we saw this in the parliament's multiculturalism inquiry, where hundreds of Australians raised concerns about sharia law, immigration, integration and competing cultural demands. These people are not 'extremists' or 'racists', as the modern day version of Lenin's 'useful idiots' would have us believe. These people are patriots, deeply concerned with the type of country we will be leaving to future generations. And, frankly, I share many of their concerns—as does the great silent majority. Is it any wonder that faith in our political class is at such a low, when some politicians have so much trouble reflecting the genuine concerns of regular people in favour of some token appeasement to political correctness?

Just as we face challenges to our culture and laws, our society also faces a concerted push to deny the most fundamental right in existence: the right to life for the most vulnerable in society: the unborn, the sick and the elderly. We must remember that part of the duty of government is to care for its citizens—particularly those who cannot care for themselves.

Unfortunately, the push for legalised killing continues. In recent weeks Australia's first euthanasia clinic opened in Adelaide only a few streets away from where I live. Advocates of euthanasia claim that safeguards can limit the abuse of euthanasia. They say that the slippery slope does not exist. But they are either uninformed or are being deliberately misleading to further their cause.

In Belgium, where euthanasia was legalised in 2002, there have been a number of cases where patients were killed who did not explicitly request euthanasia and where nurses administered the lethal drugs despite this being against the law. And now, the Belgian parliament is even considering allowing euthanasia for minors. Tell me again that the slippery slope does not exist. But they are either uninformed or are being deliberately misleading to further their cause.

In Belgium, where euthanasia was legalised in 2002, there have been a number of cases where patients were killed who did not explicitly request euthanasia and where nurses administered the lethal drugs despite this being against the law. And now, the Belgian parliament is even considering allowing euthanasia for minors. Tell me again that the slippery slope does not exist. But they are either uninformed or are being deliberately misleading to further their cause.
It is a similar slippery slope with unborn babies' right to life. I know this is an emotive issue for people on both sides of this debate, but when legal, medical abortion was introduced in the sixties did the advocates for abortion foresee that 70,000 to 100,000 unborn children would be killed each year in Australia? Were they so naive as to think that abortion would just be restricted to protecting the health of the mother? These days in places like Victoria abortion is available virtually any time during pregnancy and it even caters to the whims of parents: they can abort a healthy baby girl if they prefer a boy. The human toll of this slippery slope is simply astounding, and yet even abortion on demand is not enough for some. Greens party cofounder Peter Singer, for example, spends his time advocating for human rights for apes but does not seem that concerned about unborn children or even disabled children that have been born. Singer argues:

Killing a disabled infant is not morally equivalent to killing a person. Very often it is not wrong at all. I disagree. I think it is absolutely wrong. We should be promoting a culture of life in society and not allowing the shadow of death to be cast over all our lives. I know of many Australians who share this view and I am continually heartened by their support. They might not be the ones who shout the loudest, but that does not mean that they are wrong or they should not have their voices heard.

The same goes for those Australians who support the current definition of marriage. They often endure terrible slurs for simply giving their opinion and sometimes get labelled homophobic, which is an absolutely unfair accusation to make. Defending traditional marriage in no way means that someone harbours hatred for homosexuals. This is yet another example of the political Left using insults rather than evidence to make their point. In fact, the Left continue to invent new phobias as pejorative terms for anyone that does not agree with their radical agenda.

In response I would like to suggest that many of these people seem to suffer from veritaphobia—a fear of telling the truth. And the truth is that history has demonstrated that tampering with tradition has unforeseen consequences. When I questioned the possible future demands associated with redefining marriage, my words were labelled as the 'worst sort of slippery slope argument'. It was said that there is no country that has legalised same-sex marriage that has legitimised polygamy. Critics climbed over themselves, and stumped over the truth, on their way to the nearest microphone to twist my words for their own ends. They conveniently failed to notice that we already see in Brazil and the Netherlands, where same-sex marriage is legal, the recognition of multimember unions. I will say it again: tampering with tradition has unforeseen consequences. This is not about denying rights; it is about the fact that individual desires should not trump the wisdom of the ages.

Part of that wisdom has come to us through organised religion. Of course, religious belief is essentially a private matter for individuals, but when religion is discussed in the public sphere double standards abound. Frankly, in this brave new world it is seemingly permissible for people to denigrate Christianity in all manner of ways but not to critically examine other competing belief systems.

There are concerted efforts to remove Christian influence from our society, despite the incredible contribution Christian ethics and beliefs have made to our way of life. And, contrary to popular belief, recent studies have found that most religious persecution is directed against Christians. They face oppression in nearly three-quarters of the world's
nations. Where are the headlines about this in our mainstream press? Just imagine the indignation if believers of a different faith were subject to the same level of persecution. We would never hear the end of it, and yet when it comes to the slaughter and oppression of Christian people the silence is deafening. The inconsistent reactions from the perpetually outraged in respect to religion—and any of their other pet causes—demonstrate the deliberate agenda that political correctness pursues against free speech.

Many Australians saw that through the Labor government's blatant attempts at censorship via their proposed media council and antidiscrimination laws. While these more obvious methods have been called out for the rubbish they are, more subtle efforts continue to enforce groupthink on society today. We see it in our newspapers, on TV, in our kindergartens, our schools and workplaces. We regularly see it on our ABC. One of its flagship programs, Q&A, regularly has a token conservative panellist outnumbered four to one, as if this represented community sentiment. It does not, but it does represent the ABC's bias. So it is reasonable to ask: why are taxpayers footing a $1 billion bill for the ABC when it consistently fails to present a balanced view?

Sure, the political Left speak about tolerance, but time and again we see that their tolerance only extends to an echo of their own voice. Rather than respectfully disagreeing and getting on with debate, traditionalist views are drowned out in a cacophony of slurs, smears, confected outrage and attempts to cow others into silence. A former member of the parliament, the Hon. Dr David Kemp, put it this way:

The threat to freedom of speech has always come from those who believe they have some superior wisdom, or access to a truth that others must be forced to see.

This threat must be met each and every time we see it and it must be met with an unwavering commitment to free speech for everyone, not just those who are deemed worthy by the self-appointed elites.

It is also time for this parliament to tackle the sense of entitlement and the burgeoning welfare state. Every Australian should have the opportunity to reach their full potential through education, employment and hard work. The spirit of entrepreneurship and diligence are the keys to individual prosperity and a stronger economy. In 2009-10, according to the ABS, 60 per cent of Australian households received more in social benefits than they paid in taxes—60 per cent. Of course some of them genuinely need assistance, and part of the government's job is to help them. But to have 60 per cent of households relying so heavily on government in this way is far too much.

Too many children are growing up in families that are stuck in a hopeless cycle of generational welfare. We simply cannot allow this debilitating path to continue. Nor can we allow a government to live beyond their means, for that is merely stealing from future generations to fund the indulgences of today. Making change in these areas will require tough choices to be made. It means we have to stop kicking the proverbial can down the road hoping someone else will eventually pick it up. But in the end isn't that what we are meant to be doing—picking up after the legacy of previous can kickers and getting Australia back on the right track? What our forefathers built for us and what past generations have fought hard to maintain is too precious to play around with. Our values, our principles and our traditions have endured the test of time and are worth preserving and speaking up for.
So I say it again: just because you support traditional marriage does not make you homophobic, just because you defend Australian culture does not make you a racist, just because you defend the right to life does not make you a misogynist, just because you are a Christian does not make your views any less important in the public debate. Australians who believe in the essential pillars of our democracy, in our traditions and in our values must learn to throw away the insults of the self-styled progressives and stand strong against such tactics.

What traditional conservatives seek to defend goes to the very heart of our way of life and the blessed bounties we receive from residing in this land. In this new parliament it is fair to say that I carry a bit of scar tissue from my commitment to these values over the past seven years, but I am absolutely resolute in my determination to continue to stand for conviction over political convenience in this parliament and beyond.

Senator LUNDY (Australian Capital Territory) (12:38): The address-in-reply is an opportunity to reflect upon the new government's agenda, as expressed by the Governor-General in this place on the first day of sitting of the 44th Parliament. It is with a disconcerting sense of deja vu that I rise today to comment on the coalition government's plan to slash thousands of jobs from the Australian Public Service and make savage and unnecessary cuts to the programs and services that benefit the lives of so many Australian families.

I have had the great honour of representing the people of the ACT as senator since 1996 and yet, sadly, the content of my comments today echo those of my early speeches to this chamber in that same year. Now, as then, I rise to defend not only my community and the many dedicated public servants I have the immense privilege of representing, but also millions of vulnerable Australians across our nation, from a new government that is embarking upon a program of cuts to the Australian Public Service that is motivated by a tired and redundant ideology. We are just a few short months into the new Abbott government and yet it is abundantly clear that the stale, old Liberal Party playbook has been dusted off and we are witnessing a replay of the early actions of the Howard government and many state coalition governments since. Now, as then, the coalition comes to government committing to make a set number of cuts to Public Service jobs while at the same time effusively promising that there will be no forced redundancies. Well, I have heard that before. But, following their election, the new government initiated a review.

Federally, the coalition are in the habit of calling these commissions of audit, for which the resulting recommendations, I presume, are very much a foregone conclusion. I know the pattern well. The promises of the pre-election period are quickly discarded and deep, painful cuts to the Public Service are enacted due to a manufactured debt and deficit crisis. But what we know is that these measures are unnecessary and that the debt and deficit crisis is a product of a deliberate and deceitful political campaign to saddle Labor with the blame for their plans, this government's plans, to radically cut government services. For the entire period of the last parliament, the coalition conducted an unrelenting and entirely spurious campaign against the former government in relation to debt and deficit. The then opposition leader, Mr Abbott, and Mr Hockey deliberately sought to manufacture a sense of crisis in the condition of the federal government's finances—all specifically designed to suit their political advantage—and completely ignored the reality of Australia's robust economic performance under Labor's stewardship. This campaign needlessly and recklessly damaged consumer and
business confidence in our economy during the most trying period for the global economy since the Great Depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s. But this campaign, motivated by political self-interest and quite divorced from reality, has been exposed for what it was—that is, farcical.

The priorities of the new government in the period since the election have exposed its campaign as posturing solely for the political purposes I described and put the lie to any notion of a debt crisis or budget emergency. We now have a government whose priority is to abolish a price on pollution without a credible plan to reduce the punishing impacts of pollution on climate change; we now have a government whose priority is to give a tax cut to billionaire mining companies through the abolition of the minerals resource rent tax; we now have a government whose priority is to hand hundreds of millions of dollars of tax concessions to the 16,000 superannuants with net worth in excess of $2 million, while ripping away a tax concession for 3.6 million of our lowest-paid workers, who are predominantly women; and we now have a government whose priority is to dismantle the early years quality framework intended to boost the wages of hardworking childcare professionals, who are amongst Australia's lowest paid workers, and reallocate that money to subsidise au pairs and nannies for comparatively wealthy families. These are not the actions of a government confronted with a budget crisis. These are the actions of government suffering from an ideological myopia. Sadly, we know why this campaign was confected. It is designed to provide the necessary political cover for the pursuit of a tired and dated ideological agenda of cuts to the public sector. We know this, and I know this, because we have seen it all before.

I will return to the government's cuts and their impact on my community, but first I would like to turn to the real facts of Australia's economic performance under the previous Labor government. I do so because it is essential to combat the inevitable revisionism of the coalition on this matter. It is a revisionism that was also conducted by the Howard government when they were elected in 1996 which attempted to paint the reforming period of the Hawke-Keating government in an unjustly negative light. We have already seen the attempts to downplay the enviable economic inheritance that this government has received from the previous government in this chamber, and doubtless we will hear much more of it. It is the Howard-Costello playbook, dusted off, being played again.

The previous Labor government's record—of which, as a member, I was exceedingly proud—is a solid one. This is especially true when taking into account the severe economic downturn in the period following the global financial crisis and the economic performance of comparable economies. And this, unlike the new government's unsubstantiated attacks on that record and the revisionism of that period that we have already seen by members opposite in this chamber, is attested to by many of the world's most pre-eminent economic institutions and commentators. During our time in government we grew our economy by more than 14 per cent, in some of the most challenging economic conditions ever faced by an Australian government. This feat is all the more impressive when contrasted with the performance of comparable economies. The same period saw the United States's economy grow by less than one-fifth of that, and the European Union saw its economy contract by two per cent.

Under Labor's sound management our economy grew from the 15th largest to the 12th largest in the world. Our prudent and measured fiscal stimulus helped avoid the rapid upswings in unemployment experienced across the developed world and the crippling social
and economic costs now being experienced across much of southern Europe and elsewhere. One of our finest legacies in this regard is that, according to Treasury analysis, the previous government's stimulus measures helped save 200,000 jobs during the darkest period of the global financial crisis. That is 200,000 families sustained by employment in a period when they otherwise would not have been.

The former government's expeditious response has been acknowledged by leading economists and economic institutions worldwide. Nobel Prize winning economists such as Paul Krugman and Joseph Stiglitz, along with the International Monetary Fund, have praised the design and scope of Australia's stimulus response to the global financial crisis as the most effective stimulus response of any government in the world and a model to be emulated internationally in the event of another global downturn.

Unemployment remained low under Labor, particularly when contrasted against the performance of comparable nations over the same period. We created one million new jobs while across the world tens of millions were shed. Interest rates fell from 6.75 per cent to 2.75 per cent, saving Australian families with a $300,000 mortgage $5,000 a year. Inflation was contained across the period of government. In fact, under Labor's stewardship Australia experienced the first minerals export boom in our history that was not also accompanied by an outbreak of inflation.

With net government debt just above 10 per cent of GDP, Australia has one of the lowest levels of government debt in the world. For the sake of comparison it is worth noting that the United Kingdom, the United States and Japan all have net debt levels more than eight times our position. Even Canada, a country of similar resource abundance, has a net government debt position in excess of 34 per cent. Our credit rating from all major credit ratings agencies is AAA, and we remain one of merely eight nations worldwide with a stable outlook.

The former Labor government is proud of its achievements in managing the economy, and these facts are firm evidence of our strong and intelligent stewardship. We bequeathed to the new government a growing, low-inflation, low-unemployment economy with an enviable set of government books. Our policies ensured that hundreds of thousands of Australians remained in their jobs in the aftermath of the most severe economic downturn since the Great Depression and that new jobs were created. We left the new government with an economic and fiscal outlook that would be coveted by leaders across the developed world. That is Labor's proud record.

But, going back to my earlier points, we know the real reason for the government's posturing on this. They need their manufactured sense of crisis in relation to government finances to provide the necessary political cover for their 'commission of cuts'. It is simply cover so that they can arbitrarily and unnecessarily take the axe to the Australian Public Service and the many services provided by government that so many Australians, particularly those on low incomes, rely upon. A reality based appraisal of the fiscal and economic conditions bequeathed to the government provides no justification for the cuts to the provision of government services that lie at the heart of the government's agenda.

The impacts of this agenda will be felt most sharply in one place, and that is of course Canberra. As a proud and passionate Canberran, and this being our wonderful centenary year, I feel more strongly about this than ever. Canberra is my home and home to hundreds of
thousands of people who are also proud to call Canberra home. But there is no way to deny it: the slash-and-burn agenda of the coalition is destined to hurt our regional and local economy.

In the face of all this, there is still plenty of room to be positive. We have actually weathered the storm before. We endured an economic downturn from 1996 through to 1998—I think that was the lowest point—but since that time we have diversified in quite an extraordinary way. Having been through a downturn following the election of a coalition government, we know that things do turn around. So I am quite positive about Canberra’s future, despite this parlous state of affairs. I would particularly like to take this opportunity to applaud and acknowledge the forward vision and planning, at an economic level and at a social level, of the ACT Labor government. As I said, we have a more diversified economy now than in 1996, andCanberrans, working in the Public Service or in business, particularly small business, have shown ourselves to be a very resilient and resourceful community.

Thanks to the foresight and efforts of many, Canberra is now a world-leading education hub. We sit at the nexus of some of our many great national institutions of scientific and social research, such as the CSIRO; the John Curtin School of Medical Research; the national ICT centre of excellence, NICTA; and many more. Proximity to these institutions, to our federal Public Service and to a highly educated population, both here in Canberra and in the region, makes us a more attractive destination than ever for investment and start-up business. We will always have proximity to the Commonwealth government, one of the largest purchasers for many goods and services in the Australian economy. One area that I am particularly interested in, as always, is information and communication technology. The Commonwealth will remain the largest single purchaser of information technologies in Australia.

All these things are great strengths of the Canberra economy and all these things, as they have before, will help us through harsh economic times. Canberra has a very bright and brightening future. But we must learn from what happened in 1996 and harden our resolve to be able to withstand the pressures that will be brought to bear as the coalition takes the axe to the Public Service here. Just to remind people listening today, when the Howard government came to power in 1996 they promised, committed to, 2,500 Public Service job cuts with no forced redundancies. We know the reality was tens of thousands—some reports have the numbers well over 30,000 ultimately. This resulted in loss of business and consumer confidence and a collapse in property values and ultimately a recession. The Abbott government has promised 12,000 job cuts and no forced redundancies but we have already seen them back away from this commitment. As the additional supplementary estimates information came out, they were forced to concede that they were not able to make their forecast savings of $5.2 billion with only 12,000 job cuts and no forced redundancies. The reason that forced their concession in this regard was that once you project that there will be no forced redundancies the natural attrition rate changes. This is a known factor, it has happened before, yet we still had a new government that persisted in taking what many of us in Canberra knew and tried to convey during the election campaign was a promise that they would be unable to keep. That has come to pass and they have not been able to keep the promise of no forced redundancies. We have seen them abandon that promise and, if experience is any guide, the ‘commission of cuts’ will continue to construct a cover for a desire to cut further.
With that context in mind, Canberra has just come off one of the best years ever in celebrating our raison d'être. The centenary of Canberra has proven to be not just a fantastic celebration for Canberrans but indeed for the whole nation as systematically we have moved through our centenary year highlighting and celebrating each step 100 years ago when the formation and foundation stones of this great city were laid. I have reflected many times in this chamber on the significant historical steps taken on significant dates and I have had the pleasure of seeing the commitment of the ACT government through their creative director of Canberra's centenary, Robyn Archer, as she has worked her magic through a whole range of extraordinary events, celebrating the great minds of the nation through their many topical talks and through lectures relating to the profound sciences. We have seen extraordinary cultural events. We have seen our cultural institutions step up and put their best foot forward and open their doors to not only Canberrans but the many hundreds of thousands of Australians and overseas visitors coming to see an array of exhibitions and artworks and cultural institutions. It moved me to see those exhibitions but they remind many Australians how proud they also can be in the national capital when they come here and realise perhaps for the first time that this city is as much theirs as it is for the people who live here. It is very much a city for the whole of Australia, and in this sense whatever damage is inflicted through cuts here we will be resilient. I do not believe the economy will be as damaged as it has been in the past but this is because it is a lived experience and we know what we need to do to keep stimulating at a local level through start-up businesses to promote small business activity, we know that for those families affected by job loss we need to work harder in providing greater job opportunities across the ACT Public Service and indeed through transition to the private sector.

All of these things make me extremely proud, as I said at the start of my comments, to be a senator for the ACT. We are facing tough times, and all the indicators are showing that, but it will not dampen our spirits as a community. We have been through these tough times before and have recovered with great strength. I look forward to working through this period with the people I represent with a sense of optimism and resilience as we take on the challenge of having contraction forced upon us through unjustified and ideological cuts imposed by this newly elected Abbott government.

Senator WATERS (Queensland) (12:57): As we began the 44th Parliament and as I listened to the Governor-General's speech I reflected on the achievements of the last parliament that I was so proud to be part of. I remember with great clarity that wonderful day when we passed our first carbon price laws in this parliament. What a joy that day was. I felt so proud as a Queenslander to be doing what is necessary and taking that first step towards what is necessary to safeguard our reef, to safeguard our beautiful farmland and our wonderful rainforests and to safeguard our coastal way of life. As a mother, I thought about the effect that those sorts of decisions would have on future generations. That was one very high point, but we had others. The passage of the mining tax, albeit, sadly, a watered-down version, was a really crucial step in this nation's history to try and share the wealth. The passage of our first universal dental care laws in Denticare allowed children finally to be able to get the dental care that they need. Just as they would go to a doctor they can now go to the dentist. Finally, we got some protection for our farmland and our aquifers from coal seam gas exploration and mining with the passage of a water trigger in our environmental laws.
I reflected on all those achievements and I felt very proud. But in listening to the Governor-General outline the agenda of this new government, frankly I was horrified. I was horrified at the lack of long-term vision and at the selfishness and narrow-minded approach to policy making that was expressed by our gracious Governor-General in advocating and speaking the Abbott government's agenda. The first thing that struck me as incredibly sad and short-sighted and confronting was this obsession with repealing our carbon price. And not just that, but proposing to replace it with this amorphous, undefined concept. We heard in estimates and in Senate inquiries last week that not even stakeholders know the details of this amorphous Direct Action Plan, which no economist—and certainly no ecologist or soil scientist—in the country has said will work. And it has a set amount of funding dedicated to it that our Prime Minister has now said he will not go above, even if this government is not on track to meet its five per cent cut of greenhouse gas emissions. We have a weak scheme, which is not even backed by its own proposers.

The Clean Energy Finance Corporation, that wonderful renewable energy bank that the Greens are so proud of being part of establishing, was here last week and said it is actually making money for the taxpayer. It is investing money in renewable energy not at a cost to the taxpayer, but at a profit, and it is bringing down emissions. This marvellous carbon price legislation and mechanism, with all of its good features and all of its success, is now on the chopping block and dismissed with a three-word slogan: 'Axe the tax'. Such tragic short-sightedness.

The Governor-General continued on with the Abbott government's agenda of axing the mining tax. We all acknowledge that it has its flaws—it needs to be much stronger; it could and should be raising far more revenue—but rather than fixing those problems the government propose to get rid of it entirely. Of course they are not proposing to reverse the cuts that single parents have to face when they were dropped off their parenting payments onto Newstart. What a shame that some cuts are open to exploration and others are not.

The other particularly painful aspect of the Governor-General's speech was the reference to securing our borders. I felt a real chill down my spine as those words were read out. Securing our borders from what? From desperate people who are fleeing situations of danger that most Australians do not experience and probably will never experience in their lives. Fleeing with their families—with their children, with their parents, with their siblings—and just wanting to have a safe life and to contribute to a new nation where they can feel like their lives are not at risk and their children can prosper and flourish. Securing our borders from those people? Is that really what it has come to? Are we that afraid of other human beings? I was horrified.

Of course we know the promise to retrench 12,000 public servants is going to hurt not only those families affected but also will cut the services on which we all rely. I thought it perfect irony that the new Commission of Audit that is being proposed by this government will be headed by none other than the head of the Business Council of Australia, Tony Shepherd. We know businesses reign supreme under this new world order, and now they are in charge of the razor gang of this new government. It is horrific, but somehow very fitting.

We heard in this past week that even promises that had been made pre-election, which we had assumed would be kept, are now going to be completely tossed out. The school funding promise, the Gonski funding promise that was made clearly by the then opposition leader,
who is now Prime Minister, is now meaningless. We are told those words apparently do not mean what we thought they meant. The Prime Minister, when he was Leader of the Opposition, did not actually mean what he said. So many backflips and so much short-sightedness and self-interest. The overall take-out message from that speech that I sat here and heard with great sadness was a real lack of positive vision, a fear about the people we share this planet with, a disdain for the needs of the natural world and this obsessive belt tightening for no apparent good in disregard for the real needs of families and workers and the services on which we all rely.

Sadly, this is not an experience that is new to us in Queensland. We have now had a government with a similar very destructive agenda unleashed on our state for the past 18 months. We have already had almost 14,000 public servants sacked from their work. As I have said, it is not just the families that suffer from those sackings but also the services on which we all rely are now not there. They have been contracted; they have been dismissed.

Sadly, the Newman government has cut or repealed or watered down more than 15 of the environment protections that Queenslanders had become used to and had felt were necessary—protections for our free-flowing wild rivers, many of which occur on Indigenous land. Just last week I met with traditional owner in the Wenlock region David Claudie. He said he does not want mines and dams on his land; he wants to keep those protections for his land that were on our law books but which Campbell Newman is going to repeal. It is going to be open slather on the cape once again. Our coastal protection laws are also gone—so much for the protection of our reef from the huge number of new and expanded coal and gas ports. Our national parks—not so sacred after all, despite the fact there is only four per cent of them in the country and about that number in Queensland. Logging is fine; grazing, yes, that is fine: all of that sacred land is now open. It is also open, of course, for massive tourism developments; however, hotels, cows, logging do not belong in national parks.

There have been other sneaky systematic reforms, like changing the court costs rules so that people in the community who want to challenge a decision on a development and who want to have their say about the future of their regions and their locales now cannot afford to go to court because now you have to pay in the Planning and Environment Court. These are systemic changes to lock people out of our democracy. Sadly, we have seen even more of that in recent months from our state government with the changes to the rules about bikies. Now it seems that people are not allowed to gather anymore and ride their motorbikes. The extent of those laws is what is truly scary, the fact that they could actually apply to any organisation of three or more people. That is horrific. We are back in the Joh days. 'Here we Joh again!' as the phrase goes. There are things like the sentencing mandate that has been brought down: judges are not allowed to decide things like sentences anymore, even though they have for eons and that is actually part of the doctrine of separation of powers. Never mind, Campbell Newman and his Attorney-General will dictate how long alleges criminals will go to jail for.

It seems a political appointment has now been made to the Crime and Misconduct Commission—set up in Queensland after that wonderful inquiry by Tony Fitzgerald—who is dictated to by the state government in what they can and cannot say, and when that is investigated that parliamentary committee gets sacked. There is absolutely no scrutiny or transparency. These people have a glass jaw and they are intent, it seems, on removing all
environmental protections and locking down and removing our civil liberties. Being from Queensland, I find that very concerning.

The attacks do not stop there. They are now going to change the electoral system to lock in their own power. They are going to lift the public funding threshold to 10 per cent to make sure that only the big parties can have a say in parliament and retain their seats. Most importantly, they are going to lift the cap on political donations so if you are rich enough you can buy yourself a seat in parliament in Queensland now. Sadly, we all know what the influence of wealth does to politics. We have seen that very recently in this very parliament where Mr Clive Palmer, who is due to give his first speech today, spent between $12 million and $20 million—we do not quite know because he has not told anybody yet—and has effectively bought himself representation in the parliament. He had a bit of an argument with Campbell Newman about a mine and a railway, did not like the result, spent a whole lot of dough, and now he gets a voice in federal parliament.

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Bernardi): Senator Waters, the Clerk has reminded me that you should refer to Mr Newman as the Premier of Queensland, his appropriate title.

Senator WATERS: Thank you, Mr Acting Deputy President, I will do that in future. So Mr Clive Palmer is here ostensibly to represent the people of Fairfax but it remains to be seen whether it will be his interests or theirs that get the most currency in this place.

It is such a disappointment to see this complete lack of a positive agenda from the new government. This is going to be a really challenging parliament not just for those in here who actually want a better future, fairer society and protection for our planet but for people in the community who feel the same way. I was particularly disappointed with the Abbott government's plan for a so-called 'one-stop shop' for environmental protection. The shop is selling out the environment and letting the state premiers do that. We have had 30 years in this country of the federal government gradually playing more of a role in protecting places and species that are so significant that the world wants us to conserve them—nationally and internationally significant places and species. They have become the responsibility of this parliament, but Mr Greg Hunt, who is meant to represent the environment, look after it and caretake those places, has decided that he does not really want that responsibility anymore. He would rather leave that up to state governments—state governments which have an atrocious track record on environmental issues. The Franklin dam is the best example; the Mary River dam in Queensland is another example where the state was willing to sell out our environmental assets. It took the federal government to step in and say: 'Sorry, that is too precious to lose. That is of national significance. We won't let you destroy it for private profits.' That is the system now under threat from this government. They are sneaking through changes and entering into memoranda of understanding with all the states. There is a huge build-up to the COAG meeting next week, with states being heavied to take on these new responsibilities because Mr Greg Hunt does not want to do his job anymore as the Minister for the Environment. He does not want to have responsibility for protecting those precious places and species. He does not want the climate laws either, so I do not know what he wants to do in his role as environment minister—I think he is probably going to have a bit of free time on his hands, if that is his approach.
In Queensland, the reef is a massive employer for our economy. We have 63,000 people who rely on the reef for their livelihood. That is an awful lot of people—far more than the mining industry has ever had—and yet we have plans for a doubling and trebling of coal exports, which will drive climate change and the direct destruction of the reef through the six new or expanded coal and gas ports that are on the books. The World Heritage Committee has said, 'Guys, you have got to stop this industrialisation or we’re going to list the reef as World Heritage in danger.' You would hope and think that that would have some kind of effect and that the government of the day would take that warning seriously and do what is necessary to arrest the decline of our reef—but no. We have had no moratorium on these coal ports. We are full steam ahead. We have a strategic assessment that was released last week that does not actually stop any of those destructive developments that the World Heritage Committee are so concerned about. We have the Abbot Point decision due to be made by the Minister for the Environment, Greg Hunt, next week; it would become the world’s largest coal port, in Queensland, right when the climate scientists are saying we are seriously at the eleventh hour. I do not want to see the reef I enjoyed so much as a child devastated by the dredging and the dumping and the shipping highway that it would become if that Abbot Point coal port expansion goes ahead. I do not want to be party to the climate effects of opening up the Galilee Basin for the profits of Mr Clive Palmer, Ms Gina Rinehart and a few Indian multinationals. That is not in our nation’s interests. It is not in our grandchildren’s interests. It is in the interests of making a few rich people even richer, to the detriment of all of us. I hope that the Minister for the Environment reconsiders what I suspect will be his approach on Abbot Point and thinks long and hard about his own children’s future and the future of all of our children.

Many of those ports are proposed for gas export as well as coal. We know that coal seam gas is dangerous to our aquifers. We know that the National Water Commission and the CSIRO have warned us about the potential long-term effects. We do not even know if we can mitigate those long-term effects. We could be contaminating or depleting aquifers that can never be repaired; that is what the science is saying. Yet we have seen an open slather and approvals given left, right and centre by both the state and federal governments with no regard to the precautionary principle which says if you are going to really bugger something up, maybe you should think twice about it before you give the approval. Never mind that—just give the big tick to big business and the big miners. When you are in the bush, make a nice little promise to a landholder and then do absolutely nothing about it when you are back in parliament.

I was temporarily pleased with Prime Minister Abbott's reported remarks to Debbie Orr, one of the landholders of Tara on the Darling Downs. Apparently he said he did think landholders should have the right to say no to coal seam gas. I agree—I think they should. It is a huge risk that is being taken with their land and water and with the climate; they should be able to say no. Sadly, when I moved a motion in this place recognising and applauding the Prime Minister for that statement, members of his party—the government here in this chamber—chose to vote against that motion. Sadly, members of the Labor Party did as well. We see one thing being said in the bush to communities and the absolute opposite being done in this chamber. I hope people realise that they are being sold a pup.
I want to finish by mentioning women. As one of the youngest women in this parliament, I recognise the huge issues that women are still facing in this day and age: the lack of equal pay, and not just for work of equal value but for the same job. There are some horrifying statistics of how female dentists are earning less than their male counterparts when they have had exactly the same training experience. The fact that that is still happening in this day and age just blows me away, and we have to fix it. Then there are women's reproductive rights, which I imagine the next Senate will probably have to confront, given the proclivities of some of our colleagues in this place. There is the discrepancy in superannuation that women find at the end of their working life, and the fact that so many Australian women still face violence in their daily life—these are crucial issues that we must make some headway on.

Yet we have one woman in cabinet—just one. Out of 20 people, all they could find was one woman. There are some good strong women on the Liberal side. Naturally, I disagree with their policy stance but they are good, strong advocates. They were overlooked and now we have a dearth of women and their perspective in cabinet. I am worried that it will really show. I am proud to now be the Australian Greens’ spokesperson for women, and I will be building on the record of my colleague Senator Rhiannon. I hope and expect to get support from women in all parties to try to further this crucial equity issue.

This 44th Parliament is going to be a bit of a tough time for us here who want a better world, who want fairness and equity and a safe environment for our kids. It is going to be challenging for people in the community who feel the same. As a mother, that is a perspective that I bring. I think about the sort of world that I want my little girl to live in and I think about when she is my age, when she herself is a parent. It is going to be a very different world. The decisions that we take in this place today will shape that future. We have such a great responsibility.

To have the carbon price repeal bills come to us later today in the Senate is a matter of great shame for me. The Greens will fight that repeal with everything we have. We must act on climate change. It is not just for ourselves; it is for all of the other creatures that we share this planet with, and it is for all generations to come. So we will fight for fairness, we will fight for climate action and we will fight for equity. We will fight for a better world and I hope that we do not see this parliament take us too far backwards in the next few years. It is a challenge that the Greens are willing to face. We pledge to all Australians that we will fight for their future.

Senator MASON (Queensland—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs) (13:17): Recently I have been fortunate to do a bit of travelling—indeed, some rather extensive travelling—in the Asia-Pacific and it has caused me to reflect upon the nature of our country, Australia, and how much it has changed in the last generation, and how much the relationship between Australia and the Asia-Pacific has changed, because it has changed so very much.

The Australia where I was born, grew up and went to school and university was a great country but always a bit sleepy back then. It was somewhat insular—prosperous and comfortable—but not always self-confident and not always self-assured. Industries were protected and prices, particularly for imported goods, were very high. Overseas travel then was a luxury. In many ways the country was still feasting off the glories of yesteryear. If it was not riding on the sheep's back then it was lounging very comfortably on its fleece. We
were in the region, but we were not really of the region. Memories of war and colonial experience were still fresh and still coloured views and relations from both sides.

But you cannot say that today. What happened? What changed over, let us say, the last 25 years? There is no doubt that transport and the communication revolution helped to finally subdue what Geoffrey Blainey described as 'the tyranny of distance'. Sure, mobile phones and the internet have helped enormously to subdue the tyranny of distance. But we should not forget that it was the reforms of successive Australian governments over the course of the past three decades that transformed Australia into the much more open, much more confident and much more successful nation that it is today.

In the 1980s—I know we are going back 30 years here—both Labor and the coalition realised that the old institutional arrangements that had really carried Australia since Federation had outlived their usefulness and were no longer enough to guarantee Australia's place in the sun. Those guarantees were diminishing and in some cases they were over. Reforming the economy, opening Australia to the world and liberalising trade and investment were initiated largely by the Labor government—and they should be acknowledged for that—but supported in a bipartisan spirit by the Liberal and National coalition, which understood it was in the national interest that changes be made lest Australia be left behind in the Asia-Pacific, which was then itself just starting to emerge from slumber.

We laugh and we shake our heads now, but how well I recall the then Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr Lee Kwan Yew, make his observation about Australia in 1980. He said Australia was destined to become 'the poor white trash of Asia'. That is what Mr Lee said in 1980. And he was wrong. He is still alive today and he acknowledges that he was wrong. But if Australia had not changed, if we had not embarked on serious reform, today we would be the world's largest trailer park. We would be second rate and a second-rate country. Sadly, the bipartisan spirit of economic reform was rarely apparent as the Howard government continued the reform agenda. Over the past years of the Rudd, Gillard and then Rudd governments, the reform instinct has largely disappeared from public policy as Labor confused tax increases for economic reform.

But in the same way as Australia continues to survive natural disasters, we have survived Labor governments. I am confident that the new Abbott government will progress the national interest in a steadfast and appropriate way. In the meantime, Australia continues to enjoy the fruits of visionary work and tough decisions of past governments which have set our country on a new and better course. Australians today enjoy a higher standard of living than they did when I was growing up. It is a much higher standard of living. We have far more opportunities in education, in work and in life generally. We can buy a lot more things and we can buy them more cheaply. We can travel and communicate much more easily. When I look back to the 1970s and 1980s, I sometimes have to pinch myself when I see how far Australia has come. This is not said in any partisan fashion at all. Australia has been one of the most successful nations on earth over the last 30 years.

Let us face it, that is because of a bipartisan spirit of economic reform. It has changed this country enormously. We can go to the world, but also, the world can come to us much more readily. We export not just wool and coal, but highly sought after products, talent and ideas. We are much more at ease with the world because we are much more comfortable in our own skin. When I was growing up, my friends would always tug their forelock to Europe or the
United States or somewhere else. They always wanted to be somewhere else, never in Australia. But today, that is far less apparent. Australians tug their forelocks to no-one. It is precisely because we are now economically confident and socially confident that we can progress initiatives like the New Colombo Plan, which is one of the flagship programs of the Abbott government.

You will be aware that the New Colombo Plan aims to provide young Australian undergraduate students at university the opportunity to study and work in the Asia-Pacific. It is a wonderful opportunity for young Australians. I studied overseas more than 25 years ago now. In my generation, nearly everyone who was lucky enough to study overseas went to the United Kingdom, to the United States or perhaps to Canada. You were somewhat quirky if you went somewhere else. Certainly, if you went to a university in the Asia-Pacific, that was considered quite unusual. But haven't things changed? That is no longer the case. Whereas I saw my future, my opportunities, bound up—it seems strange now, but bound up—with Britain, with the United States or more broadly with Europe, most young Australians today see the future bound up much more in their region, whether it is China, India or the Asia-Pacific more generally. That is an enormous change in just 25 years.

The New Colombo Plan heralds a new age of discovery. Much of Australian historical opinion, if not hagiography, commonly credits Mr Whitlam and Mr Keating with having discovered Asia. But as I like to remind this chamber, not surprisingly not many people realise that the original pioneers of Australia's rendezvous with our region were liberal politicians such as Sir Robert Menzies, Sir Paul Hasluck and, later, Lord Casey. Their efforts predate the involvement of those two Labor prime ministers. The coalition continues to build on that very important legacy. The New Colombo Plan is another sign that under a coalition government Australia is determined to have a mature, respectful and productive relationship with our neighbours. It is different today; the world is different. In 2013, such a relationship needs to be based on reciprocity and mutuality.

For centuries, for about 500 years since the days of Marco Polo and Vasco de Gama, the West had met the East largely to possess its treasures, initially through trade and then through colonisation. Spices, tea, silk, porcelain and later rubber, oil and cheap electronics flowed to satisfy the West's appetite for the exotic. This subsequently fuelled the Industrial Revolution and later a mass-consumption society. That was the initial relationship between East and West. Where the goods went, people soon followed. Just as hardworking Asian labourers had crossed the oceans to build American railways, extract Australian gold and fill English textile factories so had the continent's young and ambitious sought the benefits of Western education and Western opportunities. This included the tens of thousands who took advantage of Australia's original Colombo Plan, and the millions who have studied in Australia ever since.

But today, this traffic is no longer one way. The coalition's New Colombo Plan is animated, and this is a big change. It is animated by the acknowledgement that the playing field has now evened out and that Asia and the West, including Australia, are equal partners in building the future. We can learn from one another and benefit from one another, which is why the key aspect of the relationship is exchange and two-way mobility.

No longer is it a matter of the West teaching all to the East. It is now a matter of trading perspectives and learning from each other. As I said before, it is only because as a nation we are more comfortable in our own skin, more confident and therefore more at ease with the
world, that we can truly engage with Asia. We have changed so much in just 25 years. The New Colombo Plan aims to lift knowledge of the Asia-Pacific region in Australia, and strengthen our people-to-people and institutional relationships through studying internships undertaken by Australian undergraduate students in the region.

Our country is one of the great providers of tertiary education to many countries across the world. In fact, Australia continues to educate more students from overseas per head of population than any other nation on earth. In terms of sheer numbers, Australia teaches the third highest number of students from overseas in our tertiary institutions right now and we also do it very, very well. We will continue to do that, but we also want to see our undergraduate students consider studying overseas for part of their course, becoming familiar with our neighbours' languages and their cultures and benefiting with work experience opportunities on the ground. As foreign minister Julie Bishop has said, the government wants to see study in the Asia-Pacific region become a 'right of passage' for Australian undergraduate students and an endeavour that is highly valued right across the Australian community.

Funded by $100 million, the New Colombo Plan will commence in 2015 after a pilot phase in 2014. Japan, Indonesia, Singapore as well as Hong Kong are being invited to participate in the pilot phase. The success of this program will rely on close cooperation between governments, universities and businesses in Australia and throughout the region. The new architecture of these regional agreements can no longer just be government to government; it has to be now government to government, bureaucrats to bureaucrats, universities to universities, business to business and non-government organisations to non-government organisations, and so forth. It has to have many streams because governments cannot make this work; it will take the cooperation of many.

The New Colombo Plan is a good illustration of the coalition government's focus on Asia. As the Prime Minister said during the election campaign:

Decisions which impact on our national interests will be made in Jakarta, in Beijing, in Tokyo, in Seoul, as much as they will be made in Washington.

As Australia continues to welcome hundreds of thousands of international students, and I hope we always will continue to, it is time that the Marco Polos and Vasco da Gamas of our generation Y venture out from our friendly ports and into the wide world, this time not to look for spices and silk but for knowledge and work.

A few weeks ago I was lucky enough to visit Japan, where I spoke to government officials and business leaders about the New Colombo Plan. I can tell you they are very excited about it; they liked the idea. They want to see more young Australians in Japan because they too understand that Japan needs to become more open to the world. As Japan helps Australian students become more Asia ready, Australian students will help Japan become better prepared to truly embrace the globalised world. The approach of the Abe government is much more outward looking for a Japanese government, and that dovetails very nicely with the New Colombo Plan and our idea of sending undergraduate students to Japan. So the Japanese government was particularly enthusiastic about it. I know that the enthusiasm is equally great in the other three pilot countries: Hong Kong, Singapore and Indonesia. I know from speaking with government officials in other Asia-Pacific countries that they are also very keen to come on board in 2015 and subsequent years.
In three decades, thanks to the political courage and wisdom of a number of politicians from both sides of politics, Australia went from the verge of becoming the poor white trash of Asia to one of the region’s great success stories and a much desired partner for our neighbours in trade, investment, energy, education, tourism, culture and many other spheres of life—all within about a generation and not much more. I believe the New Colombo Plan will build on the success we have had in remaking our country and will go towards securing our shared future in the Asia-Pacific.

As this is my first chance to speak in the 44th Parliament, I thought I would say something positive. I believe that over the last 30 years there was very much a bipartisan approach in many areas of economic reform and there is no doubt that that set Australia on a course for sustainable growth, and that that is one of the principal reasons Australia is now one of the great success stories in the world. It is not something that any Australian should ever forget. We are a much, much better country than we were in 1980 and that is really thanks to decisions taken by governments of both stripes, often against the public will. Sometimes governments need to lead and let us just hope that the Abbott government can.

Senator STERLE (Western Australia) (13:35): I rise to make my remarks in the reply to the Governor-General’s speech. I listened intently to Senator Mason’s contribution, most of which I found very, very interesting and agreed with. What I must make note of is that Senator Mason talked about governments in opposition working together in the best interests of the nation, whether it be economic or diplomatic, and it is so true. That would be nothing less than what the people of Australia expect from us. Probably like you, Acting Deputy President Ludlam, on a number of occasions around barbecues, at the local golf club or down at the pub a major trend has been coming in my direction in terms of what voters think of politicians. It cannot be repeated in the same words in this chamber because I would find myself on my feet defending my words and trying not to get thrown out, so I will not lower my standards. Sadly, the quality of the political debate over the last 12 months to three years has been appalling. I listened intently to the Governor-General’s speech. I do hope, as most of my colleagues hope, that one day Australians will see us as people of quality and people who have dreams and visions for our nation. However, I cannot put my hand on my heart and say that that has been the case in this place over the last few years.

The degree of childish behaviour is like kids in a sandpit—in fact, you can have a laugh at kids in a sandpit, because they might be blueing and two minutes later they will be all over each other sharing a lolly or an ice cream. I have to emphasise that I hope we lift our game in the debates in this chamber and the other chamber, because I am sick of trying to defend the behaviour here of the last few years.

When I listened intently to the Governor-General’s speech in this chamber some two weeks ago, one would have thought that the intent of the incoming Abbott government offered some things for the country, but let us look at the coalition’s mantra in last couple of years. I liken the government to the dog that has caught the car—the mongrel mutt that barks and chases everything down the street. It never gets the car and may get clipped on the nose by a mudflap, but this one has caught it. The reason I say that is from hearing people say things in conversations I have had with business people who have come to my office in last two weeks or on the phone. I thought I was imagining it, but these people have asked: ‘Has this government got any plans? Has this government got any visions of grandeur for our children
and our children's children? Has this government got any vision of what the heck it's going to do now it is in government?' In the last two or three years in opposition, the Mr Abbott-led coalition only spoke about what it was not going to do. All we copped was what it was going to stop. 'There will be no mining tax.' Good luck to the miners; they have lined the pockets of political parties on both sides. It is no secret that they contributed a heck of a lot more to the Liberal Party than they did to the Australia Labor Party until the mining tax was announced. But the government bluffed Australians by saying what a fantastic government they would be by abolishing the mining tax.

I am a supporter of the mining industry—make no mistake about that. It is not the only industry but it is an important one for Australia. I am also not scared to ask: what is wrong with a profits-based tax? If we are digging commodities out of our country and exporting them, these commodities are not renewable. What was wrong with taxing a company that had reached $50 billion in profits, so a bit more would come back to Australia? Mr Acting Deputy-President Ludlam, I know your party's stance is that $50 billion is way too generous. You have said the tax should not be limited to coal and iron ore, but it should be on every mineral dug out of the ground. There are good arguments for and against that.

By Mr Abbott eliminating the mining tax and so doing a favour for the miners, without any negotiation, there will be some nasty, unfortunate consequences. In my role as chair of the Senate Rural and Regional Legislative Committee for six years, and now being on the references committee in opposition, I have made no secret that road funding is very important to me for a number of reasons. One is as a Western Australian, where we really rely on our roads. We have one railway line to the eastern states and a dilapidated wheat rail line, which gets more embarrassing each year with governments backflipping and not putting any money into that line either. Another is my background as a road train operator between Perth and Darwin. Two pet projects were to be delivered on behalf of the Gillard and Rudd governments, and one of those is funding of some $500 million for the North West Coastal Highway. Mr Acting Deputy-President Ludlam, coming from WA you would know that shocking single-lane road. We know the width of the new Shay Gap road is a nightmare. How do I know? It was a nightmare 30 years ago, when I was trucking there. I was there a couple of weeks ago and it is still a nightmare. My son does three trips a fortnight on that road to the Pilbara. It is well known that this major arterial for mining and offshore oil and gas fields carries eight-metre wide loads, at times hanging over both sides of the road. It carries a massive number of road trains daily, but when two road trains coming from opposite directions pass each other at 100 kilometres per hour, the legal limit, there is a possibility that these juggernauts will hit as there is no more than 12 inches between their mirrors.

When Mr Albanese, as the federal Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, announced this road would be upgraded along with major upgrades to widen the North West Coastal Highway north of Carnarvon, this news was welcomed by the West Australian transport industry and road users. With Mr Abbott determined to repay the mining companies for funding his 2010 and 2013 election campaigns, this is an offset as the Abbott government has said it will not guarantee these road projects. The Transport Workers Union in Perth, of which I am a lifetime member, as I was when I was a trucker—it is the worst-kept secret in Australia—is adamant about getting these projects done. Minister Albanese recognised the importance of these projects so he dedicated the funding, and should the Labor Party have
been re-elected those projects would have gone ahead. Money was in the budget, as indicated on the Labor Party website and the forward estimates. Since the victory of the coalition, those projects were not forthcoming, because the Regional Infrastructure Fund, where the funding would come from, was funded by the mining tax. There is a payback for the miners but the downside is no $500 million for road widening in WA.

Then we had Mr Briggs, the Assistant Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development, on Radio 6PR Perth being interviewed by Paul Murray about the funding of these road projects. I listened intently to what Mr Briggs said:

… as the Finance Minister said before the election, we are committed—
that is, the Liberal Party—
… to those projects, the Great Northern Highway and the North West Coastal because they are extremely important projects.

Not being one that does not trust politicians, as that would be a little disingenuous—I would like to think they are all like you and I, Mr Acting Deputy President Ludlam—I thought I might just take the opportunity to follow up those statements in Senate estimates the week before last. As deputy chair, I asked questions to the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development and to Mr Mrdak, the secretary. I asked him clearly whether those projects were funded. I have the transcripts here. I do not need to table them, but they are here if anyone wants to see them. Mr Mrdak came out very clearly, with Senator Sinodinos at the table representing the minister, and said that these projects are not committed. They are not funded at this stage. The Abbott government will not build these projects just yet. I am putting my own words around this, but they are looking at everything and they realise some projects are far more important than others.

Senator Edwards: Sterlo, we want outcomes!

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Ludlam): Order!

Senator STERLE: I do appreciate your protection, Acting Deputy President; I need it from Senator Edwards. He frightens me dearly. I will try and compose myself while I go back to telling the truth and not to making stuff up. What they clearly said was, 'Well now, we don't know now because we don't know if the money is there. We'll see and hear how much heat will come out of WA and we may well fund them.' I asked Mr Mrdak, the secretary of the department, if it would be right to say that no minister could go out there and actually make these announcements? To which he said that they cannot say that because it has not been decided. What we are leading to here is that the government Australia voted for on September 7 is not the government they thought they were going to get.

Apart from the road funding in WA, there are other massively important road-funding projects that are not going to be delivered. It clearly came out at Senate estimates again that the Melbourne Metro Rail project, worth about $3 billion, will now not go ahead. The Brisbane Cross River Rail project will not be going ahead. The Perth urban rail public transport project, worth $100 million, and previously worth $500 million, is not going ahead. I know that would rile you, Mr Acting Deputy President, because you have been very vocal on public transport and rail infrastructure in WA, as we have.

For the South Australians, Tonsley Park public rail transport project is a no-go. There was $4½ billion worth of projects but Mr Abbott made it very clear before and after the election
that he will not be building public transport or rail. Apart from road-funding projects that a lot of people do not know about yet that will not be going ahead, we saw last week one of the biggest backflips—I cannot think of another term—or bulldust statements we have ever seen from Mr Pyne on education. Prior to the last election, I think every Australian was well aware that I thought the Liberals were using the terminology—

Senator Edwards interjecting—

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order!

Senator STERLE: Senator Edwards from South Australia just threw a line out there along the lines of 'you cannot fix everything with money'. I tell my kids that all the time too. I do not condone going out before the election and saying you will throw a lot of money at something but once you get elected changing your mind. Those opposite now blatantly go out there and lie. Look at Mr Pyne's form on education.

Senator Kroger: Don't you remember what you have done for the last few years?

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order! Senator Sterle, please direct your comments through the chair. On my right, Senator Sterle is entitled to be heard in silence.

Senator STERLE: It is always amazing that when the truth comes out and Senators or politicians get caught talking out the side of their head, don't they get vocal? Don't they jump up and find every excuse why it is all right to lie to the Australian people? The opposition at the time could not wait to tell everyone that if they got in, the grown-ups would be in charge and that they are open for business. Let us look at those two lines. First, 'the grown-ups are in charge'. Let us look at the debacle off our shores to the north, the embarrassing situation. If we do not have anyone who is capable of sorting out the issues with Indonesia, I tell you what I will do: I will shout myself brand-new pairs of Havis and boardies and I will go over and sort it out because I will do a damn better job than what is going on at the moment.

Senator Kroger interjecting—

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order! On my right.

Senator STERLE: So, for crying out loud, if you do not have any grown-ups, can you just find one—pay one? Find an ex-bureaucrat or someone who can be a grown-up, who can get over there and who cannot carry on like this.

Let us talk about the north while we are at it. What about the shadow immigration minister at the time, Mr Scott Morrison? Between Mr Morrison and Mr Abbott, I am trying to think of the lines that I used to hear all the time. First it was 'stop the boats' then it was 'turn back the boats', 'turn back the boats when safe', 'buy back the boats', 'deny the boats', 'hide the boats' and 'what boats?' Watching the Prime Minister and the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection is like a scene from South Park, with Officer Barbrady: 'nothing to see, move along'. This is just incredible. I just wish that the grown-ups were in the building, because they are certainly lacking in the coalition party room.

Let us go back to education. Let us look at the footage of the COAG meeting the other day with the state education ministers. This is a government that has been in for 10 weeks. I am not expecting miracles. No-one expects miracles. You have to find your way. They have to sort out labour and staffing issues; they have to have an internal fight about who gets promotions and who gets the bigger office. I know, I understand. After 10 weeks we had Mr
Pyne, the Minister for Education, tell the Australian people he was on a unity ticket, that the coalition were on a unity ticket with Labor on public school funding and that no school would be worse off. Then we have Mr Pyne publically slapping down state education ministers from both persuasions, Labor and Liberal, and refusing to honour agreements with New South Wales and other states that were agreed to before the election. In the footage of the wound-up state ministers, there is Mr Pyne in the corner with the most silly of smirks on his face; to him it was just a big joke.

I know I am running out of time so I will move on to one of the other clangers: ‘We are open for business.’ Oh my goodness, I think that might have come from the Prime Minister talking about foreign investment and attracting foreign investment to Australia. We all know this great nation was built on foreign investment. Coming from Western Australia, if we did not have foreign investment where would we be, not just in agriculture but in mining? When I tour the Ord stage 2 development, the sugar—Senator Eggleston was talking about it proudly earlier on today, and I was agreeing with him—thank goodness for the Chinese; they are pumping in nearly a billion dollars. But it is not only the Chinese up on the Ord River. There are the Brits, the Americans, the Indians; they are all up there. They are ‘open for business’.

I recall another clanger while we were talking about foreign investment, while it was a hot topic, and it was in relation to the sale of GrainCorp to the American conglomerate ADM. I saw another comedy sketch where the Treasurer, Mr Hockey, came out, breaking into one of those famous sweats, and saying that he would not be bullied—the Libs have to repeat everything twice—about foreign investment.

As chair of the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee, I can tell you that tonight was set aside to continue our inquiry. It was ably supported by Senator Gallacher and I from Labor; we wanted to hear more and talk more about GrainCorp. We wanted to talk more to ADM. Guess what? The panic hit the room. Senator Heffernan, you old dog—you sly old dog! Great work behind the scenes, fantastic; knocked the Treasurer right between the eyes, blew him out of the game. So we find that we are not really open for business. We might be open for business but we just have to run that past the Nationals first and make sure that they are happy with that.

A government senator interjecting—

Senator STERLE: As for the grown-ups: we just have to try and find some grown-ups, because we do not have any grown-ups over there. If we had grown-ups we would not have the foreign minister out there—where was she? In Cambodia or Myanmar or somewhere—telling them the Japanese were our best friends while insulting the Indonesians. Now she is trying to pick a fight with the Chinese. That is her latest one. For crying out loud, as I said, I am happy to chuck on a new pair of Havis, a new pair of boardies, I will go over. I could not do a worse job than what is going on with that lot over there.

Senator WHISH-WILSON (Tasmania) (13:55): I thought I would start my speech this morning by making a couple of confessions. The first confession is that actually I agree with the strong point that was made by Senator Bernardi in his speech earlier today. Senator Bernardi said: ‘The public is sick of politicians putting their convictions aside.’ On that, I absolutely agree with the senator for South Australia. Whatever you think about the Greens, we are a party of very strong convictions. I would like to thank the 40,000 or so Tasmanians who returned the Greens to the Senate in this last federal election. They did so because they
know that we will stand by our convictions. We always do stand up for our strong values and we will certainly do that in this term of parliament.

The second confession I would like to make is about the Governor-General's speech. I actually thought for the first few minutes that the Governor-General's speech was the Governor-General's speech, that they were actually her words. I have since found out from speaking to a number of Tasmanians that they were as ignorant as I was. I remember thinking to myself after about a minute: 'I can't believe the Governor-General is being so vacuous and using such toxic terminology in her speech about Australians and the Australian economy'. I quickly realised that in fact these were the words I have heard and every Australian has heard ad nauseam for the last three years from Prime Minister Tony Abbott.

Then I thought: 'first impressions are most important'. After sitting and listening to that for 20 minutes, what really struck me about that speech was the message it was delivering about the next three years of coalition rule in this country. The idea is simple: we live in an economy. That is what the speech struck me as saying. 'There is nothing else to our lives except for business and the economy.' We do not live in an environment or live in a community. We live in an economy. In other words, the fundamental assumption is that what is good for business, especially for big business and their interests, is good for all of us. Personally, I believe and my party believes, as do other people in the Senate, that that is a fundamentally flawed and dangerous assumption: 'look after business first and the rest will follow'.

The Greens recognise that the economy is important. It is an important tool for allocating resources, helping manage our communities and our lives. It is here to help us flourish. It is not the other way around. We are not here to be a slave to the economy and to help the economy flourish, necessarily. When I think about the legislation that is shortly going to be before this House, such as the repeal of the clean energy package and the mining tax, I thought about a recent 7.30 interview with Al Gore.

Senator Abetz interjecting—

Senator WHISH-WILSON: Yes, you know the one Senator Abetz. Annabel Crabb was sitting in. Mr Gore made same pretty big statements about what we have come to know as 'special interests'. He described how, in relation to climate change and the destructive influence of energy, coal and oil companies, our democracy has been hijacked and that special interests control decisions too frequently. He then quite provocatively went on to claim that the debate in Australia around climate change and the repeal of a carbon price reminded him of the tobacco companies in the United States who were able to lobby compliant politicians to deny links between tobacco smoking and cancer; that shameful period of history that we look back on now and cannot believe happened. He went on to say that the power of special interests is a political fact of life and is pitiful. Especially when he was queried about whether this was some sort of conspiracy theory, he said, 'No, this is the way it works.' And that has certainly been my experience in my very recent time in parliament.

Debate interrupted.
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Education Funding

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (14:00): My question is to the Minister representing the Minister for Education, Senator Payne. I refer the minister to the school funding promise made by the Prime Minister on 2 August when he said: We will honour the agreements that Labor has entered into.

Will the government keep this promise?

Senator PAYNE (New South Wales—Minister for Human Services) (14:00): Yes.

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (14:00): Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. In relation to the school funding commitments and arrangements that are being made with the New South Wales, Victorian, South Australian, ACT and Tasmanian governments, will the government honour those agreements in full as promised by the Prime Minister in August?

Senator PAYNE (New South Wales—Minister for Human Services) (14:01): Again, I respond by indicating that the answer is yes.

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (14:01): I ask a further supplementary question. Prior to the press conference which was held just before question time in which the Prime Minister had to rescue the floundering Minister for Education, can the minister advise what contact or communication was had between the Premier of New South Wales or any member of the New South Wales government, the Minister for Education or herself?

Senator PAYNE (New South Wales—Minister for Human Services) (14:01): I will take it on notice in relation to the minister. I can advise in relation to myself: absolutely none. Let me make it absolutely clear that what we are talking about here is an education system which Labor purported to support and then in the economic statements just before the election happily ripped $1.2 billion of funding out of that funding. We know that. The Australian people know that, but you are not prepared to admit to that and that is the big difference.

We did not take $1.2 billion out of the model but we have to put it back in, though, to clean up Labor's mess. We promised a national model and a fair model. We have delivered it. We have honoured the agreements and we have matched funding. We now have in principle funding agreements with Queensland, Western Australia and Northern Territory of which the previous government—(Time expired)

Trade Unions

Senator McKENZIE (Victoria—Nationals Whip in the Senate) (14:03): My question is to the Minister for Employment, Senator Abetz. Is the minister aware of reports over the weekend that a Transport Workers Union slush fund was used to support the election of certain union candidates in TWU branches and in the Health Services Union? What is the government doing to ensure that union members in Australia can have peace of mind that their money is not being used to fund factional brawls?

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 can inform the distinguished chair of the Senate's education and employment committee that I am
aware of the media reports this weekend. Those reports interestingly enough actually appeared in the Fairfax media. Those revelations told us about hundreds of thousands of dollars being used to fight not for trade union members but for union leaders, their fiefdoms and ALP endorsements. Given the vast amounts of money, it is clear that it is not just a benign, innocent social club type of operation; we are talking hundreds of thousands of dollars here. Indeed, in relation to the Transport Workers Union slush fund the suggestion was that it was a minimum of half a million dollars. That is not just some Christmas social club; that is a huge amount of money. It is serious money with serious consequences—money held in secret funds, in buckets and in brown paper bags.

If these activities of union officials were to be core business, one asks the question rhetorically: why wouldn't these moneys be put through the trade unions official accounts and disclosed as they lodge their returns each and every year with the Fair Work Commission? Trade union members around the country are entitled to be assured that the money that they pay to unions is on the basis of an insurance policy rather than wanting to hold hands and sing *Solidarity Forever*—most of these people actually sign up and pay as an insurance policy. To look after their money, we have introduced the registered organisations commission bill and we encourage Labor— *(Time expired)*

**Senator McKenzie** (Victoria—Nationals Whip in the Senate) *(14:06)*: Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. Is the minister aware of any other union slush funds that could be of concern to union members?

**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)*: Originally, the Australian people were told that the Australian Workers Union slush fund of the early 1990s was simple a one-off. But, in her exit interview with Slater and Gordon, the former leader of those opposite disclosed that slush funds were a common occurrence within the trade union movement. Then there was a degree of dissembling about that, suggesting that is not actually what was meant. But now we know, courtesy of recent revelations, that the Transport Workers Union had a similar fund, and the ETU, the CFMEU, the MUA, CEPU—and so the list goes on. It is quite clear that Ms Gillard, in her exit statement from Slater and Gordon, stated the truth, that these slush funds are endemic. They are a rip-off and workers are entitled to be protected from this sort of endemic culture of illegality and funny money. *(Time expired)*

**Senator McKenzie** (Victoria—Nationals Whip in the Senate) *(14:08)*: Mr President, I have a further supplementary question. Is the minister aware of any impediments to greater accountability and transparency of registered organisations?

**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)*: Australians want, and quite rightly demand, greater accountability of their registered organisations, especially trade unions, hence the coalition's registered organisations commissions bill. Labor and the Greens are impeding this with an attempt to refer the legislation not to the Senate's legislation committee but the Senate's references committee—a complete abuse of their numbers in this place. And the reason they are doing it is because they are hopelessly compromised.

*Honourable senators interjecting—*
The PRESIDENT: Order! Senator Abetz, resume your seat. You are entitled to be heard in silence.

Senator ABETZ: It is quite clear that the vast majority of those on the other side, chances are, in their previous careers had some understanding of these slush funds and might have some very interesting tales to tell about how these slush funds operated. We believe that those opposite are hopelessly compromised, but nevertheless we will introduce the legislation to—

(Time expired)

Education Funding

Senator KIM CARR (Victoria) (14:09): My question without notice is to Minister Payne, representing the Minister for Education. I refer to the Prime Minister's and the Minister for Education's press conference today. We have heard three different announcements inside of a week, but still no commitment to a six-year funding agreement on schools in Australia. What possible confidence can the people have that the government will honour its latest commitment?

Senator PAYNE (New South Wales—Minister for Human Services) (14:10): It is somewhat remarkable that a former minister amongst those opposite would ask what possible confidence the community could have in a government, given the experience that Australia had at their hands, but let me nevertheless make it very clear what we now have and what we did not have before. What we now have is a national school funding agreement because, although it may be revelatory for those opposite, a national funding agreement includes all of the states and territories—it actually includes Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory. I understand that is a revolutionary concept, but as a revolutionary concept it may be one with which Senator Carr can grapple. We have indicated that there will be—

Senator Jacinta Collins: No, you don't. There is no agreement.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Payne, resume your seat. When there is silence, on both sides, I will ask Senator Payne to continue. Senator Payne is entitled to be heard in silence.

Senator PAYNE: We have indicated that there will be a funding amount of $2.8 billion—

Honourable senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Order, on my right and my left! Senator Payne is entitled to be heard in silence.

Senator Cameron: What did Barry O'Farrell say?

The PRESIDENT: Order, Senator Cameron!

Senator PAYNE: The government is providing a national school funding agreement including all of the states and territories, including $2.8 billion of additional funding for schools over the next four years. This ensures that all states and territories, regardless of whether they signed a deal with the previous government, will have funding certainty over the next four years. The government will also commit to the $1.2 billion that those opposite—Labor—ripped out of school funding. That is an absolute commitment from the Prime Minister and from the minister this afternoon. Not only did we promise Labor's level of funding before the election but we have now exceeded it. That is a very important difference to note between us and the previous government. It was the previous government, under the
leadership, as education minister, of Mr Shorten, who ripped $1.2 billion out of the budget for this particular funding approach, not this government. We will replace that $1.2 billion into the budget. *(Time expired)*

**Senator KIM CARR** (Victoria) (14:14): Mr President, I have a supplementary question. Can the minister confirm that today the Prime Minister announced that there would be $1.2 billion worth of cuts to education to be announced in MYEFO? How can you maintain the funding certainty? How can you maintain this when it is nothing more than a stitch-up with the Western Australia, Queensland and Northern Territory governments at the expense of Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania, where a majority of students are actually enrolled?

*Honourable senators interjecting—*

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! When there is silence on both sides I will give the minister the call.

**Senator PAYNE** (New South Wales—Minister for Human Services) (14:14): It is absolutely no surprise to me that Senator Carr is so contemptuous of students in Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia, but this government is not. This government is interested in a fair national system of education funding, and that is what the Prime Minister and the Minister for Education have announced today. Those on the other side are embarrassed because they failed to deliver a national funding program and, in light of their failure, we have succeeded. That is the fundamental difference between us and them. Where they decided that only some schools and some students across Australia were entitled to their fair share of funding, we have decided that all schools and all students are entitled to their fair share of funding—and it will be national and fairer funding. What about the fact that, in his last act as minister, it was Mr Shorten who short-changed parents, students and their schools. It was Mr Shorten who removed from the funding model $1.2 billion, which we will replace. *(Time expired)*

**Senator KIM CARR** (Victoria) (14:14): Mr President, I ask a further supplementary question. Minister, on top of the $1.2 billion announced to be cut from the education budget today, how can you assert that funding will be maintained for Australian schools as a result of your failure to commit to years 5 and 6 of the original schools funding plan?

**Senator PAYNE** (New South Wales—Minister for Human Services) (14:14): As even Senator Carr, hopefully, could manage to accept, over the forward estimates we committed—a commitment which we made clear before the election—to the same funding envelope, funding package, that the Labor government was advancing over the forward estimates.

*Opposition senators interjecting—*

**The PRESIDENT:** Senator Payne, resume your seat. You are entitled to be heard in silence. On my left, if you wish to debate the issue, the time is after three o’clock, not now.

**Senator PAYNE:** What I was saying was that the funding which was committed over the forward estimates—the commitment which we made before the election—is the commitment that we will keep. We promised Labor's level of funding before the election. We have now indicated that we are able to exceed that. You would think that those opposite would thank us, would say that that was a good thing for Australian students, Australian teachers, Australian parents, Australian schools—but, no, because they cannot climb over the low, muddy hillock of politics to acknowledge what can be done for Australian students with a proper education.
funding model. That is what we will put in place, that is what Minister Pyne will put in place and that is what Prime Minister Abbott supports. (Time expired)

National Security

Senator FAWCETT (South Australia) (14:16): Can the Attorney-General update the Senate on reports of the public release of more classified information today on the Guardian website?

Senator BRANDIS (Queensland—Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council, Minister for Arts and Attorney-General) (14:16): I thank Senator Fawcett for his question. I am aware of reports published this morning by The Guardian Australia which make certain claims about the alleged activities of Australia’s intelligence organisations. Those claims are made on the basis of material placed into the public domain by the American traitor Edward Snowden. I note that the document on which the report is based is unverified. I also note that the unverified document is described as a ‘draft’ document, which, contrary to the reports, does not report or record any activity by any Australian intelligence agency. It is, as the honourable senator knows, the longstanding practice of successive Australian governments not to comment on intelligence matters.

Senator FAWCETT (South Australia) (14:17): Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. Can the Attorney-General explain the legal framework that our intelligence agencies operate under?

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): Yes, indeed, Senator Fawcett, I can describe that framework. As you are aware, the Australian intelligence agencies operate under a strong framework of legislation and parliamentary, ministerial and executive oversight. The legislative framework is provided for by the Intelligence Services Act and the ASIO Act. Those acts were reviewed in 2011 by the independent reviewer of the intelligence community, who reaffirmed that the legal framework was sound and enshrines an appropriate balance between our security and safeguards for our privacy. The honourable senator would also be aware that there is a strong framework of parliamentary oversight, through the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security and the Senate select committee on defence and foreign affairs in particular. As well, there is ministerial oversight and oversight through the Inspector General of Intelligence and Security.

Senator FAWCETT (South Australia) (14:18): Mr President, I ask a further supplementary question. Could the Attorney-General please explain the purpose and the benefits of Australia’s intelligence activities?

Senator BRANDIS (Queensland—Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council, Minister for Arts and Attorney-General) (14:18): Yes, indeed I can. The purpose of all of Australia’s intelligence activities and the operation of its intelligence agencies is to serve Australia’s national interests and protect Australian citizens. Can I, by way of illustration, point out to the honourable senator that Australian authorities have disrupted terrorist planning in Australia and thwarted a number of mass-casualty attacks. As a result of their activities, 23 people have been convicted of terrorism offences in Australia in the last four years. Australia’s intelligence has also helped to prevent at least four attacks in
South-East Asia in the last decade and contributed to the arrest within South-East Asia of over 20 terrorists. The government is confident that the Australian intelligence agencies will act in accordance with the law and always in the service of the national interest.

**Education Funding**

**Senator WRIGHT** (South Australia) (14:20): My question is to Senator Payne, representing the Minister for Education. Education minister Christopher Pyne said on Friday he was committed to sector-blind funding only in terms of the extra loading amounts that disadvantaged children attract. These loadings comprise only 17 per cent of the funding quantum we have heard so much about from the Prime Minister. Despite his own comments, Minister Pyne told Fairfax Media that the claim that only the disadvantaged loadings would be sector blind was 'hysterical fearmongering'. If that is the case, how will the rest of the money be distributed and can the minister guarantee that every cent of the federal government's school funding contribution will be delivered on a needs based sector-blind model?

**Senator PAYNE** (New South Wales—Minister for Human Services) (14:20): I thank the senator for her question. What I am most definitely able to promise—to the sector but most particularly to Australian students, Australian parents and Australian teachers—is that we will fund schools in every state and territory of Australia, which is in fact—

**Senator Cameron:** Is that a core or a non-core promise!

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Senator Cameron, it is not your question. Senator Wright is entitled to hear the answer to her question.

**Senator PAYNE:** As I was saying, we will fund schools in every state and territory of Australia. That is the most important difference between the so-called national funding model put forward by the previous government and this truly national model. As the Prime Minister and the minister indicated this afternoon at their press conference, the minister has been consulting across the states and territories since the election because he was always concerned about the importance of funding certainty for next year. Now we do have agreement from those states which were discarded by the previous government. Not only were they discarded but so were their students, and that has been a matter of significant concern for the minister since the election. As well as the funding model which has been confirmed and announced today, we are now able to focus on further important things in education but most particularly quality and standards, those sorts of things that will enable more principal and parent control in schools, that will enable—

**Senator Wright:** Mr President, I raise a point of order. I did not ask about the funding across the states and territories. The question was actually about whether or not it would be sector blind and needs based. The minister, with respect, has not answered my question.

**The PRESIDENT:** The minister is addressing the question. The minister still has 29 seconds remaining to address the question. There is no point of order.

**Senator PAYNE:** Most importantly, the government is keeping its commitments on school funding. We are delivering more funding over the next four years than was promised by the previous Labor government. We will also honour funding which was promised to non-government representative bodies for four years, including the funding announced for the Catholic Education Commission and the funding announced to the Association of
Independent Schools. This consistency in the commitments that were made and the announcement that was made has been confirmed by the Prime Minister—(Time expired)

Senator WRIGHT (South Australia) (14:23): I have a supplementary question, Mr President. The Gonski panel received more than 7,000 submissions, visited 39 schools, consulted 71 education groups and produced a 286-page report pointing to a broken school funding model with as much as a five-year educational gap between the most and least privileged students in year 9. Last week Minister Pyne said, 'I don't believe there is an equity problem in Australia.' Is that the formal position of the coalition government?

Senator PAYNE (New South Wales—Minister for Human Services) (14:24): I think that the senator's reference to the work of the Gonski panel is in fact extremely important. The work of the Gonski panel I am sure never envisaged that they might be saddled with a government which would not fund every student in every state and territory in Australia but perhaps thought there might be a consistent approach to funding. Unfortunately they were completely short-changed on that, much like Australian students were short-changed by the previous government, and this government is committed to an even-handed approach across the states and territories on what is a legitimately national funding agreement. I think that the approach this government is taking in relation to working so hard since the election to negotiate in-principle funding agreements with Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory is what will deliver a proper schools funding agreement in this country, is what will deliver a schools funding agreement that supports every child, every parent, every teacher and every school in the country. (Time expired)

Senator WRIGHT (South Australia) (14:25): Mr President, I ask a further supplementary. Today we have heard yet another iteration of the government's school funding plan. It is the third in the last week. Given that last week Mr Pyne announced that he would renegotiate all deals made by the former government after next year, why should the parents and teachers of Australia trust this government to deliver anything that resembles a fairer school funding model?

Senator PAYNE (New South Wales—Minister for Human Services) (14:25): The people of Australia, the students, teachers and parents, can trust this government to deliver on the model that has been committed to and announced today, for one very good reason. We will not be the people ripping $1.2 billion of funding out of that model. We will confirm the delivery of the $2.8 billion additional funding for schools over the next four years, ensuring that all states and territories, regardless of whether they signed the deal with the previous government or not, have funding certainty over the next four years. We have also committed to restoring the $1.2 billion that Labor ripped out of school funding before the last election. The member for McMahon, Mr Bowen, confirms it was ripped out by Labor. Ms Ellis confirms it was ripped out by Labor. The people on the other side who are oblivious to the facts will still try to delude themselves, but we will deliver a proper national school funding agreement across all states and territories to ensure—(Time expired)

Carbon Pricing

Senator WILLIAMS (New South Wales) (14:27): My question is to the Minister representing the Minister for the Environment, Senator Cormann. Will the minister inform the Senate how the carbon tax negatively impacts on jobs, families and the economy?
Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance) (14:27): I thank Senator Williams for that question and for his ongoing commitment to families, a stronger economy and job creation across Australia. The Labor-Green carbon tax is an $8 billion a year tax on electricity. In fact, the carbon tax was deliberately designed to push up the cost of electricity, and by pushing up the cost of electricity what it does is push up the cost of living for families and for pensioners and it pushes up the cost of doing business. Pushing up the cost of doing business reduces our international competitiveness, puts investment at risk and of course puts jobs at risk. The carbon tax makes it harder for Australian businesses, either Australian import-competing businesses or Australian exporting businesses, to compete with those businesses overseas which do not face the same electricity tax. In fact, the Labor-Green carbon tax helps overseas emitters, helps businesses overseas that are emitting more for the same amount of production output to take market share away from businesses in Australia which are putting out fewer emissions for the same amount of production.

Scrapping the carbon tax will bring down the cost of electricity. Scrapping the carbon tax will bring down the cost of living for families and for pensioners. In fact, scrapping Labor's carbon tax will deliver cost-of-living improvements for the average family across Australia to the tune of about $550 a year. Labor is standing in the way of a $550 a year saving for families—(Time expired)

Senator WILLIAMS (New South Wales) (14:30): Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. Can the minister advise the Senate what impact the carbon tax is having on investment decisions and therefore jobs?

Opposition senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: When there is silence, Senator Cormann, you will get the call. You are entitled to be heard in silence.

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance) (14:30): Thank you, Mr President. In answer to Senator Williams's question, the carbon tax is putting investment and jobs at risk.

Senator Cameron: Why have the Nationals done the Treasurer over?

Senator CORMANN: Just to give you a practical example of that, I refer senators to some comments published last week in the Australian Financial Review by Mr John Hannagan, the Chairman of Rusal Australia.

Senator Cameron: Is that the one where Hockey said he wouldn't be bullied?

Senator CORMANN: Rusal is the world's largest aluminium company.

Senator Cameron: Is that the one where Hockey said he wouldn't be bullied?

The PRESIDENT: Order, Senator Cameron!

Senator CORMANN: This is what Mr Hannagan said: 'Rusal Australia will not invest another cent in capital projects until Labor supports the coalition in axing the carbon tax.' In fact they told the previous government:

... its investment in the Queensland Alumina refinery at Gladstone was being put at risk by the government's unilateral carbon tax and energy policy.

They also pointed out that no other competitor of theirs in other parts of the world faces the same costs. In fact, Queensland aluminium—(Time expired)
Senator WILLIAMS (New South Wales) (14:31): Mr President, I ask a further supplementary question. Can the minister advise the Senate what would be the impact on Australian jobs, families and the economy of moving to a floating price emissions trading scheme?

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance) (14:32): I thank Senator Williams for the question. The truth is, whether it is a fixed price carbon tax or a floating price carbon tax or a floating price emissions trading scheme—whatever name Labor wants to give it—it will continue to push up and push up and push up the cost of electricity. If you look at the former government's own modelling, it thought it would push up the cost of electricity to the tune of—$38 a tonne of carbon was going to be the price by 2020.

They never tell people this, that they expect the price on carbon, whether it is fixed or floating, to continue to go up and up and up and to continue to increase the burden on families, to continue to increase the burden on seniors, to continue to put pressure on business, to continue to put jobs at risk. Labor should do what they said they would do before the election—that is, vote to terminate the carbon tax. Kevin Rudd and Labor said they had already done it. (Time expired)

The PRESIDENT: Senator Cormann, raising that literature is disorderly.

Education Funding

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (14:33): Mr President, my question is to the Minister representing the Prime Minister. I refer the minister to the school funding promise made by the Prime Minister on 2 August when he said, 'We will make sure that no school is worse off.' Will the Prime Minister keep his promise?

Senator ABETZ (Tasmania—Leader of the Government in the Senate, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Minister for Employment) (14:33): Mr President, there is no need for any school to be worse off under our funding model. We have said time and time again that we believe in parent power rather than Canberra control. We said parent power rather than Canberra control. What we will be doing with this new funding—and might I add replacing funding that the then Minister for Education, Mr Shorten, ripped out of the funding envelope with the connivance of the then minister for finance, who has been similarly rewarded by a leadership position in this place. So the two leaders of the Australian Labor Party were the people who raided the Gonski envelope of $1.2 billion. Where did the money go? It was 'gone-ski,' wasn't it, courtesy of Mr Shorten's shortfall and Senator Wong not quite getting her figures right in relation to the matter of education. It will ultimately be for the individual states and territories to determine—

Opposition senators interjecting—

Senator ABETZ: how the money is to be allocated. Look, it was a Freudian slip because under Labor it was funny money. It was $1.2 billion funny money short. Mr Pyne and Mr Abbott, despite the financial circumstances and constraints that we face, have been able to find a way forward to ensure that students in Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory are not disadvantaged in circumstances that Senator Collins herself was willing to countenance in an interjection earlier in this question time.

Senator Jacinta Collins: Those states weren't offered the money; they declined.
Senator ABETZ: They were offered the money. Mr President, we are hearing it again! And because they did not accept it, Labor denied them the money and withdrew the 1.2 billion—(Time expired)

Opposition senators interjecting—

Government senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Order on both sides! The time to debate the question is after question time.

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (14:36): Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. I note the minister refused to repeat the Prime Minister's promise, so I give him an opportunity. I refer him to the Prime Minister's further claim on 2 August: 'We want to end the uncertainty by guaranteeing that no school will be worse off.' Will the Prime Minister keep this promise?

Senator ABETZ (Tasmania—Leader of the Government in the Senate, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Minister for Employment) (14:36): Mr President, the former minister for finance is somewhat slow. What we indicated, very clearly, is that no school need be worse off given our funding. But because the states are responsible for the allocation of moneys—and just before the chorus gets too excited—

Senator Wong: New words!

Senator ABETZ: be very careful, because under the models already adopted in part in New South Wales and other states you might actually find that some schools are worse off, courtesy of various state government decisions. What we are saying is: the money is available and, under the terms and agreements that were entered into, those circumstances will continue unless the states agree, of course, to change. (Time expired)

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (14:37): Mr President, I ask a further supplementary question. Is the Prime Minister going to keep the school funding promises he actually made or the promise he now wants to pretend he made? Is the promise to guarantee no school will be worse off, or is the new promise—to cover a broken promise—that there is no need for a school to be worse off under your broken system?

Senator ABETZ (Tasmania—Leader of the Government in the Senate, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Minister for Employment) (14:38): Those of the 'there will be no carbon tax under a government I lead' party hardly come into this debate with any credibility when it comes to honouring promises to the Australian people. The leader of the opposition can turn her chair around because we know well and truly who was the architect of that disastrous Labor policy.

Opposition senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Order! I have not given you the call, Senator Moore, for one reason. When there is silence I will give you the call.

Senator Moore: Mr President, I rise on a point of order relating to relevance. It was a specific question about a promise. We are waiting to hear that answer.

The PRESIDENT: There is no point of order at this stage. I believe the minister is addressing the question. The minister still has 36 seconds remaining.
Senator ABETZ: I can understand the Labor Party's sensitivity in relation to the 'no carbon tax' promise because that was the issue on which they lost the last election, and they are still going to stand in the way of its repeal in this place, in the event that media stories are correct.

Coming to the specific issue of education, can I indicate to the honourable senator and leader of the opposition that we are a party—I have said this before and I will continue to say it—that has every intention of keeping our promises. (Time expired)

Superannuation

Senator BUSHBY (Tasmania—Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (14:40): My question is to the Assistant Treasurer, Senator Sinodinos. Can the minister outline to the Senate the importance for Australians of transparent, competitive and well-governed superannuation schemes?

Senator SINODINOS (New South Wales—Assistant Treasurer) (14:40): I thank the honourable senator for his question. He has demonstrated expertise in banking, finance and superannuation and it is a well-informed question. I can inform the Senate that along with, I believe, almost all members of this chamber I believe in the importance of a transparent, competitive, well-governed superannuation system. To that end I released a discussion paper last week which canvassed issues around all of those desirable attributes.

Let me begin with the first, which was better regulation of superannuation. By that I mean where there is a need to regulate superannuation we will institute measures which reduce the costs of compliance—

Opposition senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Order! When there is silence on my left we will proceed.

Senator Cameron: They are modest men!

The PRESIDENT: Order, Senator Cameron!

Senator SINODINOS: Importantly, that paper will also canvass reforms to the governance of superannuation funds. There are already moves among both the corporate funds and the industry super funds to improve their governance. What we are doing is setting out a framework, consistent with our election commitments, which will canvass the options of going closer to corporate-style governance or adopting the APRA style of governance, which involves having independent directors and an independent chairman.

The reason I raise this—and the reason for the sensitivity on the other side, I believe—is there is some fear that this is just having a go at one particular sector of superannuation. My point is this: no-one in the superannuation industry who has transparent, accountable governance has anything to fear from these measures. Indeed, it is precisely because we are encouraging a debate around this that we can get the best possible governance.

We will also be seeking to promote transparency in superannuation by completing some measures that were started by the previous government around greater transparency on product choice, dashboards and portfolio holdings. We will also address the issue of default super. We will make sure that the industrial relations system is open and any product which meets certain basic APRA criteria— (Time expired)

Senator Cameron: Have the Nats said no? If the Nats said no—
The PRESIDENT: Order! Senator Cameron, I remind you that calling across the chamber is disorderly. Constantly doing it is completely disorderly.

Senator BUSHBY (Tasmania—Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (14:43): Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. Is the minister aware that the hard-earned superannuation savings of Australian workers are being used to bankroll an online newspaper? If so, what is the minister's response?

Senator SINODINOS (New South Wales—Assistant Treasurer) (14:44): I have heard of this online newspaper to be funded by three industry superannuation funds at $2 million each—an online news service allegedly taking material from the ABC and the Fairfax media; I have not heard of The Australian or The Spectator being involved.

My point is: the superannuation funds have a duty to make sure that everything they do is in the interest of maximising returns for their members. The Australian prudential regulator has spoken to the superannuation funds involved about this matter and is keeping it under observation. We do not want a situation where members' funds are dissipated on political online news services and not being used for maximising returns. The funds involved claim that the money is coming out of their marketing budget but, as all members opposite know, money is fungible—the money you spend over here is not available to invest over there and generate a return for members. (Time expired)

Senator BUSHBY (Tasmania—Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (14:45): Mr President, I have a further supplementary question. Can the minister tell the Senate why it is important to protect the superannuation savings of Australian workers?

Senator SINODINOS (New South Wales—Assistant Treasurer) (14:45): It is important to protect those savings because there are $1.6 trillion of assets in superannuation and they will grow over time as the superannuation guarantee continues to increase, as it will under the bipartisan commitment to it. It is important that we make sure that those funds are invested as appropriately as possible, which is why it is important that there is transparency, there is choice and there is competition in the super fund market. The measures we are taking, which are election commitments, will help to discharge those responsibilities. I say to those opposite: the best thing that can happen to the industry funds and to the unions in this country is that they embrace competition, because competition causes people to thrive.

Education Funding

Senator KIM CARR (Victoria) (14:46): My question is the minister representing the Minister for Education, Senator Payne. Comments made by the New South Wales Minister for Education, Mr Piccoli, noted that the Commonwealth had implied that if there were a reduction in funding for the states that have signed up to the schools agreement, then indeed that reduction may well only come out of public schools. Is this the Commonwealth's position?

Senator PAYNE (New South Wales—Minister for Human Services) (14:47): The government has made it very clear—and I think this might be the third or fourth time that we are saying this for Senator Carr, but nevertheless we are very generous people so we will keep doing that—that we will honour the funding deals reached with the states over the four-year period as promised. We are also working with Victoria and Tasmania to finalise their bilateral agreements so that the funding can flow.
What the Australian government will do to Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory is the same amount of Commonwealth funding that was committed by Labor even though a National Education Reform Agreement was not signed. We have already made arrangements so that $230 million of funding will flow to them for 2014, and this will give the government ample opportunity to formalise new heads of agreement with these three jurisdictions. They will not be conditional on signing up to a deal which reduces their authority over schools or creates unnecessary red tape.

What we have is a proper national funding model—a funding support model. What Labor did was to make a complete mess of school funding negotiations. Now that we have agreement across the board for our funding plan we can deliver national school funding reforms. We will also remove the red tape as demand and control features that characterise Labor's model, and we will treat the states and territories like adult governments who operate and own their government schools. But most importantly, there is only one party in this chamber that has taken money away from schools—that is $1.2 billion—and that is Labor.

Senator KIM CARR (Victoria) (14:49): On a supplementary question, Mr President, I refer the minister again to Mr Piccoli’s comments. Given that Senator Abetz has told the Senate chamber today that there is no need for schools to be worse off, can the minister advise which schools in New South Wales will lose funding as a result of this government’s broken promise on school funding?

Senator PAYNE (New South Wales—Minister for Human Services) (14:49): If I can assist Senator Carr, the person to whom he is referring is Mr Adrian Piccoli, the Minister for Education in New South Wales. Let me make it very clear, as I have on two or three previous occasions, that we are talking about the same level of funding for schools in New South Wales and the same level of funding for other states and territories that agreed to the National Education Reform Agreement. That will now flow through to Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, who were left out by those opposite. It is the same amount of funding for New South Wales. I think that is fairly simple to understand. If the senator really pays attention he will know that the New South Wales government—(Time expired)

Senator KIM CARR (Victoria) (14:51): Mr President, I have a further supplementary question. Given Mr Piccoli’s statement concerning funding for public schools, can the minister explain why the Commonwealth government believes Australian public schools should suffer as a consequence of this government's breach of faith?

Senator PAYNE (New South Wales—Minister for Human Services) (14:51): It is an absolute disgrace that those opposite—and that senator in particular—would verbal what people have said in relation to this matter and try to score even cheap political points. But nevertheless, what is very, very clear is that the same amount of funding money will go to New South Wales schools and, as I was about to say before, if the senator paid a skerrick of attention to what has already been done in New South Wales he would know that allocations have already been announced. Unless he has some inside information from, apparently, his close friend the New South Wales minister, I do not expect they will be varying their own funding application. Quite frankly, it is a matter for them. The Commonwealth government has made its commitment very clear: the same amount of funding will go to New South Wales as was going to New South Wales before. How that is distributed and whether any changes
are made to that, is a matter for the states and territories. The senator knows that and chooses to ignore it.

Anzac Centenary

Senator BERNARDI (South Australia) (14:52): My question is to the Minister for the Centenary of ANZAC, Senator Ronaldson. Can the minister please outline the government’s proposal for local, community based commemoration under the Anzac Centenary Local Grants Program?

Senator RONALDSON (Victoria—Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Centenary of ANZAC and Special Minister of State) (14:52): I thank Senator Bernardi for the question and for his ongoing interest in the Centenary of Anzac, as well as my colleagues behind me; and indeed their fight for veterans before the last election, particularly in relation to DFRDB and the DFRB indexation issue. I thank my colleagues most sincerely.

The Abbott government is determined to ensure that local, community based commemoration is at the heart of our agenda for the Centenary of Anzac. The Australian government will be putting in some $140 million towards some very significant projects: the redevelopment of World War I galleries, the Albany Interpretive Centre and further commemorative activities at Villers-Bretonneux and Gallipoli. But within Australia, the local, community based commemoration program is supported through the $18.75 million Anzac Centenary Local Grants Program.

The Centenary of Anzac, as honourable senators will know, is indeed about commemorating ordinary men and women who did extraordinary deeds. This local commemorative grants program is an important part of that. That is why the Abbott government has increased funding to the program to $125,000 for every federal electorate. I remember in my time in the other place, when Con Sciacca was the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, and he conducted the Australia Remembers program, a fantastic bipartisan support to local communities throughout Australia, from the biggest cities to the smallest towns. The Abbott government has increased funding to ensure that this occurs. (Time expired)

Senator BERNARDI (South Australia) (14:54): Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. I ask the minister if he could provide the Senate with examples of the projects which may be funded under the ANZAC Centenary Local Grants Program.

Senator RONALDSON (Victoria—Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Centenary of ANZAC and Special Minister of State) (14:55): Just finishing off: as I said before, we have actually extended the closing date for applications to 31 May 2014, three months later than originally proposed. In relation to the grants program designed to support local community programs, there can be a wide variety of potential grants to be made. Just some would be new First World War memorials or honour boards and restoration of memorials or honour boards; public commemorative events, whether they be concerts of First World War music, commemorative plays or re-enactments; preservation and interpretative displays of First World War military memorabilia and artefacts, which can include the purchase of display cabinets—a whole variety of things; conservation work; and educational projects, including research by schools. I understand a number of communities are looking at some new Avenues of Honour. (Time expired)
Senator BERNARDI (South Australia) (14:56): Mr President, I ask a further supplementary question. I thank the minister, and ask if he could advise the Senate who is eligible to apply for funding under the program and exactly how they may do so.

Senator RONALDSON (Victoria—Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Centenary of ANZAC and Special Minister of State) (14:56): This morning I arranged a bipartisan briefing for all members and senators, particularly lower house members, in relation to the local commemorative grants program. It was very well attended, and I think Senator Farrell and his counterpart in the other place were facilitating that. Indeed, this will be local community driven but each federal member in the other place will be required to put together a committee that will assess local application forms. That local committee will look at local applications and then they will be sent off to the department for their assessment. As I said briefly at the meeting this morning, it is important that this Commonwealth funding is used to leverage other potential sources of funding within local communities. This will be the most significant commemorative event in this nation's history and I encourage everyone to get actively engaged.

Education Funding

Senator O'NEILL (New South Wales) (14:57): My question is to the Minister representing the Minister for Education, Senator Payne. I refer to the comments made by the Minister for Education on 30 August, when he said:

… we are committed to the student resource standard, of course we are. We are committed to this new school funding model.

Will the minister keep his promise?

Senator PAYNE (New South Wales—Minister for Human Services) (14:57): I thank the senator for her question and congratulate her on her swearing in earlier today as a senator for New South Wales. What I am certainly able to indicate to the chamber is that we are committed to our national needs based funding model that works, and is fair and equitable. The difference between our commitment and that of the previous government would be that an equitable funding model includes all states and territories and does not leave out Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. The difference between this model and that of the previous government would be that our model is fully national. That is, again, revelatory I know; but it includes all states and territories, not leaving out Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. That model may include a number of issues, like loadings for students with high needs. It will not treat students in the states and territories that were previously excluded by the former government as second-class citizens.

That is why we are replacing the $1.2 billion of funding that Mr Shorten, as the education minister, ripped out of schools funding in this country. Whether one is a member of the House of Representatives or a member of the Senate, I am still able to say that there is only one party in this place that has taken money out of school funding, and that is the Labor Party.

Senator O'NEILL (New South Wales) (14:59): Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. Is the government committed to the student resource standard and the funding model under the Better Schools Plan agreed with all state and territory governments?
Senator PAYNE (New South Wales—Minister for Human Services) (14:59): What I have said previously is that the coalition is delivering a national funding model for schools, which includes the additional $2.8 billion in funding over the next four years. We also do not believe that money is the only element in better educational outcomes in Australia. What about parental control and principal control? What about the red tape and the extra—

Opposition senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Order! Senator O'Neill is entitled to hear the answer to the question.

Senator PAYNE: As I said very clearly in my answer to a previous question from those opposite, we will honour the funding deals reached with the states over a four-year period as promised. We will work with Victoria and Tasmania to finalise bilateral agreements so that funding to those states can flow. We will also give Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory the same amount of funding that was committed by Labor, even though they did not sign the National Education Reform Agreement. We have already made arrangements so that $230 million of funding will flow to them for 2014. This will allow us, as the government, sufficient opportunity to formalise those new heads of agreement with those three jurisdictions. Those students are entitled to that money. (Time expired)

Senator O'NEILL (New South Wales) (15:01): Mr President, I ask a further supplementary question. Why is the government breaking its promises to state governments, parents, teachers and students, particularly with the student resource standard?

Senator PAYNE (New South Wales—Minister for Human Services) (15:01): This government are absolutely committed to keeping its promises as enunciated by me several times earlier today. We are not breaking promises. We are not the party that took money out of education; those opposite are.

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

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE: TAKE NOTE OF ANSWERS

Education Funding

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (15:01): I move:

That the Senate take note of the answers given by the Minister for Employment (Senator Abetz) and the Minister for Human Services (Senator Payne) to questions without notice asked by Opposition senators today relating to schools funding.

Today we have seen the latest iteration in the coalition's twists and turns to avoid keeping the promises they made to the Australian people before the election. Everybody knows that education was a key issue in the election. Despite Mr Pyne describing the Gonski report and reforms, which are the foundation of Labor's Better Schools Plan, as a con, a 'conski', he had an 11th-hour conversion because it was very clear that this was a plan supported by teachers, by parents, by students and by schools across this country. Instead of the 'conski', as Mr Pyne called it, what we saw was a set of unequivocal commitments from this Prime Minister and this education minister that they would honour the agreements that the Labor government had made, that they would ensure that they would deliver precisely the same policy, that they would keep their promise to the Australian people and that there was a unity ticket when it comes to education. You only have to go through some of the quotes from the Prime Minister to see this:
TONY ABBOTT: (August 2, 2013): … We will make sure that no school is worse off.
The same day, he said, 'We will guarantee that no school will be worse off' and:

… every single school in Australia will receive, dollar for dollar, the same federal funding over the next four years whether there is a Liberal or Labor Government after September 7.

And he said: 'We will honour any deal that has been made. We will honour the agreements. We will honour any commitment which has been made. There is a unity ticket.' He went on and on. What have we seen since? We have seen the Prime Minister of this country not only refuse to give the same commitment when invited to give the same commitment; he actually said this:

We are going to keep the promise that we actually made, not the promise that some people thought that we made, or the promise that some people might have liked us to make.

So what he was saying to the Australian people just over 24 hours ago was: 'Sorry, you heard it wrong. You know when I said "unity ticket", you heard it wrong. When I said "no school will be worse off", oops, you heard it wrong. I'm sorry, you just must have misheard me.' This is the new standard from this Prime Minister, who said, 'We will keep our promises, but it is not actually the promise we made.' That was in the same interview where we saw the extraordinary exchange on the use of plurals and the singular. Apparently, when they said 'no school would be worse off', they actually meant 'no schools'—plural, because they want to talk about funding envelopes and quantum, and muddy it up. This is all part of a Prime Minister who is seeking to slide away from his election commitments.

What happened today? Just before question time, we saw the press conference you hold when you know you are sinking, the press conference you hold when you know the Australian people are on to you and are saying: 'You are breaking an election promise. You are breaking your commitment.' We saw the press conference you hold when you know your education minister is sinking, because that is the only explanation for a press conference where there is a complete reversal on a number of things Mr Pyne has said, including just a few days ago when he said he was going to completely renegotiate all the agreements. But, all of a sudden, it is: 'We didn't really mean that. You might have just heard that, but you heard that wrong. We didn't actually say that.'

What is absolutely clear is this: there was only one party before and after this election committed to properly funding our schools across this nation—that is, the Australian Labor Party. I also acknowledge the work of the Greens on this. On this issue, they do support proper funding and proper resourcing of education. What we saw today in question time as well was the latest round of weasel words. Before the election it was 'no school will be worse off', then we had a discussion about quantums and envelopes with Mr Pyne walking away from the commitments and the Prime Minister walking away from the commitments.

Senator Heffernan: I rise on a point of order, which is a correction to the point of order.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: What is your point of order?

Senator Heffernan: Senator Wong has misled the chamber because, under Gonski, Junee High School, in my electorate, is going to lose—

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: There is no point of order.

Senator WONG: Today we heard the latest round of weasel words, 'No school need be worse off.' The guarantee has changed. (Time expired)
Senator FAWCETT (South Australia) (15:07): I particularly take note of the comments made by Senator Wong, who went to a very good private school in Adelaide. But her concept of ‘across the nation’ seems to be rather lacking, when the plan Labor put in place for education, supposedly a national framework, left out a number of the states and territories. Her comment that this was a nationwide scheme shows a distinct lack of understanding of geography and demographics. The fact is that people live in states other than those signed up by the Labor Party.

I am also concerned about the concept of guarantee. The Commonwealth, which signed contracts with the independent and Catholic sector, for example, is in a position to guarantee that money, because it signed a heads of agreement for a contract to give a certain amount of money to those sectors. How those school systems spend that money is up to them, but the Commonwealth can guarantee that money. With a state system, because Australia is a federation where the Commonwealth government is a creature of the states, when the Commonwealth gives funding to the states it is a state government responsibility to allocate that funding. Without breaking the constitutional requirements around who is responsible for education in the state, the Commonwealth cannot guarantee what the states will do with that money. It is particularly puzzling that members opposite get quite so wrapped up in the fact that the government is quite correctly identifying that whilst we can guarantee funding to one sector all we can do is say we will give the same amount of money to state governments, but how they distribute it is up to them. There is nothing particularly remarkable about that statement of fact and the constitutional basis for it.

In terms of the agreements, there was a press conference before question time today that made a little redundant much of the speech Senator Wong has just given. Obviously the speech was prepared early this morning and perhaps it could have done with some judicial editing—

Senator Conroy: Judicial? Do you mean judicious?

Senator FAWCETT: before she rose to take note of those answers. But negotiations with Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory mean that the government is now on track to have a national—and that means every state and territory—agreement around education funding.

Senator Conroy: New South Wales?

Senator FAWCETT: That is important, because if we are to be a government taking seriously the future of every child in Australia, we should not be in the same situation as Labor found itself in the dying days of that bad government. Then the Minister for Education and the Prime Minister signed even bigger cheques, if required, to try and get states and territories to sign up for a blatantly political reason, so the then government could say it had the support of states. The money given and the conditions under which that money was given therefore differ from state to state, not for any particularly good or sound educational reason or for the future of our children, under agreements reached with those jurisdictions that signed. Senator Conroy rightly interjected that some of those states were Liberal states, but the then federal government's motivation was purely political in that it would do, say and pay anything to get states to sign up. That leaves us a shambles of a system where the money going to support a child in one state is different to the money going to support a child in
another state or territory. That is hardly the basis for a national system to benefit our children in the future.

One of this government’s early achievements from getting those states on board is that we are now on the path to a national system where we will be putting back into the system $1.2 billion of funding that Labor ripped out of the system.

Senator KIM CARR (Victoria) (15:12): I rise to take note of this matter. Senator Fawcett has a fundamental flaw in his argument—that is, prior to the election, coalition speaker after coalition spokesperson committed to the Labor government’s funding model, which contained a whole series of conditions to maintain funding by the states and on which the Commonwealth would pay record levels of moneys to the states. The coalition, in opposition at that time, said they would match those commitments dollar for dollar, agreement for agreement, model for model. Now that is not the position, and today we have the third effort in a week by the government to try to clarify their position, which fundamentally boils down to repudiating an election commitment. They are repudiating their commitment to the people of Australia and to the students of Australia. Furthermore, today yet another election promise was broken.

Senator McKenzie: I raise a point of order under standing order 72, that after question time we move a motion to take note of answers. My understanding of Senator Carr’s contribution is that he is moving a motion to take note of matters. I am still unclear as to what those matters are.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: There is no point of order. Senator Carr is speaking to the motion moved by Senator Wong.

Senator KIM CARR: Raising frivolous points of order will not help you at all. Today we have seen a further breach of promise, because the coalition prior to the election also said there would be no funding cuts from education. That was the position then, but today the Prime Minister announced that a further $1.2 billion in cuts from education would be announced straight after parliament rises this year—a further breach of promise. That is what was said, Senator Abetz, and he made the promise on 5 September 2013. He said: … there will be no cuts to health, no cuts to education, no cuts to pensions, no change to the GST …

And now we have seen an announcement today that there will be a further series of budget cuts to education. What really interests me is that, prior to the election, the government of Western Australia was offered an extra $920 million funding by the Labor government. That offer was rejected by the Premier of Western Australia. Why is it that the total amount of money now being put to the non-signatory states today is only $1.2 billion?

One can only presume the commitments that the Premier of Western Australia made at the time, that he would get more money from an Abbott government than he would from a Labor government, have not been borne out. My understanding is that the offer from Mr Abbott is now substantially less than $920 million. You should ask yourself a simple question: why is it that the government of Western Australia would sign up, even in principle, to a proposition that would deprive the state of Western Australia of so much money?

One has to bear in mind that, clearly, it is part of the chicanery and the deception that is going on and part of the deceitful comments of the Prime Minister with regard to his cynical political manoeuvres on schools funding—a commitment made prior to the election that they
could of course be on a unity ticket with Labor, a commitment made that there would be the same funding arrangements and the same funding models presented by Labor and that, if you voted Labor or Liberal, you would get the same deal on schools. Of course, that is clearly not the case, to the point where we are now seeing three separate plans announced inside a week.

Senator Conroy: Three?

Senator KIM CARR: Three separate plans inside a week, when we are getting coalition education minister after coalition education minister in Victoria and New South Wales and Labor ministers in South Australia and Tasmania saying they want to see the agreements they have struck honoured. But you are not getting that from this government. Now we have a position from Senator Abetz where he says there is no need for schools to lose money. What a rock-solid commitment that is! No need! We know the answer and the minister in New South Wales has belled the cat. The cuts will be to government schools and that is the result of the sectarian policies that the government is seeking to reintroduce into the education debate in this country. But I come back to a simple proposition: why is it that the Western Australia Premier rejected $920 million from the Commonwealth Labor government, yet he accepts a far less amount from the Liberal government under Tony Abbott? Why is it? What is the deal? What is the special arrangement? And what does it mean for the Queensland government? Similar sorts of offers have been made to them and repudiated by them. What does it mean for the Northern Territory government, with similar sets of arrangements offered by Labor, rejected by conservative premiers and chief ministers? (Time expired)

Senator SESELJA (Australian Capital Territory) (15:18): I might start where Senator Carr left off. With respect to a couple of the points he made, he seemed to be a little bit confused about the argument he was trying to prosecute. In taking up the case of WA, he in fact made the coalition's case. The only party that was taking money away from the people of WA was the Labor Party. That was part of the $1.2 billion that the Labor Party ripped out of education—from WA, Queensland and the Northern Territory. I am not sure which part of that Senator Carr does not understand. But he seemed to be quite confused in delivering his arguments.

I go to both Senator Carr's and Senator Wong's points. It is clear that the Labor Party always accuses other people of their worst sins. That is what we are seeing here in relation to this education debate. The party which were so dishonest in government are now trying to claim that the coalition is in fact no better. Let us look at the facts as we deal with it.

The Labor Party is now criticising the coalition government for delivering more money for education. The coalition has committed to delivering more money for education than would have been delivered had the Labor Party been re-elected. The Labor Party was to rip $1.2 billion out of education. Chris Bowen and Kate Ellis confirmed that they were to rip $1.2 billion out of education.

Another point to make is that we believe in a national funding agreement, not a funding agreement that goes to some states and territories but a national funding agreement which covers all six states and both territories. That is the fundamental difference. The coalition is now being criticised by those opposite for committing to the same amount of money for the states that signed up and also committing to an additional amount of money for those who will now sign up. That is what we are being criticised for in this chamber today.
Senator Conroy: You won't keep your promise!

Senator SESELJA: We have kept our promise. And the fundamental problem that the Labor Party seem to have is that they do not apparently trust their state and territory colleagues when they get the same amount of funding from the Commonwealth. When it comes to school funding, the Labor Party's position appears to be that they cannot trust the Tasmanian government to deliver fairly for the people of Tasmania. When it comes to school funding, the Labor Party's position in this place appears to be that they cannot trust the governments of South Australia and the ACT to deliver. That is the position of the Labor Party that they are putting to us today.

The coalition has agreed to honour the amount of funding that was committed to those states, to honour the agreement with the independent schools and the Catholic sector and to provide additional money that the Labor Party had committed to ripping out from the people of the Northern Territory, Queensland and Western Australia. That is the fundamental difference.

Minister Payne, I believe, could not have been any clearer in answering these questions during question time today, but, in fact, those very clear answers from Senator Payne have led to such a confused attack by the Labor Party in the Senate this afternoon. We saw the confusion from Senator Carr; we saw the confusion from Senator Wong. They cannot get their story straight. So let us just summarise what they are now criticising. They are criticising a coalition government for delivering the same amount of money to the four states and the territory that signed up and for delivering extra money which the Labor Party had ripped out and would have continued to rip out had they been re-elected. Those are the fundamental differences.

The coalition will not be lectured to by the Labor Party, whose record on trust is below par and whose record on education funding is below par, given they wanted to rip $1.2 billion from the Northern Territory, Queensland and WA. (Time expired)

Senator MARSHALL (Victoria) (15:23): I know that one of the joys of being in government is that, in moments like these, the minister will send you down some notes to be religiously followed, but I suggest to you, Senator: you ought to not do that. You should actually think about the issues, do some of your own research and not just parrot the notes that are put in front of you. I know it is not your fault.

Senator Kroger: Don't be so patronising!

Senator MARSHALL: I know you are a bit sensitive about that, Senator Kroger, because we see you reading from those sorts of notes all the time. But what you ought to start to consider—

Senator Kroger: I'm actually reading the Red at the moment.

The PRESIDENT: Order on my right!

Senator MARSHALL: You are not speaking to this debate. I am not suggesting you are reading from notes right now.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Marshall, direct your comments to the chair.

Senator MARSHALL: I am talking about when you make these contributions, Senator Kroger. Take some advice and actually think about the issue before you simply parrot what
the minister has asked you to say. This is the same minister sending you notes who called the Gonski reforms a con—he called them a 'conski'.

The Liberal Party would have to be the only organisation in the whole of the country that did not appreciate that the schools funding model we had in place in this country was not working. It was failing our students. It must be the only party in the country that does not understand that education is the absolute key to our future economic prosperity. It is the cornerstone of all innovation and enterprise. If we do not get education right for our kids and for our future, it is the economic prosperity of everyone in this country that will fail. Everyone—the private school sector and the government school sector—knew the funding model was a failure and was not working. So the Labor government undertook massive reform to create a schools funding model that would take us through to the next generation by providing billions of dollars in extra funding where it was needed most: in delivering the education society that we need if we are going to compete on the global stage into the future. If we want to keep our economic prosperity in this country, we must get education right.

I think it is a shame that you finally worked that out only during the election campaign. After calling the Gonski reforms a con, you realised that you were alone—that parents, teachers, the private school sector, the public school sector and everybody else knew that we needed to move forward with extra funding, proper tied funding, proper responsibility and commitments at state and federal levels to improve government funding here. You finally came on board and you realised you were out of touch with the views of the rest of the community. So you desperately tried to make promises. Mr Abbott made the promise that there would be no difference between Labor and Liberal. He promised that, if you voted Labor or Liberal, you would get the same package of educational reform. But, of course, that did not happen. I remember Abbott saying: 'There is not a sliver of light between Labor and Liberal on this policy.'

What did we see today? There was this massive backflip where they found $1.2 billion, which they could not find on Friday but found today. But, of course, that only takes us up to four years of funding in this space. When you are talking about future generations, four years of funding is not enough. Our model went to six.

Senator Seselja: So you're critical of four years? Well, that's a criticism now.

Senator MARSHALL: Let me tell you, Senator: there is a lot of light between four and six years. That is two years worth of light. If you say there is not a sliver of light between Labor and Liberal in terms of educational funding but then leave off two years worth of light and say you are delivering on your promise, let me say: keep reading the notes that the minister gives you. Keep yourself in the dark if that is what you want to do, but you ought to try and understand these issues, because education is too important for the games you are going to play.

You found $1.2 billion and you have not funded education for six years. What did Mr Abbott say today? He said, 'Over the weekend we found $1.2 billion worth of cuts.' We know those cuts are going to come from the education sector. So you will cut $1.2 billion to try to make the Australian public believe that you are living up to the commitments you made before the election. People are not stupid, no matter what Tony Abbott says. He said they were stupid last week because they did not understand what he meant when he said the words 'no school would be worse off'. He said the same about the press. He said, 'You shouldn't
listen to what I say; you should only listen to what I thought I was saying.' Of course, he has form on that. He has been on the public record before, saying that you cannot trust anything he says unless it is read from a script. Unfortunately, when he made these promises on education they were not read from a script. *(Time expired)*

The PRESIDENT: Before I call Senator Wright, I remind senators to address their remarks to the chair and not across the chamber.

Senator WRIGHT (South Australia) (15:28): I rise to speak to the motion to take note of answers given in question time today by the Minister representing the Minister for Education. Today we have the third iteration in the last week of the coalition's school funding plan. Hasn't it become almost unrecognisable from what we heard before the election! At that point, the incentive—the big motive—was to neutralise an issue that was becoming increasingly of concern to the Australian public and creating problems for the coalition.

Basically, before the election it was, 'Let's do whatever it takes to get this off the agenda. Let's promise what we think the Australian people might want to hear and then we'll worry about the consequences later.' Before the election we had Mr Pyne saying:

… you can vote Liberal or Labor, and you'll get exactly the same amount of funding for your school. We had Tony Abbott saying that he was on a 'unity ticket' with the previous government when it came to the model and the money. We were told that no school would be worse off.

That was all done with the design of taking this difficult issue off the agenda for the coalition government, because many Australians know that by making sure we have a fair school funding model every single child has a fair chance to reach their potential through their schooling in Australia. That is what happened.

But what we have seen now is absolutely scurrilous conduct on this issue—slipping and sliding, ducking and weaving, duplicitous and deceitful. This was the government that promised us they would be methodical, calm and thoughtful. Instead we have had conduct that has been designed to mislead and obfuscate and totally try to confuse the voters. In fact, it has been playing the public for fools, but it will not work, because in the end Australians—parents and educators—are absolutely committed to seeing a better school funding system in Australia, so that every child has the chance to do their best and reach their full potential. This is a core function of government.

Education Minister Pyne and Prime Minister Abbott now have no idea what they are doing, and they have absolutely no credibility on this issue. That is because, ultimately, they have no principle they are adhering to when it comes to school funding.

To our shame in Australia, most of us understand that we currently have one of the most segregated schooling systems in the developed world. It is to our eternal shame that in Australia a child's performance at school is more likely to be determined by their background, and factors totally unrelated to their ability, than any of our comparable OECD peers.

The Gonski panel received more than 7,000 submissions, visited 39 schools and consulted 71 education groups and produced a 286-page report with 41 findings and 28 recommendations. That report unequivocally pointed to a broken and inequitable school funding model that is not delivering good educational outcomes for Australian children, where, at year 9, there is up to a five-year performance gap between some of the most privileged and some of the least privileged and disadvantaged children in Australia. It is that
which must be rectified. It is that which requires both an investment of significant money and a model that is based on needs and is sector blind.

Unfortunately, we know that this government has never acknowledged that there is an equity issue when it comes to our school funding model in Australia. We know that in fact it was this government, in a previous manifestation, under the Howard prime ministership, that oversaw the introduction of a funding model that saw over those years far greater increases in funding to the wealthier schools in Australia at the expense of the poorer schools.

The Gonski review has shown that our system is unfair and broken. The fact remains that it is the model—the needs based, sector blind model—designed to overcome inequity and give every kid a fair chance to achieve their potential, which absolutely has to be taken up.

This government committed to both the money and the model and now they are trying to backtrack from that model, trying to raise their hands and say, ‘We do not have control over how the states and territories are going to dispense that money.’ The Gonski model was about reaching conditions so that we could make sure that the money that is invested goes to those students and schools that need it most. They are indeed in public education, which educates 80 per cent of the most disadvantaged students in Australia. We need to ensure that the money goes exactly where it is needed or we will not see a change. *(Time expired)*

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

The Clerk: Petitions have been lodged for presentation as follows:

**Australian Banking System**

To the Honourable President and members of the Senate in Parliament assembled:

The petition of the undersigned shows:

That in the increasingly uncertain global financial circumstances, Australians are very concerned about the impacts on the Commonwealth of Australia and the counter-party risks associated with holding national assets in financially distressed countries like the UK that have an increasingly negative credit rating outlook. We are concerned that the progressively loose monetary policies of foreign Central Banks, such as Zero Interest Rate Policies and Quantitative Easing are debasing their national currencies and are:

1) Impacting the Australian economy by raising the comparative value of our currency and reducing the international competitiveness of our export industries and labour markets;

2) Undermining the basis of trust in the international currency regime that has been the historic hallmark of the affluence of developed economies since the Second World War, while growing international tensions;

3) Increasingly seeing developing nations seeking to protect the wealth realised in their development by diversifying their foreign currency reserves through gold accumulation initiatives of their central banks. These countries are reported to include China, Russia, India, South Korea, Thailand, Mexico, Brazil, Paraguay, Columbia, Argentina and Azerbaijan;

4) Forcing prudent nations, of both mature and emerging economies, to repatriate their national gold reserves from the historical financial centres of London and New York back to their own soil in increasing numbers. Countries reported to have or are undertaking such repatriation efforts include Germany, Venezuela, Ecuador, Mexico, Romania, Azerbaijan, Libya and Iran;
5) Causing citizens of nations around the world to become sufficiently concerned over the potential impacts to petition their governments to audit and account for their gold reserves. Countries with such initiatives include USA, Netherlands, Switzerland and Australia;

6) Seeing international investment strategies hedging the risk of devaluing global currencies by investing in agricultural and industrial commodities, precious metals and other tangible assets that push inflationary effects into the real economy; and

7) Increasing the likelihood that a currency crisis will re-establish the role of gold as a monetary asset in the global financial system against which other currencies will be valued.

Your petitioners ask that the Senate:

Minimise the risks and impacts that a global currency crisis or similar event would have on our nation by establishing initiatives for the Commonwealth of Australia to:

a) Reinstate gold as a reserve asset for the Australian banking system;

b) Repatriate its gold reserves from London back to Australia to be held on Australian soil; and

c) Begin an ongoing program of accumulating gold reserves, considering the efficiency of collecting taxes payable from precious metal mining companies in the refined metals they extract as a means of continually adding to those reserves.

by Senator Collins (from 548 citizens).

Australian National Flag

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

The petition of the undersigned shows:

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

Your petitioners request that the Senate:

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

by Senator Ronaldson (from 7 citizens).

Petitions received.

NOTICES

Presentation

Senator Rhiannon to move:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that:

(i) Australia and other donors are due to announce their 3-year pledges to the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria at the replenishment meeting being held in Washington DC on the morning of 4 December 2013 (AEST),

(ii) the Global Fund is seeking a total of $15 billion to build on progress in bringing an end to AIDS, TB and malaria,

(iii) President Joyce Banda of the Republic of Malawi has stated that nations like Malawi need countries like Australia to offer strong support for the Global Fund to succeed and that Global Fund investments have saved an estimated 9 million lives worldwide,

(iv) the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI) is committed to saving children's lives and is on track to immunise 500 million children by 2015, and
(v) at the GAVI Pledging Conference in June 2011 the Australian Government increased Australia's commitment from $60 million over 3 years to $200 million for the period 2011 to 2013, of which $52.5 million remains outstanding; and

(b) calls on the Federal Government to:

(i) commit $375 million to the Global Fund for the period 2014 to 2016, and

(ii) complete its current pledge and increase investments in GAVI to $75 million in both 2014 and 2015.

**Senator Wright** to move:

That the Senate—

(a) notes:

(i) needs-based funding, where money is distributed equitably according to need, is essential to ensuring all students can access high-quality education,

(ii) that disadvantage occurs in all sectors of schooling, but is concentrated in government schools,

(iii) the discredited SES funding model was responsible for increasing inequity, and

(iv) the Government made a clear pre-election commitment to maintain the reformed school funding model from 1 January 2014 for 4 years, with the same funding envelope; and

(b) recognises that, in reneging on its pre-election commitment, the Government will perpetuate and worsen the inequities at the heart of the schooling system, which needs-based funding reform had the only chance of reversing.

**Senators Hanson-Young and Carr** to move:

That the Senate—

(a) notes:

(i) the failure of the Minister representing the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection (Senator Cash) to comply with the order of the Senate of 14 November 2013 by noon on 18 November 2013; and

(ii) that tabling publically available information such as transcripts and operational updates is a failure to comply with the order, and that tabling of other publically available information would still represent a failure to comply with this order;

(b) orders the Minister representing the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection (Senator Cash) to comply with the order by 5 pm on Wednesday, 4 December 2013; and

(c) does not accept the claims of public interest immunity made by the Minister in respect of the documents ordered by the Senate to be tabled, or the grounds for making these claims.

**Senator Hanson-Young** to move:

That the Senate calls on the Government to give parents of newborn babies detained in immigration detention unrestricted access to their children.

**Senator Hanson-Young** to move:

That the Senate—

(a) instructs the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee to reconvene for the consideration of supplementary estimates on Friday, 6 December 2013, from 9 am to 5 pm, to hear further evidence from the Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection (Senator Cash) and relevant officers concerning 'on water operations' to appear before the committee to give evidence; and
(b) directs the Minister to ensure that relevant officers from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection and officers of Operation Sovereign Borders, including Lieutenant General Angus Campbell, appear before the committee for that purpose.

**Senator Sterle** to move:

That the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee be authorised to meet during the sittings of the Senate for private briefings, as follows:
(a) on Monday, 9 December 2013, from 10 am; and
(b) on Tuesday, 10 December 2013, from 4 pm.

**Senator Fifield** to move:

That the days of meeting of the Senate for 2014 be as follows:

- **Autumn sittings:**
  - Tuesday, 11 February to Thursday, 13 February
  - Monday, 3 March to Thursday, 6 March
  - Monday, 17 March to Thursday, 20 March
  - Monday, 24 March to Thursday, 27 March
- **Budget sittings:**
  - Tuesday, 13 May to Thursday, 15 May
- **Winter sittings:**
  - Monday, 16 June to Thursday, 19 June
  - Monday, 23 June to Thursday, 26 June
  - Monday, 7 July to Thursday, 10 July
  - Monday, 14 July to Thursday, 17 July
- **Spring sittings:**
  - Tuesday, 26 August to Thursday, 28 August
  - Monday, 1 September to Thursday, 4 September
  - Monday, 22 September to Thursday, 25 September
  - Tuesday, 30 September to Thursday, 2 October
- **Spring sittings (2):**
  - Monday, 27 October to Thursday, 30 October
- **Spring sittings (3):**
  - Monday, 24 November to Thursday, 27 November
  - Monday, 1 December to Thursday, 4 December.

**Senator Fifield** to move:

That consideration of the business before the Senate on Wednesday, 4 December 2013, be interrupted at approximately 5 pm, but not so as to interrupt a senator speaking, to enable Senator O'Neill to make her first speech without any question before the chair.

**Senator Ludlam** to move:

That there be laid on the table by the Minister representing the Minister for Communications, no later than noon on Monday, 9 December 2013, the Strategic Review of the rollout of the National Broadband Network conducted by NBN Co and due to be provided to the Government on Monday, 2 December 2013.
Senators Smith and Pratt to move:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that 1 December 2013 is World AIDS Day;
(b) recognises that:
   (i) more than 35 million people now live with HIV/AIDS worldwide, and almost 10 per cent of these are under the age of 15,
   (ii) every day nearly 6 300 people contract HIV, nearly 262 every hour,
   (iii) in Australia in 2012 there were 25 000 people living with HIV and 1 253 new diagnoses of HIV infection, a 10 per cent increase from previous years,
   (iv) in 2012, 1.6 million people died from AIDS-related illnesses,
   (v) in some communities HIV rates are as high as 40 per cent,
   (vi) since the beginning of the epidemic in the 1980s, more than 75 million people have been infected with HIV and nearly 36 million have died of AIDS-related illnesses,
   (vii) there are now outstanding antiviral treatments available to people living with HIV, and
   (viii) although a lot of work has been done and many medical advances have been made, there is no cure and no vaccine, so a lot of research and work still needs to be done before we see the end of HIV;
(c) acknowledges that:
   (i) in July 2014, Melbourne will host the 20th International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2014),
   (ii) the conference will bring together 14 000 delegates from around 200 countries, which will be the largest medical conference ever held in Australia, and
   (iii) the conference will be chaired by Nobel Laureate, Professor Francoise Barre-Sinoussi, and Professor Sharon Lewin; and
(d) calls on the Parliament to:
   (i) continue Australia's strong commitment to an enduring effective partnership between government, scientists and the community to meet the needs of people living with HIV,
   (ii) continue Australia's strong commitment to medical health and research; and
   (iii) foster and cultivate Australia's medical health and research community and researchers to ensure we stay at the forefront of all aspects of treatment, care and research in HIV.

Senator Edwards to move:

That the Veterans' Entitlements (Actuarial Certificate—Life Expectancy Income Stream Guidelines) Determination 2013, made under subsection 5JB(1C), paragraph 5JB(1A)(b) and subsection 5JB(5) of the Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986, be disallowed. [F2013L00671]

Senator Edwards to move:

That Veterans' Entitlements (Actuarial Certificate—Lifetime Income Stream Guidelines) Determination 2013, made under subsection 5JA(1B), paragraph 5JA(1)(b) and subsection 5JA(6) of the Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986, be disallowed. [F2013L00670]

Senator Madigan to move:

That the Senate—

(1) That so much of standing orders be suspended as would prevent this resolution having effect.
(2) That the Fair Trade (Australian Standards) Bill 2013 be restored to the Notice Paper and that consideration be resumed at the stage reached in the last session of the Parliament.
Senator Cash to move:
That the Senate:
(a) notes:
   (i) that 25 November is observed as White Ribbon Day,
   (ii) that White Ribbon Day aims to reduce and prevent violence against women and raise awareness of the issue in all Australian communities,
   (iii) that the White Ribbon organisation is the world's largest male-led movement to end men's violence against women, and
   (iv) the Coalition's commitment to increase funding to the White Ribbon campaign by $1 million over 4 years; and
(b) acknowledges:
   (i) that partner violence is the most common type of violence against women, affecting 30 per cent of women worldwide,
   (ii) that women are most at risk of violence in the home and from men they know, and young women are at greater risk of violence than older women,
   (iii) that, in the past year, between 5 and 10 per cent of Australian women experienced at least one incident of physical and/or sexual violence by a man, and
   (iv) the men and the members and senators that swear the White Ribbon Oath: 'I swear never to commit, excuse or remain silent about violence against women'.

Senator Rhiannon to move:
That the Senate—
(a) notes that:
   (i) political donations for the 2013 federal election made on or after 1 July 2013 will not be made public until 1 February 2015,
   (ii) political donations under $12,400 do not have to be disclosed by parties or candidates to the Australian Electoral Commission, and
   (iii) this higher disclosure threshold level means the public is not aware of the details of a large number of political donations received by political parties; and
(b) calls for:
   (i) a donation disclosure threshold of $1,000,
   (ii) a ban on overseas donations,
   (iii) a $50 cap on anonymous donations,
   (iv) donations to different branches of a political party to be accumulated and treated as donations to the same party in order to stop political parties minimising their disclosure obligations by donation splitting,
   (v) 6-monthly disclosure of donations and political expenditure, and
   (vi) online disclosure of donations over $1,000 in the 3 months prior to an election or from when the election is called.

Senator Xenophon to move:
(1) That so much of standing orders be suspended as would prevent this resolution having effect.
That the Poker Machine Harm Reduction ($1 Bets and Other Measures) Bill 2012 [2013] be restored to the Notice Paper and that consideration be resumed at the stage reached in the last session of the Parliament.

Senators Siewert, Senator Boyce, Senator Moore and Senator Fifield to move:

That the Senate—

(a) acknowledges that 3 December marks the 21st anniversary of the International Day of Persons with Disability;

(b) congratulates the following winners of the National Disability Awards;

(i) Ms Ann Procter (Duffy, Australian Capital Territory) and Mr John Moxon (Northmead, New South Wales), recipients of the Lesley Hall Award for Lifetime Achievement in Disability,

(ii) Mr Huy Nguyen (Victoria), recipient of the Emerging Leaders Award in Disability,

(iii) Western Desert Dialysis (Alice Springs, Northern Territory), recipient of the Excellence in Accessible Communities Award,

(iv) Penrith City Council (Penrith, New South Wales), recipient of the Excellence in Improving Social Participation Award,

(v) Mr Robert Pask (Bentleigh East, Victoria), recipient of the Excellence in Advocacy and Rights Promotion Award,

(vi) ABLE Employee Action Group and Westpac Group’s Diversity and Flexibility Team (National), recipient of the Excellence in Improving Employment Opportunities Award,

(vii) Hear for You (National), recipient of the Excellence in Improving Personal and Community Support Award,

(viii) Down Syndrome Victoria (Fitzroy, Victoria), recipient of the Excellence in Improving Education Outcomes Award,

(ix) Ms Susan Race (St Albans, Victoria), recipient of the Excellence in Improving Health and Wellbeing Outcomes Award,

(x) The Project, Network Ten (Victoria), recipient of the Yooralla Media Award of Distinction, and

(xi) Ms Lesley Hall, recipient of the Prime Minister’s Awards for Outstanding Achievement;

(c) joins with all Australians, including those with disability, in celebrating the many advances that have been made to improve the lives of those with disability and their families;

(d) acknowledges the important role that so many organisations and individuals play in supporting and advocating for people living with a disability; and

(e) acknowledges that much remains to be done to remove the barriers to employment, education and full community participation of people with disability.

BUSINESS

Consideration of Legislation

Senator FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate) (15:33): I move:

That the following general business orders of the day be considered on Thursday, 5 December 2013 under the temporary order relating to the consideration of private senators’ bills:

Poker Machine Harm Reduction ($1 Bets and Other Measures) Bill 2013 (subject to restoration to the Notice Paper).
Fair Trade (Australian Standards) Bill 2013 (subject to restoration to the Notice Paper).
Question agreed to.

NOTICES
Postponement

The following items of business were postponed:

Business of the Senate notices of motion nos 3 and 4 standing in the name of the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate (Senator Wong) for today, proposing references to the Education and Employment References Committee, postponed till 3 December 2013.

General business notice of motion no. 20 standing in the name of the Leader of the Australian Greens (Senator Milne) for today, proposing a reference to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, postponed till 3 December 2013.

General business notice of motion no. 22 standing in the name of Senator Whish-Wilson for today, proposing an order for the production by the Minister representing the Minister for Trade and Investment, postponed till 3 December 2013.

General business notice of motion no. 28 standing in the name of Senator Hanson-Young for 3 December 2013, proposing the introduction of the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2013, postponed till 5 December 2013.

Withdrawal

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (15:35): I withdraw business of the Senate notice of motion No. 2 standing in my name for today.

MOTIONS

Arctic 30

Senator MILNE (Tasmania—Leader of the Australian Greens) (15:35): I seek leave to amend general business notice of motion No. 21 standing in my name relating to the Arctic 30.

Leave granted.

Senator MILNE: I move the motion as amended and circulated in the chamber:

That the Senate—

(a) supports the right to free assembly and peaceful protest;
(b) notes:
    (i) with deep concern Russia's disproportionate charges of hooliganism against two journalists and 28 crew of the Greenpeace vessel Arctic Sunrise (the Arctic 30) who were peacefully protesting against oil drilling in the Pechora Sea, and
    (ii) the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea's binding ruling which orders the release of the Arctic 30 following payment of a bank guarantee by the Government of the Netherlands to allow them to leave the territory and maritime areas under the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation; and
(c) urges the Prime Minister (Mr Abbott) and Minister for Foreign Affairs (Ms Bishop) to be in continuous, direct contact with the Russian Government to urge it to abide by the tribunal's ruling and help ensure that Australian citizen Colin Russell and the other 29 individuals no longer face these disproportionate charges and are permitted to return to their homes.

Senator FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate) (15:36): by leave—The government will be opposing this motion. The Australian government has
provided comprehensive assistance to Mr Russell since the *Arctic Sunrise* and its crew were detained by Russian authorities in the Barents Sea on 19 September. The government has made a range of official representations aimed at ensuring he is extended due legal process by Russian authorities, and by registering our concerns to have his case resolved expeditiously. Ms Julie Bishop wrote to her Russian counterpart on 14 November and raised Mr Russell’s case twice with the Russian deputy foreign minister at the APEC forum ministers meeting in Bali, in October.

The Australian ambassador to Russia raised the case with a senior Russian foreign ministry official, in Moscow, on 20 November. Mr Robb has also raised the matter. I should reiterate that the Australian government has no standing in the Russian legal proceedings and has no capacity to intervene in them, but obviously the government does do all that it can to support citizens— *(Time expired)*

**East West Link project**

*Senator DI NATALE* (Victoria) (15:37): I move:

That there be laid on the table by noon on Wednesday, 11 December 2013, by Infrastructure Australia or the Infrastructure Coordinator, all documents in relation to the East West Link project provided to Infrastructure Australia by the Victorian Government, in particular, but not restricted to, the full business case.

Question agreed to.

**COMMITTEES**

**Committee of Privileges**

**Appointment**

*Senator MILNE* (Tasmania—Leader of the Australian Greens) (15:38): I move:

That standing order 18 establishing the Committee of Privileges be amended as follows with immediate effect:

(a) in paragraph (1), omit "7", substitute "8"; and

(b) omit paragraph (3), substitute:

(3) The committee shall consist of 8 senators, 4 nominated by the Leader of the Government in the Senate, 3 nominated by the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and 1 nominated by a minority party and independent senators.

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

The Senate divided. [15:43]

(The President—Senator Hogg)

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**AYES**

Bilyk, CL  
Carr, KJ  
Conroy, SM

Cameron, DN  
Collins, JMA  
Dastyari, s
Senator Wong did not vote, to compensate for the vacancy caused by the resignation of Senator Joyce.

Question agreed to

MATTERS OF URGENCY

Education Funding

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (15:46): The President has received the following letter from Senator Moore:

Pursuant to standing order 75, I give notice that today I propose to move:
That, in the opinion of the Senate, the following is a matter of urgency:

CHAMBER
Given the pre-election promises made by the Coalition to support the Better Schools Program and its public statements committing to a "unity ticket" on the Better Schools Program, the need for the Government to honour its pre-election promises to avoid the dire consequences for equity, improvement of achievement and opportunity in Australia if the Government does not keep those promises.

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 KIM CARR (Victoria) (15:46): At the request of Senator Moore, I move:

That, in the opinion of the Senate, the following is a matter of urgency:

Given the pre-election promises made by the Coalition to support the Better Schools Program and its public statements committing to a "unity ticket" on the Better Schools Program, the need for the Government to honour its pre-election promises to avoid the dire consequences for equity, improvement of achievement and opportunity in Australia if the Government does not keep those promises.

The question is that the Senate take note of the actions of the government in regard to schools funding, and I think the Senate should be aware of just how deep the hypocrisy runs within this government concerning school funding. Frankly, it is breathtaking. Today we have seen the third policy announced by this government inside a week. The double backflip we have seen in the last two days is nothing short of extraordinary. The Prime Minister has backtracked, displaying extraordinary levels of duplicity. The deviousness which the government has presented is amazing. In doing so, what the government has done is break yet another election promise, because on 5 September the government said there would be no cuts to health, education or pensions.

What we hear announced today is that the government says it will come up with 'perfectly sensible' savings—'perfectly sensible' is the new code word for a broken promise—of an extra $1.2 billion to fund the school funding commitments that have been made to Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. We ask the simple question: where are these so-called sensible savings going to come from? They are going to come from the education budget, breaking a promise that the Prime Minister said they would not break.

We know, of course, that the government has moved away from Labor's Better Schools plan, which would have delivered an extra $9.4 billion. That is the level of commitment the government had to match if it is to maintain its election promise: $9.4 billion over six years. This is funding that is designed to improve the outcomes for students and to ensure that money goes to those students who most need it, because the fact is
that in this country the levels of inequality are truly extraordinary. We know that 80 per cent of students from working-class backgrounds go to government schools, that 85 per cent of Indigenous students go to government schools and that 78 per cent of students with a disability go to government schools. But who is it that this government is targeting for its funding redistribution and reprioritisation? Government schools.

What authority do I have for saying that? I have the education minister in New South Wales, a Liberal minister, saying that is the intent of the government's policy position. We have the new minister saying that they want to return to the SES model. I know it is dressed up in so many different ways and under so many different guises, but he essentially says a good starting point is the Howard government policies. He also says that equity is not an issue in schools in this country. That is an incredible proposition to advance given that we have such high levels of inequality in this country. It is incredible that he wants to rely on the completely dysfunctional and discredited funding model that was presented under the Howard government, which saw the wealthiest private schools in this country increase their funding by between 50 and 90 per cent; which saw 1,075 schools maintain their funding despite the fact that their circumstances had fundamentally changed, because that was a commitment made by Mr Howard early in the piece; and which saw 60 per cent of schools in the Catholic education system outside the funding model.

So what we have is a model that was accepted by conservative governments in Victoria and in New South Wales, supported by Labor governments in South Australia and in Tasmania—a majority of school students covered by the system—but of course rejected by the governments in Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland for blatantly political reasons. They were told—and they made these public comments—they would get a better deal under Mr Abbott. The situation in Western Australia is that the Labor government offered $920 million. So what is the better deal that Mr Abbott is offering, given that the total amount that he is suggesting today is $1.2 billion across Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia? How can it possibly be that there is a better deal? Well, there is not. What we find is that the government of Western Australia has been duped as well. Why shouldn't they be? Everyone else in the country has been.

We have a circumstance now where this government totally lacks credibility and authority when it comes to schools funding. In fact, it is outright treachery that they should go to an election trying to neutralise their political position, because they knew that the Labor Party's position was miles ahead and they wanted to ensure that their whole political position in terms of the election was neutralised while they made commitments such as that every single school in Australia would receive, dollar-for-dollar, the same federal funding over the next four years, whether there was a Liberal or a Labor government after 7 September. That is a commitment that has been repudiated and not reinstated by today's announcements. In fact, what we see is the Victorian Premier, for instance, saying, 'We will fight tooth and nail to have the deal delivered in full. We will fight for the agreement that will be implemented and signed with the legitimate government of the day,' namely the Labor government. The Victorian education minister made clear, along with Victorian schools and the schools
community: 'We expect the Commonwealth to honour this funding which was agreed on 4 August.' Why should they feel it necessary to say that? Because the Commonwealth government has repudiated those agreements. We see similar statements being made in New South Wales. The Premier of New South Wales feels it is necessary to say to the new Prime Minister, 'Start acting as a government. Stop pretending you're still in opposition. Start actually running the country on the basis of the needs of all the people in this country. Stop pretending that you can play these partisan political games with the welfare of students of this country. '

What we know now is this: before the election the Liberal Party attack school funding as a political issue that has to be neutralised. Of course, their real position is exposed after the election. When the minister puts his foot in it repeatedly, the Prime Minister has to try and sort it out, but in so doing he makes further breaches of promise and provides no way near the commitment that he made before the election. On 3 August he said:

As far as school funding is concerned, Kevin Rudd and I are on a unity ticket. There is the nonsense that it is just about the money. Of course it is not just about the money; it is how it is distributed; it is about who gets what, when and why. These are the fundamental principles of politics: who gets what, when and why. This government is saying that the people in government schools ought to get less. This government is saying that the people of Western Australia should get less than they were offered.

According to the Leader of the Government in the Senate today, there is no need for people to be worse off. What a firm commitment! What rock-solid guarantee is there? We know that this government treats everything as a political exercise. There is no commitment to the fundamental principles of equity. There is no commitment to the fundamental principles of ensuring prosperity for all the people of this country. It is about developing the partisan politics that we have seen in the past—the sectarian politics of the past. A government that did no work in opposition is now relying upon the failed and discredited policies of the Howard government. It is a government that has no commitment to the future of Australia but is all about trying to get past the next opinion poll, and on the basis of what? On the basis of some shoddy arrangements it made prior to the election. (Time expired)

Senator Ryan (Victoria) (15:57): I am a man of sympathy, and that performance was just embarrassing for Senator Carr. With his hyperbole, his series of complaints, his confected outrage, Senator Carr is attempting to hide the fact that he has no pull within his own party. I have sat in here and, whilst Senator Carr was industry minister, watched the Labor Party rip hundreds of millions of dollars out of Senator Carr's beloved car plants. We sat here during Senator Carr's months in the wilderness between leadership challenges and we saw hundreds of millions of dollars stripped out of higher education only months after it was promised to be the centre of this great new world order to allegedly fund Labor's so-called Better Schools plan. Then, in the dying moments of the election campaign, after the last parliament had been dissolved, we saw Labor's true form being exposed by the sunlight of the election. Labor's true form saw them strip $1.2 billion out of education in this country, just as they did to higher education less than six months earlier. Let not their confected outrage hide the fact that the current Leader of the Opposition, Bill Shorten, the member for Maribyrnong, the then minister for education, was party to stripping $1.2 billion out of school education in this country. He was party, as were senators on that side, to saying to students in Western
Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland, 'You will not be funded on the basis of your need. You will not be funded, as we think our more preferred jurisdictions are going to be funded.' The Leader of the Opposition was party to the greatest attempt at a swiftie in education this parliament has seen, and it was only due to the Charter of Budget Honesty that that attempt was exposed to the sunlight of the election campaign. We will not let the Labor Party run away from its past. It is a past of funding cuts to education, even in this calendar year, that have never been undertaken by this parliament before, and they happened on the Labor Party's watch. They happened when the Labor Party was in office with the support of their Green cousins in the other place. So let us not hear their confected outrage, because under the Labor Party there was no national funding model.

The first basis of a fair funding model is the fact that it is national. The first basis of fairness should be that a student in Victoria or in the Northern Territory, having their needs taken into account, is not treated differently purely because of the jurisdiction they live in or the lines on a map that the centralists opposite so often claim to be concerned about. Yet, under the Labor Party, that is exactly what happened. They ripped $1.2 billion out and they treated students differently. That is not a record that they will be proud of and it is not a record that all the confected outrage and hyperbole is going to hide from the Australian people. What is the truth? The shadow Treasurer and member for McMahon belled the cat last week when he admitted that $1.2 billion had been taken out, a fact that the former Minister for Education did everything he could to avoid admitting publicly in his confected outrage on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. I was impressed by how helpful the member for McMahon was being to the Leader of the Opposition in that case, making sure that he outlined the facts of his short period of administration in that portfolio!

What we see today from the Labor Party is a continuation of their complete untrustworthiness in office. I noticed that, in moving to take note of answers today, Senator Carr asked why other states did not sign up. There was a reason some states did not sign up. It was that they knew they could not trust this mob. If you were in the higher education sector in February, you had budgeted for future years, and then, come March or April, Labor ripped the guts out of funding for higher education programs. If you keep doing the same thing over and over again—if you keep trusting the Labor Party and they keep breaking their promises—the more fool you. So the fact that some jurisdictions did not sign up, the fact that some jurisdictions knew that the Labor Party was not to be trusted, is not a condemnation of them; it is a condemnation of the Labor Party.

What we know is that only two states and one territory had fully signed up to this program. The shadow Treasurer, the member for McMahon, outlined that as well. The Labor opposition seeks to divert attention from this fact because the other claimed signatories had not signed up to detailed funding agreements. I attended my first ministerial council meeting of Commonwealth, state and territory education ministers with the Minister for Education, Mr Pyne. I would say: do not believe everything you read in the press. What has happened today is that the coalition government has fulfilled and delivered on its promise of ensuring that the funding that was going to be made available for Australian schools, government and non-government, is being delivered to Australian families and students and to the people that administer the schools: the states, the territories and the non-government sector through various organisations.
Labor attempt to try and avoid discussion of the $1.2 billion they stripped out by referring to years 5 and 6 of these so-called agreements—they were never committed to by the former opposition. Let me explain why. Since 1974, when I was but the age of one, every funding agreement has been in a four-year cycle. They have always been quadrennial funding agreements. Because the Labor Party was not willing or could not bring the Gonski package to any meaningful conclusion in years of negotiation—it could not get the states and territories and non-government sector to sign up to detailed funding plans—the Labor Party attempted to divert attention from this by promising huge sums of money in the out years.

Again, let us go back to the higher education sector, which has a similar portfolio, similar department—although it was hard to keep up under Labor’s changes of minister and Prime Minister. The promises they made a year ago were ripped out of the system in under 12 months. So why on earth would anyone trust the Labor Party to make, for the first time ever, more than a four-year funding agreement? Let us put this in context. They were trying to negotiate funding agreements that were three elections away, if we assume a three-year election cycle. So it was going to be beyond the 2013 election, beyond the 2016 election and the last year was beyond the 2019 election. You cannot trust that mob for one election. Why on earth would you trust them for three?

The coalition always made clear we are going to stand with the historic arrangements for funding, which have been in four-year cycles, to give certainty to schools. The certainty the Prime Minister and the minister have delivered today is the certainty we promised before the election. Nothing those opposite say can be trusted in this space. While they were printing up stickers to distribute to and mislead voters in September, the Pre-election Economic and Fiscal Outlook belled the cat and outlined how they actually cut funding to education—money that we have put back today with this announcement. So the only party in this Senate that has cut funding to schools is the Labor Party. It is those opposite. They have the gall to bring this motion here today and have Senator Carr’s confected outrage about our announcement that our funding ensures that no school needs to be worse off. Labor will try and play word games in order to avoid accountability for their own poor performance.

Labor has also complained about some other aspects of our agenda. We do want to remove the command-and-control aspects of the Australian Education Act. We do not think that we in this place or bureaucrats in this city, or indeed the regional city centres of the Department of Education, have a place in telling people how to run schools. Labor is trying to hide behind that veil in order to avoid the fact that—we know and Australian families know—it does not like parental control; it does not like local autonomy. It does not trust communities and parents to run its own schools. Senator Carr earlier, when he complained about aspects of the SES formula, betrayed what the real agenda has always been for the Labor Party.

In 1964 the Menzies government started funding science labs. It started guaranteeing parents and families in Australia choice in education for their children. It is a core role of the Commonwealth parliament to guarantee that choice. It is something that those opposite have not been comfortable with. To hear complaints about how much the Catholic school system is getting takes me back to the days of Joan Kirner, takes me back to the days of Gough Whitlam—but that is Labor’s agenda. It is about envy. It is about not liking choice. Today the Commonwealth government, Prime Minister Abbott and Minister Pyne, have guaranteed that
the money that was promised to Australian students and families is going to be delivered, despite Labor's best attempts to take it off them.

Senator WRIGHT (South Australia) (16:07): I rise to support this motion because the state of school funding in Australia is in crisis. This is blindingly apparent to voters right across the political spectrum. It is not only a matter now of basic decency, of basic social justice that in one of the wealthiest nations in the world every single child, no matter where they live, should have the opportunity of having high-quality education, as has been our proud tradition since the century before last. This is also about investing in Australia's future and investing in Australia's human capital, because we cannot afford to squander the human potential that lies within those kids that at the moment are not getting access to a decent education because of their background.

Despite all the talking and even all of the activity by the Minister for Education—and there has been some frenzied activity in the last few weeks—he has not even acknowledged this crisis, let alone committed to the solution to the crisis, which has been so clearly identified by an expert panel, the Gonski review and many commentators across Australia. We need needs-based funding reform to begin to resolve the crisis. Just last week, again, we had Minister Pyne saying:

I don't believe there is an equity problem in Australia.

Despite all the evidence, despite what the commentators, almost with one voice are saying, he does not believe it. Unfortunately, it is very clear that neither does Prime Minister Abbott. The coalition itself does not believe it. Yet I know there must be members of the coalition government who absolutely know that there is a crisis in the way we are doing business in school funding in Australia today.

I ask myself: what about those politicians? What about those National Party politicians who live in country areas? The evidence is really clear that small schools and remote schools are not getting their fair share; they are not getting the access to high-quality education that kids in other, wealthier, more privileged areas of Australia are getting. How do those politicians talk to their constituents about that? How do they reconcile that inequality?

The Minister for Education, in lurching from position to reworded, nuanced, tweaked and massaged position on this issue, has been selling the furphy that it is not a dollar figure which will fix declining educational performance; it is things like teacher quality. Of course teachers matter. Of course teacher quality matters. But that is not to suggest that we do not have a fine workforce in Australia. There may be some changes that can be made in terms of the training, assistance and support that teachers come out with. Many teachers are extremely idealistic and end up leaving the profession far too soon because they are not supported. They are faced with conditions like casualisation, lack of support and lack of mentoring. So there are certainly some things we can do there.

Of course the curriculum matters, because we need to provide modern Australian kids of this century with a rich, diverse curriculum that stimulates thinking and creativity. As any coalition member of parliament knows, of course money matters too, especially in education. It is what pays for teachers. It is what pays for infrastructure. It is what pays for the buildings that the kids sit in when they learn. It is what pays for materials. It is what pays for technology. Education is about human relationships, if it is not about anything else. Human relationships are labour intensive and they are costly. Of course it matters.
When a school cannot afford enough paper for the year and parents are asked to put their hands in their pockets to bail out the school—parents without a lot of disposable income—let alone paying for new textbooks, of course money matters. Money matters when kids huddle under blankets because the school heating system has failed. How can they learn when they are cold? Of course money matters.

Of course money matters when computers stop working, as was the case at a school I visited recently, and for a period of time they are offline; they cannot do the work because they have not got the means to get those computers fixed quickly. When struggling, disadvantaged kids who need the most attention cannot get that because the school cannot afford more teachers or more student support officers, then, before we even have the debate on the quality of the teachers, we know of course that money matters. Let us ask ourselves seriously: if money did not matter, if money is not the answer to these things or part of the answer, why is it that some of the wealthiest schools in Australia are fighting so hard to make sure they will not lose a single dollar under a transformed model?

Let us look at the numbers. Yes, the numbers are there to demonstrate that we have spent more overall on school funding over the last decade. Yes, educational standards have declined, and there is plenty of empirical research to show this. We know that our lowest-performing students in Australia are as many as eight years behind our highest-performing students, and that is absolutely shameful. But in fact it is not a paradox that we have spent more on education and we have less, because it is where we have spent that money and how we have spent that money that matters. We have spent more inequitably and we have, therefore, not surprisingly, ended up with more inequitable outcomes.

Australia is the third lowest funder of public education in the OECD. The figures also show that under the Gonski reforms predecessor—including the infamous SES funding model, to which Minister Pyne harks back with some nostalgia; even last week he refused to rule out that we would return to that system—and the infamous SES funding model, to which Minister Pyne harks back with some nostalgia; even last week he refused to rule out that we would return to that system—wealthy private schools in Australia received millions and millions more dollars in funding each year. The most affluent private schools received the biggest boost in funding in the 10 years the Howard government administered the SES model.

The Department of Education in New South Wales figures show that funding for the wealthiest private primary schools in New South Wales—already wealthy—grew by more than 80 per cent between 2000 and 2010, and funding for elite private high schools rose by 50 per cent. By contrast, funding for the most disadvantaged high schools that are struggling to educate the most disadvantaged kids in Australia rose by a measly 12 per cent and for primary schools by only 25 per cent.

The reforms set out in the Australian Education Act, while far from being a perfect implementation of the Gonski review—and we discussed that a lot before we ended up agreeing to pass the bill—went a long way towards establishing a sustainable, needs based funding model which would correct the years of inequity and get us back on the path to universal high-quality education. Minister Pyne, in his role as shadow education minister in the election campaign, committed to maintaining the reformed school funding model from 1 January 2014 for four years with the same funding envelope. It was pretty unequivocal, and the Australian public understood that that was what he was signing up to. Now he is the minister he has flagged walking away from this commitment to needs based funding. He has never acknowledged there is an equity problem in Australia's education system. Failing to
provide funding for the schools that most need it, where the most disadvantaged kids are, is walking away from that needs based model.

It is not just that the minister needs to uphold his pre-election commitment to needs based funding; he must also commit to overall dollar figures for school funding. He also needs to sign up to and care about this issue. He needs to acknowledge the evidence that so many other people in Australia have acknowledged for so long—that there is a genuine inequality in our schooling system and it is not serving our nation well. It compounds disadvantage, it squanders human potential and it has the capacity to create greater gulfs, differences and social dislocation in our country. It is a cost to society in terms of lost productivity alone, which is too great to pay.

The Australian Greens are calling on the government to match what the previous government committed to, because we have to ensure that we invest in our students and all students in Australia so that no child's performance at school is dependent on wealth, power, income or possessions. We have to have a system in Australia so that every single kid can achieve their potential no matter where they live and whatever their background.

**Senator STEPHENS** (New South Wales) (16:17): I too rise to contribute to this urgency debate. The motion that we have before us is to call on the government to ensure that it avoids the dire consequences for equity, improvement, achievement and opportunity in Australia of not keeping its promise to support the Better Schools program.

We have all witnessed today what was an extraordinary backflip by the Prime Minister and the Minister for Education. However, we know what this really was: this was a political stunt that has come about as a result of the extraordinary backlash in response to Minister Pyne's announcement last week. The anger and distress of education ministers last week after that conference was palpable, and it did not take very long for parent groups, educators and Australians generally to go to the issue—that is, that this minister has never, ever, ever been committed to the reforms that were proposed by the Gonski review, led by someone who had a genuine interest in improving our education system. It was supported by the hundreds of people who made submissions, trying to improve our education system by bringing it into the 21st century and focusing on the learning needs of our students rather than the funding and infrastructure needs of government and the commitments of government.

When we think about the issues in those terms, what more could Mr Pyne and Mr Abbott have done but to today before question time scramble the egg once again, do another backflip, saying, 'Yes, we've now agreed. We've signed up. It's all going to be fine'? The devil is always in the detail, isn't it? In the statement the Prime Minister said they had identified $1.2 billion in cuts, which will fund this agreement that they have now entered into with the states and territories that had not signed up, which will be reviewed sometime in the future.

We heard in question time that there will be no strings attached, so what we did not hear was that there was going to be a commitment from our state and territory governments not to withdraw funding. We have seen that has already happened, and so these three states and territories that have now signed up are going to have carte blanche to continue their own cuts in their state education budgets. That is hardly a support of the status quo.

We have no idea of the details. When is an agreement an agreement? Mr Pyne last Friday said that those states and territories that did not have a signed intergovernmental agreement
did not have an agreement, but today we have an agreement in principle by those three authorities cobbled together and stitched up just in time for question time. So what is the actual content of that agreement? What are the in-principle facts? What is the no-disadvantage test that was alluded to in that statement? We are yet to see what that is all about.

I was quite taken with Senator Wright's contribution, because she really got to the nub of the issue of the problem that we have had with the SES funding model which Minister Pyne on Friday was quite wedded to—he has perhaps been a product of that system more generally and is most familiar with it—but it is not the view of his colleagues. In particular, I want to congratulate the Minister for Education in New South Wales, Adrian Piccoli, who really got to the nub of the issue when he said: 'We've got to invest in our children's education. We've got to invest in our education system. We've got to invest in bringing on new teachers. We have a retirement age cohort of teachers. We're going to be left with a significant gap, and the Gonski reforms, which were systemic reforms, are the ones that are going to deliver the issue.' I think we all want a guarantee that, regardless of this dodgy deal that was announced before question time, there will be equity, access and affordability in our education system in the future.

Senator McKENZIE (Victoria—Nationals Whip in the Senate) (16:22): I too rise to speak on the urgency motion before us. It is hard to stand here listening to the rhetoric of those opposite as they outline the need to stick to promises of needs based funding models, of funding models with integrity, of ensuring that signatures are on the bottom line of any contracts—applying the Catherine King model, if you like, of contractual arrangements that was so commonplace in the past government's approach to their dealings with states and local governments: promises made, funding promised but not allocated, signatures not attained, and then we are in the mess that we were left with.

I am a great believer in the strength of education and, indeed, public education as the birthright of every single Australian. The coalition recognises the need to reform the education system. We have 10,000 schools and millions of students—over a million located outside of capital cities, I might say, and 660,000 of those are in state schools—so getting it right is important to those of us who are interested in the future. But there is one key factor in this debate that we do need to consider, and I would just like to quote Ken Boston, who was a member of the Gonski review panel. He said:

Public expenditure on education has never been higher. It has been wasted because it has not been distributed strategically according to need and has not been spent on the things that really matter.

I think we could go through a litany of funding proposals in education by the former government which show the unstrategic allocation of funds in terms of educational outcomes—maybe in political outcomes it was very strategic to allocate their school funding where they chose to. But the reality is that there is one bucket of money and we need to make sure it is spent in a way that has educational outcomes. I think we are committed to doing that.

One of the issues that the opposition fails to recognise time and time again—and the Greens completely reject the notion that we live in a federation—is that the states are responsible for education funding. It is not the Commonwealth's role to ensure that state governments, no matter which colour they are, remain unaccountable for how their state school systems are functioning. When we looked at the critique from the states when we were doing the Senate inquiry into the Australian Education Bill, there was a significant amount of
concern from states around the lack of autonomy that they would experience under the model as it was proposed. That is something that, in government, we on this side understand. We understand that we live in a federation and that we need to work collaboratively with our state governments, no matter who they are, to ensure that every child in our nation receives an education, which is their birthright.

I just want to attack one of the assumptions that have so often been made in this debate and that really gets to the heart of the matter, and that is that more money equals better education. That is simply not the case. The Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee headed to China last year to look at a range of success measures that the Chinese education system has had internationally and to work out what was done. I can tell you: the student resource standard that they were getting per student in Chengdu, Shanghai or Beijing was a lot lower per student than our students get—

Senator Kim Carr: We want Chinese standards now? I am pleased to hear it!

Senator McKENZIE: No, Senator Carr. More money does not equal better educational outcomes, and we know that.

Senator Kim Carr: Tell them about Geelong Grammar!

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Stephens): Order, Senator Carr!

Senator McKENZIE: I am so glad you have re-entered the chamber, Senator Carr, so I just want to reiterate this about the argument you are making. Why wouldn't Premier Barnett sign up when you were offering $920 million more than the government is? The reality is that it was because he was not prepared to trade away his state's sovereignty. He was not prepared to accept the fact that—

Senator Kim Carr interjecting—

Senator McKENZIE: the former government, despite offering more money, was not actually going to deliver better educational outcomes to WA's students. Additionally, one of the issues that created the whole malaise that we find ourselves in is that strategic appropriation of money towards educational funding occurred when promises were made that the system would be reformed—even though the chair, David Gonski, was walking away from the mess that that model became under its politicisation by the former government, racing towards an election that they were never going to win—and that nobody would lose. No state would lose, no school would lose and no student would lose. It was an absolute fallacy. If you are going to construct a model based on need, then those with the greater need should get the greater money—hence, somebody has to lose. By making that promise, we set up a public discourse in which we saw state pitted against state, school system pitted against school system and student pitted against student. One thing that has come out of this debate is that we do absolutely need greater transparency in understanding what went wrong, what was actually agreed to and where we need to go from here. I think Dr Ben Jensen articulates that beautifully in some comments around how we can ensure that the funding model we come up with is one that actually delivers on what we all want.

In terms of the coalition's promises, we do want a system where we will put more money—$230 million—back in for states in 2014. I have been fascinated by the public debate on this. I was listening to, I think, Radio National a couple of days ago and there were principals talking on, I think, the Breakfast show, complaining about the uncertainty of funding for 2015
and what a travesty this was going to be. I have sat in Senate inquiries about this, when principal after principal, from sector after sector, had to start employing their new teachers within 2½ terms and had no idea what their funding envelope was going to be. This was under the previous government. And here we are, over 18 months away from a similar point, and principals are out complaining, concerned about the uncertainty under the government’s proposal, when there was no such noise from the AEU and from principals associations under the previous iteration.

We want a needs based model, we want it to be truly national and we want it to be fair. As a National Party senator I understand that geography does matter. Lines on a map, Senator Carr, do matter, and under your government our youth suffered too much— (Time expired)

Senator LINES (Western Australia) (16:30): I rise to support Senator Moore’s urgency motion relating to the Better Schools program. I want to start by putting some facts into the Hansard and making some opening statements. If you have listened to the government today and over the last week, as I have, you will know there have been an incredible number of backflips. There really have. This government is completely out of control, and Minister Pyne, the Minister for Education, has shown himself to be completely unfit for the job before him. He has no idea what he is doing.

It is as if Gonski has gone and has been forgotten. According to the government, it is as if Gonski never, ever existed, because now the government is saying it has to go out and develop a fair and equitable model, when that is what Gonski did. Let us just remind ourselves for a few minutes of what Gonski actually did. Gonski undertook the most comprehensive review of education that our country has seen over the last 40 years, and the review was based on ensuring real equity of opportunity for all our children. That was at the core of the review. It received overwhelming support from principals, teachers and parents. If you listened to the government today, you would think that somehow Labor is on its own in this debate. Labor is not on its own. It has the support, overwhelmingly, of Australian parents, of Australian teachers, of Australian principals. It has support in the Catholic and the independent sectors and it has support in the public schools sector. So let us not kid ourselves that the Labor opposition is some kind of ogre. We are on the side of right here and we are with the majority of Australians in supporting a fair and equitable public and private school system in this country, one that we currently do not have.

Gonski found that we were investing far too little in our schools—I am sorry, Government; money does matter—that too many students are missing out and that the current system is not efficient. I think we agree on that. It is certainly not fair and it is not effective. Why isn’t it effective? Gonski confirmed for us that there are growing gaps in student achievement, that Australia’s overall performance has fallen in the last 10 years, that postcodes—yes, lines on maps do matter—are defining economic outcomes and that students in disadvantaged areas are up to three years behind students who live in wealthy areas. One in seven 15-year-old students does not have basic reading skills. Yet we hear from Minister Pyne that somehow, between now and the next school year, they have to go out and, in secret, over a couple of months, develop a new funding system—when we have got a comprehensive, well-supported review. It is called Gonski and it has certainly not gone. It has not gone from Labor senators and members of parliament, it has not gone from school principals and it has not gone from teachers and parents. It still has overwhelming support.
Under Labor’s reforms following the Gonski expert panel’s review, we agreed that we needed $14.65 billion in our schools over six years, with a Commonwealth contribution of $9.4 billion. Let us be clear about what Labor’s model would do. We have heard a lot today about Western Australia—and I would like to correct the ACT senator; it is a shame he is not in the chamber—but as a Western Australian senator I can tell you what is going on in Western Australia. Labor’s model would put an end to education budget cuts by requiring states to grow their funding alongside that of the Commonwealth, not allowing—as we have seen in Western Australia—disgraceful cuts to education but actually requiring and demanding that states grow their budgets. That is the reason Colin Barnett did not want to sign up to Gonski: nudge, nudge, wink, wink; he took a bet; he thought maybe his mates Mr Abbott and Mr Pyne would get into government and meanwhile he could slash and burn the education budget in Western Australia, which he has done, and then, regardless of any inaction of his he would get the money anyway. That is exactly what is happening. The Abbott and Pyne government is intending to reward bad behaviour. You are rewarding a Western Australia Premier who has ripped significant funds out of schools.

Before we got to where we are now, there was so much public pressure on the coalition—not just from Labor but from parents, school principals and teachers across the nation—that Mr Pyne and Mr Abbott were at pains to assure the voting public that we had a unity ticket. I bet Tony Abbott now rues the day that those words came out of his mouth, but that is what he said at a press conference on 4 August:

... an absolute unity ticket when it comes to school funding.

On 2 August—he was getting a bit desperate by then—he had said:

There is no difference between Kevin Rudd and myself when it comes to school funding.

Christopher Pyne said on 29 August, ‘You will get exactly the same amount of funding for your school whether you vote Liberal or Labor.’ What a dishonest statement that was. Unfortunately Australian voters, who want to trust their politicians, took Mr Pyne on faith. Mr Abbott at a press conference on 2 August guaranteed that no school would be worse off. But there must have been some small print there somewhere because Colin Barnett, the Premier of Western Australia, is on the public record as saying, ‘Actually, in WA some schools will be worse off.’ So perhaps the caveat around that was that in terms of federal government funding Mr Abbott meant no school would be worse off, because we have got Mr Abbott being directly contradicted by the Premier in Western Australia, who said that some schools will be worse off.

So where do we get to? We have now seen three different models over the last week, as Senator Carr pointed out to us. Despite the Gonski panel finding that the old school funding model, the Howard model, was broken, that it was inefficient and an unfair model, that money was flowing to schools that were well resourced but not to students with high needs, just last week Minister Pyne announced—I did not need to read this quote or to have it researched because I heard it myself—that the government would scrap the Gonski model from 2015 and replace it with a new system that was similar to the one we have got now. Mr Pyne just last week did not see too much wrong with that model. I think someone had a word in his ear since then, but last week I heard him say that there is nothing much wrong with the current model. Mr Pyne went on to say that Labor’s model, supported overwhelmingly by parents, by public and private schools, by the Catholic system, by principals, was somehow unworkable.
So just last week Mr Pyne was liking this model but when Julie Bishop was education minister that model was criticised.

Perhaps the biggest criticism of this government comes from one of their own. I was at a meeting earlier this year with Adrian Piccoli where he proudly said to an audience of parents and students and others interested in public education, 'I've got three words to say: I got Gonski.' That is what he said in the Town Hall in Sydney in about March of this year. I heard him too decry this government as acting immorally. So carp at us all you like, but the critics of the government on what it is doing to the school system are not just Labor, it is the community, it is your own people, it is the education minister in New South Wales, Adrian Piccoli, who was proud to sign up to Gonski, who knew it would deliver well. He is your biggest critic.

**Senator RUSTON** (South Australia) (16:40): I too rise to speak on the urgency motion before us. Firstly, can I say how extraordinarily astounded I am that we are even debating such a motion. I am absolutely astounded that we are even having this discussion having listened to the debate that we have had in the house today, the debate that has been around over the last week in relation to this matter. During question time today I probably heard the Minister representing the Minister for Education, Senator Payne, and the Minister representing the Prime Minister, Senator Abetz, say on many, many occasions that the funding was not going to be cut for any schools in any state or territory of Australia. So can I repeat the words of the Prime Minister a minute ago when he said, 'We are committed to a fairer funding model which will ensure no school will be worse off because of anything that the Commonwealth does.' I am not quite sure what we are actually debating here today if we are ensuring that every school, every state and every territory will not be worse off by the actions of the Commonwealth. I may be wrong here, but it seems to me that we are debating the semantics, the details of nomenclature, instead of actually debating the issues of education.

What I think would be a really terrific outcome here would be if we took this time now and started to address the real issue that is before us, and that is the delivery of good education in Australia. I really believe there is a tremendously good outcome for education when we do have a country that, despite all the problems we have seen in our education system over the years, has a reasonably good education system, but nobody is even remotely suggesting that we cannot do a better job of it. What we have seen announced today is one of the most important steps towards that better education system, and that is that we have a national agreement. Let us not hide behind the fact that we came into this parliament with an agreement in relation to education that excluded three significant jurisdictions. Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory had not signed up to the national funding model, so it really does make a bit of a farce of calling something a national funding agreement when you have got three significant jurisdictions which have not agreed to it. Firstly, we have to acknowledge that we now have, albeit only in principle, agreement from the other three jurisdictions so that we actually have a national funding agreement.

That leads on to the obvious issue that has been of great debate over recent days, and that is the funding. We noticed in the chamber today that there was some suggestion that we had not increased the amount of money that is being applied to this model. But we have to realise that prior to the election $1.2 billion had been allocated to the jurisdictions that were excluded...
from the agreement that had been achieved by the previous government and that $1.2 billion had been taken out of the budget. By reinstating that $1.2 billion, by getting the three jurisdictions to commit to this national agreement, I think we have to acknowledge that there has been a significant and substantial progression and benefit to the development of a national education program for better schools in our country. I think the substantial change with this new national agreement is not just the equity but, more importantly, that, while the financial arrangements are going to remain largely the same, albeit with the addition of these extra jurisdictions, the control is proposed to be removed.

I am a great believer in the system of federation in this country, and we have to recognise the fact that we actually elect our state governments to do a job. I think we have to stop taking away from state governments and thinking that we here in Canberra know best about everything—we don't. If you have a look at the model that was previously proposed, it was basically setting up a command and control style operation in relation to education. It was going to give the federal education minister the ability to direct the states and territories as to how they fund or operate their schools. That is just completely and utterly against everything that we believe in, in the sense of people out there on the ground. The teachers in the schools, the principals in the schools, the parents of the children are all in far better positions to understand the nuances and the details of the things that are most important to their particular schools, their particular communities. For us to think that we know better sitting here in Canberra is an arrogance that we can well do without.

Labor's model was going to create a new bureaucracy that was going to collect even more data from schools, from states and from territories, so we would have ended up with a situation where we spent more of our time collecting data than we would actually worrying about what the children need and the teaching of our children. It also required that federal school inspectors enter schools and examine all the schools' records and monitor improvements against federal criteria. Where did Big Brother come into this whole exercise? He seems to have been alive and well.

In closing, what we are seeing here, with the changes that are being proposed by the coalition, is nothing more than a recognition that education is a very, very important issue. It is something that we place a huge amount of importance on; however, we do not believe that the people who sit here in Canberra are in a better position to dictate what happens. We believe it is appropriate that the state jurisdictions have the ability to deal at a grassroots level with the issues that affect individual schools and individual states. The idea of just adding money is certainly not the answer. I believe that the previous government failed to get a national agreement, and we have achieved that in less than three months. We have kept our promise to maintain school funding to this program. In fact, if you put back in the $1.2 billion that was slashed from the budget prior to the election, you could actually say that we have increased the amount of funding that is available for these programs for the states that had not signed up. We continue to recognise the important role that the states and individual schools should play in the management of their schools.

Question agreed to.
MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS
Aviation Safety Regulation Review


Senator STERLE (Western Australia) (16:48): by leave—I move:
That the Senate take note of the document.

Labor welcomes the minister's statement and the announcement of a further review into the regulation of aviation safety. It is a well-known fact that Australia has an aviation safety record that is the envy of the world, and we want to keep it that way. This is a result of the efforts of governments of all persuasions, which have never made aviation safety a political issue, and this is to be commended. I can say as chair of the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee for the last six years, and now as chair of the references committee, that when we do address aviation safety it is bipartisan, and done very closely in association with the Greens and the minor parties as well. I acknowledge that the new government did not make this matter a political football in opposition, and we do not intend to make it one either. It is important that this issue is one that continues to enjoy bipartisan support from all of us in this building. While the Labor government took the view that when it came to aviation safety we could never, ever be too cautious, this is not self-centred. As much of our time as senators is spent on aeroplanes, we actually do understand as much as anyone just how important aviation safety is to all Australians.

While I have the opportunity, I would like to commend the previous minister, Anthony Albanese, for his achievements while in government. The former minister is responsible for the significant reform we have seen in the aviation sector, particularly over the last six years under his leadership, including as the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport. No less than $1 billion is being invested in upgrades for air services. The former government opened new control towers in Adelaide and in regional centres such as the Sunshine Coast and Broome, where I had the privilege of joining the then minister for the opening of that wonderful piece of infrastructure in the Kimberley. The air traffic control process has also been streamlined to achieve greater cooperation between defence systems and the civil aviation sector. Minister Albanese was responsible for implementing the first comprehensive plan for aviation that encompassed all aspects of the aviation industry, including safety, workplace planning, regulatory issues and international agreements.

The former government also improved the governance of the Australian Transport Safety Bureau by having commissioners and by extending the ATSB's responsibilities to include rail and shipping so that it could provide a comprehensive approach to transport safety issues in Australia. Then Minister Albanese also set up a board of governance for the Civil Aviation Safety Authority, which was chaired by Dr Allan Hawke. I acknowledge that this particular initiative received the support of the parliament. This plan, which went through a formal green paper and white paper process, has set guidelines for the aviation industry for decades to come. All the recommendations from this process were put in place by the former government.
Labor hope that this review will continue the reforms that we implemented while in government. Labor are proud of our record on aviation safety while in government. We got the balance right between costs to the industry and the vital importance of safety and appropriate regulations. We welcome the news that Mr David Forsyth will chair the government’s review. Mr Forsyth was appointed Chair of Airservices Australia by the former government in 2008 and performed that role admirably until last year. Under his leadership, Airservices Australia invested deeply in training and critical safety infrastructure. I believe he will bring a great depth of experience to the government’s review. I commend his appointment.

I am also pleased to see that the government has appointed overseas experts to this review. This is entirely appropriate given the international nature of our aviation industry and it will be useful to have input from across the sector. I know Mr Albanese welcomed the news that Mr Forsyth will be joined in this new review by Mr Don Spruston from Canada and Mr Roger Whitefield from the UK. Both men are more than qualified to undertake their roles in this review. I also note that the ATSB recently invited the Canadian transport safety bureau to undertake an independent review of the ATSB’s investigation methodologies and processes. I look forward to seeing the results of the ATSB review when it is completed next year and I hope that this kind of international cooperation will continue in future.

Australia’s aviation industry has faced many challenges in recent years. In September there were more than five million passengers on domestic flights; Sydney’s domestic airport alone saw more than two million passengers travel through its terminals. In the international sector, 54 international airlines operated services to and from Australia during the month of September. International scheduled passenger traffic in September 2013 was 2.681 million, compared to 2.533 million in September 2012. That is an increase of no less than 5.8 per cent.

In relation to that great state on the other side of the country, we have seen an unprecedented increase in passenger travel through our domestic and international terminals in Perth. In September of this year the domestic terminal saw more than 740,000 inbound and outbound passengers—an increase of more than 20 per cent over the same period in 2009. The international terminal has seen an even greater increase, of more than 25 per cent, over that period, as we saw more than 335,000 inbound and outbound passengers. These figures show just how vital the aviation sector is to all aspects of the Australian economy. It also highlights the importance of ensuring we have a safe, secure and sustainable aviation sector.

Other challenges facing the industry include the proliferation of low-cost carriers, the huge growth of fly-in fly-out airline and helicopter services and the emergence of unmanned aerial systems. These are just some of the big challenges facing aviation safety; others include new aircraft types and the wider use of satellite based technologies. There is always a balance to be struck between safety regulation and cost. As Shadow Minister Albanese recently said, this balancing is best done by experts, not by politicians. Hear, hear! I could not agree more. The aviation sector injects no less than some $7 billion into the Australian economy each year. It is one of our vital industries. Australia has an enviable record of aviation safety, as I said earlier, but it is only through the diligent efforts of the industry and the regulators that this will continue. I firmly believe that we must keep our personnel appropriately trained and skilled and be prepared to provide proper resourcing well into the future.
As I have said before, I welcome the minister's acknowledgement today that Australia's safety performance is among the best in the world, that it is built on a strong regulatory system and that we should do everything needed to maintain that. The opposition will follow the review and carefully consider its recommendations when they come forth in May next year. We hope that the minister will keep us updated on the progress of the review during the coming months.

Senator IAN MACDONALD (Queensland) (16:57): It is a pleasure to support the minister's statement and to follow Senator Sterle, who I know has a very keen interest in transport matters—not just as a transport unionist but, I am aware, from his work as chairman of various committees over the years. He has a serious and abiding interest in transport generally and aviation safety in particular.

I am pleased to read in the minister's statement: Safety will always remain the Government's highest priority in aviation policy. That will never change.

I also highlight another paragraph of the minister's statement:
I acknowledge the concerns being expressed by some sectors of the aviation industry, in particular general and regional aviation, about the costs of regulatory compliance and how outcomes of the current aviation safety regulatory reform programme compare with regulatory approaches in other countries.

I am particularly delighted to see the minister concentrating on that. As someone from a rural and regional area of Australia I am very well aware of the cost of aviation generally in the more remote parts of the state.

One of the failures of the previous Labor government in dealing with these issues was the almost ridiculous situation of, for example, a security process at Horn Island airport, up in the Torres Strait. The cost of introducing that system was prohibitive, almost bankrupting the local council which runs the airport. The government did provide some assistance after a lot of urging by me and Mr Warren Entsch, the member for Leichhardt, but it was nowhere near enough.

Generally, as with many other aspects of life in Australia, what happens in the bush is out of sight, out of mind, and rules are made—perhaps quite rightly—for a majority. But very often in making rules for the majority those areas of our nation which are remote seem to miss out, so I am particularly delighted that the minister has this in mind when looking at the cost of regulatory compliance, particularly from a remote regional aviation point of view.

I might pause here to say that there have been a lot of good regional aviation operations over many years. I am particularly delighted at the relatively new service that operates now in Northern Australia, out of Darwin into very many other places in the north. Recently they introduced yet another service—a direct service from Darwin to Townsville—which from memory is operating three days a week, but it might even be more. So congratulations to Airnorth on the work they are doing to make travel in Northern Australia that much more affordable and possible.

This review arose out of a number of submissions that had been made to Mr Truss as the coalition's opposition spokesman. One of the things that was raised regularly with me was the general aviation industry's concern at the administration of aviation safety. I repeat: nothing should ever lessen our concentration on safety, and all of us in this room, being regular users of airlines, would probably have a more precise interest in that than most others. There was a
lot of concern about the administration of the Civil Aviation Safety Authority. I attended one meeting in Brisbane that had a lot of follow-up meetings subsequently, of a group who were very concerned at the way CASA was operating. The complaints to me were many and varied but some of those that were more prominent than others were about the approach of certain officials in the Civil Aviation Safety Authority to general aviation.

I was told often that one particular inspector would call upon a general aviation outfit, usually in the country, and give a certain set of directions. Some time later a different officer would come in and give a completely different interpretation of the rules and regulations. There was also a very great concern about Australia apparently following a European model, if I can say that broadly, of civil aviation regulation and safety when perhaps we would have been better off following the New Zealand experience and regulations of recent times. I must confess I did not fully understand all of the elements of what is obviously a detailed area of learning and expertise of operations but it was clear to me that the administration of the Civil Aviation Safety Authority did need some looking at.

I am not saying for a moment that everything complained of to me was accurate. I am not saying that the director and his staff were not good, professional people. All I am saying is that there were sufficient concerns raised with me by many, many constituents that did require the government to look seriously at the administration of safety in our country. Unfortunately, the previous government did not bite the bullet as far as this was concerned but I am pleased to see that Mr Truss, the current minister, has implemented this very wide-ranging aviation safety regulation review that can only work to the benefit of all Australians who use the airways to move around. As a result of this review, and hopefully further action by government, we will get an even better system of aviation safety regulation in Australia.

Senator MOORE (Queensland) (17:05): I was very keen to take part, for a short time, in this debate because over recent months I have been visited by a number of people who have been involved in our aviation industry. They all were keen to have a say in the future of aviation in this country. As Senator Sterle has pointed out, we welcome the review that was announced today by the minister. This gives, by the process that they are putting in place, an opportunity for the voices to be heard.

Senator Macdonald, I was with you for most of your statement except that little bit where you said our government had not grasped the nettle. The reason people came to see me was that they had responded to the plan that the previous government—our government with Minister Albanese—had put in place. For the first time there was a national aviation plan that looked at the range of aviation issues in our community. I think what had happened for many years was that people had seen aviation issues linked to large passenger aircraft, to the significant growth in numbers that we have seen over the last few years. Senator Sterle pointed out some of the statistics, but only a few of them. We saw in a number of the annual reports that have been tabled in the last couple of months the extraordinary growth in the number of passenger air flights in larger commercial airliners over the last 10 years. The numbers are confronting.

But they are not just linked to the major capital cities. The issues that were raised by people talking with me in many of the same places as Senator Macdonald—in Brisbane, in Townsville, in Mount Isa—were about the fact that there is a new form of air industry in our country. Particularly when we went to the Torres Strait recently, I had the opportunity to talk
with a number of people who were involved in the helicopter industry, which is based in North Queensland and services a range of needs. The people who work in this industry are largely small business people who built up their businesses because of their passion for aviation and because they identified niche needs that lead across the northern part of our country. They did a lot of work in terms of tourism, in taking people to various places, but they also worked extensively with service providers, who rely almost exclusively on this form of transport to do the kind of work where we, in other parts of the country, have other options.

In the parts of the Torres Strait that I was privileged to visit, there are no options. If you are going to do your job, if you are going to visit the communities, if you are going to service the airways, if you are going to look after the telephones, if you are going to provide the health services and if you are actually going to service the vehicles on the islands, the only method of transport that fits within a time frame is the helicopter service. The big issues that were raised by those people when I was talking and travelling with them, and also afterwards, were resources availability and training. Training is part of the National Aviation Plan that former Minister Albanese put in place. I am keen to see, to be part of, the review that is going to happen into effective, appropriate and timely training for people who want to take their role in the industry.

The discussions I had talked about training now being available through high school. Now we have options. Through their senior schooling in Queensland, and I am sure in other states, young people who have an urge to work in this industry can take on board preliminary training as pilots, as people who work on the security of aircraft, maintenance and planning in the area. All of this can be offered in the high school curriculum, so while building a career and making choices about where they wish to work they can take that up within a concentrated plan that allows all the elements to work together.

I am very keen that in this new process of review the important issues of preliminary training, introductory training and ongoing training for people to upgrade skills and move between elements of the industry will be considered so that we will have appropriate, well-resourced and also well-skilled trainers in this field. There is a worry—and we see it—that perhaps sometimes the training available is not always to the levels of skills that we would desire and which people want.

The other element that people were very keen to talk to me about was the cost. If people are wanting to work in the industry, they have to pay considerable amounts of money to do their training and upgrade their skills. At this stage, there is no kind of resource support available for people in that area. I would like to put on record concerns about that so that into the future we will be able to have this knowledge and skill base that would be accessible to anyone who wishes to work in the industry.

I visited the Sunshine Coast area, and that is an area of burgeoning growth in the airline industry. It has been the beneficiary of the fly-in fly-out services. People do not have to go only to capital city areas, they can use the Sunshine Coast and other airports and air facilities around the country to provide this valuable service. This allows people to maintain their home base in areas such as the beautiful Sunshine Coast but have special services provided. This has actually increased the volume of traffic and the financial stability of the Sunshine Coast airport. They are able to use that service and maintain their home base and keep their work in the various mining facilities around the country. Some of the flights that are going are not just
within Queensland but connect further to Western Australia and South Australia so that people are able to do that.

It is also important to know that there are great individual initiatives that are taking place in our airlines. I particularly want to mention the work that is being done in the Toowoomba region by a private company there. It has actually put the effort in and is building a high-quality airport facility just outside Toowoomba. This is going to be able to provide services for domestic travel, which is very important. It will also provide services for the very important industrial travel as the Darling Downs opens up to a range of mining initiatives as well as its important agricultural base. By providing this airport facility just outside Toowoomba, we are able to see that this is a diversification of options. No longer does this kind of facility have to be located only in capital cities.

In terms of all the aspects that senators Sterle and Macdonald talked about, the need for absolute safety is always at the forefront of any discussion in this area. As well, there is the need to offer real options to the industry for the people who have an interest, who actually have the chance to see that this is something that is important for our economy. I know Senator Sterle talked about the enormous economic benefit to the aviation industry in our community. I wish to put on record my acknowledgement of the work that was done by former Minister Albanese and the people who worked with him. It does not matter which policy area that we find in this place, we need to balance the need for effective regulation with the need for innovation and development.

Of course, when we talk about aviation, the first issue that comes to mind is safety. We see that, and Australia has a proud record. In fact our proud record shows that our regulation bodies have been effective, that we have had a high level of training, we have had a high level of maintenance and we have a skills base in our country of which we can all be proud. We need to have appropriate regulation. This is not an area where you actually have to cut back on regulations. You need to have effective and appropriate regulations.

I know the purpose of the review is to look over the whole area and that is welcome, but in terms of the overall commitment we must acknowledge that we are starting from a very high base. The work that has been done over many years needs to be acknowledged and engaged in any review that is put into place.

We welcome the review. We know that there will be regular reports back to this place so there will be the opportunity to talk about it and, of course, for the committee structure, Senator Sterle, to be engaged at every stage. I think that is an important aspect, we welcome it and we congratulate the new minister.

Senator LUDWIG (Queensland) (17:14): As a pilot and a glider pilot, and someone who is interested in aviation, I do want to speak to this document on the review of aviation safety regulation. As there is limited time available, I will get an opportunity to contribute at a later time. It is encouraging to see in the review that work will be undertaken to ensure that areas of aviation that I have a strong interest in will be consulted. It is very good to see that Mr Phillip Reiss, President of the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association of Australia, will take a particular role in this. General aviation play a vital role and, by and large, they have been overlooked by successive governments in the past. That is not to detract from the broader ambit of the Australian government's aviation safety regulation review and the strong case for the review made by all the previous speakers.
I will only take a moment of the Senate's time to reflect upon some of the more important areas that need to be addressed and the need to get it right. Through this review, we get an opportunity for eminent Australians to ensure that we can get safety in our airways at the regular public transport level, the general aviation level and what I would call the sports aviation level, so it can be an integrated whole and we have an outcome that provides a good result. I am always a little sceptical when it is 'just another' review. Governments use reviews as a way of not making decisions. I hope it is not going to be that. I hope that this review will be a real review of the operations and that real recommendations come out of the review, and that the government looks at those recommendations with a view to implementing them. Of course, I am not going to second-guess what those recommendations will be or call on the government to implement them. The government should take into account those recommendations to ensure that we get outcomes that will provide for better safety outcomes in aviation for all. With those short remarks, I will take this up at another time. I seek leave to continue my remarks.

Leave granted.

DOCUMENTS

Asylum Seekers

Order for the Production of Documents

Senator MOORE (Queensland) (17:18): by leave—I want to make a comment about documents that were presented in the chamber this morning by Senator Cash in response to the Senate order for the production of documents. We have had a short time to look at the documents and we have found that they are all available on the public record. They are transcripts that are on the public record. We point out that we do not believe this is in the spirit of the presentation of a response to a Senate order for the production of documents. We expected something more than we can get on the internet or in some other way. We are also concerned that we had no warning that these documents were to be presented this morning. I understand it is standard practice that when documents come into the chamber in response to an order that we are advised of that. It is an important thing to put on the record. Senator Cash, you moved very quickly out of the chamber this morning so I had no time to catch you at that time. I thank the indulgence of the Senate for allowing me to make that statement.

Tabling

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Stephens) (17:20): I present documents listed on today's Order of Business at item 12, presented to the President, Deputy President and temporary chairs of committees after the Senate adjourned on 14 November 2013.

The list read as follows—

Government documents
1. AAF Company—Report for 2012-13 (received 22 November 2013).
3. Gene Technology Regulator—Quarterly report for the period 1 April to 30 June 2013 (received 27 November 2013).
Return to order

Immigration—Asylum seekers—Ministerial briefings and correspondence—Order for production of documents—Document (motion of Senator Hanson-Young agreed to 14 November 2013) (received 18 November 2013).

Letters of advice relating to Senate orders

Indexed lists of departmental and agency files

Australian Public Service Commission (received 28 November 2013).
Immigration and Citizenship portfolio (received 19 November 2013).
Industry, Innovation, Climate Change, Science, Research and Tertiary Education portfolio (received 21 November 2013).

List of departmental and agency appointments and vacancies

Department of Social Services (received 19 November 2013).

Lists of departmental and agency grants

Department of Social Services (received 19 November 2013).
Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio (received 21 November 2013).
Prime Minister and Cabinet portfolio (received 21 November 2013).

PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION

Election Petition

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Stephens) (17:20): For the information of senators, I present an election petition of the Court of Disputed Returns in respect of the election of senators for the state of Western Australia.

DOCUMENTS

Joint Select Committee on an Australia Card

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Stephens) (17:20): I present a report on access to documents of the Joint Select Committee on an Australia Card.

COMMITTEES

Education and Employment References Committee

Report

Senator LINES (Western Australia) (17:20): I present a report of the Senate Education and Employment References Committee on matters referred to the committee during the previous parliament. I seek leave to move a motion.

Leave granted.

Senator LINES: I move:

That the report be adopted.

As we know, certainly from the Gonski panel, literacy and numeracy are incredibly important and are key within our education system. What we know from Gonski is that Australia's educational standards have fallen behind, particularly over the last 10 years, and that too many young people leave school and are functionally illiterate. This means that these young people are unable to compete on an equal footing for jobs that offer fulfilling and ongoing employment. They are also unable to compete on an equal footing for career based
opportunities such as traineeships or apprenticeships. What we are seeing is that far too many young people are missing out. As a Western Australian senator, I know that in some of our key manufacturing areas in the Kwinana strip youth unemployment is at appallingly high levels. Some of this is due to young people leaving schools inadequately skilled, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

Falling literacy standards not only affect young people’s career opportunities but also slow them down in other areas. For example, falling standards prevent young people from getting drivers licences as they are unable to sit the tests. In some communities in Western Australia additional funding has been made available so that young people can be tutored one on one to prepare them to sit for drivers licence tests. But we should ensure that our schools are well funded so young people leave school with all the skills required to be successful in life, rather than having to seek tutoring. Young people find it embarrassing to acknowledge that they do not understand a basic form or cannot read it to a sufficient level to complete it competently. From a West Australian perspective, having a driver licence is critical because most young people in my state drive to their places of employment.

In this inquiry into NAPLAN, the committee thought it was not appropriate to take on trust or assume that we are getting the best from our schools. It is sad that the government thinks that requiring schools to deliver good standards and be accountable for these good standards is centralised, Big Brother-type interference. If we are going to commit billions of taxpayer dollars to our schools then we need to ensure that schools are accountable, that teachers are the best they can be and that teachers are properly supported through access to ongoing education. Also, we as the Australian public and taxpayers want public accountability. That is what NAPLAN tests are designed to do. They test primary school students in years 3 and 5 and secondary school students in year 9. Despite criticism, it is appropriate that schools undergo some national testing as long as supports are in place—there are quality teachers, quality principals and quality systems that are well supported and funded.

We are a young nation when it comes to European settlement. We want to compete on a global stage. To do that, we need a first-class education system, whether public or private. The system should deliver what our students needs. Australian taxpayers and parents want accountability from our schools and our children to be much more than functionally literate. We want our children to succeed and their school years to be the best they can be. We want young people to have a lot of opportunity and to experience a broad range of educational and other activities through their schools. That requires us to be diligent in telling schools that performance needs to be measured. We cannot tell if we are succeeding by taking on good faith that schools are doing well.

The only other measure we have is the personal measure when children in year 12 sit their high school certificate and apply for entrance to university. That is not a real measure of the success of our schools. It is a measure of the performance of individuals against a standardised test. It is therefore appropriate for us to have national testing and it is important for us to make sure that national testing meets our needs—that it is adequate and reports in a way that is fair, while it identifies the real issues within our system. There was some criticism of the current NAPLAN testing and questions about whether it meets its objectives, but NAPLAN testing has not been in place for long. There has also been some controversy about reporting of testing on the My School website and the possibility of creating league tables.
However, to the best of my knowledge that has not happened and parents appreciate having the opportunity to look at how their school measures up against other schools with similar socioeconomic factors.

Safeguards and protocols exist, but, as the committee did not give many organisations and groups an opportunity to contribute to the inquiry, it is appropriate for us to continue that work. We should always be prepared to revisit this area. It is not appropriate for members of parliament and senators to say we had an inquiry into NAPLAN and so it is done and dusted. It is something we should revisit as often as necessary, and certainly every couple of years, to make sure the rigour we want in our system exists and the accountability we expect in our education system is there. But most importantly it is to make sure that our education system is delivering to our young people so that young people leave school not just functionally literate but ready and able to take on whatever it is that they see their future as, to take on fulfilling careers, to be able to sit very easily for their driver's test and pass, to be able to move in our society and to be part of a functioning society.

I certainly would recommend the report to the parliament. Our work on that committee is not finished and we are seeking the opportunity to continue that work. I will leave those comments for later.

Senator MARSHALL (Victoria) (17:30): I was the Deputy Chair of the Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee. It was very ably chaired by Senator Chris Back. I will say at the outset that, while I am no longer a member of the Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee, I had been on that committee for many years. We approached these inquiries generally in a very bipartisan manner and this inquiry was no exception. I commend Senator Back.

NAPLAN is an issue that has created quite a bit of public controversy. It was appropriate for the Senate to conduct this inquiry. I will come to some of the findings of the inquiry in a moment. Senator Mason and I, during Senate estimates over many years, went through some of the details of NAPLAN testing. He is one of the senators on the other side who I readily concede has a very deep and genuine commitment to education. Let us put to one side some of his wackier ideas, of course. But, on the whole, I know he has a very genuine commitment to education.

We have talked about these issues. The report reinforced a number of the things that we have been discussing in Senate estimates over many years: the need for us as a nation to have a measurement process, a benchmarking process not only for students but for our schools. We need to ensure that as a nation we are providing the best education we possibly can to all of our kids no matter where they are. NAPLAN is a very useful tool to identify areas of weakness and areas of need so the governments can address those issues on a needs basis. If you do not collect the evidence, if you do not collect the results and if you do not test our kids on the skills they are learning at school, how can you have a system which plugs those holes and addresses those needs?

We have seen some other countries go down retrograde steps with this sort of testing, where they have punished schools or jurisdictions for not performing to a higher level. That has been one of the criticisms that opponents of the NAPLAN have argued very strongly. But when this system was set up, the then opposition, now government, was very supportive. This is not a tool to be used as a punishment on systems or schools. It is one which we use to
identify weaknesses so we can put more money if necessary, if that is what it takes, into those areas to lift the standard or provide more teaching resources or even better teaching resources for better standards. NAPLAN testing is a very useful tool for policy makers to continue to develop an education policy.

One thing I think we all agree on in this place is that education is the genesis of our future economic prosperity. If we wish to compete in a globalised world, we will do so because of the cleverness and the enterprise of our people. Education is the key to all enterprise and it is the key to all innovation. Without that framework and without getting it right at the lowest level, at even the preschool level, we do not set ourselves up for being the knowledge nation we will need to be when we are competing over the next decades with people in our region. That is not to say there are not some flaws with NAPLAN; there are. There is a lot of work going on in making the results more readily available and more quickly available to schools, to teachers and to students. First and foremost, NAPLAN is a tool to measure overall performance.

Individual assessment of students goes on every day in the classroom. Every teacher every day is constantly assessing their students through personal contact and through tests they do at the school. Teachers do not need to rely on NAPLAN to understand how their students are performing or whether they are attaining the levels that we expect in the delivery of the curriculum. NAPLAN was not really a tool to enable teachers to do that on an individual basis. It was more of a globalised policy response to ensure that where there is need identified, we put in the resources.

One of the flaws of NAPLAN, which came out in the inquiry and which I know from my personal knowledge talking to teachers and principals, is that there is a lot of pressure in some schools on some teachers to try and teach to the test. In fact, they become obsessed with trying to get a good NAPLAN result. I think that is unfortunate and detracts from what the NAPLAN is able to achieve for us as policy makers. When we have had ACARA before us in Senate estimates, they make it very clear that NAPLAN is presented in such a way where it is impossible to teach to the test because it is a test of skills attained. It is not a question-and-answer test on the knowledge you have collected over a period of time, so it is an incredibly difficult test to teach to if that is what you want to do. But we do know it happens in some jurisdictions. State jurisdictions put enormous pressure on the schools to lift their overall NAPLAN results as well. The state education bureaucracies put enormous pressure on the principal, who then transfers that pressure down to the teachers and then the teachers are under pressure to teach to the test.

We know kids pick up on these issues. I say that as a parent as well. When they know the teacher is under pressure to perform under NAPLAN and they are teaching to the test, the students inevitably pick up that pressure too, and all of a sudden it becomes something that it was never supposed to be—that is, a high-stakes, high-pressure environment. It ought not be that.

We should never pretend that our kids should not be tested in schools. They should be tested. We are going to be tested as adults on a regular basis and we cannot pretend we are not going to put our kids through some of that pressure. You are going to have pressure when you go for job interviews. You are going to have pressure at all sorts of levels throughout your working life. We cannot pretend there is not going to be pressure. Students should also be
tested on the skills they are attaining because it helps us as policymakers to direct funding where funding is most needed.

So, if there are flaws with NAPLAN, what we seriously need to be doing is looking at the delivery of NAPLAN and the way the education departments—and some do it better than others—put that pressure on the kids. I was lucky enough that where my kids go to school—they go to public schools—the principals have the philosophy that it should not be a high-stakes, high-pressure test. I know by talking to those teachers that that did not come through from the top. It was simply another test, an important test: ‘We will have some practice tests, and that is absolutely appropriate. But we will not drill, day after day, and spend week upon week, month upon month, practicing for something that is really "unpracticable" according to ACARA.’

I do recommend some of the issues that the committee recommended. I commend ACARA for working very well in trying to get the online marking process so that what results there are can be used by schools in a more useful way. But what the committee did conclude is that, given the time constraints in the last parliament, we did not have enough time to really do this issue justice. There is concern in the community, and I would encourage the Senate at some point to commence another inquiry to finish the work that the committee started in the last parliament. We want to hear from parents, we want to hear from the public, we want to hear from educators; we want to hear how we can make it better for policymakers. After all, we invest an enormous amount of money in our future and in our kids. We have an obligation and a responsibility to ensure that we get best value for that. That is so crucial to where we sit in a globalised world. Whether we maintain our prosperity or whether we do not, it all starts with education.

Senator BILYK (Tasmania—Deputy Opposition Whip in the Senate) (17:40): I also rise to speak on the report into NAPLAN. I also was a committee member at that stage of the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee. It is really interesting to note that there were no recommendations from this committee as such, but it was suggested, as Senator Marsh all has suggested, that this committee look again at how NAPLAN is going, because we need to do more work in that area. We did not have enough time back in June to go any further than a two-day hearing. Senator Back chaired the committee and I support Senator Marshall in saying that Senator Back was a very good chair of that committee. I thoroughly enjoyed working with him.

NAPLAN is an annual assessment of Australian students, and it happens when they are in years 3, 5, 7 and 9. They are tested in the areas of reading, writing, language and literacy. I think I am the only person in this chamber—or in fact in this parliament—that actually was a hands-on childcare worker. So, as an ex-childcare worker, I really understand the value of education.

When I was in the childcare industry we used to do programs for individual children. What I see with NAPLAN is that that is really an extension of what is happening there. Individual students and schools can learn how they are going through the NAPLAN process, and then the schools and the teachers can work to fill any gaps that might be there. We all know that if you are lacking in those really basic areas of reading, writing, language and literacy, your life is going to be much more difficult. Coming from Tasmania, where there is a high rate of
literacy problems and concerns, I think it is really important that we keep pushing to have NAPLAN testing continue.

The tests have been conducted every year since 2008, in May. A few months later, around September, the results are made available publicly on the My School website and at an individual school level. Over a million students complete three separate tests over a week every year. These results are published online and also reported in the media. That has caused a bit of controversy, because some people agree with NAPLAN and of course there are some people who do not. But I think it is really important in Australia—and we have seen this with a number of reports—where educational standards have fallen. To be a competitive society we need to make sure that we can compete everywhere, and the best way to do that is to make sure that people are able to compete in the job market. If you do not have those basic skills of reading, writing, language and literacy then you will find it much harder to compete in the job market.

We see that once again in my home state of Tasmania, where the youth unemployment is at really high levels and a lot of that has to do with the fact that the education processes do not always meet the needs of the students. NAPLAN to me is a bit like doing a skills audit, and it is really important that we make sure that people are skilled up. Schools also need to be really well equipped and well funded, and we are going to have a few discussions on that possibly later this week but certainly over time with regard to the concerns about Gonski.

We need to do NAPLAN tests, because we need to know what areas students are lacking in. If you do not know what areas the students are lacking in, then of course you cannot help fill the gaps. I think Senator Marshall said that some people have not been very happy with NAPLAN, but ACARA had this to say in the report about NAPLAN tests:

… (ACARA) submitted that the National Assessment Program 'is the means by which governments, education authorities and schools can determine whether or not young Australians are reaching important educational goals for literacy and numeracy'.

I do not think that anyone would argue that we really need to know what those levels are. The report went on to say:

On its website ACARA advises that the primary objective of NAPLAN is to provide the:

[M]easure through which governments, education authorities, schools, teachers and parents can determine whether or not young Australians have the literacy and numeracy skills that provide the critical foundation for other learning and for their productive and rewarding participation in the community.

The tests provide parents and schools with an understanding of how individual students are performing at the time of the tests. They also provide schools, states and territories with information about how education programs are working and which areas need to be prioritised for improvement.

I wish to reiterate that it is really important that we have a program such as NAPLAN, because if the gaps start as low as grade 3, even earlier, then you have got a problem with learning, especially for young children trying to catch up. You see this in high schools quite frequently where children have been left behind. One thing the Labor government was very determined to do was to make sure that no child was left behind in the education stakes.

The committee heard some concerns that over time the purpose of NAPLAN has expanded. I think this is partly because the NAPLAN data is our only nationally consistent data for educational outcomes. Before NAPLAN, we did not have that sort of data collection service
and so we did not get the whole picture. We got the picture in some schools and for some individual students but we never had it for schools as a whole and we certainly did not have a national picture. I think it is really important for the future of Australia to make sure that everyone can fully participate in society and to ensure that we pick up any problems as early as we can.

I gave a speech not that long ago in this place about literacy levels in Tasmania and how difficult it was for many adults who cannot read and write. In everyday life they have difficulty filling out bank forms or being able to read labels or boxes in supermarkets. I think if some of these adults had been caught early on, if the system had identified them and helped them to correct those problems, then they would probably have a much better lifestyle. It is one of those areas that there is disagreement about, but it is also very important for us to keep working on it.

I noticed in the report that there was encouragement for the new parliament to recommend to the Senate the re-adoption of this inquiry early in this parliament. As I said, we only had two days for the inquiry and we held meetings in Melbourne in June. I would also endorse Senator Marshall's words about ensuring that that happens.

A lot of the disagreement around NAPLAN was not necessarily about the testing per se but about how the data might be used. People gave evidence that they were concerned about how the data was used and that it might disadvantage particular schools. The criticism did not actually disagree with testing per se. When you go out in the real world, once you have left school, you will be tested on everything, from getting your driver's licence to job interviews—a range of things. You need those skills. You need to be confident about being tested and it is a very important process. I have not heard from anyone in my home state that their children have been stressed by the process. For all the reasons I have outlined, it is very important that we keep NAPLAN going and that we also encourage this parliament to continue the testing. (Time expired)

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order! The time for debate on the motion has expired. Question agreed to.

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee
Documents

Senator STERLE (Western Australia) (17:51): I present the Hansard record of proceedings and documents presented to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee at the committee's hearing into beef imports and I seek leave to move a motion.

Leave granted.

Senator STERLE: I move:

That the Senate take note of the documents.

The Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee held an inquiry here in Canberra back in May—I think about 17 May—in relation to beef imports into Australia and there were some 14 submissions. The committee is a wonderful bipartisan committee. It is chaired currently by my good self, but under the last government it was chaired by Senator Heffernan. Mr Deputy President, I have witnessed quite a few committees in the period that
you and I have been here and I have to say that this is one committee that does not play the stupid game of politics and does not spend its entire time sniping at each other. It is one committee that has only one interest, and that is the best interests of Australia, predominantly in the transport, agricultural and regional development areas.

We had concerns over beef imports and the quality of Australia’s biosecurity. We do not have an issue with Australia’s biosecurity, but we have to make sure that it is maintained to its greatest level. Therefore, we put terms of reference through the Senate for our committee to inquiry into and report on the possible imminent importation of beef products from countries whose cattle herds have bovine spongiform encephalopathy, BSE, or foot-and-mouth disease, FMD. We looked at the processes undertaken by Australian government agencies in determining risks to consumers and industry and the adequacy of such processes. We looked at the lessons to be learnt from the recent contamination of the beef supply chain with horse meat throughout Europe and its implications for Australian consumers and industry. We looked at the likely implications of allowing imports of beef from BSE and foot-and-mouth disease countries on Australia’s international reputation and standing as the world’s safest exporter of beef. We also looked at the adequacy of Australian food-labelling laws to ensure that Australian consumers can make a fully informed choice on Australian meat products.

I would like to acknowledge fellow committee members. We have a good collection of members: Senator Gallacher; Senator Thorp, at the time; Senator Nash; Senator Edwards; Senator Siewert; Senator Back; Senator Xenophon; Senator Colbeck; Senator McKenzie; and now we welcome Senator Lines as an official RRAT—well done, Senator Lines. I would like to take the opportunity to thank those interested parties—as I said, there were some 14 submissions, if my memory serves me right—who made the effort to not only put in a submission but also come to Canberra to present the cases to the committee.

Some might think there are some wonderful names there—foot-and-mouth and BSE—but I want to take this opportunity, if I may, to share some information from the committee around problems, should these diseases get into Australia. If you would just bear with me, Mr Deputy President, I will find it—in all the excitement I packed up thinking it was time to go.

**Senator Fifield:** You usually give up the call if you are not speaking.

**Senator STERLE:** I am not giving up the call, and it is nice to see that you are not on the phone putting bets on, like you were last time you got caught—that’s just a joke!

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** You have the call, Senator Sterle, and address the chair.

**Senator STERLE:** I do, and thank you very much, Mr Deputy President. I have to share this with the Senate. There was an ABARES analysis carried out on behalf of the review, summarising the economic effects associated with a possible foot-and-mouth disease outbreak in Australia, and it is very important that people should know this. Based on data in 2000 and 2001, the Productivity Commission estimated that over a 10-year period there would be severe, direct economic losses to the livestock and meat processing sector from an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. These losses ranged from $7.1 billion for a small, three-month outbreak to $16 billion for a large, 12-month outbreak—that was expressed in current dollar terms back then, so it would be a lot more now. The Productivity Commission also estimated the economy-wide effects of a large outbreak as an alternative measure. The economy-wide effects were estimated to reduce Australian GDP by between $10.3 billion and $16.7 billion,
in current dollars back then—and that was over a 10-year period—which is equivalent to a one to two per cent decline in GDP in one year. Control and compensation costs were estimated to range between $25 million for the small outbreak and $600 million for the large outbreak. Also, reflecting international experience, the economic impact of trade restrictions would be far greater than the cost of controlling the disease.

It is a very important issue. What actually happens is that Australia does import meat from foreign countries and we do import meat particularly from places like Croatia where there has not been an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease or BSE for a number of years. But the fear is that, if we were to drop the standards of control on our borders, the flow-on effect could be devastating, and no more so than with live exports too, particularly into Indonesia. This was about beef imports into Australia, but our export market and our domestic herd would be decimated should there be an outbreak of those two diseases. Ninety-four per cent of our live export goes to Indonesia alone.

This is not a cheap political swipe—this is a very serious issue—but I did note in one of the local newspapers over the weekend the concern from Australia's growers at the moment with some issues we have between Australia and Indonesia. There was a threat from a minister in Indonesia to seek live cattle from, I believe, India or Brazil. India is known to have foot-and-mouth disease, and that would not only be devastating to the domestic stock in Indonesia but also it would not take long for it to jump across the Torres Strait into Australia. We hope that that is just a threat from an Indonesian minister at the moment.

Going back to our inquiry, I would like to take the opportunity to thank the senators who always contribute to the rural and regional affairs and transport committee. Senator Macdonald is a regular RRATer, if that is a word I can use—sorry, Senator Macdonald! I would like to also thank Stephen Palethorpe, who was the committee's secretary at the time. Stephen has gone off to greener pastures somewhere in the Pacific. He is on loan to an island somewhere. We would welcome Stephen back, but as one door closes another door opens and, if there is a beauty in losing Stephen, it is that we have gained Tim Watling. We have poached Tim from another committee, but I have worked with Tim before—I think on the education, employment and workplace relations committee. He is now our gain.

Senator Cameron interjecting—

Senator STERLE: We are good at it. That is why we are the RRATs, you see. We are very good at that sort of stuff. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you, Tim, for your hard work, particularly this year. This is just one inquiry, but we have had some nine or 10 going on. Normally they are all at the same time and it is a mad, hectic pace. I would also like to take the opportunity to sincerely thank Tim's very hard working and diligent crew down there in the RRAT secretariat, none more than Trish, who is an absolute diamond. She has been around longer than me. She is younger than me—I just want to get that out! I also thank Kirsty and Lauren for their hard work. When we are dealing on this committee, there are a number of views, as you could imagine, but we treat each other with respect. We also afford ourselves every opportunity to speak to each other, because, as I said when I started my contribution, one thing about the RRAT committee is that we sincerely put the best interests of Australia first, whether it be in agriculture, regional development or transport.

Question agreed to.
DOCUMENTS

Tabling

The Clerk: Documents are tabled pursuant to statute. Details will be recorded in the Journals of the Senate and on the Dynamic Red.

Details of the documents also appear at the end of today's Hansard.

COMMITTEES

Membership

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (18:02): Order! The President has received letters from party leaders requesting changes in the membership of various committees.

Senator FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (18:02): by leave—I move:

That senators be discharged from and appointed to committees as follows:

Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity—Joint Statutory Committee—

Appointed––Senators Edwards and Parry

Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples—Joint Select Committee—

Appointed—Senators Edwards and Parry

Corporations and Financial Services—Joint Statutory Committee—

Appointed—Senators Bushby and Fawcett

Education and Employment Legislation Committee—

Discharged—Senator Smith

Appointed—Senator Kroger

Electoral Matters—Joint Standing Committee—

Appointed—Senators Kroger and Ruston

Environment and Communications Legislation Committee—

Appointed—

Substitute member: Senator Whish-Wilson to replace Senator Waters for the committee's inquiry into Australia Post on Friday, 6 December 2013

Participating member: Senator Waters

Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade—Joint Standing Committee—

Appointed—Senators Eggleston, Fawcett, Kroger, Macdonald and Parry

Law Enforcement—Joint Statutory Committee—

Appointed—Senators Edwards and Parry

Migration—Joint Standing Committee—

Appointed—Senators Edwards and Williams
National Broadband Network—Select Committee—
Appointed—
Senators Ruston, Seselja, and Smith

National Capital and External Territories—Joint Standing Committee—
Appointed—Senator Seselja

National Disability Insurance Scheme—Joint Standing Committee—
Appointed—Senators McKenzie, Seselja and Smith

Parliamentary Library—Joint Standing Committee—
Appointed—Senators Boswell, Seselja and Williams

Treaties—Joint Standing Committee—
Appointed—Senators Fawcett, Kroger and Smith
Question agreed to.

BILLS

Commonwealth Inscribed Stock Amendment Bill 2013
Returned from the House of Representatives

Message received from the House of Representatives returning the Commonwealth Inscribed Stock Amendment Bill 2013, informing the Senate that the House has disagreed to the amendment made by the Senate and desiring the reconsideration of the amendment.

Ordered that consideration of the message in Committee of the Whole be made an order of the day for the next day of sitting.

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
Climate Change Authority (Abolition) 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
Clean Energy Finance Corporation (Abolition) Bill 2013
First Reading

Bills received from the House of Representatives.

Senator FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (18:04): I move:

That these bills may proceed without formalities, may be taken together and be now read a first time.

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (18:04): Mr Deputy President, the opposition ask that you put the question separately on one of the procedural elements of the motion that the minister has moved, and that is 'that these bills may be taken together'.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Senator Wong, just so we are clear: do you want to debate that portion of the motion under standing order 113?

Senator WONG: Correct, and I am requesting that that question be taken separately.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: As you realise, I am obliged to do that. So let us break it up into the three elements. The first element was 'that these bills may proceed without formalities'. That is the question I now put.

Question agreed to.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: The second motion is 'that these bills may be taken together', and that is the question I now put.

Senator WONG: The opposition oppose the debating of these bills together and will subsequently be seeking to have a separate and specific debate on two very important elements of this package. Let us be very clear about what this government is doing. The Senate is being asked in very short order to debate 11 bills, which include not only the clean energy legislation repeal but also the abolition of the Climate Change Authority and the abolition of the Clean Energy Finance Corporation. In the opposition's view, this is a debate which the Senate ought to have as separate debates, particularly on those two bills, because they are of such importance that they deserve the proper scrutiny of the Senate.

It is the case that on occasion the Senate does choose to take bills together, but let us be very clear what this government is proposing. Let us be very clear why this government is choosing to bring these bills forward together as a package. It is because they want to limit debate, limit scrutiny, limit consideration. You can see that by the way in which they have sought to handle this debate to date. We had what I describe as a quick and dirty committee investigation, committee inquiry, by the Environment and Communications Legislation Committee, referred on 14 November, report by today—one day's hearing on the package of 11 pieces of legislation. It is the case that the Senate as the second chamber, as the chamber in this parliament which I believe does such important work in terms of scrutinising, debating and properly considering legislation, should ensure that all of these bills are properly debated, properly scrutinised and subject to the proper consideration of the Senate.

The opposition is not going to be party to, as a government is proposing, the whole of the architecture that has been established by this parliament to address climate change being swept away in one fell swoop following a very limited number of hours of committee consideration and, as importantly, no real examination of the consequences of the
government's proposed actions. The opposition have made our position very clear. We do not support doing nothing on climate change, and that is the government's position. Just as importantly, I think it is critical that the Clean Energy Finance Corporation and the Climate Change Authority's role and function be properly debated by this chamber. It is a blind, narrow, ideological approach to this issue which we have from those opposite. We know they have that, we know that the Prime Minister's position is that climate change is 'absolute crap', we know that that is his position. And we know that the actual content of the government's policy is in fact to do nothing on climate change. That is the reality. But I want to turn to why we think it is important, separate to the debate on whether or not we should address climate change through pricing carbon, that the Senate needs to focus on two very important institutions that this package of bills seeks to remove.

I turn first to the Clean Energy Finance Corporation. Notwithstanding the fact that we had such a narrow and limited time for investigation by the committee in relation to these bills, there was some very important evidence given on 26 November by the Clean Energy Finance Corporation which got some press. I think it is important for the chamber for us to consider that evidence and take the opportunity to consider the merit of abolishing it. I turn to some of that evidence. First, evidence was taken that the CEFC has funded projects which involve over 500 megawatts of clean energy generation capacity installed or supported covering renewables and low-emissions technology. Second—and this is one of the most important aspects of the evidence which was given—the Clean Energy Finance Corporation is delivering abatement at negative cost, that is, benefit to the taxpayer of $2.40 per tonne of carbon dioxide abated, net of government cost of borrowing. What that means when people talk about negative cost is that taxpayers actually make money out of this. So not only is the Clean Energy Finance Corporation achieving abatement at the lowest cost possible, they are making money for the taxpayer. In fact, it will cost the taxpayer money if the Clean Energy Finance Corporation is abolished.

I will be honest with the chamber as one of the ministers involved in establishing the Clean Energy Finance Corporation on behalf of the previous government. This is a far better result than even we anticipated. If you had said to me at the time that we were looking to establish this that you could achieve results at this sort of cost, at this sort of economic and financial cost to taxpayers, I would have said that was optimistic. They have performed beyond expectation. The Clean Energy Finance Corporation is investing across a broad range of technologies, including wind, solar, bioenergy, energy efficiency and lower emissions technologies. It has conducted active discussions with 37 proponents for $4.5 billion worth of projects and initial assessment of a further 142 projects representing 179 projects and $14.9 billion worth of opportunities. The CEFC is funding projects in regional and rural Australia. Co-financing is integral to the CEFC strategy: through matched private sector funds of $2.90 for each one dollar of investment, the corporation has been able to catalyse over $1.5 billion in non-CEFC private capital, that is, investment by the private sector leveraged by the corporation, not investment by the taxpayer, although the taxpayer obviously is getting the benefit of it.

In summary, the evidence showed that, first, the corporation is delivering all of the presumed benefits; second, the commercial approach taken by the corporation has meant that the presumed negatives of such a fund have not been realised; third, the CEFC has exceeded
its expectations and is delivering substantial abatement while making a return for the taxpayer; fourth, and critically, it will cost the taxpayer more to shut down the Clean Energy Finance Corporation than the taxpayer will save. I repeat, it will cost the taxpayer more to shut down the Clean Energy Finance Corporation that it will save. That is such an important piece of evidence which demonstrates why it is so important that we have some proper debate around the abolition of that particular entity.

I know what the government will say. Senator Abetz's views on the climate science are well known: he does not accept the science. I disagree with that but I respect his views. He does not accept the science. But in fact this is not actually the issue, and it would be good in this chamber, which does have such a long history and proud reputation as being a chamber that does scrutinise legislation, if we could get beyond some of the rhetoric when it comes to climate policy. The government ought to explain very clearly why it is that they want to abolish the Clean Energy Finance Corporation; leaving aside our differences of views about pricing carbon, why it is that a party that believes in the market can be so blindly ideological as to want to shut down a corporation which is actually making taxpayers money out of abatement. Why is it that they would possibly want to do that? We will be subsequently moving to ensure that the Senate has the opportunity to debate fully and properly the abolition of the Clean Energy Finance Corporation.

It is really quite clear from the evidence and also from the public statements that the government's approach on the CEFC is really driven by ideology rather than practicality, by ideology rather than pragmatism. If you are killing off an entity simply because it was something that your predecessor had put in place and because you simply want to abolish everything that is actually making money for taxpayers in delivering abatement—not only at a lower cost but also at a benefit to taxpayers—it would seem very strange that you would continue down that path. Really the only reason for the government doing so is they have a clear ideological position against anything that, frankly, has the words 'clean energy' or 'climate' in it.

In relation to the Climate Change Authority, I do want to make some points about why it is that the opposition, hopefully with the support of others in this chamber, will be seeking that that is also separated out. I think one of the great tragedies of the way in which the climate debate has proceeded in recent years is that those opposite as well as those who deny the science and who want to undermine the science always try to ensure that people never look beyond today. They have a debate that is only ever about today, it is only ever about what is happening now. They try to avoid as much as possible having a discussion, having a debate or taking responsibility about what will happen in the future. As I have said previously in this chamber, climate change fundamentally is an argument about whether or not this generation of Australians, this Senate chamber, this house will choose to take responsibility for something that is occurring that will have its worst consequences long after we have left this place. Some would call it intergenerational equity, others would just say it is taking responsibility now so that our children and grandchildren do not have to.

I think the importance of the authority is that it is the statutory body which tries to lift the gaze; it actually tries to get members and senators in Parliament House not only involved in the public debate, it also tries to make us look beyond today and tomorrow and really look to the consequences of unmitigated climate change for future generations. It is a body that seeks
to rise above the politics of the day, and that was why it was established. It has members who are well known and well regarded by both sides of politics, eminent Australians like Mr Bernie Fraser, who one could—the senator is chuckling there. It is interesting, isn’t it, that someone who has held positions under governments of both political persuasions could be the subject of ridicule by the Leader of the Government in the Senate in that way. So the Climate Change Authority is chaired by Mr Bernie Fraser. It has ex officio members including Professor Chubb; Dr Lynne Williams, who is a well-known public servant and academic; and Mr John Marlay, who I think is still a non-executive director of Boral and other companies; as well as Ms Heather Ridout, Professor Clive Hamilton and a range of other individuals.

And what does the Climate Change Authority do? It essentially delivers independent expert advice; it engages stakeholders in the gathering of information and enabling a better policy debate; it undertakes extensive and rigorous research and analysis, and presents transparent and practical reports. It also conducts reviews of key climate change initiatives. The first two points in the summary of its brief include Australia’s emissions reduction targets, carbon budgets and caps for the carbon-pricing mechanism, and progress towards meeting Australia’s medium- and long-term emissions reduction targets. I am sure Senator Milne can talk at greater length about this, but the point I make, particularly in relation to those two aspects of the work of this statutory authority, is this: it is, by its very nature, designed to try to ensure that governments of the day and the Australian community are informed about the medium- and long-term issues and challenges of climate change. By its very nature it is seeking to ensure that we do not simply have a debate that is trapped in the hurly-burly of politics now; it looks to the way in which climate change not only will affect this nation and the rest of the world over the years to come, but also what the options are for Australia around how we manage that, what are the responsibilities we must take.

I, for one, think this was one of the significant improvements of the clean energy package, the introduction of the authority, because it—that is, the expansion of its remit—does ensure that we have an independent body, a body independent of government, that can make sure the Australian people and the Australian people’s representatives are informed as to the merits of different policy options and as to what actions will be taken.

We on this side of the chamber believe it is critical that we have a proper debate on the legislation that is before the chamber. There will be a lot of talk, I am sure, in the contributions to come about mandates, and I would make a couple of points. In 2007, both parties of government went to the election promising an emissions trading scheme. I sat in this chamber and watched Senator Abetz, you, Mr Deputy President Parry, and all of those who are now on that side, vote against that mandate on at least two occasions and then change leaders because you did not want to honour that mandate. We on this side have made very clear our position when it comes to climate change. We have made it very clear that we do not agree with doing nothing, and what the government is proposing is a do-nothing option. We on this side of the chamber also believe that this chamber—this Senate—is charged with ensuring that we properly scrutinise and debate legislation, and this is not an occasion where we believe the sort of truncated process that we have seen in the committee—the limited time for committee consideration and the limited information on the alternative, which is direct action—is appropriate.
In conclusion, I want to make some points about direct action which are germane to the procedural debate we are engaged in. This is a government that wants to get to a vote and limit scrutiny of these bills in part because they really do not want to tell Australians what their policy is. Their policy is a slogan. Their policy is a pamphlet. They are not even releasing details of what will constitute their policy until after this debate. If you listen to the unfortunate Mr Hunt—the walking exemplification of what happens when you turn your back on everything you have previously said and believed in—he has made it very clear he has a long way to go when it comes to policy detail. He has a long way to go, but this government is demanding that this Senate vote on all of these bills in a job lot without being prepared to put on the table precisely how their policy will work. That says something very clear about the agenda of the Abbott government.

We do not agree that all of these bills should be taken together. We believe there should be separate debate on two really important statutory bodies not only because of the evidence we have heard today, but because the function and role they play in the clean energy package merits a discussion. Certainly, before they are abolished, this chamber should exercise its responsibility and ensure that the merits or otherwise of this are debated fully.

Senator ABETZ (Tasmania—Leader of the Government in the Senate, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Minister for Employment) (18:25): We have just witnessed the ultimate government change denier in this place. To not acknowledge that the Australian people voted in relation to this package of bills is breathtaking: breathtaking in its political stupidity, from the Australian Labor Party point of view but, even more importantly, breathtaking from the economic point of view. We know what the carbon tax has been doing to our nation. So bad was the carbon tax that before the 2010 election the Labor Party went to the Australian people, hand on heart, and said, 'There will be no carbon tax.' If the carbon tax was such a good idea why didn't they promote it? But after the 2010 election, having promised no carbon tax, they introduced it. Even worse, in the 2013 election campaign they put out brochures such as the one I hold, saying, 'Kevin Rudd and Labor remove the carbon tax.' That is what they said before the 2013 election. They are now being given the opportunity to actually remove the carbon tax and what are they doing? They are voting in the exact opposite direction to ensure that the carbon tax remains in place.

What we have seen from the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate is typical of an opposition that is frustrated by the will of the people. They are using every measure and standing order available to try to delay the inevitable. The Australian people voted loud and clear. If there was any issue that was up for discussion, not only in the 2013 election but since the 2010 election—for the full three years—it was that there should be no carbon tax. The Australian people knew what the issues were, and this package of 11 bills seeks to implement the government's policy. Now we have this lame excuse that there are two aspects of this package that need to be considered separately. The Leader of the Opposition in effect gave a second reading speech on both those bills. The reason why we are moving to abolish the Clean Energy Finance Corporation is outlined in the second reading speech. It is there for all to see. Very simply, setting up a government bank with $10 billion—that is 10 thousand million dollars of borrowed money, underwritten by taxpayers—to invest in high-risk ventures should be a thing of the past in this country.
What is more, we were upfront with the Australian people. Unlike those opposite, we were upfront and said: 'If we are given the mandate on 7 September we will abolish the Clean Energy Finance Corporation.' Nothing could have been clearer. We said it and we are seeking to do it, and who now stands in the way but the Labor Party which promised no carbon tax and then promised they would get rid of it? Now we are giving them the opportunity to vote and they oppose it. Similarly, in relation to the Climate Change Authority (Abolition) Bill—why are we putting that forward? Because if you remove the carbon tax there is no real need for this authority, the principal role of which is to provide advice concerning the ongoing operation of the carbon tax. You abolish the carbon tax but you still want the Climate Change Authority, whose task was to advise on the carbon tax.

Senator Pratt interjecting—

Senators ABETZ: Senator Pratt interjects—a person who campaigned against the carbon tax.

Sitting suspended from 18:30 to 19:30

Senators ABETZ: I am in continuation in relation to the opposition's stunt of trying to split the package of bills which would finally remove the much-despised carbon tax from Australia. Before dinner, the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate suggested that there were two particular bills that needed separate consideration. I ask a very simple question: are the Labor Party going to vote differently on the other nine bills? Does that mean they are going to support the other nine bills but oppose these two that have been plucked out, it seems quite randomly, by the ALP? The deafening silence from the other side tells us everything we need to know: this is a stunt. There is no intention to vote differently in relation to the other nine bills, so why separate them out and why say that they need to be treated differently when you are, it would appear, going to vote exactly the same way?

We saw crocodile tears being shed by the Leader of the Opposition, who, whilst in government presided over the raw abuse of power and the guillotining through the Senate of the carbon tax—which they promised they would not introduce—and over 200 other bills, in concert with the Australian Greens.

Now, all of a sudden, the Leader of the Opposition believes all these issues need to be considered in greater detail. Can I remind this place and the Australian people—and I am sure the Australian people do not need reminding—this debate about a carbon tax started within the body politic of Australia before the 2010 election. Before the 2010 election, the Liberal-National Party coalition and the Labor Party promised the Australian people there would be no carbon tax. One party went back on that promise and we know which party that was. It was the Australian Labor Party, in one of the greatest acts of betrayal on the Australian electorate ever perpetrated by a government.

But not content with that betrayal they went to the 2013 election with a brochure and a policy, saying, 'Kevin Rudd and Labor removed the carbon tax.' That is simply false. We are still under a carbon tax. Job destroying as it is, punching holes in household budgets, ensuring that we do not get as much investment in this country as we so desperately need, the carbon tax is still here. Everybody knows it, yet Labor went to the election in 2013 saying that they had already removed it. Now they are being given the opportunity, in 2013, to actually vote for the abolition of the carbon tax and what are they doing? They are doing the exact opposite...
of what they said. They have form here; this is not just a one-off. They did that before the 2010 election and after the 2010 election. Now, in reverse, they are doing it before and after the 2013 election.

Then we had the nonsense from the Leader of the Opposition in this place asserting that, somehow, financial prudence required the continuation of the Clean Energy Finance Corporation. That from the discredited finance minister, who personally presided over $100 billion worth of budget deficits! She comes into this place and purports to argue matters economic. I do not think so, especially not when we said to the Australian people up-front that we would be abolishing the Clean Energy Finance Corporation. Indeed, we said in the second reading speech that, setting up a government bank, with $10 billion—that is, $10,000 million—of borrowed money, underwritten by taxpayers, to invest in high-risk ventures should be a thing of the past century. You would have thought that the Labor Party would have learnt their lesson when it comes to government banks. But it does not seem that they have. The wheel keeps turning and round and round they go, never learning the lessons of history.

Let us have a look at the other bill that, one assumes, Labor and the Greens would seek to excise from this debate and that is the Climate Change Authority (Abolition) Bill 2013. Once again, we said up-front before the election that we would be abolishing this authority with all its associated costs. We have had a longstanding commitment to abolish the Climate Change Authority for one very simple reason: it is not needed if you abolish the carbon tax. Of course, that is why Labor do not want to abolish this authority, because they want to keep the carbon tax. They want to keep the carbon tax, despite having said in brochures that they had already removed the carbon tax. Why on earth would Labor want to debate the continuation of this authority when they said that they had already abolished the carbon tax? Because the principal role of the authority is to provide advice concerning the ongoing operation of the carbon tax. We very simply say that, without the carbon tax and without this role, the need for a separate body to do this and other things will be gone.

But let us be clear: the bill also provides that the other, limited functions of the authority that might be required in the future will continue and be undertaken by the Department of the Environment. It is all very clearly spelt out and, as a result, exposes the contribution by the Leader of the Opposition for what it is: an absolutely hollow smokescreen to try to cover up a very transparent attempt just to delay and frustrate not—might I add here—the government's agenda but the people's wishes. The people actually voted for the abolition of the carbon tax.

Then we heard this nonsense from the Leader of the Opposition that both parties went to the 2007 election suggesting there should be a price on carbon. The answer to that is yes, but, as is always the wont of the Labor Party and the Greens, they left out a vital aspect. That was that we would act in concert with the rest of the world in relation to carbon pricing. After the Copenhagen summit was such a rip-roaring success, it was deemed by us that we would oppose and not be supportive of a price on carbon. It is job destroying. It is punching holes in household budgets to the tune of $550 per annum. So, by voting for this package of legislation, those opposite can redeem themselves with the Australian people. They presided over one of the highest increases in cost of living ever perpetrated on the people of Australia and they also presided over a huge increase in job losses.
We know what the carbon tax does: it punches holes in household budgets and it costs jobs. You ask any manufacturer that makes cars in Australia. It is a reverse tariff. Every Australian-made car has that component of carbon tax built into its price that no imported car has. Or there is the example of Coogee Chemicals, which was going to invest $1 billion in Australia, create 150 permanent jobs and provide either export earnings or import replacement of billions of dollars throughout the life of the plant. The carbon tax was the straw that confirmed to them that they should not be building in Australia. Where did they go? To China, where the CO$_2$ emissions will be twice than would have occurred in a pre-carbon-tax Australia. That is why we have consistently said that the carbon tax was bad for jobs, bad for investment, bad for the economy and, perversely, bad for the environment.

Let me debunk the other falsehood asserted by the Leader of the Opposition: that we do not have an alternative policy. I am sorry; yes, we do. It is called the Direct Action Plan. We had it there at the 2010 election and for three years the Labor Party and the Greens tried to destroy it, day after day, month after month, year after year—and do you know what? They got no traction. They spun their wheels. The Australian people said, 'Yes, there is a better way to fix the environmental issues.' We said we could achieve the five per cent target through our Direct Action Plan, a plan that will ensure that the countryside actually looks better and has more trees, that our soils will be more fertile and that we will be able to assist in innovative technologies to help reduce carbon emissions—all good, practical environmental suggestions which can work and will work without such a job-destroying tax as the Labor Party have now committed themselves to.

Let there be no suggestion that ours is a do-nothing policy. It has been out there for three years and Labor and the Greens tried to pull the wings and the legs off it—and it still flew and the Australian people voted for it. We were told by Senator Wong that we did not want to tell the people about our policy. My goodness, we were out there selling it and the Labor Party and the Greens were out there trashing it—or they attempted to and failed. Now they have the audacity to say that we do not have a policy in this area. Day after day, week after week, month after month and year after year, the Labor Party sought to trash our policy position.

Now the Labor Party in particular have a choice to make. They can continue to frustrate the passage of this legislation—and, sure, the government will be upset. But do you know who is going to be even more upset? It is the Australian people and the huge swag of people who voted for the coalition for the very first time in their lives at the last election. The reason they did so? Sure, it was manifold—there was the border protection issue; there was the economic management; there was the pink batts problem; there was Building the Education Revolution; there was the internal squabbling. There was a host of reasons why the Australian people decided to change the management of this country, but it would be fair to say that the key issue, the standout issue, was the carbon tax that Labor promised not to implement and then did.

Now we are here having a repeat of this debate, after they went to the 2013 election promising that they had already removed the carbon tax. No, they had not. Now they have a chance and guess what? They are going to vote against these measures. They have learnt nothing from their betrayal of the Australian electorate in 2010 and nothing from the consequences of their 2013 election defeat.
I make these comments in sorrow for the once great Labor Party, which used to look after the interests of households, families and the average worker. They have deserted them in the vain pursuit of a green ideological elite which rank-and-file Labor voters are repudiating. They did so at the 2013 election, they did so in state elections right around the country and they did so in municipal elections right around the country, yet here we have the Labor Party and the Greens still in lockstep.

The Labor Party would have some shred of credibility in this debate for separating out the bills if the next speaker could tell us whether they are actually going to vote differently in relation to these 11 separate bills. So if they are going to wave the other nine through and just seek to tarry on the last two that Senator Wong mentioned, there might be some credibility. But the Leader of the Opposition gave us no indication that the Labor Party would cooperate with the will of the Australian people and wave the other nine bills through. That is what exposes this tactic as a simple political tactic designed to frustrate the will of the Australian people.

**Senator MILNE** (Tasmania—Leader of the Australian Greens) (19:45): I rise tonight to support the motion put forward by Senator Wong to say that the bills ought not to be debated together but should be separated out. There was a very good reason for this. It is not about voting differently from the Greens point of view. It is about actually separating the issues and giving the coalition some opportunity to change their own mind. That is the critical way I would present this.

I want to go back through the history of why you would separate these out into three separate packages of bills. Currently we have an emissions trading scheme in Australia. It is legislated and it is operating as an emission trading scheme with a fixed price period for three years, designed to go to flexible pricing in 2015.

Why is it that there was a fixed price period for an emissions trading scheme? The reason goes back to the debate we had through the parliament from 2007 onwards right through to 2009, when the former Labor government’s legislation was defeated. That was because, if you have an emissions trading scheme—a cap and trade scheme—you have to put in a cap and you have to make a determination of what appropriate cap that should be. That means: what level of emissions reduction is appropriate for Australia, the highest per capita polluter in the world? What is the appropriate cap for us in a world where we are trying to constrain global warming to less than two degrees? What is the burden share of the global task that it is appropriate for Australia to shoulder? Therein lies a fundamental difference of opinion, back in 2007, 2008 and 2009, of this parliament.

Whilst the Labor Party and the coalition agreed to a target of five per cent emissions reduction on 2000 levels, with the possibility of going to 25—that was the agreed target then—the Greens pointed out that in 2007 at the Bali United Nations Convention on Climate Change, at the COP, it had been agreed that developed countries like Australia needed to reduce their emissions between 25 and 40 per cent on 1990 levels, because that would leave headroom for developing countries to be able to continue to develop. In other words, we shoulder the responsibility for the historical contribution of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere to enable the developing world to be able to develop.

That was the agreement. So an agreement by both the coalition and Labor back in 2007-09 to stick with a five per cent emissions reduction target flies in the face of what was a globally
fair share. The point I make is that it was never going to be resolved at the political level as to what is the appropriate target for Australia. So when the Multi-Party Climate Change Committee was formed it was agreed that we needed a mechanism to depoliticise the target that would be set—the cap that would be set—for an emissions trading scheme. So the link between these bills is this: it was decided to legislate an emissions trading scheme, set a price and set up a climate change authority whose job it was to take into account the latest science and take into account what other countries were doing and make a recommendation to the Australian parliament on what the cap should be when Australia moved to flexible pricing.

So the climate change authority was an important piece of infrastructure to de-politicise the targets for emissions trading. It was modelled on the experience in the UK, where they had set up a climate council that had enormous respect through academic institutions, the community and broadly across Europe. It was the job of the climate council in the UK to recommend to the UK parliament what an appropriate level of emissions reduction would be for the United Kingdom. It was headed up by some extraordinary scientists, including an Australian, Robert May. I want to pay tribute to the work he has done globally in the context of addressing climate change.

It was that new piece of infrastructure—or institution—that was a huge improvement on what we had before. The worth of it was demonstrated this week when at the hearing into the abolition of these bills the Investor Group on Climate Change, giving evidence, said that with all the political shenanigans going on the investment community has to have a sense of what is really the task at the global level in terms of emissions reduction and what is the sort of parameter that Australia might have to be engaged in in bringing down emissions so that they can plan their investment strategies accordingly.

Mr Nathan Fabian, from the Investor Group on Climate Change, said quite clearly that they had really valued the draft report of the Climate Change Authority, which said that there are two scenarios that Australia should consider: one is reducing emissions by 15 per cent, by 2020; the other is reducing emissions by 25 per cent, by 2020. To go from that at 2020 up to 45 to 50 per cent by 2030 is a huge jump in a decade. The Climate Change Authority has that role.

I believe that when the coalition goes out into the community and talks about 'Axe the tax,' the community has no idea that encompassed in that slogan is the abolishment of a new and important institution that has really just begun its work. It has brought down a draft report and will bring down its final report in February next year. The timetable that had been established was for it to take—and it is now taking—submissions on its draft report, bring down its final report in February, make that recommendation to the parliament and have the parliament decide whether to accept that recommendation and incorporate it as the cap so that we can go to flexible pricing in 2015. That was the timeline, all set out and understood. In the meantime, the linkage with the European Union had been determined to start in 2015. That is the way the institutional structure was meant to come together, with the recommendations to the parliament to set the cap, and then go to flexible pricing in 2015. That is how it fits together, but I do not believe the community has any idea that the excellent work of the Climate Change Authority and the report that they have brought down is included in the abolition of these institutions.
If we were to vote for the abolition of these institutions we would not get the final report of the Climate Change Authority next year, which is making the recommendation on the appropriate cap. The Climate Change Authority has embraced the notion of carbon budgeting—that there is a limited carbon budget we can put in atmosphere—and Australia’s appropriate contribution in terms of that budget. It is not an unlimited budget. We have already gone through a large quantity of the emissions that have been catered for in that budget. That is why we should be looking at this and saying that we are dealing with three separate things here: one is the Climate Change Authority, one is the emissions trading scheme and one is the Clean Energy Finance Corporation. That came out of the Multi-Party Climate Change Committee as well.

The reason it was set up is this: the Greens secured $10 billion to go into the Clean Energy Finance Corporation to fund renewable energy, energy efficiency and clean energy technology. This is because the price was not going to be high enough in the current emissions trading scheme, the fixed price period, to drive the transformation in renewable energy at the scale that will be necessary to see the kinds of cuts by 2030 that I just spoke about. In the 45 to 50 per cent range of emissions cuts on 2020 levels, you need to have large-scale renewables and heavy investment in energy efficiency to give yourself a chance to meet that. To get those large-scale renewables built, you need to have an attractive carbon price that will make those large-scale renewables competitive with old fossil-fuel models. That was not going to happen on a $23, $24 or $25 price. That price is based on a 550-parts-per-million scenario and not a 350- or 450-parts-per-million scenario, which are the ones you need for a safe climate.

We recognise that you need not only a carbon price with an emissions trading scheme but also complementary measures—that includes the renewable-energy target, which already exists, and the Clean Energy Finance Corporation. It would enable co-financing and the convening of financial institutions and so on to get money out the door to build large-scale renewables in the necessary time frame. That is how these institutional structures fit together and how they are interrelated. That is why they need to be looked at separately. What is interesting is that absolutely no-one has been able to make the case for the abolition of the Clean Energy Finance Corporation. This corporation have spent less than $550 million—because some of that fund came from the low-carbon fund—and they have leveraged $2.2 billion in private-sector investment. That means jobs across Australia as well as emission reductions.

We heard from Senator Abetz that this is vain and ideological, but I would suggest the only vanity and ideological bent here is from Senator Abetz and the coalition. Some of the projects that clean energy finance corporations have invested in are the Taralga Wind Farm, the Macarthur Wind Farm, the Moree Solar Farm and Sundrop Farms at Port Augusta in South Australia. Their current portfolio mix is 56 per cent in renewables, 30 per cent in energy efficiency and the remainder in clean technology. They have 179 projects in their pipeline, with a project value of $14.9 billion. That is investment in Australia; that is jobs in Australia; that is clean energy for the future.

Senator Abetz said that the carbon price has meant there is not as much investment as we should have had. In fact, the Clean Energy Finance Corporation is leveraging huge amounts of investment and the role that it is playing as the convener, as a co-financier, cannot be
underestimated. It is giving the banks and financial institutions the confidence to now go and invest in the technologies of the future. What we are seeing here with this attempt to rush through a repeal of these acts is condemning Australia to a rust-bucket economy, because it is saying that, as the rest of the world moves to reduce emissions, Australia is going to go in the opposite direction, which means we will lose any competitive advantage from the sun and the wind—great resources that we have in abundance here in Australia. We are going to lose that competitive advantage.

Already we have seen that Beijing and Shanghai last week started their emissions trading schemes, and on 10 December Guangdong province, with 100 million people, will start its emissions trading scheme, linking up to a national Chinese emissions trading scheme in the near future. Just as California and China are moving to emissions trading, Australia is going backwards, condemning this country to shoring up the old fossil-fuelled economy when we should be moving to the transition to the clean economy.

I think the reason we need to split these bills up is for the coalition to be able to stand up and explain to people in depth what is wrong with the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, because there was no evidence given to the committee to support the abolition. In fact, all the evidence from the investors, the NGOs and the whole business community was to recognise what a fantastic job the Clean Energy Finance Corporation have done. From the board level, with Jillian Broadbent as the chair, through to the executive officer, Oliver Yates, and the whole staff, they have done an amazing job. I want to hear, and I think the Australian people deserve to hear, from the coalition exactly what is wrong with an organisation which is creating jobs, leveraging private sector investment, reducing emissions and making money for the government. What more could you ask from an institution? It is a raging success.

So I would suggest the only vain and ideological position on the Clean Energy Finance Corporation is the one being adopted by Tony Abbott and Eric Abetz, the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Government in the Senate. I would like to have them explain to the Australian people why they will not support the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, and I am hoping that separating out these bills will give the coalition an opportunity to rethink its position on maintaining the Clean Energy Finance Corporation and the Climate Change Authority, because Ban Ki-moon, the UN Secretary-General, has asked Australia to put on the table, by September next year, an increased level of ambition to go into negotiations for a global treaty in 2015. Those global treaty negotiations are now on. The one institution in Australia that is now best positioned to give sound advice to government in relation to the appropriate contribution Australia can make is the Climate Change Authority. To the suggestion that the Department of the Environment has those skills, I respond by suggesting that a large number of those skills were lost as so many people lost their jobs in the Department of the Environment and the department of climate change. We as a nation will have to step up. We have made a fool of ourselves in Warsaw; that cannot continue. The environment minister said that climate change was going to be central to the G20. We took over the chair of the G20 yesterday. If Australia is going to chair these global institutions and play our role in negotiating a global treaty, we have to have the level and depth of expertise somewhere, and it is no longer in the bureaucracy; it is in the Climate Change Authority. It was in the department of climate change; it is now in the Climate Change Authority. That is why it simply cannot be abolished.
I would call on the coalition, through this debate, to regard those issues separately. They had better have a rationale for getting rid of the Clean Energy Finance Corporation and ending the role of the Climate Change Authority pending the G20, the Ban Ki-moon summit next year and the negotiations going into the COP in Lima next year, leading into the COP in Paris in 2015, when the global treaty is meant to be negotiated. I do not think Australians are going to be very impressed with a government that is saying to the rest of the world that Australia has become a laggard and a shirker and we are not going to play our role or live up to any kind of global responsibility.

That is why the bills need to be split. That is why they need to be debated separately, because this can no longer be a debate of cheap slogans. Let us have the debate about the merits of these institutions and the roles that they are playing and get across the detail. If you have a sound argument, let us hear it, but it has to go beyond, 'Axe the tax,' and, 'We said the Australian people voted for this.' I do not think the Australian people know that encompassed in the slogan, 'Axe the tax,' is getting rid of the Clean Energy Finance Corporation and renewable energy investment or getting rid of the only institution which is giving independent advice on the appropriate level of effort from Australia on behalf of future generations. That is why these bills should be split and the debates held in that way.

Senator CAMERON (New South Wales) (20:05): I agree with Senator Wong that we need a proper debate on this issue, and I support the proposition that a debate on this issue is absolutely important for the future of climate change analysis in this country. The Clean Energy Finance Corporation and the Climate Change Authority are two important organisations in this country. The Clean Energy Finance Corporation is supporting business to invest in the technology of the future, low-carbon technology, and the Climate Change Authority is providing the analysis and overview about how we are going in relation to our various targets.

The reason why the coalition want to walk away from the Climate Change Authority is quite clear: that Direct Action will not stand up to any scrutiny or analysis whatsoever when it comes to delivering what it is claimed to deliver. The Climate Change Authority is a threat to the coalition policy, because it would analyse the failures of this so-called Direct Action policy and make it clear to the Australian public that it is an absolute con job of a policy.

There are 11 bills. When you look at the scope of those bills and you see what is happening with this Direct Action policy it is about the coalition walking away from the science that underpins the need to do something on climate change. It is about walking away from future generations, because future generations will pay the price of inactivity in relation to climate change, not only in this country but around the world. It is about walking away from market mechanisms and the economics of climate change that is clearly supported by almost every economist of any standing in this country and certainly by the overwhelming majority of climate scientists in this country.

The coalition's position is a victory of politics over science. That is the reality. It is about playing politics with scientific endeavour. It is about playing politics with the future of Australian children. It is about a victory of short-term policy over long-term policy. When it comes to trust, you only have to look at the coalition's position over the last 10 weeks—flip-flopping on education, flip-flopping on investment, flip-flopping on every issue of substance that comes before us.
Senator Birmingham interjecting—

Senator CAMERON: I am not surprised that they do not want to face up to science. Senator Birmingham used to believe in climate change. He used to believe that there were real issues to be dealt with, but he has subjugated his beliefs to the absolute nonsense of Direct Action. Senator Birmingham, if you believed in the science, you would take on board—

Government senators interjecting—

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Fawcett): Order! I remind senators on my right that Senator Cameron has the right to be heard in silence. Senator Cameron, I remind you to address your remarks through the chair.

Senator CAMERON: I apologise, Mr Acting Deputy President. I will do that. Senator Birmingham has certainly abandoned his claim to believe in the science by adopting this so-called Direct Action policy and getting out there being a warrior for so-called Direct Action. When you look at the science, every organisation of any standing in this country says that there is a problem that has to be dealt with. There is the CSIRO, the pre-eminent scientific organisation in this country, part of the top 10 scientific organisations in the world, and what do they get for saying there is a problem that has to be dealt with? Massive job cuts by the coalition. The Bureau of Meteorology—again, eminent scientists; again, leaders in their field—say that there are huge problems with climate change in this country. The Australian Academy of Science overwhelmingly take the view that this is a problem that must be dealt with.

I can foresee the same thing happening here as happened to the scientists on the public payroll in Canada. The scientists with the Bureau of Meteorology or the CSIRO will suffer the same fate as the scientists in Canada. They will be told, ‘You are not allowed to speak out on this issue. You will subjugate your scientific thought for the political correctness of the government.’ That is what I think we will see here in terms of the CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology.

You have to wonder why we are doing this. Do we want to abandon the children of the future? Do we actually want to accept that there is a reality out there that has to be dealt with? I have to go to the pre-eminent scientific analysis on that, and that is the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. They have put out a clear position. But, before I go to that, let me take up one issue that Senator Abetz raised in his contribution. He said that the coalition were supportive of a price on carbon only if the rest of the world moved. Let me provide you with a bit of refreshed memory in relation to the coalition. Former Prime Minister John Howard set up a task force to look at the issue of climate. That task force was chaired by Peter Shergold and commissioned by the Prime Minister in 2007. That task force said that the cost of delaying action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions would far outweigh any short-term benefit of not acting. This was the coalition’s task force, the Shergold task force. I will quote what they said so we can understand where Senator Abetz is coming from. The Shergold report said:

After careful consideration, the Task Group has concluded that Australia should not wait until a genuinely global agreement has been negotiated. It believes that there are benefits, which outweigh the costs, in early adoption by Australia of an appropriate emissions constraint. Such action would enhance investment certainty and provide a long-term platform for responding to carbon constraints. Combined with Australia’s existing domestic and international work on technology development and cooperation,
including the Asia-Pacific Partnership for Clean Development and Climate, it would position us to contribute further to the development of a truly comprehensive international framework.

So there is the Howard government's adviser. This is the Shergold report saying unequivocally, 'Don't wait, don't hang around. The cost will be more if you hang around and do nothing. If you want to be part of developing a truly international framework then Australia has to play its part.'

Following the release of the Shergold report, as it became known, the Howard government promised to introduce an emissions trading scheme if it were to be re-elected at the 2007 election. Mr Howard would later describe his decision thus:

We had bitten the bullet on emissions trading with the Shergold report released on 1 June rapidly being turned into clear policy. This was the agenda of an active government so policy-confident and by no means spent and exhausted after 11 years of power.

This was in Mr Howard's personal and political autobiography *Lazarus Rising*. So let us not fall for the re-invention of the coalition's position on this. Let's not fall for a change of history by the coalition. Quite clearly, they supported a price on carbon. Quite clearly, they supported doing this prior to a truly global response emerging.

It was not just the Howard government that was looking at these issues. If you look at the Australian Bankers Association at the time, they said:

Climate change has considerable economic, social, environmental and business risk. Continuing uncertainty is disrupting the efficiency of existing markets as well as creating difficulties with regard to financing terms and investment decisions. Australia needs leadership and early action to provide business investment, operational and market certainty. It is important for Australia to take action now and minimise the impacts of uncertainty.

This was at the time the coalition was supporting a price on carbon. The ABA went on to say: Climate change also presents considerable opportunity. Trading, product creation and ancillary services including risk consulting, funds management, legal and accounting should be developed as export services regionally and globally. It is important for Australia to take action now and take advantage of the opportunity to position itself as a carbon hub within the Asia Pacific region.

I am afraid for the Australian Bankers Association that we are not going to be a carbon hub. If this legislation gets through we will be a carbon joke. We will be an absolute carbon joke because no-one believes that Direct Action can deliver.

Why are we doing this? If you go to the IPCC, they say clearly that there are observed changes in the climate system—

…that the 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 amount of snow and ice has diminished; sea levels have risen; and the concentrations of greenhouse gases have increased.

That is from the scientists. And in relation to the atmosphere, they say that each of the last three decades have been successively warmer at the earth's surface than any preceding decade since 1850. 'In the northern hemisphere, between 1883 and 2012 it was likely the warmest 30-year period of the last 1,400 years.' They go on to say that we will have warmer and/or fewer cold days and nights, warmer and more frequent hot days and nights over most land areas, warm spells and heatwaves, the frequency and duration increasing over most land areas. And on and on it goes.
Over the last two decades the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets have been losing mass. Glaciers have continued to shrink almost worldwide. So on it goes: the sea level rising, the atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide increasing. What is the response to that by the coalition? It is a joke. It is so-called Direct Action. No-one of any standing has supported this policy either as an economist or as an environmental scientist.

Then they want to take away some of the positive aspects that have been put in place to try to deal with what John Howard recognised had to be dealt with, and that is the Clean Energy Finance Corporation. The Clean Energy Finance Corporation is headed by Ms Jillian Broadbent, a very well-respected business person, who conducted the review. When she sent her letter of transmittal to the responsible ministers she said the establishment of a $10 billion fund dedicated to invest in clean energy—

...will capitalise and leverage the flow of funds for commercialisation and deploy renewable energy, low emissions and energy efficiency technologies. In this way we will be preparing and positioning the Australian economy and industry for a cleaner energy future.

I am afraid the coalition do not want to position the Australian economy to a cleaner and more energy-efficient future. They want to take us back to a position where we are solely reliant on carbon-intensive industries. Ms Broadbent goes on to say that after the CEFC's establishment, after 15 months of operation, they have acted with commercial rigour and have avoided excessive risks. It is absolutely untenable for the coalition to get up here and argue that this is about creating a bank and that it is all going to go into disaster. The CEFC have acted absolutely impeccably in terms of their operation. They have adopted a conservative approach to building their investments. They have given the taxpayer a return while reducing CO$_2$ in the atmosphere. They have acquired what is described as 'positive externalities' to demonstrate how any project successfully addresses market barriers.

They have funded projects involving 500 megawatts of clean electricity generation. That is the equivalent of one unit at Liddell coal-fired power station. It is a massive amount of energy. Their total portfolio of $536 million has delivered $2.2 billion in value. They are delivering abatement at negative cost, $2.40 per tonne of CO$_2$ abated compared to what would be probably $80, $90 or $100 for every tonne they try to abate under direct action. This is so far superior to the coalition's Direct Action policy that you wonder how anyone with any sense, any understanding of the science or any understanding of the economics could walk away from the Climate Energy Finance Corporation.

So it is delivering, if you look at some of the case studies—new wind farms in Taralga, the Macquarie Wind Farm in Victoria, Victoria's Portland wind farm expansion, the Moree Solar Farm, chicken manure and organic waste being reused to power and heat establishments, the tomato farm solar innovator, the GBES biogas and cuts to the grid energy use and on and on it goes. The CEFC should be congratulated for the work they have done. We should ensure that they stay in place because this is about doing something practical in addition to a price on carbon, and that is absolutely essential.

As for the Climate Change Authority, as I have indicated, what that is about is that the coalition does not want someone independent analysing the failure of Direct Action. That is what it is about, because Direct Action is destined to fail. Every analysis of Direct Action clearly indicates that you will not meet your abatement targets; that the cost will be over the top; that you will have to employ thousands of public servants to actually manage it; that
those public servants will not be in a position to understand the projects that they are going to
dole money out on; that by far, business will have the inside knowledge on it; and that there
will be an information asymmetry in the public service trying to deal with this. You know that
every report that has come through over the last few years about direct action-type policies,
that is paying people to take on a project and do a certain outcome, has not delivered. It just
has not delivered. If you look at what Direct Action will result in, it will be a fiasco.

We are entitled to stand here and say that millions of Australians voted for the Labor Party,
millions of Australians want action on climate change and millions of Australians want us to
ensure that children will get a decent future, and the Labor Party will not abandon those who
voted for us. We are determined to make sure that our children have a future.

Senator FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and
Assistant Minister for Social Services) (20:25): I think it is important to recognise that this
actually is a procedural debate that is occurring here at the moment. You would not have
known from the contribution of Senator Cameron that that is the matter which is before the
chair—

Senator Ian Macdonald: Or Senator Milne.

Senator FIFIELD: Or, as Senator Macdonald points out, the other contributors thus far.
The question before us is whether the package of bills be taken together. I would have thought
that if there has ever been a package of bills that has been more widely canvassed before an
election, or the policy that these bills seek to give effect to, it would be this particular package
of bills. I know that those opposite say there is the importance of the need for scrutiny. Of
course, absolutely, we agree with that. That is why the government itself referred the package
of bills to the legislation committee for inquiry. What the great difference is here to our
predecessors in government is that what we are actually seeking to give effect to is an election
commitment to abolish the carbon tax and to abolish a number of agencies. The previous
government introduced legislation that actually sought to break an election commitment not to
introduce a carbon tax. There was an inquiry at that time for that package of legislation as
well, an inquiry, I might say, that went for about as long as the inquiry that we instigated. As I
said before, the difference was our inquiry was into a package of legislation that actually
sought to give effect to an election commitment.

I am not going to detain the chamber any longer because I think it is important that we get
to the substantive debate as quickly as possible, but I just did not think that the contributions
of Senator Cameron and Senator Milne could go unanswered.

Senator MADIGAN (Victoria) (20:28): I will not speak for long on this matter, but I do
want to make it perfectly clear where I stand in this debate. Listening to Senator Cameron's
contribution, I thought it was a bit rich—talking about subjugation of scientific debate to
political correctness on the government's policy of the day. Senator Abetz has said that the
opposition's decision is a stunt and there is no reason to separate these bills because the
opposition intends to vote the same way on all of them. That may be true, but I am not a
member of the opposition so I am not sure exactly how they intend to vote on every bill—
although I have some idea. I did not support the former government, now opposition, when it
sought to ram through whole blocks of legislation in late 2011, including the carbon tax
legislation, and I have no intention of supporting the coalition government to do the same
thing—11 bills together on the red today. When the ALP, the former government, guillotined
legislation, there were howls of dissent from the coalition benches about the antidemocratic nature of this practice, and rightly so. Now we have a chance for the coalition in government to demonstrate a more democratic approach to legislation, and I lament the fact that they seem to be employing the same tactics. I said before and I will say again: I do not support guillotines, no matter who tries to use them. As I have said, I am not a member of the opposition but neither am I a member of the government. I am a DLP senator and I know how I intend to vote and I do not intend to vote the same way on every bill. I certainly support most of the government's position regarding the carbon tax but I will save that for the coming debate. However, I do not support the abolition of the Clean Energy Finance Corporation. Again, I will go into further detail on my reasons during the coming debate. I will support the opposition in their move to open all these bills to debate because the Senate is a place for scrutiny, debate and argument.

The PRESIDENT: The question is that these bills be taken together.

The Senate divided. [20:34]

(The President—Senator Hogg)

Ayes ......................27
Noes ......................37
Majority ..............10

AYES
Bernardi, C
Boyce, SK
Cash, MC
Edwards, S
Fawcett, DJ
Fifield, MP
Johnston, D
Macdonald, ID
McKenzie, B
Payne, MA
Ruston, A
Scullion, NG
Sinodinos, A
Williams, JR

Birmingham, SJ
Bushby, DC (teller)
Colbeck, R
Eggleston, A
Fierravanti-Wells, C
Heffernan, W
Kroger, H
Mason, B
Parry, S
Ronaldson, M
Ryan, SM
Seselja, Z
Smith, D

NOES
Bilyk, CL
Carr, KJ
Dastyari, s
Farrell, D
Gallacher, AM
Hogg, JJ
Ludlam, S
Lundy, KA
McEwen, A (teller)
Milne, C
O'Neil, DM
Polley, H
Rhiannon, L

Cameron, DN
Conroy, SM
Di Natale, R
Farner, ML
Hanson-Young, SC
Lines, S
Ludwig, JW
Madigan, JJ
McLucas, J
Moore, CM
Peris, N
Pratt, LC
Siewert, R

CHAMBER
Clean Energy Legislation (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013

First Reading

The PRESIDENT (20:37): The question now is that the Clean Energy Legislation (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013 be now read a first time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Senator FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (20:37): 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—

The Australian people have already voted upon this bill.
Now, the parliament gets its chance.
The 2013 election was a referendum on the carbon tax.
The people have spoken.
Now, it is up to the parliament to show that it has listened.
The Australian people have pronounced their judgement against the carbon tax: they want it gone.
This bill delivers on the coalition's commitment to the Australian people.
It is also a cornerstone of the government's plan for a stronger economy built on lower taxes, less regulation and stronger businesses.
The carbon tax is bad for the economy and it is bad for Australia: it costs jobs, hurts families and does nothing for the environment.
The new government has already scrapped the fringe benefits tax hit on the car industry and the attack on nurses' and teachers' self-education expenses by not proceeding with Labor's announced but not enacted new taxes.

The government has already established a once-in-a-generation commission of audit and commenced a root-and-branch review of competition policy.

Still, repealing the carbon tax is the first economic reform of this parliament—and it will be followed by bills to repeal the mining tax, to restore the Australian Building and Construction Commission, and deal with Labor's debt legacy.

The first impact of this bill will be on households whose overall costs will fall $550 a year on average.

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.

Prices for groceries, household items and services will also fall because the price of power is embedded in every price in our economy.

This is our bill to reduce your bills.

When the price of power comes down, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission will be ready to ensure these price reductions are passed on to households and businesses.

But families and pensioners will keep the tax cuts and benefit increases already provided.

The carbon tax will go but the carbon tax compensation will stay so that every Australian should be better off.

Repealing the carbon tax will reduce costs for all Australian businesses, every single one of them.

The previous government argued that only big business paid the carbon tax.

That is just not true. Every small business paid the carbon tax through higher electricity and gas bills and higher costs for supplies.

The carbon tax also acts as a reverse tariff.

Not only does the carbon tax make it more difficult for Australian businesses to compete abroad, it makes it more difficult for domestic businesses to compete at home—because there is no carbon tax on imports.

As the Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries said in its submission to the government, 'Australian manufacturers have been at a commercial disadvantage as a result of the carbon price when compared to imported motor vehicles.'

As cane growers said, 'The carbon tax has hurt the industry's international competitiveness.'

Australian employers do not just pay the costs of the carbon tax—they also pay the costs of complying with it.

Repealing the carbon tax also removes over 1,000 pages of primary and subordinate legislation.

Repealing the carbon tax cuts the size of the climate change bureaucracy.

So repealing the carbon tax will reduce the cost of living, make jobs more secure and improve the competitive position of our country—why would anyone be against that, especially when it is what the Australian people have just voted for?

Repealing the carbon tax is what the employers of Australia want now.

The Business Council of Australia 'supports the wind-up of the current carbon pricing mechanism given it places excessive costs on business and households because (our) carbon charge… is now one of the highest in the world'.
The Australian Food and Grocery Council 'welcomes the removal of the Carbon Tax as a step towards reducing the cost burden on food and grocery manufacturers, which is impeding the industry’s competitiveness and viability'.

Master Builders Australia says that the carbon tax has made worse Australia's already low levels of housing affordability.

The Minerals Council of Australia says that the carbon tax is "a deadweight on the economy" with a $1.6 billion a year burden on the minerals sector alone.

The judgement of Australia's jobs providers is in—and it is the same as the Australian people: the carbon tax is hurting jobs and growth.

It is not just our nation's businesses—big and small—that have carried the burden of the carbon tax—it has also increased the costs of community organisations and not-for-profit groups as well as state and local governments.

The carbon tax has rippled through the economy—hitting schools, hospitals, nursing homes, charities, churches, council swimming pools and community centres.

It has hit each and every group and individual that uses power—and that was always its goal, to make electricity more expensive.

The intention of the previous government was to put power prices up because that was their way of reducing carbon emissions.

The intention of the new government is to put power prices down by axing this toxic tax and using other means to reduce emissions.

By reducing the cost of electricity and gas, we will help to make households better off, workers more secure and our economy stronger.

No one should be in any doubt—the government is repealing the carbon tax in full.

We are not playing word games or playing tactical political games—we are doing what we were elected to do.

Others have said they would terminate the carbon tax but they were only renaming it.

We are not renaming it.

We are not floating it.

We are not keeping the machinery in place so we can dust it off in the future.

We are abolishing the carbon tax in full.

We have said what we mean and we will do what we say—the carbon tax goes.

This bill is one of a package of 11 bills that repeal the legislation that established the carbon tax, including the Clean Energy Act 2011 and associated charges acts and that also set up the bureaucratic programs and structures to administer and support it.

The bill is supported by four technical bills—to be introduced by the Minister for the Environment later today—that abolish the equivalent carbon tax applied through the fuel tax and excise system and the synthetic greenhouse gas levies.

Together, these bills will ensure that no business will incur a carbon tax liability after 1 July 2014.

They ensure that no equivalent carbon tax will apply from 1 July 2014 on fuels used in shipping, rail and air transport or on synthetic greenhouse gases.

Repealing the carbon tax at the end of the financial year provides certainty for business and simplifies the transition.

It means this government will not be proceeding with the previous government's legislated carbon tax increase that would have taken effect from 1 July 2014.
Our bill abolishes the tax in full.

Labor's carbon tax changes for the on-road fuel costs of heavy vehicles that were going to commence on 1 July 2014 will not happen.

That saves consumers the previous government's planned increase in the price of everything that had to be trucked around the country.

Unfortunately, the new government cannot undo the past, we can only make the future better—and that is what we will do.

Carbon tax liabilities incurred up to 30 June 2014 should be met in full.

This means liable entities will need to complete current carbon tax compliance activities in accordance with current legislated timeframes and processes.

These repeal bills preserve relevant provisions of the Clean Energy Act and other acts so that all outstanding liabilities can be collected.

The Minister for the Environment and the Treasurer will soon introduce bills to abolish bureaucratic agencies set up with the carbon tax, including the multi-million dollar Climate Change Authority and the multi-billion dollar Clean Energy Finance Corporation.

The Treasurer will also soon introduce a bill that implements Labor's previously announced decision to scrap further assistance to households in 2015-16 intended as further compensation for the damage done by the carbon tax.

Under this government, the carbon tax will not apply from 1 July so there will be no need for further compensation packages.

The government believes that the best assistance we can give industry is less tax.

We will end the merry-go-round of carbon tax industry assistance that takes from one pocket and puts less back in the other.

Because there will be no carbon tax, the Jobs and Competitiveness Program, Energy Security Fund and the Steel Transformation Plan will all be terminated from 1 July 2014.

These assistance measures will only remain to assist with final 2013-14 carbon tax liabilities.

The buy-back facility for free carbon units issued under the Jobs and Competitiveness Program and the Energy Security Fund will continue to operate for 2013-14 compliance.

There will also be a final reconciliation for free carbon units issued under the Jobs and Competitiveness Program to ensure that there is no under- or over-allocation of assistance for 2013-14.

The government will ensure the benefits of repealing the carbon tax are passed on to consumers.

The ACCC will have further powers to take action against any business that engages in price exploitation in relation to carbon tax repeal.

Businesses are already subject to the existing law to prevent false, misleading or deceptive conduct.

Penalties of up to $1.1 million for corporations and $220,000 for individuals will apply.

The ACCC will also monitor prices in key sectors in the lead-up to, and following, the repealing of the carbon tax.

The government is repealing the carbon tax because there is a less complicated and less costly way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions—that will actually reduce emissions and won't damage the economy.

The government will scrap the carbon tax and then proceed with its direct action plan.

The centrepiece of the direct action plan will be the Emissions Reduction Fund—a market-based mechanism for reducing carbon dioxide emissions.
The fund provides a powerful and direct additional incentive for businesses to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. The fund will use positive incentives to reduce Australia's greenhouse gas emissions. Direct action means more trees, better soils and smarter technology—this is the right way to get emissions down.
The carbon tax is a $9 billion hit on the economy this year alone.
It is a $9 billion burden on jobs, on investment and on Australia that we just do not need.
This bill gets rid of it.
This bill is the government's bill to reduce the people's bills.
This bill is good for the economy, it is good for jobs, it is good for families wanting to get ahead.
Debate adjourned.
Senator FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (20:38): I move:
That the resumption of the debate be an order of the day for a later hour.
Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (20:38): In relation to the motion moved by Senator Fifield, I seek leave to move an amendment.
Leave granted.
Senator WONG: I move:
At the end of the motion that the resumption of debate be made an order of debate for a later hour add:
'and the orders of the day for the resumption of the second reading debate on the Clean Energy Finance Corporation (Abolition) Bill 2013, and subsequently the Climate Change Authority (Abolition) Bill 2013, have precedence over this bill and the other related bills until determined.'
I will speak briefly because I am aware that we have had a lengthy debate on this issue and there are other matters senators wish to debate. This motion ensures that the procedure I flagged when I moved the initial procedural motion will be adhered to and that the Senate can proceed to debate on the Clean Energy Finance Corporation (Abolition) Bill 2013 and the Climate Change Authority (Abolition) Bill 2013 for the reasons that opposition and crossbench senators have outlined.
Senator FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (20:39): At one level I can understand why the opposition want to do everything they can to delay for as long as possible the debate on the Clean Energy Legislation (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013. Their actions in the last term of government were excruciatingly embarrassing. We know that they deceived the Australian people at the election before last. They solemnly put their hands on their hearts and said there would be no carbon tax under a government led by their leader at that time. They fibbed, so I can understand why they want to delay debate of this bill, even if it is for just a day or two. We will oppose the amendment.
The PRESIDENT: The question is that the amendment moved by Senator Wong be agreed to.
The Senate divided. [20:42]
(The President—Senator Hogg)]

Ayes ......................37
Senator Brown did not vote, to compensate for the vacancy caused by the resignation of Senator Joyce.

Question agreed to.
The PRESIDENT: The question now is that the motion as amended be agreed to.
Question agreed to.

Ozone Protection and Synthetic Greenhouse Gas (Import Levy) Amendment (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013

First Reading

Bill received from the House of Representatives.

Senator FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (20:44): 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 FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (20:45): I move:
That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Leave granted.

The speech read as follows—

The Ozone Protection and Synthetic Greenhouse Gas (Import Levy) Amendment (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013 is one of two bills to repeal the equivalent carbon tax on synthetic greenhouse gases. These bills are part of the broader legislative package to abolish the carbon tax.

This bill amends the Ozone Protection and Synthetic Greenhouse Gas (Import Levy) Act 1995 so that importers of synthetic greenhouse gases and products containing those gases will not incur a liability to pay the equivalent carbon tax for synthetic greenhouse gas and equipment imported after 1 July 2014.

This will reduce costs for businesses using these gases, including for refrigeration and air-conditioning.

Debate adjourned.

Ordered that the resumption of the debate be made an order of the day for a later hour.


First Reading

Bill received from the House of Representatives.

Senator FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (20:46): 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 FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (20:46): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Leave granted.

The speech read as follows—

The Ozone Protection and Synthetic Greenhouse Gas (Import Levy) (Transitional Provisions) Bill 2013 provides for an exemption from the equivalent carbon price for the import of bulk synthetic greenhouse gases between 1 April and 30 June 2014 if certain conditions are met.

Debate adjourned.

Ordered that the resumption of the debate be made an order of the day for a later hour.

Ozone Protection and Synthetic Greenhouse Gas (Manufacture Levy) Amendment (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013

First Reading

Bill received from the House of Representatives.

Senator FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (20:47): 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 FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (20:47): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Leave granted.

The speech read as follows—

The Ozone Protection and Synthetic Greenhouse Gas (Manufacture Levy) Amendment (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013 is one of two bills to repeal the equivalent carbon tax on synthetic greenhouse gases. These bills are part of the broader legislative package to abolish the carbon tax.

This bill amends the Ozone Protection and Synthetic Greenhouse Gas (Manufacture Levy) Act 1995 so that manufacturers of synthetic greenhouse gases will not incur a liability to pay the equivalent carbon tax for synthetic greenhouse gas manufactured after 1 July 2014.

This will reduce costs for businesses using these greenhouse gases, including for refrigeration and air-conditioning.

Debate adjourned.

Ordered that the resumption of the debate be made an order of the day for a later hour.
True-up Shortfall Levy (General) (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013

First Reading

Bill received from the House of Representatives.

Senator FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (20:48): 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 FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (20:48): 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—

Together, this bill, the True-up Shortfall Levy (Excise) Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013 and the Clean Energy Legislation (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013 ensure that final assistance allocations under the Jobs and Competitiveness Program are accurate so that businesses are not over or under-allocated assistance in 2013-14.

This bill imposes a levy which recovers the value of over-allocated free carbon units received under the Jobs and Competitiveness Program for the 2013-14 financial year.

For constitutional reasons, this bill imposes the levy to the extent that it is not a duty of customs or excise.

Debate adjourned.

Ordered that the resumption of the debate be made an order of the day for a later hour.

True-up Shortfall Levy (Excise) (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013

First Reading

Bill received from the House of Representatives.

Senator FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (20:49): 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 FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (20:49): 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—
Together, this bill, the True-up Shortfall Levy (General) Carbon Tax Repeal Bill 2013 and the Clean Energy Legislation (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013 will ensure that final assistance allocations under the Jobs and Competitiveness Program are accurate, so that businesses are not over or under allocated assistance in 2013-14.
For constitutional reasons, this bill imposes the levy to recover over-allocations to the extent that it is a duty of excise.
Debate adjourned.
Ordered that the resumption of the debate be made an order of the day for a later hour.

Climate Change Authority (Abolition) Bill 2013
First Reading
Bill received from the House of Representatives.
Senator FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (20:50): 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 FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (20:50): I move:
That this bill be now read a second time.
I seek leave to have the second reading speech incorporated in Hansard.
Leave granted.
The speech read as follows—
The Australian people delivered a clear message on September 7 that they do not want a carbon tax.
The government is meeting this promise to the Australian people by repealing the carbon tax and simplifying unnecessary climate change bureaucracy.
Repealing the carbon tax will boost Australia's economic growth, increase jobs and enhance Australia's international competitiveness by removing an unnecessary tax, which hurts businesses and families.
Repealing the carbon tax will reduce annual ongoing compliance costs for around 370 liable entities by almost $90 million per annum.
Repealing the carbon tax will lower retail electricity by around nine per cent and retail gas prices by around seven per cent than they would otherwise be in 2014-15 with the carbon tax.
Repealing the carbon tax will remove over 1,000 pages of primary and subordinate legislation.
This bill is part of a package of bills which contribute to the government's delivery of its commitment to repeal the carbon tax and remove unnecessary bureaucracy.
The government has a long-standing commitment to abolish the Climate Change Authority because it is not needed. I say this with no disrespect to the members or staff of the Climate Change Authority. We will bring its relevant functions in-house: into the Department of the Environment.
In an economic environment that demands greater rigour in the spending of public money, the Australian people want a smaller climate bureaucracy. Our pledge to abolish the Climate Change Authority will make a significant contribution to making this happen.

The government is already well placed to receive authoritative advice on climate change matters from existing government bodies.

We have the Bureau of Meteorology to advise on climate trends and climate science. We have the CSIRO to advise on the environmental effects of climate change, climate science and the most appropriate and effective technological and scientific responses to climate change. We have an entire department of state, in the Department of the Environment, dedicated to providing the government authoritative advice on environment and climate change policy.

The principal role of the authority is to provide advice concerning the ongoing operation of the carbon tax, and without this role, the need for a separate body to do this and other things will be gone.

The government is clear—evidenced by our introduction of the carbon tax repeal bills today—that the carbon tax will be repealed.

We are abolishing the carbon tax to reduce cost pressures on households and business, boost economic growth, increase jobs and enhance Australia's international competitiveness.

The government is also abolishing the carbon tax because it does not work.

It does not work because, at its heart, the carbon tax is an electricity tax. It relies upon the assumption that people will either change demand for or supply of electricity.

The problem is that demand for electricity is largely inelastic because it is an essential service. This means the carbon tax pushes up the price of electricity without actually reducing emissions.

The previous government's own modelling from November 2012, which it submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, shows that domestic emissions increase under the carbon tax from around 560 million tonnes in 2010 to 637 million tonnes in 2020.

This scheme, at this time, in this form will not reduce Australia's emissions and will not reduce global emissions. In other words, the carbon tax does not work.

Let us be clear. The government accepts the science of climate change. The government is committed to our unconditional emissions reduction target to reduce emissions by five per cent below 2000 levels by the year 2020. The government will consider further action and targets in 2015 as has been our policy and as the Prime Minister reaffirmed only yesterday, on the basis of comparable real global action, in particular by major economies and trading partners.

However, the government believes there is a fundamentally better way to reduce emissions than through a carbon tax.

The Australian government will reach its emissions reduction target through its direct action plan to efficiently and effectively source low cost emissions reductions and improve Australia's environment.

This will be done primarily through our Emissions Reduction Fund which will purchase the lowest-cost abatement. The fund will provide incentives for abatement activities across the Australian economy, rather than pushing up prices. I will now turn to the details of the bill.

The bill repeals the Climate Change Authority Act 2011 in order to abolish the Climate Change Authority.

The bill makes consequential changes to other legislation to reflect the fact that the authority will no longer exist. To this end, references to the authority in other legislation will be removed, including references which allow for the sharing of information with the authority or concerning the authority's financial management.
The bill provides that the limited functions of the authority that are required in the future will continue. The bill amends relevant acts to provide that the legislated reviews of the Carbon Farming Initiative, the National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Scheme and the renewable energy target will be undertaken at the direction of the minister.

It is my intention that these reviews should be undertaken by the Department of the Environment, which has the requisite skills and expertise to do them. The review of the renewable energy target will be undertaken in consultation with the Department of Industry.

Lastly, the bill transfers any assets and liabilities of the authority to the Commonwealth and makes arrangements for the winding up of the authority's activities.

The abolition of the authority is expected to result in a saving of $22 million over the forward estimates, further improving the budget bottom line.

Debate adjourned.

Ordered that the resumption of the debate be made an order of the day for a later hour.

Customs Tariff Amendment (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013

First Reading

Bill received from the House of Representatives.

Senator FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (20:51): 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 FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (20:51): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Leave granted.

The speech read as follows—

The Customs Tariff Amendment (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013 amends the Customs Tariff Act 1995 to remove the elements of this act that were legislated by the former government to apply the carbon tax through the fuel tax and excise system.

Importantly, this will reduce the increase in excise-equivalent customs duty on aviation gasoline and aviation turbine fuel that represents an equivalent to the carbon tax applied to Australian imports.

Currently, Qantas imposes a carbon price surcharge of between $1.93 and $7.25 per passenger on all domestic flights, depending on the distance travelled. Virgin Australia imposes similar surcharges.

The repeal of the carbon tax will reduce one of the major components of airline costs, and enable airlines to pass on a significant saving to travellers.

Debate adjourned.

Ordered that the resumption of the debate be made an order of the day for a later hour.
Excise Tariff Amendment (Carbon Tax Repeal) Bill 2013

First Reading

Bill received from the House of Representatives.

Senator FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (20:52): 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 FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (20:52): 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, which amends the Excise Tariff Act 1921, reduces the increase in excise on aviation gasoline and aviation turbine fuel that is applied when an equivalent carbon tax is applied to Australian manufactured fuels.

An estimated $196 million was raised in 2012-13 by applying the carbon charge to aviation fuel.

This bill will reduce one of the major components of airline costs, which can be passed on to travellers and consumers.

The bill also reduces the act's complexity by removing references and notes associated with the imposition of the carbon tax.

Senator FIFIELD: I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.

Ordered that the resumption of the debate be made an order of the day for a later hour.

Clean Energy (Income Tax Rates and Other Amendments) Bill 2013

First Reading

Bill received from the House of Representatives.

Senator FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (20:53): 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 FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (20:53): 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—

Today, the Australian Government is taking the first step in honouring its election commitment to repeal the carbon tax.

Abolishing the carbon tax will deliver lower energy bills and lower business input costs.

It will benefit the economy by subtracting from inflation and generating an economic growth dividend.

I am advised that abolishing the carbon tax effective from 1 July 2014 will lower the Consumer Price Index by around 0.7 percentage points in 2014-15.

Average retail electricity prices should fall by around nine per cent and retail gas prices by around seven per cent.

In the first year alone, abolishing the carbon tax will on average lower household costs by $550 for the year.

It will also improve competitiveness for trade-exposed emission-intensive industries.

Repealing the carbon tax is also part of the government's deregulation agenda. It will reduce compliance and administrative costs for businesses.

By abolishing the carbon tax, the government will repeal more than 440 pages of primary legislation and 354 pages of clean energy regulations.

The Clean Energy (Income Tax Rates and Other Amendments) Bill 2013 is part of a package of bills that remove the carbon tax.

This bill amends elements of the Clean Energy (Income Tax Rates Amendments) Act 2011 to repeal the second round of personal income tax cuts, that are due to start on 1 July 2015.

In its final budget handed down on 14 May 2013, the former government deferred the 2015 personal income tax cuts and booked a $1.5 billion saving over the forward estimates.

But the former government never followed through by legislating this change.

The government understands households will continue to face cost of living pressures.

That is why we will keep the current personal income tax thresholds and the fortnightly pension and benefit increases. But with the repeal of the carbon tax, there is no longer any need for the second round of personal income tax cuts.

Therefore, this bill repeals legislated amendments to the Income Tax Rates Act 1986 so that the statutory personal income tax rates and thresholds do not change on 1 July 2015.

This bill also amends the Clean Energy (Tax Laws Amendments) Act 2011 to repeal related amendments to the low-income tax offset.

This bill also repeals legislated amendments to the Income Tax Assessment Act 1936 so that the related amendments to the low-income tax offset do not take effect on 1 July 2015.

Overall, the repeal of these amendments means that the tax-free threshold will remain at $18,200, rather than increasing to $19,400.

The second personal marginal tax rate will remain at 32.5 per cent, rather than increasing to 33 per cent. And the maximum value of the low-income tax offset will remain at $445, rather than falling to $300.

This bill legislates the $1.5 billion saving that the former government announced during the 2013-14 budget.

Senator FIFIELD: I seek leave to continue my remarks later.
Leave granted; debate adjourned.
Ordered that the resumption of the debate be made an order of the day for a later hour.

Clean Energy Finance Corporation (Abolition) Bill 2013
First Reading
Bill received from the House of Representatives.

Senator FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (20:54): 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 FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (20:54): 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, repealing the Clean Energy Finance Corporation Act 2012, delivers on our election commitment to abolish the Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC).
The CEFC was established on 3 August 2012 and was given a wide remit to lend taxpayers money. The CEFC extended the reach of the carbon tax by creating a $10 billion fund to invest in renewable energy technologies and energy efficiency projects.
The CEFC used a full range of financial instruments to co-finance and invest directly and indirectly in these projects and technologies.
From the outset, the concept of the CEFC overlapped with the 20 per cent renewable energy target.
By itself, this target encourages investment in renewable energy. The target does not need to be accompanied by $10 billion of CEFC spending to encourage investment.
Setting up a government bank with $10 billion of borrowed money, underwritten by taxpayers, to invest in high-risk ventures should be a thing of the past in this country.
This bill also transfers the CEFC's existing assets and liabilities to the Treasury.
The Commonwealth will ensure both an orderly transition of the CEFC's investments to the Commonwealth and minimal disruption to the clean energy market so business can continue as usual.
We will of course honour all payments that are necessary as part of meeting our contractual obligations to committed investments.
These obligations will be met from the CEFC's existing funding, which will be transferred to a new CEFC Transitional Special Account.
This account will also cover the Treasury's management costs in administering the CEFC's investments. Any other liabilities relating to the CEFC will also be covered by funds from the special account.
Future monies that were due to be appropriated to the CEFC annually until 2017 will no longer need to be borrowed and will have a positive impact on the gross debt on issue.
The bill also provides for excess funding to be returned to consolidated revenue at any stage if it is no longer needed for managing the CEFC’s assets and liabilities.

With this bill the government is delivering on its commitment to abolish the CEFC.

**Senator FIFIELD:** I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.

Ordered that the resumption of the debate be made an order of the day for a later hour.

**Minerals Resource Rent Tax Repeal and Other Measures Bill 2013**

**First Reading**

Bill received from the House of Representatives.

**Senator FIFIELD** (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (20:55): 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 FIFIELD** (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (20:56): 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 Minerals Resource Rent Tax, commonly known as the mining tax.

This bill ends a sordid history of poor taxation policy. And it discontinues or re-phases measures that were intended to be funded from the expected but disappearing revenue of the mining tax.

Given that the mining tax has failed to deliver meaningful revenue and the government has had to borrow to pay for the related measures, the total mining tax package has imposed a significant cost to the budget.

Passage of the bill will abolish a flawed tax and deliver $13.4 billion in budget savings over the forward estimates period to 30 June 2017.

This will begin to repair the nation’s finances and put the budget on a more sustainable footing.

**Schedule 1—Repeal of the Minerals Resource Rent Tax**

Schedule 1 of the Bill seeks to repeal the Minerals Resource Rent Tax with effect from 1 July 2014. Australia’s mining tax has had a long and tortured journey.

The Henry Tax Review, commissioned by the first Rudd government, recommended introduction of a Resource Super Profits Tax (RSPT). The government forecast that the original RSPT would raise $49.5 billion in the five years from July 2012.

The RSPT was an unprecedented hit to one of Australia’s most successful industries, which understandably reacted negatively.

Ultimately the announcement, consultation, and handling of the RSPT was a contributing factor to the downfall of former Prime Minister Rudd.
Then new Prime Minister Julia Gillard made a key promise to resolve the impasse with the resource sector over the tax.

Her government negotiated with three of Australia's biggest miners, and from this the Minerals Resource Rent Tax was enacted in 2010.

This new version of the mining tax included an extension of Petroleum Resource Rent Tax to onshore projects.

The forecasts for revenue expected from the new version of the mining tax were significantly revised down from the original tax. $49.5 billion was to be collected from the RSPT over a five year period. This was reduced to $26.5 billion to be collected from the Minerals Resource Rent Tax over the same period.

Since its creation, forecast revenue from the tax has been repeatedly written down.

In February 2013, the former Treasurer, the member for Lilley, released information that indicated the tax had raised just $126 million in its first six months of operation.

Since its inception from 1 July 2012, it has collected a net $400 million.

The mining tax is a flawed tax.

It has been opaque in its operation with key details of how the tax works not clearly articulated by the former government.

One such example is their failure to explain the upfront tax deduction from the market valuation method used to calculate tax liabilities for the mining tax.

This complex and unnecessary tax has imposed considerable administrative costs on resource operators required to comply with it.

Less than 20 taxpayers have contributed to the net $400 million raised by the mining tax to date, but around 145 other miners have been required to submit mining tax instalment notices while making no net payments.

In other words, around 145 taxpayers are complying with the mining tax legislation, but are not actually paying any tax.

It imposes a significant regulatory and compliance burden on the iron ore and coal mining industry and has damaged business confidence in these industries that are critical to future investment and jobs.

Repealing the tax will restore confidence and promote mining activity, which in turn will create jobs and deliver prosperity to the broader community. It will send a clear signal that Australia wants to be a premier destination for mining investment, and is once again open for business.

While mining companies in Australia will no longer be required to pay the mining tax, they will continue to pay their fair share of tax through state royalties and company tax.

**Schedule 2—Loss carry back**

Schedule 2 of the bill seeks to repeal the mining tax related company loss carry-back.

The bill provides that, from the 2013 14 income year, companies can carry their tax losses forward to use as a deduction for a future year.

This will save $950 million over the forward estimates.

**Schedule 3—Small business instant asset write-off threshold**

Schedule 3 of the bill amends the instant asset write-off threshold provisions for small business entities.

The threshold value of a depreciable asset for the purposes of instant asset write-off provisions was increased from $1,000 to $6,500 as part of the introduction of both the mining tax and the carbon tax package.
This bill seeks to reduce the threshold amount from $6,500 to $1,000 from 1 January 2014.

From 1 January 2014, small business entities will be able to immediately deduct the value of a depreciating asset that costs less than $1,000 in the income year the asset is first used or installed ready for use.

This measure will provide a $2.6 billion saving over the forward estimates.

Schedule 4—Deductions for motor vehicles

The bill seeks to provide that from 1 January 2014, motor vehicle purchases made by small business entities will no longer be eligible for an accelerated deduction of $5,000.

These purchases will instead be treated as normal business assets under the concessional capital arrangements available under subdivision 328-D of the Income Tax Assessment Act 1997 and depreciated at a rate of 15 per cent, in the year which the asset is first used or installed and then 30 per cent for subsequent years.

The removal of this measure will provide savings of $450 million over the forward estimates.

However it is important to note that in an unrelated initiative the coalition will assist the automotive industry by not imposing Labor's $1.8 billion fringe benefits tax hit to salary sacrificed cars.

Schedule 5—Geothermal energy

Schedule 5 of the bill seeks to repeal the geothermal exploration deduction.

As a consequence, geothermal energy exploration and prospecting expenditure will not be immediately deductible.

Amendments are included in the schedule to provide a capital gains tax (CGT) roll-over in cases where a geothermal exploration right is merely exchanged for a geothermal extraction right relating to the same area.

Geothermal exploration will then be consistent with the treatment of other mining rights.

The removal of this measure will provide $10 million in savings over the forward estimates.

Schedule 6—Superannuation Guarantee Charge percentage

Schedule 6 of the bill seeks to delay further increases in the superannuation guarantee rate for a two-year period.

The superannuation guarantee rate will remain at 9.25 per cent until 30 June 2016 and then rise to 9.5 per cent on 1 July 2016 and then in increments of half a per cent a year until it reaches 12 per cent on 1 July 2021.

The pausing of the superannuation guarantee will save $1.6 billion over the forward estimates.

Schedule 7—Low income superannuation contribution

Schedule 7 of the bill seeks to abolish the low income superannuation contribution (LISC). The contribution will not be payable on or after 1 July 2013.

When we are responsibly able to and once the budget has been returned to a strong surplus the coalition will revisit concessional contribution caps and incentives for lower income earners.

The removal of this measure will save the budget $2.7 billion over the forward estimates.

Schedule 8—Repeal of income support bonus

The bill seeks to repeal the income support bonus, which was intended to be funded from the anticipated revenue from the mining tax. This indexed, non-means tested payment was paid twice annually to eligible social security recipients.

This bill will abolish all future payments of the income support bonus commencing from the date of Royal Assent of the legislation. It will save $1.1 billion over the budget forward estimates.
Schedule 9—Repeal of schoolkids bonus

Finally, this bill seeks to repeal the schoolkids bonus. The schoolkids bonus is a payment that is not linked to education or education expenses, paid for by borrowed money which will need to be repaid by the same children it is supposed to benefit. The coalition government will provide a more efficient, targeted approach to improving education outcomes for students through effective education policies, rather than bonus payments to individuals. The removal of this measure will save the budget $4.5 billion over the forward estimates.

Conclusion

Full details of the all of these measures are contained in the explanatory memorandum to the bill. The government has consulted with key industry stakeholders since the repeal of the mining tax was announced as a priority election commitment, including a recent round of public consultation on the exposure draft legislation.

Whilst some of the related expenditure initiatives are worthy in nature, they have been carelessly linked to a complicated and burdensome tax that will, at the end of the day, never pay its way.

Senator FIFIELD: I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.

Ordered that the resumption of the debate be made an order of the day for a later hour.

COMMITTEES

Membership

The PRESIDENT (20:57): Messages have been received from the House of Representatives transmitting for concurrence resolutions relating to the formation of joint committees as listed at item 15 on today’s order of business.

Senator FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (20:57): by leave—I move:

That senators be appointed to committees as follows:

Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples—Joint Select Committee—

Appointed—Senator Siewert

DisabilityCare Australia—Joint Select Committee—

Appointed—Senator Siewert

Economics Legislation and References Committees—


Electoral Matters—Joint Standing Committee—

Appointed—Senator Rhiannon

Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade—Joint Standing Committee—

Appointed—Senator Whish-Wilson

Human Rights—Joint Statutory Committee—

Appointed—Senator Wright

Migration—Joint Standing Committee—

Appointed—Senator Hanson-Young
National Capital and External Territories—Joint Standing Committee—
   Appointed—Senator Hanson-Young

Privileges—Standing Committee—
   Appointed—Senator Ludlam

Treaties—Joint Standing Committee—
   Appointed—Senator Ludlam.
   Question agreed to.

Senator FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (20:57): I move:

That consideration of message No. 27 relating to the Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia be made an order of the day for the next day of sitting.

Question agreed to.

Senator FIFIELD: I seek leave to have the remaining messages considered immediately.

Leave granted.

Senator FIFIELD: I move:

That the Senate concurs with the resolutions of the House of Representatives contained in messages Nos 15 to 26, relating to the appointment of certain joint committees.

Senator IAN MACDONALD (Queensland) (20:57): by leave—I wish to speak to the motion of concurrence in the formation of the committees that have been announced. I will not keep the Senate for too long. I just want to indicate to other parties, to whom I have distributed a proposed amendment, why this is not proceeding now, and that is because the government has asked to have a little extra time. I would certainly hope that the government will agree with the amendments that I have moved, which in fact bring the establishment of this committee more into line with the coalition’s pre-election promise in relation to Northern Australia.

I will speak at more length on that tomorrow when the motion is dealt with. Hopefully it will not have to be a long speech, because hopefully the government will agree. I have not approached the Greens, the Australian Labor Party or the Democratic Labor Party or Senator Xenophon to lobby for this. I would hope they might have supported it anyhow, and particularly after I explain the purposes of the proposed amendments.

Can I just say in relation to the substantive motion, which deals with other select committees, that I have become more concerned perhaps only in recent times on how the Senate does not always seem to be consulted as fully as it should in relation to joint committees. It disturbs me somewhat—I do not know what happens with the Labor Party—that decisions seem to being made outside of the Senate on what happens in these committees and how they are constituted. That is something I will be pursuing over the next 6½ years that I am in the Senate—God willing.

I want to draw to the notice of the Senate one step forward by the House of Representatives in relation to joint committees, and that is that, in relation to some joint committees now and to the Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia—which is not being debated just at the moment—they have at last accepted the Senate practice of having participating members. I think that is appropriate. Not all of us can be on every single joint committee. Many of us
have an interest in various committees, but there is a limit to the number of voting members. I think the idea of having participating members on joint select committees is an appropriate one. With that explanation to others to whom I distributed my proposed amendments on why it is not being dealt with now, I would urge support for concurrence with the motion before the chair.

Question agreed to.

REGULATIONS AND DETERMINATIONS

Disallowance

Senator HANSON-YOUNG (South Australia) (21:00): I move:

That the Migration Amendment (Temporary Protection Visas) Regulation 2013, as contained in Select Legislative Instrument 2013 No. 234 and made under the Migration Act 1958, be disallowed.

It is with both thankfulness and sadness in this place that this motion has had to be moved today. I am thankful that the Senate is able to stop terrible pieces of legislation when indeed it needs to, and that in the case of a piece of regulation it is still the parliament that has the opportunity to view regulations and make a decision as to whether they are indeed in the best interests of the Australian public or in the best public policy interest at all. It is with sadness, though, that this regulation was ever tabled by the government. We know that the disastrous effects of temporary protection visas on genuine refugees are real. The reason we know that is that we have seen the dramatic, harmful and dangerous effects firsthand. We have had temporary protection visas before in this country and they were incredibly cruel, incredibly dangerous and created incredible suffering for the people they were imposed upon.

The cruelty of this particular government's approach to refugees is nothing more than an attack on Australia's generous heart. It is no better exemplified than in the use of temporary protection visas. Temporary protection visas under this government are for punishment's sake only. They are only being given to people who have already arrived in Australia. They have waited for years in immigration detention and then waited more years perhaps on a bridging visa or in community detention only to finally have their application for asylum assessed, be found to be genuine refugees and then be slapped with a temporary protection visa.

I am pleased to say standing here tonight that the result of this motion will mean that we will rid the statute books of the use of these cruel visas which keep refugees—men, women and children—in limbo for three years with the fear always hanging over them of being deported back to the places they had to flee because of war, torture and persecution. No longer will these refugees have to continue to live in limbo. By scrapping the Abbott government's attack on vulnerable refugees, this motion will enable these people to be reunited with their family members, live a life free of fear and start putting their lives back together again—free of uncertainty.

Australia is a compassionate nation and the support for this motion tonight reflects the values that we hold dear. We are the country of a fair go. We are a country that says if you deserve help, you go through the process and we offer you that protection. Temporary protection visas of course leave those who are most deserving living a life in limbo. By passing this motion we are indeed upholding our reputation as a caring nation. Under this particular policy, Prime Minister Abbott is once again favouring punishment over protection.
When it comes to the most genuine refugees, that is indeed the cruellest and harshest response we could take.

Temporary protection visas are cruel. They are inhuman and their harmful effects on refugees and their families can exist for a lifetime. We know that under the Howard government, when temporary protection visas were used, they never worked as a deterrent. I want to go to a couple of key reasons why we know that is the case. In 1999, when temporary protection visas were first introduced, they did not stop the flow of asylum seekers coming here by boat; in fact they had the reverse effect. In the two years prior to temporary protection visas being introduced, 1,078 people arrived by boat. In the two years after temporary protection visas were introduced, that number went to over 8,000—eight times as many people came by boat after the Howard government introduced temporary protection visas. That is a 700 per cent increase.

These visas never worked as a deterrent. All they did was punish the most vulnerable, the most genuine, the most deserving refugees simply for having dared seek protection for their families. Refugees on temporary protection visas often refer to living in fear of being returned home, once their visas expire, to face the dangers they fled in the first place. Of course their fear extends to the family members that they have had to leave behind and they are not able to be reunited with under the temporary protection visa rules. This constant fear, this constant uncertainty, this constant limbo leaves very capable people with nothing. It is very hard as a refugee to start putting your life back together while you are being told the entire time by the government of the day that you may be sent back to the hands of the Taliban. How are you meant to hold down a job if, in that three-year period, you may be turned around and sent home? How can you develop a proper connection with your community and start contributing positively to society if you are worried the entire time about the treatment at the hands of the Taliban of your family back home, who are never able to come to Australia while you remain in this limbo.

Of the 11,206 temporary protection visas that were granted between 1999 and 2008 when the Labor Party—and kudos where kudos is due—removed temporary protection visas the first time around, only five per cent of those people were not given permanent protection in Australia. Let me say that again: 11,206 temporary protection visa holders, and 95 per cent of them were then able to stay in Australia permanently after we had put them through the turmoil, the torture and the uncertainty of having to live in limbo, with the fear of being sent back to the hands of their persecutors. These people deserve the permanent protection of our borders, not a life of uncertainty and continued oppression.

It is crucial that we understand the negative impact that this is going to have on the women and children in refugee families. We know that, when family reunion was denied, more women and children were forced to take perilous boat journeys. The very real human impact of that was no better exemplified than by the SIEVX tragedy. In the SIEVX disaster in October 2001, when 353 asylum seekers drowned on their way to Australia, the majority of those people—288 of them—were women and children who were there because they could not come on a family reunion visa.

This policy is dangerous, it is risky and it does nothing to deter people from taking those dangerous journeys. It is impractical, it is ineffective and it issues punishment for punishment's sake. Of the arrivals of people who came to Australia once temporary protection
visas were first introduced, the numbers of women and children increased substantially. Women went from comprising seven per cent of arrivals in the two years prior to temporary protection visas to 20 per cent in the two years after. Children went from comprising seven per cent in the two years prior to temporary protection visas to becoming almost a quarter of all boat arrivals in the years following the introduction of temporary protection visas. The facts are clear. Temporary protection visas risk people's lives. By taking away family reunion the government is creating a greater incentive for the people smugglers to take advantage of people's vulnerability.

Temporary protection visas leave open the possibility of returning vulnerable refugees to their homelands, as I have already said. We cannot let this government's cruelty continue to spread beyond not just their political rhetoric, but right into the lives and hearts of genuine refugees who have been through so much in order to get here. These TPVs are in many ways being used retrospectively, because they are only being given to people who have already arrived here in Australia. Many, as I have already said, have spent many years in immigration detention. They have had their cases checked, they have been kept from their families for this long, they have been through the suffering of indefinite and long-term detention, only now to get out the other end, being recognised as people who had to flee the tortures and brutalities of war and persecution, and then be slapped again by the Australia government, who say, 'While we think you're a refugee and we accept that you are, we'll only pretend that that is the case for maybe three years or so.' That is not how a responsible, a compassionate, or even practical country deals with the issues relating to refugees in our region.

We have to get past this idea that the domestic politics of the day should dominate. This is about people's lives. There is no better example of cruel policy for its own sake than the reintroduction of temporary protection visas, which failed to protect, failed to care for and, in fact, risked the lives of people and cost the lives of many women and children along the way. It is irresponsible. It is dangerous. And I am thankful tonight, standing here, that this Senate may very well make the right decision to rid the statute books of temporary protection visas and put us on a path of coming up with ways of managing the needs of refugees by looking through a humanitarian lens and not just through the nasty gutter politics of the day-to-day election polls.

Senator CASH (Western Australia—Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women) (21:13): To set the factual background for my contribution to this debate on the disallowance motion, I advise the Senate as follows. Operation Sovereign Borders is being successfully implemented. Despite the best effort of the Greens and those on the opposition benches it is achieving its stated goals. To date, we have seen an 80 per cent reduction in illegal boat arrivals coming into this country, and that is in but the first 72 days of the operation of Operation Sovereign Borders. This, of course, is in part due to the reintroduction of temporary protection visas.

This evening the Australian Labor Party will be making it clear to all Australians where they stand on the issue of border protection. They will be given a clear choice: the choice of whether to stand firm with the government, which is implementing policies which are effective and are going towards achieving their stated goal, which is to stop the boats, or they can side with their alleged former alliance partners, the Australian Greens, and remove a central plank of the government's border protection policies, being temporary protection visas.
In other words, those that are now in opposition can show the Australian people that they either stand for something, which is strong border protection policies, or, if they decide to side with the Australian Greens, confirm to the Australian people that (a) they learnt nothing from the result of the 7 September election and (b) they stand for nothing more and nothing less than promulgating the people smugglers' business model.

Let us remind ourselves of what occurred when the former government wound back the Howard government's proven border protection policies, which included temporary protection visas. As a result of that deliberate decision by the former government, we saw over 50,000 people arrive illegally in Australia, we saw a budget blow-out of in excess of $11 billion, we saw the confirmed tragic loss of over 1,100 lives at sea and we saw over 8,000 children placed in detention. The choice for the opposition is therefore very clear: more of the same disastrous policies if they side with the Greens and support the disallowance motion, or they can send a very clear message to Australians and to the people smugglers that the opposition want to stop the boats.

After a catastrophic five years of the former government, this government has now reintroduced temporary protection visas. In 2007, when the former Howard government lost office, there were but four people in immigration detention and none of them were children. Contrast that with the over 8,000 children that were placed in detention by the former government. In August 2008 the then Labor government and former senator Chris Evans, who was the relevant minister at the time, made the decision to wind back the proven border protection policies of the former Howard government, abolishing the Pacific solution, which included temporary protection visas. I have already outlined for the Senate the cost of Labor's border protection policies, a cost which the Australian people acknowledged when they cast their votes on 7 September. After almost six years of failed policies from those that are now in opposition, the Australian people elected the Abbott coalition government with a very clear mandate to clean up Labor's mess and to make a difference from day one, which is exactly what this government has done, and the statistics bear witness to that. This government has introduced a strong arsenal of measures to combat the people smugglers. This includes the restoration of temporary protection visas.

Let there be no doubt in anyone's mind tonight, as they cast their vote on the disallowance motion, as to whether or not temporary protection visas work, because they do. In the short time since temporary protection visas have been reintroduced, 181 asylum seekers who were in the community on bridging visas have made their own decision to return home. That is because they were offered a temporary protection visa, and that was not what they wanted when they came to this country. The number of people arriving illegally by boat in but the first eight weeks of Operation Sovereign Borders has declined by almost 80 per cent compared to the number in the eight weeks prior to the introduction of Operation Sovereign Borders. If your goal as a government is to implement a policy that is to eventually stop the boats and stop people risking their lives to make the perilous journey by sea to Australia, the statistics stand up for the fact that Operation Sovereign Borders is doing just that.

November, as senators would be aware, is traditionally a high-volume month for boat arrivals to Australia, particularly as the monsoon season approaches. Last November there were 2,443 illegal arrivals to Australia on 41 boats. This November, subsequent to the commencement of Operation Sovereign Borders, we have seen a total of 207 people arrive on
five boats. You might ask yourself why. The answer to that question is very easy. This government has the resolve that the former Rudd government and the former Gillard government and then the former Rudd government failed to have. We said to the Australian people we would implement policies that would stop the boats. This included temporary protection visas. That is exactly what we have done, and the end result is an 80 per cent reduction in boat arrivals in the eight weeks in which Operation Sovereign Borders has been in place. The positive progress of Operation Sovereign Borders is, as the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection has said on several occasions, not due to any single measure or any single relationship or any single partner. All of the measures work together to give us a successful suite of policies, just as they did before under the former Howard government's Pacific solution.

When we assumed office on 7 September we were well and truly aware of the former government's legacy caseload in relation to their failed border protection policies. The former government—and those on the other side do not like to admit to it—have left a Labor legacy caseload of in excess of 32,000 people who had arrived in this country and they had not commenced processing them, and more than 20,000 of those people are living in the community and are now on bridging visas. To say that it will be a significant task to clean up Labor's mess in this regard is possibly the understatement of the year. But again this government has the resolve to clean up the mess that the Labor Party left us. Central to this approach, as Australians know, is the reintroduction of temporary protection visas. For those who arrived before 19 July and are subject to offshore processing, under a coalition government they will not get permanent residence in Australia as they would have if the Labor Party had been left in office. They will not be given family reunion under the Abbott coalition government. They will not be allowed to leave Australia and then return and they will be required to satisfy mutual obligation requirements in return for welfare payments. They will face a much tougher assessment process, not the tick-and-flick approach that was adopted by the former government, and they will do all of this without the largess of taxpayer funded lawyers to run their multiple appeals.

Under this government those arriving in Australia illegally by boat will also not take the place of offshore applicants under our refugee and humanitarian program. The days when a person who came here illegally by boat and displaced a person who had been sitting in a camp, as I have said before, not for five years, not for 10 years, not for 15 years but in some cases for 20 and in excess of 20 years—that is not going to occur under this government. We have been very clear that we are going to break the nexus between what the current and former government did and we will expose the fraud in relation to their alleged increase of the humanitarian program to 20,000 places. It is a fact, though those on the other side do not appear to like to admit this, that 7,000 of those alleged 20,000 places were going to be granted to people who came here illegally by boat. In other words, all the former government did was increase the number of places so that they could in part hide the number of people that were coming to Australia. That will not occur under this government. Under this government the 13,750 humanitarian visas will go to people who are in a camp. A humanitarian visa will not go to a person who has arrived here illegally by boat and is given a temporary protection visa. There are no two ways about it. The former government's 20,000 places in Australia's humanitarian settlement program were nothing more and nothing less than a con to the Australian people, quite frankly a con potentially to the most vulnerable in society who
believed that if they did the right thing and went to a camp they may have got a place here. That was never going to happen under the former government.

That is why this government has taken what are very tough decisions in relation to border protection policy and that is why we have reintroduced temporary protection visas. Anyone who came here before 19 July and who engages Australia's protection obligations will not receive permanent residency under the coalition government. They will receive a temporary protection visa and they will not displace someone who has been sitting patiently in a camp for many years.

As I have stated, the choice for those opposite is very clear. They can side with the Greens and send a very clear message to the people smugglers that they support the people smugglers' business model and they do not want to take the strong steps that are required to eventually stop the boats. Alternatively, they can support the government in doing what is right by our borders and taking the steps that this country needs to clean up Labor's mess and make the difference that we have from day one. I remind those opposite when they are casting their vote later on this evening of the words of former senator Bob Carr who in a speech to Labor's right faction only six weeks ago offered but one piece of advice. This is what he said: … there should be not a bit of daylight between Tony Abbott and Labor on irregular migration. [If you] embrace the Greens-Left-Fairfax-ABC position, you are going to go backwards at the next election.

That is a former Labor senator, a former minister for foreign affairs, telling those in his party that they should not side with the Greens, that they should not take the approach they took while they were in government, which led to an absolutely disastrous legacy, and that they should close the gap between the policies of the former Labor government and the policies of the current Abbott government.

Again I remind the senators: Operation Sovereign Borders, which includes the reintroduction of temporary protection visas, is having an effect. You cannot deny that, based on the statistics. For the first time in five years the Australian government has the upper hand when it comes to strong border protection policies. When those opposite were in government, they said time and time again—albeit I think they were misleading the Australian taxpayers every time they said it—that the purpose of their policies was to stop the boats. We all know what actually occurred: they had 11 different policies, and not one of those policies stopped the boats. However, if they are true to their word and they do want to support policies that stop the boats, then they should vote with the government tonight and ensure that temporary protection visas are available as part of the suite of measures that this government has implemented, which, based on the statistics, are doing exactly what we said they would do—that is, stopping the boats. As I have stated: since the introduction of temporary protection visas, 181 asylum seekers who have been on bridging visas in the community have been returned home. That is because they were not offered permanent residency; they were only offered temporary protection. That proves that temporary protection visas work. The Australian Greens may not like that fact, but the fact of the matter is the visas do work.

If you want to be part of a government that has strong border protection policies, if you want to be part of a government that does not encourage people to get on boats and risk their lives, if you want to be part of a government that does not want to see pregnant women and children in detention, if you want to be part of a government that effectively spends taxpayers'
money when it comes to protecting the borders, then there is only one decision for you tonight—that is, to vote with the government. *(Time expired)*

**Senator KIM CARR** (Victoria) (21:33): TPVs, as the minister would know, were first introduced by the Howard government in 1999. They limited the type of protection available to genuine refugees by providing only temporary protection. Under the circumstances, these remained temporary so long as a refugee claim was unresolved. There were no rights of family reunification; if a TPV holder left Australia, then there was no right of return. The Rudd Labor government abolished TPVs in 2008 and, as we have just heard, the Abbott government has reintroduced TPVs through the Migration Amendment (Temporary Protection Visas Regulation) 2013, which came into effect on 18 October this year.

The new regulations do not allow TPV holders to apply for or be granted permanent protection at any point in the future. Under the Howard government, upon the expiry of a TPV, its holder was entitled to apply for permanent protection. TPVs will also apply to asylum seekers who have already lodged protection visa applications under the previous scheme but who have not had those applications finalised prior to October 2013. In this sense, this regulation carries with it an element of retrospectivity.

The explanatory memorandum to the regulation states that the purpose of TPVs is to deter people from taking the dangerous boat journey to Australia. On 19 July 2013 the Labor government introduced the PNG regional resettlement arrangement. Under this arrangement, every person who arrives by boat is transferred from Australia. If such a person is found to be a genuine refugee, then that person will be resettled in PNG. This arrangement has effectively taken Australia off the table; this arrangement is working. And contrary to what the minister has actually said tonight, this arrangement is the principal reason why there has been such a significant reduction in the flow of boats from Indonesia and Sri Lanka. This is the reason there has been such a significant change in the movement of boats—this reason, announced on 19 July 2013, and not the farce that the minister has been speaking of—her secret arrangement. But what, in fact, has she done, other than to hide the boats? She has done very little. This arrangement, as I said, is the principal reason why there has been such a significant reduction in the flow of boats from Indonesia and Sri Lanka.

With the PNG regional settlement arrangement in place, the Abbott government's stated rationale for TPVs is of course redundant. I think this is an important principle. The TPVs will not apply to any new arrivals in Australia because these arrivals are being resettled in PNG. The TPVs cannot act as a disincentive; they will only apply to a cohort of people who are already in Australia.

However, the policy of the coalition does contemplate resettlement in Australia using TPVs as a measure of last resort. This intent of the regulation will undermine—I repeat, it will undermine—the PNG arrangement which is currently working so effectively. The government needs to be honest. Minister, you need to be honest about the intention and about how the PNG arrangement and TPVs are going to work together. TPVs do not allow for any method of family reunion. Additionally, TPV holders who leave Australia are not permitted to return. For this reason, TPVs act as a magnet to women and children seeking reunification with their loved ones.

This was exemplified under the Howard government and it was reflected in the number of boat arrivals—in particular, the number of women and children who were on those boats.
Look at this in terms of the two years following the introduction of TPVs: in the two years immediately prior to the introduction of TPVs—that is, from November 1997 to October 1999—a total of 1,953 persons arrived by boat, of which seven per cent were minors and seven per cent were women. In the two years immediately after the introduction of TPVs—that is, from November 1999 through to October 2001—a total of 10,217 persons arrived by boat, of which 24 per cent were children and 20 per cent were women. Given these figures, it was always only a matter of time until a tragedy of the proportions of SIEVX occurred. I remind the Senate that was the occasion when 353 people, mostly women and children, were drowned trying to reach their families. TPVs only encourage this type of tragedy to occur, such is the desperation of people to be reunited with their loved ones and left no other option but to seek reunion by seeking such a dangerous boat journey.

I am sure it would not take much to remind all of us here in the Senate of the numerous reports and studies on the impact of TPVs on the mental and physical health and wellbeing of asylum seekers. Forced separations of families cause significant mental health and medical problems for refugees. The three-year period of a TPV prolongs the uncertainty of an asylum seeker's situation. This causes stress and anxiety and often compounds pre-existing conditions due to experiences of persecution in home countries. TPVs also prevent inclusiveness in the Australian community and promote a disinclination to participate in education and build up relations in this country. The retrospective nature of the current regulation does not afford procedural fairness to asylum seekers, who will be waiting for their claims to be processed and will now find they are only able to apply for temporary protection.

The regime introduced by the Abbott government, in the form of the Migration Amendment (Temporary Protection Visas) Regulation 2013, is even harsher than the policy introduced under the Howard government. Under the Howard government, TPV holders were entitled to apply for a permanent protection visa upon the expiry of their TPV. Under the current regulations no such right exists. This means anyone on a TPV will never have any prospect of obtaining a permanent protection visa. On the expiry of the TPV, holders will have to reapply for another TPV. They cannot apply for permanent protection at any stage. It is at present unclear what services TPV holders will have access to under the current regulations. This could mean TPV holders are not entitled to access basic health services, Medicare, Centrelink, housing, resettlement services or counselling. For all these reasons Labor will support this disallowance.

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

The Senate divided. [21:46]

(The President—Senator Hogg)

Ayes ..................36
Noes ..................26
Majority ..............10

AYES

Bilyk, CL  Brown, CL
Cameron, DN  Carr, KJ
Collins, JMA  Conroy, SM
Dastyari, s  Di Natale, R
Senator Wong did not vote, to compensate for the vacancy caused by the resignation of Senator Joyce.

Question agreed to.

COMMITTEES

Education and Employment Legislation Committee
Environment and Communications Legislation Committee
Economics Legislation Committee

Report

Senator BUSHBY (Tasmania—Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (21:49): Pursuant to order and at the request of the chairs of the respective committees, I present
reports on legislation from the Education and Employment Legislation Committee, the Environment and Communications Legislation Committee and the Economics Legislation Committee together with the Hansard records of proceedings and documents presented to the committees.

Ordered that the reports be printed.

COMMITTEES

Membership

The PRESIDENT (21:49): Order! I have received letters from party leaders requesting changes in the membership of various committees.

Senator FIFIELD (Victoria—Manager of Government Business in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Social Services) (21:49): by leave—I move:

That senators be appointed to committees as follows:

Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples—Joint Select Committee—
Appointed—Senator Siewert

DisabilityCare Australia—Joint Select Committee—
Appointed—Senator Siewert

Economics Legislation and References Committees—

Electoral Matters—Joint Standing Committee—
Appointed—Senator Rhiannon

Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade—Joint Standing Committee—
Appointed—Senator Whish-Wilson

Human Rights—Joint Statutory Committee—
Appointed—Senator Wright

Migration—Joint Standing Committee—
Appointed—Senator Hanson-Young

National Capital and External Territories—Joint Standing Committee—
Appointed—Senator Hanson-Young

Privileges—Standing Committee—
Appointed—Senator Ludlam

Treaties—Joint Standing Committee—
Appointed—Senator Ludlam.

Question agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

The PRESIDENT (21:50): Order! It being after 9.50 pm I propose the question:

That the Senate do now adjourn.
Murray-Darling Basin

Senator BIRMINGHAM (South Australia—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment) (21:50): Tonight I wish to draw attention to some significant developments and advancements in our government's progress and commitment to see the Murray-Darling Basin Plan implemented in full, on time and done so in a manner that ensures our irrigation communities continue to be the productive centre of Australian agriculture and continue to produce, with the maximum level of efficiency possible, food, fibre and produce here in Australia, by Australian farmers, for Australians and for export to the rest of the world.

Last week, in my capacity as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment, I had the distinct pleasure of approving a raft of grants in funding allocations to the South Australian government that will support river communities in my own state of South Australia. The South Australian River Murray Sustainability Program has been the brainchild of river communities themselves over a period of time. They lobbied and they agitated the former government, the state government of South Australia and all sides of politics to ensure that they could develop a package that would allow them to make necessary contributions towards the water recovery targets required to bridge the gap for the successful implementation of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. But also, importantly, they were seeking funding or support to ensure that they could have strong economic sustainability and security into the future.

Our government has given firm commitments to ensure that irrigation communities do enjoy economic sustainability into the future. It is one of the prime reasons and motivations behind our policy commitment that we are giving effect to, capping the extent of buybacks of water licences that will occur. Instead, we are giving priority to infrastructure developments that will ensure the efficiency of irrigators and allow them to use every drop as carefully and wisely as possible to get maximum value for every drop. In doing so, they could return some water to environmental flows to meet those targets under the Basin Plan whilst ideally preserving, if not enhancing, their own productive capabilities.

This cap that we will apply will be set at some 1,500 gigalitres out of the 2,750 gigalitre gap to be bridged towards the implementation of the Basin Plan. Across Australia, across the Murray-Darling states, a range of projects is being supported to ensure we develop and enhance efficiency of irrigation systems, and of on-farm systems in particular. A lot of work is being done, particularly by state governments, to help ensure that we have the right projects in the right places to develop the necessary infrastructure that will give us the water savings required to meet our objective of full Basin Plan implementation by 2019.

The projects I speak of tonight in South Australia are a good example of projects developed from the grassroots up. In this case, they are developed not just with a water security or efficiency objective, but also with a productivity and economic development objective for those communities. In total, the South Australian River Murray Sustainability Program will support some $265 million of investment across South Australia's river communities. The program is comprised of a number of elements.

Firstly, there is the South Australian River Murray Irrigation Efficiency element. This will support $80 million of investment directly into on-farm initiatives that will help make farmers more efficient in their water usage. In doing so, it will allow them to return a minimum of some 16.8 gigalitres of water towards the Commonwealth's 'bridging the gap' targets for the
Basin Plan. The second element, the South Australian Government Water Purchase element, is a $40 million program from which we expect to yield some 19.2 gigalitres towards bridging the gap required to see the implementation of the Basin Plan.

Complementing these two elements is a $120 million package administered out of the Department of Agriculture for the South Australian River Murray Irrigation Assistance program. This is being driven very much by an element of seeking to enhance and further develop the economic opportunities and capacities of those irrigators and farming communities. Through that program, we expect to see some farms get bigger, some farms diversify and some farms undertake significant new business practices. However, ultimately we expect to see all of them pursue something that increases their productivity, hopefully their profitability and their capacity to employ more people in those local communities. We also expect to see them have the capacity to ensure that they actually continue to sustain not just economic production but the lifeblood of the communities that those farms are based in up and down the river system in South Australia. Finally, in the components of this package is an additional $25 million as the South Australian regional development element which will go to support, in particular, works at the Loxton Research Centre.

Overall, this is a very significant package—one of the largest packages and certainly the largest package for South Australian irrigators in particular. Both as the parliamentary secretary and as senator for South Australia, I am very pleased to have seen it delivered. I do, however, express some concern at the attitude of the South Australian Minister for Agriculture, the Hon. Gail Gago in this process.

In my time in this role, I have happily enjoyed constructive relations with the South Australian Premier, Mr Weatherill, and the South Australian Minister for the Environment, Mr Hunter, who have both worked very hard to ensure that we take the right steps forward towards the implementation of the Basin Plan. So I was surprised last week, just as I was signing off on these guidelines, to receive a letter from Ms Gago, who seemed to be complaining about the length of time that it had taken for the guidelines to be approved notwithstanding that our government has been in place for all of three months.

Ms Gago seemed to ignore the fact that the real issue lay with the quality of guidelines that had been developed within her own department. Even more surprising was the fact that although I received her letter last Wednesday, last Thursday Ms Gago then issued a press release complaining about the length of time being taken for the development of guidelines. Again, this was ignoring the reality that the problem was that the guidelines developed within her department had not met the standards the Commonwealth expects to be applied to such programs.

I want to work cooperatively with the South Australian government. I want to ensure that I work cooperatively with all of the state governments to get the Basin Plan duly implemented. What I expect though, is that ministers behave more like Premier Weatherill or Minister Hunter than Ms Gago has done, and rather than conducting their negotiations by press release as she chose to do, that they actually make some contact if they have a concern with the way things are progressing. In this case, her concerns were unfounded because, firstly, steps had been taken to ensure the money would flow and, secondly, the problem lay at her end not at the Commonwealth's end. In future, she needs to ensure that her government's house is in order before she starts throwing any blame around.
All of that said, I am pleased that the money is now going to flow. I will be holding the South Australian government to account from here on in as we make payments to them to ensure that they get it out the door quickly to support the irrigation communities of South Australia and that they get on with the job of ensuring that they get maximum value for it, communities get maximum benefit from it and it makes the necessary contributions to see the Basin Plan implemented and irrigation communities have a healthy and vibrant future.

Crime Prevention

Senator BILYK (Tasmania—Deputy Opposition Whip in the Senate) (22:00): I rise tonight to speak about an issue I am sure is of great interest and importance to all senators—that is, the prevention of crime, particularly crime committed by youth. The Australian Institute of Criminology estimates that crime costs the Australian community $32 billion a year. These costs include things such as goods stolen or damaged in the course of the crime being committed, lost productivity due to victims of crime being unable to work or businesses halting their trading, medical expenses for treating victims and the cost of policing, prisons and the security industry. These financial costs are monumental but they only represent part of the overall cost of crime. The other cost is the human cost to the victims, their families and loved ones but also to the perpetrators, who may end up serving time in prison when they could be more productive members of society.

Given the enormous cost of crime to our community, it should come as no surprise that even small amounts invested in crime prevention can have a huge pay-off. The best types of interventions to stop people from committing crimes are those aimed at children and young people. We know that intervening to stop a child from offending can dramatically reduce their chances of reoffending as an adult. Research shows that people who appear in court or are convicted of an offence as a child are more likely to appear in court or be convicted of an offence as an adult. This is the motivation behind some of the fantastic diversionary projects aimed at providing employment and life opportunities for at-risk youth across my home state of Tasmania. I want to focus particularly on those programs that received funding under the National Crime Prevention Fund because they are now at risk thanks to a recent decision of the Abbott government.

The National Crime Prevention Fund was funded from the proceeds of crime, money which had been confiscated from criminals, and has committed $40 million towards projects that provided community safety infrastructure and youth outreach services. In my home state of Tasmania, funding for eight crime prevention projects worth a total of $1.3 million was announced by the then Minister for Justice, Jason Clare. These eight projects sadly are now facing the Abbott axe. Last month, the government informed the proponents of these eight projects and the hundreds of other organisations across Australia that they were reviewing all grant programs and that the recipients should refrain from making any financial commitments. It was revealed later in Senate estimates by the Attorney-General, Senator Brandis, that the government would axe the National Crime Prevention Fund.

I will mention briefly a few of the projects in my home state that were due to receive funding so that senators opposite can get an appreciation for what they have put at risk. The Youth Insearch program is a highly effective model which has been successfully employed in Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales to support at-risk young people between the ages of 12 and 18, and divert them from engaging in antisocial behaviours. The program involves a
three-stage approach, including weekend camps, support groups and the opportunity to take on leadership roles supported by leadership training. The Youth Insearch Foundation was awarded a $280,000 grant to deliver the program to over 200 young people in Tasmania. The design of the program is based on an extensive and sound research base and is backed up by evidence of its successes which include reduced drug use, reduced criminal behaviour and increased school attendance.

The Huon Valley PCYC was granted funding of $115,000 to implement Project Pathfinder. The Huon Valley is a rural area where there have always been high levels of youth unemployment and low educational attainment. Project Pathfinder assists young people in finding their pathways to employment through work experience placement and the opportunity to develop practical work skills. It would work particularly with young people aged from 10 to 17 who have offended or are at risk of offending and are disengaged from school or their families. As well as providing regular training one day a week at the PCYC, the centre had developed partnerships with local businesses and community organisations to allow participants to gain life skills and some real-world work experience. The Huon Valley PCYC have a track record of taking at-risk youth and engaging them in innovative ways to assist in their education and skills development. For this particular project, they had secured the support of 20 local businesses. I was pleased to have the opportunity to write a letter of support for the grant application to the then Minister for Home Affairs, Jason Clare, and I am bitterly disappointed that this funding is now under threat.

I would like to speak about Training Opportunities and Options for Learning, or TOOL, and their Youth Employment Challenge. TOOL is based on Hobart's eastern shore and provides opportunities for young people to engage in training to improve their skills and employment prospects. TOOL works particularly with young people who are at risk of educational disengagement, long-term unemployment and criminal behaviour. They received a grant of $190,000 for their Youth Employment Challenge project, which would connect disengaged young people to after-school work, employment and traineeships in local businesses. The area the project would be delivered to includes almost half of Tasmania's lowest income families. TOOL had designed the Youth Employment Challenge project to be self-sustaining, meaning the grant they would have received would have continued to provide life and career opportunities to young people into the future, not just over the two-year life of the project.

The flow-on benefits from these opportunities are enormous. It is not only about giving these young people a job. Once they are secure in employment, they are diverted from crime and other antisocial behaviour. Their families have greater financial security and, among families who experience generations of unemployment, a sense of pride that one of them has secured a job. They also feel a great sense of gratitude for the opportunities they have been provided, and generally give back to their community by engaging in community capacity-building activities. The point I am trying to make here is that it is not just the clients of these services who benefit, but the whole community around them.

The result of the Abbott government's short-sighted decision on the National Crime Prevention Fund will be more crime on our streets, more victims of crime and more lives wasted because young people turn to a life of crime rather than finding positive and productive life opportunities. Clearly, the Abbott government fails to understand the
importance of these grants in intervening in the lives of young people, to give them a positive outlook in life and turn them away from the criminal behaviour that can be so destructive to themselves and to others. A number of the participants in successful crime prevention programs, such as TOOL, have remarked that they were on track to end up in the Ashley Youth Detention Centre or Risdon Prison had it not been for these programs giving them the opportunity to demonstrate their potential, develop their skills and secure meaningful employment.

While the axing of the National Crime Prevention Fund may save the government a few dollars in the short term, the consequences of this decision will have costs for the budget in the long term, and a devastating impact on the Australian community. These grants were not funded from general revenue but from money confiscated from criminals. The grants were awarded through a competitive process and included among the selection criteria was a demonstration of community or stakeholder support for the project.

The projects I have just spoken about all have strong community support and involvement, so there is no good reason, as far as I or any other fair-minded person can see, for the Abbott government to axe these grants and put the future of hundreds of worthwhile crime prevention projects in doubt. It is a narrow-minded and mean-spirited decision that will throw into turmoil the futures of so many disadvantaged and disengaged young people. These grants were fully funded, fully costed and fairly awarded by the previous government. The projects they were going to fund have the potential to change lives.

I say to the Abbott Government, and in particular to Senator Brandis and the Minister for Justice, Michael Keenan: for the sake of the youth of Australia and for the sake of victims of crime, reverse this mean, penny-pinching decision and give the recipients of the National Crime Prevention Fund the grants they were rightfully awarded.

**Environmental Activists**

**Senator LUDLAM** (Western Australia) (22:09): Tonight I rise to speak on the multiple fronts on which our environment is under assault. I want to acknowledge those people, particularly the West Australians, who at some time in their lives took stock of what was happening around them and did not look away. There are people in Western Australia and across this ancient continent who took up work in defence of life on earth and to this day they form the backbone of the environment movement, which has done so much to protect and preserve the environment sustaining our communities and economy. Those in the Goldfields and their allies across the country continue to hold the line 40 years after uranium mining was first seriously proposed for Western Australia. This is the campaign that got me started and ultimately propelled me into this chamber, where I am proud to represent those who do so much in defence of our community and environment. They include Uncle Glen Cook; my friend, colleague and mentor Kado Muir; Vicky McCabe; Geoffrey Stokes; Richard Evans; and their supporters from the south who walk in the footprints of those who have walked this ancient country for millennia, such as Mia Pepper, Marcus, KA and Bilbo.

Many of these people are unknown to members of this chamber and yet they have played a powerful role over such a long time in keeping the outback free of the most toxic of industries. As I speak, there are people camped at Challar Forest on Western Australia's south coast, not too far from Walpole. Western Australia has globally significant forests. The south-west of WA is a global biodiversity hotspot and the state has a strong and proud
tradition of standing up in defence of old-growth and high conservation value forests. We know that forests help regulate climate and moderate weather. A recent report showed a strong link between declining rainfall and unregulated deforestation in Western Australia. Half of the forests of Western Australia's south-west have been permanently removed. Of the remaining half, only about 15 per cent is in pre-European condition, yet the Western Australia government will shortly table plans to double the area of native forest logging in the south-west. To those like Jess Beckerling, who is engaged in protection of native forest ecosystems in the south-west, and Ellie Smith and Dylan Lehmann, who were involved in recent non-violent direct action in defence of these priceless ecosystems, I am proud to represent your work.

Across the Kimberley and the mid-west—and we are a couple of years behind the extraordinary confrontations that have occurred in New South Wales and Queensland—we are seeing the ongoing threat of hydraulic fracking of our precious water resources on the driest inhabited continent on earth. Yet we are letting the gas industry overrun our farming, pastoral and wilderness areas by injecting sand, chemicals and occasionally diesel into aquifers, our precious water bodies, in order to squeeze out the last finite drops of fossil fuels. Almost the entire Kimberley, including the water supply of Broome, is under exploration threat. Lock the Gate has a proud history on the east coast and is now established in Geraldton. Mount Lesueur is a flashpoint at the moment, an incredible area rich in biodiversity but now under threat from gas fracking. I acknowledge Lisa Smith and other members of Frack Free Geraldton and the farmers calling for gates to be locked and a veto. Dale Park, who is the head of the Western Australian Farmers Federation, said:

What we are calling for is a right of veto on exploration for gas and petroleum, like we have with mining, because that actually makes the negotiations a lot more equal when dealing with drillers and gas companies.

We know that people of the west Kimberley are accomplished in sticking up for themselves when those from the south come calling with vast and inappropriate industrial development proposals, such as a dam across the Fitzroy river, GM cotton plantations and more recently the defence of the Kimberley coast against an onshore gas plant.

And now most recently, this community, which has won so much at such extraordinary cost, is facing unregulated gas fracking across the area as well. Those people have welcomed me to the camps on the Kimberley coast as I have traipsed through there with my colleagues, Robin Chapple and Rachel Siewert, from time to time. I brought Bob Brown and Christine Milne through that part of the country. Some camp there still in defence of dreaming trails that have been sung for tens of thousands of years for the intact cultural heritage of that part of the world.

We know that the destruction of the precious environment of Western Australia does not just occur in wilderness areas or in those far-flung parts of our state but happens very close to home. For those of us who live in the Perth metropolitan area, we are still seeing vast areas of precious and irreplaceable urban bushland going under bulldozers. Dawn Jecks and James Mumme from Hands off Point Peron and those others across the southern suburbs have in some instances put their lives on hold to save their area around Point Peron. Others have stood up for the Beeliar Wetlands—over more years than I can remember—for a totally inappropriate, appallingly expensive freeway project that refuses to just lie down and die.
Now Premier Barnett is at it again. My colleague Lynn MacLaren MLC has provided important support for that campaign over a very long period of time.

What these things all have in common is that they are linked to a global phenomenon: the destruction our model of unlimited industrial growth is visiting on ecosystems across this continent is not just an Australian phenomenon. It is linked with what scientists are calling the Holocene extinction, the sixth great extinction event. All of these phenomena are linked and so the movements across the state of Western Australia, across this continent of Australia and across the world are themselves linked in this great work of protection.

In here, as a representative the Greens, I am proud to advocate for strong national environmental laws. What is new Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, doing in response to this cascading extension event, which is flowing across the terrestrial, marine and riverine ecosystems? Wherever you go, the fingerprints are there. What this Prime Minister is proposing to do is absolve himself of responsibility. That 30- or 40-year arc of accumulation of national environmental law to deal with issues of national environmental significance is simply to be washed back to the states and territories.

As a West Australian, I can say with great confidence that the Barnett government, the framework of state environmental law and the deliberate enfeeblement of the EPA have failed on so many counts to hold industry and government up to the standards that the community expects. Why would you hand national environmental powers, including protection of native species and biodiversity and even industries as toxic as the uranium industry, back to somebody like Premier Barnett and an Environmental Protection Authority that has conflicted itself out of decisions as weighty as those on James Price Point and finds itself in the courts as a result?

I am proud to stand with those who care for the environment and who back their care up with action. Those on the other side do not appear to care about the destruction of the very things that sustain us, but it is what drives the Greens. It is what propels us to turn up in here day after day. So we stand with those who are putting themselves in the way of business as usual, in the way of this extinction event that is rolling across the landscape—where governments act as proxies for large corporate interests, stealing from current and future generations, totalling it up and calling it GDP. As my dear friend Dave Sweeney, a nuclear campaigner for the ACF, said, ‘Community power is base load power.’ It is always on. It is always there, and I am proud to represent it in this place.

Nepal Election

Senator KROGER (Victoria—Chief Government Whip) (22:19): The Australian government was recently invited to observe the historic Nepali election held on 19 November 2013, and I was privileged to be invited to represent the government, along with Senator Ursula Stephens representing the opposition.

Australia was one of only five nations, including the UN, that were invited to join other international and local observers to provide an independent review of the electoral process and all matters connected with the conduct of the election.

In an attempt to give some context to our participation and the election itself, a brief explanation of the governance of the Himalayan nation of Nepal is necessary. Nepal was a kingdom for over two centuries, ruled by absolute monarchs. In 1990, with the country slowly
changing, the then King Birendra agreed to become a constitutional monarch. Later, civil unrest combined with competing interests of political parties led to a civil war that ravaged the country for over a decade. Following the tragic loss of lives of a reported 16,000 people, the government brokered an agreement with the Maoists that saw the abolition of the monarchy. An election was held in 2008 to elect a constituent assembly that was charged with the responsibility of drafting the country's constitution. This assembly was disbanded after four years, having failed to reach any agreement, with a caretaker government taking over and calling for a new election.

It was in this complex environment that we observed this second election. The threat of violent protests and bomb threats, combined with the palpable excitement of many Nepalis who embraced the opportunity to have a say in the direction of their country, ensured that the election was a very dynamic process.

I flew to the district of Baratnagar to observe the election. In this district we visited a cross-section of rural, urban and ethnic based polling centres. With the Code of Conduct for the Election of the Constituent Assembly Member 2070 (2013) in hand, we reviewed the set-up of polling centres, the opening of the centres, observed 10 different polling centres on election day, observed the process of closing the polling stations and the safeguard measures undertaken to ensure the integrity of the ballot papers, followed the delivery of the closed ballot boxes to the counting centre and returned the following day to witness the process of counting the votes.

At the same time we spoke with numerous electoral officials to ascertain their views about the process and about the use of the identity card circulated in the last week, and we spoke with volunteers and party officials along with a couple of candidates.

I commend the Nepal Electoral Commission on the overall conduct of the election. It was a fair and freely conducted election with extensive processes to ensure that all of the 28 million citizens could register to vote, and were encouraged to do so. Voting is voluntary. Notwithstanding the enormous task of establishing a streamlined process across the challenging geography of the country, with many remote areas, there was a consistent and honest attempt to conduct a democratic and fair election.

In the lead-up to the election and on the day itself, there were real and hoax bomb threats that the 40,000 strong Nepali army and police forces dealt with. A bomb was safely detonated by the army behind the first polling booth that I visited on election day. It was handled capably and in no way deterred people from voting—in fact, I think it gave many of them something to watch whilst they queued.

Australia has financially supported the Nepal Electoral Commission with a donation of $800,000. This has enabled the establishment of an electoral training centre and assisted in the development of an electoral process. I commend the strategic use of overseas development aid in fostering and strengthening the core values of freedom, liberty and democracy. This money has been well invested.

My thanks to our ambassador, Glenn White, Ben Reese and Damien Dunn, along with the local staff, who put together a terrific program for us, ensured our safety and wellbeing and provided expansive briefings so that we were well informed. Thanks to Prem and Vickal, our competent and knowledgeable drivers, who navigated us over some challenging terrain. The
embassy also organised a tour of projects that have benefited from Australian aid money. These projects demonstrated how well targeted and managed projects can make a real difference to the lives of so many. The ambassador and his staff represent Australia in Nepal with distinction.

**Senate adjourned at 22:25**

**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.*

**Acts Interpretation Act 1901**—Subsection 34C(6)—Statements relating to extensions of time for presentation of periodic reports—


**Aged Care Act 1997**—
- Aged Care (Residential Care Subsidy – Homeless Supplement Amount) Determination 2013 [F2013L01984].
- Residential Care Subsidy Amendment (Homeless Supplement) Principle 2013 [F2013L01981].

**Australian Meat and Live-stock Industry Act 1997**—
- Australian Meat and Live-stock Industry (Beef Export to the USA—Quota Year 2014) Order 2013 [F2013L01966].

**Australian Prudential Regulation Authority Act 1998**—Australian Prudential Regulation Authority (confidentiality) determination No. 22 of 2013 [F2013L01983].

**Australian Securities and Investments Commission Act 2001 and Corporations Act 2001**—
- Using the Work of Internal Auditors – November 2013—ASA 610 [F2013L01938].

**Broadcasting Services Act 1992**—Broadcasting Services (Primary Commercial Television Broadcasting Service) Amendment Declaration 2013 (No. 3) [F2013L01999].


**Christmas Island Act 1958**—List of Acts of the Western Australian Parliament for the period 9 March to 9 September 2013.

**Civil Aviation Act 1988**—
Civil Aviation Safety Regulations 1998—
Australian Technical Standard Order C1007a—flight data recorder interface unit [F2013L01941].
Centre Wing to Outboard Wing Attachment Joints—
AD/PZL/5 Amdt 1 [F2013L01942].
AD/PZL/5 Amdt 2 [F2013L01967].
Connecting Rods—AD/CON/63 Amdt 2 [F2013L01930].
Landing Gear – Interruption of Retraction Sequence—AD/A320/14 Amdt 1 [F2013L01928].
Powerplant Fire Detection System – Installation—AD/CESSNA 400/86 Amdt 2 [F2013L01958].
Revocations of Airworthiness Directives—
CASA ADCX 023/13 [F2013L01944].
CASA ADCX 024/13 [F2013L01957].
Standby Generator Control Unit (GCU)—AD/A320/7 Amdt 1 [F2013L01929].
Commissioner of Taxation—Public Rulings—
Class Rulings CR 2013/83-CR 2013/90.
Taxation Determination TD 2013/22.
Corporations Act 2001—
ASIC Class Orders—
CO 13/1406 [F2013L01986].
CO 13/1409 [F2013L01987].
CO 13/1410 [F2013L01988].
CO 13/1411 [F2013L01989].
CO 13/1412 [F2013L01990].
CO 13/1413 [F2013L01991].
CO 13/1420 [F2013L01943].
CO 13/1473 [F2013L01992].
ASIC Market Integrity Rules (Competition in Exchange Markets) 2011—ASIC Class Rule Waivers—
CW 13/1448 [F2013L01961].
CW 13/1479 [F2013L01959].
Currency Act 1965—Currency (Royal Australian Mint) Determination 2013 (No. 5) [F2013L01960].
Customs Act 1901—Customs Amendment (Record Keeping Requirements and Other Measures) Regulation 2013—Select Legislative Instrument 2013 No. 251 [F2013L01968].


Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999—

Amendment of List of Exempt Native Specimens – Coral Sea Fishery (deletion) (19 November 2013)—EPBC303DC/SFS/2013/54 [F2013L01951].

Amendment of List of Exempt Native Specimens – Coral Sea Fishery (inclusion) (19 November 2013)—EPBC303DC/SFS/2013/55 [F2013L01950].

Amendment of List of Exempt Native Specimens – Hippopus hippopus (horse's hoof clam) (19 November 2013)—EPBC303DC/SFS/2013/58 [F2013L01998].

Amendment of List of Exempt Native Specimens – Pilbara Fish Trawl Interim Managed Fishery (19 November 2013)—EPBC303DC/SFS/2013/56 [F2013L01997].

Amendment of List of Exempt Native Specimens – Queensland East Coast Otter Trawl Fishery (deletion) (26 November 2013)—EPBC303DC/SFS/2013/53 [F2013L02003].

Amendment of List of Exempt Native Specimens – Queensland East Coast Otter Trawl Fishery (inclusion) (26 November 2013)—EPBC303DC/SFS/2013/61 [F2013L02004].

Amendment of List of Exempt Native Specimens – Queensland Gulf of Carpentaria Line Fishery (deletion) (26 November 2013)—EPBC303DC/SFS/2013/60 [F2013L02000].


Amendment of List of Exempt Native Specimens – Torres Strait Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery (13 November 2013)—EPBC303DC/SFS/2013/57 [F2013L01996].


Fisheries Management Act 1991—Heard Island and McDonald Islands Fishery Management Plan 2002—Heard Island and McDonald Islands Fishery Total Allowable Catch Determination 2013 [F2013L01996].


Health Insurance Act 1973—

Health Insurance (Diagnostic Imaging Services Table) Regulation 2013—Select Legislative Instrument 2013 No. 247 [F2013L01979].

Health Insurance (General Medical Services Table) Regulation 2013—Select Legislative Instrument 2013 No. 248 [F2013L01980].

Health Insurance Legislation Amendment (Various Measures) Regulation 2013—Select Legislative Instrument 2013 No. 250 [F2013L01982].

Health Insurance (Pathology Services Table) Regulation 2013—Select Legislative Instrument 2013 No. 249 [F2013L01978].
Higher Education Support Act 2003—
Higher Education Provider Approval No. 6 of 2013 [F2013L01985].

VET Provider Approvals—
No. 63 of 2013 [F2013L01931].
No. 64 of 2013 [F2013L01932].
No. 65 of 2013 [F2013L01934].
No. 66 of 2013 [F2013L01935].
No. 67 of 2013 [F2013L01936].
No. 68 of 2013 [F2013L01948].
No. 69 of 2013 [F2013L01946].
No. 70 of 2013 [F2013L01993].
No. 72 of 2013 [F2013L02005].

Migration Act 1958—
Migration Amendment (Internet Applications and Related Matters) Regulation 2013—Select Legislative Instrument 2013 No. 252 [F2013L01962].
Migration Amendment (Visa Application Charge and Related Matters No. 2) Regulation 2013—Select Legislative Instrument 2013 No. 253 [F2013L01963].
Migration Regulations 1994—Visas Attracting a Non-Internet Application Charge—IMMI 13/145 [F2013L01937].
Specified Period in Which Labour Market Testing Must be Undertaken—IMMI 13/136 [F2013L01953].

National Health Act 1953—
National Health (Concession or entitlement card fee) Amendment Determination 2013 (No. 1)—PB 86 of 2013 [F2013L01955].
National Health (Paraplegic and Quadriplegic Program) Special Arrangement Amendment Instrument 2013 (No. 3)—PB 87 of 2013 [F2013L01947].
National Health (Price and Special Patient Contribution) Amendment Determination 2013 (No. 7)—PB 75 of 2013 [F2013L02007].

Radiocommunications Act 1992—
Radiocommunications (Spectrum Access Charges—2.3 GHz Band) Determination 2013 [F2013L01994].
Radiocommunications (Spectrum Access Charges—1800 MHz Band) Determination 2013 (No. 1) [F2013L02006].
Radiocommunications (Spectrum Access Charges—1800 MHz Band) Determination 2013 (No. 2) [F2013L01995].

Social Security Act 1991—
Social Security (Disaster Recovery Allowance) (Prescribed payments) Determination 2013 [F2013L01964].
Social Security (Disaster Recovery Allowance) (Rate calculator) Determination 2013 [F2013L01971].


Taxation Administration Act 1953—

Additional method of working out the amount of monthly instalment liabilities in accordance with the Taxation Administration Act 1953 [F2013L01933].

Provision of further time for lodgment of the 2013 Minerals Resource Rent Tax (MRRT) Return – Low volume non-payers' Instrument (No. 1) 2013 [F2013L01940].


Therapeutic Goods Act 1989—

Therapeutic Goods (Listing) Notice 2013 (No. 3) [F2013L01921].

Therapeutic Goods (Listing) Notice 2013 (No. 4) [F2013L01922].

Therapeutic Goods (Listing) Notice 2013 (No. 5) [F2013L01924].

Therapeutic Goods (Listing) Notice 2013 (No. 6) [F2013L01925].