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**SITTING DAYS—2019**

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FORTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—FIRST PERIOD

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

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

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

Printed by authority of the Senate
### Members of the Senate

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<th>Senator</th>
<th>State or Territory</th>
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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 Victoria to fill a casual vacancy (vice S Conroy), pursuant to section 15 of the Constitution.

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

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

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

(5) Chosen by the Parliament of Tasmania to fill a casual vacancy (vice D Bushby), pursuant to section 15 of the Constitution.

(6) Chosen by the Parliament of Victoria to fill a casual vacancy (vice M Fifield), pursuant to section 15 of the Constitution.

(7) Vacancy created by the resignation of Senator Arthur Sinodinos on 11 November 2019.
PARTY ABBREVIATIONS
AG—Australian Greens; ALP—Australian Labor Party;
CA—Centre Alliance; CLP—Country Liberal Party; IND—Independent;
JLN—Jacqui Lambie Network; LNP—Liberal National Party;
LP—Liberal Party of Australia; NATS—The Nationals;
PHON—Pauline Hanson's One Nation

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

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<tr>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for the Public Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Women</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Marise Payne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Cabinet</td>
<td>The Hon. Greg Hunt MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Indigenous Australians</td>
<td>The Hon. Ken Wyatt AM MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister to the Prime Minister and Cabinet</td>
<td>The Hon. Ben Morton MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development</td>
<td>The Hon. Michael McCormack MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Water Resources, Drought, Rural Finance, Natural Disaster and Emergency Management</td>
<td>The Hon. David Littleproud MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Population, Cities and Urban Infrastructure</td>
<td>The Hon. Alan Tudge MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Regional Services, Decentralisation and Local Government</td>
<td>The Hon. Mark Coulton MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Road Safety and Freight Transport</td>
<td>The Hon. Scott Buchholz MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister to the Deputy Prime Minister</td>
<td>The Hon. Andrew Gee MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Regional Development and Territories</td>
<td>The Hon. Nola Marino MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>The Hon. Josh Frydenberg MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Population, Cities and Urban Infrastructure</td>
<td>The Hon. Alan Tudge MP</td>
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<tr>
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<td>The Hon. Michael Sukkar MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Housing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Superannuation, Financial Services and Financial Technology</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Jane Hume</td>
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<td>Minister for Finance</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Mathias Cormann</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Vice-President of the Executive Council)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Leader of the Government in the Senate)</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Zed Seselja</td>
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<td>Senator the Hon. Bridget McKenzie</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Jonathon Duniam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Marise Payne</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Simon Birmingham</td>
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<td>The Hon. Alex Hawke MP</td>
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<td>The Hon. Greg Hunt MP</td>
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<td>Minister for Aged Care and Senior Australians</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Richard Colbeck</td>
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<td>Minister for Youth and Sport</td>
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<td>Disaster and Emergency Management**</td>
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<tr>
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<td>The Hon. David Coleman MP</td>
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<td>Multicultural Affairs**</td>
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<td>**Assistant Minister for Customs, Community Safety and</td>
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<td><strong>Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Paul Fletcher MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Education</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Dan Tehan MP</td>
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The PRESIDENT (Senator the Hon. Scott Ryan) took the chair at 09:30, read prayers and made an acknowledgement of country.

BUSINESS

Consideration of Legislation

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Leader of the Government in Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (09:31): I seek leave to move a motion to provide for the consideration of the Migration Amendment (Repairing Medical Transfers) Bill 2019 for the remainder of today.

Leave not granted.

Senator CORMANN: Pursuant to contingent notice standing in my name, I move:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent Senator Cormann moving a motion to provide for the consideration of a matter; namely a motion relating to the consideration of the Migration Amendment (Repairing Medical Transfers) Bill 2019 may be moved immediately and determined without amendment or debate.

This is one of the core issues that we took to the last election: our promise to repeal the Labor-Greens backed weak medevac laws, which have weakened our border security arrangements and weakened our national security. Today the Senate will have an opportunity to side with the government in support of stronger national security and against weaker national security arrangements.

This legislation has, of course, been subject to a Senate inquiry. We've had significant debate already. It is obvious from the speakers list that has been circulated in the chamber that Labor and Greens senators have asked to be grouped together towards the bottom of the speakers list, so clearly there is no significant urge by Labor or Greens speakers to participate in this debate any longer. We believe it's in the national interest for this legislation to come to a vote, to be resolved, and for us to leave here this week with the strong border protection and national security arrangements that this government has put in place having been restored. That is why I'm moving this suspension and intend to move the motion circulated in the chamber.

The effect of this motion will be that there will be a further continuation of the second reading debate that's consistent with the order on the speakers list circulated in the chamber. Again, it was not our decision for Labor and Greens senators to be put on the list where they are; it was at the specific request of Labor and Greens senators. On that basis, given where we are in this process, I commend to the Senate the suspension motion and, indeed, ultimately the motion in relation to time management in relation to this bill.

Senator KENEALLY (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (09:33): Well, it is clear that a secret deal has been done—a deal between the government and Senate crossbencher Senator Lambie. The parliament and the Australian people have a right to know what this secret deal is. What is the secret deal? There's been a deal between the Morrison government and Senator Lambie to drive a stake through the heart of medevac, and they're keeping it secret from this parliament and from the Australian public.
Without the full details of this secret deal, how on earth can senators cast a vote in this debate?

Without the details of this secret deal, senators are being asked to cast a vote. Will it start the boats again? Will this secret deal undermine national security, or will this secret deal follow through on a better result for the people who are held in regional processing centres in Manus and Nauru? We simply don't know. Is this what this government has come to—secret deals done behind closed doors, and now dragging it in here, guillotining debate so that it can rush to a vote?

We know that this is a Prime Minister who is willing to do or say anything or promise anything, so what has been agreed to by Senator Lambie and the government? Is the one condition Senator Lambie made clear over the weekend the deal? Have they agreed to Senator Lambie's one condition? Have the government given her their word? Have they actually put pen to paper? These are all questions we don't know the answer to, because they're unwilling to tell us. This is a deal that will remove life-saving medical transfer provisions for people in PNG and Nauru. Before medevac came into existence, 12 people died on this government's watch—12 people—and countless other people were left sick, disfigured, scarred. If senators are to repeal medevac without any knowledge of the deal, they are voting blind.

I ask: does Senator Hanson know the secret deal? Does Senator Roberts know what is in this secret deal? They've given their commitment to vote for a repeal of medevac. Now they're being asked to vote for a repeal of medevac. There's a deal they don't know anything about. You've been cut out of the process, have you? Do you know if this deal is going to be good for the people on PNG, or bad? Do you know if this deal is going to restart the boats, or not?

Do you trust this Prime Minister? I say to Senator Lambie: think about this Prime Minister. He will make up anything just to get himself out of a political bind. He promised to ban the expulsion of gay students on the basis of their sexuality; he never delivered on that deal. He promised to introduce religious discrimination laws by the end of the year; he has pushed that off into the never-never. The Prime Minister promised to deliver the national integrity commission; he pushed that deal off to next year. He promised to respond to the ACCC report on digital giants; he pushed that off. He's gone slowly on the dairy code after they committed to doing that. They promised higher wages; that's a broken promise. They promised to put flash technology for diabetes sufferers on the PBS by March this year; they failed to deliver on that. They have a worthless ministerial code—having witnessed Angus Taylor. And they've gone slow on the banking royal commission. So how can Senator Lambie have any confidence they will deliver on whatever secret deal she has struck with this government?

The fact remains that medevac was only ever needed because the Prime Minister and the Minister for Home Affairs refused life-saving transfers for sick people. Labor believes that Australia can have strong borders without losing our humanity. Let's be clear—people's lives are at risk. When we are casting our votes on this legislation, people's lives are at risk. It is not the time for secret deals. It is not the time for political games. And the worst part is: how are we as a parliament possibly supposed to hold the Prime Minister and this government to account when they're doing secret deals with the crossbench that they're not telling the parliament or the people of Australia about? They're asking us to just trust them with a secret deal. Medevac has saved lives and continues to save lives. It should not be repealed with a secret deal, and Labor will vote to save medevac.
Senator BIRMINGHAM (South Australia—Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment and Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate) (09:38): What we've just heard from ambassador Keneally there—

The PRESIDENT: Order, Senator Birmingham! I ask you to refer to senators by their formal titles.

Senator BIRMINGHAM: What we've just heard from current Senator Keneally there—and staying Senator Keneally, thanks to the fact we don't have a Prime Minister Bill Shorten—is Senator Keneally engaging in complete overreach and completely misleading conduct in terms of the issue that is before this chamber. We hear from Senator Keneally and those opposite, again and again, statements that try to create the belief that somehow without their flawed medevac laws there is no process or no role for medical practitioners in terms of the transfer of individuals to Australia. That is completely untrue.

The truth is that processes for medical transfers already existed prior to the medevac laws, and they will continue to exist should this bill pass the Senate. Specifically, section 198B of the Migration Act allows for transitory persons from a country or place outside Australia to come to Australia for a temporary purpose—for medical or psychiatric assessment or treatment. These provisions have been used and will be used. That is what is there already. The repeal of Labor's laws doesn't change the ability to medically transfer a transitory person to Australia. It does not change that.

The truth is that it is a misconception that the medical transfer provisions inserted by these so-called medevac laws introduced doctors into the transfer process. It did not. The department and ministers of the day have consistently relied upon advice from doctors and medical practitioners to form decisions on whether to bring a person to Australia for medical treatment. We've always been clear on this position.

Senator Keneally poses rhetorical questions to the chamber like, 'How can somebody trust or believe or otherwise on these matters?' How on earth can anybody trust the Labor Party when it comes to matters of border protection? How can they be trusted at all? We know that when it comes to temporary visas, the Labor Party are willing to roll back those parts of the government's successful border protections. We know that Mr Albanese has previously gone to the Labor Party national convention wanting to roll the whole lot back. We know that Senator Keneally herself has wanted to roll back plenty of elements when it comes to border protection policies. And we know that when Labor were last in office they completely lost control of our borders.

The government wants a circumstance where we don't have to deal with these issues at all in the future. We know that we can best have that circumstance by maintaining complete control of our borders, by maintaining the orderly arrivals that this government has achieved by stopping the boats and stopping new individuals going into detention. Our policies have worked in stopping those boats. Our policies have worked in getting all children out of detention. Our policies are working in terms of resettling individuals as a result of agreements we're striking elsewhere around the world. Our policies continue to provide the provision for medical advice to inform decisions made by the minister, and it is completely misleading for Senator Keneally or anyone else in this place to pretend otherwise.

Senator McKIM (Tasmania) (09:42): I want to be abundantly clear with the Senate that the debate we're currently having is literally a life or death debate. It is literally a debate that
will make such a difference for and have such an impact on so many people that I urge senators to put away—as Senator Birmingham just brought out—the political boilerplate rhetoric here and actually focus on what we are debating. It is literally a life or death debate. There are literally lives at very real risk based on the decisions that we make today. Without medevac, the transfer of desperately ill and sick people who have been in Australia's offshore detention regime for coming on to seven years now—the overwhelmingly majority of whom have significant and serious physical and/or mental health problems—will ultimately be determined by the minister. Medevac placed those decisions where they ought to be in a civilised society, which is in the hands of doctors. That is what we are debating.

It is obvious now that Senator Lambie has done a deal with the government. I can only urge both parties to that agreement to come clean on what it is, because how can we have this debate when the majority of the Senate is in the dark about what that agreement is? How can we have a debate that is going to determine whether some people live or whether some people die without the full knowledge of the facts at our disposal?

This is the culmination of well over a year of work by this parliament and, ultimately, a decision made by this parliament to place medical decisions where they ought to be in a civilised society, which is in the hands of the doctors. What we don't need now is a secret deal that will determine whether some people live and whether some people die, and the Senate being asked, as I dread is the case, to conduct these votes and debates absolutely in the dark about what, if anything, the government has agreed to with Senator Lambie. Come clean and allow the Senate to operate as it should, in the full possession and the full understanding of all of the facts that are relevant to this debate. Don't do a secret deal when people's lives are in the balance. That is what I fear has occurred. That is what I fear is going to occur. Playing with people's lives through some secret arrangement is one of the most reprehensible things that you can do as a member of parliament.

This is not just some ordinary piece of legislation that might change the amount of money that someone has or what access they have to public transport or other everyday government services; this is a piece of legislation that will literally either save lives or cost lives. It is completely unacceptable that we should be asked to make these life-or-death decisions without all of the facts at our disposal. I urge Senator Cormann, I urge the Prime Minister, I urge Minister Dutton, I urge whoever has been dealing with this on behalf of the government and I urge Senator Lambie: please put the information on the table so that we can understand whether we are voting to save lives or to kill people. That is what sits in the balance here—whether people live or whether people die. There is nothing more serious that this parliament will ever debate, so let's debate it in the full possession of the facts.

Senator GALLAGHER (Australian Capital Territory—Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate) (09:47): Here in opposition, we have certainly seen some bad law pass this chamber. We have seen the government push through legislation that we haven't agreed with and that other members of the crossbench haven't agreed with, but, in almost all of those cases, we've been able to debate in openness and transparency the matters on which we disagree and the content of the arrangements of that legislation, because it is put before the chamber. But what we understand, in some of the discussions that have been happening around this bill, is that, whatever agreements may or may not have been reached with Senator Lambie, we will not be given the opportunity to scrutinise those arrangements, to debate them.
or to disagree with them, because that is part of a secret arrangement between the government and Senator Lambie.

I can't think of a more important piece of legislation that touches on the lives of over 500 people who have been forced, through the lack of action by this government, to be held in offshore detention now for seven years. Think about that, each one of us here. Imagine, Senator Reynolds, being stuck somewhere without the opportunity to leave for seven years.

**Senator Reynolds:** Who put them there? You put them there; every single one of them!

**Senator GALLAGHER:** I'll take the interjection. I can guarantee that Labor in government would not have left 500 people on an island for seven years without lifting a finger to do a thing about it. I can guarantee you that. These places were for offshore processing, not for indefinite detention, which is what they have turned into.

_Honourable senators interjecting—_

**The PRESIDENT:** Order on my left and right. Senator Urquhart and Senator Reynolds!

**Senator GALLAGHER:** Some 500 people have been forced to spend seven years—

**Senator Reynolds:** Fifty thousand people. It wasn't you picking them out of the sea; customs officers had to get them out.

**The PRESIDENT:** Senator Reynolds!

**Senator GALLAGHER:** This mean government is so obsessed with getting a win after this shocking week and after defending a minister's behaviour that is, frankly, disgraceful. They're desperate. They're trying to get a win off the back of more than 500 people.

_Honourable senators interjecting—_

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Please pause the clock. I'm going to insist that, when I name senators and ask them to come to order, they count to 20 before they start interjecting again and breaking the standing orders again. We have two sitting days to go. We need to deal with this debate. The senator should be heard in silence.

**Senator GALLAGHER:** Thank you, Mr President. This government is so obsessed by this legislation that was passed by the democratic houses of this parliament in the last term. It simply allows a refugee currently in offshore detention who needs medical treatment that can't be provided where they are to be brought to Australia to access that medical treatment. They are so obsessed with their ideology—their determination to be inhumane to the more than 500 people left there—that they will do anything to get a deal on this today. We're hearing on the grapevine that we will not be given any opportunity to have a look at what that deal is. What is it that this government has offered and agreed to in order to pass this legislation?

Let's understand what this is. If this legislation passes today, the 535 people still in PNG and Nauru—the majority of whom have been found to be refugees and have been held for seven years—will not be able to access the processes that have been put in place under the medevac laws for doctor consideration about their health needs. That's what we're doing today. This chamber has every right to stand up and demand that the details of the deal that has been done be provided to this chamber. We should be allowed to debate it. We should be allowed to disagree with it. If in the end you get the numbers, well, you get the numbers.

Labor will continue to fight to ensure that people on PNG and Nauru are not just left there, without anyone caring, in what has turned into indefinite detention. We will continue to
ensure that in some way their health needs are maintained, despite the meanness of this government and its ideological pursuit of campaigns essentially against Labor. They're prepared to put these 500-odd people in the middle of it. It's a disgrace.

Senator DI NATALE (Victoria—Leader of the Australian Greens) (09:53): Let's name what's going on here. The government have done a deal with Senator Lambie to repeal the medevac laws and they have got a side deal, which is secret. So we've got a government working with Senator Lambie to repeal laws that provide people access to health care. That's all that the medevac laws do. The medevac laws say that, if you are sick, you have a right to see a doctor and it's the doctor who makes the decision about the sort of health care that you receive. That's a fundamental human right. Giving people access to medical care has got nothing to do with refugees or, indeed, with people in Australia. That is a fundamental human right. That's all the medevac laws do.

Now we know that those laws, which enshrine what we all understand to be a basic right afforded to every citizen, are going to be repealed on the basis of a secret deal. There's some arrangement that the government has entered into with Senator Lambie that, through the course of this debate, the Australian people will not be made aware of. We won't know what has been decided in secret. That is not the way a parliament works. It's not the way a government should work—negotiating deals in secret, agreements in secret, that fundamentally alter what has been one of the most contentious pieces of public policy in this country for decades.

Now we're being told to accept the repeal of medevac, because there's some secret deal in the background—that may make the situation better or worse; we don't know. We simply do not know. My plea to the government is: make this deal public. Demonstrate that you respect the principles of transparency and accountability. If you are going to enter into an arrangement to repeal laws that protect a fundamental human right, at the very least you owe it not just to this parliament but also to the Australian people to have the basis of that agreement made public.

What you're going to hear now is an hour's motion that forces us—if there's not a vote by 11 o'clock there will be a vote at 11 o'clock. And through the course of this day you will not hear from the government or, indeed, from Senator Lambie what the basis of this secret deal is. To enter into a deal like this over an issue that has been so fraught, so contested, so debated, that has been an area of public policy where the Australian government has been criticised by so many human rights organisations—Amnesty International and the UN—and then to repeal this law on the basis of a deal that we will never get to see, understand or scrutinise is a disgrace. It speaks volumes about the standards that this government decides it wants to uphold. It's a government that's mired in sleaze, in allegations against ministers, and has demonstrated that, while it wants to attack the rights of working people to organise under the banner of integrity, it has no integrity itself.

If this government had a shred of integrity it would allow this parliament to scrutinise the basis of what is the repeal of a law that protects a fundamental human right. Over the past few weeks we've seen scandals around Minister Taylor, we've had allegations against Minister Wyatt and now allegations are surfacing around Mr Christensen. Just when you thought that this government could not sink any lower here they are, ramming through a piece of
legislation where a side deal has been negotiated—and the Australian people will never know what the basis of that deal is.

_Senator Griff interjecting—_

**The PRESIDENT:** I'm sorry, Senator Griff, Senator Wong takes precedence.

_Senator WONG_ (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (09:58): I thank Senator Griff. In the short time remaining in the suspension of standing orders, can I make this point: it appears that there's been a deal done to repeal medevac. That's what it looks like. The Australian people want to see the deal. This Senate wants to see the deal. I've seen enough—we've all seen enough—of this government to know that they ram through legislation without any concern for transparency. They don't care if people have seen what we're voting on—and this legislation is about the lives of vulnerable and sick people. It appears to have been decided in secret and out of public view, away from any scrutiny. Certainly that's consistent with the way this government operates. It's not a government that likes scrutiny. It's not a government that likes transparency. We've seen that in the Prime Minister's persistent, stubborn, obstinate refusal to answer questions about Mr Taylor's behaviour, and Minister Taylor's refusal to answer questions.

It is up to this Senate, regardless of our views on the substance of matters, to insist upon scrutiny and transparency. That is what this chamber is for. In this chamber it is usually the case that the government, the executive, doesn't have the majority in its own right, which means we're the only chamber in this parliament that can ensure there is scrutiny. So I say again: show us the deal. Show the Australian people the deal. If the deal is so great, why don't you come out and tell us what it is?

I will say this to Senator Lambie. I regard her as a friend. I have a lot of respect for her. She is a straight shooter. We don't always agree, but she is a straight shooter. I would say this to you publicly, Senator Lambie: do not let them require you to vote for legislation with a requirement of secrecy around the deal. It is not a reasonable proposition for the government to put to you, and it's not a reasonable proposition for someone who is as straight a shooter as you are to say, 'I'm going to be part of an arrangement which I'm not allowed to make public and on that basis I'm voting for legislation.'

I say to the government: this is a deal which should be subject to the scrutiny of this Senate and the scrutiny of the Australian people. None of the claims that the government has made about medevac have been backed up by facts—none of them—so why would Australians now say, 'But it's fine; we're just going to accept the claims the government makes about some deal we can't see'?

This is fundamentally about transparency and scrutiny. Senators may come to a different view about the substance of the legislation. Labor senators have made clear our view about the substance of this legislation—why it is unnecessary, why it is wrong and why Minister Dutton continues to mislead Australians about the effect of it. But, ultimately, this is not just about the substance; it's also about the role of this chamber and it is about whether policy can be made in the shadows or whether it is subjected to some sunlight. This is the only part of the parliament where you actually get a bit of sunlight. It's the only chamber where you get some sunlight. We know how this government works. We know how this Prime Minister works. He always wants to duck and weave, obfuscate and tell people, 'That's in the bubble; that's
gossip.' He's always got a way of avoiding accountability. This is the same tactic. Senators in this chamber, whatever their views on the substance, should not allow that tactic to prevent the Senate from doing its job.

The President: The time for the debate has expired. The question is that the motion moved by Senator Cormann to suspend standing orders be agreed to.

The Senate divided. [10:06]

(The President—Senator Ryan)

Ayres .....................38
Noes .....................37
Majority.................1

AYES

Abetz, E
Askew, W
Birmingham, SJ
Brockman, S
Cash, MC
Colbeck, R
Davey, P
Fawcett, DJ
Hanson, P
Hughes, H
Lambie, J
McGrath, J
McMahon, S
O'Sullivan, MA
Rennick, G
Roberts, M
Ryan, SM
Seselja, Z
Stoker, AJ

NOES

Ayres, T
Brown, CL
Chisholm, A
Di Natale, R
Farrell, D
Gallacher, AM
Green, N
Hanson-Young, SC
Kitching, K
McAllister, J
McKim, NJ
Patrick, RL
Pratt, LC
Sheldon, A
Smith, M
Sterle, G
Walsh, J
Watt, M

Bilyk, CL
Carr, KJ
Ciccone, R
Dodson, P
Faruqi, M
Gallagher, KR
Griff, S
Keneally, KK
Lines, S
McCarthy, M
O'Neill, D
Polley, H
Rice, J
Siewert, R
Steele-John, J
Urquhart, AE (teller)
Waters, LJ
Whish-Wilson, PS
Question agreed to.

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Leader of the Government in Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (10:08): I move:

That a motion to provide for the consideration of the Migration Amendment (Repairing Medical Transfers) Bill 2019 may be moved immediately and determined without amendment or debate.

And I move:

That the question be now put.

The PRESIDENT: The question is that the question be now put, as moved by Senator Cormann.

The Senate divided. [10:10]

(The President—Senator Ryan)

Ayes ......................38
Noes ......................36
Majority ................2

AYES

Abetz, E
Askew, W
Birmingham, SJ
Brockman, S
Cash, MC
Colbeck, R
Davey, P
Fawcett, DJ
Hanson, P
Hughes, H
Lambie, J
McGrath, J
McMahon, S
O'Sullivan, MA
Rennick, G
Roberts, M
Ryan, SM
Seselja, Z
Stoker, AJ

NOES

Ayres, T
Brown, CL
Chisholm, A
Di Natale, R
Farrell, D
Gallacher, AM

Bilyk, CL
Carr, KJ
Ciccone, R
Dodson, P
Faruqi, M
Gallagher, KR
Question agreed to.

**The PRESIDENT** (10:14): The question is that the procedural motion moved by Senator Cormann be agreed to.

The Senate divided. [10:14]

(10:14)

Ayes .................38

Noes ..................36

Majority ..............2

AYES

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NOES

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Question agreed to.

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Leader of the Government in Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (10:16): I thank the Senate. I move:

That—

(a) the Migration Amendment (Repairing Medical Transfers) Bill 2019 be called on immediately and have precedence over all other business;

(b) if, by 11 am, the bill has not been finally considered, the questions on all remaining stages shall be put without debate;

(c) paragraph (b) of this order shall operate as a limitation of debate under standing order 142; and

(d) following conclusion of consideration of the bill, the Senate shall return to the routine of business.

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

The Senate divided. [10:17]

(The President—Senator Ryan)

Ayes ...................... 38
Noes ...................... 36
Majority ............... 2

AYES

Abetz, E .............................. Antic, A ..............................
Askew, W ............................. Bernardi, C .............................
Birmingham, SJ ..................... Bragg, A J .............................
Brockman, S .......................... Canavan, MJ .........................
Cash, MC ............................. Chandler, C ..........................
Colbeck, R ............................ Cormann, M ..........................
Davey, P ............................. Duni, J ..................................
Fawcett, DJ ........................... Ferravanti-Wells, C ................
Hanson, P ............................. Henderson, SM ....................
Hughes, H ............................. Hume, J .............................
Lambie, J ............................. McDonald, S ........................
McGrath, J ............................ McKenzie, B ........................
AYES
McMahon, S
O'Sullivan, MA
Rennick, G
Roberts, M
Ryan, SM
Seselja, Z
Stoker, AJ
Molan, AJ
Paterson, J
Reynolds, L
Ruston, A
Scarr, P
Smith, DA (teller)
Van, D

NOES
Ayres, T
Brown, CL
Chisholm, A
Di Natale, R
Farrell, D
Gallacher, AM
Green, N
Hanson-Young, SC
Kitching, K
McAllister, J
McKim, NJ
Patrick, RL
Rice, J
Siewert, R
Steele-John, J
Urquhart, AE (teller)
Waters, LJ
Whish-Wilson, PS
Bilyk, CL
Carr, KJ
Ciccone, R
Dodson, P
Faruqi, M
Gallagher, KR
Griff, S
Keneally, KK
Lines, S
McCarthy, M
O'Neill, D
Pratt, LC
Sheldon, A
Smith, M
Sterle, G
Walsh, J
Watt, M
Wong, P

Question agreed to.

BILLS
Migration Amendment (Repairing Medical Transfers) Bill 2019
Second Reading

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

Senator GALLAGHER (Australian Capital Territory—Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate) (10:20): I move the second reading amendment, a very simple and important amendment, that has been circulated in my name on sheet 8851:
At the end of the motion add:
", and further consideration of the bill be made an order of the day for the first sitting day after the Minister representing the Minister for Home Affairs has laid on the table all documents relating to negotiations between the Government and Senator Jacqui Lambie in relation to this bill".

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (10:20): I move:
That the question be now put on the amendment.
The PRESIDENT: My advice from the Clerk, Senator Wong, is that we cannot have a closure motion put when the Senate is under proceedings set by a time management debate that we have just determined.

Senator WONG: I seek leave to move that the amendment just moved by the Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate be now put.

Leave not granted.

Senator WONG: Do I have the option of seeking to suspend standing orders, Mr President?

The PRESIDENT: I'm going to take some counsel from the Clerk.

Senator WONG: I'm asking the Clerk.

The PRESIDENT: My guessing is getting better, I have to say.

Senator WONG: It has to be an absolute majority.

The PRESIDENT: Because there is no contingent notice on the Notice Paper for this matter, it would require an absolute majority of the Senate for the motion to succeed. But you do have the option to seek a suspension that is not on contingent notice.

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (10:21): Thank you, Mr President. I move:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent Senator Wong moving that the question be now put.

The second reading amendment—so we are clear, and in the interests of democracy and transparency—is to ensure that this Senate actually sees the deal before it votes on the bill. So it is a second reading amendment which makes clear that further consideration of this bill be made an order of the day for the first sitting day after the minister representing the Minister for Home Affairs has laid upon the table all documents relating to negotiations between the government and Senator Jacqui Lambie in relation to this bill.

It's a pretty reasonable proposition, ladies and gentlemen, because at the moment we have cabinet ministers in here like lemmings, coming in here to vote for a bill and on a deal they haven't seen. That's how cabinet government works in this country. Members of the cabinet of Australia are coming in to vote on a deal that has been done with Senator Jacqui Lambie that they don't even know about. What sort of cabinet government is that? What sort of process of democracy is that? Wow! This is government, is it? We just walk in and put up our hands and walk across the chamber on a deal that not even the cabinet has had a look at. What sort of government are you running?

So I say to the crossbench: I guess that many of you have different views about this legislation. I don't share some of those views but I accept you have a right to those views. But you should require of this government some transparency on this. You should require of this government some disclosure. You should require of this government something more than secret deals in the shadows on issues that are important to Australia, on issues of public policy. That's what this chamber should be for. We should not be voting on legislation which is predicated on a backroom deal no-one has seen. And frankly—

Senator Molan: A well-organised one!

Senator Rennick: You weren't asking for it last week.
Senator WONG: You know, I'd really like you to have the guts to one day stand up and make a contribution, because you're pretty happy to sit on your backside and yell from the backbench. I stand up and I speak to this chamber. Why don't you have some guts and do the same?

The PRESIDENT: Senator Wong, I ask you to address your comments through the chair.

Senator WONG: Sorry. Which bit am I supposed to withdraw, Mr President?

The PRESIDENT: Just address your comments through the chair.

Senator WONG: Okay. Certainly. I'll talk to you. So what we have, ladies and gentlemen, is a deal that has been done that no-one wants to talk about, the deal that dare not speak its name. You're being asked to vote—in fact in 35 minutes—on the substantive legislation and on amendments which are to be moved, without knowing what these arrangements are, on an issue that has been contested and on an issue which we know has been the subject of mistruths and false assertions pedalled by the Minister for Home Affairs.

Mr Dutton has said things which are not true about this legislation. That is what he has done. But we are supposed to now take his word for it? We are supposed to now vote on legislation on the basis of arrangements that no-one has seen? The media hasn't seen them—I assume—the federal cabinet hasn't seen them and the Senate hasn't seen them. But given the last vote on this legislation is likely to pass on the basis of that arrangement, well, I don't think the Australian people think that's good enough. Whatever people's views on this highly contested issue, I don't think Australians think it is reasonable for politicians to rock up and do a deal around a public policy issue that has been so contested without senators or the public knowing anything about this legislation.

It might be that Mr Dutton is about to do a press conference to let us know what it all is, but the fact is the coalition have walked in here and demanded a vote and most of them don't even know what the arrangement is. So I say to the crossbench as I say to the Senate: this bill should be put off until the government come clean on what the policy changes are. This legislation should be put off until the government tell Australians what they have changed in order to ensure this legislation passes the Senate. This legislation should be adjourned for a vote until the government are prepared to face the scrutiny of the Senate, the Australian people and the media and answer questions about the legislation. If it's such a great proposition, what are you so ashamed of? If it is such a great proposition, why would you hide it? Why are you hiding?

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Leader of the Government in Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (10:27): Let me make the most important point up front: there is no secret deal. Let me repeat that again: there is no secret deal. There is no secret. The Australian people know extremely well the work that we have done to strengthen our border protection arrangements. The Australian people understand very well what we have done in order to clean up the mess that Labor left behind on our borders when you lost government. The Australian people know perfectly well how we are ensuring that the boats don't start coming again and they understand that, under our legislation, medical transfers were possible
before Labor brought back weak medevac laws. And medical transfers where appropriate will be available after the Labor-Greens weak medevac laws have been repealed.

Obviously the Labor Party doesn't believe anybody can be persuaded by a good argument. Whenever we are able to persuade anyone, the Labor Party assumes there must be some secret deal. There is no secret deal, there will be no change to our strong border protection arrangements, there will be no change to our strong national security arrangements and there will be no change in the way we deal with the legacy caseload that Labor left behind when last in government. We will continue to do what we have done steadfastly over the last six-and-a-bit years. We will continue to protect our borders and we will continue to work our way through the caseload that Labor left behind and the caseload that Labor sent offshore. You should be ashamed of yourselves. The government is continuing to clean up your mess.

Let me tell you: the government are hopeful that we were able to satisfy a majority of senators in this place that Labor's weak medevac laws need to be repealed, that it is necessary and that we are doing all the appropriate things to deal with the legacy caseload without compromising our border security and national security arrangements. I mean, we are hopeful that not only through constructive engagement, through discussion, through extensive briefings explaining what we're doing, but also by explaining the risks of keeping medevac laws in place as they currently stand carefully and constructively and over an extended period of time, we have been able to persuade the majority of senators that Labor's weak and bad medevac laws must be repealed in order to strengthen our national security again. Labor, the Greens and various others weakened our national security arrangements in the lead-up to the last election. That is why we are bringing this on this week.

It is very obvious that the Labor Party did not want to participate in this debate. They explicitly asked for their speakers to be put towards the bottom of the speakers' list. I don't know if that was a game of tactics or an indication of the fact that they didn't actually want to engage in the debate. Look at the speakers' list that was circulated through the informal arrangements in this chamber; it's very obvious that the Labor Party asked to be put at the bottom of the list. We need to get on with this. This is just another attempt to avoid a vote by the Senate on this very important legislation, which repeals the weak Labor-Greens backed medevac laws, which are not necessary and have weakened our national security arrangements. The laws should be repealed as soon as they possible can be.

Senator HANSON (Queensland) (10:30): One Nation strongly supports the repeal of the medevac legislation. If the Labor Party had any common sense about this, they would listen to how the Australian people feel about it. This legislation resulted in 179 people being brought into the country, and only 19 were hospitalised. Of that 19, only six were hospitalised immediately upon their arrival in this country. The Australian people—

An opposition senator interjecting—

Senator HANSON: You've taken the people for a ride here. The Labor Party has allowed these people to come here to Australia. This Kerryn Phelps bill is ridiculous and does not address the problem. Medical attention was given to these people. You have allowed them to come into this country to abuse us—as soon as they get into the country they are then using it to stay here. How many of the people have been sent back? None—not one. They have all used it as a back door into the country, yet look at the people who want to come into Australia the legal way. We know that these are self-inflicted—like palm oil into their bloody penises.
This is what they've done to get into the country, and it's costing us $10,000 for them to do it. There's not just one; there are multiple cases of it being done. They're actually swallowing stones to come here. For what reason? To get into the country so that they can use our laws to overturn—and we can't send them back.

This is not about what deals have been done. I will sit here and listen to the Labor Party's 'greater than thou' act, as if they have never done their deals. They are a bunch of hypocrites. When they're in government, they will deal with whomever they can to get their legislation through. I know that deals are being done in this place by both sides of parliament, so don't stand up as if you're greater than thou—you're not. We're not here to discuss any deals done with Jacqui Lambie. That's none of my concern. I'm here to vote on a bill that is going to secure our national security. That's what this bill is about, so stop making it into something that it's not. It's about people coming here to Australia illegally—illegally! Have a good look at their backgrounds, because a lot of these people have been investigated by the Federal Police and by ASIO. They are not good characters. And you want to see them in this country? You are quite happy to see them in this country—these people of not good character? They're rapists. These people are thugs. They don't belong here in Australia. They've gone through the process but you're quite happy to open up the gates and allow them in here. Are you going to take responsibility if these people turn on us—if they're going to be a threat in our society? Is that what you really want?

If Labor ever get control of this country, they will be the worst thing for border control. They haven't learnt at all. They don't understand the Australian people. The Australian people don't trust them on border protection—they don't trust you! That is a fact. The Australian people don't trust you, and especially you, Senator Keneally. The people don't support you and don't trust you. When you were premier, you couldn't even look after your own state and give people in New South Wales the medical treatment they needed. They couldn't get it under your leadership, yet you're bending over backwards to get the illegals into the country before Australian people can get medical attention. Any medical evacuation costs us about $100,000. For $100,000, do you know how much medical attention could be given to people in Australia?

So 179 have come here under the guise that they are in desperate need of medical attention and only 19 ended in hospital and six immediately. Answer that for the Australian people. Tell me how the Australian people feel about that.

We will be supporting this bill very, very strongly. It should never have happened. We have to trust our authorities that they have given them the medical attention that they need. They have never denied them that at all. I am sick of the lies that are going on. You say the people of Nauru are hostages. They are not. One woman from Nauru said: 'You people in Australia are stupid. You've made us Nauruans very wealthy people. They live the life. They mix with our people. They have babies. They get visas. They can travel the world. You people in Australia are stupid, because you've made us very wealthy people.' That's exactly what the Labor Party has done. You have put the Australian people in that situation. Shame on the Labor Party!

Senator McKIM (Tasmania) (10:35): Let's be clear about Australia's shameful offshore detention regime—this dark, foul and bloody chapter in our country's history. It was designed with secrecy in mind. It was designed to be secret. It was designed to put people on Manus
Island and Nauru, out of sight of the Australian people, out of sight of the Australian media and out of sight of the world's media. The media couldn't get visas to go and visit, people like me were deported, and people like Senator Hanson-Young were spied on when they went over there. It was designed to be a secret system. That wasn't a bug in the system; it was a feature of the system. And that secrecy has allowed for murders, rapes, sexual assault of children, untold suffering and people's lives being destroyed. That's what that secrecy was designed to deliver, and it successfully delivered all of those things.

And where are we today? We are still in the dark, with secrecy being not a bug but a feature. And just as the previous secrecy allowed for those murders, rapes, self-harm and sexual abuse of children, so will today's secrecy allow for untold human harm and misery. Again, it wasn't just the secrecy allowing for those things; it was designed to operate like that. That has been a feature of our offshore detention system for five, six or seven years now, and that is what will happen as we go forward from this day because the system will remain shrouded in secrecy and the secret deal that has been arranged between the government and Senator Lambie will remain shrouded in secrecy.

And just as all of that previous secrecy allowed for those rampant human rights abuses, so into the future will we see increased levels of human suffering—the suffering of innocent people who did nothing other than stretch out a hand to our country and ask us for help. We will see the suffering, harm and the misery continue. This is a dark day for the majority of Australians who support the medevac legislation. It's a dark day for the Senate, which is being asked to make a decision, shrouded in secrecy, without all of the information in our hands. But do you know who this is the darkest day for? It's the darkest day for those people who remain in Papua New Guinea and Nauru. That's who this is the darkest day for. Under medevac they could have confidence that if they have a medical condition so significant that it could not be adequately treated in Papua New Guinea or Nauru and the doctors believed they needed to come to Australia for treatment, that is what would happen. Senator Lambie, the government and One Nation are taking that comfort away from them.

We have seen deaths, we have seen murders, we have seen rapes and we have seen assaults on children, including sexual assaults on children, and what Senator Lambie and the government are doing today is shrouded in secrecy, as this system has been since day one. They've done a deal to repeal the medevac legislation. The people in offshore detention need our help. They desperately need our help, and Senator Lambie and the government today are going to vote to put decisions on whether people should be transferred for medical conditions back in the hands of the minister who has shown repeatedly that he will fight tooth and nail, including in our courts, to prevent people getting the treatment they need—and deaths have resulted.

**Senator KENEALLY** (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (10:41): Imagine being a cabinet minister, knowing that your government has done a deal and you don't know what it is; you're kept in the dark. You don't know, yet Senator Lambie knows. But nobody else in this parliament is allowed to know; the Australian public aren't allowed to know. Are you that powerless over there, cabinet ministers, that you're not to be trusted with knowledge of what this deal is? If you know, put it on the table! Put it on the table and let us all see it. If it's so wonderful, if it is so fantastic, why can't the whole of the parliament know and why can't all of the Australian people know?
Understand this: when we vote later on this morning, there are going to be members of the government backbench who have no idea what they're voting on or what they're voting for. There are going to be—

**Senator Scarr:** To protect Australia's borders!

**Senator KENEALL Y:** I will take that interjection from Senator Scarr. Have they trusted Senator Scarr, but not the frontbench of the government, with the deal? I don't think they have. Senator Scarr and all of his backbench colleagues will wander in here like lemmings, along with the frontbench, and vote for a deal done with Senator Lambie, and they don't even know the contents of it. That's why this amendment is important. It seeks, for the edification of the government frontbench, their backbench and the whole of the parliament, to know what is in this legislation and what deal the government has done with Senator Lambie.

And maybe members of the government don't understand this: the Australian public supports medevac. Sixty-two per cent of the Australian public in an Essential poll supported medevac.

**Government senators interjecting—**

**Senator KENEALL Y:** Boy! They don't like hearing that, do they? They do not like hearing that the Australian public thinks it is an Australian value that when you are sick you get to see a doctor. Amazing idea! You get to see a doctor when you are sick. The Australian public supports that. They support that. Understand this: the government likes to say, 'Oh, you get to see a doctor now.' The government has been going to court since 2015 to stop sick people getting medical treatment. That's what they've been doing. They've been going to court to stop sick people from getting medical treatment. When the Department of Immigration, before it became the Department of Home Affairs, issued a directive in 2015 that medical transfers should only occur pretty much on the brink of death, that is when medical transfers ceased. They all but ceased.

Understand this: 900 people were transferred by the government—

**Senator Hanson interjecting—**

**Senator KENEALL Y:** Nine hundred people, Senator Hanson, have been transferred by the government for medical treatment, but those were mainly before 2015. Then in 2015 they issued this directive that sick people should no longer get treatment; sick people should not be transferred unless they were on the brink of death. That is what the directive said; I read it out in my second reading speech. And that is why medevac has been necessary. Because this government, devoid of a heart, devoid of any human compassion, devoid of empathy, just wants to keep people locked up in indefinite cruel detention for years and years and years, using them as some kind of human warning signal, claiming that somehow this is integral to Operation Sovereign Borders. Let's be clear: medevac has nothing to do with Operation Sovereign Borders. Labor supports Operation Sovereign Borders. We believe you can be strong on border protection without going weak on humanity. This government goes weak on humanity at every single turn. Understand this: what you're voting on today will deny sick people treatment. It will deny sick people the opportunity to see a doctor and to get treatment.

**Honourable senators interjecting—**

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Senators Gallagher, Wong and Seselja. Please stop the clock. I have asked senators—last two days of term. Senator Seselja, Senator Wong, I have asked
people, when I call them by name, to count to 20 before they continue to breach standing orders and interject.

*Senator Seselja interjecting—*

**The PRESIDENT:** Senator Seselja!

**Senator KENEALLY:** What is going to happen today is a secret deal done by the government with Senator Lambie. Neither Senator Lambie nor the government are willing to tell the parliament or the public what's in that deal. This amendment seeks to put it on the table because, otherwise, people are going to be voting in the dark and they're going to take away hope from the people on Manus and Nauru that they are going to be able see a doctor when they are sick.

**Senator LAMBIE** (Tasmania) (10:46): I'm quite sure many people know in here this has been a really hard decision for me to make. Sorry, everyone, for taking this long to make it but we're getting there. Medevac isn't a national security threat but there are real problems with the way it's operating. There are problems that sit at the centre of its operation. They cannot be amended away. The Labor Party and the Greens may think everything is A-okay, but I am not comfortable with it and I will tell you: they know as well as anybody else that this isn't right.

To those who say that doctors should make the final call on matters like that: doctors don't make our health policy. The final decision-maker for health policy is the Minister for Health. You can take advice from doctors, but doctors aren't elected. They aren't accountable to the public; they can't be voted in or out. The Minister for Finance isn't an economist. The Minister for Veterans Affairs is not a veteran. The Minister for Education isn't a teacher. We have a system here where we let experts give advice but we do not let them make the final decision on matters of this nature.

Medevac lets the doctors make the call, and the minister has an incredibly limited ability to overrule it. If you care about the government being accountable to the people, that should bother you; it bothers me but it doesn't bother me enough to let people die, so I am faced with a question of what to do. Do I repeal the legislation or let it sit there? It is not as perfect as the activists would have you believe but it is not as terrible as the media loudmouths would have you believe either. The usual suspects in the media can make a big song and dance about someone coming because they've got a cold or whatever it is they are talking about.

I have got to be honest; my rule throughout this whole process has been: if it's on the front page of the newspapers and it's anything to do with medevac, it's probably not worth reading. But they dial up the outrage if a person is coming for medical treatment because they've got a cold or a bee sting or a kidney stone. Before medevac, someone presented to a nurse with a flu and 13 days later he was dead. The Queensland coroner found that death would have been completely preventable if we had done something more to help. So I do not accept we can go back to the way things used to be.

I asked myself how we could do things differently. I put up to the government a proposal to work with me to secure my support for the passage of the repeal of medevac. I'm not being coy or silly when I say I genuinely can't say what I proposed. I know that's frustrating to people and I get that. I don't like holding things back like this but when I say I can't discuss it publicly due to national security concerns, I am being 100 per cent honest to you. My hand is
on my heart and I can stand here and say I will be putting at risk Australia's national security interest if I said anything else about this. Every journalist asked me to discuss it anyway because they assume that everyone who refers to national security to keep something secret is a lying, cynical bum, and they're probably right most of the time. I understand that instinct.

So I put a proposal to the government, and since then we have worked together really hard to advance that proposal. We've worked to an outcome I believe we both want, which is an outcome where our borders are secure, the boats have stopped and sick people aren't dying while waiting for treatment. As a result of that work, I'm more than satisfied that the conditions are now in place to allow medevac to be repealed. I am voting for the repeal of medevac because I'm satisfied that the conditions that led to medevac being passed aren't the same as the conditions today. The world in which this vote takes place is different, and I thank the government for working productively with me to make sure of that.

I get that this vote will disappoint many, and I apologise for that. This is a matter of conscience. I can't let the boats start back up and I can't let refugees die, whether it's sinking into the ocean or waiting for a doctor, and I am voting to make sure that neither of these things happen.

Senator DI NATALE (Victoria—Leader of the Australian Greens) (10:50): We've just heard conflicting accounts. We had Minister Cormann say that there was no deal. Now we've just heard Senator Lambie say there is a deal. Who's lying? Who is lying, Minister Cormann? Are you lying or is Senator Lambie lying? We've just heard that you and Senator Lambie have worked on a secret proposal, in good faith, that she cannot disclose for so-called national security reasons, and you, only a few moments ago, stood up and said there was no deal. In fact, you walked over to Senator Lambie and said, 'Is it okay if I say there's no deal?' We heard you say it. Who's lying? Who's misleading this parliament? Who on earth is misleading this parliament? Because there is either a deal, as Senator Lambie has just said, and you're lying, or Senator Lambie is lying. Someone is misleading the Senate. Someone is misleading the Senate about one of the most important pieces of legislation that has been before this parliament.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Senator Di Natale. Can I remind senators to not dance around the use of unparliamentary language, particularly as we close the parliamentary year. The question is that the motion to suspend standing orders moved by Senator Wong be agreed to. I remind senators this requires an absolute majority to succeed.

Senator Wong interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: You may be good at that prediction, Senator Wong. I will let the Senate determine it. The question is that the motion moved by Senator Wong to suspend standing orders be agreed to.

The Senate divided. [10:56]

(The President—Senator Ryan)

Ayes .....................35
Noes .....................37
Majority.................2

AYES

Ayres, T Bilyk, CL
Brown, CL  Carr, KJ
Chisholm, A  Ciccone, R
Di Natale, R  Dodson, P
Farrell, D  Faruqi, M
Gallacher, AM  Gallagher, KR
Green, N  Griff, S
Hanson-Young, SC  Keneally, KK
Kitching, K  Lines, S
McAllister, J  McCarthy, M (teller)
McKim, NJ  O'Neil, D
Patrick, RL  Pratt, LC
Rice, J  Sheldon, A
Siewert, R  Smith, M
Steele-John, J  Sterle, G
Walsh, J  Waters, LJ
Watt, M  Whish-Wilson, PS

Abetz, E  Antic, A
Askew, W  Bernardi, C
Bragg, AJ  Brockman, S
Canavan, MJ  Cash, MC
Chandler, C  Colbeck, R
Cormann, M  Davey, P
Duniam, J  Fawcett, DJ
Fierravanti-Wells, C  Hanson, P
Henderson, SM  Hughes, H
Hume, J  Lambie, J
McDonald, S  McGrath, J
McKenzie, B  McMahon, S
Molan, AJ  O'Sullivan, MA
Paterson, J  Rennick, G
Reynolds, L  Roberts, M
Ruston, A  Ryan, SM
Scarr, P  Seselja, Z
Smith, DA (teller)  Stoker, AJ
Van, D

Question negatived.

The President (10:58): Senators, we have 1½ minutes left. The next speaker was Senator Hanson. Do you seek the call, Senator Hanson?

Senator Hanson (Queensland) (10:58): Yes, I do, thank you.

Senator Di Natale interjecting—
The PRESIDENT: I understand leave will be granted. I've given the call to Senator Hanson because she was the first at her seat. My apologies. I didn't have a prior indication like I did previously. Senator Hanson.

Senator HANSON: There has been a lot of talk now in the chamber about this—

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

Senator Di Natale: I thought the convention in this place was that when the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate or, indeed, the Manager of Opposition Business sought the call—

The PRESIDENT: All right, Senator Di Natale.

Senator Di Natale: I'm not sure as to why they weren't—

The PRESIDENT: Senator Di Natale, I'm trying to maintain the dignity of the Senate at a tense moment. On the previous occasion I was advised that the opposition person would seek the call, which gave me an opportunity to then supersede the speaking list. On this occasion I wasn't. I'm not blaming anyone. I had given the call to Senator Hanson. Senator Hanson, please continue.

Senator HANSON: Thank you very much. Good try, Senator Di Natale, to stop me from making a few comments on this. I just had a quick talk with Senator Lambie then. It's extremely hard for her. I do trust her judgement.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The time for allotted consideration of this bill has now expired. The question is that the second reading amendment on sheet 8851 be agreed to.

The Senate divided. [11:05]

(The President—Senator Ryan)

Ayes ......................35
Noes ......................37
Majority.................2

AYES

Ayres, T
Carr, KJ
Ciccone, R
Dodson, P
Faruqi, M
Gallagher, KR
Griff, S
Keneally, KK
Lines, S
McCarthy, M (teller)
O’Neill, D
Polley, H
Rice, J
Siewert, R
Steele-John, J
Walsh, J
Watt, M
Wong, P

Bilyk, CL
Chisholm, A
Di Natale, R
Farrell, D
Gallacher, AM
Green, N
Hanson-Young, SC
Kitching, K
McAllister, J
McKim, NJ
Patrick, RL
Pratt, LC
Sheldon, A
Smith, M
Sterle, G
Waters, LJ
Whish-Wilson, PS
I seek leave to move the amendments on sheet 8856 together.

Leave granted.

The PRESIDENT: That is actually a committee stage amendment. Sorry, I was led to believe there was another second reading amendment. The question is that the bill be read a second time.

The Senate divided. [11:09]

Ayes .................. 37
Noes .................. 34
Majority .............. 3

AYES

Abetz, E .......................... Antic, A
Askew, W .......................... Bernardi, C
Bragg, AJ .......................... Brockman, S
Canavan, MJ ........................ Cash, MC
Chandler, C ........................ Colbeck, R
Cormann, M ........................ Davey, P
Duniam, J .......................... Fawcett, DJ
Fierravanti-Wells, C ................. Hanson, P
Henderson, SM ........................ Hughes, H
Hume, J ............................ Lambie, J
McDonald, S ........................ McGrath, J
McKenzie, B ........................ McMahon, S
Molan, AJ .......................... O'Sullivan, MA
Paterson, J .......................... Rennick, G
Reynolds, L .......................... Roberts, M
Ruston, A ........................... Ryan, SM
Scarr, P ............................ Seselja, Z
Smith, DA (teller) .................. Stoker, AJ
Van, D .............................. S

PAIRS

Brown, CL ........................ Birmingham, SJ
Urquhart, AE ........................ Payne, MA

Question negatived.

Senator KENEALLY (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (11:07): I seek leave to move the amendments on sheet 8856 together.

Leave granted.

The PRESIDENT: That is actually a committee stage amendment. Sorry, I was led to believe there was another second reading amendment. The question is that the bill be read a second time.

The Senate divided. [11:09]

(The President—Senator Ryan)
Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

The PRESIDENT (11:11): Senator Keneally, you have sought and been granted leave to move amendments on sheet 8856.

Senator KENEALLY (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (11:11): I move Labor amendment (1) on sheet 8856:

(1) Schedule 1, item 15, page 5 (lines 11 to 29), omit the item, substitute:

15 Continued application of old law

(1) This item applies in relation to a transitory person if, immediately before this item’s commencement, any of the following had occurred:

(a) a decision had been made by the Minister in relation to the person under section 198D, 198E, 198F or 198G of the old law;

(b) the Secretary had identified the person as a legacy minor under section 198D of the old law but had not notified the Minister;
(c) the Secretary had been notified about the person under section 198E of the old law but had not notified the Minister;

(d) the Minister had been notified about the person under section 198D or 198E of the old law but had not made a decision about the person;

(e) the Independent Health Advice Panel (the panel) had been notified by the Minister about the person under section 198F of the old law but the panel had not informed the Minister of its recommendation in relation to the person;

(f) the Minister had been informed by the panel about the person under section 198F of the old law but the Minister had not made a decision about the person;

(g) the Minister had been informed by an officer about the person under section 198G of the old law but the Minister had not made a decision about the person.

(2) Despite the amendments and repeals made by this Schedule, the old law continues to apply, in relation to the transitory person, as if those amendments and repeals had not been made.

(3) The old law is the *Migration Act 1958* as in force immediately before this item's commencement.

(4) To avoid doubt, this item does not affect the operation of subsection 7(2) of the *Acts Interpretation Act 1901*.

These are important amendments—

The PRESIDENT: Senator Keneally, there is no opportunity for debate here other than by leave.

Senator KENEALLY: I seek leave to make a statement of no longer than five minutes.

The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for three minutes.

Senator KENEALLY: These are important amendments. These are amendments that would ensure a savings provision of sorts for people who have already applied for a medevac transfer—that is, sick people on Manus and Nauru who have already applied for the medevac assessment and who are already in the medevac assessment process. They would be saved by this provision that would allow them to complete that. If they are assessed by doctors—doctors appointed by Minister Dutton, by the way—to need medical treatment, they will be able to access it through the medevac process. If this government is so intent on repealing medevac, surely it can. Surely there are some members of the government backbench who have some semblance of a beating heart to understand that if a person is sick they should be able to access medical treatment. Those people who are already in the assessment process should be able to complete it.

These are fundamentally important amendments. It is clear that the indefinite nature of detention has meant that people's physical and mental health has deteriorated substantially. There are sick people on Manus and Nauru. That is undeniable. What is also undeniable is that this government has gone to court to block them from getting medical treatment. That is why medevac was necessary. This government, under their secret deal with Jacqui Lambie—or is it not a deal? Minister Cormann says there is no deal. Senator Lambie says there is a deal. They have refused to lay any details on the table. We have cabinet ministers who are in the dark. We have government backbenchers sitting over there in the dark. We have the Australian public in the dark. Understand this: this is not just some deal. They are changing Australian government policy when it comes to the provision of services to people on Manus.
and Nauru, when it comes, potentially, to our relationship with our partner and ally New Zealand and when it comes to how we disrupt people-smuggling operations.

This government talks about the need to send the right messages to people smugglers. What are they doing today? They are sending a big, blank cheque. They have a secret deal that might actually make it easier for the people smugglers to market now, right? 'Hey, the Australian government's done a secret deal with Jacqui Lambie. We can't tell you what it is, but it probably makes life easier for us to transfer people here.' That is what this government resorts to, right? They often tell us we have to be careful of the messages we send. They're changing government policy. They're not telling us. They're not telling the Australian public. They're not telling anyone what it entails. At the basic minimum, they should preserve medevac for those people who are sick and need treatment.

Senator McKIM (Tasmania) (11:15): I seek leave to make a one-minute statement.

The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

Senator McKIM: Thank you. I appreciate the courtesy from the Senate. The Greens will be supporting this amendment from Senator Keneally because, as she has rightly pointed out, it would mean that those people who are currently in the medevac process would be able to continue through that process. What we are about to decide in this Senate, what we're about to do in this Senate, is dismantle the only element of humanity that existed in our offshore detention policy. We are about to dismantle the only aspect of our entire offshore detention regime that offered desperately ill people a modicum of hope. What we're about to do is take away that hope, take away that small chink of humanity that was crafted by this parliament, and it is a dark day. (Time expired)

The PRESIDENT: The question is that the opposition amendment on sheet 8856 be agreed to.

The Senate divided. [11:17]

(The President—Senator Ryan)

Ayes ....................35
Noes ....................37
Majority.................2

AYES

Ayres, T
Carr, KJ
Ciccone, R
Dodson, P
Faruqi, M
Gallagher, KR
Griff, S
Keneally, KK
Lines, S
McCarthy, M (teller)
O'Neil, D
Polley, H
Rice, J
Siewert, R
Steele-John, J
Walsh, J

Bilyk, CL
Chisholm, A
Di Natale, R
Farrell, D
Gallacher, AM
Green, N
Hanson-Young, SC
Kitching, K
McAllister, J
McKim, NJ
Patrick, RL
Pratt, LC
Sheldon, A
Smith, M
Sterle, G
Waters, LJ
Question negatived.

Third Reading

The PRESIDENT (11:21): The question is that the remaining stages of the bill be agreed to and the bill be now passed.

The Senate divided. [11:21]

(The President—Senator Ryan)

Ayes .................37
Noes ..................35
Majority ..............2

AYES

Abetz, E
Askew, W
Bragg, A J
Canavan, MJ
Chandler, C
Cormann, M
Duniam, J
Fierravanti-Wells, C
Henderson, SM
Hume, J
McDonald, S
McKenzie, B
Molan, AJ
Paterson, J
Reynolds, L
Ruston, A
Scarr, P
Smith, DA (teller)
Van, D

Whish-Wilson, PS

Antic, A
Bernardi, C
Brockman, S
Cash, MC
Colbeck, R
Davey, P
Fawcett, DJ
Hanson, P
Hughes, H
Lambie, J
McGrath, J
McMahon, S
O'Sullivan, MA
Rennick, G
Roberts, M
Ryan, SM
Seselja, Z
Stoker, AJ

Brown, CL
Urquhart, AE

Birmingham, SJ
Payne, MA
AYES

Hume, J
McDonald, S
McKenzie, B
Molan, AJ
Paterson, J
Reynolds, L
Ruston, A
Scarr, P
Smith, DA (teller)
Van, D
Lambie, J
McGrath, J
McMahon, S
O’Sullivan, MA
Rennick, G
Roberts, M
Ryan, SM
Seselja, Z
Stoker, AJ

NOES

Ayres, T
Bilyk, CL
Carr, KJ
Chisholm, A
Ciccone, R
Di Natale, R
Dodson, P
Farrell, D
Faruqi, M
Gallacher, AM
Gallagher, KR
Green, N
Griff, S
Hanson-Young, SC
Keneally, KK
Kitching, K
Lines, S
McAllister, J
McCarthy, M (teller)
McKim, NJ
O’Neill, D
Patrick, RL
Polley, H
Pratt, LC
Rice, J
Sheldon, A
Siewert, R
Smith, M
Steele-John, J
Sterle, G
Walsh, J
Waters, LJ
Wong, P

PAIRS

Birmingham, SJ
Brown, CL
Payne, MA
Urquhart, AE

Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

DOCUMENTS

Tabling

The Clerk: I table documents pursuant to statute as listed on the Dynamic Red.
Full details of the documents are recorded in the Journals of the Senate.
COMMITTEES

Autism Select Committee
Northern Australia Agenda Select Committee

Meeting

The Clerk: Proposals to meet have been lodged as follows:

Autism—Select Committee—private meeting otherwise than in accordance with standing order 33(1) on Thursday, 5 December 2019, from 11 am.

Effectiveness of the Australian Government's Northern Australia agenda—Select Committee—private meeting otherwise than in accordance with standing order 33(1) on Thursday, 5 December 2019, from 10.30 am.

The PRESIDENT (11:23): I remind senators that the question may be put on any proposal at the request of any senator. There being none, we'll move on.

BILLS

Counter-Terrorism Legislation Amendment (2019 Measures No. 1) Bill 2019

Second Reading

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

Senator WHISH-WILSON (Tasmania) (11:24): The Counter-Terrorism Legislation Amendment (2019 Measures No. 1) Bill 2019 is essentially the same bill as the Counter-Terrorism Legislation Amendment Bill 2019, which was tabled and then lapsed at the dissolution of the last parliament. Schedule 1 of the bill will amend provisions relating to restrictions on bail and parole in the Crimes Act to expand the presumption against bail; introduce a presumption against parole; and introduce new provisions dealing specifically with bail and parole for minors. Schedule 2 of the bill will amend the continuing detention order, commonly known as the CDO scheme, in the Criminal Code to expand the eligibility for the scheme and remove, in certain circumstances, the requirement for an individual in relation to whom an application has been made for a CDO to be provided with a complete copy of the application.

In submissions to various parliamentary inquiries into this bill—and the lapsed bill—it was not supported in its current form by any legal, human rights or academic stakeholders. The amendments in this bill expanding the presumption against bail and introducing a presumption against parole have been made in response to a 2017 decision of the Council of Australian Governments. The COAG decision followed an incident in Victoria where a 29-year-old man on parole with a long history of violent offences and drug abuse killed a man, took a woman hostage and sparked a siege in what was regarded as an Islamic State inspired terror attack. It is, however, noted that this man, despite his extensive criminal history, was not on the radar of counterterror police. However, expert stakeholders have argued that the amendments in this bill go beyond what is required to give effect to the COAG decision by, for example, capturing individuals with only a tenuous link to so-called terrorism. Even the COAG decision itself was criticised by expert stakeholders who argued that 'disproportionate sentences will deter people from taking responsibility for their crimes, because they won't plead guilty'. They also argued that studies and evidence from around the world show punitive
approaches are counterproductive and that the reforms don't include rehabilitation, deradicalisation and post-release supervision, meaning offenders will still pose a threat when released at the end of their sentence.

So changes to parole and bail laws risk leading to higher incarceration rates without making society any safer. As argued by barrister and human rights advocate Julian Burnside when commenting on the COAG decision which led to the bill:

… a presumption against bail is a bad idea: it means jail before a finding of guilt.

On parole, Julian Burnside argued:

… the politicians should leave that to judges and the parole board. Moves like this are a reminder of the old idea that 'We will take your freedom in order to protect your liberties'.

In its submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security inquiry into this bill, the Australian Human Rights Commission recommended that the bill not be passed. If the bill were to proceed, the Human Rights Commission recommended that it be amended to protect child offenders on bail or parole and to ensure all information is provided to a respondent to an application for CDO, unless doing so:

… would unacceptably compromise national security or other compelling public interest, or … the respondent is in some alternative way provided with sufficient information adequately to defend the proceedings.

In its submission to the current bill, the AHRC also recommended sections be amended so that presumption against bail and minimum non-parole periods for certain offences would not apply to children. In its report on the lapsed bill, the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights found sections of the bill breached Australia's obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, warning it would be inconsistent with Australia's obligations to treat other obligations as of equal weight to the obligation to consider the best interest of the child.

Like the Human Rights Commission, the Law Council argued that sections 15AA, presumption against bail, and 19AG, minimum non-parole periods, should be amended so that they do not apply to children. This bill, according to the Law Council, will interfere with the court's ability to hand down sentences to children that are proportionate to their individual circumstances and the nature of the offending conduct, as required under international law, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the CRC.

This would also be consistent with recommendation made in the Independent National Security Legislation Monitor's 2018 report to the Prime Minister on The prosecution and sentencing of children for terrorism. It recommended that the protection of the community where a terrorism offence has been charged should be the paramount consideration, and section 15AA of the Crimes Act should be amended to expressly provide for a consideration of the 'best interests of the child in every case as a primary consideration', and that section 19AG of the Crimes Act should be amended such that the provision no longer applies to offenders who are under 18 at the time of offending.

The Law Council also argued that by imposing a non-parole period—that is, three-quarters of the head sentence, otherwise known as the 75 per cent rule—this bill is essentially seeking to legislate an attenuated form of mandatory sentencing that 'interferes with the ability of the
judiciary to determine a just penalty which fits the circumstances of the offender and the crime'.

Like the Law Council and the vast majority of legal experts and associations, the Australian Greens have always opposed the use of mandatory sentencing regimes. In its report on this bill, the Senate Standing Committee for the Scrutiny of Bills noted, in relation to the presumption against bail:

… it is a cornerstone of the criminal justice system that a person is presumed innocent until proven guilty, and presumptions against bail (which deny a person their liberty before they have been convicted) test this presumption.

Regarding schedule 2 amendments relating to the continuing detention orders, CDOs, the committee said:

… the Bill also proposes … to bring the information disclosure obligations for a CDO … 'more in line with the procedure in other contexts, such as proceedings for criminal prosecutions'.

The purpose of the CDO is to prevent an offender who has served sentences for terrorism related offences but has not been rehabilitated during that period of incarceration from being released into the community. Given this purpose, Drs Rebecca Ananian-Welsh, Tamara Tulich and Nicola McGarrity and Professor George Williams, whilst not disagreeing with the proposed changes to eligibility for a CDO, submitted that a CDO scheme can only ever be justified if 'a mechanism exists to accurately assess the level of risk that a convicted terrorist poses upon his or her release' and 'effective rehabilitation programs are available for convicted terrorists in jail'. However, these provisions are currently not in place and will not be put in place by this bill. The question is: why not? As such, while Dr Ananian-Welsh raised no obligations or objections to specific changes to CDOs made by this bill, they are opposed to the existence of a continuing detention regime at this present time.

The Senate Standing Committee for the Scrutiny of Bills also has longstanding concerns regarding the CDO scheme. In its report on the lapsed bill it reiterated concerns regarding the proposed extension of the scheme, finding the explanatory materials to the bill did not contain adequate justification for the changes.

The Senate Standing Committee for the Scrutiny of Bills also raised concerns in its report regarding the proposed limitation on an offender's right to receive a complete copy of a CDO application. It found this withholding of information 'may limit an offender's right to a fair hearing as the offender may not have access to all of the relevant information on which the application for the order is made.' This provision, the committee rightly noted, would partially reverse changes made to the bill that introduced CDOs—the Criminal Code Amendment (High Risk Terrorist Offenders) Bill 2016—to address concerns that offenders would not receive sufficient information ahead of the hearing for an application.

I also wanted to take this opportunity to raise concerns around money laundering. The government have come into this place, and their whole political frame in the last two parliaments, and certainly from what we've seen today with the medevac bill, is that they're strong on crime and they're strong on borders. Yet Australia has been internationally condemned for having some of the laxest anti-money-laundering laws in the world, including for terrorist related offences. This is an opportunity for the Senate to consider what neither the Labor or Liberal governments have done in the last 13 years and introduce laws that strip
exemptions that are currently in place for lawyers, accountants and real estate. The Greens have tried to introduce these amendments previously, and they've been voted down.

I wanted to read my second reading amendment to the chamber today. At the end of the motion, we would add:

but the Senate:

(a) notes that:

(i) the explanatory memorandum to the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Bill 2006 forecast a ‘second tranche’ of legislation that would include real estate agents, accountants and lawyers as designated services under the Act …

That was in 2006. Yet, it's now 2019 and we have never received that legislation. The question is why? Why haven't we tightened our anti-money-laundering laws to be in line with most of the rest of the world? The OECD said Australia was a haven—a haven—for dirty money, for money laundering.

Part (ii) of my amendment says:

… in April 2016, the Government released the statutory review of the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Act 2006 which contained a recommendation that the Government develop options to regulate real estate agents, accountants and lawyers under the Act …

Part (iii) says:

… the Government undertook consultation on the regulation of real estate agents, accountants and lawyers under the Act, which closed in January 2017 …

That was nearly two years ago. The government revisited this nearly two years ago—they did extensive consultations on it—and yet we have still seen no sign of any legislation to remove the exemptions for those three industries.

Part (iv) of my second reading amendment says:

… the Financial Action Task Force's April 2015 Mutual Evaluation Report on Australia's progress in combatting money laundering and terrorist financing stated that Australia is an attractive destination for foreign proceeds of crime, particularly corruption-related proceeds flowing into real estate …

And may I remind the chamber that only three weeks ago Mr Peter Dutton proudly trumpeted that the Federal Police and AUSTRAC had busted a $20 million real estate investment, in my home state of Tasmania, that had been directly linked to foreign money laundering. In this case it was Chinese investors, but my understanding is the only reason we found out about that particular investment in my home state—a significant agricultural property bought with dirty money—was because the Chinese government had provided the information to the Federal Police in an act of cooperation. Otherwise, we would never have known about it. And how many other properties are there, both in suburban areas and in agricultural areas around this country? How many other properties have been subject to the proceeds of crime, through laundered money buying real estate assets through an industry that is exempt from anti-money-laundering laws?

Why is it exempt? I understand that George Brandis, when he was Attorney-General, made it his personal crusade to bring these laws in before he finished his job. But even someone of his position and gravity within the coalition was unable to bring these laws in. I also note that comments made by Peter Dutton have changed their tune in the two weeks since he came out saying that we were now going to go after people using real estate in this country to launder
money. Is it because the real estate industry is a significant donor to both the Liberal and the Labor parties? In my opinion, that's most likely the case. There's no other reason for them to be exempt from anti-money-laundering laws when the evidence before us is that money is being laundered.

It's estimated a billion dollars a year goes through Australian real estate. And foreign investment in Australian real estate, be it residential in urban areas or be it agricultural land—and especially agricultural land—is a very sensitive issue and a significant matter of public interest. For Australians, the idea that somehow dirty money from overseas is being used to compete against them when they are seeking to buy their first home or seeking to buy a farm or seeking to build a business is abhorrent. It's already a sensitive issue, and as soon as Australians learn that we have loopholes in our laws that allow laundered money to go into real estate, they'll be up in arms about it, mark my words.

Part (v) of the Greens' second reading amendment says:

... the December 2017 OECD Phase 4 Report on Australia's implementation of the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention recommended that Australia address the risk that the real estate sector could be used to launder the proceeds of foreign bribery …

Part (vi) says:

Australia is one of only six countries in the world not to have included real estate agents, accountants and lawyers as designated services under anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism laws

And part (vii) says:

AUSTRAC estimates that $1 billion in suspicious transactions flowed through the Australian property market from just one country, China, in just one year, 2016

The likelihood is that that's just the tip of the iceberg. Billions and billions of dollars of dirty foreign money is being laundered through Australian real estate.

I accept—because the Greens have looked at drafting legislation on this—that there are some complications around legal privilege for lawyers and accountants. But may I point out that other governments, such as New Zealand's, have recently brought in these laws. It's just a lack of political will in this place that is preventing it from happening. You can't come in here and criticise the CEO of Westpac and Westpac management for $11 billion worth of money laundering through a payment system that they should have known about—and Senator Cormann's words in response to a question I asked him on this in Senate question time last week are ringing loud and clear—if you yourself as a government can't bring in anti-money-laundering laws that allow AUSTRAC to monitor these sectors when we know that those sectors are laundering money.

I don't know if Westpac management knew they were laundering money through their systems. They were warned their systems were vulnerable and were going to be exploited by paedophiles, organised crime and, potentially, terrorists. They knew that, but they didn't fix their systems. But it's worse in this situation because our government knows that money is being laundered through real estate and it is not putting in place the legislation it needs to crack down on that. It is knowingly sticking its head in the sand because it is taking donations from the real estate industry, and billions of dollars of foreign money being laundered through real estate means big fees for real estate agents right around this country.
I don't know how many real estate agents know how much laundered money is used in their transactions. I would be surprised if any of them did. But do you think they would be horrified if they knew? I hope they would. And I certainly want to raise this alarm bell in my own state of Tasmania where we are getting a barrage of foreign investment in our property, farms, agricultural land and businesses. We have a right to know, and our authorities like AUSTRAC have the right to have the resources and the framework and architecture in place that allows them to get information from sectors like accountants, the legal profession, and the real estate profession so they can actually do their job. I urge all senators in here today to support the Greens second reading amendment and, more importantly than that, I ask Senator Cash and the government, after 13 years of inaction on this issue, to bring forward these laws.

I note the Financial Review has written three or four stories on this. There are a couple of good journalists there who have been on this case for some time now. Just this week they editorialised that the Australian government needs to bring in these laws, and, to demonstrate how seriously they're taking the issue, they even gave the Greens a half-page story in the Financial Review, which is a pretty rare occurrence. That's how much this issue means to them, and I believe the people who have contacted my office through LinkedIn and through other outlets in the industries themselves want to see action taken on this. They thank the Greens for standing up in this place and being the ones who are brave enough and are sufficiently free of conflict to bring forward these laws. We will do that, and I urge the Senate to support the Greens second reading amendment. Accordingly, I move:

At the end of the motion, add: “, but the Senate:

(a) notes that:

(i) the explanatory memorandum to the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Bill 2006 forecast a 'second tranche' of legislation that would include real estate agents, accountants and lawyers as designated services under the Act,

(ii) in April 2016, the Government released the statutory review of the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Act 2006 which contained a recommendation that the Government develop options to regulate real estate agents, accountants and lawyers under the Act,

(iii) the Government undertook consultation on the regulation of real estate agents, accountants and lawyers under the Act, which closed in January 2017,

(iv) the Financial Action Task Force's April 2015 Mutual Evaluation Report on Australia's progress in combating money laundering and terrorist financing stated that Australia is an attractive destination for foreign proceeds of crime, particularly corruption-related proceeds flowing into real estate,

(v) the December 2017 OECD Phase 4 Report on Australia's implementation of the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention recommended that Australia address the risk that the real estate sector could be used to launder the proceeds of foreign bribery,

(vi) Australia is one of only six countries in the world not to have included real estate agents, accountants and lawyers as designated services under anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism laws,

(vii) AUSTRAC estimates that $1 billion in suspicious transactions flowed through the Australian property market from just one country, China, in just one year, 2016,

(viii) in November 2019, the Financial Action Task Force suspended their evaluation of Australia's progress in combating money laundering and terrorist financing, and
(ix) the Government's rhetoric about being 'tough on crime' does not match with their failure to legislate the second tranche of anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing laws; and

(b) calls on the Government to introduce legislation to include real estate agents, accountants and lawyers as designated services under the *Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Act 2006*.

**Senator WATT** (Queensland) (11:44): I rise to make a second reading speech contribution on behalf of the Labor Party. The Counter-Terrorism Legislation Amendment (2019 Measures No. 1) Bill would make a number of amendments to the Crimes Act 1914 and the Commonwealth Criminal Code. Schedule 1 would amend the Crimes Act to expand the existing presumption against bail for terrorism offenders to a larger class of persons and also introduce a similar presumption against parole for terrorism offenders. Schedule 2 would amend the Criminal Code to address a perceived gap in the continuing detention order regime and also enable the minister, in an application for a continuing detention order, to withhold exculpatory information from a terrorist offender in the interests of national security, the safety of human sources, and the security operations and public.

The bill is consistent with principles that were agreed by the Council of Australian Governments on 5 October 2017. In particular, it is consistent with the principle that the presumption against bail and parole should apply to categories of persons who have demonstrated support for, or links to, terrorist activity. This bill was referred to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security for inquiry and report. Labor and Liberal members of the committee made one recommendation to improve the bill, and I'm pleased that the government has accepted that recommendation in full.

There was one area of disagreement between Labor and Liberal members of the intelligence committee. The nature of that disagreement is set out in an additional comment to the committee's report. The disagreement relates to section 19AG of the Crimes Act. Under that section, a court is required to fix a non-parole period of three-quarters of the head sentence when sentencing a terrorist offender. In his report on the prosecution and punishment of children for terrorism offences, the Independent National Security Legislation Monitor, James Renwick SC, concluded that, insofar as it currently applies to children, section 19AG does not comply with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. For that reason he recommended that section 19AG of the Crimes Act be amended so that it no longer applies to offenders who were under the age of 18 at the time of offending.

Labor members of the committee were persuaded by Mr Renwick's report and agreed with his recommendation to amend section 19AG so that it no longer applies to children. Liberal members of the committee did not agree with that recommendation. It is, however, important to note that this bill would amend section 19AG of the Crimes Act so that it more closely conforms with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. So, while the bill does not implement Mr Renwick's recommendation in full, it does mark a welcome improvement on the existing position.

Labor understands that the government will be moving an amendment in the Senate to implement the bipartisan recommendation of the Intelligence and Security Committee. Subject to the Senate agreeing to that amendment, Labor supports the passage of this bill.

I might just mention in passing that Senator Whish-Wilson has also moved a second reading amendment to this bill. While Labor does urge the government to consider the various
matters that are raised in that second reading amendment—and we think they are matters that are worth considering—we won't be supporting this amendment. My understanding is that it has been tabled very late, and we haven't had the opportunity to give it full consideration. So, on that basis, we will be opposing that second reading amendment.

Senator CASH (Western Australia—Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business) (11:48): I thank all senators for their contributions to the debate on the Counter-Terrorism Legislation Amendment (2019 Measures No. 1) Bill 2019. Australians have been shocked and saddened by the recent terrorist attack on innocent members of the public in London on Friday afternoon London time. Australia's deepest sympathies are with the victims and their families. While the bill that we are debating predates this tragic event, sadly, this event once again demonstrates the need for the legislative measures in this bill, which are aimed at protecting the Australian community from terrorist offenders.

Since September 2014, Australia's National Terrorism Threat Level has been set at 'probable'. This means that there is credible intelligence assessed by our security agencies indicating that individuals or groups continue to possess the intent and capability to conduct a terrorist attack in Australia. In this prevailing threat environment, it is critical that Australia's counterterrorism legislative framework remains effective and responsive to the constantly evolving threat of terrorism.

The measures in the bill strengthen the tools that law enforcement and intelligence agencies have to protect the Australian public from the threat of terrorism. This bill implements the commitment this government made at the Council of Australian Governments in the wake of the terrorist attack in Brighton, Victoria, to ensure that, at the federal level, there is a presumption against bail and parole for persons who have demonstrated support for or links to terrorist activity. Indeed, all of the states have subsequently passed their own legislation implementing the principles underpinning these presumptions in relation to state based offences. This bill makes it clear that anyone who has links with or who has shown support for terrorist activities will not be released on bail or parole unless they can show that there are exceptional circumstances that would justify their release into the community.

It is a disturbing reality that children are committing terrorist offences. Given that the impact of a child committing a terrorism offence on the victims and the community is no less than that by an adult, the presumptions against bail and parole apply to all offenders, regardless of their age. This bill includes safeguards for children in addition to those already afforded to all offenders under the relevant legislation. This ensures the potential of children for rehabilitation is taken into account at key steps in the justice process without compromising the security of the community.

The bill also makes two important amendments to improve the operation of the High Risk Terrorist Offenders Scheme in division 105A of the Criminal Code that allows for continuing detention orders for high-risk terrorist offenders. The first amendment will address a gap in the scheme to ensure that jailed terrorist offenders who are also serving time for non-terrorism offences remain eligible for a continuing detention order at the expiry of their prison sentences. This amendment will ensure that terrorist offenders remain eligible for a continuing detention order irrespective of whether the final day of their sentence is served for a terrorism offence or for another offence. This amendment supports the protective purpose of the High Risk Terrorist Offenders Scheme by ensuring that the Commonwealth can take
effective action against dangerous terrorist offenders who are about to be released into the community.

The second amendment will bring the options for protecting national security information contained in continuing detention order applications into line with the information protections available in other contexts. These enhanced information protections allow the Commonwealth to limit the disclosure of such information to the terrorist offender by relying on protective court orders, such as public interest immunity and orders under the National Security Information (Criminal and Civil Proceedings) Act 2004.

The measures in this bill do not detract from the robust framework of safeguards already in the High Risk Terrorist Offenders Scheme. The measures are reasonable, necessary and proportionate, and ensure that the High Risk Terrorist Offenders Scheme can better achieve its principal objective, which is to protect the community from the threat posed by dangerous terrorists.

On 1 August 2019, the bill was referred to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security for inquiry and report. The advisory report of the committee was tabled on 14 October 2019. The committee recommended the passage of the bill, subject to a recommendation regarding the operation of public interest immunity in relation to continuing detention order applications. In response to this recommendation, the government has amended the bill to clarify that the provisions of the bill do not alter the way in which the ordinary doctrine of public interest immunity would operate in practice. I would like to thank the committee again for its detailed consideration of the bill. The work of the committee was invaluable in ensuring that the measures contained in the bill are necessary, reasonable and proportionate.

I will just address the second reading amendment that has been moved by Senator Whish-Wilson on behalf of the Australian Greens. The government will not be supporting the amendment moved by Senator Whish-Wilson on behalf of the Australian Greens. The Australian government is committed to continually improving Australia's anti-money-laundering and counterterrorism financing laws and to working with industry to ensure that Australia's financial system is hardened against criminals and terrorists without placing undue burden on industry. On 17 October 2019—in other words, recently—the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2019 was introduced into the Australian parliament. Additional reforms will be introduced into parliament in early 2020 which will further contribute to the government's effort to disrupt and dismantle the criminal business model.

I will also now address two other points that Senator Whish-Wilson raised in talking about the Australian Greens' second reading amendment. The first is in relation to presumptions against bail and parole. I advise the Senate that presumptions against bail and parole are necessary because, when it comes to terrorism—and we are talking about terrorism here—the risks to the community of further offending are so great that it is appropriate the starting position be that bail or parole is refused. This reflects the existing position in relation to terrorism offences, where a presumption against bail already applies. The presumptions will apply to persons who have demonstrated support for or have links to terrorism. I will just repeat that for the benefit of the chamber: the presumptions will apply to persons who have demonstrated support for or have links to terrorism.
The presumptions are not an arbitrary ban against bail or parole for these people. Decision-makers retain the discretion to grant bail or parole if the person can demonstrate that exceptional circumstances justify their release. The defendant also has the option to appeal the court's decision regarding bail. In accordance with the existing parole arrangements for all federal offenders, offenders subject to the presumption against parole would be afforded procedural fairness in relation to their consideration by the Attorney-General for parole. Further decisions of the Attorney-General in relation to parole are reviewable under the Administrative Decisions (Judicial Review) Act 1977.

I will also now address the second issue that was raised by Senator Whish-Wilson when talking about the Australian Greens' second reading amendment—that is, in relation to compliance with the rights of the child and Australia's obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The government is asking the parliament to amend section 19AG to ensure its compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The monitor concluded that, in its current form, section 19AG, as it applies to children, is in breach of Australia's obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Of significant concern to the monitor was that, in its current form, section 19AG precludes any judicial discretion in setting a child's non-parole period and was therefore not consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The amendments to section 19AG make it consistent with the monitor's consideration of the presumption against bail found in section 15AA, which the monitor concluded met the obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The amendments to section 19AG are responsive to the issues raised by the monitor and facilitate discretion when setting a child's non-parole period. In its amended form, section 19AG will fully comply with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and will protect the rights of children who are being prosecuted and sentenced for terrorism offences. The amendment achieves this in a way consistent with the obligations upon government to protect the community from terrorist threats, whilst ensuring that the circumstances of children who commit terrorist offences are taken into account when fixing the minimum period they will spend in jail for their crimes.

Again, I thank my colleagues across this chamber for recognising the need for these important measures. The bill reflects the government's ongoing commitment to protecting the Australian community from terrorists and ensuring our law enforcement and security agencies have the powers they need to respond to the evolving threat of terrorism. I commend the bill to the chamber.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: The question is that Senator Whish-Wilson's second reading amendment to the Counter-Terrorism Legislation Amendment (2019 Measures No. 1) Bill 2019 be agreed to.

The Senate divided. [12:04]

(The Deputy President—Senator Lines)

Ayes ......................11
Noes ......................43
Majority ..................32

AYES

Di Natale, R               Faruqi, M

CHAMBER
Wednesday, 4 December 2019

The question is that the bill be read a second time.
The Senate divided. [12:09]

Ayes .......................... 45
Noes ......................... 9
Majority ............... 36

AYES

Griff, S
McKim, NJ
Rice, J
Steele-John, J
Whish-Wilson, PS

Hanson-Young, SC
Patrick, RL
Siewert, R (teller)
Waters, LJ

NOES

Abetz, E
Askew, W
Bernardi, C
Brockman, S
Chandler, C
Colbeck, R
Duniann, J
Fierravanti-Wells, C
Green, N
Henderson, SM
Hume, J
Lines, S
McGrath, J
Molan, AJ
O'Sullivan, MA
Pratt, LC
Reynolds, L
Scarr, P
Smith, DA
Sterle, G
Van, D
Watt, M

Antic, A
Ayres, T
Bragg, A J
Cash, MC
Ciccone, R (teller)
Davey, P
Fawcett, DJ
Gallacher, AM
Hanson, P
Henderson, SM
Lambie, J
McDonald, S
McMahon, S
O'Neill, D
Paterson, J
Rennick, G
Ruston, A
Sheldon, A
Smith, M
Stoker, AJ
Walsh, J

Question negatived.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (12:09): The question is that the bill be read a second time.
The Senate divided. [12:09]

(The Deputy President—Senator Lines)
Question agreed to.
Bill read a second time.

In Committee

Bill—by leave—taken as a whole.

Senator CASH (Western Australia—Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business) (12:12): I table a supplementary explanatory memorandum and move government amendment (1) on sheet PJ101:

(1) Schedule 2, item 16, page 12 (after line 12), after subsection 105A.5, insert:

(10) To avoid doubt, nothing in this section imposes an obligation on the offender to satisfy the Court that a claim of public interest immunity should not be upheld.

Note: The offender may seek to access any information, material or facts that are likely to be protected by public interest immunity (for example, through a subpoena). Under the law of public interest immunity, the person claiming the immunity must make and substantiate the claim, and satisfy the Court that the claim should be upheld.

The amendment responds to recommendation 1 of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security's advisory report on the bill regarding the operation of public interest immunity in relation to continuing detention order applications. The government again thanks the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security for their advisory report on the bill. The committee recommended the passage of the bill subject to a recommendation regarding the operation of public interest immunity in relation to continuing detention order applications. The committee recommended that the bill and explanatory memorandum be amended so that, in respect of any application for a continuing detention order, the onus is on the Australian Federal Police minister to satisfy the court that any...
exculpatory information that is excluded from an application is protected by public interest immunity. Amendment (1) responds to that recommendation.

The bill and the explanatory memorandum that I have just tabled will be amended to clarify that the provisions of the bill do not alter the way in which the ordinary doctrine of public interest immunity would operate in practice. For the avoidance of doubt, the amendment will clarify that nothing in section 105A.5 of the Criminal Code imposes an obligation on the terrorist offender to satisfy a court that a claim of public interest immunity should not be upheld. The amendment will make it clear that, if the terrorist offender seeks to access any information, material or facts that are likely to be protected by public interest immunity, the person claiming the immunity must make and substantiate the claim and satisfy the court that the claim should be upheld. The amendment will be in the form of a new subsection 105A.5(10) and an accompanying legislative note. I commend the amendment to the chamber.

Senator WATT (Queensland) (12:15): Labor will be supporting this amendment. As set out in the committee's report, a number of stakeholders expressed concern that the bill would allow the AFP minister or an agency to withhold exculpatory material from a terrorist offender in an application for a continuing detention order. This could happen in circumstances where the agency or minister believes that the exculpatory material would be the subject of a claim for public interest immunity. The committee sought to respond to some but not all of those concerns by recommending that the bill:

… be amended so that, in respect of any application for a continuing detention order, the onus is on the Australian Federal Police Minister to satisfy the Court that any exculpatory information that is excluded from an application is protected by public interest immunity.

This amendment implements that recommendation, and Labor supports it.

Question agreed to.

Bill, as amended, agreed to.

Bill reported with amendments; report adopted.

Third Reading

Senator CASH (Western Australia—Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business) (12:17): I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

Aged Care Legislation Amendment (New Commissioner Functions) Bill 2019

Second Reading

Consideration resumed of the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Senator WATT (Queensland) (12:17): The Aged Care Legislation Amendment (New Commissioner Functions) Bill 2019 provides for the transfer of functions and powers from the Department of Health to the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission. The Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission was established on 1 January 2019. Specifically, some
functions and powers will be transferred from the Secretary of the Department of Health to the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commissioner. This bill does not transfer or provide for any additional powers to the commission or commissioner.

This I will talk to later in the speech, but, given the spotlight on aged care and the number of complaints that the commission has received, I'll say that this is another missed opportunity for the Morrison Liberal government to act on aged care. In terms of the bill before the Senate, it shifts the primary point of contact for providers and consumers in relation to quality of care and regulation from the Department of Health to the commission. The bill will provide for the commission to: approve providers for the delivery of residential care services, home-care services and flexible care services; undertake compliance and enforcement actions, including monitoring the compliance of approved providers and imposing sanctions where approved providers do not meet their aged-care responsibilities; and, finally, to administer the responsibility of approved providers to make compulsory reports of assaults.

We know that this is a serious issue. Disappointingly, the Morrison Liberal government has again been slow to act. Recommendation 6 of the Carnell-Paterson review called for the enactment of a serious incident response scheme. This review was handed to the government in October 2017. That's over two years ago. This was also a recommendation included in the Australian Law Reform Commission's elder abuse report. This report was handed to the government in May 2017. That's 2½ years ago. Evidence has also been given at the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, and counsel for the commission raised concerns about the department's inability to move promptly on the Serious Incident Response Scheme. There are five specific appealable decisions by the secretary to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. These will transfer to the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commissioner and will remain appealable to the AAT. Labor welcomes this transfer of responsibilities. Currently, no decisions made by the commissioner are appealable to the AAT. The only option for people seeking a review process, having made a complaint to the ACQSC, is through the Commonwealth Ombudsman. Even though there could have been some improvements, Labor will be supporting this bill.

I would like to turn my attention now to the government's record when it comes to reforming the aged-care system. Where do you start? Well, the recent announcement is a good example of how consecutive Liberal governments have approached aged-care reform. It's been six years of inaction underpinned by billions of dollars cut out of the residential aged-care budget by the Prime Minister when he was Treasurer. Ad hoc, piecemeal reform is never a good thing when you are dealing with older vulnerable Australians and their care. Consecutive Liberal governments have failed to reform the system in a methodical way. The problem is the Liberals have only acted when pushed politically or, now, by an interim report delivered by its own royal commission.

I wanted to set out some of the issues, because facts speak louder than words. There is no doubt that every facet of the aged-care system is broken. Why is this the case? The answer is simple. No genuine long-term reform has been undertaken by consecutive Liberal governments over the past six years. There have been four ministers for aged care in six years. The Prime Minister, Mr Morrison, has twice refused to put aged care as a priority at the cabinet table. The fourth minister for aged care, Senator Colbeck, sits in the outer ministry. How does he have the necessary resources and decision-making opportunities if he is not
sitting around the cabinet table? You would have thought the Prime Minister would have made aged care a cabinet priority, given he did call for the establishment of the royal commission—but no, he didn't.

How do we know that the aged-care system is broken? As I've said previously, every single facet of the aged-care system is broken. Why do we say this? Older Australians cannot access the care they need. Packages delivered under the Commonwealth Home Support Program are exhausted. Last week's announcement of 10,000 home-care packages means there are still 110,000 older Australians assessed and waiting for their approved home-care package. That's 110,000 older Australians who this government has assessed as needing a home-care package, and yet they continue to wait because of the funding cuts from this government. How is this acceptable? How did the Morrison government ever let the waiting list get to this unacceptable level? What's the minister's plan to deal with the remaining older Australians on the home-care package waitlist?

Under the watch of successive Liberal governments, the waitlist has grown from 88,000 older Australians to, at its height, 120,000. This is not good enough. It is totally unacceptable. What's even worse is that more than 16,000 older Australians have actually died in one year waiting for their approved package. That's around 300 older Australians a week dying, having been assessed for a home-care package but being forced to wait for it because of this government's funding cuts. How can the Morrison Liberal government defend these figures? The government has known about these figures and done nothing. Fourteen thousand older Australians have had to enter residential aged care in one year alone because they could not stay at home any longer, waiting for care that wasn't there. That's around 200 older Australians and their families and carers, every single week, having to make a decision that waiting at home for their approved package is no longer an option and being forced to go into residential aged care. The government has known about these figures and done nothing. How does this happen? Others enter emergency departments or the hospital system due to their increasing care needs.

Not only is there a distinct lack of packages available but there's also the increasing length of time that older Australians have to wait for their approved home-care package. Many approved for the highest level of home care are now waiting more than 24 months to receive their approved packages—24 months! How does this happen? I, along with other senators, have brought examples to this chamber of people aged well into their 90s who are waiting 18 months, two years and longer for a home-care package that they've been assessed as needing. These are people well into their 90s. They're already well beyond the average life expectancy of an Australian, and this government is forcing them to continue waiting into their late 90s, if they do happen to survive that long, to get a home-care package. That is a disgraceful way to treat older Australians.

The home-care package waitlist is a national disgrace. Last week the government had choices. It could have delivered more reform around the home-care packages program. Providing more home-care packages is part of the response, but what about more reform? What about the almost half a billion dollars in unspent funds across the home-care packages waiting list? Why isn't the government looking at ways of using these funds for those who need care now? We've got the ridiculous situation where there's a massive waiting list for home-care packages but at the same time there are funds that have been provided for home-
care packages that are not being spent by the government. What about making the prioritisation queue actually work properly and give care to those who need it most? For example, what about older Australians in their 90s or those with a terminal illness? What a wasted opportunity for this inept government. This is just not good enough.

For years Labor has been calling on successive Liberal governments to fix and reform the home-care packages waitlist crisis. We know that Australia has a growing ageing population. We also know more Australians are choosing to age in their own home. The minister admitted that older Australians are waiting too long for their home-care package, but what is his plan? What is his plan for the remaining 110,000 older Australians on the waitlist? When asked in question time last week what advice the minister for aged care would give a 95-year-old woman with a terminal illness who is on a waiting list for a level 4 package and has been told that under this government that package will not be available for another 22 months, the minister said, 'That package is much closer.' Minister, how much closer is this 95-year-old woman with a terminal illness to receiving the care she needs? The honest answer is: she is no closer to getting the care she needs and she may not ever get that care.

The Prime Minister last week talked about his family situation. To be honest, most Australians are in the same situation. What does the Prime Minister say to the same 95-year-old woman with a terminal illness who has been told she has to wait for 22 months to get the home care that she has been assessed as needing and has been approved for? What does the Prime Minister say to that older Australian? How much will her wait time go down because of the government's announcement? The truth is that it won't go down at all. She's still going to be waiting 22 months.

The commissioners for the royal commission had three urgent recommendations, and the government's lacklustre response to the first urgent recommendation from the royal commission around home care has been criticised by everybody across the sector. The aged-care sector is saying that the government is still not doing enough. Clearly, last week was another missed opportunity.

Away from the home-care packages waitlist crisis, there was also a missed opportunity when it comes to resourcing the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission. It's clear the Prime Minister and ministers for aged care and health are yet to even read the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission's 2018-19 annual report. Take, for instance, the staggering number of complaints received by the commission last year. The latest data revealed a 35 per cent increase in the number of complaints about aged care in one year alone. Around 8,000 complaints were made, but it was the complaints in the delivery of home care that had the biggest rise from 1,014 in 2017-18 to 1,552 in 2018-19. This is a direct reflection on the Morrison Liberal government's inaction on long-term reform to aged care. More people are waiting for home care and we're seeing more complaints about home care, so why didn't the Morrison government use last week's announcement to give stronger powers to the commission and the commissioner?

We know from evidence given at the royal commission that some older Australians and their families who have made complaints are not satisfied by the processes and the outcomes. Surely, with the number of complaints on the rise, Minister Colbeck could have used this opportunity to strengthen the commission rather than maintain the status quo. This could include applying penalties for service providers who are repeat offenders when it comes to
delivering substandard care. It may also mean giving the commissioner the ability to arbitrate on complaints. The government could also have invested in people; although we've seen a dramatic increase in the number of complaints, the staffing levels at the commission have remained static.

This leads me to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety. The royal commission's interim report was handed down on 31 October. The reflections of the commissioners laid bare the disturbing state of aged care in Australia. In the words of the commissioners, aged care in Australia is 'a shocking tale of neglect'. The evidence before the royal commission has been confronting and heartbreaking. Witness after witness has said the same thing—that the aged-care system is failing older Australians.

So the question remains: with all the evidence and solutions at hand, why hasn't the government delivered a genuine reform agenda for aged care over the past six years? It also took weeks for the government to respond to the royal commission. They didn't actually have a plan ready to go, despite the number of warnings and despite the number of reviews that we've seen in the aged-care system. It's not like the government were blindsided by the commissioners' reviews and the interim report. The commissioners made mention of the more than dozens of reports, reviews and inquiries the Morrison Liberal government has received. Experts have put forward hundreds of recommendations, with the majority of them not fully implemented and many of them left without a response.

We have to ask: why was the Morrison government caught so flatfooted and without a plan, especially around how to deal with the home-care packages waiting list? The Morrison government has known for more than two years that over 100,000 older Australians have been assessed and are waiting for their approved home-care packages. This is no secret. When the last waiting list data report was published in September, the Prime Minister, Mr Morrison, said that home care was a budget priority. The commissioners were very clear about what they identified as needing urgent action. Providing more home-care packages to reduce the waiting list for higher level care at home was the commissioners' first priority. They described the home-care packages waiting list as neglect and stated that funding should be forthcoming from the Morrison government. We would have thought that the home-care package waiting list being described as 'neglect' would have resulted in a different response from the Morrison government. But, no, it's just the same, just like all the other announcements—too little, too late.

The Prime Minister, having called for the establishment of the royal commission—and after making his own budget cuts when Treasurer—has now abrogated his responsibilities. He has not listened to the growing chorus of voices calling for urgent action to fix Australia's broken aged-care system. He has also not taken seriously enough the statements made by the commissioners, who have described the home-care packages waiting list as neglect. It's abundantly clear that there are 110,000 older Australians who will wait longer for care in their homes.

This is a disgrace. As I've said, the Morrison Liberal government could act quickly when it comes to home-care packages. Labor has been calling on the government for more than two years to deal with the growing waiting list. This is a government that is being accused by its own royal commission of neglecting older Australians who are waiting for home care. We can, and the government should, do better.
Earlier, I raised the fact that billions of dollars had been cut from the aged-care budget by the Prime Minister when he was Treasurer, and 7.30 raised this very issue when reporting on the royal commission's interim report recently. Part of the program was an exchange between the Prime Minister and a former Australian journalist, Mr Rick Morton. It was in fact an exchange that took place just over a year ago, when the Prime Minister was facing questions about the cuts he made to the aged-care budget. I'd like to spend a bit of time on these cuts, because they have had a significant impact and I know that the government disputes they were made at all. That's why we need to get on the record what the facts are.

It's fair to say that consecutive Liberal governments have a strong record when it comes to cutting the aged-care budget. Tony Abbott, when he was Prime Minister, cut $110 million from the dementia supplement in residential aged care. The Prime Minister, when he was Treasurer, cut almost $500 million in the 2015 mid-year financial review, and the exchange between the Prime Minister and Rick Morton centred on the $1.2 billion cut to the Aged Care Funding Instrument that can be found in the 2016-17 budget. Under this Prime Minister as Treasurer, almost $2 billion was cut from residential aged care alone.

These failures start at the top. The now Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, was the architect of cuts to aged care that have contributed to this broken system. Government officials confirmed at estimates last month that the viability of the aged-care sector is at risk after years of Liberal cuts. The head of the Aged Care Financing Authority, the government authority responsible for aged-care funding, admitted the viability of the aged-care sector is at risk. I asked this question of the head of the financing authority at Senate estimates:

Does the Aged Care Financing Authority have any concerns about the viability of the aged-care sector given all of these factors?

The head of the agency's answer was clear. His one-word answer was 'yes'. He does have concerns about the viability of the sector, and this can also be confirmed in the agency's 2019 annual report.

It is incredibly concerning that the viability of the aged-care sector is at risk, with 250,000 older Australians currently in residential aged care. We've already seen the impending closure of three facilities in the last month—two on the Central Coast and one in Shepparton. Of course, it is not that long ago that we saw the disturbing scenes at Earle Haven nursing home on the Gold Coast, which I've spoken about many times. The viability of the aged-care sector is at risk because of the Liberals' cuts and inaction. This government must be held responsible for where aged care in Australia is today. Older Australians deserve better.

I would like to end by saying that the royal commission has shone a light on what's wrong and on what we need to do to assure Australians that there are facilities that do a good job. Labor acknowledges the hard work of all of the commissioners and the commission team and notes the valuable contribution of the late the Hon. Richard Tracey QC. I would also like to say this: there are a lot of really dedicated, hardworking staff in the aged-care system who are doing their very best, but we know they need more resources and more support as they go about their day-to-day work. For too long the government has been hands off. It needs to do more and it needs to do it quickly. We've said for a long time now that there aren't enough aged-care workers and that those there are must be better paid. A message from Labor to older Australians, along with their families, carers and loved ones: please be assured that we will keep putting pressure on this government to fix the aged-care system. (Time expired)
Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (12:37): I rise to make a contribution on the Aged Care Legislation Amendment (New Commissioner Functions) Bill 2019. This bill transfers additional aged-care regulatory functions to the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commissioner and is the next phase of the establishment of the role of the safety commission and the commissioner. From 1 January 2020, the commissioner will be responsible for approving aged-care providers for the delivery of aged-care services, home-care services and flexible care services; undertaking compliance and enforcement actions, including monitoring the compliance of approved providers and imposing sanctions where providers do not meet their aged-care responsibilities; and the administration of the responsibility of approved providers to make compulsory reports of assaults.

These functions and this bill are a very important next step. We know that there needs to be serious reform in aged care. We know that from the interim report of the royal commission, but, even without that, just listening to the lived experience of residents, and also the families of those who have passed on, is particularly important. Listening to the lived experience of care workers also is very important, as is listening to organisations who provided a lot of evidence to the royal commission. It's obvious that serious reform is necessary.

These reforms are the second phase of this process and are part of the government's response to the Carnell-Paterson review. The first stage of the reforms came into effect this year with the establishment of the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission and the accompanying commissioner—the inaugural commissioner—Janet Anderson. The establishment of the commission marked an important step towards better oversight of the aged-care sector as a whole, allowing for information to flow more readily and easily, rather than being siloed in the various agencies in the Department of Health. We have circulated a number of amendments because we don't actually think that there's enough in the current legislation to ensure fully transparent and accountable oversight. I'll come to that later.

This bill includes reforms that are an important step towards strengthening the commissioner's existing regulatory functions and powers. It is incredibly important that we get these changes right if we are serious about creating a strong commission, giving strength to the commissioner and avoiding in the future the regulatory failures we are seeing presently. This bill didn't go to an inquiry, and I think that is a shame, given that there are a number of important issues that are still to be addressed. That's why a series of amendments have been circulated. I understand these reforms are very important, and we don't want to see them held up. We will be supporting the bill, although, as I've just articulated, we will be proposing a suite of amendments that I believe strengthen the commissioner's functions and powers. They have the support of many in community based organisations working in this space who have been calling for some of the amendments for a long time. They called for them in the first round of the rollout of the changes initiated by the Carnell-Paterson report, which established the commissioner and the commission. They called for those amendments and they have continued calling for those changes.

Our main concern with the bill is it doesn't address key changes identified during the establishment of the commission last year. We have previously supported stakeholder calls for the commissioner to receive complaints about My Aged Care, the Aged Care Assessment Team and the Regional Assessment Service systems. My Aged Care is the single entry point for older people to access information on aged care, referrals for eligibility, assessments and
connections to appropriate services in their local area. I would be extremely surprised if other members of this place had not received strong criticism from constituents trying to access aged care—both older people and their families. I would be very surprised if they hadn't also received complaints about that system. There are myriad problems continuing to plague the My Aged Care website and call centre. Evidence provided to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety indicated:

… older people have trouble using the contact centre and website, they face confusing and duplicative assessments and they are not supported to connect to services.

In 2017-18 the Commonwealth Ombudsman received 164 complaints about the Department of Health, with 44 per cent of these being about My Aged Care.

It is clear there is a need to provide people with an effective and adequate mechanism to lodge complaints about My Aged Care and assessments, given this is a crucial element of our aged-care system. The commissioner already handles complaints about other aged-care services. It makes sense that they also handle complaints about My Aged Care and assessments. While I appreciate that the commissioner is taking a 'no wrong door' approach, we believe that the commission will not be seen as a single point of contact for older Australians until they are able to receive complaints about My Aged Care and the assessment process. When you think about it, the very process whereby you first make contact with the system is flawed, yet people can't complain about that to the commission. This is why I've circulated amendments that allow the commissioner to deal with complaints about the performance of the assessment process and electronic platforms relating to aged care, such as My Aged Care. I hope the government will seriously consider these and take on board these important amendments.

One of the key recommendations of the Carnell-Paterson review was for the enactment of a serious incident response scheme. In March this year a report was released by the government that recommended the scheme be overseen by the commission. I understand that a consultative process for the Serious Incident Response Scheme has been finished. At estimates we learnt the government is still working on the finer details of the scheme. It is crucial that we get this scheme right, but I have serious concerns about the time it has taken to get this scheme off the ground, particularly when you think about what we're hearing at the royal commission.

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Gallacher): Senator Siewert, you will be in continuation. It being 12.45, we will proceed to senators' statements.

STATMENTS BY SENATORS

Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (12:45): This is the time at which Mr Taylor's representatives were ordered by the Senate to table a copy of the City of Sydney annual report and any documents supporting the claim that he made in his false documents that were doctored. I was advised that the government would be tabling something. It's 12.45, and there's nothing yet. On that basis I will proceed. If the minister here is able to tell us that they're going to table something that actually supports Mr Taylor's claim, I will seek leave at that point to make further remarks.
I would make this point: this motion was a test for the government, and it has failed that test. It was a motion that required the government to table any evidence it had to support Mr Taylor's repeated claims that he didn't doctor a document to attack his political opponent. This is a scandal that started with a dodgy trick by a mediocre minister, and it's ended with the integrity of the entire government in tatters.

Today Mr Taylor had a chance to come clean. He had a chance to clear his name. He had a chance to put this to bed and get on with governing, but guess what he's done? He's refused. Mr Taylor has labelled this fiasco 'a grubby smear'. If that were true he'd be able to prove it, but he refuses to put forward any evidence to clear his name. The only reason you would choose not to clear your name is that you can't, because you have done exactly what you have been accused of, because you have been caught red-handed.

On 23 October this year Angus Taylor used a forged document in a botched political hit job. He took a swing at a local mayor and instead gave himself an uppercut. Mr Taylor used false travel figures in official ministerial correspondence to the Lord Mayor of Sydney, which was provided to The Daily Telegraph, and he claimed—and still inexplicably claims—that the document containing the doctored figures came from the City of Sydney's website. He has claimed this over and over again in the parliament—six times, to be precise—but he has got no proof to back it up, not a skerrick of evidence, and today he has refused to provide any.

In fact, all the evidence to date is that the document with the fake travel figures was never on the City of Sydney website. Metadata from the City of Sydney proves that the annual report hasn't been changed since it was published in November last year, and the public internet archives of the website clearly show that the annual reports published on the website on 27 March, 20 April, 19 June and 24 October this year contained the correct travel figures. But, somehow, Mr Taylor still expects the Australian public to believe that the website said something different when his office looked at it. His version of events is not believable—and Senator McGrath knows it.

Those opposite could have provided any evidence to support Mr Taylor's claims, but they refuse to do so. Do you know why they refuse? Because his deception has been like a web into which more and more ministers are drawn. The Prime Minister, by interfering in the New South Wales police strike force investigation, is now complicit in Minister Taylor's dishonesty and deception. The entire government is so deep in this fiasco that everyone on that side of the chamber is now complicit in the dishonesty and deception. This lack of integrity is not only an attribute of Mr Taylor's; it is becoming the defining trait of this entire government.

The minister refuses to explain exactly what occurred here, refuses to outline his personal involvement in a botched political hit, refuses to name the staff who are complicit and refuses to tell the truth to the parliament. His behaviour has, frankly, been appalling. By his behaviour, Mr Taylor demonstrates he is unfit for the office he holds. He isn't fit to be a minister of the Crown. Deliberately misleading the parliament is a contempt of the parliament and a breach of ministerial standards. But, most importantly, his behaviour is below that which the public expect from cabinet ministers. It is the worst of politics: petty, dishonest and incompetent. Any serious government—any credible government—would be worried that this scandal would be distracting from their policies and their agenda. But this government has no integrity, and Mr Taylor is the poster boy for a government that has no integrity.
What Australians have is a discredited government protecting a disgraced minister. He failed a test today. He was given the opportunity by this Senate—in fact, he was required by this Senate—to provide any shred of evidence to back up his version of events, and he provided none. His version is not believable. He has no credibility. He has no integrity. He should no longer be a minister.

Nuclear Energy

Senator McGrath (Queensland—Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (12:50): It is time that we had a serious conversation about nuclear power in Australia. In July this year I joined my colleague Keith Pitt, the member for Hinkler, in calling for an inquiry into the nuclear economy in Australia and exploring the opportunities associated with capitalising on our uranium-rich nation. I commend the Liberal-National government for establishing a parliamentary inquiry, which is currently being chaired by my fellow Sunshine Coast colleague the member for Fairfax, Ted O'Brien.

As a resource-rich nation it is reasonable that we take the necessary steps to understand the state of the nuclear industry in Australia. Specifically, it is vital that we understand the research and development from around the globe. Most of all, it is crucial that we consider the benefits of a domestic nuclear industry to the national economy—in particular, the capacity for Australia to benefit domestically through the uptake of existing nuclear technologies or from new and emerging nuclear reactor technologies, such as the small modular reactor that is currently being developed in North America.

Additionally, with our significant endowment of uranium, it makes sense that we explore all the steps of the nuclear fuel cycle, such as fabrication, fuel enrichment, reprocessing, mining and the exporting of uranium and other fuels. It is well documented that Australia is uranium rich. Indeed, we hold 30 per cent of the world’s uranium. However, we are only the third-largest producer, currently behind Kazakhstan and Canada, of uranium. With no doubt, Australia’s uranium can only be used for peaceful purposes, such as civil nuclear power and nuclear medicine, which we can ensure through stringent trade agreements in addition to the International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards. If anything, we are best positioned to exploit uranium and use our foreign relationships to ensure that it’s only being used for energy generation, not for other purposes. On the environmental front, the inquiry has explored the extent to which nuclear and existing electricity generation sources contribute to greenhouse gas emissions through their life cycles.

I propose that our approach should align with the other 31 countries, including France and the United States: that we seek to implement nuclear energy to support our energy grid and ensure baseload power. As it is fully feasible, the domestic nuclear industry presents an opportunity not only to generate affordable and emission-free energy but also to foster our untapped potential in science and research that includes nuclear medicine, material and agricultural research, and world-class training and employment opportunities. The Minerals Council of Australia reports that as Australia begins to realise its uranium potential it would equate to an approximate $9 billion industry by 2040 and deliver more construction and higher-skilled jobs. This data is reinforced by the success of the nuclear industry in other countries around the world. This is also supported by countless examples and evidence from around the globe which demonstrate new technologies, like small modular reactors, which are both effective and safe for constructing and developing nuclear energy.
Additionally, these technologies have come a long way in managing the by-product through enhanced safety methods and configurability that is designed to produce less waste. This enhanced safety conforms well to Australia's stringent workplace and health regulations that will ensure that we can manage any environmental and storage hurdles. This aligns with improving technology to see countries like France and the United States, along with 29 other countries, operate nuclear power reactors and save 2.2 billion tonnes in global CO2 emissions.

As it stands, Australia is the only G20 country that prohibits nuclear power. Nuclear may in fact be our long-term, environmentally friendly solution to generating energy and, most importantly, bringing down energy prices. Take France, which not only produces three-quarters of its electricity with nuclear but also pays 15 per cent less for its electricity than fellow EU counterparts. It's time we had a serious adult conversation about nuclear. As well documented, the threats and dangers of nuclear are spawned out of either regulatory mismanagement or corruption. However, what we can't allow are the nay-sayers and the conspiracy theorists, who mostly come from the left side of politics, who are stopping the country from having this grown-up conversation.

**Energy**

**Senator VAN** (Victoria) (12:55): I rise to make a statement on the parlous state of energy supply in Victoria. My once great state is now facing a high probability of electricity blackouts this summer due to the failures of the Andrews government. Let there be no doubt, the blame for these blackouts will be the energy policies of cynical and ideologically driven settings, produced to scrape a few votes from Labor's hard-Left green mates. As we've seen recently, Victorian power prices are now some of the highest in the country. This is a direct product of the Andrews government's politically driven but economically naive policies. Victoria used to have the lowest power prices in the country. And I can hear those opposite asking: 'Wow, why was that? And I'm happy to tell them.

**Senator Chisholm:** We hadn't said anything.

**Senator VAN:** Can I call the senator to order, please?

**Senator Chisholm:** What about Hazelwood, though?

**Senator VAN:** That was a product of your government's policy settings. I will get onto that, Senator Chisholm.

**Senator Chisholm:** If you're going to encourage it, deal with it.

**Senator VAN:** Mr Acting Deputy President, if I could call to order Senator Chisholm, please.

**The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Gallacher):** Senator Van, resume your seat. Interjections are disorderly. I call both sides to order and allow Senator Van to make his contribution with silence in the chamber.

**Senator VAN:** Thank you, Mr Acting Deputy President. Don't worry, you will get your turn. I was explaining to those opposite why we used to have the lowest power prices. This was not because of generation technologies; it was because of an abundant supply of fuel. I know those on my side understand supply-demand economics, but a quick lesson for those opposite. If you have more fuel than you can use, it drives down prices—simple. Labor and the Greens will chip in with, 'Well, we have all this sunshine; we have all this wind, more
than we can use. Of course they are right, to a point. When the sun sets and the wind stops, how does your supply look then? Pretty low, right? So what happens to prices, Senator Rice? They go up.

*Senator Rice interjecting—*

*Senator VAN:* Have you heard of night-time?

**The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Senator Van, please resume your seat. Contributions should be addressed to the chair. Interjections are disorderly and are not usually from people making a contribution. Please continue and address the chair.

*Senator VAN:* Thank you, Mr Acting Deputy President. So this is worse at night-time. The price signals caused by the oversupply in daylight hours sends a signal to dispatchable generators that their supply is unviable. You can see a direct link between the policy settings arranged by 'Blackout Dan' and the closure of Hazelwood. So while Victoria had an oversupply of cheap generation that drove economic development and jobs based on low power prices, we now have to import higher priced energy, which means we will export jobs. So these price signals are leading to a lack of investment in coal generation which means less or no firm dispatchable power in the future. The product of this always will be blackouts in the once great state of Victoria.

The solution to this should be very simple. Let's use another abundant cheap power source that is dispatchable when the intermittent power supplies are not available. That solution is gas-fired electricity generation, or should be. Victoria has a long history of cheap, abundant, natural gas. This historically has come from our Bass Strait gas fields. However, they're getting to the end of their lives. Commonsense would dictate we use our other gas reserves to back fill. But no. 'Blackout Dan' has put a moratorium on all gas exploration and production in Victoria. So now we're importing gas from Queensland down a very long expensive pipe. Anna Palaszczuk must be loving her mate Dan because he's sending royalties and jobs to her state, not keeping them in his. The most galling part of this is that, in an attempt to stop blackouts from happening due to his stupid renewable energy target, Dan is rumoured—and I believe in these rumours—to be buying backup diesel generation for when the sun goes down and the wind stops. In case those opposite aren't aware, diesel is the most polluting and the most expensive form of energy generation. The people of Victoria are not stupid. They can see that the renewable target, while a noble aim, is a completely irresponsible energy policy. You can't claim to be looking out for Victorians and for the environment while pushing up the cost of living and polluting our cities and towns with diesel generation. Dan Andrews and his energy minister need to stand up and do the right thing by the people of Victoria. Lift the moratorium on gas exploration and production— *(Time expired)*

**Mining**

*Senator CHISHOLM* (Queensland) (13:00): Earlier this month BMA—BHP Mitsubishi Alliance—announced that they would be automating 300 jobs at the Goonyella mine in Central Queensland by rolling out 86 driverless trucks over the next two years. BMA have confirmed that the shift would affect production and maintenance employees, and BMA have said there would be no redundancies—either forced or voluntary. They can say this because the impacted workers are all labour hire employees.
The Liberal and National parties' attacks on job security over the last little while have allowed mine owners to casualise their workforce, and this is having a devastating impact on regional communities throughout Queensland. Over the past two decades mine owners have casualised a lot of their workforce. I'm reliably informed that the Goonyella mine had more than 2,100 permanent employees around the turn of the century, yet today has less than 1,000. Even though the workforce has grown, many of these casuals have been given the same job for five years, but they can be let go at a moment's notice.

The miners union have called on BMA to not make any employees redundant. They called for additional jobs and apprenticeships to be created in other parts of their business to offset any changes in job numbers and for the remote operations to be based on or near the mine, rather than in a capital city like Brisbane. Isaac regional mayor, Anne Baker, also met with BMA to understand the impacts of the proposal and to know how they intend to manage them. She said, 'Our community will see through any propaganda and will demand to know how the planned residual impacts on our community will be mitigated.'

We understand that these decisions are not taken lightly, but the company has a social responsibility obligation to engage the community and its workers on the proposals, the impacts and the way it intends to manage the impacts. So while technology does change and these changes can bring about benefits, it is important that those people are looked after, reskilled, and given good, secure, local work. According to research by consultancy firm McKinsey earlier this year, the automation of the nation's workforce will be most pronounced in mining regions, where it found that more than 30 per cent of jobs could be affected. A town like Mackay could see 27 per cent of jobs affected. They also said that, left to its own devices, automation would have significant distribution impacts. During the peak of transition, increased job churn could see Australia's unemployment rate temporarily spike by 2.5 per cent. So in the Mackay, Isaac and Whitsunday Region, which has an unemployment rate of 5.7, it could jump to 8.2. Without retraining for vulnerable workers, especially administrative and manual workers, for those in vulnerable regions income inequality could widen by up to 30 per cent.

Workers in Central Queensland are rightly sceptical of the impacts that automation will bring to their communities. You only need to look at what is happening with automation across the Pilbara, where roles are shifted to Perth out of communities. BHP need to commit to keeping jobs in regional areas and should rule out setting up automation hubs in Brisbane or interstate capitals. These jobs belong in regional Queensland, not Brisbane. Any automation hubs should be set up in mining towns like Moranbah or Dysart, or in regional cities like Rockhampton, Mackay or Townsville.

We want a mining industry that provides secure local jobs. For the companies that don't do that, there should be a price to pay. The LNP, at the last election, campaigned hard that it was the party for the coal workers, and the LNP guaranteed that the jobs of those who worked in coal would be secure. We need to see action from the LNP to ensure that all workers are looked after in the mining industry. The LNP needs to do more to ensure that people are not being forced onto labour hire, especially when they're just doing the same job for less pay and in worse conditions. The LNP have sided with mining companies over mine workers when it comes to casualisation and labour hire, and now they're doing it again when it comes to automation. This is just another example of the LNP failing regional Queenslanders.
Sadly, we are seeing a similar story in Bundaberg. The region has been drought declared by the Queensland state government. However, when they asked the local member, the member for Hinkler, Keith Pitt, and the federal government for a similar declaration, they were snubbed for not meeting the requirements due to, as the Bundaberg NewsMail put it, 'a bureaucratic flaw'. This is just another example of the member for Hinkler and the Nationals letting down drought affected communities. This is because Bundaberg has a high proportion of people in food manufacturing, rather than in primary agriculture—

Senator McGrath: Do you want to talk about Paradise Dam?

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Polley): Order! I'll just remind senators that interjections are disorderly. Senator Chisholm has the call and he should be heard in silence.

Senator CHISHOLM: This is because Bundaberg has a higher proportion of people in food manufacturing, rather than in primary agriculture. It's crazy to think that these industries are not impacted by the flow-on effects of the drought. And there is evidence that those primary industries are. A press release from Australian macadamia growers says that, despite planting more trees, production is down 5½ thousand tonnes over the last 12 months. So, despite there being more trees, production is down. And if we look at the Isis Central Sugar Mill, this year it's down 200,000 tonnes on where it was last year. So we can see the impact of the drought on those producers.

Bundaberg has experienced some of the driest conditions on record, with annual recorded rainfall being half a metre behind on average. The rejections mean that Bundaberg is not eligible for the federal government's Drought Communities Program, which gives each council $1 million for infrastructure and $3,000 to eligible farming households. This is money that would flow to help businesses deal with the immense challenges that drought has brought them. The minister has used this discretion previously in Bega in New South Wales and in Peterborough in South Australia, which has been reported in the media recently. Does this mean that he has refused to use his discretion to add Bundaberg to this important program?

The council first wrote to Minister Littleproud in July and got a response in September, saying that it would be looked into as part of the quarterly review. It's now December, and the council hasn't seen any action from Minister Littleproud. He has previously used his discretionary power to allow councils to be eligible for funding, but why not his home state town of Bundaberg? The member for Hinkler, Keith Pitt, and Minister Littleproud need to step up and allow the declaration of the state government to declare Bundaberg drought affected so that it can receive the funding support now rather than next year.

I would say to the member for Hinkler and to Senator McGrath that perhaps there should be a bit less time focused on nuclear power and more time on providing practical help to those communities in Bundaberg that have been impacted by the drought and that deserve support from this federal government, that has once again neglected Bundaberg and those drought affected communities. They deserve so much better. I am prepared to stand up for them, and the Labor opposition is prepared to stand up for them.

Asylum Seekers

Senator RICE (Victoria) (13:08): Today is a dark day for the Senate, with the repeal of the medevac bill. On the basis of a secret deal between the government and Senator Lambie,
the government has dismantled the only shred of humanity that our offshore detention system had. It was the only objective, independent insight into the system. Be in no doubt: it was a system and it is a system that is designed for secrecy. It is designed to keep people out of sight. It is designed to keep people's suffering out of sight and out of mind—out of the spotlight of scrutiny.

The medevac legislation meant that decisions on people's health and, potentially, their lives, were being made by doctors. We know that there are sick people on Manus Island and Nauru—people who have been kept in indefinite detention for over seven years. Anybody who has read Behrouz Boochani's award-winning book, *No Friend But the Mountains*, understands the desperation felt by people locked up indefinitely—locked up without hope.

We have all heard the stories of people paralysed by lack of hope, lack of meaning, lack of anything to look forward to, continuing nothingness—people who withdraw, people who stop eating and drinking, people who lie paralysed on their beds day after day after day. I feel so much for those people today, people who have not committed a crime, people who have been tortured by our government—yes, tortured. The United Nations tells us that indefinite detention is torture. Medevac gave these people hope that, as sick people, they would get the medical care they needed, the medical care they deserved, the medical care that we as Australians have an obligation to give them. I'm thinking of the hundreds of refugees on Manus and Nauru who this morning have had that hope ripped away from them. I know they will be feeling desperate. I want them to know that we will be there for them. The community is there for them. Certainly the Australian Greens are there for them. The majority of the Australian community is there for them. We will keep fighting for their safety. We will keep fighting to close the camps and to bring them here to rebuild their lives.

I haven't had the privilege of meeting those people who our government have locked up on Manus and Nauru, but I have had the privilege of getting to know many people who have arrived in Australia as refugees or as people seeking asylum. I've got a motion in the Senate this afternoon about two of them who are currently languishing jailed, denied their freedom, in the Villawood detention centre. Let's call it what it is—the Villawood jail. They are jailed purely for doing what is their right—to seek asylum if their lives are in danger. My motion this afternoon is about two journalists from Saudi Arabia who are being held there. They are two journalists who have made significant contributions, working with international publications, and their work has been praised by colleagues and international journalists. To say it's not easy being a journalist in Saudi Arabia is an understatement. The case of Jamal Khashoggi is sobering. A UN investigation concluded that his death constituted an extrajudicial killing for which the state of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is responsible. That's what can happen to journalists in Saudi Arabia.

The two men I've been in contact with are not only journalists; they're also gay. They were living in their home country, where homosexuality is punishable by death. It has been reported that they were ousted by their own government in retaliation for liaising with the international media. They feared persecution, torture and death. So they did what was their right under international law—they fled Saudi Arabia and came to Australia to find safety. But instead of being welcomed with open arms and shown what a welcoming, caring country we could be, they were immediately detained. They told *The Guardian Australia*: 'We ran away from being detained arbitrarily in jail for no reason, only to arrive in Australia and find
ourselves here in jail. We've been threatened with it in Saudi, but it never actually happened until we came here.' That's the Australia we're living in today. Through communicating with these men, I've seen photos of the results of the violent attacks LGBTIQ+ people face in detention centres in Australia. It's an incredibly dangerous place for LGBTIQ people seeking asylum. I understand these two journalists have been threatened with violence in detention and they live in fear for their safety.

I am here today for them and for all people seeking asylum in Australia. Australia can and must do better. We cannot continue along a path that involves locking up people unjustly. I urge my fellow senators in this place, and all Australians, to look at these issues for what they are—matters of life and death. Twelve people have died in detention on Nauru and Manus so far, and today's repeal of medevac makes it more likely that more will die. People's fates are now once again in the hands of an uncaring, untrustworthy government, in the hands of Minister Dutton—people who justify their cruel regime on the flawed and useless theory of deterrence and use that to mercilessly shred people's human rights, their right to safety, their right to asylum.

Those of us who have lost a loved one suddenly or randomly in circumstances that are random and seemingly unfair know how gut-wrenching this is, know the grief that those who are left behind are left with, know how their lives feel being ripped apart. And this is what our government and Senator Lambie are heartlessly imposing on innocent people who have already suffered so much. The Greens believe that our society can be so much better. We believe that seeking asylum is a human right and that people who enter Australian territory to seek asylum do so lawfully. We believe that Australia must uphold its humanitarian and legal obligations to people seeking asylum and refugee, to grant refugees protection and to reunite families as is required by international human rights law and the 1951 Refugee Convention and its protocol. We believe that people should be treated with dignity—surely that is not too much to ask?—and that we, as Australians, should be proud of the contribution we make to our community and the world. We should not hide behind our borders attacking those who come to us seeking asylum. We are here today for a fair Australia, one that supports our neighbours and the world, an Australia that we can be proud of.

Western Australia: Community Events

Senator DEAN SMITH (Western Australia—Government Whip in the Senate) (13:16): I rise this afternoon to recognise the Western Australian finalists in the WA Australian of the Year Awards of 2020. This remarkable array of Western Australians serves our nation with distinction in sections as diverse as education, medicine and science.

Western Australian of the Year finalist Annie Fogarty OAM is an education and social entrepreneur. In 2000, Annie developed the Fogarty Foundation with her husband, Brett, to deliver educational opportunities, to empower young Australians to maximise their potential and to develop stronger communities. The Fogarty EDvance program is perhaps Annie's most notable venture, which improves educational outcomes of students enrolled in schools in lower socioeconomic communities.

The Senior Australian of the Year finalist Professor John Newman is a pioneer in modern obstetrics. John is considered to be one of the world's leading voices in premature birth prevention. In 2018, John delivered a successful national rollout of the Australian Preterm
Birth Pretension Alliance, a groundbreaking program which resulted in an eight per cent decrease in the incidences of premature births in Western Australia.

And, of course, Young Australian of the Year finalist Yarlalu Thomas is a medical student and public health fellow, specialising in genetic and rare diseases. Yarlalu works with the WA Register of Developmental Anomalies, Genetic Services WA and Cliniface to revolutionise genetic healthcare services for Indigenous people. Yarlalu, who synthesises modern scientific and medical knowledge with ancient Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practices, created the UNESCO endorsed Life Languages project to translate medical terminology into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and indigenous languages more globally.

WA Local Hero finalist Suzy Urbaniak is a decorated science educator and mentor, having received a number of eminent honours, including the Prime Minister's prize for excellence in science teaching and induction into the WA Women's Hall of Fame. Susie, who's motivated by seeing young people understand the applications of science to the real world, developed the Centre of Resources Excellence, a trailblazing science, technology, engineering and maths, or STEM, program which promotes meaningful careers in the resource sector.

It's my distinct pleasure to congratulate Annie Fogarty OAM, Professor John Newman, Yarlalu Thomas and Suzy Urbaniak for their merited recognition as WA finalsts in the WA Australian of the Year Awards of 2020.

Secondly, I would like to acknowledge Julie Hughes of Ashdale Secondary College for finalising in the WA Education Awards of 2019. Julie was named as a Western Australian Beginning Teacher of the Year finalist for her innovative methods pertaining to science education. Ashdale Secondary College and its students are enriched by the presence of passionate educators like Julie. Indeed, my niece and nephew both attended and were educated at Ashdale Secondary College in Darch, so I know personally of the quality education provided by educators like Julie. This afternoon it's my hope that the Senate will agree to a notice of motion that I have, supported by other West Australian senators, to recognise the wonderful work of Julie and other notable West Australians.

In November, I had the privilege of supporting a number of occasions scheduled by Perth's Indian communities, namely the Indian Society of Western Australia, known in WA as ISWA, and Sikh Gurdwara Perth Inc. Diwali Mela, or the Hindu Festival of Lights, symbolises the spiritual victory of light over darkness, good over evil and knowledge over ignorance. Diwali Mela saw 30,000 people pour into the Claremont Showground in Perth on 1, 2 and 3 November. I'd like to extend my congratulations—and, I'm sure, the congratulations of all those 30,000 people—to the Indian Society of WA and to its president, Surya Ambati, and the ISWA management committee for providing every West Australian the chance to embrace this distinctly beautiful Hindu custom. I wish Perth's Indian community a very happy Diwali.

Perth's Sikh communities venerated the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the founder of Sikhism, at Nagar Kirtan on 9 November. Nagar Kirtan is the processional singing of divine hymns in a neighbourhood or town. The processional singing, which started at Stirling Gardens and concluded at Forrest Chase in Perth, saw more than 3,000 Western Australians enjoy and participate in this important occasion. I compliment the Sikh Gurdwara Perth Inc. president, Mrs Kaur Uppal, and her management committee on sharing Guru Nanak Dev's lessons of honesty, equality and goodwill with the people of Western Australia. Thank
you to the Prime Minister also for sending his best wishes to Perth's Sikh communities to mark this special and, indeed, historic occasion.

Gurpurab, on 12 November, saw Sikh Gurdwara Perth in Bennett Springs celebrate the 550th anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev Ji. Guru Nanak Gurpurab saw more than 5,000 people celebrate what is one of the most sacred festivals in Sikhism. To the Perth Sikh community, I wish you all a very happy Gurpurab.

The celebrations of the 550th anniversary of the birth of Guru Nanak Dev Ji culminated in a sport and youth day on 16 November. Sikh Gurdwara Perth in Bennett Springs played stadium as youth from the Sikh community participated in a suite of different sports, including netball and soccer. I am looking forward to seeing, as we all saw on that day, the star-studded Perth Sikh Swans showcase their exceptional netball skills. I'm pleased to report the sports youth day was well attended on what turned out to be a very, very warm Perth summer's day.

Finally, the Westnam United Soccer Club celebrated its night of nights at the 2019 Westnam United Soccer Club awards night on 8 November at the Macedonian hall in Perth. Westnam United Soccer Club is symbolic of the benefits of grassroots sport, so I was delighted to provide a congratulatory message to the Westnam United Soccer Club awards night. The Westnam United Soccer Club awards night recognised the coaches, the managers and the players who represent the beating heart of Westnam United Soccer Club, a grassroots sport. I praise the Westnam United Soccer Club for celebrating the particular importance of the role played by its coaches, its officials and its volunteers, who brought this important event together. Of course, I congratulate the winners of the Westnam United Soccer Club MVP awards: Andre Giles from the metro team, Hao Nguyen from the masters team, Kenny Young from the reserves team and Kevin Nguyen from the firsts team. Thank you to Westnam United Soccer Club president Ted Nguyen and his management committee for their dedication to soccer promotion in diverse communities, a mission which I'm committed to supporting as its major sponsor again in the Asian Communities Cup finals next year.

The 2019 Asian Communities Cup sees seniors and masters teams from Perth's Chinese, Korean, Singaporean and Vietnamese communities compete in an exciting knockout competition. I'm privileged to be presenting the 2019 Asian Communities Cup, and I wish all the participants the very, very best of good sportsmanship. To reiterate, I'm dedicated to continuing my support of the Asian Communities Cup in 2020 and beyond and to partnering with the Westnam United Soccer Club to expand the Asian Communities Cup to include junior and women's teams into the future.

Workplace Safety

Senator McCarthy (Northern Territory—Deputy Opposition Whip in the Senate) (13:24): I wish to put on the parliamentary record that in this week in particular, where all Australians are saying no to violence—no to family and domestic violence; no to emotional and physical violence; no to verbal and written abuse that leads to violence—we must also say a definite no to workplace violence. We have heard many speeches in this Senate on deeply important issues, such as the high rates of murdered women in our country from either violent family relationships or simply while walking home from a night out. Violence against
anyone—male, female, children—should never be accepted in our country, should never be accepted anywhere. But it does happen, every day, and we need to remain vigilant to that reality.

Today I share with the Senate my experience of what threats of violence in the workplace can feel like, and how it has been a long and oftentimes paralysing shadow over all that I do. I take this opportunity to express heartfelt gratitude to my team, in particular Johanna, Mandy, Charlie and Kirsty, who have walked with me through all these things. Next month it will be two years since the first abusive phone calls began—calls that my staff have had to endure, trying professionally to deal with constituent issues. But then the tone of the constituent calls took a turn for the worse. Call after call, message after message on my answering machine. Both my Canberra office and my Darwin office became an obsessive focus for the caller, so fixated on wanting to inflict pain, until finally I said, 'Enough!'

In my nearly 15 years of being a Labor member for both Northern Territory and now federal parliaments, I have never had to be concerned daily for my personal safety—until now. Arriving in Canberra is often fraught with anxious thoughts, and not just about politics, which has enough anxieties of its own. It was anxiety about safety. Am I safe? Are my staff safe? They are constant questions built into my daily work routine. Attending public events, especially speaking events at rallies, requires the presence of the Australian Federal Police, such is the nature of the threats against me.

Speaking to hundreds of people gathered at Reclaim the Night rallies, I realised that whilst I was advocating for the rights of the safety of others, I needed to also come to terms with my own need for safety in the workplace. The rough and tumble of political debate and political life is often seen as an expected part of our job description, but threats of violence, graphic threats of being gang raped and beaten, and threats of being killed for doing our job, for being a public figure, is reprehensible. Such threats are designed to maximise so much fear to render the person to whom the threats are levelled at incapable of doing their job, and instead ensure they live their life in a prison of impending danger.

Threats of executing me in the federal parliament have been taken seriously by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, which led to the AFP in Canberra eventually serving the personal protection order I sought for the protection of my staff and I. Mr President, I thank you for not even hesitating over this matter.

I am now aware that other Senate colleagues, including one former senator and also my colleague Senator Dodson, are also now a focus for similar threats. I thank the Northern Territory police and the Northern Territory branch of the Australian Federal Police for your immediate support and advice to my staff and me, and for taking the threats of violence very seriously. I thank also my legal teams in the Northern Territory, in the ACT and in Sydney, in particular solicitor Tim Lynch.

If the AFP is unable to easily locate the defendant or has other priorities, as was the case for my matter, it may be that the application or the orders, or both, are not served on the defendant in a timely manner or at all, rendering the personal protection order scheme ineffective. Such an experience can be debilitating for victims of violence—all victims of violence. Examination of the processes by which such orders are sought and obtained is desperately needed if my experience, as a person of some means, is any guide.
The impact on families is unimaginable, and the conflict it causes simply because they care so much and feel helpless in watching a loved one go through this experience, is completely disempowering for them too. It is one thing to be a political representative and expect a certain level of public criticism, and families do feel the frustration of watching that play out. But, when it comes to rape threats and death threats, my family has been struggling to cope, out of deep concern for me. So today I speak for them also.

My sons, CJ, Gray and Adam, are a tremendous source of loving strength. I stand here as a senator for the Northern Territory because of your belief in me, to keep going, to keep fighting for others, irrespective of the violent threats against me. I thank my dad, nearly 80 years of age. Thank you for your enduring love and wisdom in all these matters. It has been deeply disturbing and hurtful for you, I know. It has been perhaps two of the most difficult years for you and me in particular, and I am deeply thankful we have persevered and got through okay.

I thank my sister Selina, my Yanyuwa and Garrawa families and also my Wiradjuri sister Yvonne for her love and support. But, even deeper than that, I thank you for your fierce determination to spark the fighter in my spirit, to use my fear, to channel it with love, to rise above the hatred and to fight for all people.

My families, you remind me constantly of the higher purpose and focus required in serving the people of the Northern Territory and indeed Australia and that serving with a heart of love is the only way to overcome such hate. For that, I thank you. Bauji barra.

**China**

*Senator HANSON (Queensland) (13:31):* Australians are very concerned about key assets being sold to Chinese companies. I want to remind the government about the reasons for these concerns before the Treasurer rubber stamps any more sales to China. Chinese companies' relationships with the Chinese government are not like private sector companies' relationships with governments in the West. We know this because the owners of these Chinese companies tell us this is the case. In 2016, the government approved the sale of Darwin Port to Landbridge. Mr Ye, representing the company, said the Darwin Port investment was good for the company and served China's foreign policy goal, known as One Belt, One Road. We asked a firm representation Landbridge for evidence of the economic basis for that investment but nothing was forthcoming. The purchase of Darwin Port adds to the number of ports acquired by the Chinese government under its 'string of pearls' strategy.

I now want to move onto food security and the dairy industry. In 2016, the government agreed to the sale of the milk processor and dairy conglomerate Van Diemen's Land Company to the Chinese owned Moon Lake. Conditions were placed on that sale but to date those conditions have not been met, and the government is doing nothing to enforce them. The lack of action by the government casts doubt on whether any conditions placed on the sale of critical Australian assets are worth the paper they're written on.

This year, Mengniu, the company part-owned by the Chinese communist government has offered to buy Bellamy's and Lion drinks and dairy with brands including Dairy Farmers, Pura, Farmers Union and Big M. These sales will make a Hong Kong based company with deep ties to the Chinese government one of four largest milk processors in Australia. And it is not only dairy farmers who will be affected but also the Australian distribution companies,
which could be replaced by Chinese ones. As it stands, the government does not require companies to meet domestic demand before exporting. This means there is nothing to stop Mengniu leaving Australia short of milk. Given Australian fresh milk sells for 10 to 15 times more in China than the price here, it's quite possible that we will see that happen.

The Foreign Acquisitions and Takeovers Act 1975 provides the legislative framework for foreign investment in Australia. Private foreign investors are required to seek prior government approval before acquiring up to 15 per cent in a corporation or control of a business valued above $248 million at 2013 prices and indexed annually. Foreign governments have a zero asset base price threshold, but in practice it makes no difference to the outcome because all but a handful of applications to buy Australian assets have been denied. Free trade agreements lift the thresholds, with the result that an increasing number of sales happen without the need for government approval. Our government, the Liberals and the Nationals, have no problem with China purchasing our assets, property and essential services. Labor will be less restrictive because they want to raise the threshold by millions. The truth is that in the past decade the Foreign Investment Review Board has approved all but a handful of applications. It makes little difference whether foreign government owned entities apply to purchase critical Australian assets or whether foreign companies apply, because the result is the same: approved. Years ago, people talked about Australia as the 51st state of the United States, but today talk is about Australia as the 24th province of China.

I now want to talk about the potential sale of another critical asset to China. Not all of the story is known yet, but it looks to be like a sequel to 'Timorgate'. In the original story, Australia put listening devices in the rooms of Timorese negotiators, and, once that conduct became public, a dispute arose between our two countries. That dispute was settled with a treaty between Australia and the Democratic Republic of Timor which came into force on 19 August 2019. The sequel to 'Timorgate' began in July 2019 when an Australian ship anchored in the Timor Sea was served with a prohibition notice by NOPSEMA, the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority. The prohibition notice required the Northern Endeavour to cease oil production within 24 hours. Based on the facts available, an improvement notice should have been issued by NOPSEMA to the operator of the Northern Endeavour, rather than a shutdown order. There ought to be a Senate inquiry into the actions of NOPSEMA, because they have overreached their authority. The question arises as to why the government would now resist replacing the prohibition order with an improvement notice and get this Australian oil producer back in production and paying taxes.

Here are a few facts. In 2019, the ship was given a class certificate by Lloyd's verifying the soundness of the hull. A proposal to verify the soundness of the production facility had been rejected, but no alternative was suggested. A four-kilogram object found on the deck in June triggered the prohibition notice. No-one knows where this four-kilogram object came from and no-one saw the object fall. It may have been placed on the deck. The object disappeared before fingerprints could be taken. No-one from NOPSEMA visited the ship after the self-reporting of the four-kilogram object on the deck or before the issuing of the prohibition notice. The owner of the ship had a history of cooperation and had complied with all repair requests. The Northern Endeavour is a purpose-built ship that acts as a floating oil production and storage platform. It is owned by Northern Oil and Gas of Australia. As a result of the government's plan, NOGA has been put into administration. The administrator has received
an offer from a Chinese company for the Northern Endeavour, the oil leases and the assets on Timor, including a lease over the airport on the southern side of Timor. Why is the government sending NOGA out of business when it paid approximately $320 million in taxes over three years and can provide oil to Australia? None of the original actions by NOPSEMA make sense; nor does Minister Canavan's resistance to reviewing the situation. In fact, the minister is gleeful about the prospect of winding up the company and seeing 250 Australian jobs lost.

Now, we have to ask the question: who benefits? The answer to that requires us to understand Australia's plans for the Greater Sunrise oil and gas field, which is shared with Timor. Australia wants the hydrocarbons to be processed in Australia, but Timor wants it to be done on their south coast. Quite simply, it doesn't suit the government to have an Australian company successfully operating in Timor, because it strengthens the case for production to be done on the south coast of Timor.

The government has wanted to talk about integrity for weeks but will not look at its own. The government relies on the member for Chisholm, Gladys Liu—as Chinese owned—who has reportedly been investigated by ASIO for her links to the Chinese communist party. More recently, ASIO has been investigating reports of a Chinese plot to install an agent in the federal parliament.

Australians have concerns about the way Chinese owned companies operate in Australia, and for good reason. In the past two years, nine Chinese companies have been delisted from the Australian stock exchange for governance reporting, failure to pay dividends and failure to spend funds as outlined in the prospectus. The companies delisted included Wolf Petroleum, Mandalong Resources and China Dairy Corporation. I recognise that China is our most important trading partner, but we need to bring in new rules around foreign investment and influence. The government could start with the principle of reciprocity. For example, in Italy you cannot buy property unless you come from a country which permits Italians to own their property. We have about 10 million homes in Australia, and 500,000 are owned by Chinese foreign nationals. They are acquiring homes and units at the rate of 50,000 a year.

We need to investigate what is happening with the Northern Endeavour in the Timor Sea. I believe they were hard done by by NOPSEMA. During my Senate estimates inquiry into it, NOPSEMA couldn't answer the questions. Minister Canavan needs to come clean with this because, as far as I'm concerned, something stinks with what is going on here. They want to shut down an Australian company that is paying taxes, yet we have the resources of our gas being taken off the North West Shelf by foreign investors to the tune of $54 billion a year—and they pay only $400 million in tax. Why is the government intent on not giving an improvement notice to this company? Like I said, I don't believe everything is above board. Here we have an Australian company, and probably the one that will give fuel security for Australia, yet we are not doing everything we can to ensure that it keeps the licence up there. They're looking at selling it to a Chinese company. This is oil that is much needed for the country. It holds another eight to 10 years plus in oil supply, which Australia very much needs.

Welfare Reform

Senator O'SULLIVAN (Western Australia) (13:41): I rise to inform the Senate about a recent fact-finding trip I undertook across the WA border to the South Australian town of
Ceduna. The reason that I ventured to Ceduna was to observe the operation of the cashless debit card, which has been in operation in that region for longer than it has been in any of the other trial regions. In fact it has been operating since March 2016. I was intimately and perhaps uniquely involved in its rollout through my position at Generation One, as part of the Minderoo Foundation. First, I'd like to thank Rowan Ramsey, the member for Grey, for helping to facilitate the visit. His electorate is vast and sparsely populated, like much of Western Australia, with traditional rural industries dominating. He has been a strong advocate for this government's reform in the welfare sector. That is because he sees the benefits firsthand every day in communities across his electorate. I'm very glad to report that by and large the community of Ceduna supports the cashless debit card. They support its continued operations, and many even support its expanded rollout. This in part would help to reduce the stigma surrounding the card, as the more common it becomes, the less those on it will be stigmatised.

While in Ceduna I met with a wide range of stakeholders, seeking honest and robust feedback about all facets of the CDC rollout, as well as comment about the CDP and wraparound services and commentary from on-the-ground welfare advocates. I was also lucky enough to secure meetings with health professionals, retailers and leaders of the Ceduna Aboriginal Corporation. I met with representatives of the Ceduna District Council, who I'd like to thank for making the time to host me in their chambers. I met with the CEO of the Yalata Anangu Aboriginal Corporation, with the Red Cross and with Save the Children. I'd like to extend a special thanks to Paul Ronalds, the CEO of Save the Children, for taking the time to come to Ceduna to meet with me. Such is Paul's dedication and enthusiasm for his role that, when he heard I was meeting with Save the Children in Ceduna, he hopped on a plane and then on a much smaller plane to join me and his team for that meeting. Paul, your dedication is obvious, and I appreciate your taking the time to come. I look forward to working with you in the future on your many programs around Australia and, indeed, Western Australia.

Another person I want to single out for special mention is Wayne Miller. Wayne is the CEO of the Ceduna Aboriginal Corporation, and I must say that the organisation could not ask for a better leader. They couldn't find a better one if they tried, in my opinion. Wayne is only a young fella, but he's leading his community, and they are no doubt better off for it. I worked with Wayne during the rollout of the cashless debit card some years ago and, despite some pushback from the community, he and the other community leaders worked up a plan, they stuck with that plan and that plan is now paying dividends, not just in Ceduna but in the adjoining far west communities. So tribute must also be paid to the leadership groups of these communities of Koonibba, Yalata, Scotdesco and Oak Valley.

It's been a while since I've been to Ceduna, but the transformation between my visits was certainly noticeable. And it's not just me saying the town has changed since the introduction of the card. One theme that I heard consistently throughout my visit was that over the last three years the town truly has transformed. Retailers told me that thefts were down markedly since the introduction of the card. Anecdotally, alcohol related emergency department presentations are reducing and presentations to sobering-up shelters have increased. While this last point might sound counterintuitive, what it tells me is that more residents want to get on the straight and narrow and turn their lives around.
I'm not going to put the cashless debit card up on a pedestal and claim that it's responsible for the totality of the changes throughout Ceduna. The wraparound services that were put in place when the card was rolled out are no doubt contributing as well. But everyone that I spoke to, even those who had objections to the card, admitted that it was having an impact. If nothing else, they could see it as a circuit breaker that allows the support services to take effect.

Is the CDC a silver bullet? Of course it's not, and no-one is suggesting that it is. Sadly, there are occasions where problem drinkers and drug users are able to fund their habits through extraordinary cash payments, such as insurance payouts and royalties, and through cash being brought into the town by visiting itinerants. There's also evidence of people circumventing the card by buying goods, such as whitegoods, electronics or computer products, and selling them cheaply for cash. Some people are giving their card to shoppers and asking them for cash in return, often far less than what the shopper spent. While this is unfortunate, in practice, people who are doing this are effectively paying an on-the-spot fine for their actions—the difference between the cost and the sale price of the goods. Those that I spoke to do not believe that these actions are in fact widespread, and there will always, sadly, be people who will do anything they can to sidestep these laws by finding a way to drink or take illicit drugs. This is why the wraparound services are critical, because they're helping, or at least can help, people deal with their addictions and, importantly, see people move off welfare and into work.

There is also a new CDP provider in Ceduna. The local Aboriginal corporations of Ceduna, Scotdesco, Yalata, Oak Valley and Koonibba have combined to form the Far West Aboriginal Community Leadership Group. This group owns 60 per cent of the new CDP provider, called EyrePlus. The other 40 per cent is owned by PeoplePlus, an organisation with experience in the sector. This arrangement means that local people are in control of the CDP provider, allowing local knowledge and connections to be leveraged and, further, that profits from the program stay in the region, compounding the economic growth opportunities.

I was very pleased to hear that, in the six months that EyrePlus have been in operation, they've placed 67 local people into jobs, and 54 of these people are still employed. This is an absolutely fantastic outcome. CDP providers and, in fact, Indigenous corporations across Australia could take note of this ownership model and the fantastic achievement record.

After visiting Ceduna, I'm optimistic about the future of the town and the prospect of the cashless debit card being rolled out into other vulnerable communities across Australia. In Ceduna, I was told that, if the cashless debit card were to be rolled back, the town would be in a terrible place. Thankfully, this government has no plan to roll back such a successful measure. While there is no doubt that there can be improvements, I will look forward to working with the technology providers on mechanisms such as item-level blocking. This program and the associated wraparound services in Ceduna are doing exactly what they were designed to do.

Finally, I take this opportunity, which will likely be my final speech in the Senate this year, to wish everyone a very merry Christmas and the happiest of times with family and friends. May you all have a wonderful break and return safely home for your holidays, rested and ready for a terrific new decade.
Tasmania: Emergency Food Relief

Senator CAROL BROWN (Tasmania) (13:50): I thank the previous speaker for his good wishes to all senators in the chamber. It is very fortunate that in the chamber we have all four Tasmanian Labor senators. Senator Bilyk, Senator Polley and Senator Urquhart are also here, and they will absolutely support the contribution that I will be making here today. It is an issue that I have already raised in the Senate, and it is an issue that is most urgent. So I ask the government to listen to my contribution here today and act, because they need to take a fresh look at the situation that is occurring in Tasmania.

The issue that I am talking about is the crisis facing emergency food relief in my home state of Tasmania and the urgent need for the minister, Senator Ruston, to take immediate action to prevent vulnerable Tasmanians going without good, nutritious food. Currently only one of the three national emergency food relief providers operates on the ground in Tasmania. That's Foodbank. They do a good job. They're a great organisation doing great work feeding hungry Australians. Indeed, they provide more than 70 per cent of food rescued for food relief nationwide. But, in my home state of Tasmania, it is a local organisation, Loaves and Fishes Tasmania, that provides about 70 per cent of food relief to Tasmanians in need. They provide fresh nutritious food to over 200 community food programs and 38 school breakfast clubs. Loaves and Fishes partners with another national organisation, SecondBite, as part of their highly successful efforts to rescue and redistribute food to people who would otherwise go without. Indeed, SecondBite provides substantial support to transport fresh produce across Bass Strait.

The other emergency food organisation in recipient of Department of Social Services grant support is OzHarvest, who presently don't operate on the ground in Tasmania. OzHarvest, along with Foodbank and SecondBite, do great work where they operate, but two out of the three do not operate on the ground in Tasmania. All three organisations—Foodbank, OzHarvest and SecondBite—operate in every other state. This belies the insistence from the minister that only organisations that operate in every jurisdiction can receive emergency food relief grant funding from the Department of Social Services. All we are seeking from the minister is an acknowledgment that Tasmania therefore has unique circumstances—circumstances that require special dispensation from her department through the allocation of grant funds to support emergency food relief in Tasmania.

It is the case that Loaves and Fishes applied but did not receive grant money in the last round of funding for emergency food relief organisations. They were, essentially, excluded on the basis that they are a local Tasmanian organisation. It, quite frankly, beggars belief that the organisation that provides around 70 per cent of food relief in Tasmania can be exempt from being able to receive Commonwealth government assistance. Due to this exclusion, Loaves and Fishes will be forced to close their operations in southern Tasmania, severely impacting vulnerable Tasmanians in need. And I'm sure that all senators here would not underestimate the impact of a child who goes hungry nor a child who lives in fear of going hungry. And I have to say, I knew from my own personal experience from my family when I was a young child who accessed these fantastic organisations, who accessed the much needed food to be able to feed their families.

It will mean for southern Tasmania the end of emergency food provisions for 134 community food programs in southern Tasmania. It will spell the end of a successful
operation that, since July of last year, has produced over 55,000 ready-to-eat meals from over 300,000 kilograms of fresh produce. Surely this cannot be allowed to occur. Already, they have had to turn away one provider in southern Tasmania seeking produce for emergency food relief hampers over Christmas—Christmas hampers. With funding support of just $150,000 a year, this can be prevented.

This comes at a time when we are seeing an ever-burgeoning housing crisis in Tasmania, with housing stress continuing to increase. Rental stress in Tasmania is now the worst in the nation. Rent rates are the highest in Australia at 30 per cent or more of family income. Low-income households are spending as much as 86 per cent of their income on rent. These are the most vulnerable people paying most of their income on rent. As a result, they face a terrible choice. They face a choice that nobody should have to face in Australia: pay the rent or buy food. All we are asking is for the government to provide special dispensation for Tasmania in recognition of the unique circumstances we face, being the only state that does not have operations from all three emergency food relief providers that receive Commonwealth government support. We have just one. This needs to be acknowledged by the minister. We need swift and urgent action to remedy this situation. An immediate injection of, as I said, $150,000 annually into Tasmanian emergency food relief would alleviate this urgent problem that we face and would prevent a crisis in emergency food relief in southern Tasmania. Beyond that, we need a review of the eligibility criteria for organisations, I believe, that can receive emergency food relief grants. The Tasmanian situation must be acknowledged and accommodated for.

I don't have to remind this place that Australia is a federation of states in which all must be treated equally. When it comes to Commonwealth government support, it is the responsibility and obligation of the minister to ensure that vulnerable Tasmanians and Tasmanian emergency food relief providers are not ignored, sidelined and overlooked. Vulnerable Tasmanians deserve better.

The PRESIDENT: Order, Senator Brown.

MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Leader of the Government in Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:00): I advise the Senate that Senator Payne will be absent from question time on Wednesday and Thursday, 4 and 5 December 2019, due to ministerial business overseas. In Senator Payne's absence, Senator Birmingham will represent the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for International Development and the Pacific; Senator Ruston will represent the Minister for Women; and Senator Cash will represent the Attorney-General and the Minister for Industrial Relations.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Economy

Senator GALLAGHER (Australian Capital Territory—Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate) (14:00): My question is to the Minister representing the Treasurer, Senator Cormann. Can the minister confirm that the national accounts released today have revealed that economic growth actually went backwards compared to the last quarter and that annual
growth is currently sitting at just 1.7 per cent, well below your government's budget forecast of 2.75 per cent?

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Leader of the Government in Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:01): I thank the shadow minister for finance for her question on the economy. Today's national accounts confirm that the Australian economy continues to grow. It remains remarkably resilient in the face of significant global and domestic economic headwinds. Economic growth has increased to 1.7 per cent through the year, with the economy growing by 0.4 per cent in the September quarter, within the range of market expectations. While other major developed economies like Germany, the UK, Korea and Singapore experienced negative quarters of economic growth this year, Australia's economy continues to grow and has now entered its 29th consecutive year of economic growth, a record not matched by any other developed nation.

I might also just say that household disposable income grew by 2.5 per cent in the quarter and is up 5.1 per cent over the year. This is the strongest quarterly rise in a decade, with the personal income tax cuts flowing through. The average compensation to employees rose 0.7 per cent in the quarter, to be 2.9 per cent higher over the year, and is now back above the decade average. Just imagine for one second, Mr President, what would have happened if the Australian people had chosen to vote for the alternative government, and $387 billion in higher taxes had hit our economy for six. Our economy today would be weaker—

Senator Gallacher: Point of order, Mr President: you brought the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate to address comments through the chair earlier in debate today. I ask that you to be consistent and bring the Leader of the Government in the Senate to that standing order.

The PRESIDENT: Quite right. All comments should be addressed through the chair.

Senator CORMANN: The point I was making is that our economy continues to grow. Our economy is stronger than it would have been if the Australian people had chosen a different government at the last election. On the back of $387 billion in higher taxes, our economy would have been weaker, employment growth would have been weaker, unemployment would have been higher and wages would have been lower. Instead we have 1.7 per cent growth through the year, which is higher than what we had through the year to the end of the June quarter. Indeed, household disposable income grew by 2.5 per cent—

(Time expired)

The PRESIDENT: Senator Gallagher, a supplementary question?

Senator GALLAGHER (Australian Capital Territory—Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate) (14:03): I'm sure we'll get the rest of that script, Mr President. The ABS also said today:

The reduction to tax payable did not translate to a rise in discretionary spending … Can the minister confirm that household final consumption growing at just 0.1 per cent is the lowest quarterly increase since the height of the GFC?

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Leader of the Government in Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:03): What I can confirm is that consumption is stronger than
it would have been if we had not delivered personal income tax cuts. I make this point: maybe the socialists on the other side want to tell the Australian people what to do with their money. We actually trust the Australian people to decide what they do with their money. The reason we delivered personal income tax cuts is that we trust individual Australians and businesses around Australia to be able to make the best possible decisions on how they use their money. That is precisely what we are doing. Let me tell you, the Australian economy—

Senator Watt: It hasn't worked, though!

Senator CORMANN: Senator Watt says it hasn't worked! The Labor Party, when they were last in government, left behind a weakening economy, rising unemployment and a rapidly deteriorating budget position. Economic growth has of course strengthened through the year to 1.7 per cent—(Time expired)

Senator Watt interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Senator Watt, I remind you to count for a little while before you interject following me calling your name again. Senator Gallagher.

Senator GALLAGHER (Australian Capital Territory—Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate) (14:05): In dismissing the June quarter results, which have actually turned out to be stronger than those released today, the minister said:

What will matter is what comes out at the end of the day when the September quarter results are released in early December.

Given annual economic growth continues to have a '1' in front of it, does the minister now accept that not having an economic plan is hurting working Australians?

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Leader of the Government in Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:05): I completely reject the premise of the question. I will just remind Senator Gallagher again that economic growth has increased. I reject the conclusion she's reaching. Economic growth has increased to 1.7 per cent through the year. She's quite rightly quoting that part of my previous statement—that what matters is what comes out at the end of the September quarter. What that shows is that economic growth has increased to 1.7 per cent through the year; that our economy continues to grow where other economies are shrinking; that real GDP grew by 1.7 per cent through the year; that household disposable income grew by 2.5 per cent in the quarter and is up 5.1 per cent over the year—the strongest quarterly rise in a decade—with the personal income tax cuts clearly flowing through; and that average compensation per employee rose by 0.7 per cent in the quarter to be 2.9 per cent higher over the year, which is also now back above the decade average. So things are heading in the right direction. (Time expired)

Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme

Senator DEAN SMITH (Western Australia—Government Whip in the Senate) (14:06): My question is to the Minister representing the Minister for Health, Senator Cash. Can the minister update the Senate on how the Morrison government's sound budget and economic management is guaranteeing essential health services, like strengthening the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme?

Senator Watt interjecting—
Senator CASH (Western Australia—Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business) (14:07): I will take that interjection from Senator Watt. One of the benefits of a strong economy, and that is exactly what we're talking about, is the ability to provide for the essential services Australians rely on—our health system in this regard, but in particular the coalition government's record of listing lifesaving and life-changing drugs on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

I now often get to stand up in this chamber and update the Senate on announcements that our health minister makes in relation to the further listing of lifesaving and life-changing drugs. Yet again, today I am very pleased to announce to the Senate that the health minister has recently announced further listings on the PBS, including that more than 2,200 patients with metastatic small-cell lung cancer will now be able to access the drug Keytruda—a very well-known drug—as a first-line treatment in combination with chemotherapy.

As a result of our strong economy, the health minister has now ensured that Australians with lung cancer will have the broadest access in the world to Keytruda. If it was not for this listing, those patients requiring Keytruda would have paid up to $120,000 a year, depending on their specific cancer subtype. In terms of our listings, since coming to office in 2013 the coalition government has invested over $10.7 billion in lifesaving and life-changing medicines on the PBS. That is over 2,200 new or amended listings, and that equates to adding approximately one medicine every day to the PBS since we've been in government.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Senator Smith, a supplementary question?

Senator DEAN SMITH (Western Australia—Government Whip in the Senate) (14:09): Can the minister update the Senate on the policy framework that has achieved these health outcomes for Australians?

Senator CASH (Western Australia—Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business) (14:09): Again, we on the coalition side of the chamber understand that by keeping our economy strong we are able to invest in essential services, in this case the health services that Australians rely on. As a result of our economic plan, we are able to make record investments in our health system. These include increasing funding for the nation's public hospitals from $13.3 billion in 2012-13 to $22.5 billion in 2019-20, growing by 69 per cent, and our investment will reach $29.1 billion in 2024-25. Again because of the strong economy, we've also been able to make record investments in mental health: over $5.3 billion in 2019-20. Again, if you run a strong economy, these are the dividends that you can give back to Australians.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Smith, a final supplementary question?

Senator DEAN SMITH (Western Australia—Government Whip in the Senate) (14:10): How did these achievements differ from the approaches of previous governments?

Senator CASH (Western Australia—Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business) (14:10): In relation to the listings that I have referred to over a number of question times, each listing has been recommended by the independent Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee, and the health minister and the government have accepted those recommendations. This course of action differs wildly from what those on the other side of the chamber did the last time they were in government. They were so fiscally incompetent that they stopped listing life-saving and life-changing drugs on the PBS. This is despite the
recommendations from the independent Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee that drugs should be listed. In fact, in 2011, Labor's budget papers themselves state, 'The listing of some medicines will be deferred until fiscal circumstances permit'. Well, those fiscal circumstances now permit the listing of these important medications.

**Immigration Detention**

**Senator KENEALLY** (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (14:11): My question is to the Minister representing the Prime Minister, Senator Cormann. When forcing the medevac repeal bill through the Senate, the minister told the Senate:

... there is no secret deal.

Twenty minutes later Senator Lambie told the Senate:

I put up to the government a proposal to work with me to secure my support for the passage of the repeal of medevac. ... I genuinely can't say what I proposed.

Which statement is correct?

**Senator CORMANN** (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Leader of the Government in Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:12): The first point I would make is that these statements are not inconsistent with each other. That's the first point. The second point I would make again is that there is absolutely no secret deal. The government has not agreed to any changes in policy or administration when it comes to our border protection or resettlement arrangements. What we have done, and we very much appreciate the way Senator Lambie has engaged with us, is provide her with extensive and detailed briefings—we have provided her with classified briefings—about the way the government is going about protecting our borders and going about making sure that asylum seekers receive appropriate medical treatment. We made sure she fully understood what we are doing to properly give effect to resettlement arrangements. These briefings were at the classified 'secret' level. Senator Lambie, of course, made it her business to better understand what the government is doing. At the end of the process, Senator Lambie made it clear, through her vote in this chamber, that she was satisfied that the conditions were met for the medevac bill to be repealed, as it should be.

The Labor-Greens medevac bill was bad legislation. It weakened our national security arrangements, whereas Senator Lambie and the majority of senators have voted for stronger national security arrangements. We and all Australians very much thank Senator Lambie for that.

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

**Senator KENEALLY** (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (14:13): In relation to the New Zealand arrangement, Prime Minister Morrison has warned that:

... in terms of Australia's security interests and how we manage our borders, we don't believe it's consistent with that ... And:

The Australian Government has no plans to take up that arrangement whatsoever ...

Has the government reopened negotiations with New Zealand on their offer?
Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Leader of the Government in Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:13): The government has made absolutely no changes to our policy arrangements in relation to border protection or to resettlement, compared with the way they're currently in place. We continue to implement our policies and there has been no change as a result of discussions—

The PRESIDENT: Senator Wong on a point of order?

Senator Wong: My point of order is on direct relevance. The question is a simple one that goes to whether or not the government has reopened negotiations with New Zealand on their offer.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Wong, you have restated the question. With respect, I believe the minister is being directly relevant by addressing government policy. I don't believe I can rule out what he's saying on the grounds of direct relevance. Senator Wong.

Senator Wong: So your ruling is a question about whether negotiations have been reopened with New Zealand. I am clarifying the ruling. I refer to the President's ruling of 2 December, which said an answer must directly refer to or address assertions contained in a question or preamble. Is the ruling that 'policy' includes whether negotiations have opened? I would submit to you, Mr President, that that is not consistent with the ordinary meaning of the word.

The PRESIDENT: There was a quotation before that, and I believe the minister is being directly relevant to part of the question. I didn't get all the quotation down, but it did refer to a quotation from the Prime Minister about Australian government policy. I think the minister is being directly relevant in that sense.

Senator CORMANN: Thank you very much, Mr President. Let me confirm again that Australian government policy on border protection and resettlement arrangements has not changed as a result of discussions to facilitate passage of the medevac repeal bill through the Senate.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Keneally, a final supplementary question?

Senator KENEALLY (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (14:15): Can the minister confirm that, contrary to past statements, the government does now have plans to take up New Zealand's offer to resettle refugees?

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Leader of the Government in Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:16): No, I cannot confirm that.

Imigration Detention

Senator DI NATALE (Victoria—Leader of the Australian Greens) (14:16): My question is for the Leader of the Government. Senator Cormann, in your response just then to Senator Keneally's question, you said there is no secret deal. Senator Lambie said she'd only support the government's proposal on the basis of a secret deal. You say those two things are consistent. How are they consistent?

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Leader of the Government in Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the
Government in the Senate) (14:16): Senator Lambie did not say what Senator Di Natale has alleged. Senator Di Natale is verballing Senator Lambie, with the greatest of respect, and therefore I reject the premise of the question.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Di Natale, a supplementary question?

Senator DI NATALE (Victoria—Leader of the Australian Greens) (14:16): Minister, has there been an exchange of letters between a minister of the Crown and Senator Lambie relating to the repeal of the medevac legislation? If so, do those letters contain any undertakings by either party that go beyond the repeal of the medevac legislation?

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Leader of the Government in Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:17): Firstly, I will not go into private conversations with crossbench senators.

Senator Cash: We never do.

Senator CORMANN: We never do. And that applies to conversations with Senator Di Natale in the same way as it applies to conversations with Senator Wong and any other conversations. What I can say is that there has been no deal to change any policy on border protection or anything else—

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

Senator Di Natale: Mr President, there was no preamble; it was a very direct question.

A government senator interjecting—

Senator Di Natale: He didn't say no. Has there been an exchange of letters—

The PRESIDENT: Senator Di Natale—

Senator Di Natale: I haven't finished.

The PRESIDENT: What is the point of order? It can't be that you don't like the answer. It needs to be about direct relevance.

Senator Di Natale: The point of order is on relevance. Has there been an exchange of letters and, if so, are there any undertakings that go beyond the repeal of the medevac legislation? It was a very straightforward question.

The PRESIDENT: I give senators advance warning that, when we come back next year, I'm going to be much more strict on people simply standing up and saying 'relevance' and reading out a question again. I asked you to come to the direct relevance and you simply restated the question, Senator Di Natale—

Senator Wong: Mr President—

The PRESIDENT: I'll come to you in a moment, Senator Wong. I'd like to rule on this—unless you are making a submission on this point.

Senator Wong: I'm making a submission on the ruling you've just made, Mr President. Whilst I understand that it is inconvenient for the government for questions to be restated, I again submit to you—and I would ask that, if you intend to change this procedure, you take submissions that engage with all parties to this place—that it is relevant to a claim that a minister is not being directly relevant to restate the relevant aspect of the question.
The PRESIDENT: Senator—

Senator Wong: With respect, Mr President, simply dismissing points of order on the basis that we are restating the question is, in my submission, unfair and inconsistent with the standing orders. So I would like the opportunity for all parties to make submissions if you intend to change procedure.

The PRESIDENT: I did not say one could not restate the question. I simply said that someone can't get up and yell the word 'relevance' and then read out the question again. I want a point of order to draw the point as to why the answer is not directly relevant. That requires a little bit of effort, and it is an effort that most senators go to the trouble of. Simply saying the word 'relevance' and then restating the question is not sufficient to comply with the standing orders. On this, Senator Di Natale, in your submission then, you alluded to the fact that you did not like what the minister was saying in response. I do not believe—

Honourable senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Can I make my ruling before the interjections start? And then I'll take more submissions. My point is that I cannot instruct the minister how to answer a question. I cannot instruct him to address a particular part of a question. Your question was specific. In my view, he was being specific in the answer, even if that was not the answer sought. There is an opportunity to debate that after question time.

Senator CORMANN: Let me say again we provided Senator Lambie with detailed briefings at a classified level. We did not provide any undertakings to change policy on border protection, resettlement arrangements or anything else in order to secure the support of Senator Lambie for the legislation that went through the Senate earlier today. Senator Lambie, as she has stated, raised various issues to us. She raised various issues to us and she put a proposal to us. And what we did is we provided detailed briefings, detailed explanations of what we were already doing. (Time expired)

The PRESIDENT: Senator Di Natale, a final supplementary question?

Senator DI NATALE (Victoria—Leader of the Australian Greens) (14:20): A simple yes or no answer would be fine here, Minister. Did you provide an exchange of letters with Senator Lambie, and, if so, did those letters go beyond the repeal of the medevac legislation?

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Leader of the Government in Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:21): Well, firstly, I did not. Secondly, again, the government has not made any commitments at all to change policy on border protection, on resettlement arrangements or on anything else in order to secure the vote of Senator Lambie. What we have done is provide detailed briefings—detailed information—about what the policies of the government are at a classified secret level.

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

Senator DI NATALE: A point of order on relevance—just being a bit tricky with answers. The minister is representing the Prime Minister. My question is asked of him as a representative of the Prime Minister. So did the minister, as a representative of the Prime Minister—did he or the Prime Minister provide an exchange of letters?
The PRESIDENT: At the commencement of your original question I thought—and I'm happy to be corrected—you addressed it to Senator Cormann as a leader of the government. I've given you the opportunity to specify that. I think, in this case, with respect, the minister is being directly relevant by providing information that I considered to be directly relevant to your very specific question. But I am listening carefully to ensure he stays within those bounds, and I believe he is.

Senator CORMANN: Let me say again we provided detailed information and briefings at a classified secret level to Senator Lambie. In the end, Senator Lambie was satisfied that the repeal of the medevac legislation was in the public interest and voted for it. We did not make any undertakings to change policy on border protection or resettlement arrangements or anything else in return for a vote to support the medevac repeal legislation. I will take on notice to assess whether there is anything else that we can provide to you in response to that question. But let me just say again, there is no deal. All there was was an explanation of why the medevac repeal legislation was important and necessary. (Time expired)

Agriculture Industry

Senator McMAHON (Northern Territory) (14:23): My question is to the Minister for Agriculture, Senator McKenzie. Can the minister update the Senate on how the sound budget and economic management of the Liberal and Nationals government is helping to strengthen our agriculture sector, including initiatives to help this vital industry grow to $100 billion by 2030?

Senator McKENZIE (Victoria—Minister for Agriculture and Leader of the Nationals in the Senate) (14:23): Thank you very much, Senator McMahon, for your question, as a proud Territorian. All of us on this side want to see a profitable and sustainable agricultural sector, and the best Christmas present our farmers could hope for is a very long and sustained rain. But, in the absence of that, it's a coalition government holding the Treasury benches and delivering real and practical support for our farmers as they're doing it tough.

It's been fascinating to watch the Labor Party this week try and know how to say the word 'farmer', spell 'dairy' and understand food processing, because, you know what, at the last election, those opposite didn't even take an agriculture policy to the federal election. You didn't even bother! That's the actual real regard that they hold for this sector, which delivers $60 billion to the economy and employs over 700,000 Australians on farms, in regional communities, and out in the food-manufacturing sector. It's disappointing that your solution to your policy vacuum is to buddy up with a certain political party who does not have the best interests of farmers at heart.

Just in the past week I've been asked what we're doing for agriculture and I will let you know—it's only Wednesday—that this is what we have done this week. Today we announced nearly $2 million for Farmsafe to make sure our farms are safe places to work. We're streamlining our export legislation to make sure farmers can access overseas markets. Our Australian wine industry will be able to protect their valuable IP. We've got trade and market access, assisting through increasing the value of agriculture. We've supported cooperatives to ensure that they can assist primary producers to butt up against the big end of town. We're delivering, week in week out, for the agriculture sector.

The PRESIDENT: Senator McMahon, a supplementary question?
Senator McMAHON (Northern Territory) (14:25): Thank you, Minister. That's wonderful to hear. Can the minister—and I bet she can—update the Senate on how the Liberal and Nationals government is on the side of farmers and regional Australians?

Senator McKENZIE (Victoria—Minister for Agriculture and Leader of the Nationals in the Senate) (14:25): We are the ones delivering for our farmers, our fishers and our foresters. It is the Liberal and National parties in this place that actually stand up and back the regions. Look at dairy: we actually have a real plan, with dairy farmers' interests at the forefront. We're not after a cheap headline; we're after a sustainable and profitable industry going forward. We intend to make sure that mandatory code of conduct is operational by 1 January to put fairness back in place with the relationship between farmers and processors. We've got over $8 million in the ACCC to ensure we've got a dairy specialist unit, and we've got $10 million worth of grants available to upgrade energy efficiency on farms, which is exactly what the Malanda dairy farmers in North Queensland are incredibly excited about, because they're paying exorbitant prices, thanks to the Queensland state government, for their electricity.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Senator McMahon, a final supplementary question?

Senator McMAHON (Northern Territory) (14:27): Is the minister aware of any alternative approaches to deliver for the Australia agriculture industry?

Senator McKENZIE (Victoria—Minister for Agriculture and Leader of the Nationals in the Senate) (14:27): Senator McMahon, unfortunately, I can tell you there actually isn't an alternative approach for agriculture in this country. They didn't take a policy to the election. They don't have a vision for a prosperous and sustainable agriculture sector. Wouldn't it be nice if those opposite's concern for dairy was actually heartfelt? But, until recently—and I've checked the Hansard—there aren't too many of them that have said the word 'dairy farmer' in this place, despite their long careers. 'Agriculture', 'farmer', 'water'—Sterlo, you have. Australian dairy farmers actually deserve real and practical support, far beyond your simple slogans, poor policy decisions and bad economics. Your unity ticket to establish a floor price for dairy farmers would achieve the exact opposite of what you're wanting to achieve. It would see milk that's produced in other states where the cost of production is very low flood the market in Queensland.

Economy

Senator WALSH (Victoria) (14:28): My question is to the Minister representing the Prime Minister, Senator Cormann. Today's national accounts figures have revealed that the Australian economy continues to grow at less than two per cent per annum, at just 1.7 per cent. Can the minister confirm that under the Morrison government economic growth remains at its lowest levels since the global financial crisis?

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Leader of the Government in Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:28): What I can confirm is that the growth in our economy is stronger than it would have been if there had been a change of government at the last election.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Walsh, a supplementary question?

Senator WALSH (Victoria) (14:28): Today's national accounts reveal household spending up just 0.1 per cent. Isn't this because under Scott Morrison and Josh Frydenberg Australians are experiencing the worst wages growth on record and the RBA has declared that
lower wage rises have become the new normal? Given Minister Cormann considers low wages to be a deliberate design feature of the government's economic policies, is this a case of mission accomplished?

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Leader of the Government in Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:29): The last part of that question is manifestly false. That is not what I consider and not what I’ve ever said. It is a continuous misrepresentation by those opposite in respect of much more appropriate comments. We, of course, want to see stronger wages growth, but we also understand that stronger wages growth relies on stronger economic growth, stronger productivity growth—all things that we're working to achieve.

Let me say to the senator again: the economy is stronger, jobs growth is stronger, wages growth is stronger than it would have been if there had been a change of government. Indeed, her assertion that wages growth is the weakest ever is also false. Real wages growth is right on the 20-year average of 0.6 per cent. In fact, real wages growth is stronger than it was when Labor lost government. The minimum wage has had real increases in every year that we've been in government. People had real wages cuts— (Time expired)

The PRESIDENT: Senator Walsh, a final supplementary question?

Senator WALSH (Victoria) (14:30): Despite the minister's attempts to spin today's results and put lipstick on a pig, growth with a 'one' in front of it is nothing to celebrate. When will the Morrison government finally implement a comprehensive plan to turn around the economy that is floundering under its watch?

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Leader of the Government in Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:30): The only thing that is floundering is the attempts by the shadow Treasurer to get Albo's job. The only job that Mr Chalmers is interested in is the leader's job. He doesn't want to keep doing the shadow Treasurer's job. Everybody knows that he's already out there campaigning. Everybody knows that.

But let me say again: our economy continues to grow. Many other economies around the world are shrinking. If you actually look at the international context and the global economic headwinds we're facing in the domestic economy, the fact that our economy continues to grow is good news for the Australian people. The alternative, with Labor's high-taxing socialist agenda, would have been a weaker economy, fewer jobs, higher unemployment and lower wages.

Gambling

Senator ASKEW (Tasmania) (14:31): My question is to the Minister for Families and Social Services, Senator Ruston. Can the minister advise the Senate how the Morrison government's sound budget and economic management is helping to strengthen support for problem gamblers, including through the recent announcement of the new national self-exclusion register?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (14:31): I thank Senator Askew for her question on this really important issue that matters to all Australians—that is, gambling
related harm. That is why this government is absolutely committed to providing support to the almost 240,000 Australians who experience harm as a result of gambling.

Last week the government introduced legislation, which I’m pleased to say passed last night in the House of Representatives, to establish a national self-exclusion register for online wagering. This is a significant piece of legislation, and demonstrates an absolute commitment to respond to the growing concerns in the community about the impacts and the high rate of gambling related harm caused specifically by online gambling.

The register is a voluntary process, where an individual can ban themselves from interactive wagering sites across state boundaries for periods ranging from three months to permanently. It’s really important because, specifically, this tool, this first-of-its-kind-in-the-world tool, enables a gambler who sees the need to exclude themselves to be able to do so by a single action. They can actually have themselves deregistered from all gambling sites.

As much as possible, we need to also make sure that our policies allow Australians who love to have a punt to be able to continue to do so, but at the same time making sure that we have sensible and targeted measures to support gamblers who have faced and do face significant risks of harm. The register will be available to around one million consumers who currently have online wagering accounts.

Another very important feature of this particular register is that the sector, the gambling sector, has been very engaged and has made significant contributions to the development of this register to ensure that it is going to be workable for all Australians. To that end, I thank Responsible Wagering Australia and the wagering community for their very important interaction in developing this tool.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Askew, a supplementary question?

Senator ASKEW (Tasmania) (14:34): Can the minister inform the Senate why the national self-exclusion register is necessary?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (14:34): Unfortunately, we have seen that somebody who is an online gambler will have a three-times-higher likelihood of being a problem gambler than those who gamble by other means. Currently there is no uniform way in which somebody who self-identifies as having a problem with online gambling can take the necessary action to exclude themselves from websites. That means that, at the moment, those who are most vulnerable to having an issue with online wagering have to go to every website individually where online wagering is available and exclude themselves one at a time. Obviously this undermines significantly the effectiveness of an exclusion activity as a consumer protection tool, so by the introduction of this new measure we seek to streamline that process and to give people who self-identify as having a problem easy access to a solution.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Askew, a final supplementary question?

Senator ASKEW (Tasmania) (14:35): Minister, how will this legislation help participants who are experiencing gambling related harm?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (14:35): Clearly this chamber would be well aware of the potential impacts of gambling related harm and the adverse impacts that can
have on people's lives. The obvious one is financial wellbeing, but it can also impact on self-esteem, relationships, work performance, housing situation and of course physical and mental health. Last week the government actually released a baseline study into online wagering, which was undertaken by the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Some of the key findings from that study showed that participants reported having 2.3 wagering accounts, so an individual who had online wagering accounts was likely to have 2.3 of them. Eighty-three per cent of participants placed bets online using portable devices, such as a mobile phone, and 52 per cent of respondents were classified as being at risk. The National Self-Exclusion Register is a very significant measure in helping people to deal with these issues.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Bernardi has the call.

Government senators: Hear, hear!

Socialism

Senator BERNARDI (South Australia) (14:36): Wait until you hear the question! My question is to the Minister for Finance, Senator Cormann. Minister, socialism is a political and economic ideology that rejects the free market and supports bigger taxes, bigger government, central planning, government price fixing and the nationalisation of industry. Can the minister—

Honourable senators interjecting—

Senator Cormann: I can't hear the question.

Senator BERNARDI: I'm happy to do it again.

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

Senator Cormann: Mr President, I feel like it's an important question for me to be able to hear and I couldn't actually hear the question.

The PRESIDENT: I will ask for a courtesy to be extended to Senator Bernardi on the day of his valedictory speech and for the question to be heard in silence.

Senator BERNARDI: I should start again; will you reset the clock?

The PRESIDENT: I think you can keep going, Senator Bernardi. I think we have the gist.

Senator Cormann interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: The minister says he genuinely couldn't hear it, so you'll have to start again.

Senator BERNARDI: Minister, socialism is a political and economic ideology that rejects the free market and supports bigger taxes, bigger government, central planning, government price fixing and the nationalisation of industry. Can the minister please explain why the government hasn't implemented such policies and can he share with the Senate any examples of the consequences of the socialist policy agenda and where they have been implemented?

The PRESIDENT: Senator Wong on a point of order.

Senator Wong: Mr President, much as I have affection for Senator Bernardi, I do wonder whether that is actually something this minister can respond to. Is it really a matter of government policy under the standing orders? We'll all have a drink about it if you want, but really!
Senator Cormann: On the point of order, I believe that, under the standing orders, senators are able to ask questions of ministers in relation to past public statements. I advise the Senate that I have made past public statements about how bad socialism is and the impact of socialism on people and the economy.

The President: Questions are also allowed to be addressed as to the intent of the government. The last part of the question, particularly, was definitely in order. As I've done before, when—sorry, Senator Whish-Wilson?

Senator Whish-Wilson: Point of order: I was wondering if that question should be directed to Senator Canavan, the minister for nationalising coal-fired power stations?

The President: On the point of order: Senator Wong is correct. A statement wasn't referenced; however, the concluding part of the question did talk about the government's intent, which is within the remit of question time. In the past, when some parts of questions have not technically been in order, I've invited ministers to respond to the extent that they are.

Senator Cormann (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Leader of the Government in Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:39): The reason we fight socialism and support policies supporting individual freedom, free enterprise, reward for effort, encouraging people to stretch themselves and, indeed, have a go is that we understand that socialism makes people poor and will make communities weaker and will make countries weaker; whereas, of course, our policy agenda is in pursuit of policies supporting individual freedom, free enterprise, reward for effort and encouraging people to stretch themselves, take risks and have a go, underpinned by a social safety net. We understand that is the proven way to lift living standards for individual Australians, for families and their communities and, indeed, for our country as a whole, as it has in countries around the world. As somebody who grew up in Europe, let me tell you: I know the ultimate case study which has proven that socialism leads to misery and poverty. That case study is none other than the global city of Berlin. Berlin is the ultimate case study. You had three million people side-by-side in 1949 starting with the same challenges, the same opportunities, the same demography and the same climate—the same everything. On one side there was socialism—the lowest common denominator, seeking to achieve equality of outcomes—and people wanted to get out as fast as they could. The state had to build a wall in order to try and keep people in. The state started to shoot people at the wall to try to keep people in, because people wanted to get into the part of Berlin that promoted freedom, free enterprise, reward for effort and a lifting of living standards. Of course, on the western side, people were able to observe that Wirtschaftswunder—that massive economic growth wonder that was achieved on the back of free market policy underpinned by a social safety net. In countries around the world, it is very clear that socialism harms people, whereas freedom, of course, promotes success.

The President: Senator Bernardi, a supplementary question?

Senator Bernardi (South Australia) (14:41): I note the minister mentioned socialism, and I remind him that socialism's close comrade is Marxism, which, paradoxically, uses divisive identity politics as a means to reduce social cohesion and to overthrow capitalism. Minister, what is the government doing to save Australians from the Marxist agenda?
Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Leader of the Government in Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:42): We will continue to fight for freedom. Marxism is essentially just socialism on steroids. It is a failed ideology. It is an ideology that has led people in countries around the world where it has been applied into poverty and misery. Any policy agenda that seeks to pursue equality of outcomes necessarily leads people to equally mediocre outcomes, whereas our policy agenda of pursuing freedom, free enterprise, smaller government and lower taxes is an agenda that incentivises people to be the best they can be. And then, of course, more successful Australians, in our context, will lead to a more successful Australia, which is better for all Australians. So we will continue to work very hard to ensure that Australians today and into the future have the best possible opportunity to get ahead, because we understand that maximising the success of every individual Australian helps to provide better opportunity for all Australians. (Time expired)

The PRESIDENT: Senator Bernardi, a final supplementary question?

Senator BERNARDI (South Australia) (14:43): This is a very specific question, so I ask the minister to be directly relevant to it. Is the minister aware of any senator who stands approximately six feet five inches tall and has devoted their political career to rallying against socialism and Marxism? If so, what would he say to that senator right now?

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Leader of the Government in Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:43): The first thing I would say is that I once knew a guy who was in the Liberal Party party room promoting a great conservative free market agenda, but, sadly, he left us. But I feel that in more recent times that very fine senator for the great state of South Australia has been coming back closer to the bosom of the broader Liberal Party family, and I'm very pleased about that.

But, seriously, in closing my response to this question, Senator Bernardi has made a fine contribution. I very much valued his contribution inside the Liberal Party. I was disappointed when he chose to leave the Liberal Party, but, having made the decision that he has made now, I'm sure that all senators will join me in wishing Senator Bernardi all the best of success in the future. We've all enjoyed his sparring.

Education

Senator PRATT (Western Australia) (14:44): My question is to the Minister representing the Minister for Education, Senator Birmingham. According to the 2018 PISA results overnight, Australia has recorded our worst-ever international test results in reading, maths and science. Earlier this week, the Minister for Education said, 'Government reforms will lift educational outcomes.' I ask: when?

Senator BIRMINGHAM (South Australia—Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment and Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:45): I thank Senator Pratt for her question in relation to school results. If I can take one of the interjections from before, I'm sure that Senator Bernardi would concur that the results of the PISA survey are very disappointing, are unacceptable, and that we do need to see that results in relation to education improve across the country. Our children deserve world-leading education, giving
them skills to thrive, and they deserve strong literacy, maths and science skills fundamental to
their success.

Senator O'Neill interjecting—

Senator BIRMINGHAM: I'll take Senator O'Neill's interjection there about funding, because that is, of course, where the Labor Party inevitably go in relation to funding. As this
chamber has debated endlessly over the years and is well known, school funding in Australia
stands at record levels. The debate that must be had in Australia is about how we get better
results from the record investment that is occurring. Let me quote from The Australian
Financial Review today in which the education writer states that—

Senator O'Neill: Seven years of education—

The PRESIDENT: Order, Senator O'Neill!

Senator BIRMINGHAM: the PISA results have shown a collapse 'despite government
spending on schools hitting nearly $58 billion a year, 70 per cent more than when—

Senator O'Neill interjecting—

Senator Pratt: The question is: when?

The PRESIDENT: Senators O'Neill and Pratt!

Senator BIRMINGHAM: global school testing started'. So, in the life of the PISA
results, we have seen a 70 per cent increase in funding and yet a decline in relation to
performance. That is why our government want to see the states and territories—

Senator O'Neill: It's been working really well so far!

Senator Pratt: Tell us when, Senator Birmingham.

The PRESIDENT: Order, Senators O'Neill and Pratt!

Senator BIRMINGHAM: next week at the COAG Education Council—

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

Senator Pratt: My question is very clearly: when? That is why I'm interjecting. My point
is on relevance. He has not once mentioned any time scale in his answer and not come to the
relevant point of time in my question.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Pratt, I'm glad that you felt the urge to confess your error
there about the interjections—they are always disorderly. I was having trouble hearing the last
part of the minister's answer. I've allowed you to emphasise that part of the question, but I do
believe the minister was being directly relevant to the earlier part of the question you read out.
I cannot instruct him how to answer a question. I've given you the opportunity to emphasise
part of it. The minister does however have six seconds left in his time to answer. I hope I can
hear it.

Senator BIRMINGHAM: And that is why next week the states and territories need to
agree with the reforms the Commonwealth is asking them to pursue and get on with it.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Pratt, a supplementary question?

Senator PRATT (Western Australia) (14:48): Our schoolchildren have fallen around a
year behind in basic subjects, including reading, maths and science, according to data from
the 2018 PISA international students tests. Can the minister confirm that under the Morrison
government's watch Australia's performance in maths is no better than the global average for the first time ever?

Senator BIRMINGHAM (South Australia—Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment and Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:48): As I've already said, I subscribe as the Minister for Education has, as the Prime Minister has: these results are completely unacceptable. That's why—

Senator Watt: You were the minister!

Senator BIRMINGHAM: Indeed I was, Senator Watt. And the reforms that Mr Tehan is taking to the COAG Education Council next week to try to get them to speed up implementation are reforms that we were taking to that council when I was the minister—reforms that the panel led by David Gonski and distinguished educators around the country identified needed to happen to make sure that we actually use the money effectively. That is precisely what we expect the states and territories to do—use that record funding effectively, implement the reform agenda our government commissioned and get on with its implementation so we can turn around these results.

Senator O'Neill: David Gonski has a much better idea than you do!

Senator Watt: You make Dan Tehan look good!

The PRESIDENT: Senator Pratt, a final supplementary question?

Senator PRATT (Western Australia) (14:49): Given Senator Birmingham was the Minister for Education and Training during the period these tests were taken, does he take responsibility for the worst ever results in reading, maths and science? When will the Morrison government finally implement a plan to turn around an education system delivering some of the worst ever results?

Senator BIRMINGHAM (South Australia—Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment and Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:50): We have a plan, and we are trying to get the states and territories to implement it as fast as we possibly can.

Senator Wong: It's always someone else's fault.

Senator BIRMINGHAM: Senator Wong seems to completely ignore the reality that the Commonwealth government doesn't run a single school in the country. We don't run a single school in the country. What we do is try to actually drag recalcitrant states and territories, as they are at times, kicking and screaming to deliver reform faster and better and to apply the types of measures that are necessary: to declutter the curriculum, to get back to basics around maths, English and reading skills, and to deliver in terms of the modern techniques that need to be applied around properly measuring and assessing learning progressions, making sure that we look at guaranteeing that each student in the classroom is learning effectively and that they are growing in each year of their learning and that we are actually addressing these problems, which have been evident for many years. We commissioned the research to deliver the reforms and we want to hold the states and territories accountable to make those reforms. (Time expired)

Infrastructure

Senator ANTIC (South Australia) (14:51): My question is to the Minister representing the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development,
Senator Canavan. Can the minister outline how the Liberal-National government's sound budget and economic management is strengthening vital infrastructure investments to support Australian families and businesses, including in my home state of South Australia?

Senator CANAVAN (Queensland—Minister for Resources and Northern Australia and Deputy Leader of the Nationals in the Senate) (14:51): I thank Senator Antic for his question and his keen interest in seeing better infrastructure built in his home state. There is one role that government can play in our economy, and that is building infrastructure around our country. That's why we are managing the nation's budget carefully. That's why we are making sure we are careful spending other people's money, so that we can spend record amounts of investment in infrastructure to build a better country. That is why we are investing over $100 billion in 130 projects, creating over 80,000 jobs across Australia, and lots of that is happening in South Australia too.

In South Australia, in this year's budget, an additional $2.6 billion was allocated to infrastructure projects—part of the broader infrastructure package for South Australia. That package includes $4.5 billion to upgrade the north-south corridor. It includes $361 million for the Urban Congestion Fund just in South Australia. It includes $260 million for the Rural Roads Safety package. It includes $220 million for the Gawler rail line infrastructure upgrade as well. That is just in our existing portfolio package.

But we are also making sure that we can bring forward this investment as soon as possible to help create jobs in our economy and get our states moving, including South Australia. That's why last month we announced that we'd bring forward $78 million of infrastructure spending in the Adelaide and metro region of South Australia and that we would also bring forward $250 million of projects in regional South Australia as well. They include, as I mentioned, the Rural Roads Safety program that we are funding and bringing forward funding on the Victor Harbor Road and Horrocks corridor as well. All of these investments will create jobs and opportunity and build a better South Australia.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Antic, a supplementary question?

Senator ANTIC (South Australia) (14:53): Minister, how is the Liberal-National government addressing the infrastructure needs of South Australia through its record investment?

Senator CANAVAN (Queensland—Minister for Resources and Northern Australia and Deputy Leader of the Nationals in the Senate) (14:54): As we finish this year and go into 2020, 2020 will be a year of building infrastructure in South Australia. We have 17 infrastructure projects across South Australia starting next year, and that'll be very exciting for those Australians living there. Some of those 17 projects we have starting next year include: $200 million being invested to duplicate a bridge in Port Augusta between Mackay Street and Burgoyne Street, a big investment there, and starting the $143 million of investments in the Rural Roads Safety package, making sure we can put in place more overtaking lanes, which are very important on rural roads to make sure that we have safe outcomes. It also includes a $90 million project at Port Wakefield to duplicate the Port Wakefield highway. All of these projects will help support the South Australian economy. They are a sign of a government that has the money and funding to invest in infrastructure and create jobs in South Australia.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Antic, a final supplementary question?

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CHAMBER
Senator ANTIC (South Australia) (14:55): Minister, what are the benefits of the Liberal-National government's record infrastructure investment for my home state of South Australia?

Senator CANAVAN (Queensland—Minister for Resources and Northern Australia and Deputy Leader of the Nationals in the Senate) (14:55): I have mentioned many of the projects across South Australia, but the South Australian economy is also in the unique position of being able to benefit from the broader infrastructure spending around the country because, as many of us would know—and as I know Senator Antic knows well—the South Australian economy is where we produce a lot of our steel. A lot of our steel is produced in Whyalla in South Australia. The federal government has supported the continuing production of steel in Whyalla and now it can reap the benefits of making sure that Australian steel can build Australian infrastructure projects. So, on the inland rail project—not in South Australia, but between Melbourne and Brisbane—we're using Whyalla steel, supporting South Australians' jobs and making sure we spread the benefits of our infrastructure boom right around the country. Already, 38,000 tonnes of Whyalla steel are being used to upgrade the Inland Rail in western New South Wales. We hope more will be used as this project rolls out, supporting jobs in South Australia.

Member for Chisholm

Senator KITCHING (Victoria) (14:56): My question is to the Minister representing the Prime Minister, Senator Cormann. I refer the minister to the report 'Liberal MP Liu linked to donor at centre of cash drop inquiry', published in The Sydney Morning Herald and a report in The Age today. Brighsun, the company subject to a drug trafficking and money laundering probe by the Australian Federal Police and the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission, donated $105,000 to the Liberal Party just months earlier. What steps has the Prime Minister taken to investigate links between the Minister for Health and the member for Chisholm and Brighsun?

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Leader of the Government in Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:56): All political donations received by candidates of political parties obviously have to be received and declared, consistent with our relevant laws. That is the responsibility of political parties and individual candidates. I'm not aware of the circumstances she's describing. I'll take on notice whether there's anything else that I can add to that answer. But, again, let me just say what I've said on a number of occasions before: don't always believe what you read in newspapers.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Kitching, a supplementary question?

Senator KITCHING (Victoria) (14:57): The member for Chisholm has said that: 'I helped Brighsun talk to ministers. I helped them to invite the minister to come to their launch—Greg Hunt.' What steps has the Prime Minister taken to determine Ms Liu's knowledge of the activities of Brighsun, a company subject to a drug trafficking and money laundering probe by the Australian Federal Police and the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission?

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Leader of the Government in Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:57): The first point I would make is that there is nothing
unusual about ministers being invited to attend events. I'm not aware of the specific circumstances that Senator Kitching is describing there, and I'll take that question on notice.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Kitching, a final supplementary question?

Senator KITCHING (Victoria) (14:58): Brighsun CEO Charles Brent, has said: Gladys did a very good job ... she was instrumental in helping us get access, like any good lobbyist would, and that was her job … At the time she was doing fundraising for the Liberal Party … Can the Prime Minister guarantee that no member of the Liberal Party was aware of the source of the $105,000 donation donated to the party by Brighsun?

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Leader of the Government in Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:58): Again, I'm not aware. Obviously all political parties have to receive and declare political donations, consistent with our electoral laws. I am confident that is what the Liberal Party does and, I would like to think, all other political parties do—

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

Senator Abetz: Senator Wong wants to object to that.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Senator Wong: I'll take the interjection, Mr President.

The PRESIDENT: It would be helpful if you wouldn't, and we could go to the point of order, Senator Wong.

Senator Wong: Go on, let me!

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

Senator Wong: Mr President, this is an important matter. It is not just a matter of what the donations laws are. This goes to whether the Prime Minister is aware of any of his ministers or members being aware that the donation came from a company that was under investigation by the AFP and the Criminal Intelligence Commission. I'd ask the minister, on this issue, to be directly relevant to that point.

The PRESIDENT: On the point of order: the minister had previously spoken about matters that I did believe were directly relevant and took them on notice. He had been speaking for 17 seconds. I was going to give him the opportunity to continue his answer.

Senator CORMANN: Thank you very much, Mr President. I make a statement of the obvious: obviously I'm not aware of what other people might or might not be aware of. I've made that very clear, which is why I've taken relevant parts of the question, in relation to circumstances being described that I'm not aware of, on notice. I make the general point that of course all parties and all candidates have to comply with our electoral laws when it comes to receiving and declaring political donations. I ask that further questions be placed on the Notice Paper.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Leader of the Government in Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (15:00): Pursuant to standing order 190, I seek leave to make a personal explanation.
Leave granted.

Senator CORMANN: It has been brought to my attention that yesterday, during a press conference with the shadow Attorney-General and others, the shadow minister for home affairs, Senator Keneally, made two false accusations, which I would like to directly address and refute. The issue relates to commitments I made on behalf of the government in the Senate about 12 months ago during the consideration of the Telecommunications and Other Legislation Amendment (Assistance and Access) Act 2018. I delivered on those commitments made to the Senate to the letter and in full, yet Senator Keneally yesterday, and other Labor members and senators in similar terms in recent weeks, falsely asserted that I did not deliver on those commitments. I pride myself on delivering on my commitments, so I will address the false accusations made in turn.

This is specifically what Senator Keneally said yesterday: 'The Leader of the Government in the Senate, Mathias Cormann, stood on the floor of the Senate and gave an assurance that the government would pass those very amendments when the parliament resumed in February.' Senator Keneally has asserted here that I give an assurance that the government would pass further amendments to the Telecommunications and Other Legislation Amendment (Assistance and Access) Act 2018 when the parliament resumed in February. This is false. The Hansard clearly and accurately shows that what I actually committed to do on 6 December 2018 on that point was:

… that the government has agreed to facilitate consideration of these amendments in the New Year in government business time.

The government did facilitate consideration of these amendments in the new year in government business time—namely, on 13 February 2019 the government introduced the Telecommunications and Other Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill 2019 into the Senate. During the debate on that bill on 14 February 2019, the opposition moved the various amendments to the Telecommunications and Other Legislation Amendment (Assistance and Access) Act 2018 that it wanted to move. Those amendments were duly considered by the Senate during government business time, 100 per cent as promised.

This takes me to Senator Keneally's second false assertion, when she said: 'Those amendments—the government has refused now for 12 months to bring them back to the parliament. In the meantime, in the intervening months, the government, in order to avoid having any amendments put forward, have instituted a series of reviews.' This is also false and misleading. Firstly, at the instigation of the Labor Party, the government on 6 December last year agreed to a second reading amendment to ensure the PJCIS 'conduct a review of the operation of the amendments made by this bill and report on that review by 3 April 2019.' The government agreed to this in good faith at the request of the Labor Party and so did the Senate. In its April 2019 report, the PJCIS made a bipartisan request for further time—

Senator Keneally interjecting—

Senator CORMANN: Senator Keneally doesn't understand the importance of bipartisanship inside the PJCIS. In its April 2019 report, the PJCIS made a bipartisan request for 'further time for the PJCIS to complete its third review of the legislation'. Again, the government acted entirely in good faith by acting on the bipartisan request from the PJCIS—that is, the second review was a result of a Senate vote sought by Labor and supported by the
government; the further reviews are as a result of a bipartisan request by the PJCIS for an extension or are required by law, in the case of the Independent National Security Legislation Monitor review. It is important to understand the time line.

In passing the Telecommunications and Other Legislation Amendment (Assistance and Access) Act 2018 last year, the Senate agreed to refer the amendments to be made by this bill to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security in order to conduct a review of the operation of the amendments made by this bill and report on that review by 3 April 2019. Separately, on 27 March 2019, the PJCIS referred the act to the Independent National Security Legislation Monitor for review and report by 1 March 2020. That's the PJCIS, which includes the Labor Party. The PJCIS advised that it would consider any findings or recommendations in its own review of the act. That is why on 3 April 2019 the PJCIS made further recommendations following the second review of the assistance and access act. These recommendations related to the Independent National Security Legislation Monitor review, resourcing for oversight bodies and requesting further time for the PJCIS to complete its third review of the legislation.

On 9 April the chair of the PJCIS, Mr Andrew Hastie MP, on behalf of the committee, wrote to the Prime Minister requesting that legislation be introduced to defer the committee's reporting date on the assistance and access act to 30 September 2020 at the request of the PJCIS—a bipartisan request including the Labor Party. On 17 October 2019 the government published its response accepting those recommendations. On the same day, the government introduced the assistance and access amendments review bill, which defers the date for the PJCIS to complete its third review of the legislation until 30 September 2020, as requested by the PJCIS, including the Labor Party. It is important to ensure the Independent National Security Legislation Monitor and the committee have the time they need to complete comprehensive and thorough examinations of the assistance and access act and its impacts, including time to engage with industry and the public.

Finally, I also said on behalf of the government that we supported in principle all amendments to this bill that are consistent with PJCIS recommendations. That remains our position. When the PJCIS recommendations come forward we will act on them, as we always do.

The reason I put this on the record is that ever since Senator Keneally joined the PJCIS she has sought to politicise what always must be a bipartisan committee acting in our national interest. She has made false and inaccurate accusations and assertions and she has sought to play politics with our national security. Australians should be very concerned about Senator Keneally's constant propensity for political stunts involving our national security. Moreover, this is yet another inappropriate attempt to weaken our national security laws and to somehow create the impression that the government did not follow through on the commitments we made when we followed through on those commitments to the letter, as we always do.

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (15:07): I seek leave to make a very short response. I trust that Senator Cormann, since he's been given leave, will give Senator Keneally the courtesy he has been demonstrated.

Leave granted.
Senator WONG: I simply want to make two points. The first is that the Leader of the Government in the Senate requested time to respond to how he suggested he'd been misrepresented. He's used that time to get to a personal attack on the motivations of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, and that is not appropriate. That is not appropriate. If he's going to use the courtesies of the Senate to do that, he should be upfront about doing so.

Senator Cormann interjecting—

Senator WONG: You impugned her motivation. It is a personal attack, and that was not warranted.

The second point I would make is that it is all very well for the Leader of the Government in the Senate to come in here and laud the bipartisanship of the PJCIS. The people who sought to undermine the bipartisanship of the PJCIS were the coalition and, in particular, his mate Peter Dutton, for whom he couldn't count the numbers. So do not come in here and cloak yourselves in bipartisanship when it suits you.

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

Senator Cormann: I will make very clear that I was misrepresented by Senator Keneally yesterday, and I made an explanation as to why I was misrepresented.

The PRESIDENT: I'm going to rule on this. Standing order 190, for those listening in the chamber, states:

By leave of the Senate, a senator may explain matters of a personal nature, although there is no question before the Senate, but such matters may not be debated.

In my view, Senator Cormann, that contribution got into the realm of debating. Senator Wong, I let you speak to that issue. This particular standing order works on the basis of leave, and therefore I believe it needs to be more strictly adhered to.

Senator KENEALLY (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (15:09): Mr President, given your ruling, I seek leave to make a short statement.

Leave granted.

Senator KENEALLY: It does seem to suit the government to throw around the word 'bipartisanship' when it suits them and to disregard it when it doesn't. Rest assured, Senator Cormann, I do understand the bipartisan nature of the PJCIS. I understood it when Minister Dutton described the PJCIS as 'just another committee'. I understood it when the government rejected the bipartisan recommendations of the PJCIS when it came to the temporary exclusion orders legislation earlier this year. I understood it when the Labor opposition moved those bipartisan recommendations of the PJCIS in relation to the temporary exclusion orders and government members voted against them, including the government members of the PJCIS who had actually endorsed those recommendations. And I understood the bipartisan nature of the PJCIS when it was last year, in a hurried and harried fashion, asked to curtail its consideration of these encryption laws and asked to deliver a set of recommendations, which it did. I understand and make very clear that you stood here—we all watched you—and said the words, 'I also confirm the government has agreed to facilitate consideration of these amendments in the new year.' You did say that, and what you did there was indicate to everyone that, if we voted for this bill without amendments, if we, the Labor Party, gave up
the right to move amendments in that legislation, they would be moved and they would be supported, because the word 'facilitate' indicates that.

Senator Seselja: Correct the record!

Senator KENEALLY: I will take the minister's interjection, because this goes to the very point of the secret deal that has been struck today by Senator Lambie and the government. I hope somewhere in this building Senator Lambie is watching and listening to this debate, because the fact that Minister Cormann has had his, quite frankly, feelings hurt and has had to come here into this chamber and argue about whether or not the word 'facilitate' means support or not is exactly the type of loophole that they will rely upon in whatever secret agreement they have struck with Senator Lambie. This is why Senator Lambie should be very worried about whatever the secret deal that she has struck with this government is because, as long as it remains secret, she will struggle to hold them to account and, once it becomes public, it will become clear that they will find ways to wiggle out of the accountability and the commitments that they have made.

I thank the minister for taking the time in the Senate to make these points in this way because all he has managed to do is highlight the sensitivity the government has over the fact that the encryption laws remain unamended. They are and remain the subject of extraordinary concern by the technology sector in this country. They are curtailing jobs and economic growth. The House Judiciary Committee of the US Congress has written to Minister Dutton to express its serious concern that the laws, as they currently stand, do not conform to the CLOUD Act—that is, the Clarifying Lawful Overseas Use of Data Act that would allow our law enforcement agencies to have much quicker access to data overseas to solve crimes. That's what is happening here. Everyone who is listening and watching, make no mistake: that is why we have moved these amendments. Clearly the government feels sensitivity to it, but we will continue, with the support of the tech sector in this country and I hope the support of the crossbench, to pursue these amendments in the new year.

Senator McKIM (Tasmania) (15:13): I seek leave to make a one-minute statement.

Leave granted.

Senator McKIM: Thank you to Senator Cormann for placing that information before the Senate, and thank you to Senator Keneally for her response. I can confirm that the Greens are very predisposed to supporting the amendments that Labor have put forward, but I want to place something on the record about the Labor Party. I mean, fair dinkum, the Labor Party voted for the very legislation that they're now proposing to amend, and they voted for it despite the warnings of the tech sector in Australia. So when Senator Keneally gets up and says she hopes she has the support of the crossbench, that is an effective attempt to rewrite history in relation to these disgraceful amendments that dealt a body blow to the tech sector in this country, and Labor were culpable for supporting them. I believe we would have had the numbers to knock them off in the Senate, had Labor not gone all weak and rolled over and allowed the government to tickle their tummy.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE: TAKE NOTE OF ANSWERS

Economy

Senator WATT (Queensland) (15:14): I move:
That the Senate take note of the answers given by the Minister for Finance (Senator Cormann) to questions without notice asked by Senators Gallagher and Walsh today.

Another day and more shocking new figures about the state of the Australian economy under this government—a government that went to the election promising the Australian people that it would deliver a strong economy and rising living standards. Month after month after month we see that those promises to the Australian people are broken by this government. This is a government that says that it prides itself on being strong economic managers. Those opposite say that the difference between them and this side of the chamber is they can deliver good economic management. Well, where is it? Month after month we try to find signs that under this government's stewardship the Australian economy is in good shape, as it promised it would deliver. But month after month we see more and more figures showing how much the Australian economy is floundering as a result of this government's lack of leadership.

Senator Scarr: It's growing!

Senator WATT: Let's have a look at the figures that have come out today. Today, the new figures show that economic growth in this country went backwards compared to the last quarter. I take Senator Scarr's interjection where he says that the economy is growing. The latest figures show economic growth went backwards compared to the last quarter. Annual growth is only at 1.7 per cent—barely growing at all. It still has a one in front of it, well below the government's forecast of 2.75 per cent. This government's last budget was predicated on an assumption that the economy would grow at the rate of 2.75 per cent over this financial year. It is currently running at 1.7 per cent.

The tax cuts that this government went to the election on were the centrepiece of this government's economic agenda. They were the thing that was going to get the economy moving, according to the government. Now we have the Australian Bureau of Statistics saying that the reduction to tax payable did not translate to a rise in discretionary spending or, to put in plain language, the tax cuts didn't work! The tax cuts have not got people spending money in the way that the government said that they would do, and that's reflected in the poor retail figures we see; that's reflected in a whole range of other data that shows how badly the economy is performing under this government.

That is, of course, backed up by wages, where under this government's stewardship we have wages growing at the lowest rate we have seen in Australian history. Since records began on this subject decades ago, we have never seen wages growing so poorly as they are right now under this government. It's no wonder then that the Reserve Bank has recently just made the point that lower wage rises have become the new normal. That is what the Australian people have got to thank this government for: six years of office, in its third term, and it has delivered a new normal when it comes to wages—and that is lower wage rises. Congratulations! I hope you're all giving yourselves a pat on the back, you good economic managers! You people who said that you needed to win the election to keep the economy strong, give yourselves a pat on the back! You have delivered a new normal, being lower wage rises.

That is not really any surprise, because we have had the Leader of the Government in the Senate, Minister Cormann, as the Minister for Finance for the last six years. The entire time this government has been in office, Minister Cormann has held the purse strings as the Minister for Finance. What he has got to show for it is economic growth going backwards
compared to the last quarter, tax cuts that aren't working and the worst wages growth on record. I think Minister Cormann would be quite okay with all that, because we know that he was caught out on film saying that keeping the wages low in this country is a deliberate design feature of the government's economic policy. What kind of politician would actually get into office to deliberately keep wages low? That is the kind of attitude we have from this government, and we all know on this side of the house that that is what this government is about.

Today, Minister Cormann was asked questions about this. You would think that on another day when we have poor economic data coming out about this government you might see humility from this government. But no, not from Minister Cormann and not from this Liberal-National government, who said that it would keep the economy strong. They don't know the meaning of the word humility. Rather than being a bit humble, we see more arrogance from this government in saying, 'Everything is going hunky-dory; everything is going swimmingly; everything is going really, really well in the Australian economy.' In fact, they might as well say that Australians have never had it so good! How arrogant! How arrogant of this government that won an election, to its great surprise, and is now presiding over poor economic growth, tax cuts that aren't working and the lowest wages growth that we have ever seen. (Time expired)

**Senator SCARR** (Queensland) (15:19): The one thing I have learned in my over five months here is, when the Labor Party talks about economic data, you should always go to the original document and read what the actual facts say. The facts of the matter are—

**Senator Wong:** Does that apply to Angus Taylor too?

**Senator SCARR:** I'll take the interjection from—

**Senator McKim:** Rookie error!

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Order! Please continue, Senator Carr—I mean Senator Scarr.

**Senator SCARR:** Senator Carr's has perhaps a different philosophical bent! Household disposable income has in fact increased in this country by 2.5 per cent—the fastest quarterly rise in a decade—with the ABS saying it was driven by a decline in income tax payable and interest paid on dwellings as well as continued rises in the compensation of employees. That is what the ABS has said. It is not what Senator Watt has said but what the ABS has said. I'll say it again: it was driven by a decline in income tax payable and interest paid on dwellings as well as continued rise in the compensation of employees. As Senator Cormann said, it is up to the Australian people how they decide to spend or save their tax cuts. At least this side of the chamber gave them the choice. We gave them tax cuts so they could make the decision as to what was in the best interests of their families and their households. We gave them the choice.

Let me quote what Mr Philip Lowe, Governor of the Reserve Bank of Australia, said in a press release just yesterday:

The US-China trade and technology disputes continue to affect international trade flows and investment as businesses scale back spending plans because of the uncertainty.

As Senator Cormann has frequently said in this place, this economy is facing difficult international issues that are not of its making. Notwithstanding that, and notwithstanding the
fact that countries like Germany, the United Kingdom, South Korea and Singapore have all experienced negative economic growth this year, Australia is still producing positive economic growth. Notwithstanding those headwinds, there is still positive economic growth. We have maintained our AAA credit rating, and we're one of only 10 economies around the world to do that—an outstanding performance.

What are other people saying, other than those on the other side of the chamber in the opposition? Standard & Poor's said recently that the outlook for the Australian economy is sound. Deloitte said that the Australian economy is picking up with momentum. The IMF and the OECD are forecasting Australia to grow faster than any other G7 nation in 2020. The Reserve Bank of Australia has said that the economy has reached a gentle turning point.

To go on, in terms of the Reserve Bank of Australia's commentary: The central scenario is for growth to pick up gradually to around 3 per cent in 2021. The low level of interest rates, recent tax cuts—opposed by those opposite—ongoing spending on infrastructure, the upswing in housing prices and a brighter outlook for the resources sector should all support growth.

So it is a positive story and Australia is doing remarkably well, notwithstanding the headwinds on an international basis.

What else did we hear today during question time? The Canberra bubble is alive and well. Earlier today, eight out of 12 Queensland senators supported the legislation in relation to repairing the medevac scheme—eight out of 12 senators representing the will of the Queensland people. We heard their voices loud and clear at the last election. We went to that election with a promise that we would deliver those amendments to the scheme. We delivered those today, and today we can go back to the constituents of Queensland and say, 'Job done.' Eight out of 12 Queensland senators supported that legislation. We will remind Queenslanders that four out of 12 Queensland senators did not—three from the Australian Labor Party and one from the Greens.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Senator Scarr, I remind you that the motion to take note was on questions about the economy asked of Senator Cormann by Senators Gallagher and Walsh. I appreciate that it is a wide-ranging debate, but you do need to be speaking in broad terms, as you were in the beginning, about the economy. Please continue.

Senator SCARR: I am happy to end my contribution by noting how sound a position the Australian economy is in, given the headwinds it's facing.

Senator PRATT (Western Australia) (15:25): I rise to also take note of questions on the economy asked of Senator Cormann by Senator Gallagher and Senator Walsh. Time and time again we come into this place to talk to the government about the economy, and they pretend over and over again that everything is rosy. Senator Scarr has pointed the finger at the economic headwinds internationally, but time and time again we do not see an adequate response from this government, neither in the way they answer questions nor in the way they manage the economy. They come into this place without a plan to manage the Australian economy and deal with these headwinds.

Just this week, media reporting on the Australian Industry Group's *Performance of manufacturing index* has painted a very stark picture of the Australian economy, highlighting
the lack of direction from the Morrison government to boost the economy. This is my own portfolio area. In manufacturing you can see the overall economic slowdown flowing down into different sectors of the economy. It shows that Australian manufacturing is indeed contracting. It is no longer growing; it is displaying its weakest performance since 2016. It shows a weakening in building materials, wood, furniture, metal products, machinery and equipment; and paper printing, textiles, clothing and paper. It also shows, very troublingly, a drop in employment and wages.

The Morrison government claimed that the economy would improve in the next quarter. When Senator Cormann answered questions on the economy in question time today, he never adequately reflected on the negative state of the economy—where and why the economy is in difficulty—because he wants to continue saying that things are rosy. He wants to continue to believe that our economy does not need government leadership and government intervention. He simply ignores the parlous state of the Australian economy.

But we can see that real growth figures are well below average, well below forecasts and well below what is needed to get wages growing again in our nation. Weak growth like this is inevitable. It is an absolute consequence of a government that has only a political strategy and not an economic plan. This government has ignored repeated calls, not only from the opposition but also from the Reserve Bank and other industry players, for a proportionate and measured stimulus that will support the economy. These calls have come from the Reserve Bank, the business community, economists and experts, and indeed from the Labor Party.

When it put forward its mediocre package on infrastructure, the government pretended that this was the kind of stimulus it was prepared to put forward. This is not an adequate economic stimulus for our economy. It does not meet the test that the experts are calling for. It's high time that Senator Cormann, when answering questions in this place on the economy, or failing to answer those questions, held his own government to account—Minister Frydenberg and Prime Minister Morrison. Every time he comes in here, it is without a comprehensive plan to support our floundering economy, boost wages and lift productivity. When the government comes in here and answers questions on the economy, there is simply nothing that it speaks to that even touches the sides of dealing with the real issues around boosting wages, lifting productivity and boosting the state of the Australian economy. As we head towards Christmas, we see very weak results in the nation's manufacturing sector. The order books and wages are down. There is a faster rate of contraction—(Time expired)

Senator HUGHES (New South Wales) (15:30): I always find it interesting, when it comes to the economy, that it's never a New South Wales senator who asks a question, because the last time the Labor Party was in power in New South Wales the economy did nothing but tank. It continued to plummet to the bottom of all rankings, and it's taken a Liberal-National government in New South Wales to bring it back up. I did enjoy, though, the very first part of Senator Walsh's question, when she said that, during the September quarter, the economy has grown. I think, ultimately, she could've stopped there, but for some reason the Labor Party has a pathological need to talk our economy down. They're determined to see the negative in everything.

Senator Watt: Just facts.

Senator HUGHES: Senator Watt comes in with the interjections and the smiles across the chamber, but really all he's looking for is to see the negative in anything—talking down the
economy, talking down business, talking down all the states and all the work that's being done, even in his beloved northern Australia, with all of the work that the fabulous Minister Canavan is doing to support northern Australia. We can do that work because we have an outstanding economic record. Managing the economy is what this government does best.

But let's talk about the fact that it is the 29th consecutive quarter of annual economic growth. This is despite a raft of challenges. Senator Scarr was talking about some of the international headwinds, but we also need to consider the ongoing international trade tensions. We have two of the largest economies in the world currently in a stand-off, and this is obviously having an impact globally. We are in the centre of that, with considerable trading partners in both of them. It is therefore important that we walk an incredibly tight rope, and that is being done incredibly effectively by the Morrison government.

We also see a housing market downturn. This is turning around, but that is something that's occurred particularly in the major centres. But, of course, one of the other significant impacts on our economy, something that I'm not sure those opposite fully understand, is the drought. As Senator McKenzie so eloquently explained, never, prior to their new-found love of farming and drought, were those words so very frequently uttered by anyone opposite. The drought is having a direct impact on our economy, but this would be worse with $387 billion worth of new taxes, which, as far as anyone can work out, are still Labor policy. No-one really knows; we're not quite sure. I think the opposition leader is too busy looking over his shoulder at the member for Maribyrnong, who I think wants his old job back. The Australian people and the economy have dodged a bullet by avoiding a Labor government.

But what does the strong economy mean for everyday Australians? Talking about the drought, I'd just like to take a moment to look at some of the drought initiatives that, because of our economic position, we have been able to implement. Since the budget, there has been an additional $355 million to step up our drought response, and the latest announcement will triple this to more than $1 billion since the election as well as more than $1 billion in new interest-free loans. What does this mean for farmers? It means that the farm household allowance can now be extended to support four years in every 10, not just four years over a lifetime. We've also seen an ability to relax the off-farm income, offsetting it and increasing the cap to $100,000. This is ensuring that people are able to stay on their farms and keep food on the table as they endure one of the worst droughts in our history—in the last decade and century. If you also look at what's happened recently with the terrible bushfires, unlike those opposite we have been able to offer an assistance package, in line with the states, of $48.25 million. That's a bushfire recovery package that's only possible because of a strong economy.

Those opposite and Senator Watt—who, unfortunately, is no longer here—would fully understand the levy that had to be implemented to pay for the natural disaster recovery in Queensland because the government, under Labor, could not afford the package. That's not how it is over here. Whereas you guys opposite took drugs off the PBS because you couldn't afford to list any more, over here we are listing one new drug every day, and that's how everyday Australians are benefiting from a strong economy. (Time expired)

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Senator Hughes, I remind you it is not appropriate to refer to the fact that senators may have left the chamber.

**Senator WALSH (Victoria) (15:35):** Today Senator Cormann has been asked questions about slow economic growth, about low household spending, about low wages growth and
about an economy that is in trouble, and his answers can basically be summarised as: 'Everything's going fine. There's nothing to see here, and the economy is working just fine, thank you very much.' How insulting to the people who are doing it tough under this government's so-called economic leadership. How insulting to the people who are depending on this government to come up with an economic plan and a strong economy. How insulting to the people who listened to the government three months ago, when we saw the last set of figures of slow economic growth and when people were told by this government that things would improve next time. This is next time, and things haven't improved and that is a big problem for the people who are depending on this government to deliver a stronger economy.

The economy is not working fine for everyday Australians. The economy is not working just fine for the 1.9 million Australians who are looking for work or for more work. It is not working fine for those hardworking Australians who haven't had a decent pay rise under this government and who haven't had a decent pay rise in seven years. And the economy is not working just fine for the parents who are making tough decisions about whether to pay their bills or whether to pay their rent and making tough decisions at this time of year about whether they might be able to afford to take the family out or whether they need to save that money to spend it on Christmas presents for their children.

The Prime Minister has said that the harder you work, the better you do. People are working hard. People are working as hard as they can and, actually, it is this government that is asleep at the wheel. Let's take a look at this government's record on the economy, because their record is nothing short of lazy. During their seven years in power, this third-term government has been overseeing the worst economic performance since the global financial crisis. Let's not forget that Prime Minister Scott Morrison was the Treasurer for three years, and he is all over this economic outcome for the country. What we've seen under this government is declining living standards. We've seen household debt at record highs. Let's think about what that means for people. That means that people are struggling, they're doing it tough and they're very much at risk of going under. Under this government, we've got 1.9 million Australians who are underemployed or unemployed, at the same time as this government is proposing cuts to Newstart. We've got business investment at its lowest since the 1990s recession. We've got wages that are growing at just one-sixth the pace of profits. Along with this government's extraordinary economic management record, we've got a doubling of gross national debt, which has hit $400 billion for the first time in our history. And the most recent record is yet another quarter of slow economic growth—just 0.4 per cent in the last quarter.

Let's think about this government's record on wages. This government's record on wage growth is the worst ever of any government, and it doesn't seem like it's going to be getting any better. The governor of the Reserve Bank says that wages growth is subdued and is expected to remain at its current rate for some time yet. That statement is not very good news for the millions of Australians who are waiting for a wage rise and waiting for this economy to pick up so they can do better for their families and do better in their communities. This weak wage growth, of course, is contributing to Australia's economy woes because, when people can't get the wages they need, they can't spend in their local community, and the economy slows even further. That's the pattern we've got under this government. This is a
government that has no plan except to tell struggling Australians they should just work harder.

Question agreed to.

**Immigration Detention**

*Senator McKIM* (Tasmania) (15:40): I move:

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

I use the word 'answer' because that's the proforma of the Senate, but 'response' would probably be a more accurate word, because the minister didn't go within a bull's roar of answering the questions that Senator Di Natale asked him. Senator Di Natale was asking Minister Cormann to shed some light on the deal—or the no deal—between the government and Senator Lambie, which ultimately has resulted in Senator Lambie voting to repeal the medevac law earlier today.

I want to focus to begin with on one particular part of Minister Cormann's answer. He was asked by Senator Di Natale whether there had been an exchange of letters between the government and Senator Lambie in regard to ensuring Senator Lambie's vote to repeal the medevac legislation. Minister Cormann would only say that he had not exchanged letters or that he had not written a letter to Senator Lambie. What about the Prime Minister? Did he write to Senator Lambie or exchange letters with Senator Lambie? What about the Minister for Home Affairs, Mr Dutton? Did he write a letter to Senator Lambie or exchange letters with Senator Lambie? We simply don't know. But what we do know is that someone is lying to the Senate and therefore lying to the Australian people.

The truth will out, as my mother always used to tell me, but I want to make the point that if there is—as Minister Cormann and the Prime Minister, in question time in the other place, said today—no deal with Senator Lambie then what Senator Lambie has done is to give her vote to the government to repeal the medevac legislation for absolutely nothing; she has got nothing out of the government. If that is true, and there is no deal or agreement, she has voted to take away a crucial medical provision that ensures sick people get the health treatment they need.

Let us remind ourselves why medevac was necessary. Hamid Khazaei died of a leg infection because of the inaction of this government. Eleven other people died in this government's care while they were in offshore detention. This government fought tooth and nail to keep suicidal children locked up on Nauru. It was only a massive public campaign that caused these children to be released from that exile last year. A woman who was raped was denied a termination by this government while she was on Nauru. Minister Dutton and Prime Minister Morrison have worn their cruelty as a badge of honour, and I truly hope that they and others are one day held to account in the International Criminal Court for how they have broken people.

I want to end with a message to the propagandists and stenographers at *The Courier Mail* and *The Australian*: I hope you're all happy today; you have played a pivotal role in the misinformation campaign that has marred this entire debate. I'm going to name them up. Those propagandists and stenographers include Simon Benson, Joe Kelly and Renee Viellaris. I do hope you're happy with the propaganda and the stenography that you've engaged in in
recent months. I hope you're happy that your cosy relationship with the authoritarians and the fascists in the Liberal-National government can continue unabated; your cosy relationship with the rampant human rights abusers in the LNP can continue unabated; your little secret drops and your sunny little interviews with the merchants of misery can continue. You, Joe Kelly, Simon Benson and Renee Viellaris, are doing the work of ministerial media advisers while you are masquerading as journalists. You've got the gall to call yourselves journalists, but you're not; you're propagandists and stenographers. I hope you're all ashamed of yourselves.

Question agreed to.

NOTICES

Presentation

Senator DUNIAM (Tasmania—Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries and Assistant Minister for Regional Tourism) (15:45): I give notice that on the next day of sitting I shall move:

That provisions of paragraphs 5 to 8 of standing order 111 not apply to various bills as set out in the list circulated in the chamber, allowing them to be considered during this period of sittings.

I also table statements of reasons justifying the need for these bills to be considered during the sittings and seek leave to have the statements incorporated in Hansard.

Leave granted.

The statement read as follows—

STATEMENT OF REASONS FOR INTRODUCTION AND PASSAGE IN THE 2019 SPRING SITTINGS

AUSTRALIAN CRIME COMMISSION AMENDMENT (SPECIAL OPERATIONS AND SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS) BILL

Purpose of the Bill

The purpose of the bill is to amend the Australian Crime Commission Act 2002 to confirm the validity of current and former special ACC operations and special ACC investigations determinations, amend the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission's Board's process for making future special operations and investigations determinations, and make related consequential amendments.

Reasons for urgency

The bill requires introduction and passage in the 2019 Spring sittings to ensure the ongoing validity of Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission special operations and investigations ahead of litigation currently in the High Court.

STATEMENT OF REASONS FOR INTRODUCTION AND PASSAGE IN THE 2019 SPRING SITTINGS

FARM HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT AMENDMENT (RELIEF MEASURES) BILL (NO.2) 2019

Purpose of the Bill

The bill amends the Farm Household Support Act 2014 (FHS Act) and relevant subordinate legislation as the third instalment of changes to simplify the Farm Household Allowance (FHA) and adjust key policy settings of the FHA program.

The bill:
• provides for a rate of FHA that is not varied by the person's income. That is, if FHA is payable to a person, the person's income will not affect their final rate of FHA payment.
• simplifies the assets test so that all assets (farm and non-farm) will be subject to a combined single net value threshold of $5.5 million. This will include amendments to assess the value of the person's water entitlement together with the value of the farm to which it is connected.
• provides flexibility and clarity in relation to the conduct of farm financial assessments. Changes include removing the requirement to have assessments conducted by a person prescribed by the Minister's rule, providing a requirement that a person conducting the assessment must have appropriate qualifications or expertise to conduct the assessment, and clarifying that the person is entitled to the amount as provided in the invoice for the farm financial assessment (up to the cap).
• strengthens the case management approach to better support farmers in hardship through periods of financial difficulty. Changes include increasing the activity supplement to $10,000 (amendment to the Farm Household Support Minister's Rule 2014), providing that the cost of the activity is to be worked out according to the cost provided in the invoice for the activity, and extending the activity supplement to include travel and accommodation cost associated with eligible activities, provided the costs are reasonable as determined by the Secretary.

Reasons for Urgency
Passage of the Bill is urgently required in the 2019 Spring sittings to give effect to key recommendations from the independent review of the FHA program. The persisting drought conditions make the requirement to change key FHA settings more urgent as many farmers are in great need of support.

The independent review found that FHA is not meeting farmers' expectations because of the complexity of the payment and the length of the application process. FHA provides income support to meet basic household needs when farmers are experiencing financial hardship, and to create breathing space while they consider the future of their farm and take actions to improve their circumstances.

The bill seeks to implement key recommendations from the review, to deliver improvements to farmers and their partners who are experiencing hardship and seeking support through the FHA program.

STATEMENT OF REASONS FOR INTRODUCTION AND PASSAGE IN THE 2019 SPRING SITTINGS

INTERACTIVE GAMBLING AMENDMENT (NATIONAL SELF-EXCLUSION REGISTER) BILL AND
NATIONAL SELF-EXCLUSION REGISTER (COST RECOVERY LEVY) BILL

Purpose of the Bill
This Bill package establishes a National Self-Exclusion Register, to allow consumers to self-exclude from all regulated interactive wagering services in Australia.

Reasons for Urgency
Passage of legislation would deliver on commitments made by Commonwealth, state and territory governments. Key stakeholder groups, including the wagering industry and the community sector, are already applying pressure to governments to implement the National Self-Exclusion Register as quickly as possible.

Passage of legislation during the Spring 2019 sitting period is required to enable the Australian Communications and Media Authority to engage a third-party provider to develop and implement the National Self-Exclusion Register.
The Australian Communications and Media Authority has since advised that these processes are expected to take 12 to 18 months, from the passage of legislation, to complete. This means that the National Self-Exclusion Register is likely to be delayed at least 12 months longer than the initial implementation timeframe.

Currently, there is no self-exclusion system available across all regulated interactive wagering services. The Commonwealth is the only jurisdiction with the power to enact and fully enforce a legislative scheme with application across Australia.

STATEMENT OF REASONS FOR INTRODUCTION AND PASSAGE IN THE 2019 SPRING SITTINGS
SPECIAL RECREATIONAL VESSELS BILL
Purpose of the Bill
The bill allows special recreational vessels trading to apply for temporary licences under the Coastal Trading (Revitalising Australian Shipping) Act 2012.

Reasons for Urgency
The proposed bill should be brought forward as a matter of urgency in order for the legislation to commence before the end of the year. The special recreational vessels industry has advised they are expecting a large number of these vessels to be in the Pacific over the this summer and over the next 18 months for the Tokyo Olympics and the America's Cup in Auckland, and want certainty that they can sail to Australia and be able to offer charters. Broader economic benefits are expected from the operation of these vessels in Australian waters.

Withdrawal

Senator URQUHART (Tasmania—Opposition Whip in the Senate) (15:45): I withdraw General Business Notice of Motion No. 72 standing in the name of Senator Kitching for 5 February 2020 relating to the establishment of a select committee.

Presentation

Senator Wong to move on the next day of sitting:
That the Senate—
(a) notes the importance of ensuring that Australian Parliament House is a safe place to visit and work;
(b) notes longstanding security arrangements in Parliament House have evolved in recent years and that further changes are proposed, in particular, the operation of closed circuit television systems (CCTV) and the new Electronic Access Pass System;
(c) notes that these systems, like other security and information systems, are managed by the Department of Parliamentary Services, under the authority of the Presiding Officers, on behalf of the Parliament;
(d) notes that, under the Parliamentary Precincts Act 1988, the powers of the Presiding Officers to manage and control the precincts apply subject to relevant orders of the Houses, which means that the administration of these security and information systems is constrained by the powers, privileges and immunities of the Houses and their members;
(e) affirms that the collection of information about parliamentarians and their staff is to be managed such that parliamentary privilege is protected;
(f) requests the Presiding Officers expedite protocols for adoption by the commencement of Parliament in 2020, such that:
(i) management of data collected through the CCTV and Electronic Access Control System (EACS) is consistent with relevant Australian Government standards for the protection of personal information,

(ii) members and senators whose privilege may be impinged by a decision to release data are provided opportunities to make submissions prior to the release of any data collected through the CCTV or Electronic Access Control System, where such a decision to release is in the remit of the Presiding Officers and not required by law, and

(iii) the governance arrangements for CCTV or the Electronic Access Control System provide opportunities for non-government members and senators to participate, in relation to both determinations to release data where parliamentary privilege or the privacy of senators or members may be impacted or claimed, and system oversight;

(g) notes the President's advice, that as an interim arrangement, pending finalisation of the protocols referred to in paragraph (f), when the President in consultation with the Clerk considers that the release of CCTV footage or EACS data may involve matters of privilege in relation to the functions or authority of the Senate or its committees or in relation to the free performance of a senators' duties, the President will consult the Deputy President prior to agreeing to the release of any CCTV footage or EACS data to an external agency, or following the release of any such material where that release is required by legal processes without determination or decision of the Presiding Officers; and

(h) further notes the Senate's previous resolution in December 2018, calling for an update on the MOU between the Attorney-General and the Presiding Officers, requests that this be expedited, and affirms this as a priority for 2020.

Senator Ruston to move on the next day of sitting:
That the provisions of paragraphs (5) to (8) of standing order 111 not apply to the following bills, allowing them to be considered during this period of sittings:

Australian Crime Commission Amendment (Special Operations and Special Investigations) Bill 2019
Farm Household Support Amendment (Relief Measures) Bill (No. 2) 2019
Interactive Gambling Amendment (National Self-exclusion Register) Bill 2019
National Self-exclusion Register (Cost Recovery Levy) Bill 2019
Special Recreational Vessels Bill 2019.

Senator Sterle to move on the next day of sitting:

Senator Waters to move on the next day of sitting:
That there be laid on the table by the Minister representing the Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction, by no later than 3 pm on 5 December 2019, the following documents:

(a) written justification for why the Department of the Environment and Energy (the Department) is using the 5% target instead of the up to 15% 2020 target for the second Kyoto Protocol period to calculate the size of their 2030 Paris Nationally Determined Contributions abatement task, as reflected on page 2 of the Climate Solutions Package brochure, and on page 10 of Australia's emissions projections 2018;

(b) written justification for why the Department is using the 5% target instead of the up to 15% 2020 target for the second Kyoto Protocol period to calculate the size of Australia's Kyoto carryover credits,
as reflected on page 2 of the *Climate Solutions Package* brochure, and on page 10 of *Australia's emissions projections 2018*;

(c) any correspondence, emails, meeting notes, memos or any other documentation relating to whether the conditions, as outlined in the Cancun Agreement and subsequent Doha Amendment, for a target of up to a 15% emissions reduction on 2000 emissions by 2020 have or have not been met; and

(d) any correspondence, emails, meeting notes, memos or any other documentation relating to the choice of 5% over up to 15% reductions by 2020 as the baseline for either the calculation of the 2021-2030 abatement task or the size of Australia's Kyoto Protocol period two carryover credits.

Senator Faruqi to move on the next day of sitting:

That the Senate—

(a) notes with deep concern that:

(i) over a hundred fires continue to burn across New South Wales,

(ii) data from the New South Wales Department of Environment shows harmful pollutants in Sydney's air are already over three times worse than at any moment in the past five years during bushfire season,

(iii) the toxicity of the air in some parts of Sydney is the equivalent of smoking between four and ten cigarettes a day,

(iv) particle pollution can trigger heart attacks, strokes, lung cancer and asthma attacks,

(v) New South Wales Health has stated that bushfires were to blame for an increase in people presenting to emergency departments with asthma and breathing difficulties, and

(vi) Mr Greg Mullins, the former chief of NSW Fire and Rescue, has stated that 'climate change has supercharged the bushfire problem' and that 'if anyone tells you this is part of a normal cycle or we've had fires like this before smile politely and walk away, because they don't know what they're talking about'; and

(b) calls on the Federal Government to protect the health of the people of New South Wales and declare a climate emergency.

Senators Siewert and Di Natale to move on the next day of sitting:

That the Senate—

(a) acknowledges that:

(i) First Nations peoples are the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land we call Australia,

(ii) 26 January marks over 230 years of on-going dispossession and oppression for First Nations peoples and is considered a day of mourning by many First Nations peoples,

(iii) by continuing to celebrate Australia Day on 26 January we deny the truth about our shared history, and

(iv) Australians come together and march on Invasion Day because they want to tell the truth about our shared history, and acknowledge the ongoing impacts of colonisation; and

(b) urges all Australians to:

(i) respectfully engage in conversations about what 26 January means to First Nations peoples, and

(ii) be in solidarity with First Nations people on this painful day by attending Invasion Day events in their regions.

Senator Brown to move on the next day of sitting:

That the Senate—
(a) recognises that a Tasmanian organisation, Loaves & Fishes, provides around 70% of emergency food relief in Tasmania, servicing over 200 community food programs and 38 school breakfast clubs;

(b) acknowledges that Loaves & Fishes applied for but were excluded from receiving emergency food relief funding from the Commonwealth Government on the basis they are a local Tasmanian organisation;

(c) recognises that Tasmania is the only State in the Commonwealth that does not have on-the-ground operations from all three emergency food relief providers that receive funding support from the Department of Social Services;

(d) notes that, without Commonwealth Government funding of $150,000 a year, Loaves & Fishes will have to close their Hobart operation which supports 134 community food programs in the region, and since July 2018, has distributed more than 300,000 kilograms of fresh produce and produced over 55,000 ready to eat meals;

(e) calls on the Federal Government to ensure that vulnerable Tasmanians and Tasmanian emergency food relief providers are not overlooked for Federal Government support; and

(f) requests that the Federal Government act swiftly to resolve this matter, and that funding to support Tasmanians in need flow immediately.

Senator Waters to move on the next day of sitting:

(1) That the Senate notes—

(a) the Bureau of Meteorology’s (the Bureau) 2019-20 severe weather outlook has indicated that ‘this summer there’s a higher chance of extreme heat developing across our inland with soils so dry and an outlook for clearer skies’;

(b) the Bureau has declared that the Murray-Darling Basin is experiencing the most severe drought conditions in 120 years of records;

(c) in New South Wales (NSW), more than 2 million hectares have been burnt by bushfires since 1 July this year, including more than 10% of the area covered by NSW’s national parks and reserves; and

(d) in Queensland, more than 170,000 hectares have been lost since the start of the bushfire season and more than 50 bushfires continue to burn across the state.

(2) That the State of the Climate 2018 report, authored by the CSIRO and Bureau of Meteorology, indicates that, as the climate crisis continues, Australia will see:

(a) a further increase in temperatures, with more extremely hot days and fewer extremely cool days;

(b) a decrease in cool-season rainfall across many regions of southern Australia, with more time spent in drought; and

(c) an increase in the number of high fire weather danger days and a longer fire season for southern and eastern Australia.

(3) That—

(a) we are in a climate emergency;

(b) the burning of coal, oil and natural gas is the major global contributor to the climate crisis; and

(c) this summer, more Australian lives are at risk from extreme heatwaves, bushfires and drought as a result.

Senator Davey to move on 4 February 2020:

That the following bill be introduced: A Bill for an Act to amend the Water Act 2007, and for related purposes. Water Act Amendment (Critical Drought Relief for the Southern-Connected Basin) Bill 2020. (general business notice of motion no. 354)
Senators McDonald, Canavan, McGrath, Rennick, Scarr and Stoker to move on the next day of sitting:

That the Senate—

(a) acknowledges all recent recipients of Australian Bravery Decorations;
(b) notes that the Bravery Medal is awarded for acts of bravery in hazardous circumstances;
(c) recognises the following Queensland recipients of the Bravery Medal: Miss Elizabeth Adams, Mr Craig Coleman, Sergeant Paul Cox, Mr Damond Gray, Mr Matthew Hassen, Mr Alan Lawry, and the late Mr Robert Pickersgill;
(d) notes that the Commendation for Brave Conduct is awarded for other acts of bravery which are considered worthy of recognition;
(e) recognises the following Queensland recipients of the Commendation for Brave Conduct: Mrs Vivienne Coleman, Warrant Officer Class Two James Cottle, Mr Robert Devlin, Mr Craig Hogarth, Mr Daniel McDonald, Mr Darryn Marshall, Sergeant Matthew O’Brien, Mr Roberto Serola, Mrs Kerry Seymour and Senior Constable Jay Shepherd;
(f) notes that the Group Bravery Citation is awarded for a collective act of bravery, by a group of persons in extraordinary circumstances that is considered worthy of recognition; and
(g) recognises the following Queensland recipients of the Group Bravery Citation: Constable Richard Adderley, Sergeant Agnelle Bagetti, Senior Constable Jason Banks, Mr Cyril Cairns, Mr John Collins, Senior Constable Dale Cook, Mr James Ferguson, Mr Samuel Fours, Master Vishaak Gangasandra, Dr Ashok Gangasandra Basavaraj, the late Mr Geoffrey Grant, Mr Christopher Holloway, Mr David Jefferson, Mr Michael Kindness, Mr Roy Koplick, Senior Constable Brendan O’Brien, Mr Richard Staples, Senior Constable Ashley Thompson and Mr John Verbeek.

Senator Keneally to move on the next day of sitting:

That there be laid on the table by the Minister representing the Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs, by no later than 12 pm on 9 December 2019, the detailed 2018-19 end of financial year reports for the migration, skilled temporary residents and visitors programs.

Senators McDonald and McMahon to move on the next day of sitting:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that:

(i) Australian farmers are highly productive, with each farmer producing enough food to feed 600 people, 150 at home and 450 overseas – feeding approximately 50 million people across the world each year,
(ii) Australia's Free Trade Agreements (FTA) give our primary producers and exporters preferential access into the growing markets across Asia,
(iii) the Federal Government's work to deliver FTA means that Australian farmers are poised to take advantage of the projected growth in Asia,
(iv) there is a high demand for Australia's safe and nutritious agricultural products across our international markets,
(v) trade has lifted the real income of Australian households by over $8400 a year, and
(vi) in 2017-18, the Australian red meat and livestock industry created employment for around 404,800 people, of these, just over 172,400 people were directly employed in the industry – the industry was also responsible for the employment of a further 232,400 people in businesses servicing the red
meat and livestock industry, and as this industry exports 60% of product, six in every ten jobs relies on our ability to trade with the world;

(b) congratulates the Federal Government on the entry into force of major FTA across north Asia, including:

(i) the China FTA which has resulted in beef exports totalling $1.75 billion in 2018–19 – a 75% increase from $1 billion in 2017-18; in November 2019 alone, Australia's chilled and frozen beef exports to China reached a new record high of 34,264 tonnes, 134% above November last year; dairy product exports totalling $1.7 billion in 2018-19 – a 54% increase from $1.1 billion in 2017-18,

(ii) the Japan FTA which has resulted in beef exports totalling $2.3 billion in 2018 – a 14% increase from $2 billion in 2017, cheese exports totalled $498 million in 2018 – a 17% increase over 2017, and

(iii) the Korean FTA which has resulted in beef exports totalling $1.37 billion in 2018 – a 25% increase from $1.1 billion in 2017;

(c) notes Indonesia's demand for Australia's quality clean, green produce will continue to be built on the back of demand from its increasingly affluent 260 million strong population – under IA CEPA, over 99% of Australian goods exports to Indonesia will enter duty free or under significantly improved and preferential arrangements; and

(d) supports the growth of Australian agriculture through the negotiation of preferential market access in export markets of the world.

Senator McKim to move on the next day of sitting:

That there be laid on the table by the Minister representing the Prime Minister, by the adjournment of the Senate on 5 December 2019, any communication, including attached documents, between ministers of the Government and Senator Lambie, or their staff, relating to negotiations between the aforementioned parties regarding the Migration Amendment (Repairing Medical Transfers) Bill 2019.

Senator McAllister to move on the next day of sitting:

(1) That a select committee, to be known as the Select Committee on Foreign Interference through Social Media, be established to inquire into and report on the risk posed to Australia's democracy by foreign interference through social media, with particular reference to:

(a) use of social media for purposes that undermine Australia's democracy and values, including the spread of misinformation;

(b) responses to mitigate the risk posed to Australia's democracy and values, including by the Australian Government and social media platforms;

(c) international policy responses to cyber-enabled foreign interference and misinformation;

(d) the extent of compliance with Australian laws; and

(e) any related matters.

(2) That the committee present its final report on or before the second sitting day of May 2022.

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

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

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

(c) one nominated by minor party and independent senators.

(4) That:

(a) participating members may be appointed to the committee on the nomination of the Leader of the Government in the Senate, the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate or any minority party or independent senator; and
(b) participating members may participate in hearings of evidence and deliberations of the committee, and have all the rights of members of the committee, but may not vote on any questions before the committee.

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

(6) That the committee elect as chair one of the members nominated by the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and as deputy chair one of the members nominated by the Leader of the Government in the Senate.

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

(8) That, in the event of an equality of voting, the chair, or the deputy chair when acting as chair, have a casting vote.

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

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

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

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

Senator Keneally to move on the next day of sitting:

(1) That the Senate notes:

(a) that Australia has the second-largest migrant workforce in the world;

(b) that, according to Australian Population Research Institute, almost a fifth of the nation’s cleaners, store packers, and food and hospitality workers are on temporary migrant visas, and the number of migrants on the visas has jumped from 1.8 million to 2.2 million in the past four years;

(c) that due to their temporary status and threats of deportation, migrant workers are more often subject to exploitation, wage theft and even physical and sexual abuse; and

(d) as the Chair of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Migration, Mr Wood, stated ‘Organised crime and illegitimate labour hire companies are using this loophole to bring out illegal workers who are often vulnerable and open to exploitation. This represents an orchestrated scam that enables these criminal elements to exploit foreign workers in Australia until their claims are finalised’.

(2) That a select committee, to be known as the Select Committee on Temporary Migration, be established to inquire into and report on the impact temporary migration has on the Australia's economy, wages and jobs, social cohesion and workplace rights and conditions, with particular reference to:

(a) government policy settings, including their impact on the employment prospects and social cohesion of Australians;

(b) the impact of temporary skilled and unskilled migration on Australia's labour market;

(c) policy responses to challenges posed by temporary migration;
whether permanent migration offers better long-term benefits for Australia's economy, Australian workers and social cohesion;

e) the impact of wage theft, breaches of workplace rights and conditions, modern slavery and human trafficking on temporary migrants; and

(f) any related matters.

(3) That the committee present its final report on or before the second sitting day of May 2022.

(4) That the committee consist of five senators, as follows:

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

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

(c) one nominated by minor party and independent senators.

(5) That:

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

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

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

(7) That the committee elect as chair one of the members nominated by the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and as deputy chair one of the members nominated by the Leader of the Government in the Senate.

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

(9) That, in the event of an equality of voting, the chair, or the deputy chair when acting as chair, have a casting vote.

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

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

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

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

Senator Kitching to move on 4 February 2020:

That the following bill be introduced: A Bill for an Act to enable Australia to impose sanctions to promote compliance with international human rights law and respect for human rights or to deter significant corruption, and for related purposes. International Human Rights and Corruption (Magnitsky Sanctions) Bill 2020.

Senator Hanson-Young to move on the next day of sitting:
That the Senate—
(a) notes that mismanagement, water theft and allegations of corruption have undermined confidence in the Murray-Darling Basin Plan;
(b) rejects the National Party's and Mr Barnaby Joyce's assault on the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, the environment and South Australia; and
(c) calls on the Federal Government to support the delivery of water to South Australia under the Murray-Darling Basin Plan which is necessary for the survival of the River and the Lower Murray, and the communities that rely upon it.

Senator Gallagher to move on the next day of sitting:
That the Senate—
(a) notes the Morrison Government's consistent failure in 2019 to uphold its own Statement of Ministerial Standards or to be an open, transparent and accountable government in line with the expectations of the Australian community on matters, including:
(i) Prime Minister Morrison's inappopriate contact with the New South Wales Police Commissioner regarding a criminal investigation into a member of his Cabinet, the Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction, Mr Taylor,
(ii) Prime Minister Morrison's refusal to confirm whether he invited the head of the Hillsong Church, Pastor Brian Houston, to a state dinner in Washington DC,
(iii) Prime Minister Morrison's refusal to uphold his own ministerial standards for former Ministers Pyne and Bishop,
(iv) Prime Minister Morrison's refusal to require Mr Gladys Liu, MP, to make a full and frank statement to the Parliament,
(v) Minister Taylor's and Minister Frydenberg's involvement in the 'grasslands' affair,
(vi) Minister Taylor's use of falsified information in correspondence to the Lord Mayor of Sydney,
(vii) Minister Porter's appointments to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal,
(viii) Minister Hunt's awarding of MRI licences in South Australia, and
(ix) Minister Dutton's awarding of the $423 million Paladin contract; and
(b) expresses its disappointment in the Morrison Government's ongoing disregard for its Statement of Ministerial Standards, the conventions of our parliamentary system of government, and the expectations of the Australian community for integrity and accountability in government.

Postponement
The Clerk: Postponement notifications have been lodged in respect of the following:
Business of the Senate notice of motion no. 2 standing in the name of Senator Brown for today, proposing the disallowance of the Marine Order 47 (Offshore industry units) 2019, postponed till 4 February 2020.

BUSINESS

Leave of Absence

Senator DEAN SMITH (Western Australia—Government Whip in the Senate) (15:46): by leave—I move:
That leave of absence be granted to Senator Payne for today and 5 December 2019, on account of ministerial business.
Question agreed to.
BILLS

Transport Security Amendment (Testing and Training) Bill 2019
National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2019

First Reading

Senator DUNIAM (Tasmania—Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries and Assistant Minister for Regional Tourism) (15:47): I indicate to the Senate that these bills are being introduced together. After debate on the motion for the second reading has been adjourned, I will be moving a motion to have the bills listed separately on the Notice Paper as indicated on today's Order of Business. I move:

That the following bills be introduced: A Bill for an Act to amend legislation relating to transport security, and for related purposes.
A Bill for an Act to amend the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011, and for related purposes.

Question agreed to.

Senator DUNIAM: I present the bills and move:

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

Question agreed to.

Bills read a first time.

Second Reading

Senator DUNIAM (Tasmania—Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries and Assistant Minister for Regional Tourism) (15:48): I table the explanatory memorandum relating to the bills and move these bills be now read a second time. I seek leave to have the second reading speeches incorporated in Hansard.

Leave is granted.

The speeches read as follows—

TRANSPORT SECURITY AMENDMENT (TESTING AND TRAINING) BILL 2019

Australia's transport sector is one the safest and most secure in the world. However the sector remains an enduring target for terrorists, and we need to do all we can to ensure that security arrangements are robust and responsive to this threat.

The Transport Security Amendment (Testing and Training) Bill 2019 (the Bill) amends the Aviation Transport Security Act 2004 (the Aviation Act) and the Maritime Transport and Offshore Facilities Security Act 2003 (the Maritime Act) to improve the effectiveness of screening at Australia's security controlled airports and security regulated ports.

The Bill does this in two ways. Firstly, it improves the capacity of aviation security inspectors to perform their important work in testing aviation industry participants' security systems. Secondly, it will establish the framework needed to introduce a national standard of competency of aviation and maritime screening personnel.

Aviation security inspectors play a pivotal role in ensuring Australia's aviation security systems remain resilient against terrorist attacks. Inspectors test airport security systems to ensure that security obligations are being met by aviation industry participants. These tests probe for potential weak points in aviation security arrangements, and in doing so ensure that the Department of Home Affairs can act to ensure security arrangements continue to be fit for purpose. This Bill introduces measures to clarify
the ability of aviation security inspectors to carry out this important work. In particular, inspectors will be able to conduct system tests with test pieces at locations beyond screening points in an airport terminal, without the risk of committing an offence against other laws.

This means that the Department will be able to expand system tests to cover a wider range of locations, security measures and aviation industry participants. For example, following passage of the Bill aviation security inspectors will expand their testing regime to include air cargo examination and catering facilities.

In addition to strengthening the ability of aviation security inspectors to fulfil their important role, we must also ensure that we have in place sound education and training requirements for security screeners.

Security screeners perform a vital role in securing our airports and seaports. They prevent weapons, such as firearms or explosives, from making it onto an aircraft or cruise ships, ensuring we can all travel safely and securely.

The Transport Security Amendment (Testing and Training) Bill 2019 will ensure that the education, training and testing requirements for screeners remain effective and flexible in an increasingly complex security environment. It will establish the necessary framework so that screeners are well equipped to respond to threats now and into the future.

This Bill introduces measures allowing the Secretary of the Department of Home Affairs to prescribe the requirements associated with screeners' training, qualification and accreditation. This will allow screener requirements to be adapted efficiently in response to rapid changes in the security environment, creating a more flexible and agile workforce.

This measure responds to a 2016 Inspector of Transport Security inquiry into aviation and maritime transport security. The Inquiry highlighted a need for a specialised qualification, the introduction of national accreditation tests, on-the-job training, and continuing professional development for screening personnel. The Bill also introduces measures explicitly requiring screeners to have completed relevant training or accreditation before exercising certain powers. Currently, certain screening powers are automatically granted to screeners. This change will support industry by developing an environment where individuals can screen in some tasks when competent, while still completing training in more challenging functions.

Collectively, the amendments in this Bill will further strengthen security at Australia's airports and seaports. The Bill will assist in ensuring the safety of the thousands of Australians and international travellers who transit our ports of entry and departure daily.

I commend this bill to the Senate.

NATIONAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING REGULATOR AMENDMENT BILL 2019

Today I introduce the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2019.

The Australian vocational education and training (VET) sector delivers outstanding education and training through a variety of institutions, through public and private registered training organisations (RTOs), within universities, and schools. It is a dynamic and responsive sector that supports millions of students to obtain the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in an ever-changing economy. It provides flexible opportunities to engage in education and training as a starting point to a career pathway or as a solution to upskill or re-skill.

That is why last year this Government committed $18.1 million to support reform of the national VET regulator, the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA), to improve its engagement with the sector, and increase its focus on training excellence over a minimum standards compliance regulatory approach. This Bill is the first tranche of changes to ASQA as we move the agency towards a more transparent and balanced regulator that builds quality and capacity in the VET sector.
ASQA has a wide range of legislated responsibilities important to the success of the Australian VET sector, including registering and monitoring some 4,000 RTOs, accrediting courses, undertaking compliance audits, collecting and distributing information about VET and taking appropriate regulatory actions. It is important that we have a trusted, respected and independent regulator that takes action to protect students and ensure confidence in the quality of training.

This bill responds to recommendations from both the 2018 Braithwaite Review into ASQA’s primary legislation and the 2019 Joyce Review into vocational education and training, to ensure the legislation is fit for purpose and supports ASQA and the sector in delivering quality VET services.

To this end, the Bill strengthens registration requirements for RTOs to ensure only those RTOs genuinely committed and adequately resourced are able to operate in the sector. As such, organisations applying to ASQA to become registered will be aware of the high expectations placed on them and the need to show they are prepared and committed to providing high quality training from the first day their doors open and throughout their registration. Further, the Bill introduces a new requirement on RTOs to notify ASQA when significant changes to their business are likely to occur. This will ensure ASQA has better and more timely information about a RTO's operations, assisting ASQA to mitigate risks to students and VET quality.

Improving the transparency of ASQA’s regulatory actions will ensure the sector has confidence in the ability of the regulator to make appropriate, consistent and proportionate regulatory decisions. To achieve this, the Bill provides for the publication of audit reports, expands information entered on the publicly available National Register as well as enabling ASQA to share information electronically with others responsible for administering laws relating to VET. ASQA will also be able to authorise the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) to disclose information that would reasonably inform a person's choice to enrol in VET and that would encourage compliance or improvement in training quality. In addition, the Secretary of the Department responsible for VET will be able to release information on students' and employers' experiences of training provided by RTOs. This information will assist students in making informed enrolment decisions and provide employers with better information about training quality. Combined, these measures will ensure students are informed and protected through the availability of consistent and transparent information about RTO services and ASQA's regulatory assessments of training organisations.

To improve the efficiency and effectiveness of ASQA's operations the Bill makes amendments to enable ASQA to request documents in electronic form and expands its powers to use enforceable undertakings to take action against a RTO where it deems an undertaking is more effective, aligning it with similar powers of other regulatory regimes. In addition, ASQA will have powers to stay regulatory decisions if a RTO seeks internal review by ASQA, providing flexibility to support training delivery so students' studies are not interrupted during a review process.

To ensure the Minister responsible for VET is able to respond effectively to sector issues, the Bill clarifies the nature of directions the Minister may issue to ASQA to improve its regulatory processes. This will assist the Minister to support and direct ASQA without impinging on the statutory independence of the regulator.

Improvements to the efficiency of the NVETR Act will enable a simpler and faster acting appointment process for ASQA Commissioners. The Chief Commissioner is ASQA’s Chief Executive Officer, so there is a high risk of complications if unexpected circumstances mean that there is a vacancy in that office. The Bill will enable the Minister to appoint a Commissioner to act as Deputy Chief Commissioner during a vacancy in the office or whilst the Deputy Chief Commissioner is absent from duty. As a result, the Deputy or acting Deputy Chief Commissioner will automatically act as the Chief Commissioner where there is a vacancy in the office of the Chief Commissioner. Further, the Minister may also appoint an acting Commissioner. These changes will improve appointment timeframes to ensure ASQA can continue to operate effectively and with a quorum.
The Bill also aligns ASQA reporting requirements with broader Commonwealth requirements. Currently information required in the annual operational plan is also required in the corporate plan pursuant to the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013. The Bill will remove the duplication and allow the corporate plan to reflect the most current information for the plan to take effect from 1 July annually. The Bill also makes minor administrative changes to update definitions and streamline the operation of the Act.

A quality vocational education and training sector protects students, is responsive to industry, has a strong and balanced regulator and supports students to obtain the skills they need to succeed in a modern economy. This Bill is a critical element in the Government's reform to ASQA's regulatory approach and will improve confidence in the regulation of training across the sector. It will ensure ASQA has the legislative support to continue to be an effective and responsive regulator. Streamlining processes, increasing scrutiny of new entrants to the market and ensuring ongoing capacity to deliver quality training will benefit Australia's VET sector. Improvements to transparency of information and access will assist VET students to make informed decisions about their future and will provide better oversight for ASQA to monitor RTO activities. This Bill supports the continuous commitment of this Government to improve regulation and quality of the VET sector.

Ordered that further consideration of the second reading of these bills be adjourned to the first sitting day of the next period of sittings, in accordance with standing order 111.

Ordered that the bills be listed on the Notice Paper as separate orders of the day.

MOTIONS

**Australian of the Year Awards**

Senator DEAN SMITH (Western Australia—Government Whip in the Senate) (15:48): I, and also on behalf of Senators Sterle, Pratt, Lines, Dodson, O'Sullivan and Brockman move:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that the 2020 Australian of the Year Awards finalists were announced on 13 November 2019;

(b) notes that the Australian of the Year Awards has four categories, including Young Australian of the Year, which celebrates exceptional 16 to 30 year-olds who have succeeded from all different walks of life;

(c) recognises the 2020 WA Young Australian of the Year nominee, Mr Yarlalu Thomas, a Nyangumarta Pitjikarli man from Warralong, south-east of Port Hedland, Western Australia; and

(d) congratulates the other nominees from Western Australia:

(i) Ms Annie Fogarty, AM, of the Fogarty Foundation, Perth, nominated for 2020 WA Australian of the Year,

(ii) Professor John Newnham, AM, of the University of Western Australia, Perth, nominated for 2020 WA Senior Australian of the Year, and

(iii) Ms Suzy Urbaniak of the CoRE Learning Foundation, Victoria Park, nominated for 2020 WA Local Hero.

Question agreed to.

**Dairy Industry**

Senator HANSON (Queensland) (15:49): I seek leave to amend general business notice of motion No. 327 standing in my name for today relating to the Australian dairy industry, and the attendance of a minister.
Leave granted.

Senator HANSON: I move the motion as amended:

(1) That the Senate notes that—

(a) the number of registered Australian dairy farms has fallen from 5699 in July 2018 to 5200 at present;

(b) milk production has fallen from 12 billion litres in 2000 to 8 billion litres in 2019;

(c) dairy foods play an important part in Australia's food security and human health;

(d) none of the recommendations contained in the final report of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's Dairy Inquiry, dated April 2018, have been implemented;

(e) Australia is forecast to import more dairy products than it exports by 2023;

(f) four foreign-owned milk processors control an increasing proportion of milk production in Australia setting the price at the farm gate, and that during the period 2013 to 2017, these processors had revenues in Australia of over $160 billion but paid less than $160 million in income tax or a rate of less than 1%;

(g) the main dairy export countries, including New Zealand which is the largest dairy exporter in the world, have a regulated farm gate milk price;

(h) regulation of farm gate milk prices is correlated with growth in milk production and increasing exports, whereas Australia's export of dairy products has been in decline;

(i) on 11 November 2019, the Federal Government voted against the Protecting Australian Dairy Bill 2019; and

(j) on 2 December 2019, the Federal Government voted against debating the Saving Australian Dairy Bill 2019.

(2) That the Senate requires the Minister for Agriculture to attend the Senate on Thursday, 5 December 2019, at 3.30pm, to provide an explanation of no more than 10 minutes of the Government's plan to save the dairy industry from long-term decline.

(3) At the conclusion of the explanation, any senator may move to take note of the explanation.

(4) Any motion under paragraph (3) may be debated for no longer than 60 minutes, shall have precedence over all business until determined, and senators may speak to the motion for not more than 10 minutes.

Senator RICE (Victoria) (15:49): I seek leave to make a short statement.

The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

Senator RICE: The Greens do not agree with every aspect of this motion. We've been speaking to farmers across the country and we know from them that it's a complex issue and there are a range of views. Some farmers oppose re-regulation and don't want a price floor and are concerned about competition from New Zealand. The Greens want to see an approach that addresses the varied needs of dairy farmers across the country rather than knee-jerk reactions to respond to a single subsector of the broader dairy industry. But we will support this motion because we don't want to see inaction. It's taken far too long for the coalition to address the price crash of 2016, and, as the motion correctly recognises, none of the recommendations of the ACCCC report from 2018 have yet been implemented. The government needs to pull its socks up and start making things happen.

Question agreed to.
DOCUMENTS

Education and Employment References Committee Report: Government Response

Order for the Production of Documents

Senator URQUHART (Tasmania—Opposition Whip in the Senate) (15:51): Before moving general business notice of motion No. 328, I wish to inform the Senate that Senator Sheldon will also sponsor the motion. I, and also on behalf of Senator Sheldon, move:

That there be laid on the table by the Minister representing the Minister for Industrial Relations, by no later than 12.45 pm on 5 December 2019, the government's response to the report of the Education and Employment References Committee, *The people behind 000: mental health of our first responders*, tabled on 14 February 2019.

Senator DUNIAM (Tasmania—Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries and Assistant Minister for Regional Tourism) (15:51): I seek leave to make a short statement.

The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

Senator DUNIAM: The government is still considering and consulting with stakeholders on the report's recommendations. Therefore, the government is not in a position to table the response to the report at this time.

Question agreed to.

MOTIONS

Australian Public Service

Senator GALLAGHER (Australian Capital Territory—Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate) (15:52): I move:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that:

(i) the Australian Public Service (APS) performs an essential role, from protecting our national security to supporting the most vulnerable members of our community,

(ii) the APS is an enduring institution in our democratic system that exists to serve the government of the day but remains impartial in its delivery of frank and fearless advice, and

(iii) for the APS to continue to meet the needs of the Australian community and adapt to a changing environment, it will need strong leadership, cultural change and long-term vision from governments of both political persuasions;

(b) notes that the Independent Review of the APS, the 'Thodey Review', touted as a 'once in a generation review', is yet to be released despite being received by the Federal Government two months ago; and

(c) calls on the Federal Government to release the 'Thodey Review' to the public before the end of 2019.

Question agreed to.
Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry

Order for the Production of Documents

Senator ROBERTS (Queensland) (15:52): I move:

That there be laid on the table by the Assistant Minister for Superannuation, Financial Services and Financial Technology, by 9.30 am on 5 December 2019, the draft response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Financial Services that relate to the Banking Code of Practice enforceable provisions and penalties for non-compliance.

Senator DUNIAM (Tasmania—Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries and Assistant Minister for Regional Tourism) (15:52): I seek leave to make a short statement.

The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

Senator DUNIAM: The government's response to the final report of the Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry was released on Monday 4 February 2019, three days after the final report was presented to the government. It's publicly available on the Treasury website. The government is taking action on all 76 recommendations contained within the royal commission's final report and, in a number of important areas, is going even further.

Question agreed to.

Defence Facilities: Chemical Contamination

Order for the Production of Documents

Senator ROBERTS (Queensland) (15:53): I seek leave to amend general business notice of motion No. 333 standing in my name for today proposing an order for the production of documents concerning PFAS and the results of blood and genetic testing on humans and livestock.

Leave granted.

Senator ROBERTS: I move the motion as amended:

That there be laid on the table by the Minister for Defence, by 10 am on 4 February 2020, blood and/or genetic testing on humans and livestock, that:

(a) was taken within the contamination zones, including private land, related to RAAF Base Richmond, RAAF Base Williamtown and Williamtown Airport;
(b) shows the level of per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS);
(c) is the actual testing result for each test taken or a facsimile thereof;
(d) are all the tests taken within the last 24 months; and
(e) has any personal information redacted.

Senator FARUQI (New South Wales) (15:54): Mr President, I seek leave to make a short statement.

The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

Senator FARUQI: Communities around Australia are living with the toxic legacy of PFAS contamination in their water, in their soil, in and around their environment. People have
already lost so much. They are at breaking point. The impacts have been financial, physical and mental. They are stressed and distressed at the lack of action. The government is really dragging its heels and it's extending the suffering of the people around Australia who are living around these sites. I think the lack of empathy the government is showing is really despicable. It has been a year since the committee put out strong recommendations to the government, and the government has not responded to them. The government needs to take action immediately. We haven't heard a thing from you lot for a year. For once, do your job, take responsibility and show some empathy and compassion for the people who are owed it.

Question agreed to.

**COMMITTEES**

**Northern Australia Agenda Select Committee**

**Appointment**

Senator URQUHART (Tasmania—Opposition Whip in the Senate) (15:55): At the request of Senator Watt, I move:

That paragraph (5) of the resolution of the Senate of 4 July 2019, appointing the Select Committee on the effectiveness of the Australian Government's Northern Australia agenda, be amended to provide: That 3 members of the committee constitute a quorum of the committee, provided that the quorum shall include one Government member and one Opposition member.

Question agreed to.

**Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee**

**Reporting Date**

Senator DEAN SMITH (Western Australia—Government Whip in the Senate) (15:55): At the request of Senators Carr and Stoker, I move:

That the time for the presentation of the report of the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee on the provisions of the Native Title Legislation Amendment Bill 2019 be extended from 28 February 2020 to 16 April 2020.

Question agreed to.

**DOCUMENTS**

**Census: Gender and Sexuality Questions**

**Order for the Production of Documents**

Senator RICE (Victoria) (15:56): I move:

(1) That the Senate notes that:

(a) in briefings prepared for the Assistant Treasurer, the Australian Bureau of Statistics indicated that the October 2019 field test for the 2021 Census would include questions on sexual orientation and gender identity;

(b) the Australian Statistician has given evidence to the Economics Legislation Committee that the Assistant Treasurer, or his office, expressed a preference about the use of forms without questions on sexual orientation or gender identity in the field trial; and

(c) the October 2019 field trial proceeded without questions on sexual orientation or gender identity.
2. That there be laid on the table by the Minister representing the Assistant Treasurer, by no later than 2 pm on 5 December 2019, all communications to the Australian Bureau of Statistics from the Assistant Treasurer, or his office, in relation to these questions, including any reasons for not proceeding with these questions in the field trial.

Senator DUNIAM (Tasmania—Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries and Assistant Minister for Regional Tourism) (15:56): I seek leave to make a short statement.

The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

Senator DUNIAM: The ABS did not seek a decision from the minister on the operation of the census test. The Australian Statistician is responsible for determining the content and the objectives of the testing program for the census. Advice from the ABS to the minister on the census test and census were tabled in the Senate last week under an OPD from Senator Rice.

Question agreed to.

**MOTIONS**

**Immigration Detention**

Senator RICE (Victoria) (15:57): I move:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that:

(i) two gay Saudi journalists are currently being detained by the Australian Government after fleeing their home country where homosexuality is punishable by death,

(ii) it is reported that the two men were outed by their own government after contact with foreign media, and feared death and torture, and

(iii) the men have drawn similarities between their treatment in Saudi and their treatment in Australian detention – they have allegedly been threatened with violence from other detainees in the centre and been intimidated by guards; and

(b) calls on the Australian Government to:

(i) acknowledge the increased risk these men face being held in detention due to their sexuality, and

(ii) expedite the assessment process for these two journalists and ensure their safety while their claims for asylum are assessed.

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

The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

Senator DUNIAM: It is the longstanding practice of successive governments not to comment on individual cases. Australia takes its international obligations seriously, and any claim for asylum is assessed in accordance with those obligations.

Question agreed to.

**Domestic and Family Violence**

Senator WATERS (Queensland) (15:57): I move:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that:
(i) the overall national toll for women killed by violence since the start of 2019 now stands at 51, as reported by Counting Dead Women Australia from Destroy The Joint,
(ii) there is no national government reporting program to record the ongoing toll of women killed by violence in real time,
(iii) on average, one woman is murdered every week by her current or former partner,
(iv) according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety Survey 2016:
   (A) more than 370,000 Australian women are subjected to violence from men each year,
   (B) 1 in 3 Australian women has experienced physical violence,
   (C) 1 in 5 Australian women has experienced sexual violence,
   (D) 1 in 6 Australian women has experienced physical or sexual violence by a current or former partner,
   (E) 1 in 4 Australian women has experienced emotional abuse by a current or former partner,
   (F) Australian women are nearly three times more likely than men to experience violence from an intimate partner, and
   (G) Australian women are 2.5 times more likely to be hospitalised for assault injuries arising from family and domestic violence than men, with hospitalisation rates rising by 23% since 2014-15,
(v) in 2017, young women aged between 15 and 34 accounted for more than half of reported sexual assaults,
(vi) there is growing evidence that women with disabilities are more likely to experience violence,
(vii) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women report experiencing violence at 3.1 times the rate of non-Indigenous women,
(viii) in 2016-17, Indigenous women were 32 times as likely to be hospitalised due to family violence as non-Indigenous women,
(ix) the Fourth Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022 states that the overall prevalence of violence against women will only start to decrease in the very long term as gender roles change, and
(x) the Fourth Action Plan recognises that demand for domestic and family violence services has increased, and will continue to increase; and
(b) calls on the Federal Government to:
(i) recognise domestic violence against women as a national security crisis,
(ii) adequately fund frontline domestic, family and sexual violence and crisis housing services to ensure that all women seeking safety can access these services when and where they need them,
(iii) legislate for 10 days paid domestic and family violence leave so that women do not have to choose between paying the bills and seeking safety,
(iv) ensure that all government-funded counselling services for domestic and family violence are delivered by expert family violence service providers, in accordance with the National Outcome Standards for Perpetrator Interventions,
(v) implement all 25 recommendations contained in the report of the Finance and Public Administration References Committee on domestic violence in Australia, tabled on 20 August 2015, and
(vi) maintain and publish an official real-time national toll of women killed by violence in Australia.
Senator DUNIAM (Tasmania—Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries and Assistant Minister for Regional Tourism) (15:58): I seek leave to make a short statement.

The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

Senator DUNIAM: The Morrison government is committed to preventing, addressing and ultimately ending family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia. Violence against women and children is an issue this government is responding to with the largest-ever Commonwealth investment of $340 million to support the Fourth Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children. Delivery of frontline domestic and family violence services is a matter for the state and territory governments.

Question agreed to.

Medical Workforce

Senator DI NATALE (Victoria—Leader of the Australian Greens) (15:58): I seek leave to amend general business notice of motion No. 341 standing in my name.

Leave granted.

Senator DI NATALE: I move the motion as amended:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that:

(i) there were 10.9 million medical ultrasound examinations funded by Medicare last year,

(ii) the outcome of an ultrasound is reliant on the competence and expertise of the sonographer,

(iii) sonographers are the only medical imaging profession not regulated in Australia, and

(iv) calls to have sonographers regulated under national law are supported by the Australasian Sonographers Association; and

(b) calls on the Federal Government to sponsor a submission from the Australian Sonographers Association to the COAG Health Council for consideration of the proposal for sonographers to be regulated by adding the profession to the list of imaging professions already regulated by the Medical Radiation Practice Board of Australia.

Question agreed to.

Department of Home Affairs: Visa Processing

Senator URQUHART (Tasmania—Opposition Whip in the Senate) (15:59): Before asking that the motion be taken as formal, I wish to inform the chamber that all opposition senators will sponsor the motion. I, at the request of Senator Keneally, and also on behalf of all opposition senators, move:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that:

(i) the Department of Home Affairs employs nearly 2000 dedicated and hardworking Australians to process visa applications across the country and the world,

(ii) this is crucial work that ensures the integrity of our visa processing system and is the cornerstone of our sovereignty as a nation,

(iii) the Federal Government’s plan to privatise Australia’s visa system threatens the livelihoods of thousands of Australians and their families, and
(iv) privatising Australia's visa system will lead to increased costs of visas, greater risks of worker exploitation, data security breaches and will make protecting national security more difficult;
(b) condemns the Federal Government for auctioning Australian jobs off to the highest bidder, and for undermining the integrity of our visa processing system and our nation's sovereignty; and
(c) calls on the Federal Government to guarantee the protection of the 2000 visa processing jobs which will be lost under the Morrison Government if they persist with their efforts to privatise Australia's visa system.

Senator DUNIAM (Tasmania—Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries and Assistant Minister for Regional Tourism) (15:59): I seek leave to make a short statement.

The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

Senator DUNIAM: Consistent with every time the opposition has moved this motion, I would like to advise that the government is not privatising decision-making. The Department of Home Affairs is conducting a tender process for a new workflow tool which will support digital visa application and decision-making. This modernisation process is necessary due to the continued exponential growth in visa applications, and these reforms are needed to reduce processing times and support high-quality decision-making on visas. This will ensure we can effectively manage national security threats at the border and support key export industries like tourism. The provider of the workflow tool will have no role whatsoever in visa decisions. This process is not being driven by a desire to reduce departmental staffing or cut costs. Claims that this process will lead to wholesale job losses and office closures are simply false.

Question agreed to.

BILLS

Telecommunications Amendment (Repairing Assistance and Access) Bill 2019

First Reading

Senator URQUHART (Tasmania—Opposition Whip in the Senate) (16:01): At the request of Senator Keneally, I move:

That the following bill be introduced: A Bill for an Act to amend the Telecommunications Act 1997, and for related purposes.

Question agreed to.

Senator URQUHART: I present the bill and 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 URQUHART (Tasmania—Opposition Whip in the Senate) (16:01): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I seek leave to table an explanatory memorandum relating to the bill.

Leave granted.

Senator URQUHART: I table an explanatory memorandum and I seek leave to have the second reading speech incorporated in Hansard.
Leave granted.

The speech read as follows—


This legislation – often referred to as the "encryption laws" in the media – empowered law enforcement and national security agencies to request, or compel, assistance from telecommunications providers in the course of their investigations.

Let me say from the outset that Labor always seeks to work in a bipartisan fashion, wherever possible, when it comes to ensuring Australia's national security.

This is why, in relation to the Assistance and Access Bill, Labor members of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security (PJCIS) worked diligently with their Liberal colleagues to complete as thorough a review as possible, and to make 17 substantial bipartisan recommendations to the legislation.

The PJCIS delivered this review and these recommendations, even though the Government curtailed the time available to the Committee and forced the legislation before the Parliament.

The Government insisted that these encryption laws were urgent and necessary to prevent terrorist attacks over the summer period and moved to pass them through the Parliament in the last sitting hours of December 2018.

In the interest of national security, Labor agreed to pass the Assistance and Access Bill on the last sitting day of 2018, but only with the commitment from the Government that it would move the amendments that reflected the bipartisan PJCIS recommendations when Parliament resumed in 2019.

This commitment was made by the Leader of the Government, Minister Cormann, as he spoke on the floor the Senate:

"I also confirm that the Government has agreed to facilitate consideration of these amendments in the New Year in Government business time. Finally, I also confirm that the Government supports, in principle, all amendments that are consistent with the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security (PJCIS) recommendations in relation to this bill. This will facilitate this bill becoming law without amendment, and I do support it on that basis."

We took the Government and the Minister at his word.

However, Minister Cormann and the Government did not keep that commitment when the Parliament resumed in February. Now in the final sitting week of 2019, it is quite clear the Government will not be moving the bipartisan PJCIS amendments it previously promised to support.

Labor maintained then, and maintains now, that the without these amendments, the encryption laws are flawed for a number of reasons.

In particular, the legislation hurts the Australian tech industry, as customers are less likely to seek out contracts with Australian companies due to the potential that they would be forced to introduce systemic weaknesses into their systems.

Our tech sector holds great potential for economic growth and job creation. The encryption laws are holding the tech sector back from achieving that potential.

Furthermore, the legislation as it currently stands may prevent Australia from reaching a bilateral CLOUD Act (Clarifying Lawful Overseas Use of Data) agreement with the United States.

Australia entered into formal discussions with the United States a few months ago to reach such an agreement, which would give Australian law enforcement and national security agencies timely access to information that is crucial to their investigations. Under current arrangements, it can take up to two years for Australian agencies to access such data.
For an agreement under the CLOUD Act to be approved, the US must determine that a partner country's laws appropriately protect privacy and civil liberties. The partner country's laws also should not introduce requirements for decryption of user data.

However, Congressman Jerrold Nadler, chairman of the US House of Representatives judiciary committee, wrote to the Minister for Home Affairs, the Hon. Peter Dutton MP, in October to express concerns about the Assistance and Access Act. He said Australia's encryption laws as they currently stand "may undermine your ability to qualify for an executive agreement under the CLOUD Act".

It is under these circumstances that we introduce this legislation to the Parliament.

The Telecommunications Amendment (Repairing Assistance and Access) Bill 2019 would amend the Telecommunications Act 1997 to conform with the bipartisan recommendations that emerged from an inquiry by the PJCIS, and introduce a judicial authorisation requirement to address concerns about the Act's compatibility with commitments required under the United States Government's CLOUD Act.

Specifically, the provisions of the Bill would do the following:

- Schedule 1 would repeal the definitions of election protection, systemic vulnerability, systemic weakness, or target technology, and clarify the actions that designated communications providers must not be requested or required to do in a technical assistance request, a technical assistance notice or a technical capability notice
- Schedule 2 would limit the actions required of designation communications providers by removing the phrase "but are not limited to" from the relevant provisions, and prevent the Minister for Home Affairs from determining additional acts or things that could be requested or required in a technical capability notice
- Schedule 3 would require the AFP Commissioner to not give approval for a technical assistance notice issued by the chief officer of an interception agency of a State or Territory unless the Commissioner is satisfied of certain things
- Schedule 4 would remove the ability of the Minister for Home Affairs to edit and delete information in relevant reports prepared by the Commonwealth Ombudsman
- Schedule 5 would introduce a judicial authorisation requirement that requires an eligible judge to approve the giving or varying of a technical assistance request, a technical assistance notice or a technical capability notice, and for that eligible judge to be satisfied of certain things before approving this giving or varying
- Schedule 6 would ensure that proposed variations to technical capability notices are assessed in the same way as proposed technical capability notices, and require the Attorney-General to authorise the designated communications provider to disclose specified technical capability notice information, except to the extent that disclosure would prejudice a particular investigation or prosecution and unless the Attorney-General determines that there are operational reasons for the disclosure not to be made

It is important to note that the majority of the amendments proposed in this Bill were agreed to by Government members of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security, and that Minister Cormann indicated to the Senate on 6 December 2018 that the Government would support them during the 2019 sitting year.

The amendments beyond the recommendations relate mainly to creating a judicial authorisation in the legislation. This serves two purposes – firstly, it would allow for greater oversight of the issuing of notices, and secondly, it would alleviate concerns raised by members of the United States Congress in relation to negotiations around a bipartisan CLOUD Act agreement.
The Parliament must always seek to strike the right balance on national security legislation. This means sensible and well-constructed laws that protect our community, without unnecessarily infringing on the private rights of citizens or stifling free debate and enterprise.

With the current laws, we do not have the balance right.

As it stands, the Act does not provide the correct tools for our law enforcement and national security agencies to help them protect our community, it threatens Australia’s tech industry and Australian jobs, and it undermines our relationships with key international strategic partners.

We do not suggest that these amendments will address all of the problems with the encryption laws that have been identified by industry, law enforcement agencies and other stakeholders.

Labor will continue to work closely with our intelligence and law enforcement agencies, industry and technology experts throughout the course of the current inquiry into the Assistance and Access laws being undertaken by the PJCIS.

However, the amendments proposed in this Bill are an important step towards repairing Australia’s encryption laws for the sake our national security and the growth of a key sector in our domestic economy and the jobs it could create.

As such, I commend this Bill to the Chamber, and call on my colleagues in the Government and the crossbench to join with Labor and support these sensible amendments.

Senator URQUHART: I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.

MOTIONS

New Skilled Regional Visas (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2019

Senator URQUHART (Tasmania—Opposition Whip in the Senate) (16:02): At the request of Senator Keneally, I move:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that:

(i) on 16 November 2019, applications opened for two new skilled regional visas – the Skilled Work Regional (Provisional) visa (subclass 491) and the Skilled Employer Sponsored Regional (Provisional) visa (subclass 494),

(ii) the New Skilled Regional Visa (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2019 (the Bill) is an important piece of legislation which would ensure that ‘holders of these provisional skilled regional visas will have the same access to welfare payments and government services as permanent visa holders where eligible’,

(iii) the Bill was introduced by the Federal Government into the House of Representatives on 31 July 2019,

(iv) the Bill passed the House of Representatives on 14 October 2019, and was introduced in the Senate on 17 October 2019, and

(v) to date, the Bill has remained without debate in the Senate for nearly two months;

(b) condemns the Federal Government for:

(i) failing both new Australians and our rural and regional communities through their mismanagement of their limited legislative agenda, and

(ii) prioritising the privatisation of Australia’s visa processing system over appropriately supporting current visa holders and the communities that they now call home; and

Leave granted; debate adjourned.
(c) calls on the Federal Government to properly consider and debate the New Skilled Regional Visas (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2019, as a matter of urgency.

Question agreed to.

Gambling

Senator GRIFF (South Australia) (16:02): Before moving general business notice of motion No. 345, I wish to inform the chamber that Senator Waters will also sponsor the motion. I, and also on behalf of Senator Waters, move:

That the Senate—
(a) notes that the 35th edition of the Australian Gambling Statistics, published by the Queensland Government Statistician's Office and released this week, show:
(i) $24.88 billion was lost by Australians in the year 2017-18,
(ii) over half of the total gambling losses came from pokies – with $12.52 billion lost, and
(iii) losses from the sports betting industry grew by 16.3% to $1.2 billion;
(b) further notes the response from Alliance for Gambling Reform chief advocate, Reverend Tim Costello, that there are direct connections in some instances between gambling harm and family violence and mental ill-health; and
(c) calls on the Federal Government to address gambling harm as a public health issue.

Question agreed to.

COMMITTEES

Economics References Committee
Reference

Senator WHISH-WILSON (Tasmania) (16:03): I seek leave to amend business of the Senate notice of motion No. 3 standing in my name for today, proposing a reference to the Economics References Committee concerning the review of foreign investment proposals.

Leave granted.

Senator WHISH-WILSON: I move the motion as amended:

That the following matter be referred to the Economics References Committee for inquiry and report by 7 September 2020:

The review of foreign investment proposals against the national interest test, with particular reference to:
(a) the protection of Australia's market-based system from manipulation that would benefit proposed foreign investment;
(b) the assessment of the impact of proposed foreign investment on market concentration and competition;
(c) the imposition of conditions on foreign investors;
(d) the extent to which the risk that foreign investment proposals are being used for money laundering is examined;
(e) the role of the Foreign Investment Review Board; and
(f) any other related matters.

Senator DUNIAM (Tasmania—Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries and Assistant Minister for Regional Tourism) (16:03): I seek leave to make a short statement.
The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

Senator DUNIAM: Foreign investment supports economic growth and expands trade and investment opportunities for both Australian and foreign businesses. The Foreign Investment Review Board assesses applications against the foreign investment framework, which strikes a balance between ensuring Australia remains an attractive investment destination, maintaining community confidence in foreign investment and protecting Australia's interests. In formulating its advice to the Treasurer, the board consults with other government agencies, such as national security agencies, the Critical Infrastructure Centre and the ATO. Where appropriate, the board will consider matters of market manipulation, concentration and competition in consultation with the ACCC and matters relating to money laundering in consultation with law enforcement agencies and AUSTRAC. We note that the Senate committee inquired into the foreign investment review framework between 2015 and 2016. The government's response was tabled on 28 March 2017 and addressed all recommendations in the report.

The PRESIDENT: The question is that business of the Senate motion No. 3 be agreed to.

The Senate divided. [16:09]

(The President—Senator Ryan)

Ayes ...................... 35
Noes ...................... 31
Majority ............... 4

AYES

Ayres, T
Carr, KJ
Ciccone, R
Dodson, P
Faruqi, M
Gallagher, KR
Griff, S
Hanson-Young, SC
Lambie, J
McKim, NJ
Patrick, RL
Pratt, LC
Roberts, M
Siewert, R
Steele-John, J
Urquhart, AE (teller)
Waters, LJ
Whish-Wilson, PS

NOES

Abetz, E
Askew, W
Bragg, A J
Canavan, MJ
Colbeck, R
Duniam, J

Antic, A
Birmingham, SJ
Brockman, S
Chandler, C
Davey, P
Fawcett, DJ
Question agreed to.

Pensions and Benefits

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (16:11): I move:
That the Senate—
(a) notes that:
(i) people living on Newstart and Youth Allowance find the festive season a particularly difficult time and they do not enjoy the same Christmas spirit as other Australians,
(ii) the low rates of payments means they are unable to afford gifts and the additional costs associated with the festive season, resulting in exclusion from participating in seasonal activities and events,
(iii) the social isolation and exclusion people feel when they cannot participate in their community or partake in family activities is devastating for their emotional and social well-being and sense of being part of the community, and
(iv) this situation is particularly hard for children; and
(b) calls on the Federal Government to immediately increase Newstart and Youth Allowance so that people in our community are not isolated and excluded.

Question agreed to.

Queensland: Urannah Water Scheme

Senator McGrath (Queensland—Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (16:11): I move:
That the Senate—
(a) notes that the Urannah Water Scheme will:
(i) increase water security for the Mackay, Isaac and Whitsunday regions,
(ii) provide a storage capacity of over 1.5 million megalitres,
(iii) generate electricity with a hydro-power plant, and
(iv) create new jobs in regional Queensland; and

(b) commends:

(i) Bowen Collinsville Enterprise, including its Chairman, Mr Paul McLaughlin and former Chairman, Mr David Evans, for their long and continued advocacy of the Urannah Water Scheme, and
(ii) the Federal Government for providing a $10 million grant to fund a detailed business case and Environmental Impact Statement of the Urannah Water Scheme.

The PRESIDENT: The question is that motion No. 325 moved by Senator McGrath be agreed to.

The Senate divided. [16:16]

(The President—Senator Ryan]

Ayes ....................34
Noes ....................31
Majority............3

AYES

Abetz, E
Askew, W
Bragg, A J
Canavan, MJ
Colbeck, R
Duniam, J
Ferravanti-Wells, C
Henderson, SM
Hume, J
McGrath, J
McMahon, S
O’Sullivan, MA
Rennick, G
Roberts, M
Ryan, SM
Seselja, Z
Stoker, AJ

Antic, A
Birmingham, SJ
Brockman, S
Chandler, C
Davey, P
Fawcett, DJ
Hanson, P
Hughes, H
McDonald, S
McKenzie, B
Molan, AJ
Paterson, J
Reynolds, L
Ruston, A
Scarr, P
Smith, DA (teller)
Van, D

NOES

Ayres, T
Brown, CL
Chisholm, A
Di Natale, R
Farrell, D
Gallacher, AM
Green, N
Kitching, K
McKim, NJ
Polley, H
Rice, J
Siewert, R
Steele-John, J
Urquhart, AE (teller)
Waters, LJ

Bilyk, CL
Carr, KJ
Ciccone, R
Dodson, P
Faruqi, M
Gallagher, KR
Hanson-Young, SC
McCarthy, M
O’Neill, D
Pratt, LC
Sheldon, A
Smith, M
Sterle, G
Walsh, J
Watt, M
Forestry

Senator DAVEY (New South Wales—The Nationals Whip in the Senate) (16:18): I, and also on behalf of Senators Henderson, O'Sullivan, Brockman, Abetz, Askew, Hughes, Rennick and Van, move:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that:

(i) the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which advised the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, stated in their 4th Assessment: 'A sustainable forest management strategy aimed at maintaining or increasing forest carbon stocks, while producing an annual sustained yield of timber, fibre or energy from the forest, will generate the largest sustained mitigation benefit',

(ii) all Australia’s native forests, including the Victorian native forest estate, are certified to the global standard of Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification, which is the world's largest certification scheme for forestry and is only available to countries that practise sustainable forest management,

(iii) on 7 November 2019, the Victorian Labor Government announced it will cease all native forest harvesting in state forests by 2030, stepping down production from 2024,

(iv) the annual economic impact on the native forestry value chain and regional communities is expected to be more than $297.3 million,

(v) more than 4700 workers, their families and communities will be negatively impacted as a result of the Victorian Labor Government's decision,

(vi) regional towns and communities across Victoria, including Orbost, Benalla, Heyfield, Noojee, Violet Town, Poweltown and Corryong, are likely to be negatively affected by this decision, and

(vii) this decision creates a disturbing precedent undermining confidence in communities relying on native forestry across Australia; and

(b) calls on all parties to:

(i) recognise the significant contribution the Victorian native hardwood forestry industry contributes to the economy and to rural and regional communities,

(ii) condemn the Victorian Labor Government for seeking to destroy the Victorian native timber industry and forestry workers right to earn a living, and

(iii) call on the Victorian Labor Government to listen to the regional communities directly affected, and reverse this decision.

The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

Senator GALLAGHER: Labor won’t be supporting this motion. We do support aspects—

Government senators interjecting—

Senator GALLAGHER: Well, if I could just finish. Labor supports aspects of the motion, including sustainable native forestry, but does not believe the best way to progress the forest industry is to play political points scoring in the Senate, because that’s the easy option and not what the forest industry wants or needs. The fact is we can all do better to support our forestry industry, and Labor does support the regional forestry agreements and does support calls for all governments to properly engage and undertake comprehensive consultation with affected communities with regard to the future of the forest industry.

Senator RICE (Victoria) (16:19): I seek leave to make a short statement.

The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

Senator RICE: This motion is a litany of untruths that ignores all the evidence that native forest logging is unsustainable, is uneconomic and has not got the support of the community. It contains the wild claim that there are 4,700 workers who will be affected, whereas the evidence shows that there are less than 1,000 jobs in native forest logging in Victoria, and hundreds of these are actually government jobs. This is compared to the thousands and thousands of people who have jobs in the plantation industry, reflecting the fact that almost 90 per cent of wood that comes from Australia comes from plantations. This motion misrepresents the IPCC report from 2007 and ignores their groundbreaking land report this year that says logging of high-carbon ecosystems, such as primary forests, would have large initial carbon losses and long payback times, and thus protection of stocks would be more optimal. But most importantly this motion ignores the reality that our forests are special and the community want to see them protected.

The PRESIDENT: The question is that motion No. 329 be agreed to.

The Senate divided. [16:22]

(The President—Senator Ryan)

Ayes .................... 35
Noes .................... 33
Majority .............. 2

AYES
Abetz, E
Askew, W
Bragg, AJ
Canavan, MJ
Colbeck, R
Duniam, J
Fierravanti-Wells, C
Henderson, SM
Hume, J
McDonald, S
McKenzie, B
Molan, AJ
Paterson, J

Antic, A
Birmingham, SJ
Brockman, S
Chandler, C
Davey, P
Fawcett, DJ
Hanson, P
Hughes, H
Lambie, J
McGrath, J
McMahon, S
O’Sullivan, MA
Rennick, G
Budget: Foreign Aid


Leave granted.

Senator FARUQI: I move the motion as amended:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that the Federal Government has announced a review of Australia’s foreign aid program;
(b) notes with concern that:

(i) Australia’s foreign aid budget has been cut by 27% since its peak in 2012-13, and is well below the average for countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD),
(ii) the Liberal Government cut $117 million from the aid budget in 2019-20 – if current trends continue, Australia’s foreign aid program will be in the bottom third of all OECD countries by 2020-21,
(iii) Australia’s current aid commitment stands at an abysmal 0.21% of Gross National Income (GNI), well below Australia’s United Nations obligation of 0.7% of GNI,
(iv) aid programs in south and east Asia have been cut drastically, and
(v) the Liberals' budget cuts and political repurposing of aid to serve Australia's self-interest have
decimated our foreign aid program;
(c) calls on the Federal Government to ensure the review is conducted independently and the
findings are shared publicly; and
(d) calls on the Federal Government to:
(i) increase our foreign aid budget to at least match Australia's UN obligation at 0.7% of GNI, and
(ii) use the review as an opportunity to reset their approach to foreign aid and put poverty
reduction, climate resilience and social justice at the heart of our foreign aid program.

Senator DUNIAM (Tasmania—Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries and
Assistant Minister for Regional Tourism) (16:25): I seek leave to make a short statement.

The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

Senator DUNIAM: The government is advancing Australia's national interests by
supporting a secure, stable, prosperous and resilient region, whilst securing Australia's future
through sound economic management. Our focus includes an emphasis on economic
partnerships in South-East Asia, where many countries are undergoing rapid economic
transformation, and we have made a record commitment of $1.4 billion in development
assistance for the Pacific this financial year. Unlike those opposite, whose approach has been
rejected at the 2013, 2016 and 2019 elections, the Morrison government will continue to
operate an affordable and targeted aid program that advances and responds to our national
interests.

The PRESIDENT: The question is that motion No. 334, as amended, be agreed to.
The Senate divided. [16:27]

(The President—Senator Ryan)

Ayes .................. 33
Noes .................. 35
Majority ............... 2

AYES

Ayers, T
Brown, CL
Chisholm, A
Di Natale, R
Farrell, D
Gallacher, AM
Green, N
Hanson-Young, SC
McCarthy, M
O'Neill, D
Polley, H
Rice, J
Siewert, R
Steele-John, J
Urquhart, AE (teller)
Waters, LJ
Whish-Wilson, PS

Bilyk, CL
Carr, KJ
Ciccone, R
Dodson, P
Faruqi, M
Gallagher, KR
Griff, S
Kitching, K
McKim, NJ
Patrick, RL
Pratt, LC
Sheldon, A
Smith, M
Sterle, G
Walsh, J
Watt, M
Climate Change: Public Health

Senator DI NATALE (Victoria—Leader of the Australian Greens) (16:29): I move:

That the Senate—

(a) acknowledges that the Australian Medical Association, the Royal Australasian College of Physicians, the Australian College of Emergency Medicine and the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine, representing more than 50,000 Australian doctors, have all declared climate change a public health emergency;

(b) recognises that these highly-respected health and medical organisations have stated that climate change now poses an unprecedented and deadly threat to human lives, and have urgently called on all governments to address the climate emergency by:

(i) expediting the transition from fossil fuels to zero emission renewable energy across all economic sectors, with support to affected communities,

(ii) developing and implementing a national climate change and health strategy based on the framework developed by the health sector, and

(iii) advancing comprehensive heat hazard reduction strategies to minimise heat exposure and sensitivity across Australia, paying particular attention to the needs of vulnerable populations;

(c) further acknowledges that, through the Climate and Health Alliance, more than 50 health, social welfare and conservation groups have joined together in an open letter to the Parliament, to highlight the unprecedented and profound threat of climate change on the health of people and the health system; and
(d) calls on the Federal Government to listen to the experts, and act now to follow the 965 jurisdictions in 18 countries that have already declared a climate emergency, and take the urgent actions required to protect human and environmental health.

**Senator DUNIAM** (Tasmania—Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries and Assistant Minister for Regional Tourism) (16:30): I seek leave to make a short statement.

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

**Senator DUNIAM:** The government is taking real and practical action with our Climate Solutions Package. The most recent data shows Australia's annual emissions are coming down and are lower than when we came to office in 2013. The government is opposed to the Greens policies to destroy jobs and the economy and increase cost-of-living pressures.

**Senator ROBERTS** (Queensland) (16:30): I seek leave to make a short statement.

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

**Senator ROBERTS:** We cannot support this motion because One Nation bases its conclusions on empirical data within a logical structure that proves causation. Appeals to name do not trump facts. We note sadly a recent court finding that the devastating 2011 Brisbane floods were due to mismanagement of dams. If the Premier of the day, Anna Bligh, had acted on empirical data, rather than on the unfounded scares of so-called experts like mammalian palaeontologist Tim Flannery, who convinced the nation that droughts were the new norm due to human-caused climate change, rather than what they really are—natural cyclical events—this disaster would never have happened.

I note that it is 93 days since we challenged Senator Di Natale to provide his empirical evidence proving human cause and that he continues to refuse to do so. It is nine years and two months since I first challenged Senator Larissa Waters to provide the same, and she fails to do so.

**The PRESIDENT:** The question is that motion No. 355 in the name of Senator Di Natale be agreed to.

The Senate divided. [16:34]

(The President—Senator Ryan)

Ayes ....................33
Noes ....................35
Majority ...............2

**AYES**

Ayres, T
Brown, CL
Chisholm, A
Di Natale, R
Farrell, D
Gallacher, AM
Green, N
Hanson-Young, SC
McCarthry, M
O'Neill, D
Polley, H
Rice, J
Siewert, R

Bilyk, CL
Carr, KI
Ciccone, R
Dodson, P
Faruqi, M
Gallagher, KR
Griff, S
Kitching, K
McKim, NJ
Patrick, RL
Pratt, LC
Sheldon, A
Smith, M
A letter has been received from Senator Hanson:

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

In light of the comments by the Governor of the Reserve Bank that, under certain circumstances, all options for unconventional monetary policy should be on the table, the need for the Senate to reassure everyday Australians that this will not include negative interest rates or bank bail-ins.

Is the proposal supported?

More than the number of senators required by the standing orders having risen in their places—
The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT: I understand that informal arrangements have been made to allocate specific times to each of the speakers in today's debate. With the concurrence of the Senate, I shall ask the clerks to set the clock accordingly.

Senator HANSON (Queensland) (16:36): At the Australian Business Economists dinner last week, the Governor of the Reserve Bank, Dr Philip Lowe, delivered a speech that officially declared 'unconventional monetary policy was highly unlikely in Australia'. What worries One Nation is that, in the Q&A after his speech, Dr Lowe changed his position and declared: 'If the economic indicators were moving away from the target, I think all options would need to be put on the table.' These options are called 'unconventional monetary policy'. That benign name masks a world of pain for everyday Australians.

The RBA's program would commence with the official interest rate reaching 0.25 per cent. The official interest rate is currently 0.75 per cent and is tipped to fall. We are likely to reach the RBA's trigger point in this term of government. Unconventional monetary policy includes bank bail-ins, where customer deposits are turned into shares in the bank. It includes negative interest rates, where people pay the bank to use their money. It includes quantitative easing, where money is printed and used to pump up the economy.

All of these things only work if people are no longer allowed to keep their money in cash. Cash prevents unconventional monetary policy from working. Suddenly, the Currency (Restrictions on the Use of Cash) Bill takes on a new significance. Is the government planning to introduce these measures or not? The Morrison government must guarantee the Australian people that they will never seek bank bail-ins and negative interest rates in this country. The Morrison government must also drop the cash ban legislation to stop demonising people who choose to use cash.

Senator BRAGG (New South Wales) (16:38): This is a great opportunity to talk about the role of our government versus the role of the central bank. The central bank is responsible for monetary policy. The Menzies government created a central bank in 1960 and, in the nineties, we made it independent. It is very clear to us on this side of the Senate who is in control of monetary policy, and it is the Reserve Bank of Australia. The Governor of the Reserve Bank recently said on our prospects that we are not in the same situation that has been faced in Europe and Japan. 'Our growth prospects are stronger, our banking system is much better, our demographic profile is better and we have not had a pattern of deflation, so we are in a much stronger position.'

But monetary policy isn't up to the central bank. We don't believe in bank bail-ins. We have had for some years a financial claims scheme, which was tinkered with as part of the Rudd government's panicked and, frankly, bizarre response to the global financial crisis. There's been a bit of revisionism of late, where people have talked about the Rudd government's response to the global financial crisis. People may recall that, initially, there was to be an unlimited bank guarantee, which resulted in a whole lot of market linked investments freezing overnight. Mr Rudd and Mr Swan had to later change that because of the enormous disruption it caused.

Of course, on the fiscal side, Labor panicked drastically in office and not only locked the budget into a fiscal straitjacket of deficits but also wasted enormous amounts of money, which we have spent six years trying to fix. We have spent six years trying to fix the budget. Our focus has been on two things: running our fiscal policy responsibly and trying to create...
conditions where the private economy can invest and create more jobs. It is not the
government that creates more jobs; it is the private economy. Our role in this place as a
government is to ensure that the private economy can invest and create new Australian jobs.

On the fiscal side, we have delivered two significant rounds of personal income tax cuts. We have addressed bracket creep. We have given people back more of their money. We've also cut company income tax. Company tax for small businesses will hit 25 per cent in 2025, down from 30 per cent. Perhaps the signature achievement of this government has been to fix the structural deficit. I give great credit to the Leader of the Government in the Senate, Senator Cormann, for grinding expenditure growth down to 1.6 per cent—the lowest level of expenditure growth in 30 years. Getting taxes down on the company side and the personal side whilst getting in control of expenditure has meant that our fiscal position as a nation is greatly enhanced.

The second thing we want to do is promote the growth of the market. We have, I believe, presided over the most successful period of Australian trade policy. When we were elected in 2013, just 26 per cent of our two-way trade was covered by free trade agreements. That is now 70 per cent. Labor, who inherited John Howard's negotiations with China and Japan, spent six long years failing to deliver these trade deals; the unions said they weren't allowed to do trade deals, because the unions are protectionists. Since 2013 we have done trade deals with China, Japan, Korea and Indonesia. We have recently concluded the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the RCEP trade deal. And our plans continue; we are still seeking a trade agreement with India and the European Union. We believe that bigger markets and greater opportunities for Australian exporters will ultimately create more Australian jobs.

On the industrial relations side, there have been significant achievements. The reason we seek to always improve the industrial relations system, the labour laws of this country, is we are interested in a more productive and more collaborative workplace—a workplace where businesses are happy to invest, knowing that it is a good environment to invest in. With capital being so mobile, there is no guarantee that businesses will invest in Australia and create more jobs. That's why, in the last parliament, we reinstated the Australian Building and Construction Commission, to try and rein in some of the lawlessness in the construction sector. That's why we created the Registered Organisations Commission and that's why we're committed to the ensuring integrity reforms, because we believe that wherever there is poor governance, whether in a bank or a union, it is the role of this parliament to legislate to protect people to ensure that the conditions are there so that people are happy to invest and create more jobs.

The consequence of the failure of this parliament to pass the ensuring integrity laws not only shows that the Labor Party are totally in the raptures of the unions; it also shows that the 30 per cent premium on construction in this country will continue to pay for the lawlessness, because the CFMMEU thinks that court fines are speeding tickets. Those opposite continue to defend unions who spend members' money on botox, weight-loss surgery and tattoos. Until we rein that in there will be another drag on the economy, where people will be, frankly, less inclined to invest.

On the small business side, we have unveiled significant policies. We now have the Business Growth Fund, which will invest between $5 million and $15 million of patient capital in SMEs that have a turnover of between $2 million and $100 million.
procurement side, we have unleashed very practical reforms. Thirty-five per cent of all contracts with the federal government up to $20 million are now delivered by small businesses. The total value of these contracts with SMEs has gone up from $12 billion to $16 billion over the last three years. That's a 29 per cent increase and, again, I pay tribute to the work of our Senate leader in ensuring that the Department of Finance is always looking to create opportunities for small- and medium-sized Australian businesses.

Moreover, we've also reduced the payment times to small businesses. The PM gave a speech to the Business Council just a couple of weeks ago, where he basically talked about the fact that if you were a small business and you were into e-invoicing then you could be paid within five business days—five business days! We all know that cashflow is king if you're running a small business, and we're doing absolutely everything we can as a government to improve the lot of small business.

Of course, the outlook would have been very different and we would not have been talking about stable fiscal policy focused on cutting taxes and expenditure, and also trying to foster the conditions for more private investment, if the Labor Party had won office. We would be looking at $387 billion in new taxes—new taxes as far as the eye could see. There would have been more new taxes than you could poke a stick at, to be frank. The retiree tax would have clobbered people who had saved for their retirements and, of course, the housing tax would have increased rents in places like Sydney, which I represent as a senator for New South Wales, by up to 10 per cent.

The logic behind this policy was—if you can believe this for more than a minute—that they would increase taxes on houses and that would create new houses. That is just absolutely remarkable logic. Of course, we can just fancy the economic result of trying to legislate almost $400 billion of new taxes in this economic environment. We are facing global headwinds and there has been a trade war. There are significant difficulties, but imagine the response of the private economy to these tax policies if the Labor Party had been elected? So this is a good opportunity to debate this question of the role of the central bank.

The central bank is an independent central bank, which the Liberal Party created in 1960. In the 1990s, we made sure that it was independent. We don't make monetary policy: the RBA makes monetary policy. Their decisions are up to them. We're in control of our fiscal policy and we're in control of always trying to foster more and more private investment by cutting taxes, doing trade deals, cutting unnecessary regulation and always trying to strive for better governance in our economy. If a bank goes wrong, we clinch them and if a union goes wrong, we clinch them, because we're not controlled by vested interests. We're only interested in improving the lot of the forgotten people, or the quiet Australians.

Senator GALLACHER (South Australia) (16:48): I too would like to contribute to this very important debate today.

I will have to remind Senator Bragg, and perhaps Senator Cormann, that they were elected in 2013. I think the electorate is a little tired of, 'If Labor were in, it'd be worse!' Or, 'If Labor had done this seven years ago it would be worse!' I think a more practical and effective evaluation of the situation would be that we have survived because of China's stimulus and a disaster or two in Brazil, which have kept our exports at a reasonably high level. And we've also had the benefit of a relatively low dollar. These things have protected the economy to a certain extent, but it is very true that consumer confidence is very low. We don't see the
headlines we normally see at this time of the year about the retail industry having a
tremendous Christmas, with an anticipated spend of hundreds of millions of dollars.

We're not seeing that for the simple reason that people took the tax cut and saved it. They
put it on their mortgage. Their income is not increasing. When they look at the world around
them, there is no confidence to spend. Confidence will always come from a well-led
government. They've had such a period of instability and change. Forget about the prime
ministerial changes; the changes in the ministerial portfolios have impacted on their
performance. Clearly, without the continuity of a minister for a number of years, departments
don't get set in the right place.

I accept some of the things that Senator Bragg has said about paying small business
efficiently and on time. It's a cracker of an idea, but I don't see any evidence it's actually
happening, as yet. Acting Deputy President Fawcett, with your assistance on the Foreign
Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee, we looked at stimulating regional
economies with defence spending. A very good report was produced and the government
acted on it—very sensible work. But what we found when we were going around during the
inquiry was that other people were better. The mining companies were sometimes better when
involved in a spend in a regional economy. The Singaporean spend is also readily discernible
in the regional economies. So it's not on to say that if that lot were in charge it would be
worse, or that if they hadn't done what they did seven years ago we would be in a worse
position. I think the 'protect your surplus at all costs' fetish will have unintended dire
consequences.

The Reserve Bank is saying that unconventional means may be necessary to stimulate the
economy. At least 13 economists—I have their names here—agree with the Reserve Bank
governor. They are saying that there may not be the capacity to do the big-ticket items that
Senator Canavan talked about in question time. The big-ticket items may be politically driven.
They might be the wrong ones to be doing and they may need long lead-in times. At the
moment, we should be doing ongoing augmentation of the infrastructure that is causing a lack
of productivity. We should be facilitating a spend on infrastructure right across the country, in
every state and territory, to make sure that we increase productivity, because productivity is
the central issue in the economy—and the lack thereof has increased. We know that if we can
increase productivity we can get wages, profits and tax receipts up. A lot of the decline in
productivity may be coming out of it being poorly maintained infrastructure or lacking in
improvements. There are people saying, very clearly, that we should be going into
infrastructure right across this country and maintaining the roads better, improving the rail
and improving the bridges. Take advantage of a quick spend on obvious problems that will
increase productivity in places.

I appreciate that we're going to do the bypass for Port Wakefield and duplicate the road to
Victor Harbor, and rightly so. As you know, Mr Acting Deputy President, that road is littered
with black crosses. Every tree down there has black crosses on it, so the sooner we do that
work, the better. But can we get that up and running quickly enough, or should we be looking
at smaller projects that would be, in Senator Bragg's estimation, delivering to small business?
When people do the work and get paid within five days or 28 days it would be spectacular.
That is putting real money into the economy, employing people and turning things around.
At the moment, there are plenty of people saying we're in unusual circumstances. Most times, when there's a global recession we get a haircut. There's a global recession this time but with Chinese stimulus and the disaster in Brazil we got an uplift in iron ore and respective prices. We're in unusual times. Holding onto the surplus at all costs is not going to be a winner for this government. On this side of the chamber we, rightly, have been calling for tax cuts to be advanced earlier, because the last lot disappeared. They didn't appear to give the stimulus they were expected to give. I accept that the honourable Mathias Cormann is probably one of the exemplars in performance terms in the Senate. He does an exemplary political job, and reputation would have it that he does an excellent job as a finance minister, too. I'm sure having to get up and defend the indefensible at times must grind in his guts, so to speak. He would know, and the advice he's getting from all quarters is that we need to move into a bit of stimulus spending. The real trick with stimulus spending is to spend it in improving productivity. But he has political masters, as we all do, and his job is to defend the surplus at all costs.

We'll get the MYEFO in December, and there will be a great trumpet blast of: 'We've achieved! We've delivered on our promise!' But if your promise is inflicting damage on the economy when you should be moving to increasing productivity and spending in the economy, it's a pyrrhic victory. It won't come back and reward you. I know the coalition think they can go to any election and say: 'They're bad spenders. We're savers.' I don't really think that people who are hurting are going to care who spends and who saves. In fact, they may care; they will probably go for the person who's going to spend. Those people on Newstart—there are plenty of people arguing that an increase to Newstart would create a stimulus. It would, because I don't think they could actually go and save that. I don't think they would go and find somewhere to put that extra $25, $35 or $75; it would go directly into their spending. I totally reject Senator Ruston's assertion that it would go to drug dealers and pubs. Most of those people would spend it on food and clothing and shelter. So if that was to be increased, fine.

I have a deep concern about the economy in that we have an unpaid superannuation bill that is enormous. People are not being given their rightful superannuation in this country, and the ATO is so slow at acting upon it that there are funds missing out of the retirement income of people. And if you go directly to the theme of the day, the wage theft, how is it possible that a major company like Woolworths can catastrophically fail in delivering wages to people? If those workers had got their wages in full and on time, those wages would have also gone into the economy and been spent.

These matters continue to challenge everybody in the community and, as they look to the government for a response, they say: 'We're going to save money at all costs. We're going to have a surplus at all costs. At the cost of people on Newstart, at the cost of people having their wages stolen and at the cost of disregarding competent advice from the Reserve Bank governor and up to 13 independent economists.' These economists simply say this: you improve productivity by finding the right projects, augmenting our roads, stopping people dying and being injured on our roads, fixing our rail, fixing our bridges. Don't go grandstanding about these great plans that sound like you're going to win three seats in Western Sydney; put some simple, proper projects in every state and in every territory. Improve the productivity of the nation, contribute effectively to the economy, and that
productivity increase will come back in increased tax returns, receipts to the government, and, hopefully, more employment and more disposable income for those people who participate in those projects. My plea to the government is to act now. Don't defend your surplus; act now and stimulate the economy.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Whish-Wilson, I was going to ask the consent of the Senate, given it's almost five o'clock, to go to Senator Bernardi's valedictory speech. If the Senate is willing to give me leave, we'll return to this matter immediately afterwards.

Senator WHISH-WILSON (Tasmania) (16:59): I was going to say something about Senator Bernardi—

Honourable senators interjecting—

Senator WHISH-WILSON: I was just going to say, with his erroneous question on socialism today, it's a very good time to discuss the MPI in relation to the role of government in our lives.

The PRESIDENT: I'm in the hands of the Senate. If you wish to proceed, you obviously have that—

Senator WHISH-WILSON: It's a very valid point to be making, considering this MPI and the serious academic discussion about the end of the monetary policy era, about what is the role of the government in our lives. Senator Bernardi, if the Greens are a party for having government play a big role in our lives and that makes us socialists, then I plead guilty. And I'd just like to thank One Nation for bringing this forward. People are surprised that One Nation have actually got a lot of socialist policies themselves. They're probably more aptly described as national socialists than as direct socialists. Nevertheless, we share so much in common when it comes to the role of government in our lives.

We're looking at a historic low cash rate of 0.75 per cent. We've got low productivity, we've got low wages growth, we've got an upturn in lending for housing and a downturn in lending for business. We had an excellent presentation today from one of the country's experts on monetary policy and where we go to from here, Dr Josh Ryan-Collins. I recommend his writings to anyone who is interested in this debate.

I seek leave to continue my remarks later. Given there's such a large audience here for Senator Bernardi, I don't want to take any more time.

Leave granted; debate interrupted.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The PRESIDENT (17:00): I take this opportunity to acknowledge and welcome former government Senate leader Nick Minchin. Welcome back to the Senate.

PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION

Valedictory

Senator BERNARDI (South Australia) (17:00): A month or so ago I turned 50 and my mother gave me my secondary school reports. To be frank, reading them only highlighted just how incredible it is that I am actually a senator at all. The teachers' comments were basically code for 'Your son is an opinionated pain in the backside.' Not much has changed, some might think. It was clear that I was a rebel of sorts, albeit I didn't have much of a cause at the time.
That changed, of course, in the mid-1980s, when one of my teachers invited a few of us to attend our first ever political fundraiser. The real drawcard on the flier was a fully stocked fridge included as part of the admission price. 'Cool!' I thought. At 16, a political fundraiser and all the beer you can drink—what more can you ask for? So we paid our money and we turned up, only to find out that Fully Stocked Fridge was actually the name of a band, and the beers were frightfully expensive. It was only after that that I realised it was a fundraiser for the Socialist Alliance. I discovered my cause: the falsehoods of socialism. They were on full view. I remember it to this day.

Don't worry, this is not going to be another speech about the failures of socialism or a lecture on climate change, Marxism or the evil of higher taxes. You shall be spared another sermon on the institutional failings of government and why we need to feed the freedom machine. You've heard my comments on these too many times before, and some of you could probably repeat them verbatim. Instead, tonight I would like to reflect on what has been the experience of a lifetime.

When I first came into this place, in May 2006, I joined three great political friends. Nick Minchin was and continues to be a generous mentor. He is here with us today. Nick taught me the art of how to get things done in this place. He taught me when to push hard and when to let go. Actually, that's not true; I picked up the pushing hard bit, but the letting go might need a bit more tutelage, Nick!

Another is of course Alan Ferguson, a former Senate President. Alan piqued my interest in the workings of the Senate and he taught me that, no matter what level of responsibilities we may be entrusted with by others, our roles are equally important in this place. Alan and I agreed on nearly everything, but one day we found ourselves sitting on opposite sides of the chamber on a matter of conscience. His side won that ballot by a single vote. I have to tell you it was very confronting to be voting against my great friend, but it reaffirmed to me the importance of recognising that just because someone has a different point of view to you, it doesn't make them your enemy.

The third was Liberal Whip Jeannie Ferris. She was a bit of a legend. She was tough, she was very funny and she was the canniest of political operators. Jeannie unfortunately died of ovarian cancer whilst serving in office during my first year here. We had a day of condolences and many genuine and heartfelt contributions were made, and the Senate adjourned as a matter of respect. But the next day the machinery kicked into gear once again as if nothing had changed. That was my greatest and most important political lesson. That experience demonstrated to me that none of us here is indispensable. Sure, we hold important positions, but we are only temporary custodians of those positions, and it is critical for all of us to use our time here as well as we can and protect the institution that allows us to be here—our wonderful parliamentary democracy. That institution doesn't function without the contribution of so many. For those of us here, we see the toil and the sacrifice others make so that we can do our thing, and sometimes even appear good at what we do. So tonight I want to record my heartfelt thanks for the most amazing working experience that any Australian can aspire to.

In saying that, I've got to deal with the elephant in the room: on 4 May 2006 I was selected as a Liberal and on 4 December 2019 I leave as an Independent. Others will make up their own minds about the events that transpired, and I know not a single mind will be changed by
anything that I say today or at any other time. However, suffice to say, I made choices that I thought were necessary and in the best interests of the country. Those choices were very difficult for me and for my family. They were painful for many friends and colleagues. It's fair to say I lost both during the events of 2017. But those that remain mean infinitely more to me than those that I lost. My thanks go to the men and women of the Liberal Party for the opportunity that they provided to me. For whatever it's worth, I've done my best to uphold the principles upon which that great party was built. And while our paths diverged, my traditional Liberal values never changed. It gives me great pleasure to see that those values are somewhat stronger in the party now than they have been in recent times. I hope that continues. I hope it continues to be the case, and I wish the Prime Minister and the coalition every continuing success.

But back to those who really matter and make our roles easier here. The Senate team, under the leadership of the Clerk, Richard Pye, do an amazing job. Their calmness and forbearance is the stuff of legend and they can always be relied on in a crisis. Of course, I've experienced one or two crises in my time here myself. I recall one such emergency, a dire time when I needed to iron a shirt. It was in my first weeks here. I asked the Black Rod if I could borrow an iron and an ironing board. As always, they obliged. They provided that iron and ironing board. I'm delighted to announce tonight that tomorrow morning, after more than 13 years of faithful service, I shall be returning both to the Black Rod.

Now, this chamber doesn't function without the tireless work of the attendants, who I think should receive a medal for the fortitude with which they perform their roles, and for putting up with us. I couldn't give them a medal, and instead I chose to distribute chocolate frogs every fortnight to help keep them sweet. Secretly—are you listening to this?—I was hoping they'd reciprocate and deliver a daily gin and tonic during question time, but so far no such luck! To John and the team, you are amazing. You have been incredible. You have made me feel so welcome. And just a little reminder: you've got one more day to make my dream come true.

There are many others here who make this place what it is. The security team have been fantastic, the Comcar drivers superb and Dom, Tony and the rest of the crew at Aussies have never failed to make every morning that little bit brighter. My thanks go to them all.

Outside of this place, there are so many that play an active role in helping us to do our jobs—some that are not acknowledged, but to me they're important. The team at the AFP have been just amazing during some rather challenging times. They were always there, willing and able to assist my family and my staff. I cannot thank them enough for the comfort and peace of mind they've provided over the years. Similarly, Ben and the team at MAPS in South Australia have been a delight to deal with, and they've always responded to our many queries with great patience.

May I also thank each and every one of you in this chamber who have served here past and present. It has been a pleasure to serve with you all. The political battles have been glorious in victory and in defeat. My gratitude extends even to my opponents, who, it may surprise some of you to know, are not all confined to the opposition side of the chamber! You have all forced me to develop the characteristics I admire most in others: resilience and accountability. Whilst on occasion you may have drawn a little bit of blood, overall it was your opposition that made me stronger and more determined.
To the many new friends that I've made in my time here, thank you. Not long after I started, a small group of us forged the strongest of bonds over our opposition to the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. I suspect that the complete account of that bond will never be publicly known, but it withstood all the tests that were thrown at it by the vicissitudes of politics. We had an enormous amount of fun and I think we really did change the course of political history. It's also fair to say that some subsequent events and individual decisions strained the ties that bound us so tightly, but I will never ever forget the solidarity we showed to each other during an extraordinary time. It started as the G4—Mathias, Michaelia, myself and David Bushby. It later became the G8, when others joined us. Then, of course, we teamed up with a couple of Nats to make things really interesting.

There aren't many of that original group left in this place, but the friendships with Mitch and Fiona and David and Barnaby and Brett and Stephen endure today. To Eric and Connie and Scott who are still here, thank you for your friendship. There are, however, a couple of the original 'awesome foursome' who are will still here. To the sister I never had: Michaelia, thanks for being such a good sport about pretty much everything. I knew our friendship was unbreakable when you actually took me to a vegetarian restaurant and I forgave you for it! Mathias, you have been the coalition's Rock of Gibraltar—or whatever the Belgian equivalent is—my friend. You deserve all the success you've enjoyed in this place, and I wish you and your family every best wish for whatever the future holds.

There have been plenty of other mates on both sides of the chamber, the political divide, over my years here, but one is particularly notable because, to be frank, he was a centrepiece of one of my most successful political campaigns. It involves a friend of mine from the other side, and that's Senator Farrell. It's fair to say that Don Farrell has had an interrupted tenure in the Senate, and during his wilderness years, when others had forgotten him, I was the Senate keeper of the 'Farrell flame'. Nary a question time passed without me calling for his return and asking Labor, 'What would Don do?' As a cheer squad of one, I have to tell you even I was surprised when he actually got back, but it has been good to have you back, Don. I only wish a few more on your side felt the same way I do!

Some people are going to say it's a bit strange that firm friendships are forged across the political divide, and it's enough to say that the nature of politics mattered less than the content of our character in those friendships and the respect that we've had for each other. For someone who doesn't like being lied to—I probably picked the wrong business—of all the people I grew close to in this place, never did any of them do me the discourtesy of not telling me the truth. They never scarified our friendship for political expediency even under very trying times. For that alone they have my respect.

After 30-odd years in this political game, I like to think I've got a pretty good eye for the political potential of others, and I have to say that I like what I see from so many here in the Senate. To them I say: be bold, be strong, be honest with your colleagues and be true to yourself and know that, when your time comes, like it has mine, you will only ever regret the things you chose not to say. If only I'd known that all those years ago, you can imagine the result.

To the troops of the fourth estate, where do I start? I naively thought that knowing so many of you from my days as a publican might prove for a smoother ride. After all, I came here privy to all the secrets you spilled after the truth of a pay packet invested in wine generated.
Fat lot of good that did me though! In fact, I think that you knowing that I knew what you were really like simply seemed to focus your aim on me. Yes, you know who I'm talking about up there, but, rest assured you're not alone; there's a large contingent, there are plenty of your contemporaries in that same boat. It hasn't been a dull ride for either of us, if I might say, but, looking back through the files of media and political outrage that I seem to generate so readily, what caused such angst in years past has now become the subject of much more rational discussion. The rise of China, the impact of migration, the challenges to our social mores, climate change, the culture wars, Islam, fathers, mothers, marriage, border protection, burqas, Hillary Clinton and even Donald Trump—I could go on and on—all caused such a kerfuffle for offending those who have so little to worry about that they actually worry about very little. Yet, despite the clear differences in our world view, I've enjoyed the company and camaraderie of so many of those working in the gallery. They are overwhelmingly professional and committed to their craft.

That takes me to some of the people who mean the most to me outside of this place. My parents Jo and Leon have lived this amazing journey with me from day one. I actually think they experienced the highs and lows more vividly than I did, but they were always there to offer support or an extra pair of hands whenever it was needed. My brother Marcus, a second-generation publican, has always provided a safe haven from politics over a steak during our regular lunches. I have also been blessed with some incredibly loyal and true friends. The fact that they've never wavered during the turbulent times in my political career demonstrates how loyal they are. One poor chap keeps having his Wikipedia entry edited with the line, 'He's a lifelong friend of Cory Bernardi,' added to it. This is just a cruel attempt to stifle his corporate career. I know now that he's a true mate because he's stopped trying to delete it. To Gal and Carmen, Andrew and Liz, Bill and Imelda, Dusko and Di, Tom and Myriam, Simon and Ginia, Vaughn and Carolina, Terry and Donna, John and Di, Mel and Morry, Marg, Lyn and John, and Tony and so many more: thank you for being there during the good times and the bad times. I only hope that I have been as good to you as you have been to me.

Speaking of good, how good are my staff? My hiring policy was always to provide an opportunity to those who were looking for a break, and to cultivate talent. The first-time jobseeker, the career changer, the uni student, the later-in-life job entrant all were welcome if they could handle the three iron rules of engagement in the Bernardi office: No. 1, yes, it really is all about me; No. 2, I didn't say it was your fault, I just said I'm going to blame you; and, No. 3, which I'll have to listen to today, crying in front of me doesn't make anything better. Some survived and thrived in such an environment, but at least they all knew what they were getting into. Many have gone on to hold political office themselves or excel in their chosen careers post politics. Every single one of them has left a lasting impression on me, and I consider myself to be very fortunate to have shared the experience of working with them. But two special mentions must be made. The first is to Shari Savio, whose youthful ambition of working for the History Channel is still a work in progress. Instead, she's been making a little bit of political history with me for the past 10 years or more. Shari has always been an amazing person. Optimistic, happy, loyal and generous, she has this masterful way of softening whatever blow she has to deliver. It usually begins like this: 'I know what you're trying to do, Cory, but... If only I'd listened more often—hey, Shari?—who knows what might have been. I'd like also to pay tribute to Chris Browne, who pretty much joined me in the very beginning in this place. It's a credit to him and his talent that he has now risen to a very senior
position in the government. Chris, you're an outstanding individual and I wish you the very

best.

Speaking of outstanding, my two amazing sons are with us today. Oscar and Harvey were only six and four when I started here. Now they are university students, and just looking at them makes me want to burst with pride. Boys, I know there have been some difficult times for you because of my work here, but your strength and your character in dealing with the burdens unfairly placed upon your shoulders is testament to the boys you were and the men you have become. I'm so very proud of you both, and I only hope you will look back on my contribution here and think the price that you've been asked to pay has been worthwhile.

That brings me to the most important individual in my life, my wife, Sinead. A lesser husband would have baulked when his wife told a Labor-leaning journalist that the secret to our successful marriage is that we are both actually in love with the same man. But not me! No, no, no—I commend Sinead for her honesty, her insight and her good humour! Sinead is the most amazing person I know. She continues to be my best friend and my confidante in all things. As a wife and a mother, I could not have asked for any better. And during my political service, the only time I detected any real despair from Sinead was when I got a desperate phone call late one evening saying she had to send the new puppy back because it was too much work and making such a mess. I quietly explained to her that with puppies, like with politicians, the chaos and noise eventually pass and things will soon return to normal. I can tell you all that the dog is now fine, but the husband might need a little bit of extra training! Sinead, thank you for everything. I would be nothing without you.

During my time in this place, I seem to have had my hand in in a number of notable events. That wasn't always by design, but, always knowing that our time here is finite, I simply never wanted to walk lightly through these corridors wondering, 'What if?' Looking back, I'd like to think I took Kipling's words to heart in that here I met both triumph and disaster and treated those two imposters just the same. That said, it isn't for me to pass judgement on my contribution over the years. However, I do want to conclude by reflecting on the very nature of success. Each of us will have different measures of what it means to be a success, but, when I think about the difficult life of modern politics, if you can get through it without harbouring malice or discontent you have achieved success. If you can end your time here with more firm friendships than when you began, that too is a good measure of success. And if you can leave the Canberra bubble with your marriage stronger, a family you are truly proud of, and completely at peace with yourself, that to me is the ultimate measure of success. Friends, I have been blessed to have been part of this place since 2006, and I walk away with all of these treasures and many, many more. For that, I thank the people of South Australia, I thank the Liberal Party and I thank my friends and my family. I thank every one of you, and every day I give thanks to God. Thank you.

Honourable senators: Hear, hear!

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Leader of the Government in Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (17:26): I rise to pay tribute to our close friend and valued colleague Senator Cory Bernardi. His speech today was again vintage Cory. What we saw was a man with great integrity—honest, direct, warm, humorous—and he will leave this chamber being held in very high regard, I am sure, by most of us in this chamber, if not all of
us in this chamber. He is a conviction politician who has always stood up for what he believes in with great fervour. I know that on all sides of this chamber, whether we agree or disagree, we respect the way Cory has approached his engagement in the battle of ideas over his 13 years in this chamber.

Cory has made an outstanding contribution to the Liberal cause and to our nation, but he has, in his remarks tonight, left a significant part of his life out that I believe needs to be put on the public record. Before Cory arrived in the Senate in 2006, he had already made a pretty significant contribution to our country in a different form. Most of you know that, in his younger years, Cory was a talented athlete. As a young rower, he represented South Australia in the state youth eight, rowed for his club and won in the famous Henley Royal Regatta before being selected in the South Australian men’s senior eight. In 1989 he became an Australian national representative when he was selected in the coxless four, which competed in the World Rowing Championships in what was then called Yugoslavia. I’m surprised Cory hasn’t touched on this today because he does often touch on that part of his life history. For those of you who know your rowing history, you would remember that that particular team became known as the ‘Oarsome Foursome’ though unfortunately—and Cory has told us this story against himself on a number of occasions in the past—he was a member of that crew before it became awesome. A bad back injury sadly ended Cory’s promising rowing career. New recruits came into that crew and they went on to win the world championship and Olympic gold medals.

The Oarsome Foursome were well known. One of the first memories I have of Australia, after coming here as a migrant, were these ads that had an advertising jingle and these Oarsome Foursome singing heads. I believe it was for canned fruit. Cory could have been a great asset to the Oarsome Foursome in that advertisement, because Cory is actually a very good singer. He did not touch on that in his speech either. Over the years he has become quite famous for his karaoke skills, which clearly attest to that.

Rowing’s loss eventually became the nation’s gain, but not before Cory got some real-life and business experience. He spent time—wait for this—working as a labourer in Libya, building tents for Colonel Gaddafi! And he cheated death after being hit by a car at England's Doncaster Racecourse. Back in Adelaide, Cory bought a share in his family's pub and worked in the popular hotel, hosting and entertaining patrons, including some of the state's senior businesspeople and well-known journalists. He later switched careers to become an investment adviser and fund manager.

But of course Cory was an active and committed member of the Liberal Party. In 1997 he became the South Australian Liberal Party's vice-president, and in 1998, at just 28 years of age, he became state party president. In South Australia at the time, I am reliably informed that he was known as the 'boy king'. Is that right?

Senator Bernardi interjecting—

Senator CORMANN: He later became the youngest-ever federal Liberal Party vice-president, which is when I first met Cory. I was the state vice-president of the Liberal Party in WA at the time. Cory, who was very active as federal vice-president, visited our state conference and that's when we first started to get to know each other, before either of us were in the parliament.
Cory arrived in this place as a Liberal Party senator for South Australia in May 2006, selected to fill a vacancy left by the resignation of Robert Hill. I came here the following year and, as Cory outlined, there were four of us—Cory, Michaelia, David and me—who had a very close-knit friendship group at the time, loosely described as the ‘G4’. Of course, with any grouping that you're a part of, you always aim to grow the size of the group and I think it's a group that, over time, has had a beneficial impact on a number of significant policy issues for our nation.

The thing I learned very quickly about Cory, and something that is true to this day, is that Cory is very much a conviction politician. To the frustration, perhaps, of some in our party he did not always stick to the talking points, but he always stuck to what he believed in. That is why he leaves the Senate with his integrity absolutely intact and with the very high regard and respect that we hold him in as he departs this place. The old adage is that if you don't believe in something you'll fall for anything; Cory certainly has strong beliefs and he didn't fall for much at all. The things he most believes in are strong family values, individual freedoms, free enterprise and the greatness of the Australian nation.

Cory has always believed that we can use our values and our beliefs to make the future better for our children and our grandchildren. His instincts are towards smaller government and lower taxes, and he asked me another very insightful series of questions on that today. He is economically and socially conservative; in fact, he has often quite appropriately been described as a conservative warrior. Cory's beliefs and convictions have been shown many times in this place. In 2009, together with a number of us, Cory was strongly opposed to Labor's Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. We worked together to protect Australians from the impact of that scheme by ultimately being successful in having it defeated in this place. That's something that the Labor Party and the Greens are still talking about, as they were marking the 10-year anniversary of these events earlier in the week.

Cory served as a shadow parliamentary secretary in five different portfolio areas: families and community services; disability, carers and the voluntary sector; for the Leader of the Opposition; infrastructure and population policy; and supporting families. When I arrived in this place, together with Cory, I very much envisaged that we would serve together in a future Liberal-National government and make a significant contribution by serving together in that capacity. That is not the way it played out, sadly. But Cory chose the path that enabled him to best contribute his convictions, his talents and his expertise to the betterment of our nation. Cory has had a very significant impact, both inside the Liberal Party and as part of the broader political debate.

I would have preferred it, personally, if Cory had not chosen to leave the Liberal Party in February 2017 to form a separate party after more than 30 years as a member. I understood his motivations but I said to him at the time, privately, that I thought the Liberal Party would be weaker for not having his voice inside our party room; he had been the conservative conscience inside our party room so eloquently and so effectively on so many occasions. I still hold that view. My wish and aspiration would be for Cory to ultimately rejoin the Liberal Party and the Liberal family. Hopefully, that can still happen. I feel there has been a great, positive rapprochement in recent months which I hope will ultimately lead to him formally rejoining our great organisation.
There is no doubt that Cory leaves this place with his credibility and integrity absolutely intact. He has always stood up for what he believed in, and he has done it with great humour. That is, no doubt, why he had such close and genuine friendships with people on all sides of the chamber. People understand that, with Cory, it is never personal; it is genuinely always engagement in the battle of ideas, trying to find the best possible way of making our country better and stronger for the future.

Cory has given our country 13 years of great service in the Senate and we should all be very grateful for his service. On behalf of the government and on behalf of the Liberal and National parties in the Senate: Cory, thank you so much for what you've done. Our very best wishes to you, Sinead and your whole family for the future. Don't be a stranger. Please keep in touch. The membership form will be in the mail!

Senator FARRELL (South Australia) (17:36): I rise on behalf of the opposition and all of Senator Bernardi's friends on this side of the chamber to acknowledge his contribution to the Senate. I should start by thanking him for the references to me; I'm sure I'll see your fine words about me quoted in a document by my opponents in my next preselection contest!

Senator Bernardi grew up in an Italian migrant family who ran successful hotels in Adelaide, and it was there that he developed a lifelong love of alcohol, which he referred to today. He mentioned gin and tonics. He didn't mention Manhattans or some of the other alcoholic beverages that I know he enjoys. In his youth, he was a champion rower and he was given an AIS scholarship. But his career in that regard was tragically cut short.

I know you won't want me to mention this, Senator Bernardi, but you were of course recruited to the Liberal Party by Christopher Pyne—subsequently your bete noire—and then you were chosen by the Parliament of South Australia to replace Senator Robert Hill. And in this place you were mentored by Nick Minchin—yes, there he is. There is a link between Nick and me. He claims credit for my first political defeat in 1988. I did get even with him. On one occasion I was giving a speech at a fundraiser for the Adelaide Zoo. The fundraiser was to help redevelop Minchin House. I was happy to tell all the people in the audience that, next thing you know, he'd be claiming that he's got a relationship with the Minchin after whom the house was named—and it turned out to be true; he did have a relationship with them. I thought he was a blow in from New South Wales!

Senator Bernardi was first elected to the Senate in 2007 and was subsequently re-elected in 2013 and 2016. We, of course, are both elected representatives of that great state, South Australia. Just as an aside—and, again, Senator Bernardi probably doesn't want me to mention this—he was also born one day apart from our Senate leader, Senator Wong.

Senator Bernardi also represented Australia internationally, attending the United Nations General Assembly as a parliamentary representative. I remember that, at the time, you seemed to think that you got that appointment because your party wanted to get you out of the country. And I think it was there that you realised the terrible state of the Liberal Party. When you came back to Australia you resigned from the Liberal Party to form the Australian Conservatives, absorbing Family First in the process. Unfortunately, the enthusiastic riding of the Trump wave didn't bring you to prosperous electoral shores in Australia. However, you were and always have been a conviction politician—and this is certainly a rare qualification in the ranks of those opposite.
You've also had the good sense to vote independently in your position as a conservative. When the government, in the dying days of the last parliament, sought to outrageously expend taxpayers money on radio and TV advertising, you voted with the opposition to disallow that motion. I think that'll be one of your great achievements in this place.

I'd particularly like to acknowledge the contribution you've made as a committee chair and as a temporary chair here in the Senate. You're an excellent chair of the Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee and a model for others. You are fair in your distribution of time to the opposition, something I particularly emphasise, and reasonable in your approach to ministers and public servants at estimates. You're not afraid to join in opposition questioning on occasions when you're sceptical about the responses given by ministers or public servants. Similarly, you're an excellent acting deputy president in the Senate, and you could be trusted to preside over debate diligently and impartially. In the committee of the whole you're a sound pair of hands, managing amendments and complicated questions before the chair. And, with all due respect to the current occupant, if things had worked out differently, you would have made a terrific President of the Senate one day.

You also have a pretty good knack of jumping to speak on a bill in senators' statements just before it hits two o'clock—and question time, when of course most senators are in the chamber. And, as we've seen today, you love a good audience! It must be said that you're a strong speaker in this place. You possess the skill of being able to speak eloquently without relying on a written speech. That's a rare skill and has made you a compelling and engaging speaker in this place.

You've been a widely recognised backbencher during your time here in the Senate. You've been outspoken, and that's given you a level of notoriety beyond many in this place—even above ministers. Of course, this has been aided by a very good sense of humour. Your contributions to debate in this place and your adeptness at chairing the Senate and its committees will be missed. The opposition acknowledges your service to the Senate. I'm pretty sure Senator Bernardi will continue to provide a positive contribution to the Australian community after politics.

I'd also like to make reference to Senator Bernardi's wife, Sinead. I wish her all the very best in life after politics. Senator Bernardi has already used this line, but I'm going to use it again: Sinead once famously said that she and Cory were both in love with the same man! I wish them and their two sons, Oscar and Harvey, all the best and hope they enjoy the peace and tranquillity of Coffin Bay on the beautiful Eyre Peninsula.

**Senator McKenzie** (Victoria—Minister for Agriculture and Leader of the Nationals in the Senate) (17:44): On behalf of the National Party, I'd like to make a short contribution. Those of us who are privileged to work here in this place know of Senator Bernardi's passion, his passionately held views and, importantly, his strongly lived conservative values. We'll be very, very sad to see him go. He has at times been a headline writer's dream because of those impassioned speeches in this chamber. But wider Australia got to know him a little bit better thanks to fellow South Australian Annabel Crabb, who asked him some probing questions. He handled those with his strong conviction. As Nats, we were all incredibly impressed with how he handled the Australian sustainably harvested prawns and salmon on the barbecue! He did that very, very well during that episode. In hindsight, we could have recruited you, Senator Bernardi, to the grill at the National Party annual Christmas seafood barbecue over the years!
Senator Bernardi is a true friend of regional Australia and agriculture. During one of the many debates in this place on water he said, ‘When I look at the river, I see a river, I see trees and I see aquatic life, but I also see communities and agriculture, and I actually see them as necessary.’ He went on to talk about the economic lifeline that water is to agriculture for rural and regional communities in this country.

Regarding his past as an elite athlete, as a past sports minister I think he'd make a great contribution in a certain ongoing organisation that deals a lot with sport in the future—

Senator Farrell interjecting—

Senator McKenzie: He is an excellent chair, Senator Farrell, but his past as an elite athlete has served him well—his ability to work with and lead successful teams, his work ethic, his focus and his discipline. And I think you saw today, and through his entire work, his respect for his foes. I think that's important.

He has defended and argued for his beliefs and passions with conviction, often in the face of substantial public criticism that was, in the majority, completely unnecessary. But quiet Australians appreciated Senator Bernardi's contribution to the public debate. They recognised their values, their opinions and their perspective in a lot of what he has been able to contribute in this place and outside it, over time. He has paid politically and personally for those views. It is lovely to see his family here. Families are our sometimes unwilling conscripts to the work that we do. Those beautiful boys really are a testament to you and Sinead. Well done to everyone there.

Senator Bernardi has always presented his views in a respectful way. I think the word 'integrity' sums up the way Senator Bernardi has chosen to approach his politics. Importantly, he's always accepted the majority public decision when it is against his own personal views—a true democrat, but in a good way. I think that shows his strength of character.

We've got three new National Party female senators after the election, and they've all made comments around wanting to thank Senator Bernardi for making them feel so welcome and for being so generous in sharing his experience and knowledge. I know that if two National Party members of 'the G8' were here they would also want to say a huge thank you. For us Nationals, for that group to stand so strong in the face of such fierce opposition—you changed the course of our nation, and I think we all owe you and that group of eight people a debt of gratitude.

Senator Bernardi, your pre-political life covered a lot of areas. The National Party love a good small business owner. If you are tired in your retirement, if it doesn't deliver all you're hoping it will, there is a conservative party looking for new South Australian members. It shares your Christian values and your family values. It also seeks to represent rural and regional Australia. It's a party that enjoys a seafood barbecue and a Christmas party with family and friends. It's a party of patriots. Go well, Cory, the Nationals thank you for your friendship, integrity and values and for your contribution to our nation.

Senator Cash (Western Australia—Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business) (17:49): I too rise tonight to pay tribute to Senator Cory Bernardi as he ends the circle in the same way that he came into this place: in fine form and with great distinction.

In 2006, I was just a member of the Liberal Party. We had our WA state conference—Senator Cormann will know this well—and the guest speaker for our state conference, which
is always a very privileged position to have, was a person called Mr Cory Bernardi. He was from South Australia, the great state, and he was coming to address us—he was a federal vice-president of our party at the time—in relation to conviction politics. I didn't know much about Mr Cory Bernardi at the time, but I do remember that there was a buzz of excitement as this person walked into the room. He was tall, he was dark—and I believe Cory has often said, 'And I'm also handsome.' So yes, Cory: tall, dark and handsome.

Senator Cormann: That was also me, back then.

Senator CASH: It was also Mathias back then, he says! I remember when Cory Bernardi walked up on to the stage—again, I didn't know who he was—and started to address us. There were several hundred people in the room. I thought to myself: 'This person is a man of conviction. This is a person standing before us Liberals who understands the fundamental beliefs that we hold as conservatives. Not only does he understand those fundamental beliefs; by what he is saying, he is someone who lives by those principles each and every day.'

We in this place, as elected members, would all know that one of the greatest challenges whilst you are here is to stand up publicly for what you believe in—in particular, when you are under sustained attack as you have been, Senator Bernardi, on many, many occasions. But you have never wavered. You have never questioned yourself. You have never questioned your principles. Why? Because on the day that you arrived in this place, you were a senator who truly knew what he believed in. You were a senator who openly stated: 'I am a committed conservative. I am someone, regardless of what is thrown at me during the time that I represent the people of South Australia, will be unapologetic for what I believe in, and I will advocate every day for the principles that I believe in.' You are without a doubt a conviction politician, and I think that, when you leave this place, to be known as someone who has stood by their principles each and every day is something you should be very, very proud of. You have never wavered from your beliefs, and you should leave here today with your head held high.

In the almost 12 years that I have now known you, the friendship that you, Senator Cormann and I have had, I think we can honestly say, has sustained us each and every day. During our friendship, and I think in almost every conversation, the one thing you have always impressed upon us is your absolute love for your wife, Sinead, and your two boys, Oscar and Harvey. Oscar and Harvey: without a doubt, you are the shining light in your father's life. Never ever forget that, because he has reminded Mathias and me of that every single day that we have known him. Sinead: whilst you and Cory might both be in love with the same man—Cory is very open about that and reminds us about it on a regular basis!—you sustain him, you are his foundation. Without that foundation Cory would not be the man that he is today. Cory, I joined you here as a colleague. I am so proud that, as you give your valedictory in this chamber, I am able to say: my friend, I look forward to seeing you. Enjoy your life after politics.

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Faruqi): All the best, Senator Bernardi, to you and your family.
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Monetary Policy

Senator BROCKMAN (Western Australia—Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (17:55): I got caught by surprise a little bit there, but seeing as I'm on my feet and Senator Bernardi's still in the room, I will say that I've known Senator Bernardi for quite a long time. I came here just after Mathias started in 2008, and I've known Senator Bernardi since then. And, just like Mitch Fifield, who left us a little while ago, he too was one of the people in this place who treated staffers with extraordinary courtesy and respect, and I will always remember that. I think it is a great shame I did not get to serve with you in the same party, Senator Bernardi, but I do wish you all the best for the future.

Back to the economy—we're talking about monetary policy. I think the key thing that we need to remember here is that, unlike in other parts of the world, in Australia we have an independent reserve bank—although we have not had it for our entire history—and monetary policy is the domain of an independent reserve bank. This has been extraordinarily important to the success of the Australian economy, particularly over the past 29 years. Twenty-nine years of uninterrupted economic growth, a record that no other parts of the world can claim to have delivered, has been built on a number of pillars. It's been built on good government. I will note that the majority of that period of government has been the Liberal and National parties in the seats of government. It has been built on having an independent reserve bank handling our monetary policy. It has been built on developing trade links with the rest of the world, signing free trade agreements encouraging Australian businesses to interact with the rest of the world. I've said on a number of occasions that Australia is very much at the end of the line. We're a trading nation. Without trade, Australia has very little. We need to trade. We must trade. That is, again, one of the key pillars of our economic success, and so has been our financial services sector.

The financial services sector has been under a degree of criticism, and much of it justified, over the last few years, but we must remember that the financial services system that we have—the banks and the other financial services arrangements in this country—has actually served us very well over the last 30 years. In contemplating where we go from here, we must always bear in mind that, whilst there are problems and issues which need to be addressed, it's certainly not by any means a basket case. In fact, it is a financial services system that's delivered us 29 years of uninterrupted economic growth.

Again, we do have an independent reserve bank, and the Reserve Bank governor, in October, stated that:
We live in an interconnected world ... we can't ignore structural shifts in global interest rates.

... ... ...

However, negative interest rates are extraordinarily unlikely in Australia.
He went on to say:
We are not in the same situation that has been faced in Europe and Japan.

... ... ...

Our growth prospects are stronger, our banking system is in much better shape, our demographic profile is better and we have not had a period of deflation—
So we are in a much stronger position.

On the back of the largest tax cuts in two decades, we have seen the largest increase in household disposable income in a decade, growing by 2.5 per cent in the quarter, or 5.1 per cent compared to a year ago. A combination of tax cuts and interest rates will help free up cash for households and, together with record infrastructure spending, will support the economy. RBA Governor Lowe said to the House of Representatives Economics Committee on 9 August this year:

… we estimate that they—
the tax cuts—
will boost household disposable income by roughly 0.6 or 0.7 per cent of income, and that is a sizable boost.

Whether it is spent or saved—this is a very important point—the additional funds in the accounts and wallets of Australians are putting more money in people's pockets, supporting confidence in the economy and future consumption. Standard & Poor's said just last week that the outlook for the Australian economy is sound. The Reserve Bank has said that the economy has reached a gentle turning point. This week Deloitte Access Economics said momentum in the Australian economy is lifting.

Both the IMF and OECD are forecasting Australia to grow faster in 2020 than any of the G7 nations. I think that is a very important point. When we look at the international comparisons of real growth through the year—these are the figures published on 4 December 2019—we see Australia had 1.7 per cent real GDP growth, and Japan had 1.4, Germany had 0.5, France had 1.4, the United Kingdom had one per cent, Italy had 0.3 per cent, Canada was equal to us at 1.7 per cent, the euro area as a whole had 1.2 per cent, and the OECD average was 1.6 per cent. So 1.7 per cent from Australia is a very good performance, and something that again reflects the importance of both good government and also having strong, independent institutions like the independent Reserve Bank overseeing our monetary policy.

In my final couple of minutes I think we do need to reflect on the fact that the outlook for the Australian economy could have been quite different. We could have taken a different path. The Australian people, in their wisdom, decided not to. Just six months ago we looked down the face of imposing $387 billion in higher taxes on the Australian economy if those opposite had gained the seats of government. I think it is really important that all Australians ask themselves what that would have done in the current circumstances. What would that have done to the economy in the current economic environment we face? The Treasurer, the finance minister and the Prime Minister have all been very open since well before the election that the international economy and the Australian economy were facing significant headwinds. When Labor was last in power, business conditions had fallen to their lowest levels since the global financial crisis, business investment was plummeting, unemployment was rising, the budget was out of control and we had $240 billion of cumulative deficits. Now we've got a situation where GDP growth is strong, the budget is certainly very much under control and the government is delivering on its promise to the Australian people—delivering the fundamentals we need for businesses to invest, for businesses to grow, for businesses to employ people and, therefore, for the people of Australia to have the opportunities they deserve for the future.
The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Fawcett): I seek leave of the chamber to go back to Senator Whish-Wilson, who sought leave to continue his remarks. Senator Whish-Wilson, you have the call.

Senator WHISH-WILSON (Tasmania) (18:03): Thank you. I appreciate that, Acting Deputy President. I was previously saying that we have the cheapest money in history. We are in uncharted times. Yet where is the leverage? Where is our government capitalising on this historic precedent and historic opportunity? Three years ago, the Greens initiated a select inquiry into infrastructure finance and infrastructure spending in Australia. We went all around this country. We literally heard from hundreds of witnesses, mostly businesses and experts. We looked at the size of the infrastructure gap in Australia, and that varied, but in some estimates it was up to a trillion dollars. Many of the projects in that gap were small projects in rural and regional areas. There is no shortage of infrastructure projects that will set up this country for this century, will deliver productivity and will deliver for local communities.

We recommended a process where we could take money off-balance sheet, which is what other governments around the world have done, and embark on a massive program of fiscal stimulus in Australia. That's what this is about. This is an opportunity for fiscal stimulus.

Now, I don't get why this government is so obsessed with a budget surplus at such a time when nearly every economist in this country, including experts like we have at the Reserve Bank, senior figures, is saying we need more emphasis on fiscal policy. The problem we have in Australia at the moment is that so much of our money is going into an unproductive housing market boom. It is a debt trap. The cheaper interest rates are, the more people borrow. And we are using low interest rates and this debt trap to inflate our economy and economic growth. It is exactly the wrong thing to be doing. It is the lever this government chooses to pull, and I would need more than four minutes and 23 seconds to give senators in here an explanation as to why I believe that is a very inefficient, at best, if not dangerous way to be setting up this next decade of economic growth—indeed, this next century.

We should be taking money off-balance sheet. We should be doing deals with the states. We should have a financing mechanism that depoliticises, as much as possible, the infrastructure process and that actually gives business confidence. Why do businesses have such high hurdle rates for infrastructure? Interest rates are at 0.75 per cent. In fact, 10-year bond yields in Australia have been negative for the first time in history, yet hurdle rates for business to invest in infrastructure projects are still around nine per cent. If you go and ask them, 'Why are your hurdle rates so high?'—and for those who don't understand finance, a hurdle rate reflects the inherent risk that a proponent sees in investing in a project—they tell you it's because of political risk. We need a whole new infrastructure-financing mechanism.

As I said when I started this contribution, the Greens believe in a strong role for government in our lives. We believe in a government infrastructure bank. It could be set up to be independent. It could use off-balance sheet financing. It could co-invest with businesses. It could reduce, if not eliminate, the political context of infrastructure spending, so it's not pork-barrelling and we don't see the disasters we have seen in this country. We could literally set this country up for the next century. Just in my home town of Launceston, I can think of some projects, in the range of $100 million to $300 million or $400 million, that might seem small in the scale of that trillion-dollar infrastructure gap and that we could lock into record low
interest rates for 10, 20 or 30 years, that would literally transform my town. I know $100 million for the light rail in Hobart would totally transform that town. Yet where is the commitment? It's missing.

Senator Canavan is happy to come in here and talk about what he and his party are doing in northern Australia. I don't see a lot of it in southern Australia. This is a historic moment in a historic time for us to actually be driving this. There has never been a bigger opportunity. I want to put on record that I hear the government come in and say that they've got this record infrastructure spend of $100 billion. While I have my colleague Senator Steele-John in the chamber, I will just say we know that if you strip Defence spending out of that, then you've got—I'd better be careful of my language here, but you don't have much infrastructure spending. Indeed, it's declining in real terms over the forward estimates.

It is declining, because this government have dressed up their industry policy, which in itself is dressed up as defence policy. They're spending hundreds of billions of dollars on new submarines and on defence projects. That's not infrastructure spending. Infrastructure spending is committing to communities for smaller projects all around this country, as well as for some big projects that actually enhance productivity, that reduce congestion in our cities, that make life liveable for Australians—not to mention transforming our energy grid, our energy system, to 100 per cent renewable energy.

The Greens will be bringing in a plan for a new green deal. We've talked about this a lot. This is exactly what Australians want. It's happening in overseas countries. It's a green new deal that creates the jobs of the future; brings the investment of the future; gets rid of the pollution problem and the great challenge of our time, climate change; reduces emissions; and protects communities from bushfires. A new green deal for Australians—it's not opposition to government policy, but proposition. We have done the work: we have researched this, we have used multiple Senate inquiries and we've spent the last five years building our data on this.

I'm very glad that Senator Roberts and One Nation brought forward this MPI today. It has given us an opportunity to talk about our vision for Australia and why what we're doing now is not good enough and how we need to totally reconsider our approach to this. (Time expired)

Senator KITCHING (Victoria) (18:10): Today's national account figures confirm what many Australian families have been feeling for some time, and that is the economy is simply not working for them. Growth is at 1.7 per cent for the year, and a measly 0.4 per cent for this quarter. Remember, this is the quarter where the government estimated that the benefits of the first stage of the tax cuts would begin to show. They haven't. Perhaps most worrying is that household consumption—that is, what people are spending—has effectively flatlined, recording just 0.1 per cent.

Today, the Treasurer said that, yes, he would like consumption to be a little higher but that this is a significant issue, particularly as we are now going into what is traditionally a strong period for the retail sector. We won't have those figures until early next year, but if the retail sector has a very poor Christmas period then that is a significant issue for the Australian economy.

The household consumption figure is the lowest it has been since the negative days of 2008, in the global financial crisis. We were in the midst of that then and the Labor
government addressed it effectively. In fact, talking of Labor governments, Senator Brockman mentioned 29 years—I think that's what he said, but he's a little ahead of himself. We've had 28 years of continuous economic growth in this country. That was a consequence of the economic reforms that the Hawke-Keating government made. We have them to thank for the fact that our economy has remained so strong.

These dire figures from today's national accounts come on top of recent ABS labour force data showing that 19,000 jobs have been shed from the Australian economy in a month—the biggest fall since May 2016. And this figure doesn't factor in those who are underemployed and who would like to work more hours, which remains at a worrying 8.5 per cent. Together, this represents as many as two million Australians still looking for work or looking for more work.

I want to look at the Reserve Bank Act. This was passed in 1959, 60 years ago. We can see that, unusually for a central bank, it does not have just one single objective; it has three parts to its charter. Yes, it has what is normal for a central bank—that is, effecting and ensuring the stability of currency—but it also expands on this single role of controlling the supply of money in the economy to include a function that is more unusual for a central bank: the board of the Reserve Bank has a duty to consider the maintenance of full employment of the Australian people.

The legacy of the pursuit of full employment in Australia can be traced back to the vision of Joseph Benedict Chifley. Prior to becoming Australia's 16th Prime Minister in 1945, Ben Chifley served as Treasurer in John Curtin's wartime government. It was here, through the Commonwealth Bank, that Chifley extended functions to continue wartime controls on private banks, a precursor that became the model for the Reserve Bank of Australia 15 years later.

Hugh Armitage, who served as the Governor of the Reserve Bank, worked closely with Chifley on the formation of the Commonwealth Bank Act 1945, and this legislation formed the genesis of the Reserve Bank's current charter. Chifley's postwar vision was to use the instruments available to him to pursue a policy of full employment. He believed that this was of vital importance to the nation's interests. More than 70 years later, the Reserve Bank's current governor, Dr Philip Lowe, reiterated his belief in this charter goal in a speech he gave in June. He noted:

Low and stable inflation is a precondition to the attainment of full employment …

He went on to say:

The RBA is seeking to achieve the lowest rate of unemployment that can be sustained without inflation becoming an issue.

Labor believes this; it is in our DNA—indeed, it is in our very name.

Today, the government continues to run with an oft-repeated mantra that they are 'good economic managers', but the facts just don't stack up. For six years now they have been relying on outside influences to keep the economy ticking over, unwilling to intervene to protect the livelihoods of working Australians, lest this put at risk their surplus. We are now in a per-capita recession. If it weren't for immigration, the economy would be going backwards. We have record household debt, declining living standards and declining productivity—and I'm going to come back to productivity. In fact, this government is asleep.
at the wheel on getting Australia to be more productive. They are still on a sugar high from an unexpected election win and they are delivering nothing.

On productivity, we often think of productivity in a simple way: whether people are working sufficient hours and whether that has contributed to the economy. But I want to go to Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, which has developed *The Atlas of Economic Complexity*. This maps the economic progress and opportunities of various countries. The data in the index shows that Australia ranks 93rd out of 133 economies—93rd! We are behind Morocco, Senegal and Uganda. We have many success stories in technology and education services, but we also have the same export profile as Angola.

Ensuring Australians are better educated, better trained for work and re-skilled has never been more important, because if we do not do these things our economy will go backwards. But this sitting fortnight has shown us that all this government has by way of response are plans to punish registered organisations, to punish the very organisations that represent working people. They've had a go at cutting the unions off at the knees, which was clearly the first step in a long play to re-introduce a WorkChoices-type piece of legislation.

Many wage earners haven't had a pay rise in real terms for the last decade. The last time business investment was this weak was almost 30 years ago and we were in the middle of a recession. To top this off, the Treasurer has been out talking on the importance of paying down the national debt. This avoids the inconvenient fact that it was the government who voted with the Greens political party to scrap Labor's debt ceiling—that was in 2013. National debt has never been higher. It has now reached a record $400 billion, all on this government's watch.

At every turn, the government refuses to use the levers available to it to pump stimulus into this moribund economy and give it the kickstart it so desperately needs. As today's account figures show, the first tranche of tax cuts hasn't had the desired flowthrough effect it was meant to have. In an indication that the public know trouble is on the way, they have decided to bank the money instead. In a recent speech, Dr Lowe, the Reserve Bank governor, said that, looking towards full employment, 'monetary policy is not the only option, and there are limitations to what can be achieved'. Not for the first time in recent months, he went on to say that fiscal policy, through infrastructure spending, should be considered.

This all lends itself to the increasingly apparent truth that this government never expected to win the 2019 election and therefore never put in place a vision or a plan for guiding the economy through these challenging times. Perhaps they should reflect on the third part of the Reserve Bank Act, which states:

... the economic prosperity and welfare of the people of Australia.

I don't often recommend that people read the objectives of the Reserve Bank Act, but it is unusual in a central bank and I think it's well worth having regard to. All policies at the moment need to be framed around job creation and productivity gains, not in propping up a milestone surplus, which seems to be getting narrower and narrower by the day.

**Senator ROBERTS** (Queensland) (18:20): As a servant to the people of Queensland and Australia I say clearly that One Nation is worried about what unconventional monetary policy will do to everyday Australians. We do not want to see the mistakes repeated here that are already being made overseas. At the Australian Business Economists dinner last week, the
Governor of the Reserve Bank, Dr Philip Lowe, delivered a speech that officially declared that unconventional monetary policy was highly unlikely in Australia. As Senator Hanson said in the opening of this debate, what troubles One Nation is that in the Q and A after his speech Dr Lowe changed his position and declared, 'If the economic indicators were moving away from target, I think all options would need to be on the table.' These options are called unconventional monetary policy. That benign name masks a world of financial pain for everyday Australians. The RBA's program would commence when official interest rates reached 0.25 per cent. Official interest rates are currently at 0.75 per cent and tipped to fall. We are likely to reach the RBAs trigger point in this term of government.

Unconventional monetary policy includes (1) bank bail-ins, where customer deposits are taken and turned into shares in the bank; (2) negative interest rates, where people pay the bank to use the money; and (3) quantitative easing, or QE, where more money is printed and is used to pump up the economy and devalue the money. All of these things only work if people are no longer allowed to keep their money in cash. Cash prevents unconventional monetary policy from working. So suddenly people can see why the 'Cash ban bill' or the Currency (Restrictions on the Use of Cash) Bill takes on new significance. We wonder: is the government planning to introduce these measures? Senator Pauline Hanson and I call on the Governor of the Reserve Bank to clarify his remarks.

Let's consider some elements of unconventional monetary policy. Firstly, quantitative easing: QE. This is where the Reserve Bank buys government bonds and the government spends that money on pumping up the economy. This is also called debt monetisation, also known as printing money. A destructive idea. The Australian dollar will be printed and debased until inflation ensues and confidence in the economy collapses. Printing money leads to hyperinflation, which is what destroyed economies worldwide, from the Weimar Republic in the 1920s to Venezuela right now.

While this limited form of quantitative easing is the RBA's preferred model, the RBA did say that it could potentially go beyond this model if economic circumstances warranted. This includes using quantitative easing to purchase private sector assets. Typically, this would be to give the big banks some of this freshly printed money, buying mortgages off the banks. This is called mortgage securitisation. It's a simple process: the bank lends money to people to buy a house, usually an investment property, and then the government buys that mortgage, gives the money back to the bank and the bank lends that money again and again. What could possibly go wrong? This policy will transfer the risk of continuing to pump up the housing bubble from the banks to the taxpayers. But the banks deal in risk. That is what banks are for. Why is this risk being dumped on taxpayers? It could cost us billions. These measures amount to the government helping out its banking mates when it is the banks that should be responsible for themselves. Quantitative easing will likely price everyday Australians out of the housing market and give more market power to the big banks. Has there ever been a prime minister who loves his banks as much as Mr Scott Morrison does now?

Secondly, another aspect of unconventional monetary policy is negative interest rates. This is where you, the depositor, pay the bank to hold your money that is deposited with them. That seems fantastical, yet 14 countries now have negative interest rates, including the economies of Germany and Japan, which are amongst the world's largest. Australia's bond rate has been between 0.6 per cent and 0.8 per cent for months. We are almost into negative...
interest rate territory now. After allowing for inflation, Australian government bonds are indeed trading at negative returns. What should worry everyone is that people are buying these unconventional ideas. Politicians are being led down the path. The RBA and the federal government have been talking up the economy in recent years. They are saying that the Australian economy is fundamentally strong and that public and monetary policy is being managed both professionally and prudently. So why are people prepared to invest, as an example, $1,000 to get back only $998 after two years? And that is really just $950 after inflation. Why would people burn their money if the economy were doing as well as the government says it is? They wouldn't.

In times of negative interest rates, people refuse to pay the banks to hold their money. The y respond by holding their savings in cash and by paying cash. No wonder the government has brought on the cash ban bill, or, as it's officially known, the Currency (Restrictions on the Use of Cash) Bill. This bill stops everyday Australians from tendering more than $10,000 in cash in a transaction. It forces people to put their money in a bank, only to see some of that money taken in bank fees and negative interest rate deductions. This government is thinking of forcing people to consume a banking product to have their money taken from them by the banks, in order to make unconventional monetary policy effective. One Nation considers that this is just plain wrong.

Thirdly, another element of this strategy is bank bail-ins. Banks were bailed out during the global financial crisis. Governments around the world then used taxpayers' money to stabilise bank balance sheets. They gave taxpayers' money to banks. That wasn't very popular with the public, which rightly concluded that banks caused the global financial crisis in the first place. And banks continue to display bad banking behaviour: money laundering for drug dealers, as the Commonwealth Bank did until it was caught out; money laundering for terrorists and paedophiles, as Westpac are just doing; charging customers for fees without service; and charging dead people for services they never provided. The new trick is called a bail-in. This is where depositors' funds are stolen and converted into shares in the bank. Let me say that again. A bank bail-in means some or all of depositors' funds are taken from depositors and converted into shares in the bank. Depositors don't get a say in the matter; their money is stolen.

What will defeat such a bail-in is people holding their savings in cash and paying in cash. The government's cash ban bill raises its ugly head again. For a measure that the government says is highly unlikely, the government seems to be putting all the necessary steps and preparations in place. In a nutshell, the RBA governor's solution to the biggest debt bubble in Australian history is printing more money, more government intervention in financial markets and, ultimately, more debt. One Nation would suggest that a far better way to get the economy going is to increase pensions and Newstart, for example. Put money into the hands of people who desperately need it and who will spend it in their local communities. Put money into infrastructure, such as our water for life project to increase the water reserves of town weirs across rural and regional Australia, droughtproofing our country and increasing productive capacity. What about building the hybrid Bradfield scheme to provide Australia with water and power security? And what about a people's bank to provide real competition and accountability for the major banks? The Bank of North Dakota has done it since 1919. The Commonwealth Bank did it until it was gutted by Liberal-Labor governments.
I end this contribution by asking: where are the government reassurances and denials on this? Instead of taking existing wealth away from everyday Australians, why are we not increasing our productive capacity to create new wealth? One Nation are open to concluding that the Reserve Bank has decided that forcing everyday Australians to lose their money is more desirable than the banks losing theirs. Instead of helping big banks fleece depositors, the government needs to increase Australia's productive capacity to generate wealth for all. I call on the governor to clarify his remarks.

NOTICES
Withdrawal

Senator McMAHON (Northern Territory) (18:30): by leave—I withdraw the notice of motion standing in my name and in the names of Senators Davey and McDonald lodged earlier today.

DOCUMENTS
Consideration

The following documents were considered:

Auditor-General's reports for 2019-20
1 No. 16—Performance audit—Western Sydney Airport procurement activities: WSA Co Limited.

Government documents
6 Schedule of multilateral treaties under negotiation, consideration or review by the Australian Government as at August 2019.

DELEGATION REPORTS
Australian Parliamentary Delegation to the 141st Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly

Senator O'NEILL (New South Wales) (18:31): I table the report of the Australian Parliamentary Delegation to the 141st Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly, which was held in Belgrade, Serbia, from 13 to 17 October this year. I seek leave to move a motion in relation to the report.

Leave granted.

Senator O'NEILL: I move:

That the Senate take note of the document.

The Australian parliament's delegation to the 141st assembly was led by the member for Robertson, Mrs Lucy Wicks, and included the member for Fisher, Mr Andrew Wallace, the member for Bruce, Mr Julian Hill, and myself. The IPU is the international organisation of parliaments of sovereign states. Australia has had a longstanding commitment to attend IPU assemblies and associated meetings, and provides the chance to develop and progress
parliament-to-parliament relations, to build on bilateral and multilateral relationships and to promote parliamentary democracy.

The 141st assembly was attended by 1,729 delegates, 739 of whom were parliamentarians from 149 parliaments. A key focus of the 141st assembly was strengthening international law through parliamentary roles and mechanisms. Throughout that week there was also an emphasis on promoting democracy through the political empowerment of women and youth.

During the assembly, members were called upon to adopt a resolution on achieving universal health coverage by 2030. The resolution focused on promoting health and preventing disease through coordinated action across every sector and, of course, as an Australian member of the delegation, I was particularly pleased to participate in that, given reference to our Medicare standards.

Australia is a member of two geopolitical groups. Meetings took place with the Asia-Pacific Group and the Twelve Plus Group during the assembly. Meetings were also held with delegations from Vietnam, North Macedonia, Canada, the United Kingdom and New Zealand.

Australia's Ambassador to Serbia hosted a very, very enjoyable reception that was attended by delegates and staff from Fiji, Tonga, Timor-Leste, the Federated States of Micronesia, New Zealand and Australia. Speakers from Tonga, Fiji and Micronesia were present at the reception, which provided an opportunity to discuss issues of relevance to the region. I particularly thank Ms Toni Matulick for her outstanding support of our delegation. I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.

COMMITTEES

Scrutiny of Delegated Legislation Committee

Delegated Legislation Monitor


Intelligence and Security Joint Committee

Report

Senator McGrath (Queensland—Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (18:34): On behalf of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security, I present the annual report of committee activities 2018-19. I move:

That the Senate take note of the report.

Senator McGrath: I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.

Intelligence and Security Joint Committee

Report

Senator McGrath (Queensland—Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (18:34): On behalf of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security, I present the report
of the committee on the review of the Australian citizenship renunciation by conduct and cessation provisions in the Australian Citizenship Act 2007. I move:

That the Senate take note of the report.

Senator McGrath: I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.

Environment and Communications References Committee

Report

Senator Hanson-Young (South Australia) (18:35): I present the interim report of the Environment and Communications References Committee on Australia’s faunal extinction crisis, environmental protections for native grasslands and the conduct of ministers, together with the Hansard record of proceedings and documents presented to the committee. I move:

That the Senate take note of the report.

This report is damning of the minister. It shows that this government has absolute disregard for environmental protections and will use the rules to suit themselves. Evidence collected throughout this inquiry indicates that Mr Taylor not only failed to disclose his vested interests but also sought to use his ministerial office and parliamentary connections to obtain special treatment for himself and his family, which is not offered to any other landholder in Australia. After considering this evidence, the committee reached the conclusion that the Hon.—or not so honourable—Angus Taylor MP, a minister from 2016 in the Turnbull-Morrison government, has sought to use his position and connections to interfere in the operation of this case in a way that breaches not only the prime ministerial Statement of Ministerial Standards, but also the expectations that Australians have of how their members of parliament will behave.

Mr Taylor has claimed that he was representing the views of agricultural stakeholders in making representations to the minister and his department. The committee, however, has found very little evidence to support this claim. It seems that Mr Taylor's claims are overstated at best and misleading at worst. This is rank abuse of position and privilege by the minister, and it just shows that this government cannot be trusted to protect the environment and cannot be trusted to keep their own MPs and ministers in line. It seems as though there is one rule for everybody else and a special rule for them. This committee report is damning and—make no mistake—this is just one of the issues that Mr Taylor is now facing scrutiny over. This is a minister who has continued to be found to be misleading the Australian people and the parliament, and to be abusive of his position as a minister. I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted.

Senator Waters (Queensland) (18:38): I rise to make a short contribution on the report that was just tabled. This is an incredibly damning report, with three very strong recommendations made as part of an interim report of the Senate inquiry into Australia’s faunal extinction crisis. What it finds is that the current ministerial standards are failing to stop conflicts of interest, they're failing to ensure integrity and they're certainly failing to deliver good outcomes for the environment. The chair of that particular inquiry, my colleague Senator Rice, will speak briefly on that particular aspect.
What this interim majority report recommended is that the Prime Minister finally do something to restore public confidence in government integrity, which we know is at all-time lows, by actually enforcing the disclosure obligations about the personal and pecuniary interests of ministers—and not just any ministers but including Minister Taylor, that embattled and frequently mentioned minister. It also recommends that all ministers be reminded that they're not meant to be there to abuse public office for private gain. I'm incredulous that it takes a Senate inquiry report to recommend that ministers be told not to put their own private greed ahead of their jobs to act in the national public interest as ministers of the Crown.

The inquiry also recommends that the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet review the conduct of Minister Taylor and the now Treasurer, Minister Frydenberg. That is a very serious rebuke of both of those senior ministers. I hope that the government takes those recommendations on board, because it should not have to be coping with any more scandals. The public already has enough reason to have absolutely no confidence in this government or, frankly, in this institution of democracy.

The other recommendations go to the need for the Department of the Environment and Energy to be audited, in particular for the extremely long time that the compliance investigation into this matter has taken. It's still on foot. There still have been no consequences for Minister Taylor, and there has been no decent explanation as to why the compliance investigation has taken so very long—longer than any other comparable compliance investigation. The department has also been rebuked for its failure to take appropriate notes in relevant ministerial meetings. One of the final recommendations is that the Public Service Commission undertake a review of note-taking procedures.

What we have seen from this government is ministers putting their private interests ahead of the public interest; abusing public servants; seeking to interfere in compliance matters and in investigations; and apparently issuing instructions that minutes be not taken. It is about time that we saw some integrity restored to this institution. That is why the Greens have moved for a parliamentary code of conduct. It's not enough that the prime ministerial standards exist if they are not enforced and are clearly being flouted on regular occasions. It's exactly why we need a federal anti-corruption body, but it will probably be an awfully long time before we see this government introduce such a body.

Senator RICE (Victoria) (18:41): This is an extraordinary report. It goes to the heart of what is wrong with this coalition government. It is government by the coalition for their mates at the expense of everybody else and the environment. It's worth highlighting some of the extraordinary material in this report.

In November 2016 the Commonwealth received allegations that there had been a potential violation of the EPBC Act on a property recently acquired by Jam Land in New South Wales. We know from ASIC documents that Minister Taylor and three of his brothers have connections to Jam Land, either as directors or indirect owners. What is clear is that Minister Taylor spoke about issues connected to the violation of our environment with Minister Frydenberg, who was then the Minister for the Environment and Energy. Since then, we have seen a special report on how the EPBC Act affects farmers. The investigation into the original violation hasn't been closed, but they've already finalised the review as to how they're going to look after their mates. What this shows is an issue that goes to the heart of the coalition
government. It's running the country to look after its mates, not to do what's best for the nation.

The decisions we make in this place matter; we've seen that today with the medevac legislation. This is another example of the coalition protecting its mates at the expense of others and at the expense of the environment. This report on the fate of our precious grasslands shows how significant this is. After 200 years of European settlement, the vast majority of lowland grasslands and grassy woodlands in south-eastern Australia have been lost, either by complete removal or severe modification. There's only a tiny percentage left, and it was this tiny percentage that was poisoned by the owners of Jam Land. Native grasslands provide vital habitat for many threatened and rare species of plants and animals, which is what the Environment and Communications References Committee inquiry is looking at. It is looking at the extinction crisis and the loss of so many of our precious animals in Australia. For example, the ecological grassland community of the Monaro region contains some of the best remaining habitat for four nationally listed animal species—the golden sun moth, the grassland earless dragon, the pink-tailed worm lizard and the striped legless lizard. They are amazing names and they are amazing animals. Protecting these animals is what we should be doing, but, tragically, the coalition don't care about this. They care about looking after their mates at the expense of the environment and the expense of everybody else. I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted.

Senator McMAHON (Northern Territory) (18:44): I would like it noted that the coalition's senators have submitted a dissenting report. We talk about rank abuse. Well, this is a rank abuse of a Senate committee and the processes of the Senate and the committee structure. The Senate has determined numerous times not to personally investigate Minister Taylor. This report is all about a personal attack on the minister. It has nothing to do with the environment or the terms of reference. We deplore this inappropriate misuse of a Senate committee. The committee has a valid terms of reference and this has been subverted for partisan political processes. Consequently, we do not support the blatantly partisan recommendations of this interim report.

Debate adjourned.

Public Accounts and Audit Committee Report

Senator CHANDLER (Tasmania) (18:45): On behalf of the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit, I present the 2018-19 annual report of the committee, together with executive minutes, and I move:

That the Senate take note of the report.

Since its establishment in 1913, the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit has ensured the accountability and transparency of public administration and expenditure and has become an enduring mechanism of scrutiny in the institution of this parliament. Uniquely, the committee has the authority to determine its own work program and priorities and does so through a bipartisan approach. This report is presented to the parliament pursuant to section 8B of the Public Accounts and Audit Committee Act 1951 and showcases the work of its
predecessor committee, which ceased with the prorogation of the 45th Parliament on 11 April 2019.

The final year of the previous committee was busy and productive with eight reports presented in the parliament, containing 67 recommendations, and a total of 18 public hearings held. While this report outlines the work of the predecessor committee, it also includes a recommendation for the coordination of government responses to the committee's reports to bring this practice in line with common practice across government. Specifically, the committee has recommended that a single consolidated whole-of-government response to each of its reports be coordinated and provided to it within given time frames. This approach would enable the committee to consider government responses in a timely and streamlined way.

On behalf of the newly appointed chair, along with my colleagues, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the chair and members of the previous committee. I'm looking forward to contributing to the important work of this committee. I commend the report to the Senate.

Question agreed to.

BILLS

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Amendment (Assisted Reproductive Treatment Statistics) Bill 2019

Report from Committee

Senator McGrath (Queensland—Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (18:47): At the request of the chair of the Community Affairs Legislation Committee, I present the report of the committee on the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Amendment (Assisted Reproductive Treatment Statistics) Bill 2019 together with the Hansard record of proceedings and documents presented to the committee.

COMMITTEES

Jobs for the Future in Regional Areas Select Committee

Report

Senator Siewert (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (18:49): At the request of the chair of the committee I present the report of the Select Committee into Jobs for the Future in Regional Areas together with the Hansard record of proceedings and documents presented to the committee, and I seek leave to have the report incorporated in Hansard.

Leave granted.

The report read as follows—

Select Committee into Jobs for the Future in Regional Areas Report

December 2019

Introduction

Referral of the inquiry and terms of reference

1.1 The Select Committee on Jobs for the Future in Regional Areas was established on 31 July 2019 to inquire and report of the following matters:

(a) new industries and employment opportunities that can be created in the regions;
(b) the number of existing jobs in regional areas in clean energy technology and ecological services and their future significance;

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(g) any related matters.

1.2 The committee was required to present its final report on or before 4 December 2019.

Conduct of the inquiry

1.3 The committee received 174 submissions for the inquiry. These submissions are listed at Appendix 1.

1.4 The committee also conducted seven public hearings:

- 1 October 2019 in Melbourne
- 10 October 2019 in Townsville
- 11 October 2019 in Mackay
- 30 October 2019 in Whyalla
- 1 November 2019 in Collie
- 5 November 2019 in Newcastle
- 6 November 2019 in Sydney.

1.5 Witnesses who appeared at the hearings are listed at Appendix 2. Answers to questions on notice and additional information provided by witnesses are also listed at Appendix 1.

1.6 The committee also undertook a site visit to the GFG Alliance Whyalla Steelworks on 30 October 2019.

1.7 Submissions, hearing transcripts and answers to questions on notice are available on the committee's website.

1.8 The committee would like to thank the individuals and organisations that made written submissions to the inquiry and/or gave evidence at the public hearings.

Structure of the report

1.9 The report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 outlines the industries which have the most potential to provide jobs in regional areas.
- Chapter 3 explores what is required to ensure the workforce is ready for the jobs of the future.
- Chapter 4 investigates the role of planning in preparing and facilitating regional Australia to realise these opportunities.
Chapter 5 considers what governments at all levels can do to promote and support the development of the industries and jobs of the future in regional areas.

Chapter 6 outlines the approach taken to committee views in this report.

1 Journals of the Senate, No. 10—31 July 2019, p. 306.

Industries of the future

Introduction

2.1 The global economy is embarking on a period of technological and social transformation. In Australia, this is manifesting in the evolution of energy systems, the emergence of circular economies and people moving into new fields of innovation and work.

2.2 The jobs of the future for regional areas will depend on the modification of existing industries and the development of new industries. While some opportunities will be localised, the emergence of other industries will have application across regional Australia.

2.3 The sectors that already sustain regional Australia—such as mining and power generation, agriculture, service industries and manufacturing—hold the key to unlocking new job opportunities. While current skill shortages in regional areas need to be addressed, new technologies and industries may offer the opportunity to create secure and stable local jobs that are well suited for regional areas.

2.4 Indeed, the enhancement of existing industries to make them more productive, efficient and/or meet new consumer expectations could be more effective than the creation of whole new industries in some regions. For example, Mr Adrian Price of the Ai Group Hunter Region noted:

We shouldn't put all our eggs in the new-industry basket and we must be mindful of the benefits that can be gained from an incremental investment and incentivisation of existing businesses, particularly where it aligns with the ambition and vision where we want business and industry to be as a nation.

2.5 Similarly, new industries and associated employment opportunities are likely to reflect the megatrends being experienced in Australia and worldwide—most notably the shift to a circular economy and the opportunities presented by digitisation and automation.

2.6 Dr Michael Askew from the Monash Sustainable Development Institute relayed his experience in examining regional transitions both domestically and internationally:

I guess I disagree with a lot of people's opinion that we don't have a crystal ball for the future. We don't know exactly what's going to happen, but we've got a good sense of what's going to happen and we've got a good sense of what jobs will look like into the future.

2.7 And the committee heard from stakeholders across the country that many regions are seeking to plan for the future by capitalising on existing regional strengths.

2.8 This chapter examines the potential opportunities associated with renewable energy generation and storage, industries that could benefit from low-cost renewable energy generation, energy export opportunities, manufacturing, heavy industry, waste management, and natural infrastructure.

Renewable energy generation and storage

2.9 Given the planned closure of a significant proportion of fossil-fuel electricity generation capacity, the development of renewable energy generation projects and storage capacity was of keen interest to many stakeholders.

2.10 This section outlines the investment that is forecast to be built over the next 10 years and the jobs that could flow from this activity, and considers how existing and new transmission infrastructure could shape expansion.

Forecast investment

2.11 The Clean Energy Council estimates that, as of 1 November 2019, there were 82 large-scale renewable energy projects that had reached financial closure but were yet to be commissioned. This
represented over 10.5 gigawatts (GW) of new clean generating capacity, $18.6 billion in investment and 12,240 jobs during construction. This work is in addition to the 23 projects that have been commissioned this year, representing a further 1.6 GW in capacity, $3.3 billion in investment and 2885 construction jobs.8

2.12 There is considerable potential for renewable electricity generation to grow further as renewables comprise only 21 per cent of the generating capacity of Australia's stationary electricity sector.9

2.13 Under the Australian Energy Market Operator's Integrated System Plan, the 'fast track' scenario predicts up to 42.9 GW of new renewable capacity will need to be built by 2029–30. The Australia Institute estimates that the number of construction jobs associated with the 'fast track' scenario is between 18,500 and 58,500, with ongoing employment of up to 12,500.10

2.14 While there are many jobs associated with the construction of renewable energy facilities, fewer jobs are required for operation and maintenance of renewable energy generation.11 Regional Development Australia (RDA) Townsville and North Queensland noted that:

Our experience in the development of solar farms has been that is there's a sugar hit with the immediate construction jobs but employment in managing those facilities thereafter is very small.12

2.15 However, the committee heard from The Next Economy that there are a variety of roles that could flow from greater investment in the renewable energy sector:

...jobs in the renewable energy sector extend beyond construction and installation. There are also opportunities in energy efficiency services, including the retrofitting of existing building stock; developing storage solutions; upgrading the grid infrastructure; developing the digital systems that we require to manage energy flow; manufacturing renewable energy parts and products, along with the minerals and metals and chemicals needed for that sector; electrifying the transport sector; and developing smaller-scale, community-owned, renewable energy projects, especially for remote areas, that actually keep money and jobs in those areas.13

2.16 The committee also heard that heavy industries are considering how renewable energy can power their operations. For example, Mr Mark Scholem from the GFG Alliance outlined that:

Now that the chairman has announced that the 2030 vision for the new global Liberty Steel Group is to be carbon neutral by 2030—which he did yesterday, in Milan—that probably will have some impact on our thinking here in Australia...it underscores the options around renewable energy support, the electric arc furnace, green steel and the green steel model, and scrap steel and making steel from scrap with renewable energy.14

Making use of existing grid infrastructure

2.17 Tapping into existing grid infrastructure could make investments more attractive in areas where coal-fired power stations or mines have closed and/or will close in the coming years. The Nature Conservation Council of NSW noted that storage and grid stability are logical industries for places that have already got good grid infrastructure.15

2.18 Councillor Sarah Stanley from the Shire of Collie noted the benefits that might arise from existing electricity infrastructure in that area:

We're also the centre of Western Australia's electricity transmission network. At the moment, we are a large producer of electricity into the grid, but that infrastructure is an asset that remains in our community and could be repurposed to attract electricity-intensive industries in the future.16

2.19 The Clean Energy Council highlighted the benefits that can arise from being near existing infrastructure:
What you'll tend to see increasingly are projects being located where there's a stronger grid—so where there's a stronger demand and a stronger customer load, but also where there's a strong grid to support the power from the project to the customer load.

... A real strength of the transition, if you like, is the spare transmission infrastructure that's either already in existence, or about to be in existence, in those coal regions....We're seeing this with the Kidston project up in Queensland with the pumped hydro using some of the old mine resources. And I think there's another opportunity in the Bendigo region. It really is on a case-by-case basis. Certainly there is opportunity for large-scale solar in those coal communities, particularly to the north of Australia, and we've seen here in the Latrobe Valley a proposal around an offshore wind farm that would essentially tap into the transmission infrastructure. There's no 'one size fits all', but industry is focused on those areas where there are strong transmission backbones, and that does lend itself to those existing coal communities and regions.17

2.20 The cost of transmission can make investments in renewable energy unattractive if they need to feed into the grid. Mayor Greg Williamson from the Mackay Regional Council provided a concrete example:

We could produce power at 8c a kilowatt hour, we've proven that, but it's still going to cost 20-odd cents a kilowatt hour to move it on the poles and wires via renting the system on the poles and wires, which is owned by Energex. So we're absolutely no better off for a $30 million investment in a solar farm unless we're living right next door to it.18

Investing in new grid infrastructure

2.21 The development of new infrastructure has the potential to facilitate the development of renewable energy projects in other areas. For example, RDA Townsville and North Queensland highlighted that:

To help fuel confidence in the development of new energy projects in the region, especially energy generation projects, the proposed CopperString

2.0 transmission project connecting the Mount Isa corridor to the national electricity grid in North Queensland is a vital component. It would provide not only employment opportunities through construction but, importantly, opportunities for other renewable projects to connect to the grid, and enable other industries to source more reliable and competitively priced electricity.19

Potential additional benefits of increased renewable energy generation

2.22 The potential benefits from renewable energy generation in regional areas can flow beyond the generation activity itself. This can include, for example, the creation of ongoing jobs in mineral processing, manufacturing and horticulture. Further, low-cost renewable energy generation can revitalise regions that will be affected by the closure of coal-fired power generation and reinvigorate existing energy intensive industries.

2.23 The Clean Energy Council (CEC) argued that:

The strong investment in renewable energy generation over the last few years has not only enabled a record number of direct and indirect jobs, but it is supporting the broader economic development of regional areas through the provision of lower-cost energy.

Value adding manufacturing

2.24 The advent of low-cost, off-grid electricity generation has the potential to enable competitive manufacturing in regional Australia and reinvigorate energy-intensive manufacturing.

2.25 The Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union highlighted the key role that manufacturing plays in diversifying regional economies:
Manufacturing has long been the lifeblood of diverse and healthy regional economies across Australia. It has offered a complementary mix to these economies that have been traditionally dependent upon primary industries such as mining or agriculture. It has offered them meaningful, skilled, secure, well-paying jobs in regional communities, where these are often at a premium.20

2.26 Indeed, the growth in renewable energy generation presents direct opportunities for increasing manufacturing activity:

Installation and construction employs large numbers of people for short periods of time, but a globally competitive renewables manufacturing industry creates jobs for decades. The Victorian state government has only scratched the surface of the opportunity for Australia in this space. They have reopened the Ford plant in Geelong and allowed Danish multinational Vestas to start assembling wind turbines, but there is also Keppel Prince in Portland and Wilson Transformers in Wodonga, who have also been involved in the renewables supply chain, creating high skilled, meaningful manufacturing jobs.21

2.27 Beyond Zero Emissions noted that as the cost of renewable generation falls, new economic opportunities will open up:

There is significant value that Australia is leaving on the table at the moment because it can't do a lot of energy-intensive manufacturing, because it's not economical. The plummeting costs of renewables means that Australia can look at these energy-intensive industries for the first time. It will have a huge flow-on in terms of jobs and economic activity.22

2.28 The Next Economy submitted that:

The experience of other OECD countries suggests that emerging digital technologies such as robotics and 3D printing combined with cheap renewable energy holds the potential to stimulate new, decentralised forms of processing and manufacturing in regional Australia. Examples of places such as Lille in France and Cleveland, Ohio are demonstrating how small-scale manufacturing is revitalising regional areas in other parts of the world.23

2.29 The committee was provided with a number of examples of communities across Australia where local low-cost renewable energy was either powering or proposing to power industrial areas. For example, the Cradle Coast Authority outlined the industries that could be supported by locally situated renewable energy sources in that area:

Industrial parks located next to renewable energy sources can provide power for a range of large-scale energy using businesses such as shore-based aquaculture, hydroponic greenhouses, hydrogen production and export facilities. They can also support the large power needs of mineral processing which could increase the jobs provided from mines. These parks would also house energy storage capabilities. Remotely located energy parks provide an opportunity for urban renewal and population growth in the West Coast and Circular Head municipalities. This would be a significant economic stimulus for the Cradle Coast region that would broaden the current economic base of the region.24

2.30 The Townsville City Council is also supporting the creation of an industrial precinct powered by local renewable energy sources not connected to the National Electricity Market. Mayor Jenny Hill told the committee that 'The only way for us to create an industrial precinct with affordable energy is to have it as a microenvironment'.25

2.31 The committee heard that an industrial workshop in Mackay is already being primarily powered by renewable energy not attached to the traditional electricity grid.26

Minerals processing
2.32 Various stakeholders also advocated for Australia to increase the level of minerals processing, particularly those with strong growth potential such as lithium. Professor Ray Wills from Future Smart Technologies contended that:

We have to get past making big rocks into small rocks, get down the supply chain and turn those things into things that we want to use and actually add value to them.27

2.33 The ANU Energy Change Institute submitted that:

The geographic combination of vast, cheap renewable energy and hydrogen generation with massive mineral resources provides a new opportunity for Australia to value-add and refine more of its abundant metal ores for export.28

2.34 Indeed, stakeholders were keen to highlight the potential for lithium ore processing domestically.29 The Townsville City Council outlined the prospective development of a 18 gigawatt battery production facility outside Townsville:

It is a consortium called Imperium 3. It includes Boston Global, Magnis, who have the graphite—they are an Australian company—Siemens, Kodak Eastman and C4V. It is a mixture of Australian and American countries. They currently have a plant build in upstate New York. It is based on American technology, with the support of Magnis...they consider Australia as...a suitable place for manufacturing.30

2.35 Participants at the Collie hearing also saw potential in the development of a battery manufacturing industry in that region to add value to the lithium being mined there.31

2.36 But the enthusiasm for battery manufacturing might be tempered by the cost effectiveness of doing so when compared to China. On this point, Dr Martin Anda argued for the development of manufacturing to cater for specialist battery applications:

Some of the drivers are going to be unique applications of batteries. While we won't be able to compete with a mass production of lithium-ion cells for cars and homes et cetera—for many years to come that will continue to be mass produced out of China. But when we start looking at other battery types as well, such as vanadium redox flow, we have Australian vanadium mining here. We have other types of redox flow battery manufacturing in Australia, even though it's at a small scale at the moment...There might be more stationary applications. We were looking at some fairly unique applications here in Collie even with Thomas Braunl at UWA. You've got interesting tourism applications here where new types of batteries could be developed for jet skis, tourism trails and facilities.32

2.37 Another issue constraining the development of battery manufacturing facilities in Australia is access to the necessary materials. Dr Dilawar Singh from Sun Brilliance noted that:

Our precondition is that we have the raw material [lithium]. If there is no raw material, there is no project. What we have decided internally is that if we don't secure any material by the middle of next year we'll have to move to another project; we'll have to look for other opportunities somewhere else.33

Horticulture

2.38 The CEC outlined how low-cost energy from a renewable energy generation and storage system in Stawell in Victoria had underpinned the development of a significant hydroponic vegetable producer. Together the energy facility and the vegetable producer will generate $560 million of investment and provide 1300 jobs during construction with almost 300 permanent jobs on completion and another 150 direct jobs in the region.34

2.39 Per Capita outlined how clean-energy generation was supporting agriculture in regions where traditional farming was not viable:
Sundrop Farms in Port Augusta in South Australia is using cutting-edge desalination, renewable energy and aquaponics to grow 15 per cent of Australia's tomatoes in an area that is supposedly arid, barren and unable to produce this type of crop.35

Regions with significant reliance on coal production

2.40 Given the rapid advances in renewable energy generation and associated declines in the cost of firmed renewable electricity generation being lower than existing wholesale prices, it is highly plausible that the forecast closures of coal-fired electricity generation in Australia will occur more rapidly than policy makers expect. This is consistent with the insights of futurist Professor Ray Wills from Future Smart Strategies, who said, 'We always say that the future will come faster than we think, and when we look back the future always came faster than we thought'.36

2.41 In terms of individual regions, how best to address the forthcoming closures in coal-fired power generation depends somewhat on the quality of the coal resources and potential alternative markets for coal.

2.42 In low-quality thermal coal regions, such as the Latrobe Valley and Collie, it is unlikely that a new market for such coal will emerge. Therefore, coal production will likely be significantly reduced, if not ceased altogether. These regions need to focus on using existing infrastructure as a basis to develop new industries—for example, clean energy generation and relatively low-cost manufacturing.

2.43 Where high-quality thermal coal and/or metallurgical (coking) coal are produced, it is likely that export opportunities will continue and may even increase. For example, the committee heard in Mackay that metallurgical coal exports were going well.37 Similarly, the Port of Newcastle indicated that companies in the Hunter were exporting high-quality thermal coal to Indonesia and Vietnam, and this could increase in the future.38

2.44 While the potential for Australia to export more coal may exist, Mr Tim Buckley from the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis did not believe that this was going to occur:

One of the arguments that the IEA [International Energy Agency] has taken on board from the Minerals Council of Australia and from our Australian leading coal companies is that Australia's coal is better than everyone else's and therefore Australia will naturally gain market share as the market declines. Most people accept the market's declining but think Australia will gain market share. I think that is just delusional. I don't know too many industries where the market goes into terminal decline and where you win as a country by grabbing more market share.39

2.45 Similar sentiments were shared by representatives of the Monash Sustainable Development Institute.40

2.46 Mr Buckley went on to discuss the prospects for other coal exporting nations and explained that with European demand for coal falling, Russia was building infrastructure to increase exports:

European coal consumption's down 23 per cent this year. Russia was the biggest supplier and exporter to Europe, beyond Poland. Russia are redirecting those exports to the Asian markets. They've got a huge railway line already built. They've built three or four major coal export ports. Russia has increased its exports by 10 per cent this year. Ours are flatlining. So I think the idea that Russia is going to lose market share to Australia is farcical, because Russia is the lowest cost producer in the world.41

Defence service industries

2.47 The Resource Industry Network in Mackay is looking at outside-the-box solutions to utilise the existing skills of businesses to service other industries, such as defence:

If you look at the type of equipment that Defence uses, which is heavy industrial, it's very similar to what we are doing in mining services. It's trying to get the defence industry to see that as an opportunity as well.42
2.48 Similarly, the AMWU-WA Branch highlighted the potential for businesses in the South West of Western Australia to bid for defence work.43

**Technological innovation in existing industries**

2.49 Regions with energy-intensive value-adding industries also have the potential to adapt.

2.50 The committee heard from the GFG Alliance in Whyalla which is proposing to revitalise the steelworks and bring down the cost of production with a variety of innovative and technologically advanced initiatives. Depending on the final configuration, a portion of the energy used at the steelworks would be sourced from a 280 MW solar farm in the Whyalla region.44

2.51 In Townsville, Sun Metals, a solar electricity generation farm, supplies the existing zinc refinery with about 30 per cent of its electricity needs. That refinery is expanding its zinc production and is looking to expand its portfolio of renewable generation assets to further reduce its exposure to volatile electricity grid prices.45

2.52 Similarly, the development and commercialisation of the EnPot technology for aluminium smelting has the potential to redefine and expand the role of aluminium smelting in Australia as an electricity grid stabiliser as well as a value-adding base metal producer. As Mr Tim Buckley from the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis explained:

…with the adoption of technology that will allow a smelter to be effectively a virtual battery—in other words, to be responsive to the price signal that our market already creates—smelters could become virtual batteries for our electricity grid and provide absolutely key firming capacity. So when demand is high they would turn their demand down by 25 per cent and when demand is weak and power prices going negative they could turn their power consumption up by 25 per cent.46

2.53 Mr Buckley noted that the technology has been successfully deployed in Essen, Germany, over the past three years at commercial scale and has the potential to reinvigorate the Australian aluminium smelting industry:

Professor Garnaut has been saying for probably decades—he was way ahead of his time on it—that heavy industry can be reinvigorated in Australia, and that, rather than us progressively losing all of our smelters, we can actually become a smelter hub because we will have low-cost, low-emissions electricity. If you look at Alcoa, they are now ranking all of their smelters globally by emissions intensity. Unfortunately, the four Australian smelters are all at the top of the global list compared to Canada and Russia, for example, which are at the bottom, and so they are proposing closing them. This technology could reverse that and save our industry.47

2.54 Given the location of Australia's aluminium smelters in Portland, Tomago, Gladstone, Collie and Bell Bay, there could be significant benefits to the companies involved and the electricity grid if it were possible to retrofit these smelters with the EnPot or similar technology and be powered by lower-cost renewables.

**Energy export opportunities**

2.55 In addition to renewable energy generation for domestic consumption, stakeholders highlighted the potential for Australia to develop a clean energy export industry. Recent comments by Mr Darren Miller from the Australian Renewable Energy Agency indicate that, at some point in the future, renewable generation capacity may be far in excess—by as much as 700 per cent—of Australia's total energy needs and any excess could be used for energy exports.48

2.56 The ANU Energy Change Institute noted that:

The scale of the opportunity for renewable energy exports from Northern Australia is vast. Australia has in abundance the natural resources needed to become a major exporter of renewable energy and zero-carbon embedded energy products to the Indo-Pacific.49
2.57 The ANU Energy Change Institute outlined the two areas where energy export opportunities could be realised:

- export of zero-carbon electricity via high voltage direct current sub-sea cables (combining solar and wind farms with pumped hydro storage)
- hydrogen generated by electrolysis using renewable energy.

2.58 The committee is aware of a proposal to export energy through high voltage direct current cables. For example, Beyond Zero Emissions outlined the Sun Cable project and its goal to build 10 GW of solar generation in Australia, partnered with a 20 GW battery, and a high-voltage direct current cable to Singapore, which was recently given major project status by the Northern Territory Government.

2.59 Several stakeholders also noted the potential for Australia to export hydrogen. For example, the Asian Renewable Energy Hub is planned for the Pilbara region of Western Australia and will have 15 GW of wind and solar energy capacity built with the energy generated used in local industries and to produce hydrogen for export.

2.60 The Clean Energy Council outlined the potential for an energy export industry in Australia, particularly given the potential demand for hydrogen from Asia.

2.61 However, several stakeholders raised concerns about the viability and competitiveness of exporting hydrogen, particularly in the short-term. Professor Ray Wills from Future Smart Technologies cautioned the committee about the potential for the hydrogen economy to be cost competitive even if the industry were to be developed to scale.

2.62 Similarly, in relation to the cost competitiveness of hydrogen exports, Mr Tim Buckley from the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis argued that:

Half the delivered cost to Japan is transportation, because hydrogen is very hard to transport. My takeaway from that is: let's decarbonise domestic Australian industry first; and then once we've got the economies of scale, once we've got the cheap electricity, once we've got the technology all sorted out, then we become a key supplier of clean, green hydrogen to Korea, China and Japan—but once we've got the cost down.

Waste management – biofuels and recycling

Biofuels

2.63 The committee was provided with numerous examples of biofuel technologies that could be developed at scale in regional Australia and also assist with waste management.

2.64 Bioenergy Australia advocated for the development of industries based on the value extraction of organic and inorganic waste:

The beauty of Australia's bio-economy is that it is basically exclusively regional, so this is about jobs in the regions. It's about investment in the regions…

So, effectively, it is around looking at fuel, heat gas, plastic replacements, electricity, nutraceuticals, chemicals—really anything at the moment that is coming from a fossil fuel base can come from an organic or inorganic waste stream and be converted into that. As you can imagine, the jobs that can be created through the creation of this entirely new industry that virtually doesn't exist in Australia [are] substantial.

2.65 In terms of specific examples, Bioenergy Australia cited Licella, an Australian pioneer in advanced bio-fuel manufacturing with an extensively tested and conservatively scaled up pilot plant on the Central Coast of New South Wales:

They have predicted that they would build 36 plants along the east coast of Australia, taking end-of-life plastics and turning that into crude. They are non-recyclable plastics that currently exist in the
marketplace…So that would be producing a crude that could be used for roads, fuels and a whole range of different plastic replacements.59

2.66 But Mayor Greg Williamson from the Mackay Regional Council noted that currently biodiesel production in Mackay was not cost competitive. 60

2.67 Bioenergy Australia also cited waste sawmill residue as another potential biofuel source:

…what we would advocate for is the utilisation of waste sawmill residue. That's looking at utilising what would otherwise be effectively a complete waste stream…Boral…run quite a large forestry operation. They're the second-largest fleet operators in terms of transportation. They are currently working on a project that…is taking their sawmill residues—the actual residue components—and converting those into renewable drop-in diesel, and that's a hundred per cent drop-in diesel that they can be utilising.61

2.68 Bioenergy Australia also highlighted the potential to use existing gas transmission pipelines to distribute locally produced biogas from up to 90 000 units in regional Australia.62

2.69 Dr Michael Askew from the Monash Sustainable Development Institute contended that there is enough biogas capacity in New South Wales to supply that state with its gas needs.63

2.70 The committee heard several examples of facilities currently producing biogas:

Moxey Farms dairy have a massive anaerobic digester that has just gone live, about a month ago…There's an abattoir in Goulburn that went online two years ago. That has reduced their electricity costs for that particular facility by 50 per cent…64

2.71 End-of-life tyres also have the potential to be transformed into fuel sources that do not require further processing:

We have a facility in Southern Queensland—Southern Oil Refining—this is taking end-of-life tyres, which are creating massive mounds all over the country, and turning that into a 100 per cent renewable drop-in diesel that can also be converted to jet fuel as well as lignocellulosic ethanol.65

2.72 In response to concerns about crops being grown to fuel production, Bioenergy Australia contended that:

Ethanol production in Australia is a by-product of gluten production. So gluten is the predominant use of the crop and then the starch residue waste stream is converted into ethanol. That's what takes place in New South Wales. In Queensland, the waste stream from molasses production is utilised. So we are quite different than Brazil or the US in terms of the way we operate.66

2.73 The Climate Change Cluster at UTS advocated for the development of bio- refineries and algae farms to produce carbohydrates, lipids and protein from which plastics, omega oils, feed and fuel could be made. In the United States, algae have recently been defined as a traditional crop and this has opened up opportunities for farmers. 67

2.74 In Australia, Venus Shell Systems in Bomaderry sequesters carbon dioxide into pools of algae to accelerate growth. The seaweed is then processed and added to food and pharmaceutical products at commercial scale.68 This technology is easily and readily scalable and could be an area for further development in Australia.

2.75 Much of the development of biofuel facilities will need to take place in regional areas because it does not make sense to create a facility anywhere further than 150 kilometres from where the waste is going to be.69

2.76 Further, Dr Askew noted that:

…these new industries are perfectly suited to Australia because they're often smaller scale and they're decentralised. You can have a biogas plant that provides power for 25 farmers, and they can operate the plant themselves as a cooperative and generate income from offtake agreements—and all from the waste that they used to send to landfill or burn off, which they've had to pay for… So there is a
lot of independence and energy security for regions and they can generate extra income from total value capture.70

2.77 Similarly, the committee heard anecdotally that Mackay Sugar provides a third of Mackay’s electricity needs and has done so for the past 20 years.71 Given there are many sugar mills along the coast of Queensland and Northern NSW, the potential for adopting such technology seems significant.

2.78 Whilst biogas and biofuels will undoubtedly play a prominent role in the Australian energy market of the future, it is the conversion of organic material into high-value chemicals and products that also offers considerable economic and regional development opportunities. ‘Bio’ food additives, plastic, pharmaceuticals, and other high-value products can be derived from bio-innovation processes and support new industries, transform existing businesses and drive new prosperity in local communities.

Recycling

2.79 The committee heard that there was significant potential for recycling to provide additional jobs, particularly in regional areas.72

2.80 The National Waste Recycling Industry Council (NWRIC) argued that currently 20 million tonnes of material are still going to landfill that could be recovered and made available for recycling. This could potentially create up to 12 000 additional jobs, many of which would be in regional areas.73

2.81 The NWRIC noted recent national initiatives to increase resource recovery and manage waste and resources better:

That means that there is a real opportunity for us to start doing further processing and reprocessing of materials here in Australia. That requires new facilities and more employment opportunities. There is a real role for that to service regional areas, because, as you know, Australia is a big place.74

2.82 Examples of options for greater recycling and reuse of materials in regional areas include organics, construction waste, tyres and glass:

Obviously, once you get into a regional area, the economics become a lot more challenging. One of the key opportunities there is a public-private partnership. There are examples of that where councils are working with organics composters to jointly build a facility, and jointly own and operate that. There are some interesting economic models that can make it more viable for commercial operators to work in partnership with local councils.75

2.83 The NWRIC noted the importance of creating markets for those waste products, especially glass and construction materials, which are costly to transport and have limited residual value.76

2.84 To reduce the cost of waste transportation and overcome reluctance to invest in fixed plant, research is currently being undertaken into developing small-scale, mobile recycling plants which can move between regions. The committee heard that:

There is development of container style systems that can be moved from place to place that can look at processing plastics. The University of New South Wales SMaRT centre has been looking at developing smaller scale processing units that can do that. There could be a situation in terms of having mobility for crushing and washing glass, for instance, which is what’s needed to be able to get it to a form so that it can go back into local civil construction. So that could be possible. The question here is how do you make it commercially viable? How you fund it is really the challenge with that. There are technologies out there, and this is where I think the federal government can take great leadership in this to provide the right framework, and that will encourage regional councils to work with industry and coordinate.77

2.85 The potential role for governments at all levels in helping to create markets for these products is explored in chapter 5.

Ecological services and natural infrastructure

Site rehabilitation and reef restoration
There is a significant role for natural environment rehabilitation to play in providing jobs in regional areas.

The Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis noted that there were 60,000 unrehabilitated, abandoned mine sites across Australia. Remediation effectively uses the same skills as those used when the holes were created. Given that Ecosure estimates that currently there are more than 10,000 employees in the ecological restoration industry in New South Wales, Victoria and south-east Queensland, the potential jobs associated with ecological restoration are significant.

Dr Michael Askew from the Monash Sustainable Development Institute noted that in the Hunter Region:

…environmental remediation is going to be one of the big employers in the area, and not just for mine sites; there are numerous contaminated sites across the region. As a former New South Wales EPA employee I know them all too well. They present a great challenge and an ongoing challenge, and some of them present a more imminent challenge now. That includes the full range of jobs in environmental remediation, and I think there will be a lot of people employed in that sector.

The Institute for Sustainable Futures noted the benefits that site remediation could have for employment in former coal-mining regions:

Site remediation…is a very important source of jobs as both power stations and mines close down. It's making sure that bonds are properly in place and that the regulations ensure there is going to be proper remediation. That's quite important, because the skills required are quite complementary with the types of skills we have both in power stations and mining.

Ms Diane Lanyon from Ecosure described reef restoration as an emerging industry:

I believe that reef restoration is something that's on the horizon and we'll definitely be seeing more fins underwater doing some on-ground—some underwater—work. There are some really, really amazing things happening.

Mr Allen Grundy from Tourism Australia advocated to increase reef restoration activities in high tourism parts of the reef that had been affected by natural weather events:

This is why I want marine biologists and specialist people, because I want to be growing the coral and transplanting it in these high-use sites, because we can restore the environment when we've got economic and social backing behind us. We need the finance to do it, and we're working with GBRF [Great Barrier Reef Foundation] to try and get some of the funding. But we're seeing great results already. Eight months our coral gardens have been in…. The best thing is that we're bringing back the species and the varieties that were lost.

Land use management and carbon farming

Various stakeholders identified land use management as a sector that holds considerable potential for new job creation, including for Indigenous communities.

Professor David Lindenmayer emphasised the jobs associated with the management of native forests for carbon storage:

There are many things to do as part of managing that asset. For example, there are substantial parts of the forests that haven't been regenerated, after fire or after logging, that would need to be regenerated.
to regrow the stock, and then you also need to protect the stock from issues such as invasive species. We know that in south-eastern Australia, particularly in the last 10 years, there's been an explosion of animals such as sambar deer and other introduced pest species, and that has a big impact on regenerating forests.85

2.95 Professor Lindenmayer outlined the range of opportunities that could arise from reconsidering the use of native forests in Victoria:

So we can have one of these rare outcomes where we have a win in the plantation sector, a win in the native forest sector, through that resource as a carbon stock, and a win in the tourism sector. So it creates more diversity, more wealth and more opportunities, and it really is an exciting prospect here.86

2.96 The National Rural Health Alliance advocated for the expansion of investments in ecological services as a way of increasing wellbeing in regional communities, particularly Indigenous land management initiatives and regenerative farming practices.87

1 Circular economies seek to minimise waste by extracting maximum value while in use before recovering and regenerating materials at the end of product life.

2 Monash Sustainable Development Institute, Submission 96, [p. 1].

3 The Next Economy, Submission 16, p. 12.

4 Mr Adrian Price, Regional Manager, Hunter Region, Australian Industry Group, Proof Committee Hansard, 5 November 2019, p. 3.

5 Centre for Policy Futures, Submission 141, p. 9.

6 Dr Michael Askew, Program Manager, Australian Transitions Academy, Monash Sustainable Development Institute, Monash University, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 October 2019, p. 23.

7 For example, see ANU Energy Change Institute, Submission 46; Institute for Sustainable Futures, Submission 156; Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis, Submission 115; Ecoinvo Pty Ltd, Submission 2.


9 Clean Energy Council, Submission 142, p. 5.


11 See also Mr Steven McMillian, Northern Regional Organiser, Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union, Proof Committee Hansard, 30 October 2019, p. 18; Local Government Association of Australia, Submission 87, p. 7.

12 Ms Glenys Schuntner, Chief Executive Officer, Regional Development Australia Townsville and North Queensland, Proof Committee Hansard, 10 October 2019, p. 2.

13 Dr Amanda Cahill, Chief Executive Officer, The Next Economy, Proof Committee Hansard, 6 November 2019, p. 39.

14 Mr Mark Scholm, Head of Government Relations and External Affairs, Gupta Family Group Alliance, Proof Committee Hansard, 30 October 2019, p. 4.


16 Councillor Sarah Stanley, President, Shire of Collie, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 November 2019, p. 17.

17 Mr Kane Thornton, Chief Executive, Clean Energy Council, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 October 2019, pp. 41–42.

18 Mayor Greg Williamson, Mackay Regional Council, Proof Committee Hansard, 11 October 2019, p. 49.

19 Ms Glenys Schuntner, Chief Executive Officer, Regional Development Australia Townsville and North Queensland, Proof Committee Hansard, 10 October 2019, p. 2.

20 Mr Adam Wieladak, National Research Officer, Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 October 2019, p. 30.

21 Mr Adam Wieladak, National Research Officer, Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 October 2019, p. 30.

22 Mr Eytan Lenko, Chair, Beyond Zero Emissions, Proof Committee Hansard, 30 October 2019, p. 9.
23 The Next Economy, Submission 16, p. 7.
24 Cradle Coast Authority, Submission 9, p. 2.
25 Mayor Jenny Hill, Townsville City Council, Proof Committee Hansard, 10 October 2019, p. 14.
26 Councillor Greg Williamson, Mayor, Mackay Regional Council, Proof Committee Hansard, 11 October 2019, p. 49.
27 Professor Ray Wills, Managing Director, Future Smart Strategies, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 November 2019, p. 46.
28 ANU Energy Change Institute, Submission 46, [p. 2].
29 For example, see ClimateWorks Australia, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 October 2019;
30 Mayor Jenny Hill, Townsville City Council, Proof Committee Hansard, 10 October 2019, pp. 10–11.
31 For example, see Mr Steve McCartney, Secretary, and Mr Sean Emmett, Union Delegate, Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 November 2019; Ms Mellisa Teede, Chief Executive Officer, South West Development Commission, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 November 2019.
32 Dr Martin Anda, Academic Chair, Environmental Engineering, Murdoch University, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 November 2019, p. 54.
33 Dr Dilawar Singh, Founder, Sun Brillance, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 November 2019, p. 61.
34 Clean Energy Council, Submission 142, p. 3.
35 Mr Shirley Jackson, Economist, Per Capita, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 October 2019, p. 48.
36 Professor Ray Wills, Managing Director, Future Smart Strategies, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 November 2019, p. 45.
38 Mr Craig Carmody, Chief Executive Officer, Port of Newcastle, Proof Committee Hansard, 5 November 2019, pp. 10, 12.
40 Monash Sustainable Development Institute, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 October 2019, p. 27.
42 Ms Adrienne Rourke, General Manager, Resource Industry Network, Proof Committee Hansard, 11 October 2019, p. 16.
43 Mr Steve McCartney, Secretary, Western Australia Branch, Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union – WA Branch, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 November 2019, p. 38.
44 Mr Mark Scholem, GFG Alliance, Proof Committee Hansard, 30 October 2019, p. 2.
49 ANU Energy Change Institute, Submission 46, [p. 4].
50 ANU Energy Change Institute, Submission 46, [p. 4].
52 Port of Newcastle, Proof Committee Hansard, 5 November 2019.
53 Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business; the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Cities and Regional Development; the Department of Industry, Innovation and Science; and the Department of Agriculture, Submission 149, p. 60.

54 Mr Kane Thornton, Chief Executive, Clean Energy Council, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 October 2019, p. 45.

55 Professor Ray Wills, Future Smart Strategies, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 November 2019, p. 49.


57 For example, see Ms Shahana McKenzie, Chief Executive Officer, Bioenergy Australia, Proof Committee Hansard, 6 November 2019; Mr Charles Jenkinson, Director, Regional Development Australia South West, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 November 2019;


60 Mayor Greg Williamson, Mackay Regional Council, Proof Committee Hansard, 11 October 2019, p. 46.

61 Ms Shahana McKenzie, Bioenergy Australia, Proof Committee Hansard, 6 November 2019, p. 6.

62 Ms Shahana McKenzie, Bioenergy Australia, Proof Committee Hansard, 6 November 2019, p. 2.

63 Dr Michael Askew, Monash Sustainable Development Institute, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 October 2019, p. 28.

64 Ms Shahana McKenzie, Bioenergy Australia, Proof Committee Hansard, 6 November 2019, p. 7.

65 Ms Shahana McKenzie, Bioenergy Australia, Proof Committee Hansard, 6 November 2019, p. 2.

66 Ms Shahana McKenzie, Bioenergy Australia, Proof Committee Hansard, 6 November 2019, p. 2.

67 Professor Peter Ralph, Executive Director, University of Technology Sydney, Proof Committee Hansard, 6 November 2019, pp. 21, 26–27.


69 Ms Shahana McKenzie, Bioenergy Australia, Proof Committee Hansard, 6 November 2019, p. 3.

70 Dr Michael Askew, Monash Sustainable Development Institute, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 October 2019, p. 29.

71 Ms Adrienne Rourke, Resource Industry Network, Proof Committee Hansard, 11 October 2019, p. 12; and Mayor Greg Williamson, Mackay Regional Council, Proof Committee Hansard, 11 October 2019, p. 47.

72 For example, see ClimateWorks Australia, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 October 2019; Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 November 2019;

73 Ms Rose Read, Chief Executive Officer, National Waste Recycling Industry Council, Proof Committee Hansard, 6 November 2019, p. 32.

74 Ms Rose Read, Chief Executive Officer, National Waste Recycling Industry Council, Proof Committee Hansard, 6 November 2019, p. 32.

75 Ms Rose Read, Chief Executive Officer, National Waste Recycling Industry Council, Proof Committee Hansard, 6 November 2019, p. 33.

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80 Dr Michael Askew, Monash Sustainable Development Institute, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 October 2019, p. 27.

81 Dr Chris Briggs, Research Principal, Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney, Proof Committee Hansard, 6 November 2019, p. 23.

82 Ms Diane Lanyon, General Manager, Ecosure Pty Ltd, Proof Committee Hansard, 10 October 2019, p. 21.
Chapter 3

Ensuring a future workforce is ready

Jobs of the future will look similar to the jobs of today

3.1 Many of the opportunities presented by industries of the future will require the same skill sets as those required by existing industries. The committee heard that:

- construction skills will be needed for renewable electricity generation and storage, transmission infrastructure, bio-innovation industries, and manufacturing facilities
- electrical and mechanical trades are essential for the ongoing operation and maintenance of a range of industries including advanced manufacturing, bio-innovation industries, renewable energy generation and storage
- plant operators and truck drivers will be required for mine restoration and to transport raw materials to, and take finished products away from, manufacturing, bio-innovation and recycling facilities
- researchers will be required to develop and improve processes associated with energy export industries, bio-innovation, agricultural technologies, mineral processing and value-added manufacturing.

3.2 However, appropriate skill development and training are vital to ensure all workers are able to take advantage of these opportunities. People living in the regions will require an increasing level of technical skills and professional knowledge in order to take advantage of the jobs that may be on offer in the regions.1 As part of this, workers will be expected to be more technologically adept as digital technologies and automation become increasingly integrated into working environments.

3.3 Given increased connectedness and advanced digital technologies, the Mayor of Townsville City Council noted the need for workers to have these skills to take advantage of opportunities, particularly in providing services to the defence industry, and for local training opportunities so that workers do not have to leave the region to undertake training.2

3.4 Automation will reduce the number of low-skilled, entry level roles so it is important that appropriate education and training provides the skills required by employers in the future.3

3.5 Dr Chris Briggs noted that at least half of jobs will be delivered by small businesses:

I think it's an interesting point to understand that 50 to 60 per cent of these jobs are in small businesses employing less than five people, so electricians, roofers, drivers and office staff spread right out across Australia. A lot of them are out in regional Australia. In terms of supply chain we're finding more jobs there than we probably expected to find. We're not going to be making solar cells and modules but there's quite a raft of different types of manufacturing that do exist in Australia currently—towers, hub trains at assemblies for wind farms, power transformers, big bits of kit that go onsite to convert the power into the grid, inverters, cabling and quite a dynamic software manufacturing sector emerging for solar.4

Transferability of skills in coal mining regions

3.6 As the mix of economic activity changes in a specific region, the skills and training required to fill the available jobs will also change.
3.7 Some skills will be transferable, particularly trade qualifications, and can easily adjust to similar work. The Monash Sustainable Development Institute discussed the transferability of skills through the transition process using international examples:

In speaking with workers on the ground in biogas plants in Germany, wind farms in Scotland, bio-refineries in Belgium and circular systems in Finland, it is evident that many skills from carbon-intensive industries are transferable to new, sustainable industries. We have met former boilermakers, mechanics and fitters at biogas plants, wind farms and battery storage facilities who came from oil and gas refineries, coal mines and coal-fired power plants.5

3.8 Other current jobs are relatively low skilled with high pay (for example, truck driving) and these workers may have difficulty finding employment with similar conditions. This is particularly important in regional areas as outlined by the Centre for Policy Futures, which submitted that ‘a high proportion of the population in regional areas has not attained a year 12 or equivalent qualification making transition to employment in industries with higher skill requirements challenging’.6

3.9 Concerns about the skill differences between workers currently employed in coal mines and power-stations were highlighted by the Institute for Sustainable Futures:

The nature of the workforce in coalmining means that the transition there is going to be more challenging than it is in power generation. Power generation has a lot of trades, technicians and professionals. One in two coalminers is a truck driver or a machine operator—the second-lowest skill category. So it is going to be a lot more challenging than power generation, where you’ve got a relatively skilled workforce.7

3.10 Indeed, Mrs Sharon Hutch from Singleton Council noted that many students in that region were not currently interested in undertaking skills training, instead believing that they would get a well-paid job in the mines. 8

3.11 That said, there could be no shortage of forklift or truck driving work available in mine and contaminated land restoration, and in a growing recycling industry where there is latent demand presently.9

3.12 Concerns were raised that the level of remuneration for similar or available work would not be commensurate with the remuneration currently being delivered by the mining industry. Mr Charles Jenkinson from Regional Development Australia South West noted that:

Average wages here in the mining sector are $137,000. Average wages in tourism are $49,000. You can't replace those mining jobs with tourism jobs. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with tourism—and it's a help—but you're not going to replace a $137,000 pay cheque with a $49,000 pay cheque.10

3.13 It was also noted that technological advances, including increased automation, would change the nature of less skilled work. Mr Adrian Price from the Ai Group Hunter Region outlined that:

We do know already that the technological changes that are impacting us come from things like greater automation, machine learning and the like. Clearly-visible ones are automated mine dump trucks, for instance, that are controlled from a control panel somewhere, with no drivers on them at all. Those are quite complex, difficult machines to understand with current technology, so employees have to be retrained and brought up to speed with the latest equipment and technologies.11

3.14 While acknowledging that there were jobs available for every worker who might potentially be displaced from the closure of coal-based electricity generation, Dr Amanda Cahill from The Next Economy also noted the challenges facing these workers, stating that ‘I am not sure whether those jobs can be similar and in the same place. There is a lot of retraining to be done’.12

3.15 More generally, Professor Babacan from the Rural Economies Centre of Excellence highlighted why regional employers might be reluctant to invest in upskilling their employees:
That's now either up to the employer or up to the individual, and sometimes in regional areas employers don't have the capacity to invest or are not willing to invest because the bigger companies poach their trained employee or the retrained employee, and individuals don't have the economic means to [upskill].13

Engaging the unemployed in new industries

3.16 New industries can also offer opportunities to connect unemployed people with the workforce. Ms Anna Freeman from the Clean Energy Council explained what had occurred during the construction of the Karadoc Solar Farm in Victoria:

The EPC contractor—the construction company that built that—is a company named Beyond Energy Solutions Group. They decided that the biggest impact they could deliver in that region by building that solar farm would be to provide an opportunity to long-term unemployed people within the region…

The project ended up employing over 200 locals: 90 were long-term unemployed; 38 were Aboriginal people; 12 people were on community-based orders; 14 people were from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; and there were four people with a disability. Many of those workers have gone on now to work at the Yatpool solar farm, which is under construction at the moment. So it's provided a very important opportunity for people who most likely otherwise wouldn't have had one by working together with the employment services there to provide a new pathway.14

Current vacancies

3.17 While this inquiry is focused on jobs for the future in regional areas, the committee is cognisant that there is a significant level of current vacancies in some regions and industries.

3.18 Contrary to common perception, the Regional Australia Institute noted that there are jobs in regional areas from the high to the low end of the skills spectrum. In some regions, there are signs of skills shortages with the number of advertised vacancies growing by over 30 per cent in the last two years.15 Further, the Regional Australia Institute highlighted that 'Anecdotal evidence suggests that labour shortages are having a negative impact on investment and growth in regional Australia across a range of industries'.16

3.19 Dr Amanda Cahill from The Next Economy noted that there is a mismatch between jobs that are available and the workforce in particular regions. Dr Cahill cited an example from Townsville where there were 5000 renewable energy construction jobs within 400 kilometres of Townsville but not enough skilled workers to fill these roles.17

3.20 Similarly, Ecosure highlighted that it was difficult to get mid-level and senior specialists to work in their field, particularly with competition from the much-higher paid mining sector and stable and secure government jobs.18

Skills development and training need to adapt

3.21 Many stakeholders advocated for more skills and training opportunities to be adapted to, and delivered in, regional areas. The quality and accessibility of vocational training opportunities varies by region and stakeholders would like to see more flexibility in delivery and offerings tailored to what each region needs.

3.22 Associate Professor Ben Lyons highlighted that in many regional areas:

We often have a classic case of underemployment—there are jobs there but not the qualified workforce to meet that skillset. There's a training need where they either have to go to a metropolitan centre or even to Toowoomba, whereas there could be some precincts set up in those centres like a Roma, a Longreach or a Goondiwindi that could service that local need quite effectively and cost effectively.19

3.23 Per Capita argued that public investment in technical and further education in the regions is critical in addition to getting the private investment settings right.20
3.24 Many stakeholders argued for local training to meet local needs. Evidence suggested that at the local level, links need to be established and maintained between what industry needs, what education providers have the capacity to provide and the requirements of potential employees.21

3.25 For example, Mr Allen Grundy from Tourism Whitsundays noted the lack of advanced education facilities in that region, especially for specialist skills relating to maritime industries.22

3.26 Mayor Jenny Hill from Townsville City Council argued for TAFE Queensland to offer cybersecurity courses in Townsville:

TAFE Queensland offers one of Australia’s best cybersecurity courses, which we could put people through up here. Why not bring that training here? Why not allow us to develop that industry here? We can do that work anywhere across Australia.23

3.27 But some stakeholders noted that they were working with TAFEs to develop courses to give workers the skills they will need in the future. Mr Adrian Price from the Ai Group Hunter Region noted that:

We are working with TAFE New South Wales to put together a new training program called a diploma in applied technologies, which will provide tradespersons with a broader base of knowledge and ability to deal with the data-driven world that we live in—the data that’s collected off machinery and what we do with that, and those sorts of things...Of course, the rate of technology means that people have to be upskilling and retraining, basically, their whole working lives.24

3.28 The Centre for Policy Futures highlighted the need for life-long learning, particularly as the need for digital literacy increases:

University and TAFE campuses in regional areas are paramount in ensuring young people stay in the regions and older workers can up-skill to transition to new opportunities.25

3.29 Mr Paul Sloman from Cotton Australia noted that the combination of flexible learning, short courses and on-the-job training was necessary for agricultural occupations.26 Mr Sloman noted that the AgSkilled partnership between Cotton Australia, the Grains Research Development Corporation and the NSW Government is:

…making the cotton and grains industry the employer of choice and also ensuring that the employees coming into both those industries are skilled and ready to go. This was all driven by the need and the necessity from employers and employees of not fully qualified accreditation—that partial qualification, more user-friendly currently than the time commitment and the dollar commitment of full qualifications. We’re now two years into a three-year program—it’s currently under its mid-term review—with absolutely fantastic results partnering with RTOs such as Tocal College to really deliver essential training, such as in the spray drift awareness area, so conducting advanced spray application workshops, right through to safety and awareness, business training.27

3.30 RDA Townsville and North Queensland highlighted the importance of developing a skills pipeline:

To attract industries you need to demonstrate that you’ve got the skills pipeline, because they’ll look where that is. So transitioning an economy from one industry to another is about understanding it and addressing the skills needs, and then you’ve got the base to attract new industry and new business.28

3.31 RDA Hunter has invested significantly in the development and delivery of innovative Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and skills development programs to meet industry needs, including in the mining, defence and aeronautical industries.29

3.32 RDA Townsville and North Queensland outlined a collaborative partnership they have implemented to increase STEM skills in that region:

RDA has recognised this demand and is developing a project in partnership with Townsville Enterprise to connect educators, students and industry to maximise the development of STEM-related
skills. Anticipated results, based on a model already developed in the RDA Hunter region, with whom we’ve developed an MOU [Memorandum of Understanding], include an increasing uptake of STEM subjects at high school, micro-credentialling of workers in STEM-area employment already, an increase in vocational and university training in STEM and an increased pool of STEM-trained candidates for apprenticeships and future jobs. The development of a pipeline of STEM-equipped students and potential employees will ensure we have an innovative workforce ready for the jobs of the future.

3.33 Ms Rachel Lamaro from Regen Australia was concerned about the inconsistency between TAFE courses in ecological restoration:

Here on the Gold Coast in recent years, that subject was actually dropped from the TAFE program, and South-East Queenslanders are limited in where they can undertake that particular subject and know they’re getting quite highly skilled and trained staff. We actually have trainees undertaking the subject down in New South Wales, in Kingscliff, because the quality of the training is so much higher than what we’re receiving here on the Gold Coast.

... I think a standardised course is definitely required, across the board.

3.34 Concerns about the development and delivery of vocational training courses were not shared in all areas. For example, in Western Australia, Mr Charles Jenkinson from Regional Development Australia South West argued that:

...we do have a very good TAFE system in this state. If someone comes along and says, ‘I need people to be trained like this,’ they will respond to that and provide that necessary training.

3.35 That said, there does seem to be an issue with the consistency of vocational training between regions and between providers.

Apprenticeships

3.36 The issue of apprenticeships was raised by some stakeholders. The AMWU-NSW Branch emphasised the decline in apprenticeships in manufacturing industries. Mr Phillip Walters, AMWU delegate, noted that at the UGL Bayswater facility:

I did my apprenticeship back in 1981. I was one of 16 fitters and turners. There were the same amount of boilermakers, half a dozen electricians et cetera. Next year, we are taking on four apprentices: two electricians, two fitters.

3.37 And Mr Cory Wright from the AMWU-NSW Branch argued that:

Infrastructure projects in New South Wales should be a haven for young people getting a start, whether it is an apprenticeship, traineeship or any other opportunity that they can take up. It’s so desperately needed in the Hunter.

3.38 The AMWU-NSW Branch also discussed the perceived lack of a social contract in the private sector in relation to employing apprentices:

We have lost that social contract between employers and apprentices, particularly in regional areas. As has been reported, the industries all across Newcastle used to do the heavy lifting when it came to training apprentices, and those apprentices, including people that I did my own apprenticeship with, would go anywhere in the country to work. A significant number, around about 50 per cent, of apprentices drop out of their apprenticeship after the first year and there is a number of factors included in that. One is wages, of course. The other one is the way that apprentices are treated. The intel that we have is the way that TAFE is structured now is an impediment to apprentices finishing their time. If you think about an apprentice being paid the award rates of pay and the only TAFE they can go to is four or five hours away then they have got to stay away for a whole week and they have to wrestle with their employers, who largely say, ‘I am not paying for any of this.’ It actually becomes a barrier to wanting to complete the trade.
3.39 The AMWU-NSW Branch indicated that a lack of certainty for businesses is contributing to a reluctance to engage apprentices.36

3.40 The lack of certainty in energy policy was cited by Mr Kane Thornton from the Clean Energy Council as a reason why renewable energy companies were reluctant to engage apprentices and invest in workers:

I think one of the biggest challenges for our industry, and therefore the extent to which the industry has not only employed people but invested in the workforce, has been the stopping and starting, the booms and busts...That, probably more than anything else, really undermines industry's ability and willingness to invest in people. Whether that's about bringing apprentices into the industry, whether that's about training and development et cetera, I think that has certainly been a major challenge.37

3.41 Mayor Jenny Hill from the Townsville City Council highlighted that the council was the second largest employer of apprentices and trainees in Northern Queensland, telling the committee that 'Other than Energy Queensland, we are the biggest employer of apprentices and trainees. That shouldn't be the case, but it is'.38

3.42 However, just down the road in Mackay, the private sector was providing opportunities for apprentices where skilled worker numbers allowed:

There is that balance of how many apprenticeships we can offer, because you need to have those skilled workers. If we could have more skilled workers here now, the businesses could take on more apprenticeships at the same time. We realise that the apprenticeship numbers dropped off in the downturn, but you need to have that skilled worker to actually train them on the floor and look after them. You can't just take five apprentices and have one person there.39

3.43 The costs associated with the formal training part of apprenticeship courses are also causing concern:

If they fail a theory test they now have to pay extra money to resit that part of the test, which, for a young person who is already living in poverty, is very hard to do. It's even worse when they fail a practical. The money for a practical exam is something like $450...So, coupled with making it harder to get access to TAFEs, they're also making it more costly. If you do fail, if you're not up to speed and if you're not up to the mark with the theory side of it or the practical side of it, you'll now be charged more to complete and finish. So someone who has learning difficulties or incapacities is now going to be more challenged with the TAFE system. It's going to be more costly for them to get training, which we don't think is fair.40

3.44 And there may be missed opportunities for businesses to engage mature-aged apprentices. An example by Ms Liz Ritchie from the Regional Australia Institute illustrated how difficult it was for one mature-aged worker to transition to an apprenticeship:

...having left the mining sector and deciding that an electrical career was a long-held ambition, he sought out a mature-age apprenticeship. It was actually more difficult than you would imagine. It took about three or four months to find that mature-age role. I know in the past there have been many different programs to assist businesses in providing more apprenticeships, but at the moment they tend to be focused on a couple of areas and not necessarily focusing on mature-age workers. I definitely feel that when we think about this issue for regional Australia and the multiple transitions that are happening, there should be a real focus on mature-age workers.41

3.45 Ms Ritchie also queried whether the time required to complete an apprenticeship could be reduced to reflect prior knowledge:

To draw on the example that I spoke about earlier: the ability to transition from running a mine of the future to becoming an electrician, regardless of your age and stage in prior learning, is still a four-year process. I would question if that were correct or if there were opportunities for these apprenticeships to be sped up, if you will, to think about the prior skill set in a more adaptable and flexible way.42
Partnerships can help identify skill needs and appropriate training

3.46 A number of stakeholders were supportive of the need to develop partnerships between employers and training institutions.

3.47 Germany was cited by the Centre for Policy Futures as having an approach that closely matched skills with jobs:

Germany is an exemplar in its ability to train people at all levels and has developed an ecosystem around advanced manufacturing education and training. In this example, the German government recognises it is not beneficial to place targets on the percentage of the population that received a university education – rather there is a focus on the pipeline of roles required and training is offered at all levels.43

3.48 In this context, the Mayor of Townsville noted that 'you need the companies to be willing to settle here and set up here. You can't just produce graduates for the sake of producing graduates'.44

3.49 Professor Babacan from the Rural Economies Centre of Excellence contended that reforms were needed in the vocational and high education sectors so:

...there's a better relationship between industry needs and what education providers are doing.... A lot of the employer bodies told us that what TAFE provides, or the packages or the degrees, is too generic. What we're needing is more specific knowledge, so maybe looking at some part of public private partnership that enables the micro-skilling that industry needs to happen.45

3.50 Some stakeholders indicated that collaborative engagement between employers and education providers was already occurring to overcome current and prospective skill shortages. For example, Ms Sherry Smith from the Greater Whitsunday Alliance explained that:

I actually was part of a workshop a few weeks back that was hosted by the mining sector and brought those partners on board into one room—ourselves, the university and all those training providers—because they identified the best way for them as a business to survive going forward was to work together to make sure that they're all on the same page—understanding what the skill demand might be as we're all trying to identify this and look at how we can better service that.46

3.51 The Centre for Policy Futures emphasised the role of industry skills councils in ensuring training matches the available jobs:

The role of industry skills councils is critical in ensuring such a pipeline. These councils must be part of the community consultation process; work with the public authority to identify what future employment opportunities might look like; and determine the future employment, reskilling and retaining opportunities that might be available.47

3.52 Although this issue is discussed in chapter 5 in more detail, the role of government policy in providing certainty for businesses to invest in and train staff cannot be overstated:

...the use of government options with criteria for local jobs is a mechanism that has worked within Victoria and the ACT but also internationally. The interface between our skills system and the renewable sector doesn't always work very well. Some of the developers tell me that they have to ship in, for example, power systems engineers because they can't find any around Australia. They haven't been trained for some time, they tell me. So there is a big gap. The wider question of better investment certainty and investment in key things like transmission investment to help the growth of renewables is another way that we could grow jobs.48

1 Regional Australia Institute, Submission 78, [p. 4].
2 Mayor Jenny Hill, Townsville City Council, Proof Committee Hansard, 10 October 2019, p. 10.
3 Ms Liz Ritchie, Co-Chief Executive Officer, Regional Australia Institute, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 October 2019, p. 15.
4 Dr Chris Briggs, Research Principal, Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney, Proof Committee Hansard, 6 November 2019, p. 22.
5 Monash Sustainable Development Institute, Submission 96, p. 5.
6 Centre for Policy Futures, Submission 141, p. 17.
7 Dr Chris Briggs, Institute for Sustainable Futures, Proof Committee Hansard, 6 November 2019, p. 22.
10 Mr Charles Jenkinson, Director, Regional Development Australia South West, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 November 2019, p. 5.
11 Mr Adrian Price, Regional Manager, Ai Group Hunter Region, Proof Committee Hansard, 5 November 2019, p. 44.
12 Dr Amanda Cahill, Chief Executive Officer, The Next Economy, Proof Committee Hansard, 6 November 2019, p. 44.
13 Professor Hurriyet Babacan, Professorial Research Fellow, Rural Economies Centre of Excellence, Proof Committee Hansard, 10 October 2019, p. 46.
14 Ms Anna Freeman, Director, Energy Generation, Clean Energy Council, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 October 2019, p. 46.
15 Regional Australia Institute, Submission 78, [p. 1].
16 Regional Australia Institute, Submission 78, [p. 3].
17 Dr Amanda Cahill, The Next Economy, Proof Committee Hansard, 6 November 2019, p. 43.
18 Ms Diane Lanyon, General Manager, Ecosure Pty Ltd, Proof Committee Hansard, 10 October 2019, p. 16.
19 Associate Professor Ben Lyons, Director, Rural Economies Centre of Excellence, Proof Committee Hansard, 10 October 2019, p. 47.
20 Ms Emma Dawson, Executive Director, Per Capita, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 October 2019, p. 50.
21 Regional Australia Institute, Submission 78, [p. 5].
22 Mr Allen Grundy, Chairman, Tourism Whitsundays, Proof Committee Hansard, 11 October 2019, p. 33.
23 Mayor Jenny Hill, Townsville City Council, Proof Committee Hansard, 10 October 2019, p. 12.
24 Mr Adrian Price, Ai Group Hunter Region, Proof Committee Hansard, 5 November 2019, p. 5.
25 Centre for Policy Futures, Submission 141, p. 17.
26 Mr Paul Sloman, Policy Officer, Cotton Australia, Proof Committee Hansard, 11 October 2019, p. 18.
27 Mr Paul Sloman, Cotton Australia, Proof Committee Hansard, 11 October 2019, p. 22.
28 Ms Glenys Schuntner, Chief Executive Officer, Regional Development Australia Townsville and North Queensland, Proof Committee Hansard, 10 October 2019, p. 6.
29 Regional Development Australia Hunter, Submission 75.
30 Ms Glenys Schuntner, Regional Development Australia Townsville and North Queensland, Proof Committee Hansard, 10 October 2019, p. 2.
31 Ms Rachel Lamaro, Operations Manager, Regen Australia, Proof Committee Hansard, 10 October 2019, p. 35.
33 Mr Phillip Walters, Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union Delegate, UGL Broadmeadow, Proof Committee Hansard, 5 November 2019, p. 29.
34 Mr Cory Wright, State Organiser, Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union – NSW Branch, Proof Committee Hansard, 5 November 2019, p. 31.
35 Mr Steve Murphy, State Secretary, Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union – NSW Branch, Proof Committee Hansard, 5 November 2019, p. 33.
36 Mr Steve Murphy, Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union – NSW Branch, Proof Committee Hansard, 5 November 2019, p. 34.
37 Mr Kane Thornton, Chief Executive, Clean Energy Council, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 October 2019, p. 39.
Chapter 4

Transition requires planning

Employment outcomes from previous transitions

4.1 Evidence from various industries that have undertaken transition in Australia over the last few decades indicates that only around a third of displaced workers find full-time stable employment. Another third of displaced workers find work in less secure casual or part-time roles, while the remainder do not work again (some of which is due to retirement).1

4.2 In this regard, The Next Economy noted that:

Australia does not have a good track record of managing structural adjustment processes, and studies from outcomes from the demise of other industries such as car manufacturing, textiles and the logging industry have repeatedly shown that if support for workers and regions comes after closure, only a third of workers find full-time work at a similar pay rate, a third find casual or part-time work and a third remain unemployed.2

4.3 The Institute for Sustainable Futures cited evidence presented to the Victorian Parliament on the Latrobe Valley transition on the outcomes for affected workers. Dr Chris Briggs told the committee that 'not withstanding all of the resources that are going in there and what looks to be a very promising model, two years later, one in three are still unemployed'.3

4.4 Similarly, even with the long lead time and intensive support provided to employees by the companies themselves and government prior to the closure of the Australian car manufacturing sector in 2017, the employment outcomes of displaced workers has not changed significantly. One year on from the closure of car manufacturing in Australia, 36.9 per cent of affected workers have found full time employment, 32.8 per cent of workers have found casual or part-time work and 30.3 per cent of workers are either unemployed or not in the labour market.4

4.5 Only about half of the original estimated job losses from the closure of car manufacturing eventuated as many supply chain businesses were able to adapt.5 If forward notice of the closures had not been conveyed early, it is likely that employment outcomes following the closure of this industry could have been much worse.

4.6 The results of Australia's transition outcomes contrast starkly with that of Germany. The Next Economy submitted that:
To avoid such dismal prospects, lessons can be learned from Germany, where government, industry and unions have been working together far in advance of any closures to manage the transition from coal to renewable energy.6

4.7 In Germany, offering workers the opportunity to redeploy to other plants or into renewable energy projects, or retire early has enabled an orderly reduction from 130 300 coal mining jobs in 1990 to around 12 100 in 2014, with the last black coal mine closing at the end of 2018 with no forced redundancies.7

**Important factors for a successful transition**

4.8 In order to avoid outcomes similar to previous transitions, stakeholders consistently emphasised that new industries and associated jobs do not materialise through market forces alone.8

4.9 Professor Ray Wills from Future Smart Strategies succinctly summarised the speed of transitions and the role of planning:

Transitions don't happen overnight; they have to be planned, they have got to be executed and they have got to be delivered—and that's years, not days.9

4.10 Modern economies require a different lens and new tools to remain competitive and resilient. Regional economies and communities will be impacted in the absence of robust transition planning:10

The La Trobe Valley example, where closure and diversification planning occurred at the time of/after coal-fired power plant decommissioning, provides a vivid reminder of the importance of planning and the impact failure to do so has on families.11

4.11 The Centre for Policy Futures contended that structural change:

…requires careful, long-term investment from governments (federal, state/territory and local) that enables the right conditions for market forces to work:

- Connected supply chains and physical and digital infrastructure must support new or expanded industry opportunities and meet the demands of new or expanded markets and consumer expectations;
- Labour markets must be appropriately skilled and accessible as to meet new demand, with regional education offerings (tertiary and vocational) flexible and accessible to local workforces;
- Policy and regulatory frameworks must be fit-for-purpose to support new economic opportunities while simultaneously protecting social, environmental and cultural values; and
- Firms must be given the right financial conditions to risk new economic opportunities and 'brave' the international trading system.12

4.12 As outlined below, the following factors from previous transitions both internationally and domestically were identified as important:

- collaboration and capacity building
- long term planning which identifies and works towards transition
- fostering key projects to build successful transitions.

**Collaboration and capacity building**

4.13 Dr Michael Askew from the Monash Sustainable Development Institute argued that with the knowledge of what opportunities are available for regional areas:

…we need to create planning frameworks, create the right investment settings, start looking at these scenarios, start planning and start using universities that are sitting here with this knowledge about how to develop scenarios, to work with government and industry—as they are in Europe. It's about creating those collaborative frameworks.13
4.14 But each region's differences need to be taken into account. The Centre for Policy Futures submitted that 'Planning for change requires careful, long-term investment and an approach that is guided by the peculiarities of each region'.14

4.15 Similarly, Professor Hurriyet Babacan from the Rural Economies Centre of Excellence argued for regional workforce planning to identify place-based opportunities.15

4.16 The AMWU noted that a 'one-size-fits' all strategy is not appropriate:

Key to [our] submission is that not one of these opportunities is the solution for all communities. Whether it be in the manufacturing of rail rolling stock, defence equipment, food manufacturing or renewable energy generation, industry planning must be diverse, able to stand on its own two feet and tailored to fit regional communities.16

4.17 Importantly, a number of stakeholders emphasised the need to bring the affected community along throughout the process. In the context of thermal coal mining communities, Professor Karen Hussey from the Centre for Policy Futures argued that:

...if you have a community that, at the moment, is heavily dependent on thermal coal mining, then I think it is everybody's responsibility to sit down with that community and do everything they can to, first of all, impress upon that community that, never mind what the federal government does in Australia, the rest of the world is making decisions in the coming decades that put them in a vulnerable position.17

4.18 Mr Kane Thornton from the Clean Energy Council provided a succinct summary of the benefits that can come from collaboration:

People need to think about it well ahead of time and be prepared to come together, collaborate and cooperate to make that happen. I think that has been a missing part of the puzzle to date.18

4.19 Councillor Sarah Stanley from the Shire of Collie outlined the concept of the collaborative 'quadruple helix' following a visit to the Latrobe Valley:

One of the big things we got from that visit was that they took a lot of their ideas from the European Commission and the way they do regional development—which is apparently quite good. It was around that real consultative process—what they call the quadruple helix—ensuring that, whatever topic you are talking about, you have community, industry, education and government in the room. Who the representatives are may be different in any case. So you don't always just go to someone like me and ask what the community's opinion is; you want to ask the people from the community area about that particular topic—because who the community is, who the industry is, who the education representatives are and who the government representatives are will change from time to time.19

4.20 A similar collaborative concept was discussed by representatives of the City of Newcastle.20

4.21 The Monash Sustainable Development Institute (MSDI) argued that:

Regional economic growth is founded on the capacities and skills of individual stakeholders and the ability of these stakeholders to collectively drive system-wide change. Successful regions have built capacities through targeted transition training and skills development, and build coalitions of industry, government, community, and research and training entities to deliver the agenda for regional economic and social transition. These coalitions provide overarching governance, platforms for technology integration, experimentation and, importantly, coordinating functions in the reskilling, redeployment and growth of regional workforces.21

4.22 The National Centre for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER) outlined the five elements of effective partnerships based on their analysis of previous transitions:

- a common agenda—a shared vision and understanding of the key challenges and agreed actions
- shared measurement systems—with transparent key performance indicators and accessible data to track progress
mutually reinforcing activities—including space for different activities coordinated through a shared action plan
continuous communication—which aspires to being consistent, open communication and builds trust between organisations and with the displaced workers
governance structures—to include an independent entity with staff possessing the appropriate skills to coordinate the participating organisations and to support implementation actions to assist displaced workers.22

Long-term planning that identifies and works towards transition

4.23 The committee also heard it can take much longer than four years to plan and execute a transformation plan. The President of the Shire of Collie noted that larger projects can take over a decade to go from concept to reality:

In particular, the larger job-creating projects take a decade to get to the point where they turn sod. That's why we're starting today, even though the impacts of Muja [Power Station closing some of its coal fired electricity generators] are not expected to really start hitting for 10 years.23

4.24 Given the state owned power generator is closing some of its coal fired electricity generators in Collie, it is unsurprising that the Western Australian government is investing heavily in the transition for that region. As such, the move to diversify the economy and plan for the future is already well underway. The state government has established a number of Collie specific investment funding programs:

$60 million for industry attraction and development of large-scale initiatives to promote economic diversity
$18 million Collie Futures Fund for grants up to $2 million for small and medium enterprises to grow and diversify the local economy
$2 million Collie Futures Small Grants Program.24

4.25 The state government has also established a dedicated Collie development unit, in addition to the South West Development Commission and other local advisory groups, which is:

…charged with working with the community here in Collie to attract that investment and industry through leveraging that $80 million funding contribution. That team, in consultation with the communities, is responsible for development of worker transition planning and the establishment of a one-stop shop for workers, industry and small businesses, so that they can work together, in partnership, to further the future of this community.25

4.26 This transition process has involved collaboration between the state and local government, business groups and the community. Ms Julie Hillier from the Collie Chamber of Commerce and Industry commented about the process:

…it's co-designing—not coming in and consulting but truly co-designing, co-leading. I noted in one of the submissions the statement 'the need for a public authority to manage the transition'. I think there's a big difference between management and leadership, and we want community leadership and community co-design, delivery and facilitation of anything, any template and any blueprint, that is designed, moving forward.26

4.27 And this view was supported by the WA Government’s South West Development Commission:

It is imperative that they have that self-determination for their community. So I don't envisage doing things to this community. We've got to work with them and make sure that they very much feel like they are driving their community in the future.27

4.28 The committee heard in Collie that collaboration works much better without politicisation or posturing:
If we get the capability and the resilience built locally—and we're working closely with higher education and researchers so it's evidence based; we're working with government agencies; we're working with local stakeholder groups; and we're working with the community—and if we can get over artificial boundaries and, as I say, politicising or posturing, and just get on and do what we need to do as a community, then I think we've got a high chance of success.28

4.29 Planning doesn't have to require the involvement of government. Mr Adrian Price from the Ai Group Hunter Region provided examples from Pittsburgh in the United States and in Germany where transition planning had been driven without government intervention.29

4.30 Indeed, The Next Economy explained why the German example of transition planning is so often cited:

I guess that why the German example gets cited is that one of the things they did well, and which would be applicable to here, would be that they did long-term planning. They started in the mid-nineties. They didn't just leave it up to government. Apparently this is a thing across all policy development in Germany: it was seen as the responsibility of government, industry and workers. They got together and took joint responsibility for that plan. That meant they could do industry-wide sector planning. That would still be applicable in Australia, even with our geography, in terms of thinking about infrastructure, supply chains and the transportation infrastructure that is needed.30

4.31 In supporting the development of new 'green' industries, the Monash Sustainable Development Institute argued that:

Jobs growth in regional Australia will be driven by renewables and storage, bio-innovation, circular economies, environmental remediation and sustainable food systems. The extent to which we are successful in driving this growth and ensuring it works for communities is contingent on capacity and coalition building, unlocking investment, getting our planning frameworks right, and moving from concept to development.31

4.32 But the committee was also told that planning needs to be supplemented with action. As the Port of Newcastle described in relation to the BHP steelworks transition 20 years ago:

The important thing we took away from that period was that, whilst BHP had advised that it would be doing those actions some decades before it happened and plans were being developed throughout the period, the transition and the plans themselves were never implemented.32

4.33 The MSDI advocated for a 'Vision-Scenarios-Pathways' approach to long-term planning:

'Visioning' establishes a unifying framework for regional transformation and provides policy makers with the concepts and cases to advance the vision with regional stakeholders. 'Scenarios and Pathways Planning' establishes specific scenarios of what the region will look like into the future and designs transitions pathways to get there.

This 'Vision-Scenarios-Pathway' approach has been fundamental to all the successful regions we have studied and has enabled decision makers to 'lead from the future' – goals and future regional settings are crafted in consultation with stakeholders and experts, which creates 'pull' factors for action on new jobs and business innovation.33

4.34 And the MSDI provided an example from Rotterdam where new technological and social system innovations have driven strong regional employment growth:

As we were told on our first visit to the region: 'securing future employment is simple really – just model what the future industrial landscape will look like including what skills will be required, assess your current skills, and then close the gap'.34

Fostering key projects to build successful transitions

4.35 The MSDI argued that successful transition regions have targeted both catalyst and magnet projects. Catalyst projects accelerate the development of new industries while magnet projects attract
additional investment in the region. These projects mobilise world-class research and development around sustainable technologies, processes and industries.35

4.36 According to the MSDI, catalyst and magnet projects:
…foster the creation of special activation precincts and innovation hotbeds that provide opportunities for upscaling concepts, piloting technologies, commercialising ventures, and testing and assessing established projects. In doing so, these projects activate and deploy workforce innovations that reinforce innovation and ensure that new developments quickly move from the concept stage to the development stage.36

4.37 Similarly, the Institute for Sustainable Futures advocated for the development of clusters with complementary linkages between industries which, in turn, reinforce each other.37

4.38 In each of the region areas that the committee visited, stakeholders readily identified industries which could be a suitable pivot for economic diversification and regional transition:
- Townsville—battery manufacturing and cyber security and ICT38
- Mackay—biofuels and public sector39
- Whyalla—new steel works and renewables40
- Collie—ore processing, battery manufacturing and heavy industry41
- Newcastle—hydrogen exports, diversified port and supply chains, land remediation, and heavy metal recycling.42

The need for a national transition authority

4.39 A range of stakeholders supported the establishment of a national transition authority in one form or another.43 The primary objective of any transition authority is to successfully realise the key factors of planning, collaboration and identifying a way forward.

4.40 The Next Economy considered that a national transition authority could have the following responsibilities:
- overseeing funding and coordination of transition planning at both a national and regional level
- coordinating with other authorities and government agencies to ensure that the scale, type and pace of the transition will enable us to meet international climate obligations to reduce emissions
- coordinating an industry-wide, multi-employer redeployment scheme to provide retrenched workers with the opportunity to transfer to other power generators
- ensuring companies meet their responsibilities to workers in terms of redundancy payments and entitlements, retraining opportunities, and generating jobs through full decommissioning and rehabilitation of sites.44

4.41 The Centre for Policy Futures was supportive if such an authority could oversee transition planning, working collaboratively with state/territory and local governments—and regional authorities—and with input from stakeholders across business, peak bodies, unions and education providers.45

4.42 The Regional Australia Institute saw any transition authority as:
…being a facilitator, a connector and a source of knowledge that is continually being updated because it is supported to be updated and to go where others have not been able to in obtaining the data and information that you need to effect the appropriate evaluation. Therefore, through that evaluation and learning, you could have the opportunity to effect further change.46

4.43 Professor Karen Hussey from the Centre for Policy Futures outlined the need for one agency to oversee and steer transition planning at a national level:
At the end of the day, somebody in government needs to do the steering, and I've written those standard points to say to you that, in steering successfully, the government, whether it's state or federal, needs to actually have an entity within the bureaucracy for whom this is their main job.

That, frankly, folks, is perhaps the hardest part of this from a governance perspective, because there are at least six, seven or eight different parts of the bureaucracy that will see this as being core business for them. You've got to pick one, because otherwise you end up with a multitude of transition related programs being rolled out from different departments...47

4.44 However, many stakeholders argued that establishing a national transition authority would not replace the need for local transition planning bodies.48 Indeed, Dr Amanda Cahill from The Next Economy, echoing many participants, considered that 'it is not either/or, it's got to be both'.49

4.45 The Centre for Policy Futures strongly advocated for placed-based strategies led from the local level to drive any transition process:

Community consultation is fundamental to guiding the transition but it requires planning and investment to ensure community members are included and valued through the process. Indeed, it is arguable that communities need to own and lead the transition, with governments providing a 'steering' role but not leading a leading role.50

4.46 The Regional Australia Institute argued that:

It's taking a really holistic approach, but a place based approach, so that the community themselves—we talk a lot about regional Australia really planning for their future workforce themselves because they need to be in charge of their destiny and futureproof their own regions. The only way to do that from a jobs perspective is to work hand-in-hand with the regions that currently exist, or the industries that may exist that you may be able to create in your region, to create a blueprint and try to match those skills and jobs with the people that are in the community.51

4.47 The Next Economy noted that diversity of Australia's regions needs to be accounted for:

And that's why a region lead planning process is so important. It needs to be facilitated at a national level in terms of a framework and the resources to support that, but each region is going to be different in terms of opportunities.52

4.48 While noting that the case for a national transition authority is compelling and can assist in coordination, the MSDI argued for locally-based, independent regional planning coalitions which are more likely to avoid political and bureaucratic capture. Local organisation can retain a focus on the frontiers of practice and pull more organisations towards them through the transition process.53

Collation of existing information regarding regional transition

4.49 Irrespective of the establishment of a national transition authority, some stakeholders advocated for investment in a consolidated knowledge base.

4.50 Ms Liz Ritchie from the Regional Australia Institute highlighted the lack of information about regional transitions:

What has been enlightening to us is the lack of information. I guess what I would call for—I know it's in the parameters of this inquiry—is looking for an independent transition body.54

4.51 The Centre for Policy Futures noted that much extensive and relevant research has yet to be translated into a fashion that is supportive of policy development:

The University of Melbourne has developed materials describing the relevance of that strategy to Australia, and we commend the 'State of the Art Review'...to the Committee. Similarly, the work done by the Regional Development Institute and the Rural Economics Centre of Excellence have particular bearing on the Committee's program of work, as do the various other research-focused entities funded by the Commonwealth and state/territory innovation budgets (Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) for Developing Northern Australia; CRC for Low Carbon Living; Blue Economy CRC etc.).55
4.52 Professor Karen Hussey for Centre for Policy Futures also emphasised this point:

…a tremendous amount of relevant, pertinent research that’s been done across our innovation, science and research landscape that I just don’t think is being drawn on enough. One of your recommendations could easily be to synthesise some of that work—particularly, I’m thinking, out of the CRCs—in a way that looks particularly at transition planning. That’s a job that any number of people could do and do quite ably.56

4.53 A number of organisations indicated a willingness to be part of an initiative that collated information regarding regional transitions.57

1 For example, see Dr Amanda Cahill, Chief Executive Officer, The Next Economy, Proof Committee Hansard, 6 November 2019;
2 The Next Economy, Submission 16, p. 9.
3 Dr Chris Briggs, Research Principal, Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney, Proof Committee Hansard, 6 November 2019, p. 22.
6 The Next Economy, Submission 16, p. 9.
7 The Next Economy, Submission 16, p. 11.
8 For example, see The Next Economy, Submission 16; The Centre for Policy Futures, Submission 141; Per Capita, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 October 2019, pp. 47–54.
9 Professor Ray Wills, Managing Director, Future Smart Strategies, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 November 2019, p. 45.
10 Monash Sustainable Development Institute, Submission 96, p. 4.
11 Monash Sustainable Development Institute, Submission 96, pp. 5–6.
12 Centre for Policy Futures, Submission 141, pp. 5–6.
13 Dr Michael Askew, Program Manager, Australian Transitions Academy, Monash Sustainable Development Institute, Monash University, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 October 2019, p. 26.
14 Centre for Policy Futures, Submission 141, p. 6.
15 Professor Hurriyet Babacan, Professorial Research Fellow, Rural Economies Centre of Excellence, Proof Committee Hansard, 10 October 2019, p. 46.
16 Mr Adam Wieladak, National Research Officer, Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 October 2019, p. 30.
17 Professor Karen Hussey, Director for Policy Futures, University of Queensland, Proof Committee Hansard, 11 October 2019, p. 43.
18 Mr Kane Thornton, Chief Executive, Clean Energy Council, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 October 2019, p. 46.
19 Councillor Sarah Stanley, President, Shire of Collie, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 November 2019, p. 23.
20 Dr Nathaniel Bavinton, Smart City Coordinator, City of Newcastle, Proof Committee Hansard, 5 November 2019, p. 25.
21 Monash Sustainable Development Institute, Submission 96, p. 3.
22 National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), Submission 31, p. 6.
23 Councillor Sarah Stanley, President, Shire of Collie, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 November 2019, p. 22.
24 Ms Mellisa Teede, Chief Executive Officer, South West Development Commission, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 November 2019, p. 7.
26 Ms Julie Hillier, Deputy Vice President, Collie Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 November 2019, p. 5.
Chapter 5

The role of government in supporting regional transition
5.1 Governments can be important catalysts for regional transitions to occur in an appropriate timeframe. On this point, the Monash Sustainable Development Institute (MSDI) noted that ‘Governments do not have to spend vast sums of money driving the transition, but they do have to understand the drivers of investment and regional economic transformation’.1

5.2 Professor Karen Hussey from the Centre for Policy Futures argued that it is important to transition fairly and equitably with stability, stating that ‘It's not just about jobs. It's about society, it's about community, it's about people, and it's about political and social cohesion and stability. I think that's profoundly important’.2

5.3 The Monash Sustainable Development Institute (MSDI) argued that the precursors for regional transitions into renewable and circular economy industries are not being adequately supported:

The technology for transitions exists and is proven; the finance for the projects is ready; but, commonly, the regional investment settings mean that the technology and its financing can't find a home.

Investment in new innovations and industries is largely contingent upon the regulatory, policy, planning and infrastructure environments into which the investment is made. Successful transitions are built on the rigorous assessment of regulations, policy and planning frameworks, infrastructure services and material flows to determine suitability for renewable/bio-circular innovation investment. This also enables regional stakeholders to forecast the changes required to facilitate future capital investment.3

5.4 So that change can be steered from a local level, governments at all levels must work together and with businesses, unions and regional communities.

Government procurement policies

5.5 Government procurement policies can also play a role in supporting the development of new industries in regional areas and associated employment opportunities. For example, Dr Dirk Visser from the Monash Sustainable Development Institute explained that governments can create markets for products and services:

We create markets all the time, and those enablers of creating markets for new products and new services are something which is better done at a centralised level than with every region trying to do that. So that's a way in which regional governance and national governance can really complement each other….some of these bigger trends—the renewable industry, the hydrogen or the bio industry, and moving away from landfill—those kinds of markets can be created at a national level.4

5.6 Councillor Sarah Stanley of the Shire of Collie outlined how government procurement had the potential to support local businesses more:

Government investment in clean manufacturing, including procurement targets for recycled materials in government contracts, would create opportunities for meaningful, sustainable work in regional areas while helping to address climate targets…Governments—local, state and federal—are all significant procurers, and including incentives in your procurement processes would help create a market for these industries, which would lead the way for private industry that will also take on those products, creating jobs and dealing with the waste issues at the same time.5

5.7 The Centre for Policy Futures provided the following example:

Recently, in some regions the desire and need to shift to renewable energy sources has in itself provided a focus on community-owned infrastructure such as solar farms, which have both attracted investment and secured new jobs (see, for example, the Cities Power Partnership). Clever use of local government procurement principles is a particular feature in some of these communities.6

5.8 Similarly in the clean energy space, the AMWU outlined how government policies could promote industry and jobs:
I think the other kind of policy on which we’ve seen work to some degree in this space has been how governments have looked at leveraging local procurement around domestic battery use. In South Australia, they had a rebate scheme for domestic solar batteries. Early access to the rebate was given to consumers who were willing to purchase an Australian manufactured battery system, and this kind of early window was opened up for, I think, approximately six months. Within that time, three battery manufacturers opened in South Australia, including one which took up part of the Holden plant in Elizabeth, doing battery manufacturing assembly. So I think policies like these, which promote manufacturing in Australia and expand the supply chain, are critical in making sure that we get the most out of the opportunities that lithium offers.7

5.9 In Collie, the committee heard, government funding for initiatives to diversify and grow the local economy seeks to increase local content and recent changes to that state government’s procurement processes should enhance local industry participation in the supply of goods and services.8

5.10 However, the AMWU-WA Branch was not convinced that this policy had necessarily increased employment in the regional areas, arguing that many of the jobs were taken by Fly-In Fly-Out (FIFI) workers:

The irony of it is that we've got blokes coming off those jobs there who have got the skill set, and they could be working at Kemerton now. What we've been saying and what the state government has been saying quite clearly is, 'We want to try and employ local people to try and steady the economy here.' The reality of Kemerton is that it's getting built by people from Perth who are living down here. The only local benefit they're getting is the caravan parks are full and the motels are full of guys who are doing drive-in drive-out work…9

Rail rolling stock

5.11 The AMWU argued that the federal government should utilise procurement opportunities in rail, defence and renewable energy manufacturing and maintenance to better support regional communities.10 Mr Adam Wieladak from the AMWU explained that:

In our submission we show that for industries like that [defence and rail], where government plays such an important role in the procurement process, they can really anchor manufacturing hubs in regions…11

5.12 On the topic of rolling stock procurement, the AMWU noted that decisions by state governments to source from international manufacturers had not delivered the stated cost or efficiency benefits for a variety of reasons. In New South Wales, there are issues with the length of the platform, size of tunnels and whether the trains are able to run on the tracks. Similarly in Queensland, domestic manufacturers are fixing issues with the disability toilets on rolling stock.12

Biofuels

5.13 In the case of ethanol production, Bioenergy Australia outlined that, despite ethanol production being cheaper in Australia than refined petroleum, Australian producers were not operating at full capacity:

…biofuels in Australia have no direct access to market. So for ethanol, or biodiesel or renewable diesel to make their way to a consumer they need to go through an oil distributor. Now, if I were an oil distributor, I would be seeking to push my own proprietary product. I think that's quite a normal thing to do. But really, it makes the security of offtake very difficult.

When you don't have that security of offtake you're not going to have investment in new facilities and you're not going to have facilities operating at their full capacity.13
5.14 Bioenergy Australia went on to explain how changes to fuels standards could improve the offtake market for ethanol, similar to what has occurred in the United States where there is a 15 per cent ethanol mandate:

It's about getting to a place where there is an intervention which requires there to be a percentage of that fuel in every fuel that we run. For ethanol to become the octane enhancer in all our fuels across Australia would have a significant impact. It effectively would then become the refiner's responsibility to be ensuring that ethanol is running through the system.14

5.15 Mayor Greg Williamson from the Mackay Regional Council argued for a government mandate for ethanol in domestic fuel:

We want to see some leadership in, for instance, the mandate for the use of ethanol for use as a domestic fuel. At the current rate, no business can make a profit and there's no further investment in those businesses to create the future jobs. If there was a mere five per cent increase in the ethanol mandate, we wouldn't be able to grow enough sugarcane to meet the demand.15

5.16 Bioenergy Australia noted that progress was being made to reduce the level of aromatics in fuel, potentially opening up the offtake market for ethanol:

The aromatics pool has been agreed to be reduced. We are now working with the department on what could be the potential other aromatics replacements to enhance octane. We are hoping that ethanol will be seen as the cleanest, lowest-emission job-creating opportunity…16

5.17 Bioenergy Australia highlighted that the Swedish Government has implemented a mandate for biojet fuel which has provided the offtake security for producers:

One of the things that Sweden decided to do in order to support the facility for it to be financially viable was they looked at their own government travel through aviation and decided that they were going to be willing to pay a certain amount extra for all of their government travel expenses. They calculated how much fuel that would equate to and they were then able to justify through that to create an offtake for a tender for the production of that fuel within a facility.17

5.18 On 13 November 2019, the Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA) announced that it had agreed to a request from the Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction, the Hon Angus Taylor, for ARENA to develop a roadmap for bioenergy to be used in the decarbonisation of Australia's industrial sector.18 Issues that the roadmap will cover include:

- The potential for biofuels to decarbonise the industrial and transport sectors, particularly 'hard-to-abate' sectors such as aviation and marine;
- The potential for biofuels to contribute to Australia's liquid fuel security;
- Opportunities to decarbonise the gas network;
- Bioenergy opportunities for heat, steam and power;
- Quantifying the economic opportunities for Australia, including a focus on regional Australia.

**Recycling**

5.19 The National Waste Recycling Industry Council advocated for governments at all levels to support recyclers through market creation. Local councils, they suggested, could reuse materials within their own activities, such as road construction or servicing sports fields.19

5.20 Further, policy that establishes and maintains zones for recycling can make the difference for recycled materials to be cost competitive. The NWRIC provided an example of a facility in south-east Melbourne:

It's an important facility to collect and recover construction and demolition materials and glass and reprocess them and put them into roads. It's part of an area that's been targeted as a green zone, in the sense of bushland. They want to extend the lease, but there is a contradiction. It's a question of whether
they can stay there, which would have a significant impact, because trying to find an alternative place nearby—it's very important that they're located close to the source of the waste material but also can go back into construction material. That means they can compete with virgin sand, because they're trucking virgin sand from out of the city, whereas here you've got something within the city that can be aggregated, crunched up and re-used and put back out without having to travel 150 kilometres in traffic in trucks. That's an example where local and state planning is saying in one part: 'Yes, we want to have dedicated zones,' if you look at the infrastructure plan for Victoria, but then you've got a local planning decision or a state planning decision that's working against it.20

5.21 The NWRIC consistently highlighted the importance of product stewardship legislation in creating and supporting certain recycling industries.21

5.22 And the role of community education in making sure that the inputs into the recycling process do not derail it at the start was also noted. The National Waste Recycling Industry Council provided evidence that government support and education programs in Western Australia reduced contamination in kerbside recycling collection drop from 30 per cent to 8 per cent once a certain level of investment in community education was achieved, arguing that 'We all need to be reminded regularly. We need to have a lot more investment in education, and we need consistency nationally, rolling down to local council level'.22

Ecological services

5.23 A number of stakeholders cited an increased role for government in developing the ecological services sector. For example, Ms Diane Lanyon from Ecosure contended that:

Investment by the government in Australia's natural areas as if they were infrastructure could and should be considered. This is, after all, the infrastructure of our future. Connecting landscapes on a local and national scale is essential for building resilience in our ecosystems and communities in the face of a changing climate.23

5.24 Regen Australia noted that the expansion of ecological restoration into other regions would require:

- national standards for the practice of ecological restoration that are accepted and implemented by governments and industry
- government laws and policies to support best practice restoration
- access to funding and workers with appropriate skills.24

5.25 Professor David Lindenmayer outlined the enormous opportunities for native forests in Victoria to sequester carbon and create jobs:

...our environmental and economic accounting analysis suggests that the carbon market is up to four or five times more lucrative to the state of Victoria than the timber and woodchip market is at the moment.

... The estimate for a carbon farming initiative, including feral animal control, revegetation, seasonal fire crews, carbon measurement and the like, could be up to 1,000 regional jobs in eastern Victoria.25

5.26 However, Professor Lindenmayer noted that an important factor constraining private investment in natural forests was the lack of a carbon accounting framework:

What we are missing is the carbon methodology, and we're missing the vision from state and federal government to allow that exciting and important opportunity to take place.26

5.27 The Centre for Policy Futures argued that successfully and fully exploiting an expanded terrestrial and marine based carbon market would require:

- robust policy and legislative frameworks that set the rules for carbon markets in Australia
landholders being aware of the opportunities available through a carbon market and being skilled at taking on diverse revenue streams and managing multiple 'uses' of their private property.

Federal, state and local governments committing to coordinate policy around the voluntary carbon market to remove unnecessary barriers to engaging in that market.27

Regulatory barriers

5.28 Stakeholders outlined the importance of reducing regulatory barriers for existing industries and in the development of new industries.

5.29 Councillor Sarah Stanley from the Shire of Collie outlined a number of regulatory issues that, if overcome, could catalyse new industries:

Western Australia's planning framework is unnecessarily constrained, costly and time consuming. Plans for new industries are often abandoned due to costs and processes required for land rezoning, scheme amendments and other land planning processes. Any new industries that are looking to set up—we caught many of them along our transition process—come across all of the various bureaucratic processes they'd need to undergo, which are often very costly. Those things that could be extremely good in creating new employment opportunities in regional areas are just left to go somewhere else where it's easier to set up business.

... A complete overhaul of dated and rigid state agreements would allow strategic land to be repurposed for diverse job-creating industries. For example, here in Collie there's been an opportunity identified to create protected cropping located near power station infrastructure to allow that latent heat to be used to heat greenhouses to grow products for export. This industry alone has the potential to create thousands of direct employees, as well as many indirect jobs in transport, storage, processing and marketing, but it requires access to land, water and all of those other issues as well. Land is the biggest hold-up for that one at the moment, and it's probably something that could be easily changed.28

5.30 Such regulatory impediments to investment were echoed by Mayors of other regions in the South West of Western Australia.29

5.31 In the case of organic waste, Dr Michael Askew from the Monash Sustainable Development Institute noted that in the case of waste material processing:

It can be very difficult, for example, to move organic waste across local government boundaries—local government to local government. We haven't quite got our planning systems right and ready in a lot of places.30

5.32 But these barriers can be overcome, as the committee heard from the councils in Newcastle when discussing the benefits of the joint organisation network which has been established by the NSW Government.31

Policy certainty

5.33 Policy settings can also encourage the development and/or expansion of new industries. The committee heard of various examples of where policy certainty could assist regions to transition.

5.34 Ms Liz Ritchie from the Regional Australia Institute contended that:

Policy uncertainty, as everybody knows, doesn't help any transition. The first step is ensuring there is a secure landscape—and what that is—and then, once that is known, being able to move forward from there and undertake that longer term planning...32

Stable energy policy will give certainty for investment

5.35 Several stakeholders outlined the importance of a stable and long-term energy policy at a national level to provide the certainty for businesses to deploy the capital and invest in the workforce to sustain regional economies.33
5.36 The AMWU submitted that 'Increasingly we are seeing instances of capital flight from Australia due to the significant uncertainty regarding energy policies'.34

5.37 The Clean Energy Council noted that past policy changes in the energy industry had given rise to the 'solar-coaster' of booms and busts:

...without that policy certainty what we're likely to see is some real volatility in the pace of project deployment. I think one of the biggest challenges for our industry, and therefore the extent to which the industry has not only employed people but invested in the workforce, has been the stopping and starting, the booms and busts.35

5.38 And future investment may not be forthcoming without stability in energy policy:

What we're talking about here is private investors that have been putting up, and would be expected to put up, many hundreds of millions of dollars into these projects, and they expect revenue and a return on those projects over a 15-, 20- or 30-year life. And so the extent to which they have some level of policy certainty over that period of time is obviously a critical factor.36

5.39 The Clean Energy Council advocated for a long-term energy policy:

For the benefit of regional communities, the environment and generations to come, we urge the Australian Parliament to support a strong, long-term energy and climate change policy that can underpin continued investment in Australia's ageing electricity sector.37

5.40 The Next Economy also advocated for 'policy certainty in the energy space that's going to incentivise investment'.38

5.41 And without policy certainty, it is likely that volatility may again beset the renewable energy generation industry and threaten those next-round industries that require cheap energy to power their businesses.39

5.42 The Clean Energy Council outlined the impact that renewable energy policy settings have had on wind turbine manufacturing:

Australia is a relatively high labour cost jurisdiction, so manufacturing this equipment for export is challenging. Without strong local demand for wind turbines, local manufacturing does not make economic sense.

In response to the welcome, but short-term, certainty of the Victorian Renewable Energy Target (VRET) Auction round one, Vestas [a global wind turbine manufacture and operator] was able to undertake contract manufacturing of key wind turbine components for its VRET projects...Following the completion of the VRET components, these workers will be re-absorbed...where possible, but local manufacturing will wind-up.

Ongoing auction rounds (or a strong national policy) with clear local content requirements, would enable these roles to be made permanent and potentially increase the levels of local manufacture.40

5.43 The need for certainty in energy policy for renewables manufacturing was echoed by the AMWU.41

5.44 The Nature Conservation Council of NSW considered that:

...government has a role to play to ensure that the infrastructure and the grid are up to scratch to be able to facilitate the transition when that inevitably takes place...We are not looking for a complete command-and-control economy here; we're looking for a broad acknowledgement by government that it's got a facilitation role to play.42

5.45 In terms of creating the economy of the future, the Nature Conservation Council of NSW argued that it needs to be complemented with infrastructure of the future:
I'd like to see, for example, the significant infrastructure that we've got in the Hunter Valley repurposed for storage, for control of the grid and opportunities like that. But that requires government intervention; that requires government policy settings.43

Establishment of new public services jobs in regional areas

5.46 The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) advocated for government policies to reduce the reliance on contractors and establish new public services agencies in regional areas:

As the public sector has become over-reliant on external contractors, particularly in ICT (information and communication technologies), it hollows out the capacity, the price goes up et cetera. But one of the other things that is not commented on or discussed enough is that that reduces the capacity for government to direct its resources into regional areas.44

5.47 Indeed, the CPSU cited research from Associate Professor John Spoehr that 'every public sector job created has a multiplier effect that creates 1.45 additional jobs in the wider community'.45

5.48 Cr Sarah Stanley also advocated for the decentralisation of government agencies to regional areas:

A common issue in regional areas such as Collie is a lack of diversity of work, particularly in professional and creative industries. This is one of the reasons we've identified that many people choose to work in Collie but not live in Collie—a lack of diversity of work. We've got lots of work for blue-collar workers and not so much in the creative and professional fields. That means that many families choose to live in another place. Efforts by government departments to locate offices in regional areas will provide jobs in these areas as well as providing opportunities to service these departments by local businesses, helping shore up sustainability in regional areas.46

Facilitating capital investment

5.49 The importance of access to capital cannot be underestimated in ensuring that regional areas can transform their economic base.

5.50 The ANU Energy Change Institute noted that 'Natural resources alone do not create zero-carbon energy in forms useful to modern economies. Complementary capital investments will be required'.47

5.51 Similarly, the AMWU outlined issues faced by manufacturers:

Manufacturers across Australia have also been faced with difficulties obtaining sufficient capital to expand their businesses. The government has gone some way to addressing this through its Manufacturing Modernisation Fund, but there is still so much more that needs to be done. The union believes that models such as the one adopted by the Clean Energy Finance Corporation could be developed to spur on increasing investment in manufacturing and prioritise the creation of regional jobs.48

5.52 Professor Ray Wills from Future Smart Strategies agreed that capital investment for value adding manufacturing in Australia is constrained:

At the end of the day, while Australia is the 14th-largest nation by GDP, we still have some difficulty attracting capital, and especially in Western Australia. We don't have any problem attracting capital for the resource sector, but for anything further downstream it's more challenging. So there is a logical role for government to facilitate, and some of that facilitation will be to do with tax regimes, land access and approvals processes.49

5.53 While capital investment should primarily be undertaken by the businesses that are set to benefit from that investment, the committee heard that there may be a case for financial support to be provided where the market is not willing to provide such capital.

5.54 Mayor Ramon Jayo from the Hinchinbrook Shire Council argued that smaller communities often do not have projects of sufficient scale to access government financing facilities like the Northern Australia Infrastructure Fund. Mayor Jayo outlined that agricultural diversification in the Hinchinbrook
Shire could be facilitated through establishment of drying facilities and silos for around $500 000: That would enable the grower to bring his two tonne to the silos. If every grower brings his two tonne, all of a sudden you've got a 20-tonne payload in a B-double, which just changes the economics straightaway, so it makes it viable. However, the farmers themselves don't have the capital, because of the tightness of the sugar industry and that—it's been pretty tight for a while. They don't have the capital to set up the silos.50

5.55 Similar agricultural regions with established infrastructure are able to adapt:

If you look at us compared to Burdekin, Burdekin is pretty adaptable to change…if Burdekin cane is terrible, for instance, they're cashing in on $900 a tonne for chickpeas, because they already have existing infrastructure that was developed a long time ago, whereas in our district that infrastructure was never developed.51

5.56 Conversely, governments may choose to finance investments directly where there are spill over benefits that would accrue to the broader community from such investment (such as in the case for electricity grid stabilisation).

5.57 In this regard, the Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA) plays an important role in providing access to capital for renewable energy projects. However, as of 30 September 2019, ARENA only had $216.3 million in funds available to commit to new projects. According to the ARENA website:

ARENAs pipeline of projects currently exceeds this amount and whilst not all of the projects in the pipeline will be successful in seeking funding, it is expected that ARENA's funds will be fully committed in the next 12–18 months.52

5.58 Governments may also choose to back key industries in particular locations where it is likely that the predominant employer in a region requires such investment to remain viable. However, in doing so, any such finance should be contingent on that business demonstrating that it will be competitive and sustainable as a result of such investment.

5.59 The committee also notes that some global investors have changed their investment principles to incorporate sustainability and climate objectives. In line with this change, there would appear to be significant opportunities for businesses and industries aligned with such principles to access these capital markets. However, stable policy settings are an important factor for these investors in deciding where to allocate capital and, given Australia's recent history of changing energy policies, other countries may be relatively more attractive in the absence of stability in Australia.

**Local governments need to be proactive and responsive**

5.60 The committee heard governments must lead public investment in the regions to 'de-risk' later investments by the private sector and signal to the market that it will support such investments. The committee was impressed by the number of local governments across Australia that are actively engaged in and working towards making their communities more diversified and resilient.

5.61 RDA Townsville and North Queensland expanded on the 'de-risk' concept: One of the challenges in the north, and our region is included, is that our infrastructure is lagging in many areas. If we can invest into the critical economic and social infrastructure, we have a much better opportunity to attract private industry. For example, for someone working in a traditional industry like agriculture or mining, but even a freight logistics company, their costs to operate in a region like ours are much higher when it comes to transporting goods and services. Our road quality is poor in most of the regional areas and that means people have high maintenance costs, they have higher fuel costs, they have higher labour costs because of the slower speeds, and it goes on. They also have higher wastage because of the rough surfaces. That's one simple example of roads. If you don't invest in the infrastructure, you're actually crippling industry to be competitive, grow in that region and attract new industry.53
5.62 Mr Rhys Williams from the City of Mandurah also discussed the importance of government in de-risking private investment:

...we are talking about laying economic foundations, putting in infrastructure that might de-risk the opportunities for industries that perhaps have relevance to relocate to us, and about fostering ecosystems so our local workforce can benefit from the future growth of those industries we're attracting.54

5.63 Local councils also need to increase the relative attractiveness of living in a regional area by ensuring that public infrastructure and services enable communities to transition and attract people to move to, and stay in, the regions. The Regional Australia Institute noted on this point that:

Building 'liveable' communities will be increasingly important for addressing the future of work in regional Australia. With skills and professional workers growing in demand across the country, places will be increasingly in competition with each other for this workforce.55

5.64 Mayor Robert Pynsent from Cessnock City Council argued that:

Positive economic development initiatives must promote growth and investment, secure economic diversity and aim for sustainability whilst targeting resilience and community liveability. A national commitment to an approach based on best practice would be welcomed in the regions. Investment is at the core of it. Continued investment in regional infrastructure and community development will unlock liveability, enhanced lifestyle attributes to support population growth and ensure the viability of jobs in our regions.56

5.65 The Centre for Policy Futures highlighted that:

For regional areas to thrive, they must meet economic, social and environmental indicators that also sustain a high standard of living...

Community infrastructure, such as leisure activities and national parks, is also necessary to meet the social needs of regional areas. Affordable housing is equally important in attracting people to live in a region and encourages people to settle in an area...

5.66 The Regional Australia Institute offered its insight into what drives people to move to regional Australia for employment:

It's the other elements which support that job within regional Australia that will be the deciding factor for whether an individual or family chooses to move to the region, stay in the region and remain there...

... We know that a job will potentially be the deciding factor for somebody to move, but liveability, community connection and amenity will often be the reasons that they stay—that community cohesion factor.57

5.67 Even in regions where jobs currently exist, affordable accommodation was cited as a barrier to people moving to fill these positions.58

5.68 The Regional Australia Institute called for a national education campaign to educate people about the opportunities that exist in regional Australia:

There are enormous opportunities to reconfigure what our population settlement patterns look like, but we understand that you can't push people. You need to change hearts and minds, and we believe that a national campaign would be the first step to ensuring that societal shift.59

1 Monash Sustainable Development Institute, Submission 96, p. 6.

2 Professor Karen Hussey, Director, Centre for Policy Futures, University of Queensland, Proof Committee Hansard, 11 October 2019, p. 39.

3 Monash Sustainable Development Institute, Submission 96, p. 6.

4 Dr Dirk Visser, Program Manager, Professional Education, Monash Sustainable Development Institute, Monash University, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 October 2019, p. 25.
Wednesday, 4 December 2019

6.1 Throughout this inquiry the committee has heard a wide range of evidence examining issues associated with jobs for the future in regional Australia. It is clear that regional communities are affected disproportionately by the closure of significant employers, particularly where this happens rapidly. Not only do these closures affect workers, but also their families, economic activity within regional areas and social fabric of the communities themselves.

6.2 The committee has not, however, been able to reach agreement on a unanimous set of recommendations to guide the way forward for developing and realising the industries that will create jobs for the future in regional Australia. As such, the views and proposed recommendations of committee members are presented separately in additional comments attached to this report.

Chair's additional comments
Transition is coming

1.1 Australia is an economy in transition. It is a globalised economy with export markets susceptible to commodity price swings and decisions of other governments. As such, Australia needs to seek to diversify production and economic activity in regional areas to reduce the impact of external shocks.

1.2 Australia needs to be particularly attuned to signals that global markets are sending. Australia is heavily reliant on coal, oil and gas domestically and for export revenues. However, the future outlook for hydrocarbons is uncertain, with thermal coal in particular facing the very real prospect of rapid structural decline.

1.3 Domestically, the electricity generation transition is already underway in Australia with the recent closure of numerous coal fired power stations. The majority of Australia’s coal fired electricity generation are ageing, losing reliability and operating beyond original design life. Yet scheduled closures are expected to slowly occur for as long as the next 25 years.1

1.4 With both Snowy Hydro2 and the NSW government3 recently signalling that they will secure firm renewables to be dispatched at any time at a price lower than the wholesale market set by coal and gas, it seems implausible that existing coal plants can operate until the mid-2030s without losing significant amounts of revenue in the meantime.

1.5 This means Australia is already at a tipping point where new renewables and storage is cheaper than existing generation, implying a rapid, snowballing threat to older coal generators which will only continue to get more expensive and unreliable compared to firm renewables which continually drop in price.

1.6 All today's current signs show that the clean energy transition is happening faster than policy makers are willing to admit. We are not prepared for this massive disruption, nor how rapidly it will occur. Policy makers assume a steady, linear transition, whereas all previous technological disruptions in history have instead been 'S-curves' with rapid uptake and deployment. As Professor Ray Wills from Future Smart Strategies told the inquiry:

We always say that the future will come faster than we think, and when we look back the future always came faster than we thought.4

1.7 There are around 38,000 coal workers in Australia heavily concentrated in specific localities, around half of which are estimated to be employed in thermal coal production.5 For these workers and their communities, hope that coal markets alone, especially thermal coal, will continue to sustain their livelihoods over the long term does not correlate with consensus forecasts. In every part of the world, firm renewable electricity generation is forecast to be lower than electricity sourced from thermal coal by 2030.6

1.8 The biggest risk to coal-dependent communities is a failure to plan. The biggest threat these communities face is our law-makers pretending that coal markets will continue indefinitely. Once this disruption starts impacting global markets, it will be too late to minimise the impacts on unemployment and local economies. We owe coal mining workers and their communities more than being left to global markets. We have to protect the investments these coal communities have made.

1.9 As Professor Karen Hussey from the Centre for Policy Futures so eloquently put it:

…if you have a community that, at the moment, is heavily dependent on thermal coal mining, then I think it is everybody's responsibility to sit down with that community and do everything they can to, first of all, impress upon that community that, never mind what the federal government does in Australia, the rest of the world is making decisions in the coming decades that put them in a vulnerable position.7

1.10 While the threats to metallurgical (coking) coal predominately produced in Queensland are not as imminent, they are still very much real and should be acknowledged. ThyssenKrupp in Germany have recently demonstrated steel production using renewable hydrogen at their Duisberg plant. The trial
will move through to full-scale production, with three arc furnaces powered by hydrogen in operation by 2023. Heliogen, backed by Bill Gates, have successfully developed solar concentrator technology to provide industrial heat for steel, cement and petrochemical production. These technologies will provide lower costs to steel production and drive rapid decline in the metallurgical coal sector from the early part of the next decade.

1.11 From the evidence provided in submissions and at hearings across the country, regional communities told the committee they know that a transition in electricity generation and coal mining is underway and many are already making plans for the future.

1.12 But it is not just coal workers who stand to lose as regional economies transition. Without change, base metal industries also face an uncertain future as outdated technology and currently high energy costs mean many of these facilities are uncompetitive in the global market.

1.13 It is the workers in these regions that are highly dependent on significant industries that stand to lose stable employment, quality jobs and economic security. As a result, they will be forced into work for lesser pay, face insecure employment, early retirement, long-term joblessness and the associated mental anxiety that accompanies such a change in circumstances.

1.14 Australia does not have a strong record of managing these transitions well. The committee heard from various stakeholders about the devastating long-term effects that workers, their families and entire communities have endured as a result of failing to plan for change. When this happens, it is the workers who unfairly shoulder the impact of industry closures due to changed market conditions.

1.15 In Germany, a successful transition away from coal mining and associated power generation saw not one of the 130,300 black coal workers leave the industry through redundancy. Australia should strive to replicate this outcome.

Future industries

1.16 The jobs of the future for regional areas will depend on the modification of existing industries and the development of new industries. While some opportunities will be localised, the emergence of other industries will have application across regional Australia.

1.17 The sectors that already sustain regional Australia hold the key to unlocking new job opportunities. The committee heard how the best success comes from pivoting existing industries and skills into new areas.

1.18 These areas are also more-or-less known. Just as signals are sent of a market's decline, the same is happening for industries that signal a bright potential such as hydrogen, ammonia, green steel, bio-innovation, circular economies and carbon stores in land use. As Dr Michael Askew from the Monash Sustainable Development Institute put it:

I guess I disagree with a lot of people's opinion that we don't have a crystal ball for the future. We don't know exactly what's going to happen, but we've got a good sense of what's going to happen and we've got a good sense of what jobs will look like into the future.

1.19 There is a deep well of potential jobs that can be created for regional Australia. Renewable energy not only holds significant potential for regional jobs, but utilising Australia's sun, wind and talented workforce to create cheap, abundant clean energy in the regions can act as a 'magnet' to further investment and jobs in manufacturing and heavy industry, all of which requires reliable, affordable local power.

1.20 The quantity of clean energy that will be needed to export as hydrogen, ammonia or via HVDC cables, as well as electrify our transport system, substitute industrial processes and enable manufacturing and heavy industry is massive. The CEO of the Australian Renewable Energy Agency, Darren Miller has said Australia could produce 700% renewable energy,9 while the ANU Grand
Challenge for zero-carbon energy for the Asia-Pacific has mapped projects that amount to around 2000% renewables. This presents a huge potential for regional jobs growth.

1.21 However, witnesses were concerned that in some areas the transmission infrastructure and grid capacity is constraining potential construction and future jobs. The development and installation of the renewable electricity generation that Australia will need investment in transmission infrastructure.

1.22 Accordingly, the Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC) has an important role to play in facilitating the rapid rollout of renewable energy generation. In particular, they should develop a model for the establishment of renewable energy zones, ensure regulatory frameworks are fit-for-purpose for clean energy exports, and reform the existing marginal loss factor regime to provide investor certainty for renewable projects.

1.23 If Australia can get the investment settings for renewable energy right in order to massively drive down prices, Australia can leverage off demand for clean, green energy from Asia, develop an energy export industry through hydrogen exports and high voltage direct current cables and regain our competitive advantages in manufacturing and heavy industry.

1.24 Without modernisation to meet the expectations of low cost, low emissions production that is valued by the global aluminium industry, Australia's aluminium smelters will likely close in the near future. However, the potential for aluminium smelters to be retrofitted so as to increase efficiency and provide grid stability is very encouraging.

By retrofitting pots with enhanced temperature regulation – an insulated, heat exchanger jacket – whole potlines can operate indefinitely within a range 25% below to 25% above their normal operating point. Most of this demand 'swing' can occur instantly, providing a highly valuable service to the grid, much like the Tesla megabattery in South Australia has been profitably providing for almost two years.

1.25 Given the potential benefits that could flow from the adoption of such technology in a renewables-dominated grid, the Australian Government should work collaboratively with smelter operators to determine if the technology would be suitable and, if so, work together to ensure its rapid implementation.

1.26 Similarly, the development of bioenergy industries has the potential to generate jobs in regional areas, maximise the value of local resources, and minimise waste and environmental impact. Government policies and investment in research can significantly contribute to the realisation of this potential.

1.27 Australia can already produce bioethanol cost competitively at scale but there is excess capacity in current production facilities and little incentive for investment in new facilities. Given the potential for bioethanol and synthetic fuels to be used as an octane enhancer, reduce emissions and create regional jobs from using waste products, there is a potential 'win-win' through government using procurement policies for its fuel and diesel use for defence materiel and operations, and mandating the inclusion of increasing levels of bioethanol for aviation and marine fuels to drive scale. Not only would this provide a market for bioinnovation, it would also help reduce emissions in more difficult areas of abatement and create regional jobs.

1.28 However, mandating ethanol requirements for passenger vehicles creates a very real risk of a boom and bust industry as global electric vehicle production ramps up over coming years without enduring markets to sell into, leaving ethanol producers exposed. The scale of electric vehicle production is staggering, as Professor Wills stated:

Last year, the global car industry announced investments to 2025 totalling over $400 billion. There has been another $100 billion added to that. So there are $500 billion worth of pipeline investments in building electric cars up to 2025. That number will not diminish, it will only get bigger.
1.29 Witnesses also made reference to the relatively uncompetitive cost of biodiesel production. With further research and investments to expand production to scale, it is likely that Australian biodiesel production could become competitive. However, this production will only be realised if an off-take market for biodiesel is secured, such as through the Department of Defence.

1.30 The recent announcement that the Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA) will be creating a roadmap for bioenergy replacements for industrial use and transport are welcome. While ARENA is now driving Australia’s future bioenergy and hydrogen strategies, they have been subject to three separate legislated budget cuts and re-profiling from their original $3.2 billion fund and have only around $200 million left to commit to projects across all of their responsibilities. Given the crucial importance of these strategies to Australia’s future jobs and regional industries, it is crucial that their budget is increased in order to enable the deepening and broadening of these crucial strategies for regional jobs growth.

1.31 There is also significant potential to increase the number of jobs in regional areas through the expansion of ecological services industries. Environmental remediation needed for mine sites will likely generate a significant number of jobs in the future. Reef restoration is also an emerging area that is expected to generate more employment, as is carbon sequestration and associated land management practices.

1.32 Despite these forecasts, existing employment in such areas is piecemeal and not sufficient to meet current demand or need. As such, the Australian Government could take a more active role in supporting job creation in regional areas to address the need for jobs in forest and land management, and reef restoration.

1.33 The recycling and waste management industry could flourish with government support to develop markets for its products. In particular, the development of procurement policies, mandatory recycling targets and mandatory product stewardships would assist in reducing the 20 million tonnes of waste currently going to landfill and potentially create up to 12,000 jobs.

**Skill development**

1.34 While some workers in regions facing transition have transferrable skills to new industries, other employees face dire prospects for maintaining pay and conditions unless there is further investment in training and skills development.

1.35 There is particular concern about the low skill level of some mine workers, such as truck drivers, who have limited skill sets and will struggle to find alternative employment without further skill development. In industries that have a high likelihood of closing over the coming years, the Australian Government should explore the most appropriate option for younger workers with limited skills to be afforded free training and skill development so they stand ready to transition into alternative employment.

1.36 On the whole, the current demand-driven skills training system is not adequately catering to the diverse needs of regional communities and is contributing to significant localised skill shortages. There is no doubt that, without change, this system will continue to fail regional communities into the future. Governments, working with regional communities and employers, must ensure that the TAFE system is appropriately placed and adequately resourced to deliver the skills and training to match future employment demand.

**Transitions must be community led**

1.37 In unplanned transitions in the past, it was clear that existing industries were in terminal decline. Despite recognising this, government did not plan and the market alone was not going to be able to deliver the type of long-term investment that these regions needed to adjust.

1.38 Similar indications exist now with coal production. A large number of current generators are scheduled for closure over the near to medium term and new coal generators are not financially
competitive in order to be built. These communities need to prepare for the inevitable transition. With many power stations expected to close over the short term and global demand flat-lining then shrinking, it is imperative that planning begins now.

1.39 Transitions do not happen overnight. They must be planned and executed—and that takes years, not days. Accordingly, the Australia Government cannot delay or give false hope that coal will sustain communities and instead proactively secure the industries and jobs of the future in regional Australia.

1.40 It is essential that transition planning is driven by locals with input from all stakeholders. Communities themselves are best placed to know what is likely to work in their region and should be in control of planning what their communities will look like in the future.

1.41 However, there is value in the Australian Government supporting and steering the transition process at a local level. An independent regional transitions authority should be established by the federal government. Their role would be to fund and steer the creation of localised transition groups involving employers, local government, unions and communities. Decision making would be driven by local interests, but the role of federal staff should be to offer secretariat support to distribute resources, and put forward funding to enable consultations and develop plans, while also cross-pollinating ideas back at the agency so that different regions could utilise the insights that other regional areas have. Final outcomes or reports from each region could be collated and published by the federal agency.

1.42 There would be benefit from the collation and analysis of existing information regarding regional transition in Australia. Based on feedback from stakeholders, a number of organisations would be willing to be part of such initiatives.

**Government policies and investment**

1.43 Governments can play an important role in creating markets and facilitating private investment in regional areas, particularly in a time of record low interest rates where money has never been cheaper.

1.44 Governments at all levels need to increase investments in regional communities in order to lower the risk environment for subsequent investments by the private sector. In doing so, this will demonstrate to private investors and entrepreneurs that government is committed to realising targeted transformation in regional areas. This investment should extend to providing quality digital telecommunications, developing local procurement roles for infrastructure, creating markets where regional communities can benefit, fostering an encouraging regulatory environment and facilitating co-investment.

1.45 Further, the use of government procurement policies and local procurement policies can create opportunities for regional businesses, demand for the use of recycled material in public infrastructure and allow the bioenergy industry to reach its full potential. The benefits of this for regional Australia will be significant, given the need to process these materials close to where they are located.

1.46 A further area of potential regional job growth is carbon abatement in agriculture, land management and forestry in which buyers and sellers, including landholders, could identify and manage multiple uses of private property and take advantage of diverse income streams. By restoring the Carbon Farming Initiative, the Australian Government can seek to secure access to global carbon markets, huge new economic opportunities can be unlocked for Australian farmers, land managers and forestry operations to earn export income from creating and protecting carbon sinks.

1.47 Economic diversity in regional communities requires having a targeted and stable public service presence. The Australian Government should reduce its increasing reliance on external contractors and divert this funding to create permanent public service employment across regional areas. The creation of new public servant jobs in regional areas (as opposed to moving existing jobs to regional areas)
enables a more diverse local labour market with a need for diverse skills while also boosting local demand for other goods and services.

1.48 The Australian Government should create policy settings to add value to the many resources that are mined here. For example, given the nascent nature of the lithium industry, the Australian Government should ensure that a significant proportion of Australia's lithium ore is processed and used in the manufacture of storage technologies instead of simply being exported. This approach would create jobs in regional Australia, particularly in Collie which is already seeking out this industry for its future.

1.49 Many of the jobs of the future will rely on cheap, abundant, clean energy. As such, the very first step in securing these jobs is having stable energy policy to attract global investment and drive down energy prices through competition. Reversing the federal government's intentional sabotage of Australia's clean energy framework should be addressed as a matter of priority.

2 Giles Parkinson "Snowy smashes price benchmarks for 'fair dinkum' wind and solar" RenewEconomy 2 November 2018.
3 Angela MacDonald-Smith "NSW opens door to low emissions power" Australian Financial Review 22 November 2019.
4 Professor Ray Wills, Future Smart Strategies, Committee Hansard, 1 November 2019, p. 45.
7 Professor Karen Hussey, Director, Centre for Policy Futures, University of Queensland, Proof Committee Hansard, 11 October 2019, p. 43.
8 Dr Michael Askew, Program Manager, Australian Transitions Academy, Monash Sustainable Development Institute, Monash University, Proof Committee Hansard, 1 October 2019, p. 23.
9 Giles Parkinson "Australia could aim for 700% renewables, Arena boss" RenewEconomy 8 October 2019.
10 Scott Hannaford "Green Energy Plan to make Australia powerplant of the Pacific" Canberra Times 19 September 2019
11 Simon Holmes a Court "Australia's aluminium sector is on life support. It can and should be saved" The Guardian 31 October 2019.
12 Professor Ray Wills, Future Smart Strategies, Committee Hansard, 1 November 2019, p. 46.

**Recommendation 1**

1.50 The committee recommends that the Australian Energy Market Commission:

- develop a model for the establishment of renewable energy zones;
- review the current regulatory frameworks to ensure they are fit-for-purpose for clean energy exports (via high-voltage direct current cables, hydrogen and ammonia); and
- ensure reform of the existing marginal loss factor regime to ensure investor certainty for renewable projects.

**Recommendation 2**

1.51 The committee recommends that the Australian Government commit to an energy policy to provide certainty for the market to invest in and enable cheap, abundant, clean energy to restore our competitive advantages and attract manufacturing and heavy industry back to Australia.
Recommendation 3
1.52 The committee recommends that the Australian and state governments invest to create more ongoing jobs for forest and land management, reef restoration and national parks management.

Recommendation 4
1.53 The committee recommends that the Australian Government explore the most appropriate ways in which younger workers with limited skills working in industries that are likely to close could be afforded free training and skill development to enable the transition into alternative employment.

Recommendation 5
1.54 The committee recommends that state governments work with regional communities and employers to ensure the TAFE system is appropriately placed and adequately resourced to deliver the skills and training to match future employment demand.

Recommendation 6
1.55 The committee recommends that the Australian Government support regional communities to develop local transition plans by establishing an independent Regional Transition Authority that would:

- provide financial and ‘in-kind’ support provided to bring together industry, governments, unions and community groups in regions undergoing economic transformation;
- steer and facilitate local decision-making on what jobs and industries regional communities want to attract, how they intend to make it happen and what resources and timelines are required; and
- collate and disseminate final outcomes and reports for each region and ensure cross-pollination for other regions through previous or current work with other communities.

Recommendation 7
1.56 The committee recommends that the $1.217 million that has been cut from ARENA’s budget since it was established be restored and re-profiled to deepen and broaden their hydrogen and bioenergy strategies.

Recommendation 8
1.57 The committee recommends that the Australian Government acknowledge that regional economies will not transition through market forces alone. Accordingly, the committee recommends that Australian Government reduce private investor risk in regional areas by playing a leadership role in:

- providing quality digital communications;
- local procurement rules for infrastructure;
- creating markets where regional communities can benefit;
- fostering an encouraging regulatory environment; and
- facilitating co-investment.

Recommendation 9
1.58 The committee recommends that all levels of government in Australia create markets for recycled materials through procurement policies, mandatory recycling targets and mandatory product stewardships.

Recommendation 10
1.59 The committee recommends the Australian Government implement a national fuel standard that mandates a minimum level of ethanol for aviation and marine fuels and the Department of Defence commits to procurement policies and targets for biofuel use in its materiel and operations.

Recommendation 11
1.60 The committee recommends that the Australian Government:
- develop and adopt a consistent methodology for carbon sequestration in forests;
- seek access for Australian farmers, land managers and forestry operations to sell carbon abatement into global carbon markets that farmers and landholders can use to generate income streams; and
- educate landholders on the economic opportunities that can come from carbon abatement on their land through reforestation and land management.

**Recommendation 12**

1.61 The committee recommends that the Australian Government introduce a requirement for a proportion of critical mineral ores, including lithium ore, mined in Australia to be processed and value-added in Australia to enable the development of domestic battery manufacturing.

**Recommendation 13**

1.62 The committee recommends that the Australian and state governments reduce their reliance on contractors and divert this funding to create permanent public services jobs in regional areas.

**Recommendation 14**

1.63 The committee recommends that the Australian Government work collaboratively with aluminium smelter owners and prospective investors to explore options for adopting technologies that would increase the viability of aluminium smelting and allow smelters to provide demand response and electricity grid stability.

**Senator Richard Di Natale Chair**

**Labor Senators’ additional comments**

**Background**

1.1 Regional Australia has been on the losing end of economic rationalism, globalisation and structural change for nearly half a century. Good jobs in country towns have evaporated and opportunity for regional communities have diminished as a result.

1.2 Agricultural employment has declined as a result of the steady decline in family farming and the rise of corporate agribusiness with its high levels of capital intensity and mechanisation.

1.3 Successive governments have withdrawn public services from regional communities in the pursuit of the purely ideological goal of "small government". The result has been the loss of skilled, well-paid jobs from those communities and a loss of services that could support growth, jobs and a reduction in regional inequality.

1.4 Manufacturing businesses that were once the lifeblood of regional economies have closed or moved offshore as a result of relentless competitive pressure from low-wage, low-cost producers in other countries. Much of that has been enabled by state governments effectively offshoring regional jobs through procurement policies that favour purchase of infrastructure such as rail rolling stock from overseas.

1.5 Banks and other financial services businesses have closed vast swathes of their branch networks that had provided secure, well-paid, skilled jobs for tens of thousands of people in regional communities around the country.

1.6 Successive governments have targeted necessary investments in productivity enhancing and investment attracting public infrastructure at cities, while investment in regional infrastructure that would attract investment, create employment opportunities and start to reverse the decline in regional economic conditions has languished.

1.7 Automation of mining processes, which are predicted to accelerate in coming years, has seen the labour intensity of mining decline as output increases.

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1.8 The result has been an ever-growing concentration of income and wealth in our cities and a slow, hard grind on the part of regional communities trying to stay afloat.

Future risks

1.9 There are considerable future risks to the Australian economy, and regional economies in particular, posed by ongoing structural, economic and technological change. Climate change and drought impacts are another layer weighing on already vulnerable regional economies.

1.10 Longer, more intense droughts are predicted to be a feature of the Australian climate under most climate change scenarios forecast for Australia. In the absence of mitigation and adaptation measures, agricultural production will likely be hard hit. That means further contraction in agricultural employment.

1.11 Submitters to the inquiry repeatedly emphasised that low cost power for industry and certainty around long term energy policy is a precondition for future investment in new industries and new jobs in regional Australia.

1.12 It beggars belief that an advanced country such as Australia does not have a national energy policy. Not having an energy policy is the antithesis of responsible public policy making.

1.13 Australia has no energy policy, a dysfunctional energy market and a shortage of investment because of decisions taken a decade ago by vested interests, partisan business organisations, media outlets and the conservative political parties to weaponise climate change rather than engage in responsible policy making on climate change.

1.14 Evidence to the inquiry demonstrates that regional communities and the economies that sustain them face serious labour market deficiencies, particularly in relation to skill formation and re-skilling through the vocational education and training system.

1.15 Submitters consistently expressed confidence in TAFE as the vocational education and training provider of choice and consistently expressed disappointment and concern over the ongoing neglect of the TAFE system.

1.16 On the other hand, while submitters expressed confidence in particular private VET providers with whom they had direct experience, overall confidence in the depth and quality of private VET providers is generally quite low.

1.17 Further risks to regional communities whose economic base is in coal mining are emerging from international coal markets and the financial systems that underpin them. All of these risks require government action to focus on regional employment opportunities and work with business, industry, local stakeholders and unions to develop a planning framework that delivers good jobs to the regions.

1.18 Continuation of a divisive and polarised debate around climate change will continue to magnify these risks and almost guarantee that regional communities, no matter how hard they try, are unable to effectively tackle them.

Opportunities

1.19 It is clear from the contributions made to this inquiry from regional communities that many of the opportunities outlined in chapters 2, 3 and 4 of this report can be realised if we move on from the climate wars. The endless, confected conflict between fossil fuels and renewables which has brought rational government decision-making to a standstill on climate policy, energy policy and industry policy generally is now a major barrier to economic progress in regional Australia.

1.20 It is not a conflict that regional communities find helpful; it is not a conflict they want. There were no submitters to this inquiry who framed their submission in those terms. Submitters representing a wide range of interests from diverse geographical areas with an equally diverse range of economic characteristics do not see their futures being determined by the outcome of a phoney war between fossil fuels and renewable energy.
1.21 Regional communities support their coal industry while recognising international market conditions pose future risks, and they support the investment and employment opportunities that renewable energy and other new industries can provide. It is not a zero sum game for them.

1.22 What regional communities want is for government to act to provide the conditions necessary for the creation of regional jobs.

Role of government

1.23 As outlined in chapter 5, submitters to the inquiry made it clear that the creation of regional job opportunities requires extensive government support and intervention. If the market alone provided the conditions for the creation of new industries and jobs in regional Australia, it would have done so by now.

1.24 Government policy is critical to the development of new and existing industries. An actual national energy policy would provide investment certainty for the energy sector. Government procurement policies play an important role in the development of new industries including biofuels, recycling and the jobs that flow from them.

1.25 The Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union provided strong evidence to the inquiry that government procurement in rail, defence and renewable energy manufacturing play an important role in anchoring manufacturing hubs in regional communities. The AMWU also provided evidence of the additional costs associated with State governments procuring rail rolling stock from overseas.

1.26 A further example of where government can play an important role in the development of new industries and jobs is in the lithium value chain.

1.27 Labor senators endorse the proposition that government should focus on policies that will capture value for Australia from the lithium value chain through onshore refining and manufacturing, rather than reliance on what are likely to be short-lived high spot prices for lithium ore exports. It only requires the correct Government support to ensure that the maximum benefit flows back to regional Australian communities.

Labor Senators’ view

1.28 This inquiry is a welcome contribution to the body of material before the Parliament that will contribute to the development of policies to support new industries and jobs in regional Australia. For this we are grateful to all those who made submissions to the inquiry and in particular those who appeared at public hearings to place evidence before the Committee.

1.29 It is tempting in the circumstances to make a series of sweeping recommendations to government on the range of matters before the inquiry. There have been many valuable ideas and policy propositions put before the inquiry. Many of them will require more careful consideration and consultation with local communities than is feasible within the timeframe and terms of reference of this inquiry. Principally for this reason, Labor Senators are not making specific recommendations, bar one, to government arising from this inquiry.

1.30 It is absolutely clear that the lack of any semblance of a coherent energy policy is a major risk to the Australian economy and this risk is owned lock, stock and barrel by the Coalition Government which has signalled failed on a policy which should be a pillar of the economy.

1.31 The absence of an energy policy is serious. It is as serious as coherent economic, defence or health policy. It is an abrogation of government responsibility to the Australian people and it is dishonest on the government’s part to pretend that energy policy is superfluous. It is important to the regional communities whose representatives made submissions to this inquiry and to the people who make decisions about investments that will create the regional jobs that the country has a coherent energy policy that will underpin the aspirations of regional Australia for good jobs, new opportunities and a sense of genuine inclusion in Australian prosperity.
Recommendation 1

1.32 That the Commonwealth government implement a coherent national energy policy that will provide investment certainty, reduce energy prices, credibly reduce Australia's emissions and provide opportunity to all Australians for full economic participation.

Senator Tim Ayres Senator Anthony Chisholm
Deputy Chair Senator for Queensland Senator for New South Wales

Government Senators' dissenting comments

Introduction

1.1 This dissenting report was prepared by the Government Senators serving on the Committee following receipt of a draft committee report circulated by the Committee Chair, Senator Richard di Natale (representing the Greens) on Friday 29 November 2019.

1.2 As indicated by the report adopted by a majority of the committee (the representatives of the Greens and the ALP), the committee was unable to come to an agreement with respect to recommendations. Accordingly, both the Greens and the ALP members on the committee are presenting additional comments which may include recommendations. At the time of writing this dissenting report, the Government Senators have not had the opportunity to view those additional comments (just as those Senators have not had an opportunity to read this dissenting report).

1.3 The Government Senators do not believe that the majority report (adopted by the Greens and the ALP members of the committee) adequately reflects the spectrum of evidence provided to the committee through submissions or at public hearings. In particular, the Government Senators are concerned that the report does not adequately summarise the compelling evidence in relation to the importance of the resources (including coal, oil and gas), agriculture and tourism industries to our regions and to Australia. This is fundamental for the Government Senators. Accordingly, the Government Senators have dissented.

1.4 Government Senators wish to assure all of the communities, organisations, businesses, trade unions, local authorities and individuals who made submissions that their ideas, thoughts and concerns have been heard. Stakeholders who made submissions are encouraged to maintain dialogue with the Government Senators. In particular, recognition should be given to witnesses who took time out of their valuable days to make submissions and/or appear at public hearings.

1.5 Government Senators thank the Committee Secretariat, broadcasting and Hansard staff for their work during this inquiry. The support provided to the committee was outstanding.

Defining 'transition'

1.6 The word 'transition' is a loaded term which necessarily involves preconceptions around the direction of the Australian economy. The issue surrounding the definition of 'transition' is one of the reasons why the committee could not reach agreement on recommendations.

1.7 There has been a failure, both in evidence gathering and in the majority report, to properly define 'transition'. Indeed, some stakeholders were confused by what 'transition' meant in the context of this inquiry.

1.8 If no agreement can be reached as to what 'transition' means, how can sensible recommendations be made?

1.9 In the view of the Government Senators, the majority report (supported by the Greens and the ALP members of the Committee) inadequately recognises the importance of the existing industries that currently support Australia's regions. This view was articulated by the Rockhampton Regional Council which submitted:
Talk of 'just transitions' away from existing out-of-favour industries is interpreted by many as code for 'we no longer need regional Australia' and its productive primary industries including resources and agriculture.1

1.10 Government Senators note the evidence from stakeholders that the closure of industries can have a devastating impact on workers and communities. Evidence heard by the Committee in relation to the consequences of the cessation of major industrial activity (for example, coal fired power stations and the car industry) was compelling. Even with extensive planning and support, past experience indicates that only a third of affected workers found permanent, full-time employment while a further third were pushed into insecure casual and part-time employment.

1.11 This demonstrates the magnitude of the consequences for the people of our regions if current well-paying jobs in the mining industry are lost through the imposition of extreme policy positions.

**Comparisons with the German coal transition**

1.12 Throughout the inquiry, there has been reference to the so-called German coal transition of around 130 000 workers where it is claimed that no worker was made redundant. However, no detailed analysis of the German experience was undertaken by the Committee.

1.13 During the Committee process, in the view of the Government Senators, there was insufficient analysis undertaken with respect to the German coal transition and how different circumstances apply in Australia, including:

- the strength of the German manufacturing base and heavy industry base compared to Australia;
- the success and importance of the Australian coal export sector;
- the sources of reliable base load energy in the German context given its position in the European Union compared with Australia; and
- the geographic and population differences between Germany and Australia.

1.14 It should be noted that the last of the black coal mines in Germany closed in 2018. This closure was reportedly due to market forces, as the mines could not compete with higher quality, lower cost producers like Australia.

1.15 Accordingly, Government Senators are strongly of the view that great care needs to be taken prior to drawing any lessons from the so-called German coal transition and seeking to apply those lessons to regional Australia. In the view of the Government Senators, the notion that an equivalent of the German Coal transition could be replicated in Australia is misguided and dangerous.

**The importance of the coal mining and oil and gas industries in Australia**

1.16 In the view of the Government Senators, the majority report (approved by the Greens and the ALP Committee members) inadequately highlights the importance of jobs associated with coal mining and oil and gas production to Australia's economy.

1.17 The mining and oil and gas industries provide high paying jobs and contribute significantly to Australia's export revenue and tax base. They are vital for a number of our regional economies.

1.18 In its submission to the Inquiry, the Minerals Council of Australia noted that the resources sector employs more than 220,000 people in highly skilled, highly paid jobs:

The resources sector employs more than 220 000 people in highly skilled, highly paid jobs – with 57 per cent in remote and regional Australia. Workers in Australian resources industries earn around $140,000 a year on average – more than 60 per cent higher than the average for all industries.2

1.19 Government Senators believe that the livelihoods of these workers, their families and their communities need to be protected, not jeopardised with extreme policies.

**Future outlook of coal and the resources sector**
1.20 According to the International Energy Agency's World Energy Outlook (WEO) 2019, coal will remain the single largest source of electricity generation in 2040, supplying 25 per cent of generation globally. Australia is predicted to have a growing share of international coal trade as global coal demand plateaus out to 2040. Australia's net exports are forecast to grow by around 18 per cent or 65 million tonnes of coal equivalent (mtce).

1.21 Evidence of coal exports into the future was provided by the Port of Newcastle's statements during the Committee's public hearings in Newcastle:

From a business point of view, our assessment is the next 15 years won't see any significant change. There's a slight uptick if places like Vietnam et cetera keep coming online as strongly as they are. For certainly the next 15 years we expect to see volumes sitting around 160 million and a little bit above.3

1.22 Under the Government's stable economic management, the resources sector is booming, generating record exports, royalties and taxes paid by mining companies. New opportunities are being pursued in relation to a range of critical minerals.

1.23 In its submission to the inquiry, the Productivity Commission, the Australian Government's independent research and advisory body, noted the mining boom has made Australians substantially better off in the short and long term and that:

Adjustment from the mining boom is generally not a source of significant disadvantage and does not justify special intervention from governments.4

1.24 Further, the Minerals Council also noted that 'many mining regions continue to perform well and will likely experience economic and employment gains for decades to come, irrespective of commodity cycles'.5

1.25 Again, the Government Senators believe that the majority report (approved by the Greens and ALP) fails to adequately recognise this reality.

**Renewable generation is not without problems**

1.26 Government Senators would like to highlight the issues caused by excessive reliance on wind and solar generation, and the uncertainty of relying on unproven technology.

1.27 In Western Australia, the uncontrolled rise of rooftop solar is placing the stability of the Western Australian Wholesale Electricity Market in jeopardy. Indeed, the Australian Energy Market Operator has indicated that from 2022, soaring levels of renewable energy could periodically overwhelm the system and lead to rolling blackouts.

1.28 In South Australia, a large proportion of electricity supply is sourced through wind and solar generation. The variable nature of these generation sources means that the Whyalla steelworks needs to consider the additional costs (up to $129 million) associated with 'firming' the electricity grid when making investment decisions about constructing an electric arc furnace. This evidence was not included in the majority report approved by the Greens and Labor representatives on the Committee.

1.29 Further, Government Senators are concerned that investments in unproven renewable generation technologies may not result in reliable baseload generation capacity nor solve grid stability issues. For example, the Aurora Solar Energy Project in Port Augusta was highlighted by many stakeholders as a potential baseload electricity generator. However, as the Committee discovered, the original project proponent is not proceeding with the proposed solar thermal plant due to difficulties obtaining finance. These difficulties are associated with problems at a similar plant, the Crescent Dunes plant in Nevada, which has suffered a number of technical outages and, as a result, has a variable production history. Again, this evidence was not included in the majority report approved by the Greens and ALP representatives on the Committee.

**Addressing the current needs of regional Australia**
1.30 In the view of the Government Senators, the majority report fails to adequately recognise that the jobs and industries that currently support regional Australia will continue to do so into the future.

1.31 Government Senators note that the term ‘agriculture’ is only mentioned a handful of times in the majority report and ‘tourism’ is given comparable treatment.

1.32 These industries are important in sustaining regional Australia and stakeholders noted the difficulties in filling existing positions. If effort is not made to support the regions to fill current vacancies, emerging industries have little chance of filling jobs associated with the new industries outlined in the majority report.

1.33 In addition, in the view of the Government Senators, there is inadequate discussion of jobs in health and social services in the majority report, even though the National Disability Insurance Scheme is rolling out across Australia and will be one of the main drivers of employment in regional areas. The submission of the Department of Social Services noted:

> NDIS is expected to be one of the largest job creation opportunities in Australia’s history, with up to an additional 90,000 full time equivalent (FTE) employees needed by 2023. The department estimates that of the additional 90,000 FTE jobs, around 34% will be in regional and remote areas across Australia.6

**Investment in infrastructure**

1.34 Government Senators note that the majority report only mentions infrastructure in the context of supporting the expansion of renewable generation capacity.

1.35 Evidence to the Inquiry demonstrates that regional stakeholders are calling for infrastructure to support the expansion of the agricultural sector. What is needed is better access to markets—through air freight, port infrastructure, road upgrades and intermodal rail facilities. Regional communities are looking for investments to diversify production, in food manufacturing and for assistance in developing export markets.

1.36 Similarly, Government Senators note that the majority report makes no mention of the water infrastructure needed to secure this vital resource which is necessary to sustain economic activity in Australia’s regions.

**National Transition Authority**

1.37 The proposed Regional Transition Authority referred to in the terms of reference is reminiscent of the Labor Party’s election policies during the 2019 federal election. Labor’s ‘Just Transition Authority’ would have the power to implement pooled redundancy and redeployment schemes for workers in coal power stations and associated mines’.7

1.38 The policy also indicated that Labor would consider the case for the ambit of the Just Transition Authority to be extended to other industries and regions affected by climate and energy policy.

1.39 The Government Senators do not support the establishment of any National Transition Authority which dictates to the people of the regions what they can or cannot do.

1.40 A top-down, prescriptive and bureaucratic approach to regional development was overwhelmingly rejected at the federal election by the regions dependent upon mining and agriculture to provide jobs.

1.41 In the view of the Government Senators, the evidence indicated that the regional communities themselves know what they want and what is practical and appropriate. The Government should support the regions, not dictate to them.

1.42 The Government Senators on this committee believe in letting local communities shape their own future. The role of the Federal government is to be supportive.
1.43 Government Senators believe that there is a real danger to the regions that a so-called National Transition Authority would seek to impose a world view on the regions which is inconsistent with the views of the local communities – it is the future of their communities which is at stake.

1.44 As the Mayor Greg Williamson of Mackay Regional Council contended:

I think you would get a very, very dull reception for the establishment of another authority to lead a transition, when we don't really know where the transition is.8

1.45 The Government Senators agree with these sentiments.

1.46 From the evidence presented to the committee, Government Senators do not believe that a National Transition Authority is required, or desired by regional and rural communities.

**Conclusion**

1.47 In conclusion, Government Senators note that the committee received detailed submissions and evidence from a range of stakeholders, including: government authorities and departments, business, industry groups, universities, non-government organisations, unions and individuals.

1.48 There is much work being undertaken to advance the diversification of our regions and to provide job opportunities for the future. This includes in many of Australia's traditional industries: mining, agriculture and tourism. Examples have been provided of stakeholders in particular regions working together in a sense of optimism.

1.49 The Government Senators support the continuation of the industries and further development of the industries which have built our regions, including the resources industry, agriculture and tourism. The Government Senators agree with initiatives to provide support and advice services for regional businesses and to encourage diversification, upgrading, and upskilling opportunities for workers across the spectrum.

1.50 The Government Senators support initiatives for the Federal Government to work with States and Territories, industry stakeholders and communities to foster an economic environment conducive to growth, longevity and sustainability. In doing so, the Federal Government should seek to develop new areas of economic activity without jeopardising existing industries which are so important to regional Australia.

1.51 The Government Senators support initiatives such as the Government's National Hydrogen Strategy. In this regard, reference is made to the announcement made by the Federal Government on 23 November 2019.9

1.52 Government Senators are inspired by the actions being taken by local regions and communities to pursue opportunities. Much of the work being undertaken by the Federal government supports these actions. However, the driving force comes from within the communities themselves; the aspiration, passion and resilience of the people of our regions who are working together to build better places for their families and communities. Government Senators applaud these communities and the actions they are taking.

**Senator Paul Scarr**  
**Senator Susan McDonald**

**Senator for Queensland Senator for Queensland**

3 Mr Craig Carmody, Chief Executive Officer, Port of Newcastle, *Committee Hansard*, 5 November 2019, p. 11.
6 Department of Social Services, *Submission 72*, p. 10.
Senator McDonnell (Queensland) (18:50): I move:

That the Senate take note of the report.

First, I have to point out the farcical situation we are faced with, where the chair of the committee has offered no recommendations. In fact, the only thing the alliance of Greens and Labor committee members did recommend was to remove the executive summary and the committee views in chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5. Using Senate processes to push a politically charged anti-mining, anti-farming, anti-regions agenda has spectacularly backfired. Now Labor and the Greens are trying to pretend that it never happened. After six months of hosting hearings in places like Newcastle, Western Australia, Whyalla and Townsville and spending many hours and many thousands of taxpayers' dollars, we're told 'there is nothing to see here'. That was because it was made clear during the hearings that any government attempt to shut down mining and resource extraction would have disastrous consequences for regional and rural towns.

My colleague Paul Scarr and I were part of this committee. We saw straight away that the inquiry was a cheap attempt to attack the mining and resources industries and, sadly, the thousands of families who rely on the sector to survive. We have lodged a dissenting report on this inquiry after the Labor and Greens majority of committee members could not reach agreement on what recommendations to make. The evidence supplied to the inquiry showed regional Australia relies heavily on a strong resources sector that will provide jobs for many years to come. The last federal election delivered an overwhelming rejection of Labor's economy-wrecking renewable energy agenda and gave a big tick to the coalition's plan for strong, well-managed and sustainable resources and agricultural sectors.

Regional Australia has had a long history of innovating in these traditional industries that keep communities viable, and this should be encouraged to flourish. The Greens and Labor despise the regions and, even after being called out on it during the election, they are still wagging a disapproving finger at the hardworking men and women in the regions whose futures and those of their children rely on the government support of these industries. They continue to attack a sector that provides some of the world's cleanest coal and employs 220,000 people, supplying Australia and the world with reliable, affordable energy and minerals. This inquiry tried to pre-empt Australia rushing away from coal and gas to the mass adoption of renewable energy. Australia has world-leading deposits of rare earth and critical minerals representing a substantial commercial opportunity. The Morrison government will secure the future of this mineral extraction with a dedicated office within the Department of Industry, Innovation and Science.

World Energy Outlook 2019, released by the International Energy Agency in Paris, reports that global energy demand increased by 2.3 per cent in 2018, with consumption of coal-fired power up on the previous year. Our Minister for Resources and Northern Australia, Matt Canavan, said the report showed coal will have to be a major contributor to the energy mix for the foreseeable future and it remains the largest and cheapest source of electricity generated in Asia. By 2040, Australian net coal exports are forecast to grow by 18 per cent and liquid natural gas production could double. Yet we have Labor and the Greens continuing to peddle...
climate change hysteria, demanding Australia turn its back on mining and miners. This is despite the Australian Energy Market Operator suggesting that from 2022 soaring levels of intermittent renewable energy could cause rolling blackouts.

It is clear that the coalition's approach to a gradual rollout of renewable energy in conjunction with reliable dispatchable and consistent coal- and gas-fired energy is best for the Australian people and industry. And it is also clear that to follow the plan of Labor and the Greens to torpedo our more than $100 billion coal, gas and oil industries is a fast-track to disaster, especially for our regions. What I find utterly deplorable is that federal Labor wants to dictate to people how they should earn a living away from mining while their Queensland Labor counterparts are shutting down non-mining industries. In Queensland, Labor has grossly mismanaged forestry, fishing, farming and education, thereby denying jobs to people in the regions. They've closed agricultural colleges that gave people the skills to obtain good jobs on the land, and they don't supply enough STEM teachers to western and northern Queensland, which further disadvantages our children in the regions in gaining the education they need to get the jobs of the future. It is Queensland Labor that tells regional people working in the resources sector that they should reskill. How unbelievably senseless to then make it virtually impossible for them to find different work.

This is yet more evidence that Labor despises regional Queensland and doesn't deserve to lead our great state. They are not interested in the innovation, the modern practices and the bright future that we have in regional Queensland with the advent of digital connectivity and modern technology which were not referred to in this report.

**Senator SCARR (Queensland) (18:56):** I rise to support the comments made by my good friend Senator Susan McDonald in defending the regions of Queensland. This was, I must say, the first Senate select committee I had the privilege to serve on. I hope things go uphill from this point on. Under the chairmanship of Senator Richard Di Natale, we are left with a report that has absolutely no recommendations whatsoever. Why? Because the position of the Greens in relation to a range of matters was too extreme for even the Australian Labor Party to support. Senator Susan McDonald and I came to the view that the report which has been tabled did not adequately reflect the evidence which was presented to the Senate select committee—in particular, the importance of the mining industry, the agricultural industry and the tourism industry to the state of Queensland. This is fundamental for us. It is one of the fundamental reasons why I put my hand up to this serve in this parliament. We will fight every day we're in this place for Queensland's regions.

The first issue with the report, of course, is how to define 'transition'. We're from Queensland, so whenever the Greens and the Labor Party talk about transition, we know that mining jobs in Queensland are under threat. Whenever they use the word 'transition', jobs in Queensland are under threat. The Rockhampton Regional Council, in their submission, stated: Talk of "just transitions" away from existing out-of-favour industries is interpreted by many as code for "we no longer need regional Australia" and its productive primary industries including resources and agriculture.

That is absolutely correct. Senator Susan McDonald and I absolutely agree with those sentiments conveyed by the Rockhampton Regional Council. We heard evidence from a number of stakeholders with respect to the impact of local communities when coal-fired power stations are closed and when other industries such as the car industry are closed and
jobs are lost. The evidence is absolutely compelling. The evidence indicates that only a third of those workers are successful in entering into full-time employment after the closures of their employers, a third move on to part-time and casual work, and a third are left bereft, without any job at all. A third, a third, a third. We don't want this to occur to our regional centres in Queensland, and that is why Senator Susan McDonald and I are so passionate about defending our regions in this place.

You will see in the commentary in relation to this matter that there could be references to what's referred to as the German coal transition. This is a process whereby there has apparently been a transition of around 130,000 workers previously employed in the German coal industry to new jobs. Apparently no worker has been made redundant, and this is held up as the role model for Queensland to follow. People will be able to see this referred to in the majority report. However, Senator Susan McDonald and I say that we are strongly of the view that great care needs to be taken prior to drawing any lessons from the so-called German coal transition and seeking to apply those lessons to regional Australia. In the view of Senator Susan McDonald and I, the notion that an equivalent of the German coal transition could be replicated in Australia is misguided and dangerous. The fact of the matter is, as my friend Senator Susan McDonald has stated, the coalmining and oil and gas industries are absolutely fundamental to our home state of Queensland and to the future prosperity of our nation. They provide well-paying jobs to Queenslanders and they support an array of Queensland communities, so it's extremely disappointing that the Greens and the Labor Party supported this report which is tabled in the Senate today.

As Senator Susan McDonald has alluded to, the International Energy Agency's *World energy outlook 2019* states that coal will remain the single largest source of electricity generation in 2040, supplying 25 per cent of generation globally. The committee heard evidence from the Port of Newcastle, the largest coal export terminal in the world. They said:

From a business point of view, our assessment is the next 15 years won't see any significant change. There's a slight uptick if places like Vietnam et cetera keep coming online as strongly as they are. For certainly the next 15 years we expect to see volumes sitting around 160 million and a little bit above.

That's evidence from the Port of Newcastle, the largest export coal port in the world.

The committee also heard about some of the issues with solar and wind power. Perhaps the most telling testimony was heard in Whyalla, home to one of the two remaining steelworks in this country. We heard from the current owners of the Whyalla Steelworks that their proposal to introduce an electric arc furnace will actually cost an extra $129 million because of the reliance in South Australia of the electricity grid on solar and wind—an extra $129 million. We should be trying to increase manufacturing in this country. We should be trying to add value to our resources, rather than putting obstacles in place for those seeking to create jobs and wealth in this country.

We also heard in Whyalla evidence with respect to the Aurora solar energy project. This was interesting, because a number of submitters referred to this project as a beacon for the future of the solar power industry. Some quick research, however, indicated that the project has fallen over. They couldn't get finance. Why is that? Because they've got a project called the Crescent Dunes plant in Nevada, and that has suffered a number of significant technical outages. As a result, it has a variable production history. But you never hear any reservations from the Greens or the Australian Labor Party with respect to solar and wind. You never hear
those reservations. The fact of the matter is this country needs stable, secure, base-load energy, and Senator Susan McDonald and I will fight for that every day we serve in this Senate.

There was also talk of implementation of what is quaintly referred to as a national transition authority. As I said earlier, whenever the Labor Party and the Greens talk about transition, in Queensland we know that that means mining and agricultural jobs are in jeopardy. So what is this regional transition authority meant to do? It is meant to facilitate and steer the regions in the right direction with policy signals. Steer them!

Senator Canavan: Put people out of a job!

Senator Scarr: That's right. I'll take that interjection from Senator Matt Canavan: put people out of jobs. That's what it's about: putting people out of jobs. This was the failed policy which the Labor Party took to the last federal election. Regional Queenslanders spoke loudly in response. They do not want it. We heard from Mayor Greg Williamson of Mackay Regional Council in respect to this notion of creating a new bureaucracy in Canberra to steer the regions with respect to their future development. Mayor Greg Williamson said:

I think you would get a very, very dull reception for the establishment of another authority to lead a transition, when we don't really know where the transition is.

That's a lot of common sense from Mayor Greg Williamson of the Mackay Regional Council.

In summary, Senator Susan McDonald and I believe that the Australian federal government should seek to develop new areas of economic activity without jeopardising existing industries which are so important to regional Australia. A positive example of this is the government's National Hydrogen Strategy. That's positive. It's looking to add an additional industry to our country, not jeopardise existing industries. I would like to finalise my statement by saying that we were inspired by the actions being taken by local regions and communities to pursue opportunities. Much of the work being undertaken by the federal government supports these actions. However, the driving force comes from within the communities themselves, from the aspiration, passion and resilience of the people of our regions who are working together to build better places for their families and communities. The government senators applaud them.

Senator McKIM (Tasmania) (19:06): I'll be very brief, but I can't let those last two contributions go without challenging them. Fair dinkum, it's like a couple of old dinosaurs howling at the moon on their way to extinction. That's what we've just listened to: people with their heads in the sand failing to stand up for regional Australia. Regional Australians are some of the people most impacted by climate change. Regional Australians are watching their landscapes burn. Regional Australians are watching their rivers dry up. Regional Australians are losing their homes and, in some cases, their lives because of the fires that we have seen that have a direct link to climate change. Get your heads out of the sand. Get with the science, get with the program and start understanding that, unless we take radical action to reduce emissions, regional Australia will pay an extremely high price. I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.
DOCUMENTS

Prime Minister

Order for the Production of Documents

Senator CANAVAN (Queensland—Minister for Resources and Northern Australia and Deputy Leader of the Nationals in the Senate) (19:07): I table documents relating to the orders for the production of documents concerning corporate emissions and energy data and the City of Sydney's annual report 2017-2018.

Senator WATT (Queensland) (19:07): by leave—I move:

That the Senate take note of the document.

The parliament has been waiting weeks for straight answers to simple questions about the Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction's botched hit job on the Lord Mayor of Sydney, something that has become known as the 'doctored documents affair'. This morning the minister once again demonstrated his complete contempt for his ministerial obligation to be accountable to this parliament and, through the parliament, the Australian people by refusing to comply with an order for the production of documents about his role in this increasingly grubby scandal. In question time this afternoon, instead of being upfront, the government chose once again to run a protection racket for the soon-to-be-disgraced and former minister.

We know that the Prime Minister is loose with the truth, so I suppose we shouldn't be too surprised that his government is totally incapable of being honest about Minister Taylor and this whole sordid affair.

But the details of this fiasco will not be kept hidden forever. In a report published online in recent hours, two journalists from The Australian, Alice Workman and Greg Brown, have reportedly exposed the identity of the individual responsible for sourcing fraudulent figures about the City of Sydney's travel expenditure. Ms Workman and Mr Brown have published that it was in fact Minister Taylor's senior adviser, Mr Josh Manuatu, who sourced the dodgy figures that his disgraced boss relied on to launch an attack against the Lord Mayor of Sydney. Well, senators, is this sounding a little bit familiar to anyone here?

First of all, we have a Liberal government minister shopping around forged reports containing dodgy figures to try to make a cheap political point. That's certainly not the first time this type of thing has happened under the Abbott-Turnbull-Morrison government. Senators might recall that in 2014 the office of the then employment minister, Senator Abetz, attempted to 'massage' jobs figures in an official government report to suit the Liberal Party's political agenda. What a shock!

Given Minister Taylor refuses to answer basic questions about the doctored documents affair, perhaps Senator Abetz might like to shed some light on how this type of thing continues to occur in coalition ministerial offices. Was there any link between the dodgy figures that former Minister Abetz's office tried to massage into existence and dodgy figures that emerged from Minister Taylor's office? What could that link possibly be? Who within former Minister Abetz's office was responsible for this questionable behaviour? Senators will be shocked to learn that it was none other than this same staffer, Josh Manuatu, as revealed in an article published by The Guardian on 24 March 2014 entitled 'Eric Abetz denies report his office was urged to "scale up" jobs figures'. What a shocking coincidence!
What other similarities might there be between this latest ministerial scandal and the many previous ministerial scandals during the sorry life of the Abbott-Turnbull-Morrison government? Well, some of you might recall that Alice Workman has helped to uncover the truth about Minister Taylor's office's role in the doctored documents affair, just like how she helped to uncover the truth about another minister's office—Senator Cash's office—leaking an AFP raid to journalists. You might recall Senator Cash misled the Senate five times when she indignantly insisted that her office played no role in leaking the raid to the media, but she was forced to finally admit the truth when Ms Workman revealed the minister's office was in fact the true source of the leaks. Well, Minister Taylor has gone one step further. He has misled the parliament six times, claiming the doctored documents were sourced from the City of Sydney's website. But we know that's not true, because if it were true the minister would have complied with the Senate's order for the production of documents and provided proof by 12.45 pm today.

So why did Minister Taylor say that the document was drawn from the City of Sydney website? And where did Mr Manuatu obtain the dodgy figures that appeared in the forged version of the City of Sydney report? What did he tell Minister Taylor about the origin of those figures? Has he told Minister Taylor that he sourced these dodgy figures? Why has it taken journalists to expose Mr Manuatu's role in this disgraceful affair? Why hasn't Minister Taylor volunteered this information on one of the many occasions that he has been asked about the doctored documents affair in the House of Representatives? How long has Mr Taylor known that his own staffer, Mr Manuatu, was the source of these dodgy figures? How long has he then chosen to sit on this information rather than tell parliament the truth? And why won't Minister Taylor finally do the right thing: take responsibility for his disgraceful conduct and the behaviour of his own taxpayer funded office and stand down? This minister must stop making excuses, he must stop the obfuscation, he must stop blaming others and he must stand aside. The usual routine of blaming it on a staffer, like we saw from Minister Cash, and then parachuting them into a plum job with the Liberal Party just won't cut it.

But make no mistake: Josh Manuatu is no bit player in the loony right wing of the Liberal Party. He is the president of the federal Young Liberals, a member of the federal executive of the Liberal Party and the finance chairman of the ACT Liberal Party. Indeed, there are rumours that Mr Manuatu is seeking high office as the director of the ACT Liberal Party, with the blessing of ACT Liberal Senator Zed Seselja.

It is very disappointing that Senator Seselja has still not learned to be careful about the company that he keeps. During his brief, and otherwise unremarkable, tenure as leader of the Canberra Liberals, Senator Seselja made some very ill-advised choices as to the company he kept. Under his leadership, Liberal Party staffers and party members were revealed to be operating a fake Facebook page purporting to be the official page of then ACT Deputy Chief Minister Katy Gallagher. This was a vile and offensive Facebook page riddled with distasteful content that falsely attributed views to Senator Gallagher that were offensive both to her and her family. And during his otherwise unremarkable stint as ACT opposition leader, Senator Seselja was also accused of allowing the resources of his taxpayer funded office to be used as a slush fund by the Liberal Party.

I welcome Senator Abetz's arrival in the chamber, and perhaps he can shed some light on the activities of his former staffer Josh Manuatu. It is very disappointing that Senator Seselja
has not learned from his past mistakes, and I call on Senator Seselja to assure the Senate that he will play no role in helping the now notorious Josh Manuatu become the director of the ACT Liberal Party, as another attempt to look after a mate who's got himself caught up in a scandal to save his minister.

In summary: today's new information provides Minister Taylor with an opportunity. And we say to him: 'Don't follow in the footsteps of Senator Cash and just blame your staff. It's time to show a shred of dignity, do the right thing and resign.' If he won't, the Prime Minister must finally show an ounce of leadership and sack this disgraced minister. I seek leave to continue my remarks.

Leave granted.

Senator ABETZ (Tasmania) (19:16): The commentary and the smear in coward's castle by Senator Watt does him no credit in the naming of staff members. The one example that Senator Watt used in the allegation of doctored figures in relation to a former staff member of mine was specifically and categorically denied by the secretary of the department at the time. And for Senator Watt to fail to say that on a broadcast day and to put it on the public record is absolutely disgraceful. It is a private individual who has no capacity to respond to that smear. What is more, the allegation of the projected figures were such that these figures were in fact exceeded. And I was able to expose that at Senate estimates. So that which was accused—

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Kitching): Senator Watt, on a point of order?

Senator Watt: Yes, a point of order. We know that Senator Abetz is touchy, he was with Mr Godwin Grech and then he was caught out with Josh Manuatu, and he's now defending his former staffer. I ask him to come back to the point.

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Senator Watt, that's not a point of order. Senator Abetz.

Senator ABETZ: How pathetic and how disgraceful—a point of order by Senator Watt. It shows, yet again, that there is no gutter low enough for Senator Watt to traverse when it comes to besmirching individuals who cannot come into this place. But what I would say on the person to whom he refers—and he knows full well the secretary of the department categorically denied the allegation that Senator Watt has re-peddled—is why would he seek to put on the record yet again that which he knows to be demonstrably untrue? What's more, the figures that were allegedly doctored came in under that which was the actual figure. So if he did doctor the figures—categorically denied and rejected—when those figures actually came in, they were even better than the projection. And so the Labor Party story on this has completely collapsed. It looks more foolish, Senator Watt, than the Aldi bag containing money that the Australian Labor Party of course has been so anxious not to talk about and sought to hide.

The Labor Party, with a complete failure when it comes to public policy, comes in here, day after day, to besmirch and trawl the gutter for issues that bear no relevance to the lives of Australians. They are concerned about border protection, and Labor, yet again, joined with the Greens to vote against the repeal of medevac. Today they voted again with the Greens to condemn forest workers in Victoria to a life of unemployment. This is the Labor Party that
seeks to trawl these matters rather than deal with the issues of employment and sustainability for Australians.

Senator Watt: You've been called out again.

Senator ABETZ: That is what they talk about at barbecues, not about the constant interjections of Senator Watt, who wants to make a name for himself by trawling the gutter. Senator Watt can continue, but the simple fact is that the day we look forward to is when the senator talks about actual policy.

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Kitching): Thank you, Senator Abetz. Could I just remind the chamber of standing order 193, particularly suborder 3, around imputations. But I feel there was quite even-handed abuse of that standing order. We will let it go!

Debate adjourned.

NOTICES

Presentation

Senator McCARTHY (Northern Territory—Deputy Opposition Whip in the Senate) (19:20): I seek leave to give a late notice of a motion which has been circulated to the whips, and the opposition's motion for the general business debate tomorrow afternoon.

Leave granted.

ADJOURNMENT

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Kitching) (19:20): Order! It being 7:20, I propose the question:

That the Senate do now adjourn.

Christmas

Senator ANTIC (South Australia) (19:21): Tonight, I rise to speak on the importance of Christmas and the importance of respecting our Christian heritage at this time of year. Like many in this place, I held a Christmas card colouring competition this year, through which I received hundreds of brilliant entries from junior school children across South Australia's northern and southern suburbs. Christmas is a magical time of year and a busy time of year, and I appreciate the efforts that those young South Australians put into their entries. I know that many hours went into those entries and that much consideration was given to the messages contained in those drawings. The artwork and the sentiments from those entries were outstanding. I was pleased to see that so few of them used terms such as 'happy holidays'. Many of them were in fact using traditional messages and symbols. However, I was particularly taken with the work of Taya, who is eight years old and attends Pimpala Primary School in Adelaide's southern suburbs. Her entry didn't have festive beach balls, it didn't have season's greetings thongs, there were no holiday trees and it didn't wish people 'happy holidays' or 'season's greetings'. Taya's entry was in essence a statement about that which makes Christmas important to her. That statement, very simply and eloquently, was put as follows: 'Christmas isn't about presents; it's about family and friends.' It is a strong traditional message and one that properly reflects the true sentiment of the season. Her observation was so simple and so heartfelt that it gave me reason to reflect on the importance of Christmas, its
true meaning, over and above its otherwise confected meaning, and the importance of preserving the traditional meaning of Christmas from attempts to water down those values.

Christmas is a Christian holiday. It is designed to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. You can tell that from the name: Christmas. Some of the most vivid memories I have from childhood involve Christmas—the traditional decorations, the nativity scenes, the red bows, the Christmas wreaths and memories of my family coming together to enjoy each other's company and celebrate the day over a special meal. It has always been a time to celebrate and to reflect.

This experience reminds me that it is critical that this holiday continues to serve as an opportunity for Australians, whether they be Christians or not, or religious or not, to recognise the important role that this Christian heritage played in the formation of our country. I'm proud that so many people in my home state of South Australia embrace the traditional meaning of Christmas. It is the state that holds the Christmas Pageant, which has been celebrated every November since 1933 and is the Southern Hemisphere's largest public parade. We also have the Loxton Lights Festival in the Riverland of South Australia, showcasing from 30 November to 31 December. It is heartening to see so many local businesses and residents pitching in year after year to participate in this event, which brings such joy to so many people.

Christmas is a special time of year, a time to embrace tradition and to celebrate with family and friends. It is not a time for political correctness or pointscooring. I would like to thank and applaud all the people who strive to maintain a traditional Christmas at this time of year. Thank you to all the children who have participated in the competition, and thank you especially to Taya, and to Pimpala Primary School, for Taya's timely reminder regarding the importance of the true meaning of Christmas.

Northern Territory

Senator McCarthy (Northern Territory—Deputy Opposition Whip in the Senate) (19:24): I will take this opportunity, given that it will be my last chance to speak to the Senate before the Christmas break, to thank the people of the Northern Territory for their support and to certainly thank the organisations who work in the areas of family and domestic violence. For those communities who find it harsh, we know that as this Christmas comes closer and closer one of the key issues—that we've been standing so strongly about here in the Senate—is entrenched poverty.

We know that this government fails to seriously address concern around poverty. We've touched on this, we've campaigned on this—not only the concern around the Community Development Program, CDP, but also Newstart and the issue of raising Newstart. The CDP is still of major concern for 33,000 Australians, most of whom are First Nations people and most of whom live in remote and regional Australia. What is going to happen to them this Christmas? We have heard this government talk about jobs, jobs, jobs. They have said that they would create 6,000 jobs for the 33,000 people on CDP. But, wait! They went from 33,000 jobs to 6,000—perhaps jobs and then to 1,000 jobs—but, no! It's not even that. There are now only 100 subsidised jobs, instead of the 6,000 that were promised across these areas, and it is not good enough.
In the Top End of the Northern Territory we are in the wet season. We know that that creates enormous pressures for these regional and remote communities with the flooding that occurs. We seriously hope there is a good deal of rain right across the country over this Christmas and January, not flooding to the extent that it damages our livelihoods but enough rain to give hope for what 2020 could offer for all Australians. If we look at these communities that are remote and regional in Australia, especially here in the north, we know that programs like CDP are not enough, and I am putting the government on notice. We will not give up. This side of the House will not give up on pursuing a better way of life for Australians in our remote and regional northern Australia. We will not give up on it, but we're going to hear those stories more and more, especially as we embark on the Christmas and New Year season.

I certainly also want to take this opportunity, with it being the final adjournment for 2019, to thank my staff for their walk with me this year and the last couple of years. I think as we come to Christmas it is important to be able to reflect on why Christmas is important. As I've said in this House on numerous occasions, Christmas is a time to spend with family, to spend with loved ones. I thank my staff, both here in Canberra and in the Northern Territory for their work, and I also wish my colleagues on all sides of the House that time with their family and friends, because no doubt we are going to come back very strongly in 2020 to pursue these issues of equality for all Australians, for working Australians and for those Australians who feel let down by this government. We will not give up. I can promise the government that our New Year's resolution will be that we're going to come back bigger, bolder and stronger than ever before. Merry Christmas.

**Racism**

**Senator FARUQI (New South Wales) (19:29):** Muslim women have a right to be safe in our communities. We have a right to socialise and to be in public wherever and whenever we want. We have the right to wear whatever we bloody well want to. We have the same rights as any other person, but too often we are denied those rights because of the risk of violence, harassment and intimidation.

Rana Elasmar, who was almost 40 weeks pregnant, was relaxing with friends at a Parramatta café recently. A man walked up the stairs to their table, lent over them and began to spout racist vitriol. What happened next is gut-wrenching. The man savagely punched Rana in the face and head repeatedly. The heavily pregnant Rana fell to the ground and the man stomped on her head. Bystanders rushed to pull the man away. I can't even think of what could have happened had bystanders not intervened.

Rana Elasmar was the target of racist violence like so many other Muslim women have been. She put up a post on Facebook which said that this man verbalised his hatred of Muslims prior to hitting her:

How somebody feels like they have the right to hatred and he neither knows me, nor my religion.

... ... ...

We cannot allow behaviour like this to become the norm and sit silent.

Thank you for your courage, Rana.

We cannot pretend that these attacks are isolated. Charles Sturt University's 2019 report, *Islamophobia in Australia— II (2016-2017)*, makes for terrifying reading, with harassment in
shopping centres and streets, kids bullied at school and women not just being threatened by racists but being tripped along the footpath and run over with cars. Targets included children under the age of 18, women with children, pregnant women and elderly individuals.

Since the last report, severe attacks requiring hospitalisation more than doubled from two per cent to five per cent. Seventy-two per cent of the victims of islamophobia were women and almost all were wearing a hijab or a scarf at the time of the incident. Attacks in public areas have become more common, with harassment of Muslims in public areas in the presence of security officers and CCTV jumping by 30 per cent.

So how did we get here? This doesn't just happen out of the blue. It happens because there are people who constantly seek to demonise and attack us. What really sickens me is that the violence and abuse that Muslims suffer, and, in particular, Muslim women, is a business model. Merchants of hate in parliament inflame divisions between Australians, between the ones they think belong here and the ones that they think don't.

Just recently, an All Together Now report analysed 281 race-related pieces of social commentary. More than half were functionally racist. The subjects of these negatively portrayed media pieces were commonly Muslim Australians, Sudanese Australians and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Ninety-one per cent of the negative race related pieces were published in just three newspapers: the Herald Sun, The Daily Telegraph and The Australian. I guess it's good that the study didn't include Sky News, because that would have blown their racism statistics through the roof.

None of this happens by chance. Manufactured outrage and hate are in the business model of many politicians and media outlets, and they have to be held accountable for the consequences of normalising racism. It is real people like Rana who bear the brunt. It's why the Scanlon Survey recently found that 40 per cent of Australians in 2019 hold negative or very negative feelings towards Muslims. To some, racist reporting and fearmongering in the parliament makes it acceptable to abuse people.

It also fuels the far Right. Research from Victoria University found that far Right extremist groups in Victoria use these racialised narratives as recruitment tools by building false credibility for their so-called cause. The far Right also relies on social media to spread the lies. I have highlighted many times the kinds of racist and misogynistic abuse and threats that come my way, but platforms are still not taking responsibility to protect users from abuse seriously.

Everyone in this place should denounce what happened to Rana Elasmar. But my question to parliament is this: will it commit to addressing the underlying atmosphere of hate that Muslims face in our country?

Taxation

Senator ABETZ (Tasmania) (19:34): There is more to our tax system than simply how high or low rates are comparatively. I, for one, favour lower taxes, leaving individuals the personal freedom to spend their money as they deem appropriate. But there is also the vital matter—too often overlooked or ignored—of how tax collection is organised and administered. It is crucially important for those affected, as confrontations with the ATO have the potential to ruin people's livelihoods and tie them up in costly proceedings. This is
illustrated by the words of Kathryn Little, a transcription contractor whose ABN was abruptly cancelled by the ATO. She said:

No one could give me a reason why the ABN had been cancelled. No one could tell me what part of the legislation or what part of the guidelines or what part of the regulations I did not comply with.

This quote says it all about the heavy-handed, non-transparent way in which the ATO is treating too many self-employed Australians, and there are many more examples of the ATO's punitive measures. Consider the case of self-employed IT engineer Rod Douglass, as outlined in a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Tax and Revenue in October last year. Mr Douglass was pursued by the ATO for more than half a million dollars for alleged fraud or evasion for distributing half of his income to his spouse for tax purposes, in spite of a statement on the ATO's own website that splitting income with a spouse was legal and acceptable. The Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman received more than 100 requests for help from small businesses in their dealings with the ATO, following a 2018 Four Corners report on the subject, and these are only those who have proactively sought help. Undoubtedly, many continue to suffer in silence.

The core of the problem is this: there is a huge power imbalance between the ATO and small business and individuals. If the ATO pursues a particular business or person over an alleged tax debt, it has access to considerable powers. It can cancel ABNs, amend assessments without notice and with little opportunity for appeal, and even access bank accounts for garnishment before those in question are even aware there is an issue. Its access to resources and legal expertise dwarfs that of the small business people it often targets, and it has the luxury of time—unlike most small-business people, who depend on a regular cash flow to pay staff, suppliers and so on.

Small-business people being pursued by the ATO in this manner is an affront to our values. As a Liberal, I want to see enterprise thrive and prosper. Every individual entrepreneur should have every opportunity to succeed and this should be enabled, not stifled, by government and its agencies. Operating a small business is a daunting challenge under any circumstances. It's time to consider measures that can empower small-business people and hold the ATO to account, and we can take inspiration from the US. First, the ATO should recognise it is a service organisation—a recognition which would provide the necessary cultural shift. As a service organisation, it would seek to serve, understand, help and support rather than simply demand. A legislated taxpayer bill of rights with which the ATO must comply; a tax debt that can only be collected once appeals have been fully exhausted, rather than as soon as it is claimed—the onus of proof being on the tax collector rather than the taxpayer; a well-resourced taxpayer advocate to assist people to get their taxes in order; and similar measures would all provide the framework so necessary for a customer focused ATO. Through pursuing reforms of this kind, we can empower, encourage and enable small-business people, curb the excesses and lack of accountability of the ATO and bring it into line with community expectations whilst ensuring people pay their fair share of the tax burden.

Thailand: Road Safety

Senator GALLACHER (South Australia) (19:39): I want to make a contribution about a seminar I attended on 15 November in Bangkok, Thailand, at the invitation of the World Health Organization. The World Health Organization invited a parliamentarian from Australia and a parliamentarian from the United Kingdom but, due to the election in the United
Kingdom, Mr Barry Sheerman was unable to attend and they sent the executive director of the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety.

Why did the World Health Organization seek to invite a UK and Australian politician to Thailand? Well, I suppose the first awful description is that Thailand has the highest number of road deaths in ASEAN. They're ninth in the world. It is an unenviable statistic. It is the leading cause of death in Thailand amongst the population aged 10 to 29. Sixty people die, 2½ thousand are injured, 500 are seriously injured and 20 are disabled daily. Three out of four deaths involve motorcycles and cars, and four out of five of those killed are males. About 25,000 people a year lose their lives in Thailand in road accidents. Almost 65 or 70 per cent of them are under 30. The cost to their GDP is around six per cent.

The Thai government have taken the momentous step of getting a parliamentary group together. There were approximately 35 politicians at the seminar from across the chamber, from across the parties. They said: 'We can't allow this to continue. We need to do something. We need to ask people who are doing stuff: what works?' We are excellent at retrieval. We have helicopters. We have landing pads on top of hospitals. Those things aren't going to fix the problem in Thailand though. If you get more people to the hospitals, you're really going to have more long-term disabled, more seriously injured and more pressure on the health system. The seminar, at the end of a very long discussion, got to the crux of the matter: you need to design the process—the roads, the vehicles—with the correct principle in mind, which is that human beings are frail and they're not meant to travel at speed and any sudden stop is catastrophic. You need to design for people who will make mistakes because that is what we do as human beings, particularly when we're young and take more risks than when we're a little bit older and more experienced.

We need to get into both infrastructure design and the design of the vehicles they're driving. One of the excellent solutions put forward was that the Honda motorcycle company may have to be encouraged to build smaller-capacity electric vehicles and the like. One of the senators, who had been a former policeman, said: 'I go to a village. I arrest three girls without helmets or licences on a motorcycle. The village comes to the police station and says, "Why are you doing that? There are no school buses. How do they get to school?" They really need to think carefully about how they do it. They have got a good economy. It is a generously grown economy but they've got this awful tragedy happening to them each and every day. I do pay credit to the leaders in that Thai parliament who have decided to get together.'

Basically the questions to Australia were: how does the Parliamentary Friendship Group of Road Safety work? I explained it is bipartisan, it is across the chamber, you generally get people who put aside all politics, are working on a common cause and, if you can get that started, it works. Then they wanted to know how the budget in Australia works. I said we have got a generous budget in road improvements. The problem is we don't always get to spend it quickly enough with the three layers of government. The federal, state and council governments don’t always act quickly enough. We have a Black Spot Program, which is proven to save lives and injuries but we don't get action as quickly as we would like, and you need to focus on that.

But the key issue that came out of this was we need to accept that people are going to take risks and make mistakes, we need to design vehicles for that and we need to design infrastructure for that. These people are on an enormous journey, but they realise that they
cannot continue the way they are going with untrammelled economic growth. They have got good road infrastructure; it is just too crowded. There is no separation. They have got lane merging and sometimes reverse lane merging, because motorcycles come towards you the wrong way.

I want to put on the record that I commend the Thai parliament for their great effort.

**Gender Equality**

**Senator Hanson** (Queensland) (19:44): Today I wish to honour the everyday men of Australia—the many males who go about their lives working hard to provide for their families, putting food on the table, without any fuss and without expecting any fanfare or huge accolades. You men help make Australia what it is today. It’s not often that the dedicated and hardworking men in this country collectively get a pat on the back as they deserve, so I’d like to do that now. Well done, men. You deserve to be honoured. I thank you.

It is more often that we uplift women in this country. Men are widely regarded as toxic. That is wrong. The extreme majority of men are not toxic; they are good, they are caring. The issue has really come to the fore in the recent month with the bushfires around the country, particularly Queensland, New South Wales and South Australia. While the firefighters, who are mostly males, were battling the blazes, we had feminists telling us that after they fight the fires—no doubt exhausted, dehydrated, covered with ash and soot and with their skin singed from the heat—they go home and beat their partners. What an idiotic suggestion. There is zero research to back up that claim. It is perhaps no surprise that the comments were made by a good friend of the Greens. At the time, I stood firm and described the comments as disgusting and male bashing. It was not good enough for the Greens to promote and support such comments.

I also made it clear that I have had a gutful of hearing from man-hating feminists. I believe in what is fair and just and I’m sick and tired of this criticism of men in Australia, especially if they’re white. I think the property owners who watched their homes go up in flames are not too worried about a pile of paperwork that hasn’t been filled out. Why is there such an ongoing attack on the men of this country, particularly those who are showing strength and masculinity and who risk their lives to protect property, lives, pets and animals? Well, I’m not going to man bash. There is no reason to do it. The vast majority of men are not toxic; they are loving, caring, respectful and hardworking.

It is mostly men who step up and face the flames, extreme heat, rough terrain and tinder-dry fuel to fight the bushfires. In August 2019, there were 15,300 firefighters in Australia, and 9.6 per cent were female. Why aren’t the feminists who demand equality in boardrooms and politics not rushing to sign up as volunteer firefighters? Where is the feminist campaign for equality in this difficult, physically demanding and thankless profession?

In August 2019, there were 208,900 truckies in Australia, and 4.3 per cent were female. Well, the feminists should be ashamed at letting themselves down in this field. I have never seen a feminist recruiting campaign to get more women behind the wheels of a truck. Maybe it’s too demanding and not glamorous enough, so they’re happy for the men to do it. Trucking is a tough life. They spend days away from loved ones, they sleep uncomfortably and they are under pressure to meet delivery deadlines. For owner-drivers it’s a cut-throat industry and they struggle to make a decent profit. It’s worth noting that without trucks, Australia stops. So I
guess, with 95.7 per cent of truckies being men, we can thank the men that Australia hasn't stopped. I say thank you to the truckies for what they do for Australia.

In August 2019, there were 51,300 coal mining workers in Australia, and 13.9 per cent were women—no doubt less down in the mines. Why aren't the feminists demanding that more women be given jobs several kilometres underground in the darkness, the heat and the danger on the machinery drilling for coal? I could go on. Of 45,300 coach drivers, 11.4 per cent are women.

I suppose what I'm getting to is the fact that day in and day out I hear that the Greens are getting up and having a go about domestic violence against women. Yes, it is happening, but I cannot stand here and see the bashing of men going on in this country all the time. What we're seeing here in Australia is that, each day, six men take their lives and 82 men call an ambulance due to suicidal thoughts or attempts. Prostate cancer kills more men that breast cancer kills women. Two-thirds of homeless who sleep rough are men. Ninety-five per cent of workplace fatalities are men. One in three domestic violence victims are men. These figures are backed up by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, who confirm that, in 2018, 29.2 per cent of domestic violence victims were men. I would like to say thank you to men; you help make Australia the great nation it is today. To my colleagues in this chamber, thank you very much. You make it very interesting.

Queensland: Fishing Industry

Senator SCARR (Queensland) (19:49): As we approach Christmas Day, when many Queenslanders will enjoy Australian seafood, I call upon all Australians to have some thought for the plight of our commercial fishers. There was an article in the Whitsunday Times this morning which talked about a meeting of commercial fishers in Mackay. The article is entitled 'Pleasure to nightmare: fishers fear for future generation'. I will read from the article to introduce my comments on this subject. The article said:

A Proserpine commercial fisherman has warned his grandson against following in his family's footsteps because of Queensland's new fishing regulations—brought into action by the Palaszczuk-Trad government in Queensland. It continued:

Keith Brennan joined dozens of angry fishers at a meeting in Mackay on Tuesday, attended by Queensland LNP Shadow Fisheries Minister Tony Perrett and the LNP's Whitsunday candidate, Amanda Camm. Mr Brennan said the—Palaszczuk—State Government's fishing quotas could force him out of the industry.

"From the 14 years I've been in the industry, it went from a pleasure to a nightmare. I've been impacted that much that I could probably very well say tomorrow that I'm finished.

Mr Brennan's son has also managed to make a livelihood as a commercial fisherman, but he believes that won't be the case for his 18-year-old grandson.

He said:

We've advised him not to get into the fishing industry because what we can see now is it's definitely an industry that is going to crash.

In my maiden speech in the Senate I said that this country needs to make it easier, not harder, for those who are creating wealth and generating jobs in our society. I believe that no sector of our economy—no occupation, no profession—has been treated worse in my home state of
Queensland than commercial fishers. The way that commercial fishers in Queensland have been treated is an absolute disgrace.

Let me quote from Shane Ward, who is the chairman of the Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fishermen Association. Mr Ward said: 'The new fishing reform process is going to be the biggest change the Queensland fishing industry has ever had. It will see multigenerational family fishing businesses winding up production and closing down. Queensland fishers won't be able to supply markets with enough product due to a lack of quota. These markets will be lost permanently.' I've spoken to commercial fishers in this situation. I spoke to one commercial fisher who was running a very successful business out of a little town called Mapoon, which is in the Gulf. He was the only private-sector employer of Indigenous people in that township. He employed people from two Indigenous families. He was producing tonnes of fresh seafood to be consumed in this country. His quota was cut from something like 10 tonnes to 380 kilograms. His business was destroyed. He walked away. He had to walk away from that business. He still pays the annual fees of approximately $4,000 a year, but he had to walk away from that business, and those Indigenous people lost their jobs because of it. It is an absolute outrage and it is imposing huge stress on our commercial fishers and their families.

A report called Sustainable fishing families was released in January 2019. It found that fishers who responded to the survey experienced significantly higher levels of high and very high psychological distress, greater than the Australian population as a whole. Why? The top sources of stress were related to uncertainty about future changes to government regulations, government regulations on access to fishing, and red tape. Our commercial fishers in Queensland deserve better than the treatment they are receiving from Anastasia Palaszczuk and Jackie Trad. So bear some consideration for our Queensland commercial fishers when you sit down and enjoy some Australian seafood on Christmas Day.

Australian Natural Disasters

Senator WATT (Queensland) (19:54): As I've previously noted in this chamber, over the past few weeks we've seen pretty much every state in Australia hit by devastating fires. Tragically, as a result of these fires, four people have lost their lives and hundreds of people have lost their homes. Reports from the Bureau of Meteorology predict that the worst is yet to come, with no signs of the fires abating over this summer. We know from fire chiefs that the destruction we've seen at the beginning of this bushfire season is unprecedented in our country's history. Sadly, this is what Australia must expect from coming disaster seasons. Across Australia, fire seasons are starting earlier and finishing later. The government's own scientific adviser, the CSIRO, the Bureau of Meteorology and emergency leaders with decades of experience fighting fires all agree that, due to climate change, extreme weather events will only increase in severity and frequency. There will be more and more-intensive bushfires, more and more-intense cyclones hitting parts of our country that haven't previously seen cyclones and more floods—many, many more.

Labor has approached these bushfires in a bipartisan spirit, recognising that the primary task at hand has been to ensure lives and properties are kept safe. We know that all approaches to natural disaster preparedness and recovery must be a coordinated effort between governments, disaster relief organisations and emergency services. That's why the Labor leader, Anthony Albanese, recently wrote to the Prime Minister suggesting an urgent
COAG meeting be held to ensure that Australia is disaster ready. With all of this advice that we face more disasters and more-intense disasters in the future, the sensible thing to do is to bring different levels of government together and ensure that we have a plan for the future.

This COAG meeting would be an opportunity to bring together all levels of government and provide us with a chance to develop a new national strategy for disaster preparedness, ensure proper funding for national park services and emergency services and expand the capacity of the National Aerial Firefighting Centre by providing more water-bombing aircraft in response to calls for the same from emergency leaders. It could discuss investing in national disaster response, recovery and mitigation. It could discuss measures to attract and retain volunteers, who are already exhausted from their efforts so far before the traditional bushfire season has even started. A COAG meeting could develop an action plan around climate adaptation and bring forward disaster mitigation funding.

Labor was willing to work with the Commonwealth and state governments in any way required. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister has arrogantly dismissed this call for a COAG meeting. This is just the latest proof that the Prime Minister isn't interested in ensuring the country is ready for the future, and it's more proof that this LNP government is so frozen by their own infighting over climate change that they are incapable of coming up with a plan to make sure that Australian communities are kept safe. The Prime Minister wouldn't even meet with former fire chiefs to discuss Australia's disaster preparedness. They have repeatedly sought meetings simply to provide him with their own expert opinion built on decades of fighting fires, and he arrogantly refuses to meet them. These emergency leaders have dedicated their lives to protecting others. They actually know a bit about fighting fires and they know a bit about what we need to do to make sure that Australian communities are protected in the future. That's exactly why I joined our leader, Anthony Albanese, to sit down with these emergency leaders, these ex-fire chiefs with decades of experience, to discuss what needs to be done to prepare for this summer and our longer term future. They warned us, again, that more needs to be done to prepare Australian communities for the increasing disasters which will be brought on by our changing climate. They warned us, as have the Red Cross and other organisations, that Australia is simply not ready for the level of disasters that we face in the future due to climate change.

Unlike the LNP, Labor isn't afraid to listen to the people on the front line, who know what it is like to battle these fires. Much more needs to be done to protect our communities, and Labor stands ready to assist in any way we can. I ask the government, I ask the Prime Minister to please listen to the experts. Put aside your ideological issues around climate change. If we have experts in the field advising us that we face more disasters, the least we can do is make sure we're prepared.

Senate adjourned at 19:59