



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

**Calare Electorate: Thales Small Arms
Factory, Calare Electorate: Army Reservists**

SPEECH

Thursday, 1 November 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

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Speaker	Cobb, John, MP	Question No.	

Mr JOHN COBB (Calare) (09:30): I rise today to speak about some highs and lows in the defence industry in Calare. Last week I attended celebrations to mark the 100th anniversary of operations at Thales Small Arms Factory in Lithgow. There are not many members in the House who can boast a factory in their electorates which has produced arms for our troops posted around the world. But in Calare we can be proud that our part of the world is home to a factory that has produced one million weapons to equip our men and women on the front line for a century.

The Thales Small Arms Factory was opened in 1912 in Lithgow due to its proximity to a steel mill and its distance from the coast and potential enemy attacks. The factory's first job was an order to build 20,000 303 rifles for our Defence Force, and in every conflict Australia has been in since soldiers have carried weapons made in Lithgow. Lithgow Thales now employs 140 people, around 12 per cent of the local workforce, and is currently producing the Steyr being used by the Australian Defence Force today. It is incredible to have an industry like Thales in my electorate and I congratulate all involved on a fantastic 100 years for what started off as the Lithgow Small Arms Factory.

It was very disappointing that, following the high of this event, a bitter disappointment for local veterans and their families was brought to my attention. I was contacted by local veterans organisations angry at news they would not have reservists attend their Remembrance Day service. They had been advised that Army reservists would not attend commemorations in an official capacity due to 'challenging fiscal times'. That was terrible news for such an important event. Due to these funding restrictions, I am told, training days for Army reservists have been slashed by 27 per cent. Without any shadow of a doubt, those opposite are to blame—not the Defence Force, whose obvious priorities clearly must lie with the training and equipping of troops on the front line. But this government is spending \$20 million advertising a failing National Broadband Network scheme. It makes it pretty hard to swallow when they can fund that but they cannot fund reservists on the 11th of the 11th.