Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (12:52): Before I begin, I would like to commend the speeches of the member for Lingiari and the member for Cowan on the Norfolk Island Legislation Amendment Bill 2015 and related bills and thank them for those contributions, which I wholeheartedly agree with. This historic piece of legislation—and today is a historic moment—which has bipartisan support has come about following the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories report into the current situation on Norfolk Island, and it follows decades of reviews, a royal commission as my colleague has mentioned, recommendations, reports and inquiries—decades and decades of work and close examination of the economic, social and health situation of Norfolk Island, and a range of examinations across the entire Norfolk Island community and society.

The committee, of which I am a member, produced the report *Same country: different world—the future of Norfolk Island*. The report looks at the island's prospects for economic development in the wake of falling tourism figures, a budget deficit and other ongoing financial concerns. The committee recommended:

… that, as soon as practicable, the Commonwealth Government repeal the Norfolk Island Act 1979 (Cth) and establish an interim administration, to assist the transition to a local government type body— which is actually going to be a regional council—

determined in line with the community's needs and aspirations.

I underscore that recommendation: 'determined in line with the community's needs and aspirations'. And so that is exactly what this legislation aims to do.

In my case, I have been discussing these issues with the people of Norfolk Island for some five years now, both as a member of the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories and as the local member. I know a number of my colleagues are not aware of this, but Norfolk Island falls into the electoral division of Canberra. Norfolk Islanders have the option of voting in federal elections. They have the option of choosing which seat they want to vote in, and the majority of them vote in Canberra. As a result of that, I have visited Norfolk more than 10 times since I have been the member for Canberra. I have attended committee hearings, held mobile offices and business roundtables, taken part in Bounty Day celebrations, spoken at women's and Labor functions and been to school presentations. Every time I have visited the island, I have noticed a further deterioration over the last five years. That is why I wholeheartedly agree that, by reforming the island's governance arrangements and by bringing them into the Australian taxation system and the Australian social security system, we are providing the best chance of economic, social and cultural sustainability and prosperity for the people of Norfolk Island and the best way of preserving their human rights and their welfare.

The Norfolk Island Legislation Amendment Bill 2015 is part of a package of eight bills to reform the legal and governance framework for Norfolk Island. It establishes a sustainable governance framework for Norfolk Island by transitioning the Norfolk Island Legislative Assembly to a regional council, and it moves to establish an advisory council as an interim consultative body. It also moves to establish the final governance arrangements, including the application of New South Wales state law to Norfolk Island as Commonwealth law, and to allow the Commonwealth to enter into arrangements with the New South Wales government for the delivery of state-level services and extending certain mainland social security, immigration and health arrangements to Norfolk Island.

Norfolk Island is a small, remote, island community with a shallow economic and revenue base almost entirely reliant on the fluctuations of a fickle tourism industry, a smattering of duties and charges and a goods and services tax. In August 2011, which is when the census was conducted on the island, Norfolk Island's population was 2,302, which included visitors. Anecdotal evidence suggests Norfolk's population has fallen to about 1,600, as people have left the island to seek work on the mainland. Of this decreasing population, about 200 public servants support an administration responsible for every layer of government—federal, state and local, from customs, immigration, health and education to roads and rubbish. Successive Norfolk Island administrations have not
made significant inroads into broadening and diversifying the economic base or addressing the internal barriers and impediments to increasing tourism and business investment. In April 2013, economic activity was down some 24 per cent on the previous year, about 40 per cent of the shops had closed, and 25 per cent of the island's 25- to 50-year-old men had left since August 2011.

Aside from a struggling economy and falling population, Norfolk Island's infrastructure is also desperately in need of upgrading. Due to the government's dire financial situation, it is unable to pay for general repairs and upkeep on the island, and this is significantly hindering the island's economic prospects. It has only been at the behest of the Commonwealth, through the road map which seeks to integrate Norfolk Island into the Australian tax and social security system, that the administration is now considering municipal rates and taking steps to abolish policies that discourage growth. In its report on the 2012-13 financial statements, the Australian National Audit Office noted that the Norfolk Island administration estimated it would not hold sufficient cash and cash equivalents to cover operations in 2014-15, 2015-16 and 2016-17. The forecast for Norfolk Island's public finances puts it in the red to the tune of $7.4 million, $7.4 million and $7.8 million respectively. In the 27 months to June 2014, Australian taxpayers spent $40 million keeping it afloat, and I understand that over the last five years that is about $60 million. So, without yearly Commonwealth bailouts, the administration just cannot pay its bills, and the impact of this economic position on the residents of the island is dire.

As I mentioned earlier, I have visited Norfolk more than 10 times over the last five years, since I have been elected member for Canberra, and the simple fact is that people are struggling; they are doing it tough. Although the islanders are Australians, they pay no tax and so get no Commonwealth services. They have no access to Medicare and are not eligible for the PBS or any of the other services most of us take for granted. Norfolk is part of Australia but, not just because it is an external territory but because of the arrangements that were set up in 1979, Australians have to take their passport and fly out through the international terminal to get there. These anomalies ultimately only do harm to the people of Norfolk Island.

Imagine being out of work in an economy doing it tough—which it is—with no access to Newstart payments or job seeker support. Imagine having to work three to five jobs to make ends meet—and that is what people do—or relying on donated food parcels to feed the family each week. In a recent Lateline story about Norfolk Island—and I commend John Stewart for the piece that he did just recently—resident Rachael McConnell said:

There's a lot of people that would just wish that there were nobody like me on Norfolk. There's people that just wish that there weren't people doing it tough. But at the end the day, a lot of people here are in comfortable positions; they own their own homes. They haven't had to go to their parents' house and beg for food. They haven't had doors slammed in their face who they ask for assistance. They haven't had to beg off the Church for food parcels.

I quote Rachael again:

We dread having to go up to the doctors because of the expense. You don't know that something minor could lead on to something larger and you just imagine the expense of it. I was meant to have medication, but I refused to get that because it's so expensive at $70 a box—

because there's no PBS.

It's just something we can't - we don't have the luxury of going up to the hospital on a frequent basis for checkups or anything like that.

This is a quote from Eve Semple:

When you can't feed your children or pay for their sporting activities, that's a high cost to pay for the notion of self-empowerment, autonomy, self-government.

There is no point in having self-government for self-government's sake. The first and foremost recommendation of the report Same country: different world: the future of Norfolk Island, which brought about this legislation, is that the island move away from self-government. The report heard from a wide range of witnesses, including members of the Norfolk Island Legislative Assembly, the Manager of Norfolk Island Tourism and community members. The committee looked over a number of the many reviews and reports that have assessed the
effectiveness of self-government and questioned whether it has best served the interests of Norfolk Island residents. The report states that this model has failed and on many levels.

It is now clear to me that the current governance arrangements have met only the basic social and economic needs of Norfolk Island residents. For self-government to have my support it needs to be stable, economically responsible, democratic, sustainable and in the best interests of the people it serves. This is not the case under the current governance model on Norfolk Island.

I want to underscore the fact that there will be democracy on Norfolk Island under the new arrangement; it will just take a different form. Norfolk Islanders will fall into my electorate of Canberra, as we have heard. That means they will be represented by a federal representative in the House of Representatives, and voting will not be optional; it will be compulsory as it is on mainland Australia. This is in addition to electing their own regional council, with elections to be held early next year.

I am also adamant that the transition from the assembly to a regional council needs to be carried out in close consultation with the Norfolk Island community. That is why this legislation moves to establish an advisory council consisting of five members to act as an interim consultative body. As the member for Lingiari did—and I echo his words—I encourage people to nominate for that advisory council. I understand nominations have already opened. Consultation is something I am passionate about, and I will continue to work to ensure it is meaningful and inclusive.

Before I close I would like to commend a number of people who have been involved in this historic legislation either directly or indirectly over many years. I commend, of course, the committee chair as well as the secretariat of the committee that was involved in writing the report that got this legislation up and running. I would like to commend and thank the member for Lingiari and also the former senator for the ACT, Kate Lundy, who have been deeply involved in Norfolk Island issues for, as was mentioned, almost two decades. I would like to thank our former colleague Simon Crean, who started the first step in this journey by implementing the road map and also the minister who took over from him, Catherine King. I would particularly like to thank and commend Neil Pope, who was the Administrator during the road map process and who did a fantastic job at informing this legislation.

Mr Bowen interjecting—

Mr Briggs interjecting—

Ms BRODTMANN: Gents! Neil Pope, who did a brilliant job along with his wife, Jen Pope, in informing the committee and assisting us in coming to this position. Finally I want to thank Mike King and Norfolk Labor, who have been advocating for these changes for more than two decades. I know that Mike was the one who actually came up with the concept of the road map many years ago, and that framework and those guidelines have informed where we are today. I want to thank Mike and Norfolk Labor for their persistence, their tenacity and their vision for a better future for Norfolk Island.

A new model of government on Norfolk Island will provide the best chance of economic, social and cultural sustainability and prosperity for the people of the island. After all, it is home to an incredibly unique history and culture, and it is in the interests of all Australians to keep this history and culture alive and vibrant for centuries to come. Anyone who has visited the island appreciates its beauty and its colourful history. It is a rich and wonderful history with a beautiful and rich language. I genuinely believe these reforms will have a beneficial impact on all Norfolk Islanders and will protect the human rights and welfare of the residents of Norfolk Island through access to opportunity, equality and fairness. As their federal representative, that is my primary concern. I commend the bill to the House.