THIRTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—FIRST PERIOD

Governor-General

His Excellency the Hon. Sir William Patrick Deane, Companion of the Order of Australia, Knight of the Order of the British Empire

Senate Officeholders

President—Senator the Hon. Michael Beahan
Deputy President and Chairman of Committees—Senator Margaret Elizabeth Reid
Temporary Chairmen of Committees—Senators Paul Henry Calvert, Bruce Kenneth Childs, Hedley Grant Pearson Chapman, Malcolm Arthur Colston, Alan Baird Ferguson, James Philip McKiernan, Susan Christine Knowles, Kay Christine Lesley Patterson, Hon. Margaret Reynolds, Baden Chapman Teague, John Odin Wentworth Watson and Suzanne Margaret West
Leader of the Government in the Senate—Senator the Hon. Robert Murray Hill
Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate—Senator the Hon. Richard Kenneth Robert Alston
Leader of the Opposition—Senator the Hon. John Philip Faulkner
Deputy Leader of the Opposition—Senator the Hon. Nicholas John Sherry
Manager of Government Business in the Senate—Senator the Hon. Charles Roderick Kemp
Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate—Senator Kim John Carr

Senate Party Leaders

Leader of the Liberal Party of Australia—Senator the Hon. Robert Murray Hill
Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party of Australia—Senator the Hon. Richard Kenneth Robert Alston
Leader of the National Party of Australia—Senator Ronald Leslie Doyle Boswell
Deputy Leader of the National Party of Australia—Senator the Hon. David Gordon Cadell Brownhill
Leader of the Australian Labor Party—Senator the Hon. John Philip Faulkner
Deputy Leader of the Australian Labor Party—Senator the Hon. Nicholas John Sherry
Leader of the Australian Democrats—Senator Cheryl Kernot
Deputy Leader of the Australian Democrats—Senator Meg Heather Lees
<table>
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<td>Abetz, Eric</td>
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### Members of the Senate—continued

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(1) Term expires at close of day next preceding the polling day for the general election of members of the House of Representatives.
(2) Chosen by the Parliament of Western Australia vice Josephine Vallentine, resigned.
(3) Chosen by the Parliament of Tasmania vice Hon. Michael Carter Tate, resigned.
(4) Chosen by the Parliament of Tasmania vice Brian Roper Archer, resigned.
(5) Chosen by the Parliament of New South Wales vice Bronwyn Kathleen Bishop, resigned.
(6) Chosen by the Parliament of New South Wales vice Hon. Kerry Walter Sibraa, resigned.
(7) Chosen by the Parliament of New South Wales vice Hon. Graham Frederick Richardson, resigned.
(8) Chosen by the Parliament of Victoria vice Alice Olive Zakharov, deceased.
(9) Chosen by the Parliament of New South Wales vice Stephen Loosley, resigned.
(10) Chosen by the Parliament of South Australia vice John Richard Coull, resigned.
(12) Chosen by the Australian Capital Territory vice Hon. Robert Francis McMullan, resigned.
(13) Chosen by the Parliament of Tasmania vice John Robert Devereux, resigned.

### PARTY ABBREVIATIONS
AD—Australian Democrats; ALP—Australian Labor Party; CLP—Country Liberal Party; G(WA)—Greens (WA); Ind.—Independent; IL—Independent Liberal; LP—Liberal Party of Australia; NP—National Party of Australia

### Heads of Parliamentary Departments

* Clerk of the Senate—H. Evans
* Clerk of the House of Representatives—L. M. Barlin, AM
* Parliamentary Librarian—
  * Principal Parliamentary Reporter—J. W. Templeton
* Secretary, Joint House Department—M. W. Bolton
FIRST HOWARD MINISTRY

Prime Minister
Minister for Trade and Deputy Prime Minister
Treasurer
Minister for Primary Industries and Energy
Minister for the Environment and Leader of the Government in the Senate
Minister for Communications and the Arts and Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate
Minister for Industrial Relations, Leader of the House and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service
Minister for Social Security and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Minister for Industry, Science and Tourism and Vice President of the Executive Council
Minister for Defence
Minister for Transport and Regional Development
Minister for Health and Family Services
Minister for Finance
Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs

The Hon. John Winston Howard MP
The Hon. Timothy Andrew Fischer MP
The Hon. Peter Howard Costello MP
The Hon. John Duncan Anderson MP
Senator the Hon. Robert Murray Hill
Senator the Hon. Richard Kenneth Robert Alston
The Hon. Peter Keaston Reith MP
Senator the Hon. Jocelyn Margaret Newman
The Hon. Alexander John Gosse Downer MP
The Hon. John Colinton Moore MP
The Hon. Ian Murray McLachlan AO, MP
The Hon. John Randall Sharp MP
The Hon. Michael Richard Lewis Wooldridge MP
The Hon. John Joseph Fahey MP
Senator the Hon. Amanda Eloise Vanstone

(The above ministers constitute the cabinet)
First Howard Ministry—continued

Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs
The Hon. Philip Maxwell Ruddock MP

Minister for Science and Technology and Deputy Leader of the House
The Hon. Peter John McGauran MP

Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training and Minister Assisting the Minister for Finance for Privatisation
The Hon. David Alistair Kemp, MP

Assistant Treasurer
Senator the Hon. James Robert Short

Minister for Resources and Energy
Senator the Hon. Warwick Raymond Parer

Minister for Science and Technology and Deputy Leader of the House
The Hon. Geoffrey Daniel Prosser MP

Minister for Small Business and Consumer Affairs
The Hon. Judith Eleanor Moylan MP

Minister for Family Services
The Hon. Bronwyn Kathleen Bishop MP

Minister for Defence Industry, Science and Personnel
The Hon. Daryl Robert Williams AM, QC, MP

Attorney-General and Minister for Justice
The Hon. Warwick Leslie Smith MP

Minister for Sport, Territories and Local Government and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Sydney 2000 Games
The Hon. Bruce Craig Scott MP

Minister for Veterans’ Affairs
Senator the Hon. John Herron

Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
The Hon. David Francis Jull MP

Parliamentary Secretary (Cabinet) to the Prime Minister
The Hon. Christopher Gordon Miles MP

Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister
Senator the Hon. Nicholas Gordon Minchin

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Trade and the Minister for Primary Industries and Energy
Senator the Hon. David Gordon Cadell Brownhill

Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer
Senator the Hon. Brian Francis Gibson

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Social Security and Manager of Government Business in the Senate
Senator the Hon. Charles Roderick Kemp

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment
Senator the Hon. Ian Gordon Campbell

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs
The Hon. Andrew Peter Thomson MP

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Transport and Regional Development
Senator the Hon. Grant Ernest John Tambling

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Family Services
Senator the Hon. Robert Leslie Woods

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs
The Hon. Anthony John Abbott MP
**SHADOW MINISTRY**

Leader of the Opposition
The Hon. Kim Christian Beazley MP

Deputy Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Treasurer
The Hon. Gareth John Evans QC, MP

Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Minister for Social Security
Senator the Hon. John Philip Faulkner

Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Minister for Finance and Superannuation
Senator the Hon. Nicholas John Sherry

Shadow Minister for Industry and Regional Development and Manager of Opposition Business
The Hon. Simon Findlay Crean MP

Shadow Minister for Industrial Relations and Assistant to the Leader of the Opposition on Public Service Matters
The Hon. Robert Francis McMullan MP

Shadow Minister for Health
The Hon. Michael John Lee MP

Shadow Minister for the Environment, Shadow Minister for the Arts and Assistant to the Leader of the Opposition on the Status of Women
The Hon. Carmen Mary Lawrence MP

Shadow Minister for Primary Industries and Northern Australia and Territories
Senator the Hon. Robert Lindsay Collins

Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs
The Hon. Laurence John Brereton MP

Shadow Minister for Education and Youth Affairs
The Hon. Peter Jeremy Baldwin MP

Shadow Minister for Commerce and Small Business
Senator the Hon. Peter Francis Salmon Cook

Shadow Attorney-General and Minister for Justice
Senator the Hon. Nick Bolkus

Shadow Minister for Employment and Training
Mr Martin John Ferguson MP

Shadow Minister for Defence
The Hon. Archibald Ronald Bevis MP

Shadow Minister for Immigration and Assistant to the Leader of the Opposition on Multicultural Affairs
The Hon. Duncan James Colquhoun Kerr MP

Shadow Minister for Communications
Senator the Hon. Christopher Cleland Schacht

Shadow Minister for Veterans’ Affairs and Shadow Minister for Sport and Tourism
The Hon. Stephen Paul Martin MP

Shadow Minister for Transport
Mr Lindsay James Tanner MP

Shadow Minister for Resources and Energy
The Hon. Neil Patrick O’Keefe MP

Shadow Minister for the Aged, Family and Community Services
Ms Jennifer Louise Macklin MP

Shadow Minister for Trade
Mr Stephen Francis Smith MP
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Competition Policy, Assistant to the Shadow Treasurer</td>
<td>Mr Mark William Latham MP</td>
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<td>and Shadow Minister for Local Government</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Assistant to the Shadow</td>
<td>Mr Daryl Melham MP</td>
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<td>Foreign Minister on Arms Control</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Science and Information Technology</td>
<td>Mr Martin John Evans MP</td>
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<td>Senator Belinda Jane Neal</td>
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<td>Minister for Health</td>
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THE COMMITTEES OF THE SESSION
FIRST SESSION: FIRST PERIOD
MEMBERSHIP
(As at 28 June 1996)
STANDING COMMITTEES

APPROPRIATIONS AND STAFFING—The President (Chair), the Leader of the Government in the Senate, the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, Senators Baume, Boswell, Bourne, Ian Macdonald, Ray and Sherry.

HOUSE—The Deputy President (Chair), Senators Brownhill, Coates, Colston, Knowles, Panizza and West.

LIBRARY—The President (Chair), Senators Boswell, Denman, Foreman, Gibson, Lundy and Tambling.

PRIVILEGES—Senator Ray (Chair), Senator Teague (Deputy Chair), Senators Childs, Coates, Ellison, Knowles, and Panizza.

PROCEDURE—The Deputy President (Chair), the President, the Leader of the Government in the Senate, the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, Senators Bourne, Carr, Ferguson, McGauran, Ray and Teague.

PUBLICATIONS—Senator Sandy Macdonald (Chair), Senator Colston (Deputy Chair), Senators Calvert, Chapman, Jacinta Collins, McKiernan and Neal.

SELECTION OF BILLS—The Government Whip (Chair), the Opposition Whip, the Australian Democrats Whip, the National Party of Australia Whip, the Greens (WA) Whip, Senators Calvert, Conroy, Foreman and Kemp.

SENATORS' INTERESTS—Senator Denman (Chair), Senators Abetz, Bolkus, Bourne, Brownhill, Ian Macdonald, Mackay and Sherry.

LEGISLATIVE SCRUTINY STANDING COMMITTEES

REGULATIONS AND ORDINANCES—Senator O'Chee (Chair), Senator Colston (Deputy Chair), Senators Carr, Mackay, Patterson and Tierney.

SCRUTINY OF BILLS—Senator Cooney (Chair), Senators Bell, Campbell, Crane, Forshaw and Sandy Macdonald.

GENERAL PURPOSE, LEGISLATIVE AND REFERENCE STANDING COMMITTEES

COMMUNITY AFFAIRS (Legislation)—Senator Knowles (Chair), Senator Lees (Deputy Chair), Senators Denman, Neal, Patterson and Woods.

COMMUNITY AFFAIRS (References)—Senator Colston (Chair), Senator Knowles (Deputy Chair), Senators Denman, Kemp, Lees, Neal, West and Woods.

ECONOMICS (Legislation)—Senator Ferguson (Chair), Senators Sherry (Deputy Chair), Senators Chapman, Cook, Spindler and Watson.

ECONOMICS (References)—Senator Jacinta Collins (Chair), Senator Ferguson (Deputy Chair), Senators Chapman, Childs, Mackay, Panizza, Spindler and Wheelwright.

Substitute members: Senator Crane to substitute for Senator Watson on matters covered by the Industrial Relations portfolio.

Substitute member: Senator Crane to substitute for Senator Panizza on industrial relations matters.
EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING (Legislation)—Senator Tierney (Chair), Senator Carr (Deputy Chair), Senators Bell, Campbell, Crowley and Troeth.

Participating members: Senators Abetz, Bolkus, Chamarette, Bob Collins, Harradine, Mackay and Margetts.

EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING (References)—Senator Crowley (Chair), Senator Tierney (Deputy Chair), Senators Bell, Carr, Colston, Forshaw, Patterson and Troeth.

Participating members: Senators Bolkus, Chamarette, Bob Collins, Denman and Margetts.

ENVIRONMENT, RECREATION, COMMUNICATIONS AND THE ARTS (Legislation)—Senator Patterson (Chair), Senators Baume, Lees, Ian Macdonald, Schacht and Wheelwright.

Participating members: Senators Abetz, Bolkus, Boswell, Calvert, Carr, Chamarette, Chapman, Bob Collins, Cooney, Crane, Harradine, Faulkner, Ferguson, Kemp, Margetts and Tierney.

Substitute member: Senator Campbell to substitute for Senator Ian Macdonald for the period 26 June to 19 August 1996.

ENVIRONMENT, RECREATION, COMMUNICATIONS AND THE ARTS (References)—Senator Lees (Chair), Senators Knowles, O’Chee, Ray, Reynolds, Schacht, Tierney and Wheelwright.

Participating members: Senators Baume, Bolkus, Boswell, Calvert, Carr, Chamarette, Chapman, Bob Collins, Colston, Faulkner, Ferguson, Lundy, Margetts and Minchin.

Senator West for the committee’s inquiry into the Telstra (Dilution of Public Ownership) Bill 1996.

Substitute member: Senator Carr to substitute for Senator Ray for the committee’s inquiry into the Telstra (Dilution of Public Ownership) Bill 1996

FINANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (Legislation)—Senator Ian Macdonald (Chair), Senators Bell, Coates, Gibson, Lundy and Watson.

Participating members: Senators Abetz, Bolkus, Chamarette, Bob Collins, Cooney, Faulkner, Harradine, Margetts, Minchin, Schacht and Sherry.

FINANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (References)—Senator Murphy (Chair), Senator Ian Macdonald (Deputy Chair), Senators Bell, Coates, Lundy, McGauran, Sherry and Watson.

Participating members: Senators Bolkus, Chamarette, Bob Collins, Faulkner, Margetts and Minchin.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE (Legislation)—Senator Troeth (Chair), Senators Evans, Jones, MacGibbon, Teague

Participating members: Senators Abetz, Bolkus, Brownhill, Burns, Chamarette, Cook, Faulkner, Forsshaw, Harradine, Margetts and Schacht.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE (References)—Senator Forshaw (Chair), Senators Ellis, Evans, Jones, Sandy Macdonald, Troeth and West.

Participating members: Senators Bolkus, Brownhill, Burns, Chamarette, Chapman, Cook, Faulkner, Harradine, Margetts, Schacht, Troeth and Woodley.

Substitute member: Senator Teague to substitute for Senator Troeth for the period 9 May to 30 June 1996.

LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL (Legislation)—Senator Ellison (Chair), Senator Spindler (Deputy Chair), Senators Abetz, Bolkus, McKiernan and O’Chee.

Participating members: Senators Chamarette, Bob Collins, Cooney, Harradine, Margetts andNeal.

LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL (References)—Senator McKiernan (Chair), Senator Ellison (Deputy Chair), Senators Abetz, Bolkus, Cook, Cooney, O’Chee and Spindler.

Participating members: Senators Chamarette, Bob Collins, Margetts, Neal and Stott Despoja.

RURAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS AND TRANSPORT (Legislation)—Senator Crane (Chair), Senator Conroy (Deputy Chair), Senators Calvert, Bob Collins, McGauran and Woodley.


RURAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS AND TRANSPORT (References)—Senator Woodley (Chair), Senator Crane (Deputy Chair), Senators Burns, Calvert, Bob Collins, Conroy, Foreman and Ian Macdonald.

Participating members: Senators Brownhill, Chamarette, Chapman, Cook, Margetts, Murphy, Tambling and West.
SELECT COMMITTEES

COMMUNITY STANDARDS RELEVANT TO THE SUPPLY OF SERVICES UTILISING ELECTRONIC TECHNOLOGIES—Senator Tierney (Chair), Senator Reynolds (Deputy Chair), Senators Denman, Harradine, Knowles, McGauran, Troeth and Woodley.

SUPERANNUATION—Senator Watson (Chair), Senators Conroy, Evans, Ferguson, McGauran, Sherry and Woodley.

URANIUM MINING AND MILLING—Senator Chapman (Chair), Senator Margetts (Deputy Chair), Senators Bell, Ferguson, Sandy Macdonald, Reynolds and Wheelwright.

VICTORIAN CASINO INQUIRY—Senator Childs (Chair), Senator Kemp (Deputy Chair), Senators Abetz, Bob Collins, Ellison, Ray and Spindler.

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEES

ELECTORAL MATTERS—Mr Cobb (Chair), Senator Conroy (Deputy Chair), Senators Abetz, Chamarette, Lees and Minchin and Mr L. Ferguson, Mr Griffin, Mr McDougall and Mr Nairn.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE—Mr Sinclair (Chair), Mr Brereton (Deputy Chair), Senators Bolkus, Bourne, Chapman, Childs, Harradine, Jones, Ian Macdonald, MacGibbon, Margetts, Panizza, Schacht and Teague and Mr R. Baldwin, Mr Bevis, Mr Bradford, Mr Brough, Mr Dondas, Mrs Gallus, Mr Georgiou, Mr E. Grace, Mr Hicks, Mr Hollis, Mr Jones, Mr Lieberman, Mr Nugent, Mr Price, Mr Slipper, Mr S. Smith, Mr Taylor and Ms Worth.

MIGRATION—Mrs Gallus (Chair), Senator McKiernan (Deputy Chair), Senators Stott Despoja, Tierney and Troeth and Ms Gambaro, Mr Holding, Mr Kerr, Mr Sinclair and Dr Theophanous.

NATIONAL CAPITAL AND EXTERNAL TERRITORIES—Senators Colston, Ferguson, Lundy, McGauran and Stott Despoja.

TREATIES—Mr Taylor (Chair), Mr McClelland (Deputy Chair), Senators Abetz, Bourne, Carr, Denman, Ellison, Neal and O’Chee and Mr Adams, Mr Bartlett, Mr L. Ferguson, Mr Hardgrave, Mr A. Smith, Mr Truss and Mr Tuckey.

JOINT STATUTORY COMMITTEES

AUSTRALIAN SECURITY INTELLIGENCE ORGANIZATION—Senators MacGibbon, Sandy Macdonald and Ray and Mr Hicks, Mr Sercombe, Mr Somlyay and Mr Zammit.

BROADCASTING OF PARLIAMENTARY PROCEEDINGS—The President, the Speaker, Senators Knowles and West and Mr Adams, Mr R Evans, Mr Hicks, Mr Lindsay and Mr Martin.

CORPORATIONS AND SECURITIES—Senator Chapman (Chair), Senators Cook, Cooney, Ellison and Spindler and Mrs Johnston, Mrs D. Kelly, Mr Latham, Mr McLeay and Mr Sinclair.

NATIONAL CRIME AUTHORITY—Mr Bradford (Chair), Mr Sercombe (Deputy Chair), Senators Bolkus, Conroy, Ian Macdonald, McGauran and Spindler and Mr Filing, Mr Truss and Mrs West.

NATIVE TITLE AND THE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER LAND FUND—Senator Abetz (Chair), Senator Reynolds (Deputy Chair), Senators Chamarette, Ellison and Evans and Mr Causley, Mr Dondas, Mr Entsch, Mr Melham and Mr Quick.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS—Mr Somlyay (Chair), Mr Griffin (Deputy Chair), Senators Baume, Crowley, Mackay, Watson and Woods and Mr Anthony, Mr Beddall, Mr Broadbent, Mr L. Ferguson, Mr Fitzgibbon, Mr Georgiou, Mrs Stone, Mr Vale.

PUBLIC WORKS—Mr J. N. Andrew (Chair), Mr Hollis (Deputy Chair), Senators Calvert, Ferguson and Murphy and Mr R. D. C. Evans, Mr Forrest, Mr E. L. Grace, Mr Lee.
PARLIAMENTARY DEPARTMENTS

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Deputy Clerk of the Senate—A. Lynch
Clerk Assistant (Table Office)—J. Vander Wyk
Clerk Assistant (Corporate Management)—P. O'Keeffe
Clerk Assistant (Procedure)—R. Laing
Clerk Assistant (Committees)—C. J. C. Elliott
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First Clerk Assistant—B. C. Wright
Clerk Assistant (Procedure)—I. C. Cochran
Clerk Assistant (Table)—J. W. Pender
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Principal Parliamentary Reporter—J. W. Templeton
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Assistant Chief Reporter (Chambers)—M. A. R. McGregor
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Secretary—M. W. Bolton
The PRESIDENT (Senator the Hon. Margaret Reid) took the chair at 2.00 p.m., and read prayers.

REPRESENTATION OF NEW SOUTH WALES

The PRESIDENT—I inform the Senate that I have received a letter from Senator Michael Baume resigning his place as a senator for the state of New South Wales. Pursuant to the provisions of section 21 of the constitution, I have notified the Governor of New South Wales of the vacancy in the representation of that state caused by his resignation. I table the documents.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Unemployment

Senator BOLKUS—I address my question to the Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs. Minister, isn’t it a fact that you stated on Meet the Press on 25 August that:

Labor knew before the election that its target of 5 per cent unemployment by the year 2000 was unachievable; it had been told that. I know that’s absolutely certain that they knew.

In saying this, Minister, why did you ignore the advice from your department, which you were given after the election, that its projections for unemployment were consistent with:

... an average annual growth rate of 2.2% for total employment [which] is considered to be sufficient to bring the unemployment rate down to 5 per cent.

Have you received any further advice from your department in relation to this matter?

Senator VANSTONE—Those words sound roughly correct; I do not have a transcript of what I said in front of me. That is my understanding—that the Labor Party knew well that the target it was promoting as being achievable was not achievable.

I notice, Senator Bolkus, that you did not assert in your question that I am wrong in alleging that. If you want to allege that I am wrong, I am happy for you to do so and I am happy to check the matter out. It is certainly my understanding that the Labor Party went consistently through the election saying things that it knew were not true—certainly with respect to whether the budget was in order. That is what your government did. It went from election meeting to election meeting saying that the budget was in the black and everything was okay, but that simply was not the case.

I have received a range of advice from my department and from other people as to what the projections might be for employment and unemployment. As you would probably understand, Senator Bolkus, each of those estimations made by either the department or other people are based on certain assumptions. If the assumptions change, the outcomes change. I would have thought that was perfectly obvious.

Senator BOLKUS—Madam President, I ask a supplementary question. Minister, I am asserting that you misled the public in your interview. I am asserting that the advice from your department was that the growth rate was such that it would be ‘sufficient to bring the unemployment rate down to five per cent’. Did you receive any other advice from your department to confirm your Meet the Press statement? Can you table that advice?

Senator VANSTONE—I have nothing further to add.

Telstra

Senator TIERNEY—My question is directed to the Minister for Communications and the Arts. Is the minister aware of a report in the Hobart Mercury which says that Senator Lyn Allison claimed that, once Telstra was partly privatised, country people would have to pay much more for telephone services? Is the minister further aware of the opposition party’s conclusion in the report of the Senate committee inquiring into the Telstra bill that the partial privatisation of Telstra would be responsible for extensive job losses in Telstra? How accurate are these concerns, and did the weight of evidence in the inquiry support these propositions?

Senator ALSTON—Yes, I did see the report in the Hobart Mercury where Senator Allison was quoted as saying:
Country areas will be completely abandoned after privatisation...

and that—

... the move to user-pays would be devastating to rural areas, with the cost of connecting a phone to rise dramatically.

We then got a series of figures in a table, which presumably were designed to frighten the pants off anyone who did not understand the issues.

The facts of the matter are this. Irrespective of privatisation, there is already legislation in place—which will not alter if and when the Telstra (Dilution of Public Ownership) Bill goes through—that imposes and maintains the universal service obligations. That ensures that, to the extent that services to rural and remote areas are uneconomic, the cost is borne by all of the carriers. In other words, they contribute to a universal service levy, and they will pay pro rata on their revenue—currently, it is on market share.

Let there be no misunderstanding. Those arrangements will continue to apply irrespective of privatisation, there is already legislation in place—which will not alter if and when the Telstra (Dilution of Public Ownership) Bill goes through—that imposes and maintains the universal service obligations. That ensures that, to the extent that services to rural and remote areas are uneconomic, the cost is borne by all of the carriers. In other words, they contribute to a universal service levy, and they will pay pro rata on their revenue—currently, it is on market share.

Senator Bob Collins—We do it very well already.

Senator ALSTON—I explained to them how we are a world leader. They were very interested in getting a briefing from me. The only thing that disappointed them was that they were absolutely amazed that the Labor Party was opposed to privatisation. They said that, when they talked to people from the opposition, they were told, 'Never mind, it is political. We understand the logic, but it is political,' and they were very disappointed. That is the first thing to be said.

The second part of the question related to the extent to which partial privatisation could be responsible for extensive job losses. Senator Carr was saying the same sort of thing in a press release today. The important thing to remember is that between 1991 and 1995 Telstra underwent 25,000 job reductions. It did that without any industrial disputation and against the background of an acknowledgment by the union sector that these were technology driven changes. In giving evidence to the committee, Ian McLean, Branch Secretary of the CEPU, said:

I do not think there will be a difference in the number of jobs, but they will not—

Senator Carr—That's not true.

Senator ALSTON—Just a moment, sport. If Senator Carr will just listen, Mr McLean said:

I do not think there will be a difference in the number of jobs, but they will not be working for Telstra; they will be working for Skilled Engineering or some other contractor.

Colin Cooper, Divisional President of the CEPU, said:

... we have agreed in some areas that there can be staff reductions. We have been through all these processes with new technology.

Senator Tierney asked Mr McLean:

These job losses are primarily driven by technology?

Mr McLean said:

Yes. The major driver is technology ... the union recognises that.

Senator Tierney said:

What you are telling us is that the basic driving force that has been reducing the work force over the last few years is technology driven.

Mr Cooper said yes. Mr Allan Horsley, the Managing Director of the Australian Telecommunications Users Group, said:

... the industry is desperately short of people.

... if, as a result of any process, this or just management changes in Telstra result in fewer employees, those employees will pick up work, without a doubt, outside.

It is not overstating the case to say that demand is enormous.

The Chairman of the Service Providers Action Network said precisely the same thing—that there is an acute shortage of staff in the telecommunications industry today. He went on to say that all others in the industry were
having trouble getting good people. In other words, there will not be a reduction in total employment in the industry; indeed, there will be a boom as a result of a more efficient Telstra, a more dynamic industry and a more competitive environment.

Senator Bob Collins—You don’t believe that for a minute.

Senator ALSTON—I am sorry, but Ian McLean is your witness and he says it all. (Time expired)

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The PRESIDENT—Order! I draw the attention of honourable senators to the presence in the chamber of a parliamentary delegation from the National Assembly of the Kingdom of Cambodia led by the President of the National Assembly, His Excellency Samdech Chea Sim. On behalf of honourable senators, I have pleasure in welcoming you to the Senate and trust that your visit will be both informative and enjoyable. With the concurrence of honourable senators, I propose to invite the president to take a seat on the floor of the chamber.

Honourable senators—Hear, hear!

Mr Samdech Chea Sim was thereupon seated accordingly.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Cross-media Ownership

Senator SCHACHT—My question is addressed to the Minister for Communications and the Arts. Minister, when the Prime Minister rang to carpet you over your remarks about the selling off of the whole of Telstra, did he also tell you to drop the idea of a public inquiry into cross-media ownership or did he tell you that later or did he talk to Glenn Milne from the Australian first? Therefore, Minister, have you dropped the idea? If not, when will this inquiry get under way?

Senator Bob Collins interjecting—

Senator ALSTON—Precisely. It just shows what a paucity of intellectual effort there is over there.

The PRESIDENT—Senator Alston, would you address your remarks through the chair.

Senator ALSTON—Madam President, I am simply making the point that you got an answer to this question yesterday. I am more than happy to give you the same answer again. Firstly, there was a false premise in the question. So it is not requiring an answer for that reason alone. Secondly, it asked me about a private conversation between myself and the Prime Minister.

Senator Schacht—He made it public. He told the world.

Senator ALSTON—If you read the transcript on the Monday you would see that Mr Howard said that he had spoken to me twice, and that is correct.

Senator Faulkner—He carpeted you twice.

Senator ALSTON—He didn’t and he didn’t use that term and neither would I. You are, firstly, asking me a question which is falsely based. Secondly, you are asking me about a private conversation, about which I do not propose to discuss.

Senator Schacht—But it is in the public domain.

Senator ALSTON—It is not in the public domain at all—a private conversation. If we publish a cabinet decision, do you think it follows that you are entitled to come in and ask for the minutes? Well, you are not, any more than you are entitled to know the details on this occasion.

Let me answer that part of the question which I also answered yesterday. In the fullness of time—in due course—you will get a press release. I promise Senator Carr that he would be the first to know if we put out a press release. Clearly, he does not have the confidence that he will be able to understand the proposition.

Senator Carr interjecting—

Senator ALSTON—Senator Carr is now answering it. We will make an announcement on that issue in due course.

Let there be no misunderstanding that we will be trying to clear up the mess that you left—the cross-media rules that you put in place in 1986 which were conceived in malice, which were deliberately mogul specific and which were designed to consummate
all the sorts of deals that are second nature to you and yours. We want an approach that will ensure that there is diversity in plurality, that competition does prevail and that we do have a healthy media sector in this country. We will tell you how we will go about it when we are ready.

Senator SCHACHT—I wish to ask a supplementary question, Madam President. In view of the fact that the minister has now been rolled three times by the Prime Minister on media policy, now on the public record, how does the minister feel about being Howard's doormat on media policy?

Senator Robert Ray—I rise on a point of order, Madam President. Senator Schacht should refer to the Prime Minister as Mr Howard, so it should have been 'Mr Howard's doormat'.

Senator ALSTON—I think that says it all. It is perfectly clear that no-one in their right mind would take such a question seriously, even Senator Ray. If Senator Schacht cannot even get his question right and he needs to have the real leader of the opposition correct it for him, you ought to confer with him in advance. If you want to know what the question is, tell him to write more legibly.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The PRESIDENT—Order! I draw the attention of honourable senators to the presence in my gallery of Shirley Walters, a former distinguished senator from Tasmania. On behalf of honourable senators, I welcome you back to the Senate.

Honourable senators—Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Budget 1996-97

Senator ABETZ—My question is to Senator Short. The minister would be aware of plans by the opposition parties to sabotage the government’s deficit and debt reduction strategy. With the Deputy Leader of the Opposition having admitted that the Labor opposition is suffering from relevance deprivation syndrome, what harm would this sabotage do to the Australian people and, in particular, to families and small business?

Senator SHORT—I thank Senator Abetz for that question. Yes, I am certainly aware that the government is running the risk of having its budget sabotaged by Labor. I am also well aware of the fact that no less a figure than the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and No.2 in the government, the Shadow Treasurer, is admitting that Labor is suffering from relevance deprivation syndrome. Indeed, I think there are a few other syndromes they are suffering from as well. Relevance deficiency syndrome would be a pretty good one and policy deficiency syndrome would be another good one.

Opposition senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT—Order! Senator Short, would you just wait a moment until there is silence in the chamber? Thank you. It is very hard to hear what you are saying at the present time.

Senator Bob Collins—Give him a chance to read a few lines ahead.

The PRESIDENT—Senator Collins! Please maintain order.

Senator SHORT—People are not listening to the former government. No-one is listening to what Labor is saying because Labor has nothing worthy to say. So far as Labor’s proposals are concerned—

Opposition senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT—Order! Senator, it is impossible for me to hear what you are saying at the present time.

Senator SHORT—So far as Labor’s proposals are concerned in relation to the budget, they would force the government to run deficits into the next century. The proposals put forward last week by the Leader of the Opposition are nothing more than cold calculated vandalism by an irrelevant opposition to destroy the integrity of this budget.

Labor’s rampant bankcard spending spree was bad enough. Then they tried to hide the bill. Now they are trying to add another $18 billion over the next four years to that bankcard bill which, on their leaving office, was no less than $100 billion. That is not a bill that the coalition government wanted to have to pay. Labor’s bill should never have
been run up in the first place. Unlike Labor, this government is doing the hard yards and is going to pay this bill in full. We did not cause the problem—Labor caused the problem—but we have accepted the responsibility to fix it. Whilst we accept the responsibility to fix it, Labor seems determined to prevent us from doing that by frustrating and sabotaging it.

The effect of Labor’s proposals would be to increase interest rates above what they otherwise would be. We know that Australians want and need lower interest rates. Lower interest rates are good for home buyers and they are good for small business. They also mean more investment, more growth and more jobs and hope for the unemployed—the thousands upon thousands of people ignored so terribly by Labor in government. So the opposition’s sabotage does threaten Australia with higher interest rates.

Since the budget, home fixed loan rates have fallen. For example, the Commonwealth Bank has cut its three-year fixed loan rate from 9.5 to 8.7 per cent and other banks have followed suit. This budget is a very fair budget and it is a very responsible budget. It is an honest budget. It is a budget of integrity and we have no intention of letting the opposition sabotage it. (Time expired)

Senator Faulkner—On a point of order, Madam President. I think Senator Abetz was trying to attract your call for a supplementary question.

The PRESIDENT—If Senator Abetz wants my attention, I am sure he will get it. With the amount of noise, it would be impossible to do it other than by standing up.

Senator Abetz—On the point of order, Madam President: with respect, it may be appropriate in the future that, when a minister is required to sit down during the giving of an answer because of the unruliness of the opposition, the clock is stopped during that section of time to allow the minister to give a full answer. It is grossly unfair for this unruly opposition to stop the free flow of an answer to a very important question.

The PRESIDENT—The time is the same. If I cannot hear the minister it is necessary to stop, but the time is the same.

Budget 1996–97

Senator Faulkner—My question is directed to Senator Short in his capacity as Minister representing the Treasurer and the Minister for Finance. I ask Senator Short: did the Prime Minister, Mr Howard, claim in the press over the weekend that, if the Senate failed to pass the entire budget, this would have a detrimental effect on the level of interest rates? I ask Senator Short whether this the same Mr Howard who, on ABC radio in June last year—I quote him directly—said:

The two things that the markets react to and look at constantly in a revolving way are the size of the current account deficit and the strength or otherwise of our currency, and the level of interest rates is far more heavily influenced by those things than a few hundred million dollars either way on the budget deficit.

Was that the same Mr Howard, Senator Short? Was that a core belief or a non-core belief of Mr Howard’s?

Senator Short—What we are talking about is not a few dollars here and there; we are talking about proposals by Labor that are going to sabotage this budget over the next four years by $18.8 billion. That is even excluding the proceeds of Telstra. If you add them in, you are talking about sabotaging the accounts of this nation by $27 billion over the next four years.

The huge problem you lot made when you were in government—every Australian knows it except you—is that by running huge budget deficits you put up interest rates higher than they would otherwise be, you slow economic growth, you destroy investment, you raise unemployment and you lower the rate of employment growth that would occur.

The reason Gareth Evans says that Labor is suffering from a relevancy deprivation syndrome is that Labor learnt nothing from those lessons when they were in government. During the last five years they ran up a bankcard bill of $70 billion. They left office leaving the Commonwealth government with a debt of $100 billion. The interest rate payment on that debt alone this year is $9.3
billion. It is almost as much as we spend on the defence and education of this nation.

You are quite right, Senator Faulkner: the Prime Minister did say over the weekend that if this budget is sabotaged, as you so wantonly want to do, then interest rates will rise, unemployment will be higher than it would otherwise be, economic growth will be slower and employment will suffer, and so will the continuing structural problems that you left this nation with when you left office.

Senator FAULKNER—Madam President, I ask a supplementary question. Last year Mr Howard said:

The two things that the markets react to and look at constantly in a revolving way are the size of the current account deficit and the strength or otherwise of our currency, and the level of interest rates is far more heavily influenced by those things than a few hundred million dollars either way on the budget deficit.

When Mr Howard said that, Senator Short, was Mr Howard right or was Mr Howard wrong?

Senator SHORT—The larger the deficit in any budget, the lower is the level of savings and the higher, therefore, are the problems in terms of your external accounts, your inflation rate, your unemployment rate and all those structural things that go to make an economy’s growth sustainable in the medium and longer term. You obviously do not understand that. You have been going for years now not understanding that. That is the reason the Australian people rejected you so fulsomely in March. That is why they will continue to do so, unless you—

Senator Cook—Madam President, on a point of order: Senator Short finished his answer to the previous question with over a minute to go, he did not answer this part of the question, which is now the supplementary, and he still has not answered this part of the question.

Senator Panizza—What is your point of order?

Senator Cook—My point of order is: in view of that performance, would you, Madam President, direct Senator Short to do the fair thing and stop raving and actually answer the question? Or, if he is incapable of answering the question, would you direct him to sit down?

The PRESIDENT—I believe Senator Short is answering the question. There is no point of order.

Disability Support Pensioners

Senator WOODLEY—My question is directed to the Minister for Social Security. I refer to the government’s budget decision to force people over 55 to use up their superannuation savings before qualifying for a social security payment. The minister is reported as saying that groups such as superannuants should not be allowed to raid the public purse. Is it not true that the group who will lose most from this change in policy will be those people receiving a disability support pension? Will the minister confirm that in the next financial year the government will, by virtue of this change, save over $40 million from disability support pensioners? Is this not a false economy as the government will eventually be required to pay these people higher levels of age pension? Is it the minister’s view that these disabled people have up until now been one of the groups raiding the public purse?

Senator NEWMAN—I thank Senator Woodley for his question. The situation is, in regard to the new measure proposed in the budget for the over 55s, that there has been an enormous scare campaign run around Australia. I am not suggesting particularly that Senator Woodley is responsible for this, but some members of the opposition have had their fingers all over it. It concerns me very much that people are being frightened in a very cruel way—in a similar way, in fact, to what happened before the budget was released.

Senator Woodley is particularly concerned about the implications of the new measures for disability support pensioners. No matter who you are, whatever allowance or pension you are on, you are not going to be expected by the government to waste away your capital. That seems to me something which, in all the reporting of this issue, has not been clearly spelled out.
We have said that in this, as in other areas, as a matter of principle, people who have assets should be expected to make use of them before they call on the taxpayer for support. Most Australians do not believe that to be unfair. If somebody is over 55 and has been out of the work force for nine months, then we should look to including their superannuation entitlements in the means test, as has happened with the age pensioners. That has been the case with anybody over 65. As Daryl Dixon has pointed out, there has been essentially an anomaly for some time. Financial advisers have been telling people what to do. Some people on various entitlements have had quite substantial assets in superannuation but have not had to have them counted for means test purposes.

Senator Sherry—What is a 'substantial asset'?

The PRESIDENT—Order! Senator Newman is answering Senator Woodley's question.

Senator Newman—Thank you, Madam President. The specifics as to how much you have to include depend on whether you are a pensioner or whether you are on an allowance. It depends also on whether you are single or whether you are a couple. But people on very low amounts of superannuation—

Senator Sherry—How much?

Senator Newman—Well, Mrs Macklin, for example, has put around a press release which is totally and utterly untrue. I think she said that the average superannuation entitlement was something like $38,000. If that is the circumstance—and I don't have the evidence she drew on for that—that means that all those people are not going to be caught by the measure at all.

The people whom we are particularly concerned about to make sure they are not dipping into the public purse are those with substantial assets of some hundreds of thousands of dollars, who have been advised by financial planners that they can take an early retirement, stash their money in a superannuation arrangement and still get a benefit from the taxpayer who may be a battler living next door, trying to raise his or her kids with a very small wage but still paying taxes. That is the purpose of the government measure. That is what we are about.

Opposition senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT—Order! Senators on my left, there is far too much noise!

Senator Newman—Senator Woodley is trying to hear the answer, I am sure. Middle income people—people who are neither very poor nor very well to do in terms of superannuation entitlements—will be expected to draw on the income from their superannuation entitlements to reduce—

Senator Bob Collins—What's the cut-off?

Senator Newman—The income cut-offs are the same as they are for all means tests. We have not changed the means test whatsoever. It is the principle that this asset should be included in the assets test. I think it is regarded as fair. People will simply be expected to—(Time expired)

Dental Health

Senator Neal—My question is addressed to the Minister representing the Minister for Health and Family Services. I refer the minister to the government's announcement in the budget that the Commonwealth dental health program will be abolished. This is a measure that the Melbourne Age described as 'the cruellest and meanest cut in the federal budget'. Is the Victorian Minister for Health, Mr Knowles, correct in stating, 'There is no way states can cover the complete withdrawal of Commonwealth funding,' and, 'It is simply not possible for the states to fill this gap'? What then do you have to say to pensioners and health card holders about their access to dental services? Also what impact is this going to have on the waiting times for access to dental care?

Senator Newman—Senator Neal would be well aware, I would hope, that the state dental systems do continue. That is once again one of these facts which is not actually out in the public arena.

Opposition senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT—Order! Minister, just wait till there is silence. Senator Newman has
been asked a question and is entitled to answer it.

Senator NEWMAN—I thought Senator Neal and the opposition were interested in the situation of older people and dental care. I want to first of all clear away some myths which have of recent weeks been perpetuated by some people to the detriment of old people—yet another scare campaign.

Senator Faulkner—They're entitled to be scared, aren't they, with this policy? You are scaring them.

The PRESIDENT—Order! Senator Faulkner, stop interjecting!

Senator NEWMAN—The states are maintaining their dental health schemes. They had the responsibility entirely on their own until three years ago when the former Keating government introduced a four-year program, which was to come to an end in this coming year. This government has regretfully, I think, had to end it one year early because of the situation that we found the national books to be in when we came into government.

Having said that, what is also not spelled out but should be clearly on the record is that social security beneficiaries still have their health card entitlements which entitle them to dental care. So that has not been removed. Senator Neal shakes her head and seems surprised. It is a fact. My department is responsible for the health card entitlements and the distribution of health cards, and they are still covering them for dental health. So it is a cruel, cruel hoax on older people to be running this line that somehow there is no longer any dental care available for older Australians.

Senator NEAL—Madam President, I ask a supplementary question. Yes, we understand that the dental program is partially funded through the state and partially federally. Minister, what provision has been made in the budget to provide further funds if the balance of the responsibility for dental care is going to be transferred to the states?

Senator NEWMAN—There is no extra funding in the budget for dental care, as I just made clear if Senator Neal had listened. What has happened is that we have ended a program which was a finite four-year program introduced by the Keating government on the eve of an election when they were desperate for something to sell to older Australians. It has lasted for three years.

Opposition senators interjecting—

Senator NEWMAN—Madam President, could I please be heard? If they were interested in dental care, I thought they would have liked to hear the rest of the answer. I acknowledge that it has helped in some ways to reduce the waiting lists. Nevertheless, the responsibility traditionally has been that of the states. It remains the states, and the Commonwealth is still picking up the tab for social security beneficiaries.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The PRESIDENT—Order! I draw the attention of honourable senators of the presence in my gallery of a visiting delegation from the Pakistan Provincial Assembly of Balochistan. On behalf of honourable senators, I extend to you a very warm welcome.

Honourable senators—Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Young Australians

Senator COONAN—Madam President, this is the first opportunity that I have had to publicly acknowledge your recent election, and I would like to add my own warm congratulations to those of others made over the last few weeks. My question is directed to the Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs. The minister would be aware of the Labor Party's proposal to reject certain aspects of the first Howard budget, which would add $7.3 billion over four years to the debt to be borne by Australians. Will the minister inform the Senate of the disastrous effect this would have on generations of young Australians, who will be burdened with servicing this increased debt accumulated by Labor in government?

Senator VANSTONE—I thank Senator Coonan for her question. In her time here she is clearly going to devote considerable attention to the problems facing young Australians. As minister for youth affairs, I want to assure the Senate that this government is deeply
committed to ensuring that the future for Australians is one where they face a world of optimism and of hope.

We should be able to say to young Australians that into their hands we have put a land of opportunity, a land where they can get appropriate training, a land where they can expect to get a job—not any job but a good job; a real job—and a land where they can make a career choice on what they want to be, not simply on the basis of where they think they can get a job. That is the reason that we are committed to getting the budget back into the black.

Those on the opposite side—the big spenders over there—thought that they could just spend, spend, spend, put it all on the bankcard, because they are not the people who would have to pay the debt. They wanted to saddle young Australians with a massive debt. They wanted to rob young Australians of the future opportunities that they deserve.

The last five years of Labor government were characterised by a dependency on debt and deficit. General government debt increased from $17 billion in 1990 to $96 billion in 1995-96. The previous government’s short-term spending spree was a very cruel hoax played out on young Australians.

If there had not been an adjustment—if we do not get the adjustments we need in this budget—general government debt would have increased to $120 billion by the year 2000, an increase of over 600 per cent in just 10 years. Senators opposite do not like to hear this, because they understand that it is the future generations of young Australians who will be landed with this debt—not the people over there but future generations of young Australians.

So, yes, it is true that into their hands we do put a land of great opportunity. But, sadly, the former government put on their shoulders a very heavy burden—a burden of enormous government debt, a burden of fiscal irresponsibility and a burden of high unemployment. That is what senators opposite, when they were in government, did for young Australians. They created this problem. And for young Australians, we are prepared to fix it.

They have turned into a bunch of whingers and knockers. They created a problem, and we are prepared to fix it. It must be fixed so that future young Australians can have the opportunities that they should have. Uncorrected high public debt levels, like those racked up by the Labor Party, constrain future growth and impose huge costs on future generations.

This year’s budget requires 7.5 per cent of all outlays to meet the debt that was accumulated by Labor. In dollar terms, that is $10 billion—$10 billion going to pay interest that could have gone into other things. This government is prepared to make the tough decisions to ensure that our young Australians have a very positive future to look forward to. We will not walk away from the responsibility and we will not rack up debt like the previous government did. Our strategy will reduce the underlying deficit by about $7.2 billion over two years to balance the budget over the term of this parliament. In fact, senators opposite—the previous government, in fact—go further. They actually oppose $19 billion worth of proposals over four years. (Time expired)

Senator COONAN—Madam President, I ask a supplementary question. I thank the minister for her answer highlighting the damaging effect that debt will have on our young people. However, the government has a number of initiatives to assist young people. Will the minister inform the Senate of these?

Senator VANSTONE—Yes, Senator Coonan, fortunately we do, unlike the previous government. On budget night we released the statement ‘Australia’s young people: shaping the future’. That contains a number of initiatives.

Opposition senators interjecting—

Senator VANSTONE—Well may senators opposite scoff. One of the key initiatives in that statement is the $206 million for the new MAATS system—the modern Australian apprenticeship and traineeship scheme. Unlike anything members opposite had ever put forward, that is the greatest way to ensure that young Australians get proper training and end up in real jobs. We announced the implementation of the national health plan for young
Australians, funding for the national youth suicide strategy, commitments to youth homelessness through the youth homelessness pilot program, and the reintroduction of the job placement, employment and training program.

Senator Bolkus—Madam President, on a point of order: I just wanted to alert Senator Vanstone to the fact that she is giving an incomplete answer here in terms of the budget. She should be mentioning the $3 billion cuts that she is making in services to youth in the same budget.

The PRESIDENT—Senator Bolkus, there is no point of order.

Senator VANSTONE—And, of course, improving the safety and security of young people through the government's national campaign against violence and crime. For Senator Bolkus's benefit—as you would understand, Madam President, and he clearly does not—more money does not necessarily make good policy. Spend, spend, spend does not get you there. You have to put it on the bankcard. (Time expired)

Higher Education Funding

Senator WEST—My question is directed to the Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs. Is it your intention to continue to support budget cutbacks to higher education by a process of personal abuse, as was the case when you derided student concerns as the 'ugly face of self-interest' and described students as 'little brutes squealing like stuck pigs'?

Senator VANSTONE—It is certainly my intention to support the government's proposals with respect to higher education. Senator West may not understand the higher education budget. That is probably why she refers to them as cuts. I just make the point that in the higher education budget there is, in fact, $680 million as genuine cuts, genuine reductions in expenditure, to universities—

Senator Bob Collins—You said they were nicks, Senator.

Senator VANSTONE—made up partly of small cuts and nicks—yes, I said that—in operating grants and a reduction in discretional funding. Six hundred and eighty million dollars over four years against $20 billion in expenditure. The remainder of the savings in higher education comes from an increased HECS contribution from students and requiring students to pay back a bit earlier. I did say with respect to the students who are demonstrating and campaigning, who are busting into BHP and smashing windows and behaving in that fashion, that it is the very 'ugly face of self-interest'.

Senator West, you may not appreciate this: do you know that only 15 per cent of Australians get the opportunity to go into higher education? The remaining 85 per cent are not unhappy about contributing to the bill. Of course they are not. But they do think it is fair enough that the 15 per cent of Australians who have had that chance, and continue to have it, make a higher contribution. Fortunately, that percentage is changing. As you probably do know, 25 per cent of school leavers now get an opportunity to go into higher education. But let me remind you, Senator West, that they are the lucky ones. They get a degree—an internationally portable document recognising their skills.

Madam President, as you may understand, kids who do not get that chance and opportunity, the remaining 75 per cent, do not get an internationally portable document recognising their skills. They do not end up with half the unemployment rate that others end up with. They are not the upper, middle and high income earners of tomorrow, as university students are. It is not unreasonable to ask university students when they start earning—not before—to pay back more quickly; to start paying back when they earn $20,700; to pay back a movie ticket a week.

Do you know that 25 per cent of young Australians go and look for a job? They pay taxes and contribute towards the higher education system. Another 25 go into industry and get industry training or go to TAFE, but none of them end up with the same opportunities that people who get the benefit of going through higher education do. So my view about people from higher education who want to say, 'No. We don't want to pay any more.
Make the others pay,' is that this is the very ugly face of self-interest.

Senator WEST—Madam President, I ask a supplementary question. Minister, it has been reported that the University of Western Sydney will be slashing more than 1,000 full-time student places over the next three years. That equals a cut of 1,300 student places. Will you be visiting western Sydney to explain to those potential students why it is in their self-interest not to attend university? Will you explain to the parents of these potential students, who no longer qualify for your description as 'little brutes squealing like stuck pigs', how this will enhance their children's career opportunities?

Senator VANSTONE—It is very important to understand what this government has said to universities with respect to the very small cuts that we seek to make in operating grant. What we have said is that we want the undergraduate load protected. We want opportunities for new students to be protected, unlike the government you were a member of, Senator West, which over a period of five, six or seven years—I am not sure exactly—actually encouraged and led a system where there were fewer new people in higher education and more people in postgraduate studies.

What we have said to universities is, 'To the extent that you need to cut load, take it out of the postgraduate places, the people doing further higher education, and protect the undergraduate student load.' That is unlike what your government did. Let me remind you what your government said when you last wanted to increase the HECS changes. Do you want to know what your government said when you last wanted to increase the HECS changes? Do you want to know what you said to Senator Hill? You said, 'Agree with the HECS changes or we cut operating grant.' So just remember that when the debate comes up. (Time expired)

Sole Parents

Senator ELLISON—My question to the Minister for Social Security relates to sole parents. The overwhelming consensus of research into sole parent families shows that throughout the 13 years of the Labor government, poverty among sole parent families actually increased, even taking welfare pay-
better off as a result of the family tax initiative. That will be paid in a fortnightly cash amount along with their existing family payments. Contrast that with Labor's assistance to sole parents in the last budget. That was $4 a fortnight. I think they are still waiting for the last bit of it.

We promised to maintain a very important program that lone parents get a great deal of benefit from, that is, the JET program—the jobs, education and training program—and we have kept that promise. We have also retained the education entry payment for pensioners because that happens to be a very valuable initiative for sole parent pensioners. We have maintained that.

I heard somebody interjecting about child care programs. I have noticed that the advocates from the opposition are solely for yuppies in the high income areas. They are not prepared to acknowledge that we have protected low income families and that our measures will be particularly important in areas of high social disadvantage. They will be important to families where there are children with special needs, they will be important to families who live in rural and remote areas and they will be important to those community centres currently on public funding and which are going to get extra income over the next couple of years or so to restructure their businesses.

We have maintained the operational subsidy for the family day care scheme, which is very much welcomed by all parents. Lone parents make particular use of it because it is, effectively, provision of care by a neighbour and somebody they know and trust. In many areas, lone parents have a lot to be pleased about in this budget.

I have visited the Council for the Single Mother and her Child and they were very worried because of this scare campaign that was being run before the budget. They are now pleased to know that we have kept our promises to them. We have looked after those families who are in the greatest difficulty in Australia. What we need to do now, and what we are working on through our budget measures generally, is to see that more work is available for those who can and want to work. (Time expired)

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park

Senator HOGG—My question is to the Minister for the Environment. What advice has the government received on the likely impact on the tourism industry, and therefore jobs and economic growth, if your decision to impose a 500 per cent increase in visitor charges to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park proceeds? Didn't you go into the last election promising that there would be no new taxes and no increases in existing taxes on the tourism industry and its services industries. Will you now concede that you have broken this promise?

Senator HILL—This is the user pays fee that the Labor Party introduced when in government.

Senator Abetz—It was Labor's idea.

Senator HILL—Not only Labor's idea but Labor introduced it. Labor started to recognise that the users of national parks should pay a greater proportion of the costs of conserving the value of those parks. The trend to find a better balance—paying the costs of maintaining in particular, in this instance, conservation values—between the specific users of the parks and the community as a whole is taking place not only throughout Australian state and federal governments but also internationally.

We made a decision in the lead-up to this budget that there ought to be a better balance in relation to that proportion paid by the users of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Therefore, we proposed an extra $5 fee on the users to be collected in the way that the previous Labor government had set down and enacted.

The question was: what information base did we take that decision on. We took it upon the information base provided by the authorities. We obviously made our own assessment as to what might be the consequences of that and we decided that, in the circumstances, it was reasonable. You will be aware that a $6 fee upon users of the Great Barrier Reef is considerably less than the fee that we charge users of several other of our major national parks.
Senator Bob Collins—Like Kakadu.

Senator Hill—What fee did you put on Kakadu, Senator?

Senator Bob Collins—It is a public fee.

The PRESIDENT—Senator Collins, please stop shouting across the chamber. You know that is disorderly.

Senator HOGG—Madam President, I ask a supplementary question. Is the minister aware that the charge you are talking about is not levied on a day basis but on an occurrence basis and, therefore, a person who uses the reef or facilities of the reef on three occasions per day could be facing up to an additional $15 per day under the charge that you are now going to levy?

Senator Bob Collins—we don’t do that in Kakadu.

Senator HILL—That can be a consequence, in certain circumstances, of the framework that you implemented. I presume it was legitimate last year but illegitimate this year, and I notice that is becoming quite a normal function now that you have changed to the other side of the chamber. I must say that Senator Collins’s interjection does remind me that the fee that he imposed in relation to Kakadu was $15; in relation to the Great Barrier Reef, we are suggesting $6.

Refugees

Senator HARRADINE—My question is directed to the Minister representing the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. I ask the minister whether he could give us an undertaking that Xhang Meng Ling and her child will be protected. This person, as the minister would know, had been in Port Hedland. She was one of seven girls amongst 61 men and she suffered quite a lot—sexually abusive relationships and so on. She was 16 when she actually came—(Time expired)

Senator SHORT—I thank Senator Harradine for his question. It reflects his ongoing concern about refugees and people in circumstances of humanitarian need. So far as the particular case that he has raised is concerned, I am advised that in relation to the situation of Ms Xhang and her one-year-old daughter there have been a number of what have been described as very emotive claims of sexual abuse—I am not saying you are making that claim, Senator Harradine—regarding her situation but those claims have, in turn, been refuted by Ms Xhang herself. Ms Marion Le, who is Ms Xhang’s migration agent, claims in her press release dated 29 August that Ms Xhang has been subjected to abuse while in the care of the department at its detention centres in Western Australia and at Villawood.

I am advised that Ms Xhang recently met with a departmental officer and, in the presence of Ms Le, Ms Xhang denied the allegations of abuse. Indeed, on the contrary, Ms Xhang stated that she had had no problems with the staff or officers at the detention centres in Western Australia or at Villawood. Ms Le also claims that Ms Xhang’s treatment has been ‘dishonorable and would not be tolerated for an animal’. In fact, Ms Xhang’s accommodation arrangements and care have, I am advised, been very carefully considered by the department to take account of her particular circumstances. She has received constant and ongoing medical attention, including access to a range of specialist nurses who have provided, at times, 24-hour care, and also social welfare.

In relation to the point made in Ms Le’s press release, it appears that some of those claims are not correct. I understand she has now pursued the various review processes available to her, but I will get you a fuller report on that and come back to you as soon as possible.

More generally, in relation to claims of sexual abuse that have been made from time to time in similar circumstances, I am advised no claims of sexual abuse have been substantiated. Any incidents of physical abuse are dealt with by management or are reported to the police. The Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs takes its duty of care to detainees very seriously, especially in the case of unaccompanied women and minors. All detainees have access to centre management, and nursing and welfare staff at all times. Interpreters are always available and all unaccompanied minors are given special attention and care. Where possible, alternative
accommodation and care is sought for them in the community.

In the case of adults and within the constraints of a detention environment, the department does not interfere in matters involving choice of life preferences, unless those choices contravene Australian law. Through you, Madam President, to Senator Harradine, I will follow up on the final question as to where the review process lies with Ms Xhang, but it does appear that Ms Le's press release on this is sadly astray.

Senator HARRADINE—Madam President, I ask a supplementary question. I was referring to my letter to the minister of 9 August to which I have had no reply. This matter is most important for the Senate, that is to say, the human rights of individuals. I believe what Senator Short has said is the departmental patter. Madam President, what I want to know is, following Senator Short's response, does he think it is appropriate to lock up, in isolation, a 16-year-old girl with 61 men? If he does think that, I would like to see him justify it. She was locked up with 61 men along with six other women and young girls. When she had a baby, she successfully appealed to be separated from the place. (Time expired).

Senator SHORT—In response to your supplementary question Senator Harradine, yes, I am aware you did write to the minister, Mr Ruddock, on 9 August and I will take that matter up with the minister. So far as the circumstances that you quoted are concerned, there are differing versions of her situation and the situation of other women and minors in detention camps. I have given you what I have been advised is the actual situation. I will follow up the assertion that you have made and report to you on that as well. When she had a baby, she successfully appealed to be separated from the place. (Time expired).

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Senator HILL—Madam President, I ask that further questions be placed on the Notice Paper.

PARLIAMENT HOUSE: DEMONSTRATION

Senator PATTERSON (Victoria) (2.59 p.m.)—Madam President, I have a question I would like to put to you. Following the answer given by the Leader of the Government in the Senate in question time yesterday regarding the riot at Parliament House on 19 August, has the ACTU or have any of the unions involved made any offer to you to—

Senator Faulkner—I raise a point of order, Madam President. It has been the case previously in the chamber that questions have been asked of the President in the Senate during the hour that is allotted for question time. There is, Madam President, as you would be aware, a practice in the House of Representatives—

Senator Knowles—You don't like it, do you?

Senator Faulkner—I do not even know what the question is. I will tell you what we are not going to do, Madam President: we are not going to allow a situation whereby the way the procedures of this place have operated for aeons are changed on a whim. And this question asked at this time, Madam President, is out of order. There is only one way, Madam President, I submit to you that it can be asked, and that is if Senator Patterson seeks leave of all the Senate to allow this question to be asked now. It is incumbent on you, Madam President, to rule this question out of order, given that it has been asked after Senator Hill has asked that further questions be placed on notice.

The PRESIDENT—It is certainly my impression that questions to the President are usually asked at the end of question time and after question time has been concluded. I shall check the record. I believe that to be the case; I have seen it happen.

Senator Robert Ray—On a point of order: it may well have been that, on occasion, a President has been asked a question after question time. It should have been by leave but I can certainly recall, Madam President, questions to the President during question time. Even if it has been allowed in the past, it should have been done by leave, and you should not compound that particular error.

Senator Faulkner—On the point of order, Madam President—
The PRESIDENT—It needs leave to be asked after question time. There is no question about the fact that questions have been asked of the President after question time with leave, Senator.

Senator Faulkner—On a point of order: I put to you, a moment earlier that, for a question to be asked after the Leader of the Government in the Senate has placed questions on notice, it would require leave of all the Senate.

The PRESIDENT—Nobody is arguing with that, Senator.

Senator Faulkner—Thank you, Madam President. If that is the case, I ask you to rule Senator Patterson out of order and ask you to ask her to seek leave.

The PRESIDENT—I do not believe Senator Patterson had enough time to even indicate what she was doing and to ask for leave.

Senator Faulkner—She did not seek leave.

The PRESIDENT—She has not yet sought leave, and I agree with that. If she is to be asking the question, she has to do so.

Senator Patterson—Madam President, I presume they do not want me to ask you the question because it is embarrassing to them but I seek leave to ask a question of you.

The PRESIDENT—Is leave granted?
Leave not granted.

The PRESIDENT—Order! I call Senator Woodley.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Disability Support Pensioners

Senator Woodley (Queensland) (3.13)—Thank you, Madam President. I am not sure whether procedural motions take precedence over me but I wish to take note of the answer given to me by Senator Newman.

The PRESIDENT—Are there any ministers who have answers to give to questions?

Senator Knowles—Madam President, I seek leave to ask you a question.
Leave not granted.

Senator Woodley—I wish to take note of the answer given to me this afternoon by Senator Newman.

Senator Crane—On a point of order: I ask you to request that Senator Collins withdraws that remark that he has just made.

Senator Bob Collins—I said nothing.

The PRESIDENT—That seems unlikely, but if you made a remark that was unparliamentary, I did not hear it.

Senator Crane—Madam Chair, can I ask you whether or not it is in order for an honourable senator in this place to swear whilst he is in this place.

The PRESIDENT—No, it would not be in order.

Senator Crane—Well, I ask that Senator Collins withdraw what he said twice.

The PRESIDENT—Order!

Senator Bob Collins—Madam President, I am happy to withdraw any number of unparliamentary expressions. However, on this occasion, despite your editorialising on the matter, I said nothing.

Senator Crane—That is not true.

The PRESIDENT—Thank you, Senator Crane.

Senator Woodley—I move:

That the Senate take note of the answer given by the Minister for Social Security (Senator Newman), to a question without notice asked by Senator Woodley today, relating to the eligibility of people over 55 years old to receive social security payments.

I refer to the answer given to me this afternoon by Senator Newman. The information she gave was useful but there were a number of questions which I think were far more pertinent, which she did not answer. I believe that, in giving the answer, particularly in relationship to a couple of questions that I asked yesterday, the answer I received today must have some doubt cast over it.

One of the questions that I asked was: would the minister confirm that, in the next financial year, the government will save over $40 million from disability support pensioners? I really have difficulty reconciling the answer that Senator Newman gave that the
reason the government is pursuing this issue is that those who are seeking advice of financial advisers are then able to rearrange their affairs to unjustly get themselves a pension. I have the information that, in terms of disability support pensioners, this is not the situation. In fact, many of these will be caught perhaps unintentionally by the government’s action and will suffer greatly from this measure.

Of course, the other problem in this whole issue that the government needs to address is the problem of the disincentive that this will be for people to put money away for their retirement. It seems to me that the government is trying to have it two ways. It is trying to protect, as it says, the public purse but, in fact, what it will do is make worse the problem we have at the moment of trying to enable people to fund their own retirement. The government can have it one way or it can have it the other, but it cannot have it both ways.

The other reason that I have problems with Senator Newman’s answer is that yesterday she said she did not know whether or not 600,000 people were suffering as a result of the measure I referred to yesterday. In fact, those were the figures given in the budget papers.

With regard to the other issue I raised about pensioners who were unable to access the five per cent pension deeming accounts with banks, I checked with all the major banks and discovered that the National Bank and Westpac do limit the offer of five per cent interest to age pensioners. The Commonwealth Bank and the Bank of Queensland are a little more expansive, and it is only the ANZ which offers five per cent to all low income accounts.

I think the real problem that people are having with the government’s actions in this regard is that, whether intentionally or not, the government is penalising people who have very little ability to cope with the extra burden which the government is placing upon them through its actions.

Senator NEWMAN (Tasmania—Minister for Social Security and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women) (3.16 p.m.)—Senator Woodley addressed two questions rather than the one he asked me today. I have arranged for a very detailed answer to the question he asked me yesterday. He will find when he receives it that, with regard to the assessment he made about the number of banks providing low level accounts with deeming arrangements, the number is greater than he thought. It is correct that there are some financial institutions which are not providing them to people in receipt of allowances. In fact, that is their rule; it is not the rule of the government. The government expects them to provide it to pensioners and those in receipt of allowances.

Turning to the question of superannuation and disability support pensioners, which he referred to in his question today, I think it is important to quickly go over some of the things I mentioned in my answer. Superannuation assets are to be treated just like any other financial investment for those who are over 55 but below age pension age. Once people turn 55 and retire, they can access their superannuation in most cases and we can protect those who cannot access their superannuation. People will only be affected once they have been in receipt of a benefit for at least nine months. There will be little effect on those with small amounts of super. If you are a pensioner couple with your own home, $78,000 in super and no other financial assets, your pension will not be affected. A single disability support pensioner could have up to $45,000 in total financial investments, including super, and still not be affected.

As I said in my answer, Jenny Macklin, on Friday, 30 August, put out a press release suggesting that the average amount held in a super account is $38,000. Therefore, most people will not be affected. For those with larger superannuation assets who are affected, the income they generate from their superannuation will more than compensate for the loss of allowance and pension, because their super capital will continue to grow. That is something which has not been well understood. They are not being required to waste away their capital. They are expected to make use of what income is available to them before they take on the totality of a pension
or an allowance. Therefore, just like any other asset in the assets test, they have to look at what they are potentially in receipt of and then their entitlement is determined on that basis. But that does not mean they are eating into their capital.

I think it is a shame, but I understand the complexity of this issue. It may well be that that has been Senator Woodley’s problem. I have got one other example here: for a pensioner couple with $56,000 in superannuation, a house valued at $200,000, other assets of $50,000, and $20,000 in the bank producing interest, there is no reduction in pension.

Senator FAULKNER (New South Wales—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (3.20 p.m.)—I am not surprised that the Minister for Social Security (Senator Newman) is so defensive and so concerned about this debate, because it is an extraordinarily cruel policy measure that has been proposed by this government. Senator Newman referred earlier in question time to the fact that many people in the community are scared about this measure. They are scared, and they are right to be scared by this measure.

Senator Newman—You are wicked!

Senator FAULKNER—It is not wicked, Senator; it is a fact that what you have determined in this budget will lead to a reduction in benefits for older unemployed Australians. That is a fact. Of course, prior to this budget super assets held by people over the age of 55 who lost their jobs or who could not work because of sickness or disability were exempt from the income and assets test on social security payments. This encouraged those people to preserve their super—usually, of course, super in small amounts. They could preserve their super until they reached pension age. That was the situation. They got the most out of their superannuation and maximised their income once they reached retiring age.

The situation proposed by this government is that super assets are no longer exempt. That saves this mean minded, mean spirited, cruel government $225 million. This means that 54,500 people, mainly people on mature age allowance, will have their payments reduced, and that 12,900 people, mainly on disability support pension, will have their payments cancelled. That is what this budget measure means.

Counting superannuation assets under the income assets test means that you will have to work out how you survive on a much lower payment or draw on your super early. If you are forced to draw on your income stream from your superannuation at that age, you will have to sign a statutory declaration stating that you are retired even if you genuinely would like to engage in some form of employment at a later stage.

It is quite obvious, even to the economic illiterates on the other side of this chamber, that this sort of short-sighted policy of spend your superannuation now does obviously diminish national savings. So this is a cruel and very mean minded measure from this government. We have a situation where there is a very significant reduction in benefits for older Australians. It really underscores the meanness of Mr Howard’s and Mr Costello’s budget. It really underscores the mean mindedness of the Liberal Party. The measure jeopardises the superannuation of those whose jobs are at risk.

I say to the Senate that the callousness of the Howard-Costello budget, the mean minded callousness of this budget, is demonstrated by this budget measure alone. You stand condemned for what you have perpetrated on older Australians.

Senator PATTERSON (Victoria) (3.24 p.m.)—Senator Faulkner talked about mean mindedness. Let me just try to get into the thick skulls of the people on the other side of the chamber the fact that you cannot keep spending and spending and spending. One day the chickens come home to roost. I went out to talk to a group of young primary school students learning about parliament and one of them said, ‘Why did you get into parliament?’ I said, ‘I got into parliament because when I was growing up the world was my oyster. We were left, not a budget deficit, but a country that was in a situation where the world was our oyster.’

What are we passing onto the next generation? We are passing on a living standard which is worse than the one we inherited. I
do not want to be part of that. That is why we worked our inside out to be on this side of the house—that is, so we can actually be responsible with taxpayers’ money, so we can ensure that the tough decisions do not have to be made over and over again. The people on the other side want to borrow, borrow, borrow from overseas to spend on things we cannot afford. In this budget we have tried to make the savings across the board and as fair as possible. The Australian public has realised that we all have to tighten our belts.

In relation to one of the issues that has been raised today about superannuation, financial advisers have told us, and have told me, that they advise people that they can put their superannuation into a rollover fund that they cannot get to and then go onto unemployment benefits or some form of mature age allowance. I do not think that is fair and cricket, especially when it is a large amount of money. Senator Newman pointed out that there are a large number of people who will not be affected by this.

Senator Chris Evans—It is 38,000.

Senator Patterson—That is not actually correct. That is what your shadow minister said. Let me just remind the people on the other side that people who have paid superannuation, those of us who have been able to have superannuation—and, let me say, there are a large number of people, women, who have been in and out of the work force and who do not have large amounts of superannuation—have not been able to benefit from the tax benefits of having superannuation.

Many, not all—and, I must admit, there are many people who have become unemployed at an older age—who have chosen to retire early are in fact double dipping. I do not believe that is fair. We have tried to ensure that this budget is as fair as possible. The Labor Party is running around with furphies indicating that people will have to draw down all their superannuation, that they will be left with nothing, and that is absolutely wrong. They are going out and frightening older people, or people over 55, by saying that that is the case. That is not the case.

Senator Newman has explained very clearly what will happen. If a person has been on income support for over nine months, of course this will take effect. Upon reaching age 55, the Superannuation Act says it will form part of their financial investments for the means test purpose after September 1997. If they are a married couple and own their own home, and if their only other income is from financial investments, they would need to have more than $78,000 invested to be affected under the income test. They would also need more than $176,000 in assets, other than their home, to be affected under the assets test.

It would seem to me that many people out in the community would say, ‘I think that is reasonable. If they have that level of assets, maybe they should be contributing in some way to their own support and not be calling on the taxpayer.’ If you go across the country and look at all the demands that are being placed on taxpayers’ funds, we have to agree that we have to take a fair share.

We have tried to protect those on low incomes and to actually look at those who have in fact had a tax benefit through the superannuation scheme. It is a fair system. To have the Labor people on the other side saying that people will have to deplete all their superannuation is a nonsense. It is a furphy. It is misleading the Australian public and scaring older people, which I find despicable.

Senator COONEY (Victoria) (3.30 p.m.)—I understood Senator Woodley was saying that people over 55, the disabled and the old, are going to be worse off under this budget. That is absolutely true. It is very true because that is what has been agreed to by the other side. Senator Patterson, whom I have nothing but the greatest respect for, has said—and it is a legitimate argument—the country cannot keep spending, that there is a budget deficit and people have to tighten their belts.

 Senator Patterson—You are the only one who understands that.

Senator COONEY—I understand. But Senator Woodley says the result of doing that has affected these people he has spoken about who are over 55, the disabled and people who have to have their pensions taken into account
in the working out of what sort of pension they are going to get. He is absolutely correct and the argument is not about whether or not these people are going to be affected, but the reason why they are going to be affected.

The other side has spoken about the fact that this side of the chamber, Senator Woodley and the opposition which I am speaking on behalf of, are scaring these people. We are not scaring them in the sense of wanting to scare them. If they are scared, they are scared because of what has happened. What has happened, according to the government, has happened because of budgetary considerations. That might be so.

We say on this side of the chamber that those budgetary considerations should not be sufficient to cause the government to do what they have done. I must congratulate Senator Woodley on raising this issue because it is an issue that the people he has spoken about should know about. He has brought out that that has happened and that the reason for doing that is based not on social considerations but on monetary theory. That is the situation.

The argument really is whether or not it is reasonable to inflict the pain that will be inflicted on these people because of the budgetary deficit, as the government says. I must agree with people on this side and with Senator Woodley that the economic situation of this country is certainly not sufficient to inflict this sort of pain.

**Senator ABETZ (Tasmania) (3.33 p.m.)—**
The underlying issue in this whole debate is that the Labor Party and the Democrats still cannot grapple with the fact that this budget has been so overwhelmingly accepted by the Australian people. That is the thing that disappoints them; that is the thing that really gets to them. It narks them.

So what do they do? They try to pick on very small bits and pieces in the budget, misrepresent them to the electorate, set up a straw man to knock it down. That is what the Labor Party and the Democrats have set out to do because Mr Costello and our Prime Minister (Mr Howard) put together an excellent budget which has got the overwhelming support of the Australian people.

Sure, it inflicts some substantial cuts. Why does it have to inflict those substantial cuts? Because of the overspending of the previous government. We were left with a legacy that has to be cleaned up and the Australian people understand that. They accept that we were left with a mess and that we have taken on the responsibility of cleaning up that mess.

It is for that reason that the shadow Treasurer, Mr Evans, admitted in one of those rare insights he gives into himself that he was suffering from relevance deprivation syndrome. The reason is that he is trying to scare people about the budget and he is failing; they are not listening to him. And why aren't they listening to him? Because they did not listen to him and his party before the last federal election.

And why don't the people of Australia listen to the Australian Labor Party? I don't have to quote myself. I can quote Gary Gray, the federal secretary, who came down with a report, ably assisted by Senator Sue Mackay. What did they say about the Labor Party? 'When we promised something, the people of Australia would not believe us. We had broken so many promises that basically we were on the nose and, no matter what we said, the people of Australia would not believe us.'

But, instead of changing their attitude to policy and government actions, they are continuing the same old line. 'We will misrepresent, we will say that black is white, we will try anything to regain government.' They have not learnt the simple lesson: the people of Australia have seen the broad picture. They realise that we were left with a mess and that it needs to be fixed up. We have committed ourselves to cleaning up that mess.

I would like to suggest to Senator Woodley and others who want to go nitpicking within the budget that they remember what was in today's *Australian* editorial, with the heading 'Senate must not fiddle this Budget.' This
pretty strong statement coming from the Australian editorial says:

The Australian believes the government strategy is essential to sound economic management and that undermining or delaying it would be against the national interest.

I think that the Australian editor is in touch with his readership and with the people of Australia because they genuinely believe that our budget is within the national interest.

That is why the Labor Party are having problems gaining some relevancy within the Australian body politic today. By nitpicking at our excellent budget, a budget which has been so overwhelmingly received, they will ensure that they remain in opposition. It is somewhat ironic that I should be speaking against the Labor Party in this brief debate because, quite frankly, the more they and the Democrats, and anybody else who cares to join them, nitpick on this budget, it will ensure that those people who do so will remain in opposition and we will remain the government. The bottom line is: this budget has been an excellent budget well received by the Australian people. I am sure it will be supported ultimately by this place but, if not, ultimately by the people of Australia.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Higher Education Funding

Senator CARR (Victoria) (3.38 p.m.)—I move:

That the Senate take note of the answer given by the Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (Senator Vanstone), to a question without notice asked by Senator West today, relating to comments made by Senator Vanstone on student reaction to changes in funding for higher education.

The Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (Senator Vanstone) indicated that she felt that the changes to education would produce a better system of higher education in this country. The reality is that what she has been saying outside this place is that those who complain about these changes are the ‘ugly face of self-interest’. She defined the students who were protesting as ‘little brutes squealing like stuck pigs’.

The reality of all this is that the minister is introducing a new system of distribution for higher education which allocates university places according to wealth rather than merit. That is the impact of the changes that this government is proposing to force through this Senate. That is the impact of their changes which have seen in excess of $500 million taken away from student assistance. In terms of Austudy and in terms of changes to the HECS scheme we have seen money coming out to the tune of $241 million. In terms of the operating grants to universities, quite massive changes are occurring in those universities, which sees a fundamental shift in the way in which education is allocated in this country.

Massive equity problems are being introduced by this government as a consequence of their action. What we are seeing, in effect, is a new regime being placed on this country in terms of higher education which would see wealthy students effectively being able to purchase their tertiary qualifications. What that does for equity and the long-term economic position of this country, where we see the ‘rich and thick’ being able to secure their place at university on the basis of their wealth rather than their ability, to my mind is truly appalling.

We are seeing a whole range of measures being taken, allegedly on the basis of equity, whereby the minister says that she will reduce the number of places available for students in this country on the basis of government funding and will replace them by allowing people with money to buy an education.

What those changes have meant in the case of Victoria is some 4,090 fewer places in my state alone in this budget. They will be made up under this proposal to allow for people to maintain their place in a university by buying a place. That is the effect of the changes that she is seeking to introduce to this parliament—to allow Australians undertaking award courses to buy a place at a university. This is an appalling change which reflects this government’s basic philosophy—if you have money, you get on and if you are well connected, you get on.
We are basically moving away from a situation where all Australians should have the right to enjoy the benefits of an education system to a situation where the rights will be restricted to those who essentially can afford them. That is a change which this country can well do without and it is a change which I trust this Senate will have a lot to say about and will prevent this government from proceeding with.

Senator STOTT DESPOJA (South Australia) (3.41 p.m.)—Very quickly, I would like to take note of Senator Vanstone's answer and place on record the Democrats' objections to Senator Vanstone’s continual haranguing and offensive and objectionable language towards students in this country. I would like to place on record that the cuts that she referred to as ‘nicks’ today are considerable and represent the most regressive cuts and slashes to higher education policy in this country in its history.

We object quite strongly because we recognise that not only has Austudy been cut but HECS has been increased, the debt burden on students has been incredibly increased and there will be $623 million worth of cuts to operating grants over the next three years. This is both offensive and regressive.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

PETITIONS

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

Uranium Mining

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

The petition of the undersigned condemns the Government’s scrapping of the three mines policy and calls on it to completely ban the mining and exportation of uranium.

by Senator Kernot (from 20 citizens).

Religion and Democracy in Australia

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

The petition of the undersigned requests:

(i) that those of religious conviction who have contributed to the development of Australia should be recognised in the study of Australian history to ensure that a balanced history is taught;

(ii) that any syllabus prepared on the teaching of Civics and Citizenship should include the contribution of people of religious conviction highlighting their religious motivation;

(iii) that funds be allocated to ensure that teachers are given in-service training on their role of religious influences in the development of Australian democracy; and

(iv) that materials are produced to support the above for use in the classroom.

by Senator Woodley (from nine citizens).

Nuclear Testing

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

We, the undersigned, wish to lodge our protest in the strongest possible terms against the resumption of Nuclear Testing. Therefore we request:

(1) the immediate and permanent cessation of mining and the export of Uranium as a signal to all nations that we will not accept nuclear weapons in any form,

(2) the use of all means possible to dissuade France and any other nation from Nuclear Weapons Testing, and

(3) that the Minister for Foreign Affairs make a submission arguing the illegality of Nuclear Weapons to the International Court of Justice.

by Senator Kernot (from 40 citizens).

Industrial Relations

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

We the undersigned citizens respectfully submit that any reform to Australia’s system of industrial relations should recognise the special needs of employees to be protected from disadvantage, exploitation and discrimination in the workplace.

We the petitioners oppose the Coalition policies which represent a fundamentally anti-worker regime and we call upon the Senate to provide an effective check and balance to the Coalition’s legislative program by rejecting such a program and ensuring that:

1. The existing powers of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) be maintained to provide for an effective independent umpire overseeing awards and workplace bargaining processes.

2. The proposed system of Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs) should be subject to the same system of approval required for the approval of certified agreements (through enterprise bargaining). Specifically, an AWA should not come into effect unless it is approved by the AIRC.
3. The approval of agreements contained in the legislation should be public and open to scrutiny. There should be provision for the involvement of parties who have a material concern relating to the approval of an agreement, including unions seeking to maintain the no disadvantage guarantees.

4. Paid rates awards be preserved and capable of adjustment, as is currently the case in the legislation.

5. The AIRC's powers to arbitrate and make awards must be preserved in the existing form and not be restricted to a stripped back set of minimum or core conditions.

6. The legislation should encourage the processes of collective bargaining and ensure that a certified agreement within its term of operation cannot be over-ridden by a subsequent AWA.

7. The secondary boycott provisions should be preserved in their existing form.

8. The powers and responsibility of the AIRC to ensure the principle of equal pay for work of equal value should be preserved in its existing form. We oppose any attempt by the Coalition to restrict the AIRC from dealing with overaward gender based pay equity issues.

9. A 'fair go all round' for unfair dismissal so that all workers currently able to access these remedies are able to do so in a fair manner, at no cost.

10. Workers under state industrial regulations maintain their rights to access the federal awards system in its current form.

Your petitioners therefore urge the Senate to reject the above proposed reforms to the area of industrial relations.

by Senator West (from 8,546 citizens).

Higher Education Funding

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

The humble petition of the undersigned citizens of Australia respectfully showeth:

That we are opposed to any moves to cut funding to universities.

We believe that funding cuts to universities can only have a negative impact on society and will impede the development of our Nation.

Furthermore, we are opposed to any increases to the annual amount payable by students via the Higher Education Contribution Scheme.

We believe that increases to HECS will discourage individuals from enrolling in universities.

We believe that university entry should be based upon relative merit, not relative wealth.

We believe that education has a direct social and economic benefit and appropriate levels of funding should be made available from public revenue.

Your petitioners therefore humbly petition that you will not cut funding to universities or increase HECS fees. And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever ask.

by Senator Kernot (from 75 citizens).

Food Labelling

We the undersigned request the Australian Senate implements the following:

A Senate enquiry into the use of genetic engineering in the Australian Food Supply, including the ethics of its use.

That consultations be undertaken with the general public to ask us if we want this technology in our food supply and consent to its use.

That consumers be resourced to attend these consultations.

Any food that is genetically engineered or contains components that are genetically engineered are required to be labelled, including the origin of the genes.

That meaningful right to know legislation be enacted to guarantee public access to toxicology data.

by Senator Woodley (from 533 citizens).

Gun Controls

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

The petition of the undersigned shows:

that the overwhelming majority of Australians support uniform, national gun laws and the associated compensation measures as agreed between the Prime Minister, State Premiers and the Chief Ministers of the ACT and NT.

Your petitioners ask that the Senate:

continue to demonstrate its firm support for these measures;

take all possible action to expedite their implementation; and

resist all calls for the control measures to be watered down or abandoned.

by Senator Kernot (from 4,693 citizens) and Senator Newman (from 1,573 citizens).

Telstra: Privatisation

To the Honourable the President and Senators, and to the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:
The petition of the undersigned citizens respectfully shows that:

As members of the Australian community, considering:

- the strategic importance of Telstra in the national economy;
- the high levels of foreign ownership in the rest of the telecommunications industry;
- the growing importance of communications services to the lives of all Australians;
- the threat that privatisation poses to the universal availability of both present and future communications services;

We believe that it is in the national interest for Telstra to be kept in full public ownership.

We therefore call on the Federal Government to abandon its proposal to privatise Telstra, the nation's chief telecommunications provider, and to explore alternative means of funding its environmental policy.

And your petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray.

by Senator Panizza (from 14 citizens) and Senator Kernot (from seven citizens).

Telstra: Privatisation

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

The petition of the undersigned strongly opposes the Government's proposed sale of one third of Telstra and urges the Government to meet its environment responsibilities from other revenue sources.

by Senator Kernot (from 23 citizens).

Native Title

To the Honourable President and Members of the Senate:

This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the Senate the need to continue to allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who wish to claim native title, the right to access legal aid outside of the Representative Bodies established under the Native Title Act.

To force Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander claimants to seek funding from so-called representative bodies is oppressive and may result in breach of their human rights.

Your petitioners request the Senate to refuse to pass the amendment 183(4)(a) which would remove the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander claimants to seek legal aid for their native title claims from the Attorney-General's department independently of and without interference from representative bodies.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

by Senator Woodley (from 24 citizens).

Port Hinchinbrook Development Project

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

We the undersigned humbly request that the Senate honours the obligations of the Commonwealth of Australia to protect its territory that has received World Heritage status according to the World Heritage Convention of which Australia is a signatory.

Significant areas of marine and mangrove ecosystems of Australia’s World Heritage Great Barrier Reef Marine Park are directly threatened with destruction by the adjacent construction of Australia’s largest tourist resort and marina complex at Oyster Point near Cardwell North Queensland (opposite Hinchinbrook Island).

We implore the Senate to use its powers immediately to permanently halt the construction of the marina and access channel in the World Heritage "Buffer Zone" as recommended by the Valentine Report made to his Department in October 1994.

by Senator Kernot (from 45 citizens).

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

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

The petition of the undersigned citizens respectfully shows that we, as residents of the Australian Capital Territory, urge the government to:

- reject moves to cut the funding of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and instead maintain funding in real terms
- recognise and maintain the role of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation as a comprehensive, mainstream and independent media organisation, and not just a complimentary service to commercial media
- recognise the ABC Charter as a valuable instrument for the expression of Australian cultural life that should not be devalued as a result of economic and political considerations.

And your petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray.

by Senator Panizza (from 71 citizens).

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

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

The petition of the undersigned recognises the vital role of a strong and comprehensive Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and asks that:
1. Coalition Senators honour their 1996 election promise, namely that "The Coalition will maintain existing levels of Commonwealth funding to the ABC".

2. The Senate votes to maintain the existing role of the ABC as a fully independent, publicly funded and publicly owned organisation.

3. The Senate oppose any weakening of the Charter of the ABC.

by Senator Woodley (from 35 citizens).

Child Care Assistance

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

The petition of the undersigned strongly oppose the cuts to Childcare Assistance available for holiday absences for families who use long day care centres.

These cuts, which both the Liberal/National Coalition and the ALP support, reduce the amount of Childcare Assistance previously paid by the Government to parents for allowable holiday absences by half.

Your petitioners ask that the Senate reverse its support for these regressive changes to Childcare Assistance.

by Senator Woodley (from 151 citizens).

Euthanasia

We, the following petitioners strongly urge all senators to support Mr Kevin Andrews' bill to stop doctors being permitted to give lethal injections to their patients. Failure to support this bill will undermine the criminal code which protects all citizens. Voluntary Euthanasia, by targeting the sick and elderly, invariably progresses to involuntary euthanasia, (patient killing) permitting corruption and medical malpractice.

by Senator Panizza (from 122 citizens).

HECS Fees

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

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Western Australia draws to the attention of the Senate our opposition to increase in HECS fees.

Your petitioners therefore pray that the Senate will oppose the increase in HECS fees.

by Senator Murray (from 134 citizens).

Rocaltrol

To the Honourable the Members of the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia the Senate.

The petition of the undermentioned disability pensioner in the State of New South Wales, who states that he and all Australian males are grievously imposed upon and severely financially disadvantaged by the lack of action by the former Minister for Human Services and Health in the Twenty-seventh Parliament, the Hon Dr C M Lawrence MP, in causing the omission of the important medication: Rocaltrol—in the schedule of pharmaceutical benefits (P B S) being Item number 2502 Q, retail price of $94.64, (for 100 tablets).

It must be available to all Australian males. If appropriate @ $16.80 by Authority, and to all Male Pensioners @ $2.70.

There is no alternative medication nor any substitute whatsoever available to men to alleviate the severe pain of osteoporosis and allied ailments of the spine, some due to a low calcium bone density. Men are discriminated against. It is available to women and women pensioners.

This petitioner notes that he cannot obtain this drug @ $2.70. The retail price of $94.64 is beyond a pensioner's means. All Australian males unnecessarily must suffer the pain and discomfort, (and the price) which both would be alleviated if Rocaltrol was available to males. This unfair omission is deleterious to men's health and the high price is totally beyond the reach of pensioners and is a crushing financial burden.

This petitioner therefore humbly prays that the Senate of the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia will:

1. Rectify the omission and neglect by the former Minister.

2. To forthwith put Rocaltrol on the P B S for all males; pensioners $2.70.

3. Thus better protect the health and welfare of Australian males keeping them out of hospitals saving continual physiotherapy. This was proposed by the former Minister in her Men's Health Program launched in Melbourne late in 1995, and this drug would substantially save taxpayers' funds.

And your Petitioner, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

by Senator Panizza (from one citizen).

Rural Cutbacks

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

The petition of the undersigned strongly oppose the reduction of government services in rural and regional Australia.

These cuts will cause extreme hardship in areas that have not yet recovered from drought, high interest rates and the negative effects of subsidised overseas trade.
Your petitioners ask that the government reverse these cutbacks.

by Senator Woodley (from 331 citizens).

Petitions received.

NOTICES OF MOTION

Austudy Regulations

Senator Harradine (Tasmania)—Following an indication by the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Regulations and Ordinances that he intends to withdraw business of the Senate notice of motion No. 2 relating to the Austudy regulations amendments, and pursuant to standing order 78, I object to the proposed withdrawal of business of the Senate notice of motion No. 2 for today relating to the Austudy regulations amendment as contained in statutory rules 1995 No. 393, and indicate to the Senate that I wish to have my name put to that notice of motion.

Migration Regulations

Senator Bolkus (South Australia)—I give notice that, on the next day of sitting, I shall move:

That regulations 7 and 8 of the Migration Regulations (Amendment), as contained in Statutory Rules 1996 No. 75 and made under the Migration Act 1958, be disallowed.

Regulations and Ordinances Committee

Senator O’Chee (Queensland)—Pursuant to notice given at the last day of sitting and subsequent to the objection given today by Senator Harradine, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Regulations and Ordinances I now withdraw business of the Senate notices of motion Nos 1 and 3 to 13 standing in my name for today.

Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Regulations

Senator Bourne (New South Wales)—Pursuant to notice of intention, I withdraw business of the Senate notice of motion No. 14 standing in my name for today.

Australian Rules

Senator McKiernan (Western Australia)—I give notice that, on the next day of sitting, I shall move:

That the Senate—

1. Congratulate the West Coast Eagles on their magnificent 55 point victory last Saturday, over last year’s AFL premiers—Carlton;

2. Notes that the Essendon Bombers, who also played in a qualifying final last weekend, lost their game to the Brisbane Bears;

3. Records the fact that Essendon finished the season in a lower spot on the AFL ladder, outside of the top four, than did the West Coast Eagles;

4. Condemns the decision that now awards a home-ground advantage semifinal match to Essendon, a losing team, therefore punishing the West Coast Eagles by forcing them to travel from Perth to Melbourne;

5. Calls on the AFL Commissioners, in the interest of equity and fairness, to think nationally and not act parochially.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT—Senator McKiernan, it was a good try but you will not be surprised that I say that your notice of motion was out of order.

Legal and Constitutional References Committee

Senator McKiernan (Western Australia)—I give notice that, on the next day of sitting, I shall move:

That the following matters be referred to the Legal and Constitutional References Committee for inquiry and report by the last sitting day in April 1997:

(1) The capacity of the Australian legal aid system to meet community demand for:
   (a) legal advice and information; and
   (b) representation and other advocacy services.

(2) The implication of the Commonwealth’s decision to restrict its funding to Legal Aid Commissions so that these funds are used only for matters arising under Commonwealth law, taking into account particularly:
   (a) the Commonwealth’s international involvement in processes relating to legal assistance within Australia; and
(b) the Commonwealth's interests in achieving national equity and uniform access to justice across Australia.

(3) The nature and level of legislative, organisational and administrative impediments (including the recently-announced increases in court filing fees) to effective delivery of legal assistance.

(4) The appropriateness or otherwise of competition between legal aid funding and funding for law enforcement programs of the Commonwealth Government.

(5) The levels of disparity between the Commonwealth Government's funding of legal services it uses (both in-house and from private practice) and rates of payment to legal aid lawyers (both in-house and from private practice).

(6) The relationship between the legal profession and Government in delivering legal assistance services and the role of the courts in minimising the costs of those services.

(7) The equity implications arising from the current tax deductibility regime for legal expenses, including by the corporate sector.

(8) The implications, if any, for the Legal Aid system that arise from the High Court 'Dietrich' decision.

(9) The capacity of the legal aid system, in the proposed funding arrangements, to provide for separate representation of children where such assistance is essential in the pursuit of justice.

(10) The implication for the States in the suggested revised legal aid funding system.

(11) The ability and willingness of the States to raise and commit extra funds to the legal aid system to make up any shortfall of funding caused by the Commonwealth decision.

(12) Alternative sources of legal aid funding.

Telstra

Senator TIERNEY (New South Wales)—I give notice that, on the next day of sitting, I shall move:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that:

(i) the Government members of the Senate Environment, Recreation, Communications and the Arts References Committee inquiry into Telstra concluded on the evidence given that the passage of the Telstra (Dilution of Public Ownership) Bill 1996 for the one-third sale of Telstra to the public is absolutely in the best interests of Australians, and

(ii) the universal service obligations and consumer service guarantees are firmly entrenched in the Telecommunications Act and are not diminished or affected in any way by the Telstra Bill;

(b) confirms that the partial sale of Telstra will have a positive impact on employment in the telecommunications industry and other user and supplier groups, which are growing at a rate of 18 per cent;

(c) supports the view given in evidence that the reduction in telecommunication costs in country areas boosted by the partial sale of Telstra will produce scope for the creation of new jobs in regional and rural Australia;

(d) condemns the quality of the Opposition parties' 'majority' report as intellectually dishonest, in that it fails to reflect the weight of expert evidence given in favour of the sale of one-third of Telstra; and

(e) notes that the inquiry discovered there is no significant community concern about the core issues raised by the partial sale of Telstra, especially as the only regional hearing conducted anywhere in Australia was in Townsville with just two academic witnesses making submissions.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Tibet

Motion (by Senator Bourne) agreed to:

That general business notice of motion No. 202 standing in the name of Senator Bourne for today, relating to human rights abuses in Tibet, be postponed till the next day of sitting.

BHP Petroleum

Motion (by Senator Margetts) agreed to:

That general business notice of motion No. 11 standing in the name of Senator Margetts for today, relating to BHP Petroleum's offshore arrangements, be postponed till the next day of sitting.

Tibet

Motion (by Senator Bourne) agreed to:

That general business notice of motion No. 208 standing in the name of Senator Bourne for today, relating to human rights abuses in Tibet, be postponed till the next day of sitting.

D'Entrecasteaux National Park

Motion (by Senator Margetts) agreed to:
That general business notice of motion No. 207 standing in the name of Senator Margetts for today, relating to D’Entrecasteaux National Park, be postponed till Thursday, 12 September.

**Dalai Lama**

Motion (by Senator Woodley) agreed to:

That general business notice of motion No. 205 standing in the name of Senator Woodley for today, relating to the Dalai Lama, be postponed till the next day of sitting.

**King Island Dairy Products Pty Ltd**

Motion (by Senator Chris Evans, at the request of Senator Murphy) agreed to:

That general business notice of motion No. 174 standing in the name of Senator Murphy for today, relating to King Island Dairy Products Pty Ltd, be postponed till the next day of sitting.

**National Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation**

Motion (by Senator Bourne, at the request of Senator Kernot) agreed to:

That general business notice of motion No. 211 standing in the name of Senator Kernot for today, relating to the National Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, be postponed till the next day of sitting.

**Port Hinchinbrook Development Project**

Motion (by Senator Woodley) agreed to:

That general business notice of motion No. 196 standing in the name of Senator Woodley for today, relating to the Port Hinchinbrook development project, be postponed till the next day of sitting.

**NATIONAL COMMISSION OF AUDIT**

Senator CHRIS EVANS (Western Australia)—At the request of Senator Faulkner, I ask that general business notice of motion No. 197, standing in the name of Senator Faulkner for today, relating to the provision of information by the Assistant Treasurer (Senator Short), be taken as formal.

Leave granted.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I move:

That the Senate call on the Assistant Treasurer (Senator Short) to provide the following information in respect of each of the 12 items of correspondence between the Commission of Audit and departments and ministers which were withheld from tabling on 21 August 1996:

(a) a brief description of the communication;
(b) the originator of the correspondence; and
(c) the reasons for withholding the correspondence.

**Senator PANIZZA** (Western Australia)—by leave—The government will not be opposing this motion. As I am speaking on behalf of Senator Short, I should point out that where a document was not tabled either because it would reveal the deliberations of cabinet or because of national security reasons, the government will not be able to comply with part A and part B of this order.

**Senator CHRIS EVANS** (Western Australia)—I move:

That the Senate call on the Assistant Treasurer (Senator Short) to provide the following information in respect of each of the 12 items of correspondence between the Commission of Audit and departments and ministers which were withheld from tabling on 21 August 1996:

(a) a brief description of the communication;
(b) the originator of the correspondence; and
(c) the reasons for withholding the correspondence.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**PAIRS IN SECRET BALLOTS**

Motion (by Senator Chris Evans, at the request of Senator Faulkner) agreed to:

That the Senate notes:

(a) the following statements in relation to the granting of pairs in secret ballots made by senators during the debate on the election of the Deputy President on 20 August 1996, namely:

(i) Senator Hill’s statement ‘Pairs are never given in secret ballots’,

(ii) Senator Baume’s interjection ‘Never for a secret ballot’,

(iii) Senator Harradine’s statement ‘In my time here it has never happened before’, and

(iv) Senator Alston’s statement ‘They have never been used in this chamber’; and

(b) the record of the Senate Hansard for 21 April 1983 when Senator Kilgariff, the Opposition Whip, stated, following the election of the President ‘I wish to draw to your attention the fact that in the election that has just taken place it was necessary to ask for a pair for Senator Archer who is unable to attend the Senate today. This was
provided by Senator Georges from the Government ranks'.

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL

Motion (By Senator Bob Collins) agreed to:

That there be laid on the table, by the Minister representing the Minister for Transport and Regional Development (Senator Alston), by 5pm on Tuesday, 10 September 1996, the report prepared by Mr John Brew on Australian National and related matters, received by the Minister for Transport and Regional Development on 19 June 1996.

IRAQ

Senator MARGETTS (Western Australia)—I ask that general business notice of motion No. 204 standing in my name, relating to the United States' offensive against Iraq, be taken as formal.

Leave not granted.

Suspension of Standing Orders

Senator MARGETTS (Western Australia) (3.58 p.m.)—Pursuant to contingent notice, I move:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent Senator Margetts moving a motion relating to the conduct of the business of the Senate, namely a motion to give precedence to general business notice of motion No. 204.

It is urgent that Australia should condemn the United States' offensive against Iraq on 4 and 5 September on the basis of its unilateral action of violence without the support of the UN or even regional allies. Through its unilateral action, the United States has shown contempt for the United Nations, failing to get United Nations or even regional support for its action.

On the weekend, the United States tried and failed to get a Security Council resolution to support their actions in Iraq. Both France and Russia vetoed such a resolution on the basis that the offensive was an election ploy by President Clinton to boost flagging support.

While circumventing the United Nations—the United States still owes billions of dollars to the United Nations and is engaged in a process of trying to weaken the United Nations and depose the Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali—it is hypocritical to the notion of global conflict resolution when the UN is the most appropriate vehicle to prevent the escalation of this sort of conflict.

It is well known that there are few grounds for the US offensive. The rationale for attacking Iraq was that it violated the UN safe haven; however, last year it was also violated by Turkey and the US failed to act on behalf of the Kurdish people then.

Senator Hill—Mr Deputy President, on a point of order: this is not a debate in the terms that Senator Margetts is debating the motion. She is debating the merits of the US action in Iraq, not the merits of whether or not this matter needs to be debated in the Senate today. In those circumstances, I would respectfully suggest that she should be told to limit her debate to the reasons for urgency.

Senator MARGETTS—Mr Deputy President, on the point of order—

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT—I do uphold the point of order. Senator Margetts, your contribution is to indicate why the matter is urgent and has to be debated today.

Senator MARGETTS—On the point of order: I was debating why it is urgent. I said it is urgent as to why the action is necessary now. I realise it is unlikely to get support from the other parties, but in the conventions of the Senate usually there is some way I can argue why it is urgent and that is what I am doing now.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT—Proceed.

Senator MARGETTS—Thank you. We should debate this now because Australia is not just an innocent bystander in this. We are implicated in the United States offensive. Both Pine Gap and Nurrungar probably played some role in the United States cruise missile attack on Iraq, although details are kept secret.

We need to debate this now because we know that in order to provide accurate targeting information for the cruise missiles launched from B52s and US navy ships the American military needs up-to-date satellite imagery. AEP reported on 4 September that Pine Gap is one of the earth's stations for orbiting US photographic reconnaissance and electronic intelligence satellites. Nurrungar
handles communications from satellites which serve a variety of functions, including missile early warning and global military communication links.

Senator Hill—Mr Deputy President, I rise on a point of order. This is interesting but it is not relevant to the issue as to whether or not the debate on the merits of Senator Margetts's motion should take place today. The usual time for these debates is general business on a Thursday. What she must do is convince the Senate that there is an issue, not an issue relating to the past but an issue relating to the future, that is of such consequence that it needs to be brought forward. I would respectfully suggest that she is not even seeking to do that.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT—I think Senator Margetts was trying to indicate the urgency. I ask Senator Margetts to continue.

Senator MARGETTS—Thank you, Mr Deputy President. It is urgent because Australia is involved in this process and we need to understand, debate and have at least some issues in the open on why Australia is involved in the process and what part we have played in encouraging what is happening now. It is possible that either or both bases have played a role in the cruise missile attacks against Iraq. That is why it is urgent to be debated in this chamber. I would like to point out that the unilateral action calls into question Australia's renewed alliance with the United States as a result of the Ausmin talks. That is why it is urgent.

Australia is setting itself up to be implicated in any US brokered offensive. I can understand why debating this might be embarrassing for the government and for the opposition. When the US shows such blatant disregard for international law and UN processes, it is urgent if Australia is going to be a party to unilateral violence which may be opposed vigorously by how many nations/

Above all, I believe it is urgent that Australia should condemn this violent US offensive as it should the Iraqi offensive. The Kurds would be better helped with the United Nations assisted comprehensive aid program, the lifting of the blockade against Iraq and brokered peace talks. Support by honourable senators for this suspension to debate the motion may be an important measure to inform the United States that their unilateral actions against Iraq have been unacceptable and Australia will not follow US foreign policy decisions with blind support.

That is why it is urgent. That is why it is necessary for this to be debated in this chamber instead of allowing statements which in fact have been used all around the world to justify a blatantly political ploy for somebody else's election when in fact it has nothing whatsoever to do with human rights and Kurds in Iraq.

Senator BOURNE (New South Wales)—Let me indicate that the Democrats will be supporting the suspension of standing orders to debate this because we believe this is urgent, too.

Senator MacGibbon—Why?

Senator BOURNE—I will tell you exactly why this is urgent. We believe this is urgent because there is an ongoing offensive from all sides against the Kurds at the moment. The Kurdish people are in dire straits. The Kurdish people need help and the way they get help is a very urgent matter and it ought to be discussed by all nations, that includes Australia. Whether the way the Americans did it was the right way or not is something that we should be discussing now. It is something that is urgent for us to discuss now.

Let me tell you the other bit of this motion which I believe is absolutely urgent and something we should all be discussing, and discussing constantly because it is the one thing in the world today which destabilises the world; that is, internal problems within countries because of ethnic minorities. That is very urgent. That is extraordinarily urgent.

Senator McGauran—Don't you care about legislation?

Senator BOURNE—Excuse me! Senator McGauran said, 'Don't you care about legislation?' Don't you care about people! What an outrageous thing to say. That reminds me of something else that is extremely urgent. We should look at all of those people around the world who are in desperate need of self-
determination or autonomy of some sort. This is urgent.

There are thousands of people throughout the world who are in gaol because of their beliefs. They include the Kurds. Kurdish members of parliament are in gaol because they believe that the Kurds are a separate people, which they are, and they believe they should have some human rights. This is so urgent. This is incredibly urgent. This is something we should be discussing at every single possible opportunity and that includes this one.

Senator MacGibbon—This is not a laughing matter.

Senator BOURNE—Yes, indeed, Senator MacGibbon. People should stop laughing about this. This is not a laughing matter. I imagine that you were speaking to Senator McGauran at that stage and very fair, too. That is a very reasonable thing to say because it is not a laughing matter. This is no way a laughing matter. It is outrageous if anybody in this chamber—and I am looking around at every single one of you—is laughing at this. It is outrageous. How dare you! Who do these honourable senators think they are!

Government senators interjecting—

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Calvert)—Order! I cannot hear the honourable senator.

Senator BOURNE—This is an urgent motion. This is urgent because this is an ongoing offensive. It is an ongoing offensive from lots of sides, not just from the Iraqis. This is an ongoing offensive that is happening right now. It is urgent because there are a great many ethnic minorities and even majorities throughout the world who do not even have the basic human rights that they need. That is one of the points in this motion and that should be debated at every opportunity. It is urgent because we should be discovering how this Australian parliament feels and what the Australian government should be doing in relation to all these things. I will be supporting this motion.

Senator HILL (South Australia—Minister for the Environment) (4.07 p.m)—The government opposes the motion in terms that it opposes the debate taking place at the moment. The substance of the debate, which should take place on Thursday, is not a laughing matter, as Senator Bourne indicates. It is a serious matter concerning internal stability.

The behaviour and the role of the responsible international community in curbing the actions of violent dictators is an important issue. The security and human rights of the Kurds are important issues. No doubt the Greens and the Australian Democrats will choose it as their subject of general business to be debated on Thursday.

Alternatively, if Senator Bourne had believed that this was of the urgency that she had sought to impress upon the Senate a minute ago, then I would not have not been surprised had she put it down as an MPI either yesterday or today. But she has apparently overlooked that potential for debate within the standing orders of the Senate on matters that are regarded as—

Senator Bourne—I will tomorrow, don’t worry. You can look forward to it tomorrow.

Senator HILL—You choose your time. I might abuse the rule that I sought to draw to the attention of the previous occupant of that chair, the Deputy President, by simply putting on the record that the government believes that the action taken by the US was justified and appropriate in all the circumstances. The Prime Minister (Mr Howard) described that action as a proper response to a clear breach by Iraq of the broad conditions of UN Security Council resolution 688, which interdicts the repression of civilian populations. When this debate is ultimately called upon at the proper time, Senator MacGibbon has quite a lot that he wishes to add.

Question resolved in the negative.

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL

Senator TAMBLING (Northern Territory—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Transport and Regional Development) (4.10 p.m.)—by leave—Just a short while ago, Senator Bob Collins moved a formal motion with regard to the tabling of a particular document, which it was the intention of the government to table prior to 5 p.m. this
afternoon, as required by the motion. I have just been advised by the minister's office that the minister is not currently in a position to meet that 5 p.m. requirement that is in Senator Collins's motion.

No disrespect whatsoever is intended to the Senate. The minister is currently reviewing a number of aspects in the report that relate to commercial-in-confidence matters, as I am sure Senator Collins would appreciate from similar action that he had on reports in government not so long ago. I have been given an assurance by the minister that a document will be tabled in the Senate after question time tomorrow.

Senator BOB COLLINS (Northern Territory) (4.11 p.m.)—by leave—I simply want to point out the obvious to the chamber. I am a little disconcerted with this advice because the matter for the advice of the chamber has been under some discussion with the government for the last 24 hours. I have been personally involved in that. Members of my staff have had numerous discussions with the minister's office about this. The reason I sought formality for the motion that I moved is that I received advice, which was confirmed to be correct, from the government that the document would be provided by today. The government, of course, voted for that motion to produce the document. But I accept Senator Tambling's undertaking that the document will be provided no later than after question time tomorrow.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Unemployment

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Calvert)—I have received a letter from Senator Bolkus proposing that a definite matter of public importance be submitted to the Senate for discussion, namely:

The Government's abrogation of its responsibilities to the unemployed.

I call upon those senators who approve of the proposed discussion to rise in their places.

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

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT—Formal arrangements have been made to allocate specific times to each of the speakers in today's debate. With the concurrence of the Senate, I ask the clerks to set the clocks accordingly.

Senator BOLKUS (South Australia) (4.12 p.m.)—It is with a degree of regret that the opposition introduces this MPI today. We raise it because the future for the unemployed in Australia is bleak under this government; not just for the unemployed and for young people, for whom there is the prospect of very few jobs and the prospect of fewer places in tertiary institutions, but also for families, for whom this government prescribes a contractionary budget, a budget which will ensure that growth next year and the outgoing years is less than the growth in the economy over recent years. As a consequence, there will be fewer job opportunities.

We also raise this matter today because of the government's cavalier insensitivity to the unemployed. We have a Prime Minister (Mr Howard) who sheds crocodile tears over the unemployed whilst he presides over a budget which reduces the growth rate in our economy. We have a Prime Minister who, whilst feigning concern, declines to set targets for unemployment in this country either for this year or for outgoing years.

He leads the government; but it is led also by the Treasurer (Mr Costello), who has not mentioned unemployment as a concern whilst he has been Treasurer. Not only that, he has actually tried to write unemployment out of the political agenda by writing it out politically from the Reserve Bank's charter. We also have a minister who shows no understanding, no sensitivity and no concern about unemployment or any aspect of her portfolio. She has no idea about economics, no idea about training and no idea about education.

But she is responsible for these three critical areas—areas that provide life opportunities for so many hundreds of thousands of Australians. She is in charge of education, training, schools and work, but she has showed absolutely no application to the fundamental issues in these areas. She claimed in question time today that she is
fixing it. She is fixing it by having fewer university places, less funding for universities, fewer resources for schools and fewer jobs.

This is a person to whom this government entrusts the life opportunities of Australia's future generations. She arrogantly dismisses any criticism or any commentary from whatever quarter it might come—high academic quarters or commentators in the media. They are all treated with the same disrespect, disregard and arrogance by this Marie Antoinette of this government.

Nowhere better have we seen this government's disregard for the unemployed than in an interview on The World Today with Senator Vanstone some few weeks ago. When you are looking at unemployment, when you are looking at jobs, you would like to know when the unemployment rate is going to come down. Catherine Job asked what sort of time frame was being looked at, and said, 'So we are looking at months, a year, three years, a whole term before your policies do what you say they will do and start pulling unemployment down?' What does Amanda Vanstone say? She says, 'Well, I don't really think there is much benefit for anybody, especially for the unemployed.' Is she nominating one month, two months, six months, 12 months or 18 months? How wrong can she be? If you are unemployed, you want to know when your job prospects are going to increase. But, for Amanda Vanstone, she does not care. There is not much benefit for anybody.

Senator O'Chee—'Senator Vanstone' to you.

Senator BOLKUS—Senator Vanstone to anyone, in fact. Calling her by her Christian name is probably one of the kindest things that has been done to her in recent months. When the unemployment rate goes down is one thing; how much it goes down is another.

Catherine Job also asked her about targets. What was the response from Senator Vanstone in terms of targets? She said, 'What targets do is shift your focus onto some notional target that you have invented or developed to satisfy the media's need to have a target.' Well, it is not that. Targets are also important for those who are concerned about unemployment. They are important to young people leaving school and to families who may be hitting the unemployment ranks.

She does not care about when the unemployment rate is going to go down or about how much it will go down by. When asked, 'Is it going to get better, Senator, before it gets worse?', she said, 'That is another futile question, with the greatest of respect.' It goes on. This is a minister who shows absolute disregard for the issues and disregard for the people involved.

This is one of the reasons why we have raised this matter of public importance today. Another one is that, despite presiding over a budget that will increase unemployment, despite bringing forward estimates that will mean much higher unemployment than would have occurred in our economy, this minister's response, this government's response, is to not cater for unemployment, to not try to accommodate it, to not try to train or re-skill the people involved, but to massively cut back on critical programs and to massively cut back on the structures—the CES or otherwise—that are so critical for people seeking employment. This is a government with no new ideas but with old prejudices, and that is what has driven their agenda in this case.

A commitment in this area has to be of two basic characteristics, and that was a commitment that was shown by the previous federal government. Our concern for the jobless was, and continues to be, a genuine commitment. There needs to be the commitment, and we allocated significant energy and resources to the problem. And we did get results: over 700,000 new jobs in three years, which was something that the coalition said that we could never do, and real improvements in the rate of long-term unemployment—a cut by some 35 per cent over three years of Working Nation. In fact, unemployment over that three-year period of Working Nation went down from 11.7 per cent to 8.1 per cent—well towards achieving our target of five per cent by the year 2000.

There are two fundamentals in tackling unemployment. You have to have a goal and you have to have a genuine commitment, and this government has neither. Why not? Because the government is not concerned. It is
of secondary importance to them. It is of secondary importance to the extent that Peter Costello wanted to write it out of the Reserve Bank charter. The unemployed in this budget are being treated in the same way as the Aboriginal people, the elderly, migrants and all others who have been targeted by a malicious budget of this sort. Unemployment is of no real concern to the government.

There is one central and disturbing reason for the government not setting targets and not showing a degree of concern. As was evidenced quite clearly in question time today, Senator Vanstone has indicated that some of the distortions that she has been putting out in the media in recent days have been not well based.

The big, fundamental situation was that Senator Vanstone has tried to portray unemployment as being about 8.5 per cent or thereabouts under the previous government's policies and strategies. But it was quite clear from the question and the answer today that she had been advised, on taking office, that unemployment was to go down to five per cent during the course of the next few years up to the year 2000.

Senator Vanstone herself has also acknowledged that unemployment is more likely to rise than decrease. What sort of government is it which comes in with a commitment to reduce unemployment but, within just weeks of taking office, sheds that very fundamental and poor promise? Are the unemployed not of a core concern to you, Senator Vanstone? Are the unemployed not of a core concern to the government? It is quite clear that they are not.

On 21 August this year on Triple J, this minister was asked whether she was concerned that the government's new job programs would work better than the ones that they replaced. She said that, really, she was not concerned about that. She was concerned about getting competition. We have a minister who is presiding over a raft of cutbacks in necessary support mechanisms for the unemployed but also in necessary mechanisms to re-skill and re-train the unemployed to work in new job environments.

The government, in its approach in this area of cutbacks, has shown not just a degree of social vandalism but also a degree of serial slashing. Gone are the jobskills programs, the landcare environment action plans, new work opportunities, job training, special intervention programs, accredited training for youth, skillshare and jobclubs. They are all gone, and regardless of whether organisations such as Access Economics give advice to the government to the effect that these programs are cost effective, these programs are working and these programs are producing necessary results.

The government, in its approach—as I say, serial slashing in this area—has seen fit to do away with the programs because they have a conservative approach to unemployment. First of all, it is not a major concern—not a core concern. Secondly, it is going to have to happen if we are going to get other aspects like inflation right. And, thirdly, the government has no role in supporting those who may be the victims of their policies.

I think Maggie Thatcher put it right when a couple of years ago—talking about her approach, the conservative approach, the Thatcher-Reagan approach to the victims of their economic policies—she said, 'Our job is to glory in inequality. The poor will always be with us.' That is the sort of disregard this minister is showing to this particular sector. The minister has no real understanding of the economic issues. That is matched by no real commitment in terms of training and employment programs and matched by no real sensitivity to those who are the victims, and will be the victims, of her disregard and neglect in this area. No wonder she is increasingly being called the Marie Antoinette of this government.

**Senator VANSTONE** (South Australia—Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs) (4.23 p.m.)—I am somewhat amazed that Senator Bolkus would have the sheer front to bring on a matter such as this, particularly when I look and see the previous government's record on unemployment. We must understand that the people opposite were in government for some 13 years. I think Senator Bolkus was there for all of those years. For a good many of them he was a minister and, therefore, bears some
considerable responsibility for the position we now find ourselves in.

The government of the day came into office on 2 March when the policies of people opposite were roundly rejected as not being effective. It is important to recognise the record of the previous government, now opposition. In 1990-91 we had an unemployment rate of 8.3 per cent. Then there is the consequence of their policies. In the following financial year, it went up to 10.3 per cent and then it went up to 11. Then it came down to 10.5 per cent and then down to 8.9 and then down to 8.5, which is basically where we are at this point.

So people opposite are complaining about us turning away from the unemployed when their record shows that at the commencement of this decade unemployment was around 8.3 per cent. In most of the years that they were in government subsequent to that, they pushed the unemployment rate up by their ineffic•

tiveness and have only managed in the last two financial years to bring it down to what it now is. To somehow expect that in six months the damage done by 13 years of fiscal irresponsibility could be undone is, of course, sheer lunacy. But what Senator Bolkus complains of is our preparedness to tackle this problem, to tackle it in a different way from that which Labor would have done. The old ‘Spend, spend, spend. Shove it on the Bankcard. Don’t worry. Let the younger generation pay for it later’ is not the approach we take.

There is at the moment some further weakening in the labour market, and that further weakening started about 12 months before the coalition was elected. The trend employment—not the seasonally adjusted month-to-month business that jumps up and down all over the place—began to falter in April 1995. Employment grew by 4.6 per cent in the 12 months up to April 1995, but it only grew by 1.2 per cent in the 12 months after April 1995. That, of course, demonstrates the point I am making—that a further softening in the labour market was clearly evident in the previous 12 months.

We have a general framework for fixing these problems: balancing the budget, taking the pressure off interest rates and, therefore, encouraging business investment. We have industrial relations reform, reforming unfair dismissal laws. We are also making the labour market more flexible. We have micro-economic reform and are reducing business costs, making exports more internationally competitive, taking the pressure off the current account deficit to allow the economy to grow—all of these things are things Labor was not prepared to do.

What we have said is that we are going to—in addition to the things I have mentioned, putting the budget back into the black and the other matters that I raised, such as industrial relations reform—very substantially reform the delivery of services to unemployed Australians because, quite simply, Working Nation was not working.

Do you know the previous government in the last financial year spent, I think, $860 million on the three least effective brokered programs? They were programs that had effectiveness rates of 22 per cent up into the low 30s; that is, they were about 70 per cent ineffective. They spent $860 million of hard earned taxpayers’ money. This is not money that all comes from the so-called rich. It comes from very low income earners. Every dollar of theirs that we spend has to be spent carefully and effectively. We decided that that was not happening under the previous government.

Before we get carried away with the deceit being perpetrated by arguments raised on the other side, let’s just look at some of the facts. The facts are that we have planned to spend in the next four years more on labour market programs—

Senator West—Tell the truth.

Senator VANSTONE—Senator West is mouthing that it is not true. It is amazing she knows that before I have completed the sentence. Amazing!

Senator West—I’m telling you to tell the truth.

Senator VANSTONE—Let me finish the sentence, and then you can challenge it. We have planned to spend more on labour market programs in the four years to come than
Labor did in the four years prior to Working Nation. I do not dispute that there are very significant reductions in spending on labour market programs against forward estimates and against what you did in Working Nation. But what I say is that Working Nation was not working. You spent $860 million of taxpayers’ money on your three least effective brokered programs. They were programs with efficiency rates of 30 per cent; in other words, 70 per cent of it was not working.

They had a complicated and confusing system: too many programs, far too much red tape. They had four separate training programs, four different work experience programs, three different wage subsidy programs, and three different English language and literacy programs. They were new programs to create the impression of action, hiding what was the reality; that is, with all the good faith you put into Working Nation, it simply was not working. People were forced to fit into labour market program boxes designed in Canberra.

What we have done is cancel the bad parts of Working Nation. They are the programs that were not working. What we have done is pick up the very good part of Working Nation.

Senator West—You have cancelled the lot.

Senator VANSTONE—I notice Senator West says that we have cancelled the lot. She simply does not understand. I am happy to give you a briefing, Senator, if you need it to take you out of the ignorance you are clearly in. We are taking the good of Working Nation—there was some good and innovative work in Working nation: shifting to one on one case management was a creative response to the problems of the long-term unemployed. You did a good thing when you introduced case management.

When you introduced competition between the CES—or Employment Action Australia, which was their case management arm—and private sector case managers, that was a most innovative and creative thing. That is the thing that we think has got good sense to it. It has got a chance to be built on and to actually deliver real outcomes for the unemployed. To pretend that it is all being thrown out is crazy.

We are refusing to continue to put money into programs that have a 22 per cent effectiveness rate. What we are doing is shifting to a much greater emphasis on one-on-one case management—in other words, discarding the bad of Working Nation and building on the good. I would have thought even members opposite could understand that you can learn from mistakes.

Senator Bolkus—Who decides what’s bad, Amanda?

Senator VANSTONE—Senator Bolkus interjects and asks, ‘Who decides what’s bad?’ Ask any taxpayer, Senator Bolkus—through you, Mr Acting Deputy President—if they want $860 million worth of their taxes spent on the three least effective programs. Ask them if they think that is a good idea, because I do not think they will think it is a good idea at all.

It is important to note just a few other facts that seem to be inconvenient for members opposite to recognise. It seems very inconvenient for members opposite to look at the truth of the matter. I have already raised the point that in 1990-91, when unemployment was 8.3 per cent, Labor was then spending—this is in constant prices—$640 million. That is what you were doing in 1990-91 when the unemployment rate was 8.3 per cent. Next year, we are spending $1.63 billion. Next year, we are spending $1.63 billion.

Senator West—That’s over four years.

Senator VANSTONE—No, that is next year. You interject and say, ‘Over four years.’ You have not checked your figures. Just check them again. You have probably been sucked into believing the lies that some of your people publish. Next year we are going to spend $1.63 billion with a projected unemployment rate of not far over eight per cent. In other words, when we go to the previous year when Labor had a similar unemployment rate and we compare it in constant prices, we are going to be spending double what they were spending when they had that sort of unemployment rate.

Let us introduce a bit of decency into this debate. Let us be honest about what the
situation is. Let us not pretend things that are not true. Let us be frank with the electorate about what is happening. Let them recognise that we are spending $1.63 billion next year and that in the previous year when you had a similar unemployment rate you spent $640 million. We are spending double what you did when you had a similar unemployment rate in 1990-91. That puts paid to the lie that you go on with. The mere fact that Senator West interjects, and has all the facts wrong, indicates that you do not even bother with the facts. (Time expired)

Senator STOTT DESPOJA (South Australia) (4.33 p.m.)—I rise on behalf of the Democrats to express not only our concern about the budget measures that we believe do very little to increase employment opportunities for people—specifically young people—in this country, but also our outrage at the way that young people, young unemployed people and unemployed people generally, are being targeted and sluged by this government. They are being penalised and victimised.

In the measures that were announced in the budget a few weeks ago we found that those people who were seeking work, those people who were actively looking for work, have found that the criteria and the penalties applied to them will be tightened. Despite the rhetoric that we have heard in the chamber—including a lovely speech that Senator Vanstone gave in question time today about how it was hoped that young people would have an optimistic future in this country—we have seen very little vision or articulation of a strategy by this government to address unemployment and the various social and other economic problems that are associated with it.

Last week came an interesting, I thought, announcement or concession by the minister. She acknowledged that her government's policies would not necessarily improve the chances of employment in this country. She actually said that long-term employment levels could in fact rise and that it was theoretically possible that unemployment would be up to 8.5 per cent by the end of this decade. What a terrible truth for this government to have to admit. Does that not prove that even their own analyses and their own budget measures and proposals will continue to fail and will hit hardest at unemployed people in this country.

We have seen in this budget major cutbacks to areas that actually generate and support employment opportunities in this country. We have seen cuts to research and development. We have seen cuts to DIFF. We have seen a whole litany of election promises broken, whether it was the scrapping of DIFF or the export and research intensive industries scheme. The promises to retain the book bounty and the computer bounty have been broken.

Senator West—What's happened to that?

Senator STOTT DESPOJA—I think it has been completely scrapped, Senator West. In the case of the computer bounty, they promised to retain it until 2000 but that has been scrapped. We are actually looking at a budget that reduces employment opportunities that are already there—the very measures that were introduced to strengthen and support Australian industries—at a time when this government has decided it will veer away from interventionist strategies and leave our Australian industries at their most vulnerable as a result of absolutely huge tariff slashes. The very measures that were designed to prop up, support and generate competition within our own Australian business and industry sector have been cut and scrapped in this particular budget.

Senator Vanstone referred to labour market programs. This is one of the sorriest aspects of this budget. There will be $1.7 billion worth of cuts over four years. It does not matter how the minister tries to dress up those figures. That is an outrage. There will be a 35 per cent slash in places for labour market programs.

The government has now put its faith in some zeal to reform the industrial relations sector and to introduce—

Senator McGauran interjecting—

Senator STOTT DESPOJA—Public support! Senator McGauran, there is no public support for cutting job opportunities in this country. The only justification we have had
from the minister for these massive cuts to labour market programs is that Working Nation was not working well enough and that they have tried to salvage the best aspects from Working Nation, the good aspects from Working Nation.

It is a debate that should generate excitement because the fact that this government has completely abrogated its responsibility to unemployed people in this country is an absolute outrage and cuts to labour market programs are indicative of that fact. The massive slashes that have been made to labour market programs show that this government is not adhering to its pre-election promise that it will provide opportunities for people in this country who are unemployed, particularly the long-term unemployed.

Let us look at some of the programs. REEP and LEAP were programs that were going to provide jobs for 25,000 unemployed people and have been replaced by what? Like a puff of smoke, they have been replaced by the green corps.

Senator West—Disappeared, gone!

Senator STOTT DESPOJA—As an Australian Democrat, I have a commitment to the environment, environmental clean-up projects and sustainable industries, which is something this government waxes lyrical about but does not seem to understand. Three and a half thousand places do not replace 25,000 places over one year. What about the pre-election promises that they broke there? What was the funding commitment? I think they promised $68 million over three years and a scheme that would look after 17- to 25-year-olds. What have we got? Around $41 million and 17- to 20-year-olds only. Is it looking after unemployed people? No, it is not because you have to be selected for the green corps on the basis of merit.

What about people who are falling through the net? What about those short-term, long-term, unskilled, low-skilled people who are being forced into a cycle of poverty? This government fails to address that question. Once these people reach poverty and desperation levels, what does the government do? They introduce a 'dob in a dole bludger' hotline. They introduce new measures for victimising and penalising the people who are out there solidly looking for work.

Senator Newman will go down in history as the woman who has given 'Dear Diary' a bad name, thanks to her introduction of the job seeker diary. Again, this is a measure designed to recoup money from those people who are already hardest hit. What evidence has been provided that the employer contact unit—dubbed the 'dob in a dole bludger' unit—or the job seeker diary will provide new employment opportunities? None. We put a question to the minister and she was unable to provide any statistics to show that the pilot hotline that was introduced in Tasmania had resulted in anyone having their benefits cancelled because they were allegedly defrauding the system. What it does do, apart from add to the administrative and bureaucratic elements of the department, is further penalise young and unemployed people.

I noticed earlier in this debate that Senator Vanstone said she was taking the best bits out of the Working Nation program. For a long time Democrats have expressed concerns about the unfunded nature of the former government's Working Nation program. We know how important targeted and appropriately funded labour market programs are. Unfortunately, the former government did not appropriately fund those labour market programs, just as the government is now seeking to slash them terribly.

One question I do have is about the new enterprise initiative scheme which, by the government's own justification or measures of what is a good scheme, is a highly successful one. Slashing the new enterprise initiative scheme by 17 per cent makes no sense. Why would you cut a program committed to creating real jobs which has consistently produced positive outcomes of close to 82 per cent? I think that means that 82 per cent of people have found unsubsidised employment after they have been through the new enterprise incentive scheme. Why is Senator Vanstone advocating that the worst parts of Working Nation should go when, in actual fact, they are taking both the best and the worst bits out? The abolition of the CES is extraordinary. Their replacement with one-
stop shops and some kind of tendered labour market or placement program is an extraordinary social and economic experiment.

Senator McGauran—How would you balance the budget?

Senator STOTT DESPOJA—I will tell you about balancing budgets. Through you, Mr Acting Deputy President, I will talk about deficits. The Democrats have been committed to a deficit reduction program, but we are also committed to factoring in environmental and social deficits because we treat people not simply as statistics and figures. We recognise that behind the people who are searching for jobs and applying successfully and unsuccessfully for labour market programs are people's lives and livelihoods. Slashing 35 per cent of places means that fewer people are going to have access to skill development and career opportunities and will get locked into poverty cycles that we should all condemn.

The senators on the other side of the chamber who seem to find it amusing that they can throw rhetoric around like 'budgets' and 'deficits' should realise that there is a human capital cost here. We should be worrying about the impact on people's lives. Labour market programs assist people, not only economically and in a skill sense but also they add to people's self-esteem and opportunities, to their lot in life. I think this government is overlooking that particular fact. Unemployment is currently at 8.5 per cent. We had a concession last week by the minister that it will stay at that level. That is a shamefully high figure. (Time expired)

Senator WEST (New South Wales) (4.43 p.m.)—I rise today on this very important issue of unemployment. It is an issue that affects the livelihood of many people in this country. I begin with a quote from a speech which John Howard made at the Press Club on election eve:

We have gone into this election campaign committing ourselves above all other things to do something effective... to reduce the level of youth unemployment.

I will be a very disappointed man if I have not made very serious inroads into the level of youth unemployment in this country because I would like to see our performance in that area as being the mark of what we have been able to do as a Government.

Six months down the track we are able to see what they can and will do as a government, that is, to cut, slash and burn any of the programs that had any benefits to the average and ordinary people living in this country. We now have a very uncaring and callous government, a government that is weak on employment issues.

Let us talk about records. I think it is very important to do so in relation to unemployment. Let us think back to December 1982. I know there are a couple of senators in this chamber at present who will be scratching their heads because they were probably still at school in 1982—unlike you and I, Mr Acting Deputy President; we were out in the labour force. The employment rate then was 11.2 per cent, and it remained so until March 1983. And who was in government in 1982? The coalition. They left that legacy.

By December 1995, 13 years later, unemployment was at 8.1 per cent. The Hawke and Keating Labor governments had encouraged the community of this country to create an extra two million jobs. Two million more Australians had jobs created for them in those 13 years than had occurred under the previous government. We had an aim to continue this work, to reduce unemployment to a level of five per cent by the end of the century. We were prepared to work on the program. We were prepared to set targets, to be concerned and to care for our fellow Australian human beings who were less fortunate than us in not being able to get a job.

What do we get from the government? They will not even set a target as to what level they aim to have unemployment reach. We have heard them predict that unemployment will rise. What is that going to do to people? It is certainly not going to give them any dignity. It will not give them a reasonable standard of living. It will not do anything for the community structure of this very important community.

The minister talked about getting the general framework right. There was talk about labour market reforms. All that those labour market reforms offered to youth was to cut
youth wages, to say to youth that it was okay to live on $70 a week. That is the sort of thing they were about; they were about making it more flexible. All of those are euphemisms for higher unemployment, for less take-home wages, for worse employment conditions. That is what this government is offering.

Basically, they are washing their hands of the responsibility. They are setting up a broad framework so that somebody else can do it. They are letting somebody else solve the problem. They are going to abolish CES offices. We are going to have PEPE. It sounds like a Latin American combo. It does not sound like an organisation or a group that will actually deliver community services to those who are unemployed with any degree of care or compassion.

A number of programs have been abolished. It was interesting that the minister chose to speak about only three. She chose to ignore the Access Economics report about unemployment programs and job creation programs. I wonder why—because they found that they worked. What do these programs do? They provide people with real jobs, they provide people with real training and they provide community services. Most of these programs involve people actually contributing something back to the community, not just being off the streets, doing constructive work and having jobs. It involves the actual building of services and facilities for communities, so that there was a very major value not just to the individuals who had been unemployed but to the community as well. So everybody was winning. (Time expired)

Senator McGAURAN (Victoria) (4.48 p.m.)—Of all the issues that the opposition can bring forward for debate in this chamber, it is the unemployment issue on which its record was most spoiled when they were in government. They have got more to hide in this debate than they have to say. I think Senator West’s contribution proved that.

Senator Bolkus, who led the debate on this matter of public importance, left the chamber bereft of a case. Whatever case he did state, he did so with a lack of enthusiasm. He seemed to have a touch of the virus that is going around, which the member for Holt (Mr Gareth Evans) has—a lack of interest in his shadow portfolio. He was followed by Senator West—that is when the debate by the opposition really fell away—the senator who could have been the Deputy President. Senator West quoted the Prime Minister (Mr Howard) at the Press Club. She quoted him quite—

Senator West interjecting—

Senator McGAURAN—I know they are very sensitive points for you, Senator West. She quite correctly quoted the Prime Minister at the Press Club, that he would be disappointed if we could not make inroads into the unemployment rate in this country. We will be judged, like you were, on our achievements on unemployment. We have a strategy before the parliament in our budget, in our industrial relations program and in our privatisation program. If you would only let that strategy through, as has been approved by the people of Australia right until this very date, as the polls show, we will be able to get on our way and produce a policy that does make inroads into the unemployment rate in this country.

You had the privilege of being in government for 13 years. You allowed the unemployment rate at every turn to ratchet up—almost in collusion with the debt that you ratcheted up over those 13 years—until it reached that peak point in about 1991 when one million Australians were unemployed. You left office with what you considered an improvement, an unemployment rate of 8.5 per cent, or around about the 800,000 mark, and youth unemployment was at a record rate of 28 per cent.

We all know that those official figures can be doubled because of the underemployment rate and those who have given up looking for employment. You had the privilege of being in government for 13 years. You allowed the unemployment rate at every turn to ratchet up—almost in collusion with the debt that you ratcheted up over those 13 years—until it reached that peak point in about 1991 when one million Australians were unemployed. You left office with what you considered an improvement, an unemployment rate of 8.5 per cent, or around about the 800,000 mark, and youth unemployment was at a record rate of 28 per cent.

We all know that those official figures can be doubled because of the underemployment rate and those who have given up looking for employment. So you can probably double those figures at the time you left office. If that is our record after 13 years in government, I will gladly pack my bags and give the job to another. Your response, as it was once put so succinctly, was to repackage, re-badge, refund, rework and re-market all the programs, to absolutely no effect at all. You even reworked the statistics and the definition of long-term unemployment just to get an ever
so slight marginal improvement. That is a cruel hoax on the real unemployed in this country.

To show that you have not learnt your lesson after 13 years in government, you will be nominating Mr George Campbell for the position of New South Wales senator to replace that very compassionate senator, Senator Childs, in 1997. George Campbell is a former unionist who will be taking his seat in this parliament next year. He is the man Paul Keating, the former Prime Minister, accused of having over 100,000 Australian unemployed around his neck. He is the man you have just preselected for the position of New South Wales senator. The only advice I can give you is that, if George Campbell, when he becomes a senator, ever has the chance to speak on unemployment in this chamber, you should make it a non-broadcast time. We are on broadcast time today—just keep that in mind.

Senator Stott Despoja, in her ever fluent manner, mentioned that this government has overlooked the human cost of unemployment. Quite frankly, it was not until Senator Tierney, who is to follow me in this particular debate and who was the chairman of the Senator Employment, Education and Training References Committee, handed down an excellent report into long-term unemployment in October 1995 that the human face was driven home to the previous government—the sort of social and economic cost that was being borne by the unemployed.

I recommend the opposition go back and read Senator Tierney’s fine report, handed down in October 1995. That is when the social costs were really put together for the previous government. That is when he put down on paper in a report the high social cost of unemployment—the lack and loss of individual esteem, the cost to family unity, the cost to family welfare and the cost even to neighbourhoods and their services. Absolute poverty is usually driven by unemployment and that is the legacy the former government left us where the gap between the rich and poor was widened.

The single most important desire for Australians—and this is known by all—is to have the ability and the chance to get a job. It is for obvious economic and social reasons that the effects of employment have a cascading effect, especially on self-esteem. With all the ex-unionists across the chamber there, in particular Senator Murphy, you would have thought that he and the others would have had something to say when the most important jobs were falling over when they were in government, jobs such as in the timber and mining industries.

I recognise my Senate leader, Senator Boswell, in the chamber. He knows better than anyone that most absurd, humiliating and ridiculous program that was implemented in Ravenshoe. They just about shut down the whole town in Ravenshoe on the altar of the Green movement. They shut down good working class jobs. They basically shut down the whole town of Ravenshoe. What was their alternative? It was to introduce an absurd training program to turn these timber workers into waiters and porters of the tourist industry. That was an absurd attempt where politics overplayed the human face of unemployment. You hung those old Labor workers and unionists out to dry.

Our government’s approach is program driven for results. If only you allow our budget through, if only you allow the industrial relations bill and our privatisation program through, we will be able to make inroads into unemployment. We will be judged by it.

Senator CHRIS EVANS (Western Australia) (4.56 p.m.)—I rise to speak in support of Senator Bolkus’s MPI concerning the government’s abrogation of its responsibilities to the unemployed. It was most clearly brought home to me when I actually read the budget papers. As it is one of my interests, I looked for what the budget had to offer the unemployed in terms of employment programs and assistance. It took me until, I think, the second last page to find the one or two lines that were devoted in this budget speech to the unemployed.

Despite all their rhetoric while in opposition, when you actually look at the budget—the first chance to judge what the coalition has to offer about unemployment and assist-
ing people into jobs and out of the poverty traps and other problems associated with unemployment—you find a couple of lines that are couched within the general economic overview of the budget papers and the budget speech. The budget papers reveal that it is possible that unemployment would rise and it states that:

Employment should grow by around 2 per cent in the year to June 1997 and the unemployment rate should decline, albeit only slowly.

So the budget papers and the minister admit that it is quite possible that unemployment will rise. You would think that, if you have a major social problem, clearly the government should have a strategy for addressing the problem. So I looked for that strategy. There was nothing there. There is no strategy for dealing with what the budget papers and the government admit—that is, the possibility of an already significant unemployment problem rising.

They have adopted the policy that it is easier to take money out of social security recipients, those on unemployment benefits and the programs that support them, than to attack the interests of some of the more vocal and well-organised lobby groups. The unemployed have very few voices in this community. The social security recipients have very few voices in this community. They are the easy targets. They are the soft targets. This budget is about attacking those soft targets.

When you look at what the strategy is in terms of the government’s protestations about tackling unemployment, you get nothing other than the normal mumbo jumbo about the trickle down effect, market forces, et cetera, taking care of the serious unemployment problems that we have. All this in the context of taking $4 billion out of the economy this year and $7.5 billion out of the economy next year. On their own growth projections, unemployment will not fall. It is generally agreed that four per cent growth is required to help reduce the unemployment rate. They are committed to growth rates of between 3¼ per cent and 3½ per cent per annum.

If you read the fine print and analyse the budget, you will find that the government has given up on the unemployed. There is no strategy to deal with the unemployment question. There are no programs to assist the long-term unemployed—those most in need of assistance—because those programs have been slashed. What we get are arguments about the market, the trickle down effects of economic growth and the Liberals’ real jobs rhetoric. That is the stuff that really insults me, because it is an outrageous attack on the programs and the people who have been working with the long-term unemployed.

Working Nation was about trying to bring on those people who get left behind in an economic recovery and who have been unemployed for a long time. The minister has attacked those people and the programs that supported them by saying, ‘Those sorts of programs had only a 30 per cent success rate, so we had to abandon them.’

That fails to address all of the analyses of the problems of the long-term unemployed and the fact that they need special assistance because they will not get picked up in an economic recovery. The long-term unemployed need special programs that help restore their self-esteem, get them job ready and assist them back into a position where they can compete for real jobs. If you abandon those programs, as this government has done, then those people are abandoned. They will not be able to compete. They will not get real jobs, and they will not be able to get out of the cycle of poverty and despair that they are in.

This government has said, ‘The unemployed are just going to have to be the victims of the budget. We needed to save $1.8 billion in this area, so they are going to have to pay the price.’ These people have been abandoned and left to their own devices.

But, worse than that, the government has actually put in place new barriers to those unemployed people. They have put in this ‘capacity to benefit’ test. Basically, they are going to assess whether or not they think you can benefit from the remaining assistance for the long-term unemployed. If you do not satisfy the assessment that you are able to benefit, then you are on your own. You are still going to have to meet more stringent activity tests, but the government is going to
make a decision about whether or not you are worthy of assistance at all. My figures show that, of the 160,000 long-term unemployed in Western Australia, there are funds to assist only about 72,000 of them. So the government is saying to large numbers of unemployed people that they cannot be assisted, and that is a disgrace. (Time expired)

Senator TIERNEY (New South Wales) (5.01 p.m.)—I rise to speak on the matter of public importance moved by the opposition. I listened to Senator Chris Evans with some amazement, because I know the reality of what the Labor government did when it was in office. Certainly, it did set targets. It set a target of five per cent unemployment by the year 2000. Well, everyone knows that is not achievable. It is fine to set targets, but you are just never going to achieve them. You will never achieve them, so what is the point of setting them? You are just fooling people.

Senator Evans mentioned the programs the Labor Party set up when in government. You had programs all right—boy, did you have programs. Just ask the unemployed about the programs. They would do a program, and they would not get a job. They would then do another program, and they would not get a job. They would then do another program, and they would still not get a job.

Working Nation was a failure. It was supposed to make people job ready. It gave the unemployed some training but, because the fundamentals of your economy were wrong, you could never actually provide them with jobs. What this Howard government is doing is getting the fundamentals of the economy right so that jobs can be created, and that surely is the object of the exercise—not to chum people through dole queues but to create real jobs at the end of the day.

I am amazed at the wording in the matter of public importance motion, namely: The Government’s abrogation of its responsibilities to the unemployed.

I reckon that is a pretty good description of 13 years of Labor government—not the Liberal government. Look at the unemployment rate you left this country with. After each recession, it ratcheted up to another level. Since 1983 the record of the previous Labor government was rising levels of overall unemployment, rising levels of youth unemployment and rising levels of long-term unemployment. That is the bottom line. That is the thing you have to judge the previous Labor government on.

What did the Labor government actually achieve at the end of the day? With all that money, with all those programs and with all those targets, what did they do at the end of the day? What they did was leave a larger pool of unemployment. The greatest tragedy of all is that in that pool was youth unemployment.

In 1986, we had 25 per cent youth unemployment. What was it when the Labor government went out of power? Youth unemployment finished at 29 per cent—an absolute national disgrace. Long-term unemployment increased to a third of all people unemployed and, in regional Australia, the unemployment rate for some youth was rising as high as 50 per cent. That is the legacy of the last Labor government.

In 1994, the government came up with this brilliant new system for fixing this, and it was called Working Nation. What a joke! What an insult to the unemployed people in Australia to call that program Working Nation. It should have been called ‘Not Working Nation’. The program that was set up to make people job ready created a lot of red tape and it did not link training to real jobs. So, like many other Labor programs, it failed. All it did was churn the job queue. It left a very large pool of hidden unemployed by redefining people out of the employment system.

If you take into account the hidden unemployed in this country—the people who are getting only a few hours work but would like to work full time—the unemployment figure of 8½ per cent could more or less be doubled. There are figures around that show that, when this Labor government left power, the unemployment rate was closer to 18 per cent. Then, of course, we had the people who had given up totally on getting a job and were not seeking work at all. If you want to look at the real unemployment rate as a legacy of the previous government, 20 per cent is much closer to the mark.
The previous government had a lot to show in terms of what they were doing in this area. They had a marvellous program in Working Nation! It sounded good. In 1995-96 they were going to spend $850 million on it. That sounded terrific, too. But, of course, they spent most of that money on three of the worst performing programs of the lot, and one of them was new work opportunities. For every job that was created and actually lasted some time, the government spent $100,000. What a terrible waste of public money. What a terrible thing to do to these people. They were churned through what were largely useless programs that were not producing jobs at the end of the day.

The approach of this government is to get the economic settings right so that we do get real jobs created in our economy. This is done by balancing the budget. We have made huge strides in this budget to bring that about. The confidence that is coming back into the economy because of that is already obvious. The most obvious sign is the lowering of interest rates. That puts real money back into people's pockets and actually creates spending, which actually goes on to create jobs. Lower interest rates also release business investment, which then goes on to create further real jobs.

The private sector is the engine room of growth. You could solve unemployment in this economy very easily if every small business in the country puts on one more person. There are 900,000 small businesses in Australia, and that is about our level of unemployment. If they would each put on one more we would solve the problem. How do you get them to put on one more? You give them greater incentives through the economy. We are doing that through such things as balancing the budget, getting interest rates down and getting rid of rules that the Labor government brought in, like the so-called unfair dismissal laws that stop small businesses employing people.

Finally, we have to get that great engine room of growth—small business—working by proper micro-economic reform, through reforming telecommunications, through reforming the ports and actually lowering costs to business. This Liberal government is doing that. We are putting those programs in place. That will actually create the real jobs that this economy needs and get away from this facade that was put up by the last Labor government where they were really just pretending to solve the problem, not really creating real jobs.

Senator LUNDY (Australian Capital Territory) (5.09 p.m.)—I rise also to speak in support of Senator Bolkus's proposition regarding this government's abrogation of responsibility to the unemployed in this country. Last month I was privileged to be officiating at a graduation of the ACT's first construction industry jobtrain course for the long-term unemployed. It was run by the Construction Industry Training and Employment Association and it was funded by DEETYA. The trainees were aged from 22 to 38, some having been unemployed for a period longer than two years. They are the people that this government has abandoned. They are the ones that this government has given up on.

This program was a major step in getting these people back into the work force. The jobtrain program is aimed at the future building and construction workers here in the ACT. Four of those trainees from that program already have a job and three of them are getting a job next week. Is that what I see as people being churned through, Senator Tierney? I notice he has now left the chamber. Is that the useless program that he is describing, where we have seen a transition with these people going through a program and getting a job at the end of it? Seven employers have been prepared to give these people jobs. We are talking about real jobs in the private sector in small business.

This program has now been abandoned. It has been abolished by this government and those opportunities will no longer exist. Unfortunately, at the time of conducting this presentation to the graduates of this jobtrain program, I alluded to the fact that I was fearful that this government would unfund and abandon this program. We have seen that occur through this budget. To me that is not a relaxed and comfortable approach. It is
certainly not relaxed and comfortable for the many workers who may have benefited from that program. They will now not have the opportunity to even give it a go and get a look in at getting a job in building and construction.

John Howard and this budget have absolutely ripped the guts out of this program. By his actions he is denying the opportunity for people to get off the dole and back into the work force. The message that this government is sending is that they do not care. This is after an election campaign where we saw 'jobs, jobs, jobs' written all over the coalition's election slogans, banners and so forth. Do you think we can have too many jobs in sight in Canberra? Not only has this private sector program that was creating real jobs in in small business gone, but we have seen the cuts impact hugely upon our local community here. We have seen it impact to the point where thousands upon thousands of people are losing their jobs.

The labour market programs that I have been describing, like the one that CITEA was running, keep unemployed people employable. When the jobs become available these programs make sure that the people are there to fit into them. No-one can deny that 80 per cent of long-term unemployed people who have been employed came through a program funded through Working Nation.

According to Senator Vanstone, labour market programs like this one are a waste of money. Let me see Senator Vanstone say to these seven people who have benefited from this program and are now in paid employment—either through an apprenticeship or a traineeship in scaffolding, concreting or steel fixing—that that exercise was a waste of money.

This government has not even bothered to set targets. A number of my colleagues have alluded to the fact that they are pretty big on setting economic targets but pretty small and, in fact, non-existent on setting employment targets. This afternoon we have heard a number of government senators talk a lot about what Labor did and did not do in government. The fact that their focus has been on what has happened before epitomises their whole approach. They are a government that is living in the past. They are not concerned about giving Australians a future. The abandonment of jobtrain as a classic and tangible example of what they are all about shows that they do not care about the unemployed.

The PRESIDENT—Order! The time for this debate has expired.

GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S SPEECH
Address-in-Reply

Debate resumed from 21 August, on motion by Senator Teague:

That the following Address-in-Reply be agreed to:

To his excellency the Governor-General
MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY—

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

upon which Senator Faulkner has moved by way of amendment:

That the following words be added to the address-in-reply:

"...and the Senate is of the opinion that no part of Telstra should be sold".

The PRESIDENT—Before I call Senator Brown, I remind honourable senators that this is his first speech. I therefore ask that the usual courtesies be extended to him.

Senator BROWN (Tasmania) (5.15 p.m.)—It is an enormous privilege and honour for me to be standing here in this Senate as the first Australian Greens senator to join my colleague, Dee Margetts from the Western Australian Greens, and to follow in the footsteps of Christabel Chamarette and Jo Vallentine, who have pioneered the entry of Green politics into this, the national parliament. It is an extraordinary period in human history which doubles the privilege of being able to represent the people of Australia and, indeed, to be a voice helping guide this parliament towards a more effective Australia in a world which is facing great social and environmental problems.

I need do no more than quote the great contemporary British thinker and philosopher,
Jonathon Porritt, who, using 'green' in the widest sense of the word, said:

The future will either be green or not at all.

This truth lies at the heart of humankind's most pressing challenge: to learn to live in harmony with the Earth on a genuinely sustainable basis.

That causes me to ask: what is that relationship with the Earth or, indeed, with the universe?

Here we are, some six billion people, on this finite, fragile living planet. We do not understand as a generally accepted wisdom why. We do not know where we have come from and, indeed, we cannot clearly chart the future ahead, but this much we do know: we are an amazing organism which is able to think and reflect on the universe and its awesome and infinite wonder. We are, indeed, the universe; a means by which the universe is able to reflect upon itself and to alter itself. We do not know whether this has ever happened before or will ever happen again but, if we stand back and look objectively at what we are, it is a precious and awesome thing which deserves to be cradled very carefully.

And yet, by that experimentation and that ability to change this planet, we have moved now into an awesomely challenging time when it is in our hands either to proceed towards the millennium which our forebears have only dreamed about, or to proceed down the road of materialism which currently has this world by the throat, pressing on the accelerator as we go towards what any person who is thinking clearly can see is an inevitable unsustainability with the planet, with our fellow species and with ourselves.

Some millions of years ago Lucy, the small-brained Australopithecus, was one of about 125,000 of the congregation of what are generally accepted as our earliest humanoid ancestors on this planet. By some 2,000 years ago the population had grown to 125 million. By the 1880s that population—including Rome becoming the first city aggregate of one billion people on this planet—had moved through to number one billion people. Within the space of little more than a century that number has grown to six billion and, if we take the most hopeful indications, the projections are that it will proceed to somewhere between eight and 14 billion people together on a planet which is undergoing—as far as this human community is concerned—immense and accelerating change.

If looked at objectively again, it is a frightening prospect because we have to agree—before we come to grips with the moves that are necessary for us to collectively rein in our excesses and get ourselves back to sustainability—that we are not in control. We only have to look at that population pressure and what it means to this planet to know that. We only have to look at the growing gap between the have and the have-nots within the human community to recognise that we are failing to achieve the moves to sustainability which we owe the future generations.

It is a matter of concern to me that on this planet there are now some hundreds of billionaires at the same time as there are 1.3 billion people living at a level of less than $1 income per day. These people are marginalised and living in marginalised areas on the planet with increasing frustration as they recognise through modern communications that those billionaires exist and that we in the rich, wealthy and lucky northern countries of the world have, compared with them, gross consumption and profligacy in the way in which we use this planet's finite resources.

We only have to recognise that there are already on this planet some 25 million environmental refugees compared with 22 million refugees through other causes to know that it is the environment that is, if you like, in control, rather than we human beings. Anybody who reads natural history will know that, if you flout the environment's carrying capacity, you ultimately are headed yourself towards extinction as a species.

That number of 25 million environmental refugees, by the way, is predicted to double by the year 2010, and if you look at the 1.3 billion people living in marginalised circumstances on this planet, their fortunes seem very bleak indeed. If, for example, the temperature rises, as predicted, by half a degree centigrade by the year 2025 when India will have 1.3 billion people, we can expect that the wheat crop, for one, will have been reduced by 10 per cent on current levels.
There is no hope of accommodating the 300 million extra marginalised people that will be on the Indian subcontinent at that time.

We have to face this reality: either we, as a nation, are going to be outgoing and giving to the rest of the planet; either we are going to find the means for sustainable relationships for people living in much harder conditions than ours, and export it; or we are going to be the recipients of at least part of the enormous mass migrations which are going to occur for many reasons, but not least the environmental catastrophes which will overtake humanity in the coming century.

One has only to look again at the reality that if we do not rein in the greenhouse gas phenomenon one billion people on this planet will be displaced if the oceans rise by a metre at the end of the next century. This for a planet on which the wealthy ones who fly between here and London put, on average per passenger, five tonnes of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

Only today we heard in this parliament that other great British thinker Dr Norman Myers informing us that, in terms of the value of the carbon sink in this age of enormous inherent problems, if we do not bring our warming gases under control, each hectare of forest being logged on this planet is of a value between $1,000 and $4,500 for its ability to contain carbon alone—something never written into the equation, so far as I am aware, in the debate over the value of Australia's forests, one which has been raging in this country.

To summarise what I have just been saying, maybe we ought to have taken more notice, we ought to have heard more in our press about the 1992 petition to the people of this planet from some 1,575 scientists, including 100 Nobel prize laureates. They warned that if we do not change this material charge, this consumption of the planet, within 40 years life for many species, perhaps including our own, is likely to be unsustainable, that we are on a collision course with the planetary environment itself.

Had that warning that the planet is going to collapse under the weight of human activities in this day and age of economic fundamentalism, it would have grabbed the front pages of the media around the planet. As it was, it missed most Australian newspapers. It made page 9 of the Hobart Mercury, as I remember, and one of the mainland metropolitan daily. Less space was given to that extraordinarily telling warning from a global scientific think-tank than to the 'Peanuts' cartoon of the same day around this country. It is very sobering indeed to think that, after some millions of years of divergence from our feathered friends in the bird world as far as evolution is concerned, we are studying so hard to emulate the ostrich as we move to the end of this century.

With the rapid change of human circumstances, the industrial revolution following the agricultural revolution, then the technological and post-technological age of information which we are now in, we see a changing format in the political divide around the world. First, if we look at the industrial revolution, it was the Whigs and Tories. That debate was found wanting and was replaced for most of this century by a discussion between those who favoured the socialist theory and those who favoured the capitalist theory of the centralised market.

We are now learning that, indeed, it is not just we human beings alone who determine what is going to be human well-being but in fact we must take the planet into our considerations as well. So we have this new and emerging dichotomy which has put new faces into this parliament, which will put many more into it in the future and which must challenge the existing economic rationalism of major party politics right around the planet.

This can perhaps be summed up by the extraordinary warning of social chaos in Robert Kaplan's article in the Atlantic Monthly, the United States' news magazine and comment magazine, of February 1994. Quoting other sources, he says:

... for too long we've been prisoners of 'social-social' theory, which assumes that there are only social causes for social and political changes, rather than natural causes, too.

This social-social mentality emerged with the Industrial Revolution, which separates us from nature. But nature is coming back with a ven-
gence, tied to population growth. It will have incredible security implications.

Think of a stretch limo in the potholed streets of New York City, where homeless beggars live. Inside the limo are the air-conditioned post-industrial regions of North America, Europe, the emerging Pacific Rim—which of course includes Australia—and a few other isolated places, with their trade summity and computer-information highways. Outside is the rest of mankind, going in a completely different direction.

It is a debate that is going to rage, I think, as we go into the next century. It is a debate about taking back into consideration the idea that we are not people apart, that we were cradled by the wild planet, that our bodies and minds are a creation of the wild planet, not the concrete and plastic conurbations in which more and more of the human citizenry of this planet live in artificial circumstances as we move to the end of this century.

So, the rise of the Greens. It began with the world’s first Greens party, the United Tasmania Group, which grew out of the battle to save Lake Pedder in Tasmania and which had its first get together, an overflow meeting in the town hall of Hobart, in March 1972. At that period through spontaneous combustion, if you like—because this human mentality around the planet tends to reach a similar conclusion, given enough time, through the sheer dint of commonsense—other Greens parties were formed in other nations and by the early 1980s there were Greens parties in most parts of Europe.

I had the pleasure just last year of having a cup of tea with the mayor of Dublin, the first Green mayor of Dublin, John Gormley, although he is not the first mayor of a European city—that honour goes to Rome. There are four elected mayors of Brazilian cities. In Europe the Greens share the balance of power and have a number of ministries, including, I understand, the Minister for Foreign Affairs in Finland. There are numerous Greens in other Scandinavian parliaments. Some analysts say that the Greens may well win the balance of power in Germany—one of the world’s biggest economic entities—in next year’s elections. They do hold the balance of power in three of the landa, the states, in Germany. There are 17 Greens parties in Africa.

Just last month I had the privilege of meeting with the Taiwanese Greens—the newest Greens party in our neck of the woods. They are extraordinary people whose first act last year was to sail a boat out into the impact zone of the provocative and belligerent Chinese rocket test which was meant to scare the Taiwanese into voting a certain way in their presidential elections. If ever you see people in a place that needs the Greens it is Taiwan where 22 million people in a burgeoning economy are squeezed into an island less than half the size of Tasmania, where 14 dams are on the slate, where the fourth nuclear power station has just been voted down in the parliament, where gangsters run the rubbish dispersal system and thousands of citizens are out in the suburbs trying to stop landfills being dug up in their particular area under threat of arrest and imprisonment.

In Australia, besides our colleagues in Western Australia as I have just mentioned, there are 10 Greens in Australian parliaments—one in the upper house of Western Australia, one in the upper house of New South Wales and two Greens in the ACT Legislative Assembly. Four Greens in the Tasmanian parliament, led by the indomitable Christine Milne, hold the balance of power with a Liberal government in place which, by the way, in recent months, because of that Greens presence, has kept some very important promises, including sheltering education from budget cuts, increasing the number of teachers by 135 and giving a greater allocation to the free enterprise small business incubators, the local enterprise initiatives, in the state—an initiative of the Greens in 1989, which has created nearly 1,000 jobs and which deserves the tiny amount of public funding which sees those jobs created in the state which has the country’s worst unemployment situation.

I came into the Greens because of Lake Pedder. I also went to Tasmania to look for the Tasmanian tiger. I was a young doctor and I had the opportunity of three months locum in Launceston in 1972. Sad to say, last...
Saturday was the 60th anniversary of the extinction of the Tasmanian tiger. The last one was brought out of the Florentine Valley, which is now almost flattened from end to end by logging. It was one of six brought out of the Florentine Valley in the 1930s. There has been, since 1936, no tangible evidence—no droppings, no hairs, no photographs, no footprints—that will confirm the existence of the Tasmanian tiger much as we might keep our fingers crossed for its return.

I was then fortunate enough to float down the Franklin River and be involved with that remarkable organisation—a great Australian organisation—the Wilderness Society, and many other conservation organisations, including the Australian Conservation Foundation and the Tasmanian Conservation Trust, in the battle for the Franklin. Let me say this: one of the world’s most remarkable, beautiful, inspiring places was saved there because millions of Australians cared.

Beyond that, Strahan—the centre of that battle—is the only west coast town in Tasmania which has a consistent growth pattern in terms of jobs and economic investment predicated on the protection of that area and its world heritage nomination. Moreover, we failed to get a dam which would have added $1 billion to the Tasmanian debt and would have seen our power prices even higher as a disincentive to industry and certainly would have worsened the 10 to 11 per cent of unemployment that Tasmania experiences at the moment.

From there we have moved on to the forest campaigns which rage at the moment. Let me just say this: I will tomorrow have the pleasure of supporting the legislation to be introduced by Meg Lees—and I will jointly host—on woodchipping, something that we Australians have yet to come to grips with. How can we hold our heads high on this planet when the forests are disappearing at the greatest rate in history and with them occurs the extinction of some 50 of our fellow species a day, when we in this country are not even containing the loss of our forests but expanding it—an expansion which currently includes the licensing of the clear-felling, fire bombing and then poisoning of ancient rainforests and tall eucalypts in Tasmania with their amazing myriad of life forms, which have never experienced the ugly impact, this cancerous impact, on forests which comes from the charge of blinkered materialism that is out of control and at the very least giving no credence to the cry of future generations that they too will want such wonder and variety as part of their lifetime.

Some 20 years ago I, as that young doctor in Launceston, made it public that I am homosexual. Now 20 years down the line much has changed but I, naturally, have not. Nor has the Tasmanian Legislative Council. This antediluvian chamber, which I guess is the most powerful upper house in the Western world, has no women at all within its chamber. This brings great shame on my home state.

Most recently, the Legislative Council in debates tried to turn back some of the important components of national gun law legislation, with a blinkered thinking. I can sum this up by the contribution of one of the honourable members there who, just weeks after the Port Arthur tragedy, said, ‘Why do we need this legislation?’

During my time in the Tasmanian House of Assembly, where I spent 10 years, I was able to be part of many Green innovations. One of those was the ‘death with dignity’ legislation. It was blocked in the Legislative Council in 1991 without debate—one person made a contribution—and was unanimously turned down, despite an 80 per cent support from the Tasmanian people, according to a Mercury opinion poll. It is somewhat déjà vu to find myself in this parliament where this chamber may soon have legislation to overturn the Northern Territory’s pioneering legislation on euthanasia.

It is legislation which I wholeheartedly support as humane, as one giving people the right to dignity in death as they approach an unavoidable end to what has very often been a long and loving life. The alternative prospect is great indignity, which they do not want. It is a matter of right, a person’s option, that is at the core of debate on that legislation. I would hope that during the life of this Senate somebody will introduce legislation to
this parliament to emulate that Northern Territory legislation.

As it has already been prepared, I will also be introducing legislation to overturn section 329A of the Commonwealth Electoral Act, which allows a perfectly valid vote—but lands you in gaol, as it did Albert Langer, if you dare to advocate it. I will also, on behalf of the Australian Greens, push for proportional representation in our house of government. Most European parliaments have it. Under recent referenda, the ACT took it on board. So did the New Zealand people.

It simply means this: on the day after an election, everybody wakes up to find that somebody she or he voted for is in the parliament to represent them. Compare that with the current, stultified, single-member, Westminster option that we have in place here in Australia: on the morning after the election, half the electorate wakes up to find that their vote was in vain, that somebody they not only did not support but also resent is the only person from their electorate in the parliament to represent them.

We have a long way to go with democracy. Fundamental to the obvious improvements we can make is proportional representation. I would favour the Hare-Clarke system being exported from Tasmania, across the Bass Strait—a gift to the people of Australia to give them better representation.

I would also hope that we will be able to rectify section 44 of the constitution through legislation for a referendum, as the section prevents hundreds of thousands of Australians from a basic democratic right; that is, to stand for parliament. I refer to public servants who, unless they resign their jobs, appear to be threatened by section 44 and will lose their place in the parliament if they dare to stand.

I would also, on behalf of the Greens, be moving for the Indigenous people of this country, the original occupiers and owners, to be recognised in our constitution. Indeed, I will be moving to support the concept of a bill of rights and responsibilities for Australia, for all Australians.

Coming out of a High Court ruling of only last week, it seems that there is an urgent need for freedom of information legislation to be extended from the public arena to the private arena. What an absurdity—I say this as a doctor in the past—that people do not have ready access to their own medical files held by their own doctors. What an absurdity that we cannot go to a corporation or a private instrumentality, a shop, if you like—or a private school, for that matter—and find out what files relate to ourselves as individual citizens and what is in those files. That is something that could very easily be rectified.

Madam President, I would also be moving for a restoration of the levels of foreign aid from Australia. Indeed, I would be moving for their increase—to complement my opening remarks to this chamber—so that Australia can lift its head a little higher and accept a little better its responsibility to the rest of this very challenged world.

I have only to look at the estimation by Dr Norman Myers—that the recent cuts in the Australian aid budget will result in 500,000 Third World couples denied family planning advice, 900,000 unwanted births and 60,000 abortions—to see that this country has gone in the wrong direction. It needs to turn around and go back. It certainly needs to do better than the equivalent of 0.3 of one per cent of gross national product being allocated to the people elsewhere in this world who deserve nothing more or less than a fair go.

In foreign outreach, I support the peoples of Indonesia aspiring to democracy. We have been far too wimpish and quiet, at government levels certainly, as far as that is concerned. I support the people in Burma and Tibet. I welcome the commitment of the Prime Minister (Mr Howard) to meeting the Dalai Lama, one remarkable human being, when he comes to our country later this month. I will quote from the Dalai Lama, who has said:

The exploration of outer space takes place at the same time as the Earth's own oceans, seas, and fresh water areas grow increasingly polluted. Many of the Earth's habitats, animals, plants, insects, and even micro-organisms that we know as rare may not be known at all by future generations. We have the capability, and the responsibility. We must act before it is too late.
I say this about his holiness: he has said on one occasion that were he able to vote he might vote for an environmental candidate; were he able to stand, we might welcome him very much to stand as an environmental candidate.

Debate (on motion by Senator Gibson) adjourned.

COMMITTEES

National Capital and External Territories Committee

Membership

The PRESIDENT—A message has been received from the House of Representatives acquainting the Senate of the appointment of members to the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories. Details of the memberships will be recorded in the journals and Notice Paper.

AUSTRALIAN LAW REFORM COMMISSION BILL 1996

AUSTRALIAN LAW REFORM COMMISSION (REPEAL, TRANSITIONAL AND MISCELLANEOUS) BILL 1996

MUTUAL ASSISTANCE IN CRIMINAL MATTERS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 1996

First Reading

Bills received from the House of Representatives.

Senator PARER (Queensland—Minister for Resources and Energy) (5.47 p.m.)—I indicate to the Senate that those bills which have just been announced by the Acting Deputy President are being introduced together. After debate on the motion for the second reading has been adjourned, I will be moving a motion to have one of the bills listed separately on the Notice Paper. I move:

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

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bills read a first time.
AUSTUDY REGULATIONS

Senator HARRADINE (Tasmania) (5.49 p.m.)—Pursuant to notice given earlier today, I move:

That the AUSTUDY Regulations (Amendment), as contained in Statutory Rules 1995 No. 393 and made under the Student and Youth Assistance Act 1973, be disallowed.

This motion is intended to disallow a provision, a regulation which will have the effect of seriously disadvantaging those people with a dependent spouse who may have budgeted over a considerable time on the basis of the previous regulations. In effect, these regulations are retrospective. There are no transitional provisions to take account of those circumstances that I have just mentioned.

For example, take retrenched workers. You can have a situation with retrenched workers where the worker has a dependent spouse and two or three children. The worker has budgeted for the family and is doing the right thing trying to get further education so that he or she can get a job. That worker could be up to $50 a fortnight worse off as a result of these regulations. That is why I am attempting to disallow these regulations.

I do not want to go into it because I think you all know the circumstances and it will be only wasting the time of the Senate. But there has been correspondence over a period of time between me and the Standing Committee on Regulations and Ordinances and the minister. I can go through that if the Senate wants but most of the Senate will be very familiar as to that sort of correspondence and as to the issues that are involved.

I would like to refer to a couple of things that might be of interest to the Senate. The history of this goes back some time. It goes back to December last year when the Austudy regulations came in. It goes back to where I received a letter from Mr Piers Allbrook from Hobart, who is one of my constituents. I was rather concerned about the situation, as was described by him. Of course, he is only one constituent, but there will be many others in a similar situation. I will read that letter to the Senate. It states:

Ref. Student & Youth Assistance Amendment (Budget Measures) Bill 1995

I am writing to you to bring to your attention some changes to the Spouse/Parenting allowances may be brought before you in the next sitting of the Senate. These changes will have a profound negative effect upon my, and a number of other, families income. In the dying stages of the Keating government a bill was introduced to abolish the spouse allowance for AUSTUDY recipients. This amendment did not receive the assent of the Senate and therefore is still legally, though not in practice, available to eligible applicants. It was claimed that it would be replaced by the Parenting allowance administered by the Department of Social Security.

This is, unfortunately, not the case.

The major variation is that Parenting Allowance under the DSS is only available to parents with children under the age of 16. The AUSTUDY Dependent Spouse Allowance is also available to recipients of AUSTUDY with a dependent child who is aged 16-21 and who qualifies for AUSTUDY or VCES as a dependent student (ie. on the basis of the income of the student parent). There are also numerous other changes relating to the way in which income is assessed. The most pertinent of these is that AUSTUDY calculates income on the basis of taxable income, the DSS does not.

In my particular case—

I might just interpose here by saying that I am very grateful to have received this letter. There are people, our constituents, who write us letters and draw things to our attention which might otherwise not come to our attention. Here is the point I want to make so as to give you a practical example—

I was made redundant and, to retrain, I enrolled at the University of Tasmania at the start of 1995. I had calculated that with AUSTUDY and the AUSTUDY Dependent Spouse allowance our family of two children could survive. My youngest child will turn 16 on 4th August 1996 and from that time DSS Parenting Allowance will not be available to my wife. Should the AUSTUDY Dependent Spouse Allowance be maintained or the conditions governing DSS Parenting Allowance be extended to apply to dependent child who is aged 16-21 and who qualifies for AUSTUDY or VCES as a dependent student, our family will remain as a viable economic unit until I finish my degree.

Since I have entered a commitment to expend my resources and commit the welfare of four persons on the expectation of a similar constancy of commitment by the Government of Australia I would appeal to you to amend this bill to incorporate provision for the spouses of people in my position; at least until the end of our commitment to our education.
It is to be noted that should I not be retraining myself and be in receipt of 'Job Search' my wife, now aged 45, and never having had the opportunity for paid employment, would be entitled to a spouse allowance.

I responded to that particular letter. I will not go into that, but I did. I just want to refer to some of the things that I did say. I mentioned these matters in the Senate. I apologise to the chamber for being a little unprepared for this, but this matter has come on rather more suddenly than I thought it would. There is a considerable amount of material which I hope to have sorted out by the time this debate finishes.

The point I am making is that, if this is not disallowed, we will have had the situation whereby persons will have made a decision in all good faith, based on the fact that they would be entitled to a dependent spouse allowance. Because of that situation and because it was by regulation deleted, we have a situation where these people have been seriously disadvantaged by what is, in effect, I believe, retrospective regulation.

So I will leave it there. I hope that in my summing up I will be able to do a little bit of a better job, because this has come forward rather suddenly.

Senator CARR (Victoria) (5.59 p.m.)—The opposition will be supporting Senator Harradine's motion on Austudy regulations today. We do so because upon reflection this regulation is, in our view, not an appropriate means at this time. As I understand the situation, the parliament rose last year, having failed to consider measures contained in legislation that would have the effect of changing arrangements, whereby the Student and Youth Assistance Act would mean that Austudy and Abstudy would be changed and a new scheme called parenting allowance would be introduced.

Then, strangely enough, three days later the department produces regulations to the effect of securing those changes without the agreement of the parliament. While that is an issue that one may raise in terms of legality—there is no doubt that that is a legal act—it is a question of whether or not it is proper act in seeking to secure changes such as these.

I too have come across cases whereby married students with dependent children who were relying upon allowances paid under Austudy and Abstudy found that, unilaterally, those changes occurred as a result of these regulations as of 1 January this year. That might not seem much to a lot of people but the net effect of that, according to the correspondence that I have, is that there may well be a loss of benefits of some $65.35 per fortnight. For people who are on very low incomes, that is a large amount of money.

I understand that in correspondence from Mary Lovett to students it is stated:

The abolition of AUSTUDY Dependent Spouse Allowance (DSA) from 1 January was part of a package of measures to rationalise largely identical spouse benefits and payments with a similar purpose and to reduce financial dependency between partners by providing financial entitlements directly to the spouse rather than to the student as the notional breadwinner. Spouses now need to apply to the Department of Social Security for assistance in their own right.

You can see how those sorts of regulations will be interpreted under this government, where you will see up to 180,000 persons removed from the social security benefits list.

It seems to me that there is a need to have another look at this. As I understand it, it was said that there were supposed to be identical spouse benefits. When you actually examine the detail, it suggests that the loss of $65.35 per fortnight is not identical. It is quite clear from examination of the detail that the monies payable under this new allowance, and under the way these regulations have been interpreted, is a loss of benefits to people normally entitled to benefits. I could go into some detail on those matters.

In essence, what occurred under the living allowance was equal to the dependent spouse allowance unless one took the option of a $7,000 Commonwealth Bank supplementary loan, which would reduce the living allowance by $3,500 I am informed. Without that supplementary option, both the living allowance and the dependent spouse allowance for 1996 would have been some $7,351 respectively. Under these changes, the amount payable for the parenting allowance by DSS is $280 per fortnight which is equal to a
lesser amount than that paid for under the old dependent spouse allowance which it replaced.

It is not just a question of being $280 less, because if you look into this further you actually see that some old allowances were incorporated within that one allowance and they have now been removed. I am advised by the correspondence that I understand was sent to the minister—and the minister would be aware—that you get a situation where married students already used to receive the $62.80 as parenting allowance and the only difference between the $62.80 and the maximum possible amount of $280.20, which should be seen to replace Austudy’s previous dependent spouse allowance, is an increase in the parenting allowance of some $217.40 per fortnight. For a calendar year, this equals $5,652.40 which you will notice is $1,698.96 or some $65.35 per fortnight short of the Austudy dependent spouse allowance.

For a mature age student with school children, that means a loss of some considerable amount of money. I believe that students who have entered courses on the basis of allowances and on the basis of a benefit being payable to those persons ought to be able to complete those courses with those benefits intact. If they are eligible at one point and they remain eligible under that criterion, you should not have a circumstance where the rules are changed half way through a course. That is essentially what is occurring here.

Therefore we have, as Senator Harradine has indicated, a clear case of the retrospective application of these regulations.

Departmental officers are explaining to students who complain about this that there is a streamlining of certain duplications between the various departments that operate—that is, the departments of DEETYA and Social Security—which, I am told, has resulted in inevitable reductions for some. The whole purpose of this scheme was to provide an identical basis for allowances which is not occurring.

It seems that people who are living on tight budgets, and who have been living on tight budgets for some time while they were studying, cannot afford to lose $65 per fort-
faxes that have come into my office and Democrat offices over the past few months from students and parents alike. In fact, Mr Cornelius wrote to me earlier this year stating: For mature aged students with school going children the sudden loss of $65.35 per fortnight is considerable.

I think it is important that this chamber not only notes how sad it is that Austudy arrangements, or income support, for students in this country are so inadequate, but also looks further at the poverty cycle which we threaten to trap students and, in particular, student-parents in as a result of changes such as this.

Of course, it is worth noting that Austudy at its current level, at the independent rate, is about 68 per cent of the poverty line, and that is the top amount of Austudy that you can receive. I think the average student on Austudy receives around 38 per cent of the poverty line benefits. Clearly it is a system that has been in need of reform for a long time. I am glad that the ALP opposition now see fit to support the disallowance and I acknowledge the continued support of the Greens for Senator Harradine’s motion.

I put on record that the loss of $65.35 per week for student-parents is considerable. It is an outrage. It has not been matched with the proposed parenting allowance concessions that were promised. There are procedural questions that should be addressed—whether or not we legislate by press release in this country. Certainly, as I have said earlier, the transitional arrangement proposed by Senator Harradine is acceptable to the Democrats and we support his motion.

Senator VANSTONE (South Australia—Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs) (6.10 p.m.)—I may not be able to do a number of things, but I can count and I can see the fate of these regulations. There are procedural questions that should be addressed—whether or not we legislate by press release in this country. Certainly, as I have said earlier, the transitional arrangement proposed by Senator Harradine is acceptable to the Democrats and we support his motion.

I put on record that the loss of $65.35 per week for student-parents is considerable. It is an outrage. It has not been matched with the proposed parenting allowance concessions that were promised. There are procedural questions that should be addressed—whether or not we legislate by press release in this country. Certainly, as I have said earlier, the transitional arrangement proposed by Senator Harradine is acceptable to the Democrats and we support his motion.
political opportunism, and try to blame bureaucrats is disgraceful.

If Senator Carr had got up and said ‘Our government thought this was a good idea but, for a variety of reasons, we have now reconsidered’, if he had not gratuitously got stuck into the bureaucrats, I would have some respect for this position—not much, but some. But since he chose to do this by basically saying that this was something that the bureaucrats strangely did a few days after Parliament got up, I think is a very sad reflection on Senator Carr and his views of the bureaucrats in Canberra. I certainly do not think those views are held by all the Labor Party. Perhaps, Senator Carr, if you had had the opportunity to be a minister, you would not have those views of the bureaucrats either. Certainly the then Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training, a Labor minister who introduced these regulations, would not have had those views.

Let me turn to the former government’s reasoning for adopting this position. Perhaps, before I do that, I will make another point very clear—I know Senator Harradine understands the point and I think Senator Stott Despoja probably does, and the Greens, I am sure do. I see you flinch, Senator. I did not mean to say ‘I think you do’ in a way that was meant to be taken by you as disparaging. I just simply do not know, with your limited time here, whether you did appreciate this point. The point is this: that the dependent spouse allowance was created by regulation. It was sought by the previous minister to be disposed of by regulation, which is the appropriate way to do it. Let me make it unequivocally clear that neither the bureaucrats nor the previous minister were seeking to go behind anybody’s back. If Labor wants to walk away, which they clearly do, from a budget commitment they made in the previous budget for some political opportunism now, let them do that, but let them not blame the bureaucrats and let them not suggest that their own minister was somehow trying to deceive parliament; that parliament had had an opportunity to do this and it had not completed that opportunity; that the bill had not passed and therefore parliament had not approved this measure. Everybody who was here at the time would have understood that this allowance was created by regulation and therefore should be got rid of by regulation, if you want to make that policy decision. That needs to be made abundantly clear.

The legislation did not make the grade, no doubt because of the previous government’s incapacity to manage its agenda, and that is a difficult task. Nonetheless, the bill did not make the grade. Let me canvass, to be sure that people understand after Senator Carr’s disgracefully misleading speech, what was in that bill. That bill did not seek to remove the dependent spouse allowance. What it sought to do was remove a mere reference to it. The allowance was not created by that legislation and therefore did not need to be removed by that legislation. That legislation had a mere passing reference in it to that allowance. It was that passing reference, to tidy up legislation, that was being sought to be removed at the last session. So it did not make any difference whether that bill was passed or not, at least with respect to the dependent spouse allowance.

All that the reference in that legislation did was tidy the legislation up, to save it referring to something that would no longer have existed. I hope that has made the position abundantly clear—that this allowance was not created by legislation, it did not need to be
removed by legislation. It was in fact a regulatory measure.

The situation as it stood was that the student on Austudy would get about $270, the dependent spouse would get $270 and, because of the way that a social security regulation was worded, would also be able to get a basic parenting allowance of about $65. The previous government indicated it was never its intention that a dependent spouse would be able to get both of those payments. What it sought to do was to clean the matter up and ensure that that could not be done. If these regulations are not passed, we will revert to the situation where the dependent spouse can get the dependent spouse allowance and part of the parenting allowance, which it was never the previous government’s intention they would have.

I have one disagreement with Senator Harradine’s proposition that he chose to make; that is, I do not see this as a retrospective regulation. It affects people who have already embarked upon a particular course but it does not go back and take money from people who already had it. It does not take away something they already had. It simply says you would not have it in the future.

As I understand your position, you are saying that you think once someone had embarked upon a particular course of study, they are entitled to assume that the payments would remain the same for the period of that study and that if you change a regulation during that period, you are retrospectively affecting them. I am simply putting the case to you that I have a different view, if you are affecting their payments in the future, but if you are wanting to affect payments in the past, I would regard that as retrospective. That is the only point on which I disagree with you.

I can see the writing on the wall for these regulations. We agreed with the government at the time, now the opposition. We find ourselves standing alone with respect to this. I respect the view that Senator Harradine offers. He has always had that view. As for Senator Carr and his disgraceful attack on the bureaucracy, to pretend that somehow this was some backdoor move they were seeking to introduce, when it was a move by a Labor minister who knew full well that this may happen, was nothing short of disgraceful.

I do not look forward to the day when the coalition is out of government and Labor is back in government, but if that ever happens in my time here, I certainly wish you well, Senator Carr. I wish you a ministry so that the bureaucrats who you have defamed today have the opportunity to serve you well.

Senator HARRADINE (Tasmania) (6.20 p.m.)—I seek leave to table the following correspondence: correspondence from Piers Allbrook to me; my letter to the Chairman of the Senate Standing Committee on Regulations and Ordinances—incidentally, I acknowledge the work of that committee; a letter from me to Mr Allbrook; a letter from the standing committee to the minister, Mr David Kemp; the minister’s response dated 5 July; a letter to the minister dated 20 August from me and the minister’s response on 10 September. For completeness, it would be appropriate if we tabled those documents.

Leave granted.

Senator VANSTONE (South Australia—Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs) (6.23 p.m.)—by leave—I will take the opportunity at a later stage to see on what occasions a party has voted down regulations one of its own put forward.

Question put:
That the motion (Senator Harradine’s) be agreed to.

The Senate divided. [6.28 p.m.]
(The President—Senator the Hon. Margaret Reid)

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AYES

Allison, L.    Bishop, M.
Bolkus, N.    Bourne, V.
Brown, B.    Carr, K.
Childs, B. K.    Collins, J. M. A.
Collins, R. L.    Colston, M. A.
Conroy, S.    Cook, P. F. S.
Crowley, R. A.    Denman, K. J.
On motion by Senator Herron:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Senator BOB COLLINS (Northern Territory) (6.33 p.m.)—Because of the time and due to the courtesy that I always extend to the government of the day, I will dispense with speaking at this time and reserve my comments until the committee stages.

Senator KERNOT (Queensland—Leader of the Australian Democrats) (6.33 p.m.)—I would like to do the same thing. I will make any brief comments when we get to the committee stages.

Senator BOSWELL (Queensland—Leader of the National Party of Australia in the Senate) (6.33 p.m.)—I was going to say a few words on this bill but, if everyone is going to forgo—

Senator BOSWELL—No, I can speak during the committee stages, and I will do that.

Senator CHRIS EVANS (Western Australia) (6.34 p.m.)—I would like to say that I had a 20-minute speech prepared but, in view of the precedent that has just been set, I will also save any remarks for the committee stages.

Senator MARGETTS (Western Australia) (6.34 p.m.)—I do not feel that this is an occasion where we should not have a debate. We will have a debate. I do not believe it is appropriate that we should continue without raising some of the relevant issues in the bill and, yes, we will also debate the amendments as they come up.

I have great concerns about the timing of this bill and the stage at which it is being brought on, and I have expressed those concerns to the government. I have great concerns about the fact that we are dealing with a bill whose timing is designed to interfere with an election, as the nominations for that election close tomorrow.
I do not think it is particularly appropriate that we should be dealing with a bill that will affect tomorrow's election, as there was no indication until this morning that there were to be these changes. The community in general did not know about the changes, and the people who had nominated for the election were under the impression that this bill would not be passed in this chamber. But here we are expecting to debate a bill very quickly, without even a second reading debate, on a bill dealing with changes to an election, nominations for which close tomorrow. People have nominated in the belief that it will be a certain sort of election, but it will not be.

Even if we manage to launder the bill so it will not specifically be challengeable and blown apart after this—and I do not know whether this chamber can do that—the whole basis of the election is for a certain number of councils with certain sized regions, and that is what people nominated for. Some people would have made their decisions based on the size of the regions, on the number of councils and on who else they thought might or might not be running.

Whether or not there are legal challenges to the way this election is proceeding, how can the Senate run its business in this way? I think it is disgraceful that we should not have a second reading debate when we are talking about this kind of incident. We will be changing—

Senator Kernot—There is not anything new in the content.

Senator MARGETTS—We are talking about a bill that, until this morning, was not expected to pass today. So people who have nominated for this election were under the impression, whether or not this bill has gone through in another form, that these rules would not apply to this election.

Having mentioned why I am making a speech in the second reading debate, I will make some substantive comments. As we all know, this bill brings a sense of deja vu to us because we are putting the bill through a second time. The bill was introduced in another place in order to give the government a potential double dissolution trigger.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Amendment Bill 1996, as did the earlier bill, seeks to make a range of changes to ATSIC. The most significant changes include: a reduction in the size of regional councils; continuing the practice of the chairperson of ATSIC being appointed by the minister; improved accountability arrangements for regional councils; and the provision to appoint an administrator to manage the operations of ATSIC under certain circumstances.

The Greens (WA) objected to the earlier bill because of the lack of consultation. The bill was to be forced through before the ATSIC elections, which greatly influenced those elections. Some of the changes, particularly those two regarding representation and the reduced numbers of regional councillors, require more time for consultation and do not necessarily represent the views of indigenous communities, even if the ATSIC board supports them.

I know that former Senator Chamarette was very concerned during the native title committee hearings. It was apparent during the proceedings of that committee that these policy changes had been made in the form of cabinet decisions which were then imposed. The minister was then left with a very difficult position of having to justify those policy changes before he had even become totally familiar with his own portfolio.

This government should not again make the common mistake of making policy changes without taking the views of marginalised or disenfranchised indigenous communities into consideration. We do have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in this place. Therefore, we have no excuse for not having the most wide-ranging consultation before policy changes of such magnitude are contemplated by this parliament. Whatever decisions were made this morning, how many people outside this place were involved in that decision making?

I will now deal with the Greens' objections to some of the measures in this bill. The first is the continuation of the minister's role in choosing the chairperson of ATSIC. This was to have been a power which lapsed with the
1993 elections. It was continued then, as honourable senators would know, largely because of representations made to Senator Kernot. The Greens (WA) opposed the extension then, and we most certainly oppose this further extension.

It is a sad indictment of the conduct of relations between government and the indigenous people of this country that ATSIC is not trusted to choose its own chairperson. This measure should be opposed by every honourable senator who upholds the policy of self-determination in whatever form that person might choose to define such a concept.

The changes to schedules relating to numbers of regional councils are problematic. Certainly, we have received numerous submissions from regional councils and regional councillors who do not agree with reducing the numbers of regional councillors. Many argue that reducing the number of councillors will also reduce the effectiveness of the representation they are able to offer and reduce the effectiveness of regional council decision making.

The statistical tables used in this bill also fail to take into consideration the geographical factors involved. For example, there might be what looks to be a very favourable ratio of councillors to members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in certain areas, such as in the remote areas of Western Australia. However, they are largely mythological in their benefit because of the enormous amount of ground that has to be covered for those people to get together, without much funding to do so. In some cases it is utterly impossible. As far as we are concerned, we cannot support those kinds of statistics and arguments.

Proposed changes subsumed in the general rhetoric of accountability have also been coming from the government. In another context, we have seen the confusion, not to say chaos, which the government has managed to bring about in the indigenous community by its so-called accountability measures. I have repeatedly said that bureaucratic accountability is not the problem; it is about accountability in the communities to the people in terms of service delivery. If you want to concern yourself about that, you should go back to the communities and ask them about that. We cannot change from the top without going back to those people and saying, 'If you have problems with the structure of ATSIC, what are they? How can we go about dealing with those so that we can provide those services that we know you need?' Everybody in this chamber at some stage has made some comment about services to remote and regional Aboriginal communities and, indeed, to urban Aboriginal people.

Adding layer upon layer of bureaucratic accountability measures does not necessarily increase the overall accountability and effectiveness of service delivery to Aboriginal communities. One of the answers may be to improve training so that Aboriginal people are made aware of the bureaucratic hoops they have to jump through instead of adding more hoops and an expensive super auditor costing $700,000. That $700,000 could be far better spent on ATSIC programs.

I suppose we should not be surprised if we find draconian measures under the accountability banner heading. Accountability has come to mean only one thing in the lexicon of government: it means axing programs and appointments where a breach of some funding schedule is never hinted at. Where, by the way, is the accountability of those state and local government bodies which, in fact, should be required to give services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities? Where have we heard the argument from this government about their accountability?

Unfortunately, the horrific budget changes have occurred under the mantra of accountability—$400 million in cuts to ATSIC, which the Senate may not be able to prevent from happening. The accountability diatribe is an excuse to take away Aboriginal people's livelihoods and attack the basis of ATSIC, which is self-management and self-determination, through taking away people's resources for a range of crucial activities.

We passionately oppose the cuts to ATSIC programs in areas such as training, economic development, legal, cultural, arts, youth and recreational services, as well as death in custody programs. I have just spent a week in
the north, visiting Darwin, Jabiru, Alice Springs and Uluru. I had meetings with women’s council representatives. They have asked me to give a message to the Senate. They want you to know that health has not been quarantined as a result of these budget cuts and slashes. The reason it has not been quarantined—they give an example from their own work—is that there seems to be very little understanding of what actually happens in Aboriginal communities. For instance, the women’s councils have taken on the role that governments will not or cannot provide—that is, to look after their aged, look after their disabled population, look after children, look after nutrition and look after those people who are not dealt with in any way by any services which should be provided by state, local or Commonwealth government.

What do they do? They organise committees, they have meetings about four times a year and a big meeting every year and they make the decisions about what is necessary for their communities to basically survive. When old people somehow or other find themselves in an old peoples home—it is considered by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be somewhat of a shame to be cut off from your family—they are the ones who visit them and talk to them. They are the ones who take appropriate food to them. When people are disabled because of diet, alcohol problems, petrol sniffing or a range of other issues which are prevalent in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, there are women in that community who work a network to look after them when nobody else will.

These women have asked me to say that health has not been quarantined. These programs are being cut without any understanding in order to consider what is supposedly a problem with ATSIC. Yes, there are problems with ATSIC but, instead of dealing with problems, you are cutting off the ability of communities to work out some means of solving their problems. We are also mindful that some Aboriginal communities have already suffered pre-budget cuts from their ATSIC grants of up to 30 per cent. This has hit remote and isolated communities the hardest and some communities may have great difficulty in continuing to provide adequate food, housing, clothing and basic social services.

We are also aware that CDEP—the community development employment program—has not been quarantined from cuts as was originally announced. The capital component of this program will be cut and this is the main reason for Aboriginal support and usage of the program: that is, that they have some control over what is going to happen in their community. It is not just somebody’s make-work scheme or work for the dole which, of course, is discriminatory. It is working because there is some control within the communities and the communities are making their decisions. It was giving something tangible back to the community, but it has just been taken away. To work for the dole is not incentive in itself to participate in the program.

Senator Hill—Mr Acting Deputy President, I take an irregular point of order regarding progress of the program tonight. I ask Senator Margetts if she realises the Senate is about to go to documents? Would she be prepared to agree to something that I think everyone else in the Senate is prepared to agree to, and that is that we continue with this, which would require a procedural motion on my part?

Senator MARGETTS—I would not.

Senator Hill—You would not agree to it?

Senator MARGETTS—No.

Senator Hill—It is always worth a try. Cooperation works all around the chamber usually.

Senator MARGETTS—Yes. I stated quite clearly at the beginning of my speech why I was concerned about the speed with which this was brought on and the way it was brought on. I think it is quite clear why. Not just to be pathetic—

Senator Hill—To be difficult.

Senator MARGETTS—No, because I believe that this is the wrong thing to do and the wrong time to handle this. The Greens (WA) are committed to amending and voting against legislation that negatively impacts
upon Aboriginal people. Unfortunately, it does not appear that all the cuts to ATSIC can be stopped by the Senate as many changes can be slipped through under ministerial powers and in the appropriation bills. Already people in Aboriginal communities are asking me, 'How can this be done? Don't they understand the impact?''

The other significant change contained in the bill is the government's proposal to give the minister the power to appoint an administrator to manage the operations of ATSIC under certain circumstances. This is not an administrator to assist the commission or an external auditor to assess the commission's function: it is an administrator to take over the whole operation. The nearest equivalent in the business sector is a receiver-manager. However, ATSIC is neither near bankruptcy nor near death, so a receiver-manager is not needed. I have obviously heard that there are moves to—

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Calvert)—Order! It being 6.50 p.m., the Senate will turn to the consideration of government documents.

DOCUMENTS

Australian Telecommunications Authority

Senator BOSWELL (Queensland—Leader of the National Party of Australia in the Senate) (6.51 p.m.)—I move:

That the Senate take note of the document.

This report of Austel on Telstra's implementation of the recommendations of The COT cases report makes critical observations on the way that Telecom has handled the COT cases. This is a saga that has been going on now for over three years. Before the change of government I made representations to Senator Bob Collins and to a number of other senators as the portfolio changed. Since the change of government I have continued to make representations to Senator Alston.

Senator Woodley—Will he see you, though?

Senator BOSWELL—He certainly will see me. It really is a sad indictment on Telstra. There were four people that got together with their particular problems—two from Queensland and two from Victoria—and they formed what was loosely termed the Casualties of Telecom. Telecom promised them a fast track, non-legalistic arbitration. Telecom have spent $5.2 million in answering the claims of these four particular members. Then there was the $54,691.61 Australian Federal Police investigation. That was in March 1995. I would not know how much has been spent since then, but it is a considerable amount of money.

I pointed out to Senator Alston—I know he shares these concerns; he has expressed those concerns to me—that there have been, as this report indicates, two settlements made. But the settlements have hardly covered the costs of the people that were supposed to be reimbursed, the COT cases. In one particular case, Mrs Garms has spent between $300,000 and $350,000 to supply technical advice to assist her claim and she has received something like $300,000 back. In another case, there has been a huge amount of money expended and the payments have hardly covered the expenditure.

I believe that when the claimants were promised a fast, non-legalistic arbitration process that is what it meant. It did not mean that the claimants had to go and spend $300,000 or $400,000 answering technical information that Telecom put up. I have asked Senator Alston to help by having the fair and reasonable costs of the claimants paid. That is where the COT cases rest at the moment. (Time expired)

Senator MARGETTS (Western Australia) (6.56 p.m.)—I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.

Advances to the Minister for Finance—June 1996

Senator ABETZ (Tasmania) (6.57 p.m.)—I move:

That the Senate take note of the document.

As this is the first time I have been on my feet tonight, I congratulate Senator Brown on his first speech in this parliament. The reason I wish to make a few comments in relation to this document—
Senator Bob Collins—Did you agree with all the forestry bits?

Senator ABETZ—It is funny Senator Collins should ask whether I agreed with all the forestry bits because in the document I am about to address we are dealing with the forest industry special assistance scheme, payments to forest related businesses in significant hardship. What this advance to the minister relates to, of course, is the mismanagement of the whole woodchip export licence issue by the previous government.

Senator Margetts—Another subsidy?

Senator ABETZ—No, it is not another subsidy. The purpose of this provision is to provide interim hardship business assistance to forest industry businesses which had incurred additional costs and financial hardship as a direct result of the previous government’s decisions early in 1995 not to release certain coupes for woodchip exports.

It will be recalled that on 25 September 1995 the previous government agreed to provide up to $300,000 in ex gratia payments to forest industry businesses under the scheme to be administered by the department of primary industry. The agreement by the previous government to change the eligibility criteria in December 1995—something which, I might add, I fully supported—is producing more generous assessment outcomes, which have resulted in the $300,000 allocation being exceeded by $638,000. That is how much the previous government was going to short-change those people within the forest industry who were so hardly done by by the previous government.

Of course, this particular advance will allow an extra $19,690 as a final payment to three Tasmanian logging businesses who have met the eligibility criteria of the scheme. Those three logging businesses were among a total of nine that received advance payments in mid-December 1995. Really, what it is doing is putting to rest part of the legacy of the mismanagement of the forest industry by the previous government, which I am very pleased to say has been corrected by this government with its new approach. That approach has breathed new life into the forest industry and, as Senator Murphy, coming from Tasmania, would know, has included an initiative by the Tasmanian country sawmillers that represent the small operators in the forest industry to develop a new investment plant and new jobs.

Senator Murphy—They got belted up by the major companies. That’s what happened to them.

Senator ABETZ—Senator Murphy is interjecting undoubtedly because he does not like the prospect of our government’s initiatives resulting in real jobs for Tasmanians. The other matter I want to refer to in this document relates to the advance being made by the federal government—the sum of $2.5 million—by way of financial assistance to the Tasmanian government for the redevelopment of the visitors centre at the Port Arthur historic site. Possibly Senator Chamarette might want to interject again and say that this is some sort of subsidy to private enterprise.

Senator Margetts—On a point of order: I would like to remind Senator Abetz that Senator Chamarette has resigned.

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Childs)—There is no point of order.

Senator ABETZ—Senator Margetts, you will be following Senator Chamarette very soon if you continue along those lines. I simply say on behalf of the people of Tasmania that this advance from the federal government to the Port Arthur region and to the people of Tasmania is truly appreciated by the people of Tasmania.

Senator Murphy—You have short changed them every step of the way. You promised them $67 million and what did you give them—$33 million?

Senator ABETZ—The fact that Senator Murphy should interject by way of opposition to this grant and assistance to the people of Tasmania is really something which ought be condemned by most people. Out of this tragedy the federal government has come to the party to assist. I would have thought all Tasmanians would appreciate that gesture by the federal government.

Senator MARGETTS (Western Australia) (7.04 p.m.)—It is not often that I am in a
position to thank Senator Abetz in this chamber but I will thank him tonight for bringing to my attention the issue of a $700,000 advance to the woodchip industry in Tasmania.

Senator Abetz—No, there is no such thing—$700,000 advance?

Senator MARGETTS—Well, he has talked about assistance from the new government in relation to the timber industry.

Senator Abetz—No. It’s under the Labor government.

Senator MARGETTS—Whichever government is responsible, I thought I would mention, before I seek leave to continue my remarks so I do have a chance to read it, that there is a report that has not yet been tabled in the parliament—I wonder why—which has been produced by the Department of the Environment, Sport and Territories which relates to the subsidies to Australian resource industries.

That report—as I say, it is a wonder it has not been tabled yet—indicates that the actual fiscal assistance or subsidies to Australian resource extraction industries barring mining, and not actually mentioning pastoralism specifically, works out at $5.6 billion per year. I would say this is a conservative estimate. It was a government report. The environmental subsidies—that is, the damage to the environment, water resources and other environmental subsidies which the community in the future ends up paying—were estimated to be in excess of $8½ billion. I would say that is also conservative in some respects and, as I said, it did not include mining, apart from energy. I am grateful to Senator Abetz for pointing out this particular report. Yes, I will have a look at it and read it later.

The taxpayers of Australia, despite what is said about level playing fields, do pay a whopping amount of money every year to subsidise resource extraction in Australia and often it is said that we have no other choice: we have to have slash and burn budgets. I would say that governments in Australia are paying something like $5.6 billion a year in subsidies to resource extraction, including timber extraction, removing forests and turning them into glossy paper in Japan.

If those industries require subsidy then people ought to know about that and then we should make better decisions so that we do not come out and make nonsense statements like, ‘We have to slash and burn basic social infrastructure because there is no other choice.’ There are choices. They are being made all the time. The choices are that resource extraction industries are much more important to give welfare to than people who are actually using it effectively to maintain the basic social infrastructure of Australia.

There is plenty of information which says that the level of investment in resource extraction is actually creating less employment per unit of investment. It is jobless growth that is created by such types of increased investment. Basically, the real growth that is occurring may be occurring in totally different sectors which do not seem to get the same level of support that the resource extraction industries get.

Employment has gone down in many areas including, and perhaps specifically, timber industries or those industries which turn old-growth forests into little chips and send them overseas to make glossy paper. Therefore, we ought to look carefully—and I and Senator Brown will look very carefully—at this report. I am sure you will hear from us in the future, giving more details once we have had the chance to have a look at the fine print. I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted.

Senator MURPHY (Tasmania) (7.06 p.m.)—I would like to make a few comments with regard to the report. In particular, Senator Abetz pointed out the $2.5 million which has been allocated for the re-establishment of the cafe at Port Arthur. Whilst I do commend the government on taking that initiative, it is somewhat disappointing to the public of Tasmania in an overall sense that prior to, during and even after the election campaign some members of the now government, including the Prime Minister (Mr Howard), indicated that their promises would be upheld one and all. In so far as Tasmania is concerned, it was promised some $67 million in
new funding initiatives. Sadly, it has received something less than 50 per cent of that.

Senator Abetz—That’s nonsense.

Senator MURPHY—I think in so far as the people of Tasmania are concerned, whilst Senator Abetz might wish to thank the government—

Senator Abetz—On a point of order: the document that is before the chamber is quite specific. There are specific items in it. If Senator Murphy does not know what is specifically in the documents relating to Port Arthur or relating to forestry and wants to have a general budget debate, fine. There is an opportunity for that. But all he is trying to do is make some cheap political capital which is based incorrectly but on an occasion when it is highly inappropriate to do so. He ought to address the specifics of the document before us.

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Childs)—I do not uphold the point of order; I believe it is a debating point.

Senator Abetz—Talk about whatever you like!

Senator MURPHY—I will take your advice, Senator Abetz. Certainly, the people of Tasmania should be further informed on the effect of this government’s broken funding promises on the circumstances that they are now confronted with. It is a pity, Senator Abetz, that you did not do a little more work on behalf of the public of Tasmania in securing what was promised to them. Maybe the Advance to the Minister for Finance would have a lot more dollars in it if you had. It is really an indictment on the Tasmanian Liberals in terms of their efforts to secure better funding.

Funding for the Broad Arrow Cafe is very important, and the tragedy was very significant for Tasmania. But the other aspect of this report, as Senator Abetz has said, relates to forestry. It was the Labor government that took the steps to ensure that compensation rather than a subsidy was paid to people who, through no fault of their own, were displaced from opportunities for work as a result of decisions taken to conserve very important aspects of some of Tasmania’s forests.

Senator Abetz seemed to like to stray to the government’s initiatives in respect of forestry. When we see your initiatives in the form of a document with regulations relating to forestry, it will be very interesting to see how you deal with applicants for woodchip licences, in particular how you go about granting those licences.

You talk about the initiatives of the Tasmanian country sawmillers. Let me tell you that the Tasmanian country sawmillers were beaten by major companies like North Broken Hill into accepting a proposition where they would not put in an application for an export woodchip licence, as were the Tasmanian farmers. That is a sad indictment of any system—by any government.

In the fullness of time, we may well find that your proposals for the forest industry will be no better—in fact, I think they will be substantially worse—than what was previously in place. I have had my criticism of that. Yes, I think that compensation was rightly deserved by those people who were displaced from their work. I likewise worked very hard to ensure that the particular changes to the criteria which allowed for the assessment of the compensation to be made were brought about. I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted.

Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs

Senator STOTT DESPOJA (South Australia) (7.11 p.m.)—I move:

That the Senate take note of the document.

I thought it important to draw the Senate’s attention to government report No. 4, tabled today, which deals with determinations under the Higher Education Funding Act 1988. It is worth noting that in light of recent changes we will see cuts to operating grants and other expenditure on higher education institutions in this country—we will see something like a $623 million cut over the next three years—so many of the worthwhile projects that are funded under these determinations will not be funded in the future.

I refer to the booklet showing some of the reasons for determinations. They include:
higher education staff development fund; program grants for financial assistance to higher education institutions for operating grants generally, but specifically in relation to teaching, funding and research projects, as well as ensuring that the Australian National University and the University of Canberra are reimbursed for money paid to Comcare. A whole range of charges and programs will be undermined as a result of cuts to operating grants over the next four years.

In this chamber today, I noticed that the Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (Senator Vanstone), in making reference to higher education cuts, claimed that they were 'nicks' to the system. But I think that when you look at it in the context of these determinations, you will see that we have taken a razor-gang approach to the funding of higher education in this country.

Interestingly enough, in this report there are no determinations that I have been able to see under section 25(a) that reimburse university student organisations which may lose funds as a result of state interference. I mean by that, of course, the misnomer 'voluntary student unionism', which some conservative state governments seem to find quite a good thing. It involves interfering with student unions and their day-to-day organisations.

It is important for the Senate to put on record that we see the Higher Education Funding Act as playing a role in ensuring that those institutions that have their day-to-day activities interfered with by a state government, because it wants to emasculate those vital services that student unions provide, are compensated directly by the Commonwealth government. This is to ensure that their facilities and representative functions are not hampered or hindered by the interference of a state government—whether it is the Victorian government or the Western Australian government, or any other state government that has decided to interfere in the activities and actions of student organisations.

I understand that that is a matter that we will debate at some stage in greater depth. It is worth noting that the determinations as contained in this document today reveal that student organisations have not been compensated. This measure is not going to be a flagrant waste of taxpayers' money, as some Liberals would have us believe. I also note the increased dependency on overseas students to make up the shortfall in operating grants and other associated expenditure and costs for universities.

Senator Woodley—Australian kids won't be able to go to universities, soon.

Senator STOTT DESPOJA—That is right, Senator Woodley. We will lock them out by increasing fees and charges and by other psychological and financial disincentives to enter higher education. On that note, I think we should acknowledge that the Higher Education Funding Amendment Act and its various determinations ensure that we have moderately accessible and moderately publicly funded higher education institutions in this country. Some of the measures that we have seen introduced lately will impact upon that, so it may be a very different document that we will be dealing with next year.

It is also worth noting that the only target equity group that has not increased its participation rate in higher education over the past few years is those people that Senator Vanstone referred to today in the chamber, that is, people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Unfortunately, Senator Vanstone has not come up with the best way of addressing or facilitating that particular problem. In fact, she seeks to compound it.

She will increase those obstacles, those barriers and those fees and charges so that people from poorer backgrounds cannot enter higher education, and the 15 per cent that she referred to today in question time will remain an elite and minor 15 per cent. In fact, the other 75 per cent will not be able to access higher education. I hope we do not see a vastly reduced determinations report next year.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The PRESIDENT—Before proceeding, I should just briefly recognise former Senator Webster, a distinguished former member of
this place, in the gallery. I welcome you and hope you enjoy your visit here.

DOCUMENTS

International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea

Senator BOB COLLINS (Northern Territory) (7.17 p.m.)—I move:

That the Senate take note of the document.

I am pleased indeed to see this matter before the Senate. Australia of course is already a party to the SOLAS convention, that is, the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea. The 1988 protocol to which this document relates is, among other things, designed to harmonise the requirements of the Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea and the related load line conventions, both of which are designed to protect shipping and, of course, importantly, the people that sail on those ships.

The reason I have risen to comment briefly on this paper is that I want to commend the continuing work of the officers of the Australian Maritime Safety Authority in advancing the role that Australia is playing, and has played, in bringing again and again to the attention of the international maritime organisation the growing concern in Australia and around the world at the entirely unsatisfactory nature, still, of international shipping. The reason that I do want to comment briefly on this is that, sadly, as recent statistical evidence has shown, this problem appears to be getting worse, not better.

It has been known for some time now that there is a major problem in world shipping with large bulk carriers in terms of their unseaworthiness. Disturbingly, large numbers of these ships sink without trace at sea, often with the loss of life of all on board. The conditions on board some of these ships are disgraceful in terms of the living conditions of the crew, the payments to crew, the officers on board ships and the intimidation by the companies that operate the ships.

Sadly, this is a matter in which we are all indirectly involved. As an island continent we rely utterly on our shipping services. Only three or four per cent of the cargoes carried in and out of Australia are carried in Australian shipping. Well over 90 per cent are carried by international shipping, and AMSA has the responsibility, on behalf of the government, to examine this shipping.

In recent evidence before a Senate committee, I was disturbed to hear—as a former shipping minister I have a close interest in this—evidence from AMSA that the number of ship detentions and defects that have been noted on board ships that are trading with Australia and bringing the freight that we use to Australia is growing. These detentions in fact have significantly increased in recent times. It is conventions such as the one that we are discussing now that provide for the condition of equipment and so on on board these ships that are absolutely vital to the safety of the crew on board.

Debate interrupted.

ADJOURNMENT

The PRESIDENT—Order! It being 7.20 p.m., I propose the question:

That the Senate do now adjourn.

Asbestos

Condolences: Mr Brian Fraser

Senator McKIERNAN (Western Australia) (7.20 p.m.)—Thank you, Madam President. May I take this opportunity to commend you and congratulate you on your election to your very high office. A large number of people on this side of the chamber are very pleased that there was no vote on that. Had there been a vote, it might have been embarrassing. I am sure you would have attracted a lot of support from this side. My heart-warming congratulations go to you, and I look forward to working with you for the life of this Senate.

I also want to take the opportunity to congratulate Senator Bob Brown on his first speech in this place this afternoon. I only want to make mention of one aspect of what Senator Brown mentioned when he talked about a 'green' mayor in Dublin. It was only a few years ago, actually before my birth, that nobody in Ireland at all, never mind Dublin, could even wear the colour green. It was against the law. Since that time, there have been a lot of 'greenies' in Ireland. They were
mainly republicans. Some of them were quite reprobate. There were some around. I thank Senator Brown and congratulate him on his first speech in this place. I am sure there will be many more.

I want to speak of two other matters in the chamber tonight, but neither of them is quite as jocular as the ones I have just mentioned. My attention was drawn to a photograph in an article on page 8 of the *West Australian* newspaper today. It was a photograph of a person carrying a banner saying 'No more asbestos', and the headline of the story is 'Groups vow pollution action'. It features a photograph of the Mirrabooka Action Group spokesman, Hugh Cahill, outside the Atlas tip in Mirrabooka in Western Australia, which is just around the corner from my electorate office—the electorate office with the broken windows. The article states:

... Hugh Cahill said his particular concern—which is about the tip that his group is protesting about—was with asbestos contamination and pollution of the water table by toxic materials leaching from rubbish at the Atlas landfill site in Mirrabooka.

The Bellevue Action Group, the Jandakot Water Mound Coalition, the Felspar Road Action Group and the Minim Cove Protection Group all joined forces and issued a press statement saying:

... Mr Foss was performing his duties as Environment Minister with "appalling disregard for the wishes, concerns and well being of the majority of Western Australians".

"Our respective groups have strived unsuccessfully to have the Minister address serious contamination and pollution issues," they said.

"Instead of ensuring these matters receive urgent and appropriate action, the Minister has seen fit to ignore them, to procrastinate or to place commercial interests above those of public health and welfare."

Mr Foss, the minister, refused to comment. I do not know what can be read into the fact that he refuses to comment. When people refuse to comment, senators come into this chamber at a later stage and offer reasons on behalf of those people as to why they refused to comment. I suppose that is an invitation for my other Western Australian Senate colleagues to come in here tomorrow night and follow this matter through.

Mr Cahill continued with his comments, and the paper reports that two weeks ago there was a public meeting of 150 residents, who complained about the Atlas site directly to Premier Richard Court and to Mr Foss. Mr Cahill says:

"Something needs to be done." ... "We built homes near this site in the belief that it would revert to a public park and open space soon after 2000."

Instead of that, the tip continued.

My attention was drawn to that article because it was my intention tonight to speak about a very dear friend of mine who died, unfortunately, as a result of asbestosis. He died of mesothelioma in July of this year. Brian Fraser—who was described in the *Manufacturing Worker* newspaper as a 'working class warrior'—was only 52 years of age when he died.

Brian and I shared a number of things in common. Both of us were born in 1944. We were both migrants to this country. He actually came from Belfast, where he worked in the shipyards and where he served his time as a boilermaker. He finished his shift and sometimes described himself as a 'snowman', such was the pollution that came off the asbestos that was used in the shipbuilding in that place. That pollution did its deed with him, and his life was prematurely ended in July. I have only just found out about his actual death, as I was overseas at the time that he did die.

I met Brian in late February of this year during the election campaign. He was quite fit, well, hale and hearty. Perhaps, like me, he was a little bit overweight, but I think that is something to do with our age. We shared some memories of the old times. As I said, we had a lot of things in common: both of us were migrants to this country; both of us were members of the Amalgamated Metal Workers Union, the AMWU, or the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, as it is called now; and both of us served at the time as education officers for our respective states. In that union we were trailblazers in the field in the area of trade union education, not only within the
AMWU but within the trade union movement in Australia. He and I used to take great pride in the fact that, of the six education officers that the union chose to employ, they had to go to Ireland to get at least two of us.

In the same year that I came into this place, Brian went on to become the national organiser with the AMWU and was later to become the national president of the organisation. I met him in February. He was then reasonably fit for a 51-year-old—in good health, generally speaking.

After I found out he had been diagnosed as having mesothelioma, I spoke to him in June where I could, even over the telephone, discern that he had some difficulty in breathing. He told me of the great shock it was to him to have been diagnosed in that manner with that illness because he himself, having been active in the occupational health and safety field within the union, knew that it was a terminal disease, that he was going to meet his end. He prepared himself and prepared his family for that. I just greatly regret the fact that I was not there at his funeral to share the sorrow of his wife, Eleanor, and daughters Michelle, Karen and Deborah. I want to conclude by quoting from that same newspaper article. It states:

A message from ACTU Secretary Bill Kelty at Brian’s funeral described him as "a big man, fiercely loyal to his union and its members. He was big in all senses of the word, large in spirit, voice and tenacity."

Kelty said Fraser was "a warrior for the workers and the working class—prepared to stand up for their rights, protect their interests and promote their welfare."

The AMWU has gone on to name a week—Asbestos and Chemical Eradication Week—in memory of Brian Fraser. I hope that we are successful in that and that no more human beings of the calibre of Brian Fraser are taken from this life by that dreadful disease and that dreadful contamination that we suffer.

South Sea Islanders

Senator WOODLEY (Queensland) (7.29 p.m.)—I rise to speak in the adjournment debate tonight to condemn the government for what I believe is a most mean-spirited action in removing funding for a very small but very significant program to assist South Sea Islanders—the Australian-South Sea Islander community development project. I need to tell the Senate that two National Party members, one a former member and one a present member, were instrumental in harassing the Labor Party when it was in government to make sure that this program was put in place. I guess tonight they hang their heads in despair, having come into government to discover that their government has abolished a program which they were instrumental in having initiated.

Those two members are the former member for Dawson, Mr Braithwaite, and the member for Kennedy, Mr Katter. I give them credit because it was a longstanding and consistent representation and campaign that they conducted on behalf of South Sea Islanders. I guess it is only Queenslanders who would understand the history and who would have the kind of commitment which kept Mr Braithwaite and Mr Katter at the Labor government to make sure that the program was put in place. I wonder what they would say tonight. They are not here, but I thought it might be useful, in a moment or two, to read from the speeches that they made in the other place in urging this program on the former Labor government.

Before I do that I want to turn to a very patronising letter from the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs to the South Sea Islanders explaining to them that their program would no longer be funded. It begins:

Thank you for your participation in the consultations on the Australian South Sea Islander Community Development Project which were conducted by the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) and the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs earlier this year.

I attach for your information a copy of the report on the consultations.

The report has been considered by the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, the Hon Phillip Ruddock MP, who has decided that the Commonwealth will not continue to provide funding for the second and third years of the Community Development project.
Let me underline that. The project was funded for one year by the former government, and they had promised to fund it for three years. The mean spirited action of this current government has meant that this program is cut off in the middle of its progress. The letter goes on:

As you will note the report emphasises that priority areas for improved service provision are in the fields of education, housing, health, legal and employment services. Key Government responsibility for the provision of services in these areas is mainly that of state and territory governments.

That is a joke and is simply a way of passing the buck. I think the Senate needs to understand the history of this project and how it came about. To do that, I turn to the speeches of Mr Ray Braithwaite and Mr Katter made in the other place in 1993 and this will give the Senate some idea of the importance that they placed on getting this particular program funded.

I read first of all from the speech of Mr Braithwaite. He moved:

That this House acts urgently to respond to the recommendations in the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission's report entitled The Call for recognition to ensure:

(1) an end to the discrimination against the descendants of South Sea Islanders;

(2) acceptance of programs to provide these persons with equal opportunities in building, health, education and legal representation;

(3) the retention of their culture, arts and heritage; and

(4) that descendants of South Sea Islanders remain proud Australians.

Mr Braithwaite goes on:

The report by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission on the situation of Australians who are South Sea Islanders was handed down on 15 December 1992, which was some nine months ago. My motion calls for this House—and, through it, this government—to act urgently to respond to the six recommendations that are listed in that report. Perhaps, in contrast to a history of 125 years or longer of discrimination against these people, a nine-month delay may not appear too long to some people. But it is too long; and I would hope that this House, all political parties, and the government would act without delay to end this discrimination against South Sea Islanders and their descendants.

Mr Braithwaite achieved that goal and got the Labor government to fund a very small but important program. Now we find that Mr Braithwaite's high hopes have been dashed by the action of the current government in cancelling that program mid-term.

Let me read a little from a more colourful speech, as you can imagine, from Mr Katter. He spoke about the history of the South Sea Islanders in Queensland. He said:

To hide this dreadful trade in human lives behind the often misunderstood term of blackbirding belies some of the terrible stories that are today well documented. Those stories include those such as the horror that occurred on the brig Carl on the night of 17 September 1871 when the part owner and captain of the vessel, one Dr James Patrick Murray of Melbourne, and his crew shot some 80 natives that they had kidnapped from the Buka Passage in the northern Solomons when they tried to break out. These men, some only wounded, were thrown overboard to drown or be taken alive by sharks. The estimable Dr Murray got off scot-free when he turned queen's evidence. Even though the state government of Queensland tried to legislate against the forceful removal of Pacific Island natives, only one charge of slave trading was ever laid in the sad history of blackbirding—and that case failed.

I want to add my plea to that of former member Ray Braithwaite and current member Mr Katter and make a plea to this government to restore that funding. I need to ask where is the current member for Dawson, De-Anne Kelly. I wonder if she would also support this plea. There has not been much heard from her about this issue. I urge the government to reconsider what I believe is a mean spirited and penny-pinching action, and to restore the funding to this very important but really, in money terms, very small program.

**ABC: Funding Cuts**

Senator LUNDY (Australian Capital Territory) (7.43 p.m.)—Madam President, congratulations on your appointment. My contribution to tonight's adjournment debate deals specifically with cuts to the ABC. I want to begin by reading three quotes from coalition policy documents:

The Coalition will maintain existing levels of Commonwealth funding to the ABC.

The ABC must be an independent, truly national, publicly funded broadcaster devoted to excellence.
and objectivity and offering a clear alternative to the commercial broadcasting sector.

We will encourage and support the ongoing expansion of ABC Radio, including the extension of the highly successful Triple J network into regional Australia.

These are fine and noble sentiments, are they not? In an exchange between Jim Middleton and Senator Alston on March 2, Middleton said:

... the ABC and the commitment to maintain funding in real terms over the term of the coming Parliament. Does that stand?

Senator Alston's reply to that was: Absolutely.

Middleton went on to say:

Even if you discover on Monday the budget's bottom line is much worse that the government's been saying?

Senator Alston replied to that:

Oh yes. I think John Howard's made it very plain that we want to maintain—honour—all our commitments and the ABC is a very important part of that.

These were all pre-election promises from the coalition. Less than six months later we saw Senator Alston, now minister for the ABC, fearlessly take back all those promises by announcing a $55 million cut to the ABC's 1997-98 budget and the establishment of the Mansfield review into the management functions of the ABC, against all of their pre-election promises.

More and more I fear we are moving into the twilight zone with this government. Ten per cent or $55 million sounds eerily like one of their 1993 Fightback policies—surprise, surprise! Fightback contained a 10 per cent or $50 million cut to the ABC. The budget has since seen a cutting of $209 million over the next four years.

In a betrayal of voters' trust, Fightback policies have been resurfacing at every turn. Whether it is differential HECS, cuts to the public sector or cuts to labour market programs, it all comes straight from the 1993 Fightback policies. The government seems to be caught in a time warp. On 3 March this year, Senator Alston did not wake up to find himself transported back to 1993. It is now 1996. Australians rejected those Fightback policies and, as a result, the coalition was forced to reinvent itself with a new package of policies and a new set of promises.

Back in 1993, those policies were rejected in the context of what I am talking about. Australians believe in the ABC and support the ABC. It is not surprising that rallies calling to save the ABC attract tens of thousands of people. The ABC feeds the spirit of Australians. It is an essential part of our culture and to cut that funding is, in a sense, to have some of our dignity stripped away.

The ABC has been instrumental in developing and sustaining our cultural identity for decades that extend beyond my lifetime. I believe the ABC is one of Australia's most important cultural institutions. It is not only a trendsetter but also a trail blazer. It is only through the predominance of quality ABC Australian drama that the commercial stations have taken the course of making quality commercial Australian drama now available around the world. Science programs like Towards 2000 were ABC originals. They were so good that they got cut in this government's budget. Consumer programs and Australian made comedies started on the ABC. We have opera and concert simulcasts. Triple J unearths Australian music in regional areas, giving young bands a fair go and an opportunity to extend themselves. That would never have happened on commercial radio; now it will not happen on Triple J.

Who but the ABC reports on the height of the Darling River and cattle and sheep prices? It keeps regional Australia connected with their urban counterparts, with their businesses and with their environment. The ABC sets the standards and the rest follow. Without a well-funded national broadcaster, the quality of Australian production will fall, leaving all broadcasting in Australia in an unhealthy situation. In 1993 when the coalition first raised the prospect of cutting 10 per cent off the ABC's budget, ABC management was claiming that it would see the sacking of at least 1,500 people, a reduction in Australian content, closure of state-based production, cuts to transmission hours, cessation of specialist programs like the rural, religious, science and arts programs and the abolition of some regional services to Australia.
Like every other part of the public service, the ABC has been undergoing efficiency and productivity restructuring. About 80 per cent of the ABC's budget is spent on buying and making radio and television programs. So a cut of $209 million over four years will affect programming as well as personnel. But the government has not just cut the ABC's budget; it has established yet another inquiry into its role and functions to redefine and reposition the ABC for the 21st century. This comes from the very same man—now the minister—who last year chaired a Senate inquiry which found the ABC's basic structure to be quite sound and worthy of its then levels of funding.

What is the real intention of the government? Is it motivated by economic indicators or blatant ideology? Will John Howard go down in history as the man who killed off Big Ted, put UnEarthed six foot under, put the Bananas in the dole queue with the dole diary for a partner and applied the gag to some of the ABC's political commentary and current affairs reporting?

The Mansfield review is the government's attempt to dictate changes to ABC management and programming. What is at stake? Where is the independence? We cannot allow this review to marginalise the ABC, providing only specialised programs for a small section of the community. That would be its death knell. We want quality and excellence in production, not just B-grade re-runs from our public broadcaster. The efforts of commercial broadcasting to educate, inform and even entertain will always be contingent upon their reliance on sponsorship and advertising. Surveys have shown that 80 per cent of Australians tune in to the ABC at some time. Of course, it is not the only radio and TV that we watch, but independent broadcasting is all about providing choice to all Australians. And it is that choice that we need to defend.

ABC: Funding Cuts

Senator PANIZZA (Western Australia) (7.46 p.m.)—I rise very briefly to comment on what the previous speaker said. I am sure that Senator Alston can defend himself, but it is generally common courtesy that if a senator wishes to speak on the adjournment, they advise the appropriate senator that they are going to put some questions about what he or she may or may not have said and what promises he or she may or may not have broken. It is generally common courtesy to let them know. I understand that was not extended on this occasion. I invite senators to stay with those common courtesies so that the appropriate senator can come in, whether it be on the same night or on some other night, and put their perspective on the matter.

Senate adjourned at 7.47 p.m.

DOCUMENTS

Tabling

The following documents were tabled by the Clerk:

- Christmas Island Act—List of applied Western Australian Acts for the period 30 April to 6 September 1996.
- Cocos (Keeling) Islands Act—List of applied Western Australian Acts for the period 30 April to 6 September 1996.
- Corporations Act—Accounting Standards—AASB 1010, AASB 1013 and AASB 1021.

Pursuant to the order of the Senate of 18 August 1993, the following government documents were tabled:

- Advance to the Minister for Finance—Statements and supporting applications of issues for—
  - June 1996.
  - July 1996.
- Australian Telecommunications Authority (AUSTEL)—Status of Telstra's implementation of the recommendations of AUSTEL's COT cases report—6th quarterly report, 11 July 1996.
Volume 1—Report.
Volume 2—Appendices.
Treaties—
Text together with national interest analysis—
Bilateral—
Multilateral—
International Convention On Salvage, done at London on 28 April 1989. [The text of the Convention was tabled in both Houses of Parliament on 18 October 1995]
Indexed Lists of Files
Pursuant to the order of the Senate of 30 May 1996, the following documents were tabled:
Indexed lists of departmental and agency files for the period 1 January to 30 June 1996—
Australian Industrial Registry.
Office of the Governor-General.
QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

The following answers to questions were circulated:

**Second Sydney Airport**

(Question No. 114)

Senator Forshaw asked the Minister representing the Minister for Transport and Regional Development, upon notice, on 27 June 1996:

(1) On how many occasions has the Minister met representatives of the LH Project Pty-Ltd to discuss the proposed second airport on the site of the existing Holsworthy Army Base.

(2) Have any of the meetings, or any other contact with the group or its representatives, taken place after 2 March 1996.

(3) What checks were carried out on LH Project Pty Ltd so as to determine their probity as an organisation to take part in such a development.

(4) What is the current relationship between the Minister or the Government and the original promoters of the scheme.

(5) Is a joint housing venture involving Federal Government funding through the Defence Housing Authority and a major private sector construction group being undertaken in the Wattle Grove and Voyager Point area, adjacent to the site of the proposed Holsworthy Airport.

(6) Was the private partner in the joint venture assured, when joining with the Government in the project, that the Holsworthy site as a proposed second airport had been abandoned by the Government of the day.

(7) Is the Minister aware that the commercial viability of the joint venture is now threatened merely by Government acknowledgment that Holsworthy is, despite earlier assurances, now a possible airport site.

(8) Is the Minister aware that the Government itself, through its partnership in the housing development, will also be a heavy loser unless the position on the airport is quickly clarified.

(9) Is the Government taking these heavy commercial losses into consideration when studying other expenses involved in having Holsworthy developed as a second airport.

(10) Can an assurance be given to the Senate that the proposed second airport development at Holsworthy shall not proceed.

Senator Alston—The Minister for Transport and Regional Development has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:

(1) The Minister for Transport and Regional Development has met on three occasions with representatives of a private sector group which has proposed the development of a major airport in the Holsworthy Military Reserve.

(2) Yes.

(3) Checks were not appropriate on the representatives above as no agreements were being entered into.

(4) None.

(5) This question is a matter for the Minister for Defence Industry, Science and Personnel.

(6) This question is a matter for the Minister for Defence Industry, Science and Personnel.

(7) This question is a matter for the Minister for Defence Industry, Science and Personnel.

(8) This question is a matter for the Minister for Defence Industry, Science and Personnel.

(9) A financial feasibility study on the Badgerys Creek and Holsworthy options, and addressing relevant Defence issues, will proceed in parallel with the EIS process.

(10) The Government remains committed to building a second major airport for Sydney to a full international standard. Badgerys Creek remains the Government’s preferred site. However, it believes that an alternative should be considered in case Badgerys Creek proves unacceptable. The Government has therefore included Holsworthy in the environment assessment process for a second airport site. The suitability of Holsworthy for an airport development is dependent on the outcome of that process and subsequent decisions by the Government.

**Natural Resources**

(Question No. 131)

Senator Bob Collins asked the Minister representing the Minister for Primary Indu-
tries and Energy, upon notice, on 17 July 1996:

(1) How much money has the Murray-Darling Basin Commission received from the Commonwealth and the States since it was established.

(2) What was the overall level of funding for the Murray-Darling Basin for the 1993-94, 1994-95 and 1995-96 financial years and what was the funding contributions required from both the Commonwealth and the States, by Program.

(3) What was the value of funding, on a State by State basis for Natural Resources Management Strategy (NRMS) allocations through the Integrated Catchment Management Program, the Investigations and Education Program and the Drainage Program for the 1993-94, 1994-95 and 1995-96 financial years.

(4) How many projects under these Programs, by State, will require ongoing funding in the 1996-97 financial year.

(5) How many community-based projects were funded through these programs, by State, in the 1993-94, 1994-95 and 1995-96 financial years.


(7) Based on the forward estimates referred to in (6), what level of funding will be available for new initiatives through these programs in the 1996-97 financial year.

Senator Parer—the Minister for Primary Industries and Energy has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:

(1) The following amounts (a) have been received by the Murray-Darling Basin (MDB) Commission from the Commonwealth and the States since it was established:

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<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1987-88</td>
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<td>1993-94</td>
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<tr>
<td>1995-96</td>
<td>61,034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>317,159</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(a) The figures shown represent contributions paid to the MDB Commission by the Commonwealth and the States. They do not include Commonwealth and State MDB Initiative funds managed directly by the States, such as funds for the former Natural Resources Management Strategy (NRMS) Intra-state Program (predecessor of the Integrated Catchment Management [ICM] Program up to 1993-94) and the Drainage Program and State contributions to the ICM Program since 1994-95.

(0) The MDBC was established on 1 January 1988. The financial statements for 1987-88 did not distinguish between the superseded River Murray Commission and the new MDB Commission.

(2) The overall level of funding for the Murray-Darling Basin Initiative for 1993-94, 1994-95 and 1995-96 financial years was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<th>1994-95</th>
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<td>(a)</td>
<td>(a)</td>
<td>(a)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigation &amp; Construction</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>15,446</td>
<td>23,835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operations &amp; Maintenance</td>
<td>10,470</td>
<td>11,154</td>
<td>11,625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration &amp; Other Expenses</td>
<td>4,231</td>
<td>4,960</td>
<td>5,080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salinity Mitigation Investigations</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salinity Mitigation Construction</td>
<td>3,076</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>825</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salinity Mitigation Operation &amp; Maintenance</td>
<td>1,503</td>
<td>1,827</td>
<td>2,069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>27,875</td>
<td>34,240</td>
<td>43,781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community Programs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRMS—Investigations &amp; Education Program</td>
<td>7,552</td>
<td>7,482</td>
<td>7,772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRMS—Integrated Catchment Management Program</td>
<td>13,800</td>
<td>13,800</td>
<td>13,321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drainage Program</td>
<td>10,740</td>
<td>11,470</td>
<td>11,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrigation Management Strategy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5,700</td>
<td>5,914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td>32,092</td>
<td>38,452</td>
<td>38,407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>59,967</td>
<td>72,692</td>
<td>82,188</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Funding reflects contributions by Governments year by year without any adjustments for unexpended carry-overs.

The Commonwealth contributes half the cost of Salinity Mitigation Investigations, the ICM Program and the Drainage Program with the relevant States contributing to the balance.

Irrigation Management Strategy costs have been shared equally between the Commonwealth and Victoria to date.

(3) The value of funding by State for Natural Resources Management Strategy (NRMS) allocations through the ICM Program, the I&E Program and the Drainage Program for the 1993-94, 1994-95 and 1995-96 financial years was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>ICM Program</th>
<th>I&amp;E Program</th>
<th>Drainage Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vic</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(4) The number of multi-year projects requiring ongoing funding in 1996-97 under the ICM, I&E and Drainage Programs were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>13,800</td>
<td>13,800</td>
<td>7,645</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Allocation to ICM</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>5,193</td>
<td>5,730</td>
<td>5,702</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vic</td>
<td>6,621</td>
<td>6,090</td>
<td>5,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>1,532</td>
<td>1,470</td>
<td>1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qld</td>
<td>454</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>698</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDBC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>13,800</td>
<td>13,800</td>
<td>7,645</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) The funds allocated each year are not necessarily the same as the related expenditure for that year.

(b) The I&E Program was established to fund investigation and education activities which result in benefits to the MDB as a whole rather than to individual States. Accordingly, funds are not allocated on a State by State basis.

The Commonwealth, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia share equally the cost of Investigations & Construction, Salinity Mitigation Construction, MDB Commission Administrative Expenses and the Investigations and Education (I&E) Program, with Queensland making a small contribution towards Administrative Expenses and the I&E Program.

New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia share equally the cost of Operations & Maintenance and Salinity Mitigation Operations & Maintenance.
A full ICM Program for 1996-97 is currently being developed by the MDB Commission. Approval and finalisation of the 1996-97 Program is not expected until August 1996. The numbers presented are approximate but are not expected to change significantly.

The I&E Program was established to fund investigation and education activities which result in benefits to the MDB as a whole rather than to individual States. Accordingly, funds are not allocated on a State by State basis.

The I&E Program is not a community-based Program.

(6) and (7) The Senator’s attention is drawn to the relevant Commonwealth Budget Papers for all publicly available information on Commonwealth forward estimates.

(8) The value of funding for the Land Resources, Water Quality and Natural Ecosystems Programs for the 1993-94, 1994-95 and 1995-96 financial years is shown below. The amounts shown include funding for the NRMS, Drainage Program, Irrigation Management Strategy, Strategic Development projects and administrative support. The Office of the MDB Commission has advised that it does not keep records on a State-by-State basis for this funding, having regard to the position with the I&E Program as indicated in the answer to Question 4.

(9) The structure of the MDB Commission’s Program Budget, including the Land Resources, Water Quality and Natural Ecosystems Programs were revised for 1996-97. These Programs have been replaced by one Program for 1996-97; the “Basin Sustainability Program”.

The ongoing projects for 1996-97 from the ICM, the I&E and the Drainage Programs total 212. As noted in the answer to Question 8, the Office of the MDB Commission has advised that it does not keep these records on a State-by-State basis.

(10) The Senator’s attention is drawn to the relevant Commonwealth Budget Papers for all publicly available information on Commonwealth forward estimates.
Business Advice for Rural Areas Services
(Question No. 134)

Senator Bob Collins asked the Minister representing the Minister for Primary Industries and Energy, upon notice, on 16 July 1996:

With reference to the Business Advice for Rural Areas (BARA) services
(1) How many services operated in the 1994-95 and 1995-96 financial years and in what States were they located.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/Territory</th>
<th>1994-95</th>
<th>1995-96</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(2) On a State by State basis (a) what was the cost of providing these services; (b) how many businesses were assisted through the BARA services; and (c) how many jobs were created by businesses assisted through the BARA services in the 1994-95 and 1995-96 financial years.

Senator Parer—The Minister for Primary Industries and Energy has provided the following answer to the honourable senator's question:

(1) The following number of services operated in 1994-95 and 1995-96

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/Territory</th>
<th>1994-95</th>
<th>1995-96</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>330 181</td>
<td>509 535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>281 047</td>
<td>417 677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>739 671</td>
<td>626 700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>215 879</td>
<td>210 264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>175 587</td>
<td>326 178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>52 566</td>
<td>69 798</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>65 394</td>
<td>118 654</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) The number of businesses assisted was:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/Territory</th>
<th>1994-95</th>
<th>1995-96</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>1 234</td>
<td>1 217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>587</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>1 472</td>
<td>2 522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>2 450</td>
<td>2 401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(c) The number of jobs created by businesses assisted through BARA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/Territory</th>
<th>1994-95</th>
<th>1995-96</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qld</td>
<td>423</td>
<td>456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Countrylink Service  
(Question No. 135)

Senator Bob Collins asked the Minister representing the Minister for Primary Industries and Energy, upon notice, on 16 July 1996:

(1) How long has the Department provided advice to regional and rural Australia by way of '008' number through the Countrylink Service.

(2) How many calls has the service received, by State and by year, since it was established.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>QLD</th>
<th>VIC</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>TAS</th>
<th>NT</th>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>2732</td>
<td>1202</td>
<td>901</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>6048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>7796</td>
<td>3430</td>
<td>2568</td>
<td>1199</td>
<td>978</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>809</td>
<td>17255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>8147</td>
<td>3579</td>
<td>2685</td>
<td>1255</td>
<td>1022</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>846</td>
<td>18030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>14592</td>
<td>6421</td>
<td>4801</td>
<td>2245</td>
<td>1831</td>
<td>556</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>1519</td>
<td>32298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>17500</td>
<td>10297</td>
<td>5789</td>
<td>1868</td>
<td>1221</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>723</td>
<td>38038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>15874</td>
<td>9252</td>
<td>9301</td>
<td>1857</td>
<td>4932</td>
<td>2513</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>854</td>
<td>44956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>17014</td>
<td>14290</td>
<td>5810</td>
<td>1352</td>
<td>2184</td>
<td>636</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>493</td>
<td>42137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>29006</td>
<td>21531</td>
<td>14399</td>
<td>2091</td>
<td>4103</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>1774</td>
<td>701</td>
<td>74605</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996 to date</td>
<td>16879</td>
<td>13020</td>
<td>7930</td>
<td>933</td>
<td>1442</td>
<td>551</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>1230</td>
<td>37883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>129540</td>
<td>83022</td>
<td>54184</td>
<td>13220</td>
<td>18056</td>
<td>6310</td>
<td>3944</td>
<td>7459</td>
<td>315735</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: the statistical information is based on the calendar year not the financial year.

Agribusiness Program  
(Question No. 136)

Senator Bob Collins asked the Minister representing the Minister for Primary Industries and Energy, upon notice, on 16 July 1996:

With reference to the Agribusiness Program:

(1) On a State by State basis, how many enquiries were received, applications made and projects approved for assistance through the program in the 1994-95 and 1995-96 financial years.

(2) What was the value of grants made, by State, in the 1994-95 and 1995-96 financial years.

(3) Which sectors of agriculture and related activities, by State, were successful in attracting assistance through the program.

Attachment ‘A’

Agribusiness Program Statistics—By State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1994-95</th>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>NT</th>
<th>QLD</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>TAS</th>
<th>VIC</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>National(1) Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enquiries received</td>
<td>Not recorded for individual states</td>
<td>1270</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications received</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projects approved</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Senator Parer—The Minister for Primary Industries and Energy has provided the following answer to the Honourable Senator's question:

(1) The Department of Primary Industries and Energy has provided an '008' number through the Countrylink Service since 1988.

(2) The Countrylink Service received the following number of calls from each State in the years since 1988.

 Senator Parer—The Minister for Primary Industries and Energy has provided the following answer to the honourable senator's question:

(1) & (2) The Agribusiness Program received a total of 2,026 enquiries during the 1994-95 and 1995-96 financial years.

1270 during 1994-95 and 756 during 1995-96

the enquiry statistics are not collected by State.

The Program has processed 495 applications for assistance during the same period, approving grants totalling $12,879,408 for 385 projects.

attachment 'A' details the numbers of applications received, projects approved and amounts approved, by State.

(3) Attachment 'B' details the sectors of agriculture and related activities, by State, which were successful in attracting assistance through the program.
Tuesday, 10 September 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amounts approved</th>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>NT</th>
<th>QLD</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>TAS</th>
<th>VIC</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995-96 Enquiries received</td>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>145</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications received</td>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>186</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projects approved</td>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amounts approved</td>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$959,453</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$418,117</td>
<td>$239,259</td>
<td>$163,437</td>
<td>$492,218</td>
<td>$171,761</td>
<td>$2,168,261</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) Projects classified as 'National' are intended to have industry wide or nationwide benefits and are not focused on any State or Territory.

(2) Projects approved sometimes relate to applications received during a prior year.

Attachment 'B'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agribusiness Program Funding Approved Industries by State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994-95 Cotton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eggs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerging Industries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horticulture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$8,165</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) By State and program: (a) what was the value of assistance, and (b) how many farmers received assistance through the Rural Adjustment Scheme in 1993-94, 1994-95 and 1995-96 financial years.

(2) Following the 'Our Land' initiative, what are the forward estimates from the scheme for the 1995-96, 1997-98 and 1999-2001 financial years.

(3) By State and program, how much of this funding is already committed and how much is...
available for new initiatives for the 1996-97 financial year.

**Senator Parer**—The Minister for Primary Industries and Energy has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:

(1)(a) The value of Commonwealth assistance through the Rural Adjustment Scheme in 1993-94, 1994-95 and 1995-96 financial years was:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>RAS 1992 $m</th>
<th>RAS 1988 $m</th>
<th>Exceptional Circumstances $m</th>
<th>Total $m</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1993-94</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>9.922</td>
<td>29.599</td>
<td>11.474</td>
<td>50.995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>5.217</td>
<td>10.617</td>
<td>2.729</td>
<td>18.563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>7.927</td>
<td>8.831</td>
<td>15.696</td>
<td>32.454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>4.715</td>
<td>8.682</td>
<td>9.620</td>
<td>23.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>2.596</td>
<td>2.188</td>
<td>2.073</td>
<td>6.857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>0.724</td>
<td>1.466</td>
<td>0.656</td>
<td>2.846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>0.386</td>
<td>0.242</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.628</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>31.487</td>
<td>61.625</td>
<td>42.248</td>
<td>135.360</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1994-95

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>RAS 1992 $m</th>
<th>RAS 1988 $m</th>
<th>Exceptional Circumstances $m</th>
<th>Total $m</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>12.580</td>
<td>16.561</td>
<td>29.241</td>
<td>58.382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>5.315</td>
<td>2.490</td>
<td>0.399</td>
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1995-96

<table>
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<th>State</th>
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<th>Exceptional Circumstances $m</th>
<th>Total $m</th>
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<td>69.419</td>
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(1)(b) The number of farmers assisted through the Rural Adjustment Scheme in 1993-94, 1994-95 and 1995-96 financial years are shown below. Data is not collected for the number of farmers assisted under the RAS 1988 Scheme.

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Total</th>
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<td>2,163</td>
<td>3,346</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>WA</td>
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<td>112</td>
<td>1,901</td>
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<td>TAS</td>
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<td>228</td>
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<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>93</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6,299</td>
<td>5,583</td>
<td>11,882</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
State | RAS 1992 | Exceptional Circumstances | Total |
---|---|---|---|
1994-95 | | | |
NSW | 1,620 | 1,826 | 3,446 |
VIC | 734 | 68 | 802 |
QLD | 1,418 | 2,769 | 4,187 |
SA | 503 | 149 | 652 |
WA | 1,462 | 22 | 1,484 |
TAS | 259 | 57 | 316 |
NT | 56 | 0 | 56 |
Total | 6,052 | 4,891 | 10,943 |
1995-96 | | | |
NSW | 1,895 | 2,081 | 3,976 |
VIC | 1,218 | 51 | 1,269 |
QLD | 1,702 | 2,571 | 4,273 |
SA | 348 | 105 | 453 |
WA | 2,925 | 0 | 2,925 |
TAS | 273 | 44 | 317 |
NT | 59 | 0 | 59 |
Total | 8,420 | 4,852 | 13,272 |

(2) Publicly available information on the forward estimates for RAS is available in the Commonwealth Budget Papers.

(3) The amount available for new initiatives will be determined in the Budget context.

**Defence Exports**

(Question No. 158)

Senator Margetts asked the Minister representing the Minister for Defence Industry, Science and Personnel, upon notice, on 24 July 1996:

(1) What were the top 200 defence export approvals, by value, in the (a) 1994-95 financial year; and (b) 1995-96 financial year.

(2) Which companies were involved in each of these contracts.

(3) To which countries did each of these approvals refer.

(4) What was the nature of the equipment involved in each contract.

**Senator Newman**—The Minister for Defence Industry, Science and Personnel has provided the following answer to the honourable senator’s question:

(1)—(4) The details are shown below. The export approvals cover goods that are included in Schedule 13 of the Customs (Prohibited Exports) Regulations as at 1 August 1996 and include non-military lethal goods such as non-military firearms and ammunition as well as commercial explosives. The approvals include temporary exports for demonstration and evaluation purposes; returns to manufacturers for warranty and other repairs; and returns to owners of goods that have been repaired or returned after trials in Australia.

In line with previous questions of this type, the names of the exporters are not being released due to the Commercial-in-Confidence nature of the information.

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<th>Destination</th>
<th>Nature of Goods</th>
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<td>Vessels of war</td>
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<tr>
<td>5,500,000</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Fire control systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value (AUD)</td>
<td>Destination</td>
<td>Nature of Goods</td>
</tr>
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<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
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(b) 1995/96

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Jabiluka Uranium Project
(Question No. 160)

Senator Lees asked the Minister for the Environment, upon notice, on 26 July 1996:

(1) Has a commitment been made at any stage for a full public scoping process to be incorporated in the environmental assessment procedure for the Jabiluka project.

(2) Is public scoping a regular part of the environmental impact assessment (EIA) process in the United States of America and is it incorporated in EIA procedures in Western Australia.

(3) Has Friends of the Earth (FOE) written to the Minister calling for public participation in the scoping process.

(4) Is it a fact, that according to section 4.1 of the administrative procedures of the Environment Protection (Impact of Proposals) Act, an environmental impact statement (EIS) is supposed to: (a) analyse the need for the proposed action; and (b) indicate the consequences of not taking the proposed action.

(5) Have the spirit and intent of the administrative procedures to the Environment Protection (Impact of Proposals) Act been met over the years in respect of EISs for uranium projects.

(6) Did the FOE comment in a letter to the Minister that the spirit of EIA procedures has been largely ignored over the years and that this applies, in particular, to those sections of the Act which relate to what is to be contained in an EIS.

(7) What is the Minister's response to the complaint from FOE that evaluation of whether a given project should or should not proceed, especially important in the case of controversial projects such as uranium mines, has been notably absent from both draft and final EISs for uranium projects.

(8) Is it the case, as FOE claims in its letter, that p4.1 of the 1979 formal EIS for Jabiluka under the heading 'alternatives considered' deals with different mining options but fails altogether to deal with the 'no project' alternative.

(9) If the 'no project' alternative has been fully dealt with in a manner the Minister considers satisfactory, where has this been carried out.

(10) Will the 'no project' option be properly evaluated in the forthcoming Jabiluka EIS.

(11) Will crucial cost/benefit information, including economic evaluation and feasibility studies, be released for public comment so that a proper cost/benefit analysis may be carried out.

Senator Hill—The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

(1) Scoping is the process of determining the range of issues to be addressed in an environmental impact assessment and identifying the significant issues related to a proposed action. I have publicly stated that there will be a high level of public participation in the environmental impact assessment (EIS) for the proposed Jabiluka uranium mine, ensuring that the process is both open and transparent. As part of this process the draft guidelines for the Jabiluka EIS were released for public comment between 29 June and 29 July this year. The input provided will help refine the guidelines in terms of the range of significant issues and the depth of treatment necessary.

(2) Yes, public scoping is used in environmental impact assessment in the United States of America. In Western Australia public scoping is used to the extent that draft guidelines for environmental review and management program reports (equivalent to Commonwealth EISs) are issued for public comment.

(3) Yes.

(4) Yes, ‘... to the extent appropriate in the circumstances of the case’.

(5) A number of EISs for proposed uranium mines were prepared in the late 1970s and early 1980s. There are differing views as to whether the EISs met the spirit and intent of the Environment Protection (Impact of Proposals) Act.

(6) Yes.

(7) I have noted the points made by Friends of the Earth.

(8) The 1979 EIS for the proposed Jabiluka uranium mine did not include an explicit examination of the consequences of not proceeding with the mine.

(9) See (8) above.

(10) The draft EIS guidelines for the current Jabiluka proposal require an examination and discussion of 'not proceeding with the proposed development'.

(11) The draft EIS guidelines require an examination of the need for and justification of the proposal, including an analysis of the expected regional, Territory and national benefits and costs. The draft EIS will be released for public comment. I am not aware of what additional documentation prepared by or for Energy Resources of Australia for its own purposes may be made available to the public. Any studies or material used in the development of the EIS must be clearly identified and properly referenced.

Jabiluka Uranium Project
(Question No. 166)

Senator Margetts asked the Minister for the Environment, upon notice, on 31 July 1996:
(1) Have draft environment impact statement (EIS) guidelines for the Jabiluka uranium project been released.

(2) Can it be confirmed whether this EIS was released prematurely, before opposition by the Aboriginal owners was taken into account; and, if so, why.

(3) Were the relevant traditional owners consulted prior to the release of the guidelines; if so, please detail the nature of these consultations and who was consulted; if not, why not.

(4) Can it be confirmed whether the ‘no project’ option allowed in the 1979 Jabiluka EIS will also be part of the current Jabiluka EIS; if not, why not.

(5) Can the ‘no project’ and alternative project options be considered with the current option for Jabiluka; if not, why not.

(6) (a) Will there be a cost-benefit analysis in which the costs and benefits of the project proceeding are compared with the costs and benefits of the project not proceeding, completed in the current Jabiluka EIS, as was done with the 1979 EIS; if not, why not; and (b) can such an analysis be a useful tool of evaluation for considering whether or not a project should go ahead; if not, why not.

(7) Can it be ensured that a full cost-benefit analysis considering different project options is included in the environmental evaluation of the Jabiluka uranium mining project; if not, why not.

Senator Hill—The answer to the honourable senator’s question is as follows:

(1) Yes, the draft guidelines for the Jabiluka EIS were released for public comment between 29 June and 29 July this year.

(2) The draft EIS for the Jabiluka proposal has not been released, and I assume Senator Margetts is referring to the draft guidelines for the EIS. Opposition to a proposal does not prevent the initiation of examination of its potential environmental impacts under the Environment Protection (Impact of Proposals) Act.

(3) A number of discussions on the environmental impact assessment process for the Jabiluka proposal were held with interested parties, including representatives of the Northern Land Council, prior to my decision on 28 June 1996 to require an EIS and subsequent release of the draft guidelines.

(4) The draft EIS guidelines require the EIS to examine any prudent and feasible alternative, including not proceeding with the proposed development.

(5) See (4) above.

(6) (a) The proponent will be required to assess the primary, secondary, short-term and long-term adverse and beneficial impacts on the environment of the proposed mine and alternatives. There is no specific requirement that the material presented should be analysed using cost-benefit analysis.

(b) Cost-benefit analysis can be a useful tool in appropriate circumstances, but it is only one technique among many and is not without its critics. There are inherent difficulties in applying cost-benefit analysis to assessments of environmental values and attributes.

(7) See (6) above.

Logging and Woodchipping
(Question No. 168)

Senator Murray asked the Minister for the Environment, upon notice, on 2 August 1996:

(1) How much Commonwealth money has been allocated in total to Western Australia for the Comprehensive Regional (Forest) Assessment process, in 1996 and 1997.

(2) Has any money already been allocated; if so, to whom, and for what project or purpose.

(3) Who will allocate the funding and through what process will the allocations be made.

(4) Is this all the money which has been allocated or earmarked for the completion of the regional forest agreement process; if not, what additional funds have been made available or will be made available.

(5) Has it been decided whether key stakeholders, other than the Commonwealth and State Governments, should be represented on the steering committee overseeing the comprehensive regional assessment process for Western Australia.

(6) If other key stakeholders are not to be represented on the steering committee, why is this the case.

(7) Will detailed maps be provided showing precisely which areas of National Estate-listed forest in the southern forest region of Western Australia will and will not be available for construction of roads and for logging in 1997.

(8) Have any applications or expressions of interest been received from Bunnings or Whittakers to take up any of the additional woodchip export volumes made available under the new government policy as announced in July 1996.

(9) Should such applications be received before 31 December 1996, how exactly will they be assessed.

Senator Hill—The answer to the honourable senator’s question is as follows:

(1) The Government has announced its intention to provide a total of $48m over three years for the negotiation of Regional Forest Agreements in all export woodchip areas (including Western Australia) by mid-1998. The exact break-up of this alloca-
tion between regions will be finalised following discussions with State Governments on a range of issues, including the level of scientific assessment required to undertake a Comprehensive Regional Assessment in each region.

(2) Discussions are currently under way with the Western Australian Government on a range of projects to be undertaken as part of the Comprehensive Regional Assessment process. The projects are in the first stages of development although the initial part of one project on vegetation mapping has been funded to a level of $80,000.

(3) The project proposals are being jointly developed by the Commonwealth and Western Australia and must be approved by the Western Australian Regional Forest Agreement Steering Committee comprised of Commonwealth and Western Australian officials. Each project which is to be funded must be consistent with the Scoping Agreement signed by the Prime Minister and Premier. That Agreement states that "both Governments agree that the budget and cost sharing arrangements for all assessments required for the Regional Forest Agreement will be mutually agreed with an objective of matching contributions in funding or in kind."

(4) The $48m announced for Regional Forest Agreements in the 1996-97 Budget is for comprehensive regional assessments. This is all the money which has been allocated or earmarked for the completion of the process in priority forest areas, with the exception of $1.206m which was separately allocated to maintain the Forests Taskforce in the Prime Minister’s Department until the end of the 1996-97 financial year.

This funding is in addition to the $53.9 million 1995-96 Budget decision for the Department of the Environment, Sport and Territories, the Department of Primary Industries and Energy (over four years) and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (for 1995-96 only) to commence Comprehensive Regional Assessments in five high priority regions.

(5) At its meeting on 23 July 1996, the Western Australian Regional Forest Agreement Steering Committee decided that membership of the Committee be confined to Commonwealth and State Government officials. Key stakeholders will be provided an opportunity to be members of a Stakeholder Reference Group which would meet regularly with the Steering Committee.

(6) The Government is committed to ensuring that the Comprehensive Regional Assessment and Regional Forest Agreement process is transparent and open to participation and input from stakeholders. However, the necessary arrangements to achieve this have to be negotiated with each State Government. In the case of Western Australia, it was agreed that a Stakeholder Reference Group was the most appropriate mechanism.

Other mechanisms which will be pursued for public involvement, in particular by stakeholders, in the Comprehensive Regional Assessment/Regional Forest Agreement process can be classified in four distinct ways—first, input to the information gathering stage; second, through workshops, seminars and public meetings which explore the methodologies proposed for each Comprehensive Regional Assessment; third, in the development of options; and fourth, through written submissions on the draft Regional Forest Agreement.

The information gathering stage includes all relevant biophysical, social, cultural and economic issues and provides an opportunity for the information base to be modified, clarified or corrected through a range of public consultation opportunities and through written submissions. To assist in the task of presenting and consulting on the wide ranging matters to be dealt with in the Regional Forest Agreement, discussion papers will be made available for comment and a newsletter will be published.

The consultation process will be both wide-ranging and participatory through carefully focused issue-specific consultation for those matters requiring special attention. Workshops with stakeholders and community groups will be organised as a means of seeking input to the information gathering stage of the Comprehensive Regional Assessment process as well as during the development of options. Public consultation forums and workshops will be held in appropriate locations and venues across the south-west of Western Australia.

(7) The Western Australian Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) has made arrangements for the production of maps showing the Deferred Forest Areas in the south-west forest region of Western Australia. Copies of this map are available on request and can be obtained from CALM.

(8) I have no knowledge of this matter. Questions relating to this issue should be directed to the Minister for Primary Industries and Energy.

(9) Applications will be considered by the Minister for Primary Industries and Energy, the Hon. John Anderson MP, in accordance with relevant regulations.